

Let it go! A Fire Communion
Mary Bennett
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UCV

A friend, noticing my name in the newsletter, asked me what we would do at this service. I said, we'll burn our regrets and grief from the old year so as to be ready to start a new year. "But we burned things at the Yule service and at the Samhain ritual at Hallowe'en," he responded. "Some of us have a lot to burn," I replied!

Let it go- a concept that's easier said than done, right?

Although we typically think of letting go of the "negatives" of the past year, there's a sense in which we also need to let go of, well, just about everything. It seems to me all of the "Year in Review" and lists of the "The Best of 2008" lists which are circulating are ways that our culture comes to terms with the old year.

My favourite Banyen [Bookstore in Vancouver] book mark has a Buddhist saying on it:

"Since everything is ... perfect in being what it is, having nothing to do with good or bad, acceptance or rejection, one my well burst out in laughter." ~ Long Chen Pa , Tibetan yogi

Or, to paraphrase, in this case, since the past year has nothing to do with good or bad, acceptance or rejection, you may as well whisper your thoughts into the paper we'll be giving you and watch it go up in flames of transformation.

Alchemy

In medieval times, alchemists worked on transmuting base metals, such as lead, into pure gold. Carl Jung -- and others -- takes this metaphorically -- that we attempt to transform our "lesser self" -- our prima material-- into something more shiny. A lot of fire is involved in transforming something whether metals or our psyches!

New Years' resolutions - introduction

Some of you are preparing New Year's resolutions, or actively resisting do so. Resolutions in this sense fit the definition "The state or quality of being resolute; firm determination." I think of what I personally do at this time of year as more *reflections* than *resolutions*. I do spend time over the mid-winter season reflecting on the past and thinking about what my intentions are for the coming year. (Sounds a bit wishy-washy compared to "resolute, firm determination" but I don't get quite as disappointed as others.)

At the start of the service we sang "Come, come whoever you are" from a Rumi poem. Another line from that poem is, "though you've broken your vows a thousand times." New Year's resolutions are a bit like that for most of us. We may once again resolve to diet, exercise, perhaps even attend church regularly, though we've broken our vows a thousand times.

During my pondering time, I was commenting to a friend that the next year will be a very different one for me, after leaving my full-time job of 8 years. "2009 will be very different for us all -- whether we like it or not," she replied.

In case you think you might need some help in formulating your New Year's resolutions, or an "extension", I learned that Gary Ryan Blair has founded "New Year's Resolution Week--the first week of each New Year." He created a program called Got Resolutions? His website says he wants "you to astonish yourself with all of the goals you will achieve in 2009."

When I tried to leave the page without ordering any of the video seminars, workbooks, mp3 recording and resolution forms, a popup screen came up and said: **WAIT -- BEFORE YOU NAVIGATE AWAY FROM THIS PAGE...**and then

offered me a discount and further encouragement to contact Gary through 1-877-GOALSGUY or his website WWW.GOALSGUY.COM

Another definition for “resolution” is: The part of a literary work in which the complications of the plot are resolved or simplified.

Visual artists also use this concept of resolution. A painting is *resolved* when the artist considers it finished. Usually the artist also hopes others will appreciate the end result, of course. Resolving a piece of art is the final stage where it's almost done, but doesn't seem quite right. You feel something needs to be changed, but you're not sure what.

As one artist put it on a web discussion forum, “(Sometimes) nothing I try seems to resolve the painting. I darken areas, lighten areas, alter colour relationships, adjust the edges and nothing works.” Another replied, “Mostly, if I knew the viewer would understand my ideas/story/whatever-you-call-it, then I could consider a painting finished. “It's when I'm not really sure of what I wanted my paintings to be about that I have the most difficulty resolving them.”

So if your life during 2008 was a piece of art, that is ready to be resolved, you might consider:

- What was the range of colours that were on your palette this year?
- Does it feel like a realistic, or super-realistic painting, or an abstract piece?
- What's the focal point of the piece? How do the other elements of the painting work to draw your eye around the whole piece?
- Where does the light come from?
- Where is the viewer?
- Are there, right now, parts of the painting that need to have less emphasis before it's resolved?
- Perhaps there's a need for a glaze put over parts-or even the whole thing—in order to harmonize disparate elements into a unified whole.

This service can be one step in figuring out how to “resolve” 2008 for you. During the meditation and ritual you'll have a chance to consider what small thing could use some adjustment: a different colour, a glaze, or whatever in order for you to feel that the year has been finished off. Then you can “frame it”. As metaphor, the frame might be a summary of the year, the theme as you see it, or a title, rather than whether it will be black wood or silver metal.

In a sermon by the Rev. Robert Hardies, senior minister at All Souls Church in Washington DC, he says, “It is fashionable these days to view New Year's resolutions with cynicism. ... [but] I view the whole custom with sympathy and even with delight. As an opportunity for us to express our often latent but ever-present desire to be changed. To be transformed. He then quotes C.S. Lewis as saying, “Religion isn't about making people nice. That's just a byproduct of religion. But religion isn't about making people nice, it's about making people new. Not nice people, but new people.”

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If you had an insight or response to reading this homily, I'd love to hear from you. Send me an email or post a comment to my blog www.creativityandspirituality.wordpress.com

References:

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Laughter quotations (including the Buddhist quotation from Banyen) http://www.laughtercoach.com/fb_laughterpies.html

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