

## **Trinity of Gifts**

**January 17, 2010**

**This year on New Year's Eve I did not stay up to watch the ball drop on 2010. Time has shown the effect of too many" New Years celebrations and as the growing symptoms of the old foggy syndrome became more prevalent, my interest in saluting the New Year has waned. I have learned my lesson. The last time I stayed up, I spent the evening celebrating with friends, one of whom was dog sitting two lovely basset hounds in a beautifully restored home in old Salem MA. This house was a melding of the old and the new. The house itself was a relic of days gone by with 200 year old ceiling beams exposed, wide pine floors sanded and polished to a gleaming sheen, four working fireplaces well stocked with hardwood and the piece de resistance was a monstrous Sony, larger than life jumbo-tron television with digital quadraphonic sound, surrounded by a wall of reclining kid -leather barc-a-loungers and another working fireplace to complete the ambience.**

**My job was to build a fire. After I had aired out the house and the hard wired fire alarms had finally stopped their piercing shriek and the flue mechanism finally engaged- with a comfortable smoke- free fire blazing, we finally settled down with our assortment of liquid refreshment, tons of pro-cholesterol snacks and the movie, Titanic, on a mega wide screen theater size TV We were all ecstatic with anticipation.**

**Naturally the topic of resolutions came up as the film trailers were reeling through, and I responded abruptly, "nothing, I make no resolutions, no promises, they just become another source of stress and who needs any more of that?~ I have never followed through on a one." The mere pressure of having to think about promises and changes, of facing the inevitable failures, that most surely will come has been a significant factor in my passion for retiring early, pulling the covers over my head and ignoring any expectation of changing anything.**

We settled down to watch the movie; well I should say we tried. The phone book size pages of directions for operating the five boxes perched on top of the TV and the three remotes and systems operations unit, was a bit more than we were prepared for. I, being the only one with cable TV, was elected to settle into the pilot's chair, the one with the control panel that resembled that of a 747, and began to try and make some sense out of the directions. After gingerly pushing a few buttons the picture came on clear and magnificent. Video in- check! Picture on, -check! But the sound was awful, filled with static and fluxuations in the decibel levels that made it impossible to decipher the dialogue. The basset hounds howled in unison. I unhooked the speakers, played with all the controls, fumbled and fidgeted and cussed, to no avail. The evening reverted to plan B with the realization that this old video, which played so beautifully on my 16 year old 20" screen and ancient VCR, was not to be heard in digital, stereophonic surround sound.

Right then and there as I extricated myself from the systems control panel, removed the cassette and replaced the remotes to their respective places, I made my first resolution ... Keep it simple!

The complexities we face in this life need not to be of our own making.

Secondly, for Christmas that year, I had received a Zen Garden. It is intended to reduce the stresses in ones life and I will read the instructions that were printed on the box.

" When you create and cultivate this Zen Garden, you escape, for the moment, the tensions of ordinary life. Raking the smooth sand into wavelike patterns against the river rocks allows you to contemplate Zen Philosophy, serenity in simplicity."

It contained everything one needed to participate in the art of Zen Gardening, a 7X11 inch black pine tray - purified white sand -polished river rocks, a bamboo rake and a 64 page book of meditations. I opened the box and began to read the introduction. "Zen the Sanskrit word for meditation is a discipline. The purpose is to clear the mind of the chaos of everyday life in order to achieve a greater state of harmony."

OK, I could use a greater state of inner harmony, so I settled into my favorite chair with the miniature sandbox in my lap, then carefully poured in the purified sand and read further from the book of meditations. "Experiment" it told me, "meditate and enjoy!" I placed the rocks in the sand ready 'to absorb the Zen wisdom, to harmonize the tensions of my hectic world.'

Slowly and mindfully, I took up the tiny rake and began to swirl the sand around the rocks, which were actually small pebbles. The purified white sand overflowed into my lap. The first lesson was patience, so try again. Move the rocks and rake around them in the opposite direction. The purified white sand spilled over once more. I consulted my manual. It said, "If you seek how that is different from pursuing sound and form? If you don't seek how are you different from earth, wood or stone? You must seek without seeking." I read it again with no more understanding of what it meant than I did the first time. What I am really seeking is the chapter on how to keep the sand out of my lap! The manual continues, with more words of Zen wisdom. "In walking just walk. In sitting just sit. Above all, don't wobble." I wasn't wobbling. Back to the manual. "To find your way you must close your eyes and walk in the dark."

That does it! I had enough sand on the floor now, I couldn't do this in the daylight...walking in the dark with this miniature litter box is just going to make a bigger mess!"

Well into the unnumbered pages of this so called "meditation manual," with most of sand on the floor, the pebbles parked in the corners and the rakes totally useless, I did find something that began to make sense. And I quote: "When wayward thoughts are persistent, imagine that even Buddha had silly ideas sometimes."

He sure did and this inspired one of them! Maybe I had found enlightenment after all! I'll take a real beach any day! Not a purified cat box! Back in the wrapper it went, the sand cleaned up and my Zen Garden was relegated to the top shelf. My gift giver had been had by the promise of inner harmony. I

deeply appreciated the gesture but I don't know if I will tell her just how stressful this meditative cure-all turned out to be.

Resolution number two. Authentic enlightenment comes from pursuing what is truly understood and meaningful. I pledged to seek out that which brings me a lasting joy and sustains me when there is little happiness to be found.

My final resolution that year came from watching the movie Mrs. Doubtfire. You know, the one where Robin Williams, facing a divorce and the possible loss of his children, adopted the identity of an elderly British Housekeeper and went to work for his wife as a nanny to be close to his children. It's a very funny movie which I have always enjoyed watching, that is until the part where he has to pull on his overstuffed body suit in a hurry and in a shocking moment of recognition, I saw myself in the transition, in all the folds and padding that come with age, that so effectively turned him into an overweight Nanny and I into an abrupt awareness of the fruitless pursuit of preserving what I once was and could no longer contain.

Resolution number 3. Change in ourselves and our lives cannot be avoided or covered up with salves and lotions, or by demanding that things remain the same.

So I resolved to accept the changes, especially those that come with age, and with time... not to fight it, but to use it as it was meant to be, a guideline for growing up, rather than simply growing old.

Keeping it simple, keeps us focused on what is truly important. Patience and attention to the directions we have chosen that foster meaningful inner reflection, has its way of pointing us toward enlightenment. And finally, embracing the inevitability of change keeps us honest with ourselves and ready to welcome the present, rather than to dread the future

In the words of an anonymous author,

"Reach out to this newest of years, with fearless appraisal, for its promise waits thy notice for fulfillment, for all ye hath dreamed through the advent of time, ultimately lies in your hands."

So be it Amen.

Rev Holly Baylies © 2010

First UU Syracuse, NY