

**PRAYER:**

Mother-Father-God; Divine-Mind of the Universe: Thank you for new beginnings! Thank you for the opportunity to adjust, change, alter and revamp our life with every year, every day, every breath or every thought. Today is the day we've chosen to celebrate our ability to change, to create something new and wonderful for our lives. We affirm that we choose a new way and a fresh start. We affirm and declare our intention to release old, out-dated, worn-out ideas, methods, ways, habits, emotions, and beliefs. We affirm and declare our intention to adopt and institute new, workable, wonderful ideas, methods, ways, habits, emotions, and beliefs. Thank you for hearing the silent prayers of our hearts; thank you for being the constant supply of all our Good; thank you for bringing us to a point where we can create permanent, positive changes for the Higher Good of all concerned. ...and so it is... Amen.

**SCRIPTURE:**

**John 3:1-6** = "There was one of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish Council, who came to Jesus by night. 'Rabbi,' he said, 'we know that you are a teacher sent by God; no one could perform these signs of yours unless God were with him.' Jesus answered, 'In truth, in very truth, I tell you, unless a man has been born over again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' 'But how is it possible, said Nicodemus, 'for a man to be born when he is old? Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?' Jesus answered, 'In truth I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born from water and spirit. Flesh can give birth only to flesh; it is spirit that gives birth to spirit.'" [New English Bible]

**MESSAGE:**

**Annual Burning Bowl Service**

In this passage of John's Gospel, Jesus explained to Nicodemus that being *born again* means having a change of mind and heart; it means being renewed from the inside, so one's outer life and one's outcomes change. Nicodemus didn't have much spiritual understanding, so Jesus told him that spiritual understanding needed two things: water and Spirit. Old Nick could understand those two things.

The water of a baptism is an outer source for an inner cleansing and an inner purifying; it is wonderfully symbolic. Actually, we can cleanse our mind through the use of denial of negative thoughts, words, deeds, intentions and emotions. To be *born of Spirit* means we gain a realization, an awareness of our spiritual identity, our one-ness with Divine-Mind. When we gain that awareness, we can consistently affirm all the positives we desire: joy, love, life, peace, harmony, etc. 2B "born of the Spirit" means we are aware that we are each a part of the Divine-Mind, we are an expression of the God-Essence. *Knowing that as a fact*, we then gain the *peace that passes all understanding*, which strengthens our faith and hope. Thus, we are better able to live our Truth, to be always demonstrating the Highest-Version of the Highest-Vision of Self.

We come here to this Sanctuary to be more aware of and filled with the God-Essence. We open our heart and our mind to be receptive to the gifts of this New Year. Shortly, we'll intentionally quiet our thoughts, so we may hear and receive ideas from Divine-Mind, speaking to us and through us. We open our heart and mind to the Vision of Divine Will at work in all we think, say and do. This New Year gives us an opportunity to perceive our potential and to create, for ourselves, the goodness of the Divine Purposes of the God-Mind. Source wants only the best for us, and today is our day to claim all that. This will be a great time to quiet the noise of our cluttered minds, through meditation and prayer, and to be responsive to new understandings of Truth. This will be a great time to let go and to use this burning bowl celebration to guide the meditation of our hearts. We know that this can be a year of transformation! We believe in the beauty, the possibilities, the transformations and the promises of each human in this New Year. Today, we greet the New Year, aware that we are children of a living, loving, Divine-Mind. We are each filled with all the potential for growth, perfection and transformation.

Adapted by Rev. Shirley L. Geer; various sources

Divine Truth is now living within every cell and fiber of our bodies. God's Love activates our every loving thought, word and action. The outright joy we feel, when experiencing the Christ-Mind, moves through us and energizes our thoughts, words, and actions. The Presence of the living Christ-Mind assures us that all is in Divine Order, and that all is well! In this New Year, we know that Source-Energy is with us, empowering us to transform all challenges into stepping-stones to our own mastery. Prospering Ideas that are still dormant will awaken to the promise of the New Year. Our challenges are overcome in the victorious light of Divine-Mind. Truly this is our best year yet, for it is an expression of the eternal *Now*. We can choose to move forward into each day of this New Year, alert to its gifts, ready for its changes, and thankful for its reminders that we are Spirit, having human experiences. This is the *year* that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it! We affirm that we are free and unlimited in this New Year!

### **CONTRACT with GOD:**

[See below]

When you came in, you were given a "Contract with God" and in a moment, we'll use some quiet time to write our intentions for this New Year. This contract is private, personal, just between you and the Divine Source of All. Nobody else is to read it. In a minute, we'll spend some time thinking and writing, so you can recall things you want to change in your life, and how you'd like to replace negative things with new, positive situations. You'll find on the back of the contract some ideas to prompt your recall of things which you'd like to omit from your life or attract into your life. Unity suggests we *not* write down *people* on the list of things to omit, because people are Spirits bringing us challenges for our growth. But you might write down *the situation* in which you and the other person are involved. You might write that you desire to attract more love or understanding for that person.

This contract is your expression of your choices for this New Year, and how you choose to improve your Being-ness. The goal is to *express* yourself at the highest level possible, so you *define* yourself at the highest level possible. Your contract, today, is your statement to the Divine Source that you recognize how you've been defining yourself at a lower level and how you now choose to define yourself at a higher level. That's your only job on Earth, to define *Who You Are* and you do that in every thought, word and deed. Everything you think, say and do is an act of self-definition.

In your contract, communicate your dreams in writing; look at them in the stillness of your own being and let your dreams declare your affirmative prayers for the New Year. Let's take some time now to create our *Contract with God*. Write the things you choose to release from your life and the new, better things you now choose to manifest.

### **BURNING BOWL**

It's been a whole year since we've done this ceremony and some of you are new to this ceremony, so let me explain it. The God-Mind, the One Presence, promises to do a New Thing through us, *if and when* we give It the opportunity to work with us and through us. This ceremony helps us become aware of our need to open up and to make room for Spirit to work. We do that by releasing our old, worn-out, out-dated ideas and limitations of the past year, so that the New Year may gift us with the Divine bounty of all good things!

You've been given a piece of orange paper on which you are to write all the negative things that you want to release, erase and omit from your life, so you can replace them with new, better methods. After we've had time to write what we choose to release, to erase and to omit, we'll take turns burning those papers, which are symbols of the negatives in our lives. Then, it's up to us to do the work of truly stopping the old and starting the new. We all need to do mental housecleaning, so I invite you to consider what is now in your consciousness that you'd like to release and place in the burning bowl and to see transformed by the flame of Spirit. You may abbreviate or draw a picture or simply communicate

your ideas through prayer to the clean paper. Please transfer from your *Contract with God*, onto the orange slip of paper, all the negative items you've decided to release.

As we burn the orange papers, we symbolically release all the negative things, by way of the fire and smoke. We can each silently affirm, "I release you and let you go; I AM free of you!" As you are ready, a few at a time, bring your orange slip, with negativity on it, come to the door and burn your negative papers, and return to your seat. As you are ready, come forward, ignite the items you choose to release and place them into the burning bowl. As you consciously release your negative conditions, say silently to yourself, "I release you and let you go; I AM free of you!"

You have now released some of your past, some ideas, things, conditions and situations that you no longer desire. By doing so, you have created a vacuum, a space for new ideas, new relationships, and new conditions. In releasing the energy invested in negative thoughts, you can now choose to re-invest your mind-energy in affirmative, positive and rewarding thoughts, which you desire to manifest in your life in the New Year. Now, transfer from your *Contract with God*, onto the slip of blue paper, all the positive items you've decided to attract and manifest into your life. Again, you may write them in words or draw pictures or state silent affirmations. We affirm that burning these slips of paper is symbolic of offering our request or placing our order for future experiences. This is symbolic of our acceptance of the indwelling light of the Christ.

As you are ready, a few at a time, bring your blue papers, come to the center and place your order for your new, positive ideas. Come forward, ignite your written requests and offer them to the Divine-Source by placing them into the burning bowl. As you consciously offer and request your new, positive conditions, you might silently say to yourself, "I choose and affirm these new conditions for my life; I rejoice!"

It is in the releasing of the old and accepting and giving thanks for the new that true freedom is ours. In the words of Jesus, "Father, I thank you that you hear me, and I know that you hear me always." Please take your *Contract with God* home, to contemplate during the coming twelve months. Let's spend a little time in meditation, listening for Divine guidance for this New Year.

### **MEDITATION:**

This is the time when we settle into a quite, inner space; we refresh and renew our connection with Divine-Mind. Close your eyes for a private encounter, and relax; let the chair hold you; let your shoulders down and focus on your breathing – in/out. ~ Quiet the chatter in your mind and rest in silence. ~ Feel the Life-Force within you. ~ Let your intention be to have a two-way dialog with your God and to listen for Divine Ideas, Divine-Guidance, and Divine-Blessings. ~ ~ ~

Give thanks for the guidance you've received; give thanks for the freedom to choose a new way for your life. ~ Bring back to the rest of your life, all the positive changes you have chosen to make permanent. When you're ready, open your eyes.

"...no one can enter the *Kingdom of God* without being born from water and spirit."  
...and so it is... Amen.

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### **MY PERSONAL CONTRACT WITH GOD, THE ONE POWER, THE ALL THAT IS:**

[See below for ideas and suggestions.]

Knowing that there is no right or wrong about life, and knowing that I choose to do what works for my life rather than what does not work, I hereby agree and promise to God-Essence and to myself that I shall, to the very best of my abilities, *omit* the following...

Thoughts & attitudes:

Words & expressions:

Deeds & behaviors:  
Habits & routines:

And I hereby agree and promise to God-Essence and to myself that I shall, to the very best of my abilities, *institute & begin* the following...

Thoughts & attitudes:  
Words & expressions:  
Deeds & behaviors:  
Habits & routines:

Signed this day: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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**THINGS & FEELINGS TO CONSIDER OMITTING:**

Anger      Anxiety      Accusations      Avoiding      Arguments      Annoyed      Alcohol  
Belittling      Blaming      Confusion      Clowning      Desperation      Distrusting      Despair  
Depression      Defeat      Disgust      Denying my garbage      Drugs  
Embarrassing others      Frustration      Fear      Furious      Frowning      Fidgeting  
Grief      Guilt      Glaring      Hate      Hurt feelings      Hopelessness      Humiliation  
Ignoring others      Inadequacy      Intimidation      Ignorance      Justifying      Jealousy  
Jittery-jumpy feelings      Joking too much      Judging      Lack      Laziness      Limits  
Loathing      Lying      Manipulating      Minimizing      Moralizing  
Medicating [w/alcohol, drugs]      Overwhelmed      Over-lording      Procrastination  
Projecting      Put-downs      Powerlessness      Rejection      Resentment      Revenge  
Rage      Rationalizing      Swearing      Shyness      Self-pity      Shame  
Smugness      Shocking others      Silent treatment      Smoking      Talking too much  
Taking from others      Tattling      Violence      Worry      Weakness      Withdrawing  
Worthlessness

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**THINGS TO CONSIDER INSTITUTING:**

Action      Adequacy      Abundance      Calm      Cherish      Clarity      Closeness  
Confidence      Creativity      Deserving      Exercise      Freedom      Fulfilled  
Gladness      Harmony      Health      Helpful      Hopeful      Joyful      Letting go  
Loving      Meditation      Owing my emotional garbage      Peace      Praise      Plenty  
Proud      Pleased      Planning      Protection      Receptiveness      Relief  
Safety      Smiles      Self-worth      Self-trust      Self-love      Strength  
Spiritual power      Trusting      Treasure      Value      Wealth

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**THREE STEPS TO CHANGE: A-B-C**

1. Become **Aware** of what you are doing that does not work for your life.
2. **Be** responsible for it; own it; it's your stuff; you've been perpetuating it.
3. **Change** it; try something new & see if that works for your life.

*Notes to Self:*