

Linda Simmons
Doorway Ritual
New Year's Service
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When I was young, I wanted to be a nun. The simplicity of that life called to me with such strength. I longed for the clarity, the community, the common purpose and silence and lack of excess. I longed for a profound and daily relationship to faith. That longing inspired in me a child's life of service in many ways. I took care of my brothers and sisters. I taught classes for the neighborhood children in our basement. I liked to sew and write and I put together plays and performances for my family on the holidays. I was a child and a child's heart is so easily and so quietly broken. But broken does not mean destroyed. Some say a heart that breaks is one that can let the light in. Perhaps the light that came in then to my heart is what led me here ultimately, to this calling of ministry.

It is the new year dawning that has asked me to look back and see where I have been and judge what has been done and left undone and is now waiting to be accomplished in my life. Assessing the past and visioning the future while making promises to ourselves to live more fully into our visions is a custom that dates back to the days of the Romans. Janus is an ancient Roman god of doorways, of beginnings, and of the rising and setting of the sun, usually represented as having one head with two bearded faces back to back, looking in opposite directions. Janus looks both backward and forward at the same time; he sees both the past and the future. Janus was believed to represent beginnings and was invoked as a protector of beginnings. The month January takes its name from the god Janus.

Thinking back over this past year, I have been trying to envision what beginnings I might need to invoke the god Janus to bless, and what habits I would be better to leave behind. I conjured up Janus' face and even found a picture of him on line, two beautiful, young, open faces looking intently in two opposite directions. Looking at his face I wondered which creates the other most clearly: does the past, which can only be our story of it, shape the future or does the future, which can only be our vision of it,

shape the past? When I envisioned myself to be a nun, I judged who I was or was not in relation to that vision and told myself a story of how I was failing or succeeding, of how I was living well and poorly and this is the story is my past. Who we dream ourselves to be matters.

As the poet Harriet Kofalk writes,

First

I create the space

in which to grow

into new dimensions

then I can move there

First the vision must be built and then the journey begins.

What vision do you have for yourself this year? Is it to be a more patient mother or father, wife, husband, partner, friend? A kinder, more compassionate leader in your workplace? Is it to be less judgmental or even a more engaged social activist? Is it to be more honest, more present, more gentle in your public or private life or both? Perhaps it is to take better care of yourself? All visions matter, all visions impact the world.

What we believe about ourselves, who we see ourselves to be when we look to the future, that is who we grade ourselves against when we put together the story of our past. And then this story of our past opens or closes doors and gates and passageways that Janus rules over and inspires or denies other visions of who we can be. Both the future and the past determine who we are at the end of the day, what we have to give the world and each other and, most importantly I think, whether we feel worthy enough to be engaged in the world around us.

When we come up short as we look over the past and note the ways in which all those visions of ourselves, personal and public, never came to fruition because life proved more complicated and more messy and unruly than we had taken into consideration, what we do next, how we build our next vision for the next year, matters. And if we allow ourselves some spiritual accompaniment which offers forgiveness and understanding and acceptance, then we can still put together a mighty image of ourselves in a mighty world that needs us.

As author Alistair MacLean writes: Help me find my happiness, in my acceptance of what is my purpose. I love that line, in the acceptance of what is my purpose. Not in the creation or making of what is my purpose, but in its acceptance. How often these purposes are not as shiny and bright and worldly and glitzy and powerful and earth shattering as we wish. To be able to recognize and accept the duty of a purpose no matter what its garb, that is part of the gift.

Janus, the Roman god of beginnings and endings is also the God of doorways. So now we honor this new year time by stepping through a doorway. It's just an ordinary doorway. And it's a magical doorway, in the way that the spiritual leader, Starhawk meant magic – anything that changes our consciousness. On this side of the door is the year that just ended, everything that happened yesterday, or before.

On this side of the door is the rest of the day, the rest of the year, the rest of your life. Right here where the doorway is painted blue [point to the inside of the doorway], this is the present moment, just a flicker and this is where the magic happens. Don't miss it! I invite everyone to step through the door. All participation is voluntary of course. I invite you to leave behind what no longer serves you and then step through the present and on into the future, into the rest of your life.

But before you do, you will notice there is a card in your order of service. On this, I invite you to write something you want to be sure to hang onto as you go into the new year. It might be something simple that you live with all the time that you want to continue, it might be something new.

Write yourself a note of something in yourself you want to grow or build. And then you'll find an envelope. If you write your future self a note and put it in the envelope we'll mail it to you at the beginning of the new church year in September. And that will help you remember.

Bring it up as you come through the doorway, and drop it in the basket. Now the trick with the envelope is that you must address it to yourself so we can get it to you. So go ahead now and fill out your note to yourself and address your envelope and when you are done, please come up and walk through the doorway, leaving whatever parts of your old self you wish to leave behind you and walking into your renewed self and the rest of your life as you pass through this enchanted doorway.

If you are unable to pass through this physical doorway for whatever reason, no worries, please come up anyway and I will pass a symbolic doorway over you that is just as effective I assure you!

[People can walk through the door now in as music is played.]

Welcome to the rest of your life!

The Jews honor the new year during Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur which is early in the fall, the Muslim people count the year by moons, so they celebrate the new year after 12 cycles of the moon have gone by, which means their new year moves around the seasons, the Wiccan people believe the year ends at Halloween, and Chinese New Year also moves with the moon and the sun so falls somewhere between mid-January and mid-February. Hindu New Year celebrates the beginning of Spring and happens mid-March to mid-April. So there are many times to celebrate the new year, depending on who your people are and where you live. That means that the door of the new year, the door of endings and beginnings is always opening and closing and turning so that you can step through again and again or you can even watch the turning go by for a few seasons without stepping through at all.

Remembering that our purpose is already here with us, if only we have the vision to embrace who we are and the clarity to see ourselves as good enough, we can tell a story that allows us the purpose our lives already express.

When we see ourselves here as worthy, as good enough, the door of the past and future opens and reopens all year. Today, we are right where we are supposed to be, doing just what we are supposed to be doing.

The doorway of our lives leads us only where we are willing to go. Let's tell a story of compassion, peace and community.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!