

## LIGHTING THE CHALICE (unison)

Out of the Universal spark  
    came the stars and the planets and the people.  
Out of the burning bush  
    came the words of truth that will guide our way home.  
Out of the birth of a babe  
    came the illumination of love and hope in the world.  
Out of the flame we now kindle  
    comes the reminder that we must be that light of truth and  
    love and hope for one another.

(Rev. Frado)

## MEDITATION

### My Birth's Inheritance by Rev. Cynthia A. Frado

With eyes closed and breath slow and steady  
I sink into the sweet darkness of my soul's longing,  
held in the inexplicable glow of the inner light  
that was my birth's inheritance.  
With all the changing seasons of my life,  
the flame remains the same...steady, strong, unyielding  
to even the darkest night of any year.  
It does not judge me,  
It does not cause me to suffer,  
It simply receives me as I am.  
This gentle light of warmth and vision is my constant companion.  
May I find comfort and hope in its indomitable spirit,  
that it might continue to guide me on my journey  
to wherever I need to be.

## *INTERFAITH REFLECTIONS ON THE THEME OF LIGHT*

(Read by Rev. Frado and Polly Petersen)

**Inspired by Judaism**

**“The Power of Light”**

**From the wisdom of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

All that came into being...

...all the created worlds and all the ethereal entities that live in them, even the worlds that are mere emanations without tangible substance, even the worlds of thought and beyond to the realms of infinite light that preceded Creation...

—all this came to be **only as a result of the thought of you**, the earthly being, struggling in a world that only an infinitesimal glimmer of G-dliness has reached in its purity, bringing light where light could not be.

And so it follows, that with one simple act of beauty, *all those worlds and realms of light find their purpose fulfilled*, and so shine yet brighter—and reciprocate with a burst of illumination into our lowly world.

That is why the entire creation can be transformed **with one simple, sincere deed**.

Never underestimate the power of light.

Response No. 362 *Rise Up, O Flame*

**Inspired by Hinduism**

**“A Play of Light”**

**From the wisdom of Sangeeta**

(Polly)

I sketched an outline of the world I dreamed  
And invited light to bring it to life.

It poured in fluid, generous and colourful,  
Spilling over, blurring the lines.

I was taken aback as before my eyes  
All the boundaries melted away,  
And though this was not what I had wanted,  
It was better in its own way.

Light can leave no crevices unlit,  
Vacuums unfilled,  
Or shadows hidden.  
It does not discriminate between what “should be”  
And all that can happen.

With equal acceptance and loving grace for both,  
The canvas was now filled  
With a bright and complete universe.

There was some surprise,  
Some grief and even some regret,  
For my surrendered plans  
That had been laid to rest.

Yet, eventually I raised my hands  
In grateful prayer  
With a heart full of thanks...  
It may have taken awhile,  
But finally,  
Now, I understand.

Response No. 362    *Rise Up, O Flame*

**Inspired by Christianity    “Learning How to Bless One Another”  
From the wisdom of John O’Donohue**

The word blessing evokes a sense of warmth and protection; it suggests that no life is alone or unreachable. Each life is clothed in raiment of spirit that secretly links it to everything else. Though suffering and chaos befall us, they can never quench that inner light of providence. . . . *A blessing is not a sentiment or a question*; it is a gracious invocation where the human heart pleads with the divine heart. . . . *When a blessing is invoked, it changes the atmosphere*. Some of the plenitude flows into our hearts from the invisible neighborhood of loving kindness. **In the light and reverence of blessing, a person or situation becomes illuminated in a completely new way.**

Response No. 362    *Rise Up, O Flame*

**Inspired by Islam**

**“A Prayer Solicitation for Light”  
From the wisdom of Shaykh Seraj Hendricks**

O Allah, I ask You to place Light in our minds and in our thinking;  
To place Light upon our tongues and in our speaking;  
To place Light in our hearts and in our understanding;  
And to guide us with the Light of wisdom to our final parting.  
May all of us embrace, and be embraced, by the Light.  
Allahu Nur as-Samawat wa l-‘Ard...  
Nur ‘ala Nur yahdi Allahu li nurihi man yasha’  
“Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth...  
Light upon Light, Allah guides to His Light whomsoever He wills.”  
(24:35)

Response No. 362    *Rise Up, O Flame*

**Inspired by Buddhism**

**“The Buddha’s Last Instruction”  
From the wisdom of Mary Oliver**

The Buddha’s Last Instruction

“Make of yourself a light”  
said the Buddha,  
before he died.

*I think of this every morning  
as the east begins  
to tear off its many clouds of darkness,  
to send up the first  
signal—a white fan  
streaked with pink and violet,  
even green.*

An old man, he lay down  
between two sala trees,  
and he might have said anything,  
knowing it was his final hour.

*The light burns upward,  
it thickens and settles over the fields.*

Around him, the villagers gathered  
and stretched forward to listen.

*Even before the sun itself  
hangs, disattached, in the blue air,  
I am touched everywhere  
by its ocean of yellow waves.*

No doubt he thought of everything  
that had happened in his difficult life.

*And then I feel the sun itself  
as it blazes over the hills,  
like a million flowers on fire-  
clearly I'm not needed,  
yet I feel myself turning  
into something of inexplicable value.*

Slowly, beneath the branches,  
he raised his head.  
He looked into the faces of that frightened crowd.

Response No. 362    *Rise Up, O Flame*

**A Festival of Lights**

The Reverend Cynthia A. Frado

UU Society of Amherst, MA

12/4/16

It is not a coincidence that the theme of light is at the heart of enlightenment. It is the essence of revelation, that “Aha” moment, whether it be a scientific discovery or a new way of seeing your world, the light of knowledge and wisdom changes everything. To that end, I’d like to draw from a reflection on light by my UU colleague Robert Fulghum, in his book It Was On Fire When I Lay On It. (That story is for another day!) This one is about a seminar he once attended in Greece.

On the last day of the conference, the discussion leader walked over to the bright light of an open window and looked out. Then he asked if there were any questions.

Fulghum (who is a consummate jokester) raised his hand and laughingly asked him what was *the meaning of life*. Everyone in attendance laughed and stirred to leave. However, the leader held up his

hand to ask for silence and then responded “I will answer your question.”

He took his wallet out of his pocket and removed a small round mirror about the size of a quarter. Then he explained:

*When I was a small child during World War II, we were very poor and we lived in a remote village. One day on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had been wrecked in that place. I tried to find all the pieces and put them together, but it was not possible, so I kept the largest piece. This one. And by scratching it on a stone, I made it round.*

*I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun could never shine. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places that I could find. I kept the little mirror, and as I grew up, I would take it out at idle moments and continue the challenge of the game.*

*As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just a child’s game, but a metaphor of what I could do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of the light. But light—be it truth or understanding or knowledge—is there, and it will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it.*

He went on to say, *I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with **what I have**, I can reflect light into the dark places of this world—into the dark places of human hearts—and change some things in some people. Perhaps others seeing it happen will do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of **my** life.*

And then, taking the mirror and catching a beam of light from the window, he reflected it upon Robert Fulghum’s face.

Light is a common metaphor in all the world's religions. It is symbolic of all that is good and just, compassionate and forgiving, wise and loving. Described as the essence of the Divine Creator, it calls out to our higher nature. **It is the epitome of truth revealed.** To dwell in the Light, to become one with the Light, to let your light shine before all people, is to recognize that we all have within us the capacity to shed light on injustice and bring healing into the world. We all have within us the ability to channel understanding and compassion, thankfulness and joy, humility, healing and responsible stewardship.

To quote Robert Fulghum's Greek philosopher, *we are **all** fragments of a mirror whose design and shape we do not know. Nevertheless, with what we have, we **can** reflect light into the dark places of this world—into the dark places of human hearts—and perhaps change some things in some people, or even inspire others to shine their own light.*

There is yet another twist to the light metaphor, as reflected (pun not intended) in our story-for-all-ages this morning. We spend much of our lives obsessing over the past and worrying about the future, our memories and dreams filled with desires that never seem to fully satisfy. Consequently we forget to live fully in the moment. **En-lightenment** comes when we move beyond our desire and our suffering and awaken to the miraculous that is present in the here and now. It helps us look at each other and the world with a heightened awareness and appreciation that goes beyond judgment, and allows us to see, perhaps for the first time, what is holy and precious in our sight. **Gratitude as a state-of-being is the result of an enlightened soul.** The person whose heart is filled with gratitude brings light even to the darkest places.

*Make of yourself a light,* said the Buddha before he died. **Is there any greater instruction that we can leave our children and grandchildren?** *Make of yourself a light.* Become a beacon of kindness and hope in the world. Live each day from a place of humility and gratitude. Look for the blessings in every moment, even the most



difficult. Do not be judgmental. Forgive the imperfections in yourself and others. Honor and respect all sentient beings. *Bring the light of your love and concern to those places where darkness prevails*. Do not dwell on the past or agonize over the future. Instead, **bring all of your awareness** to how you encounter each moment that you are given. Show compassion and generosity toward others. Become an embodiment of gratitude. *Make of yourself a light*.

We live in a time of unprecedented hardship and angst. It is easy to shine and be grateful when there's money in the bank, the family is healthy, and you can find a parking space in downtown Amherst. But we all know from experience that financial stability isn't always a guarantee, that human bodies are susceptible to pain and brokenness, and that there will be days when the parking gods are not on our side.

Finding blessings and embodying gratitude in the midst of our despair is one of life's greatest challenges. Yet, that is exactly what we are called to do, for where there is gratitude, there is the radiance of life. Still, there are times when we feel burned-out, when our own light becomes diminished and we need it to be rekindled by the flame of another.

Author and minister Marianne Williamson says: *We are all meant to shine, as children do. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. **As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.***

It is amazing what one beam of light can do to help illuminate the path that will lead us out of the dark night of our soul...one encouraging word, one kind gesture, one loving hug, one thoughtful bowl of chicken or vegan soup. *From you I receive, to you I give, together we share, and from this we live*. The truth is that ***we cannot survive without sharing and caring for one another***. We need to have the luminescence of a

*Buddhist heart, a Jewish heart, a Muslim heart, a Hindu heart, a Christian heart, a UU heart* all the time. And when we turn up the wattage of our awareness and our thoughtfulness and our gratitude, then our blessings become magnified.

Whatever sacred scriptures inform your journey, know that *we are all fragments of a mirror whose design and shape we do not know. Nevertheless, with what we have, we can reflect light into the dark places of this world—into the dark places of human hearts—and perhaps change some things in some people, or even inspire others to shine their own light.* For each of us is called to dwell in the light of truth and justice, of compassion and forgiveness, of righteousness and love.

Perhaps the world's religions are onto something. *To walk safely through the maze of human life, one needs the light of wisdom and the guidance of virtue and a grateful heart.* 'Tis the season to make of yourself a light!

Amen and Blessed Be