

## The New Year

Chalice Lighting  
Sharing of Joys and Concerns  
Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

The Evergreen Ritual of Giving Up.

The Ritual of Sharing Hopes

I have a small grain of hope--  
one small crystal that gleams  
clear colors out of transparency.

I need more.

I break off a fragment  
to send to you.

Please take  
this grain of a grain of hope  
so that mine won't shrink.

Please share your fragment  
so that yours will grow.

Only so, by division,  
will hope increase,

like a clump of irises, which will cease to flower  
unless you distribute  
the clustered roots, unlikely source--  
clumsy and earth-covered--  
of grace.

Levertov

Discussion, if time

Group Business

Closing Words and Song "Go Now in Peace"

I have walked through many lives,  
Some of them my own,  
And I am not who I was,  
Though some principle of being  
Abides . . .  
I am not done with my changes.  
Stanley Kunitz

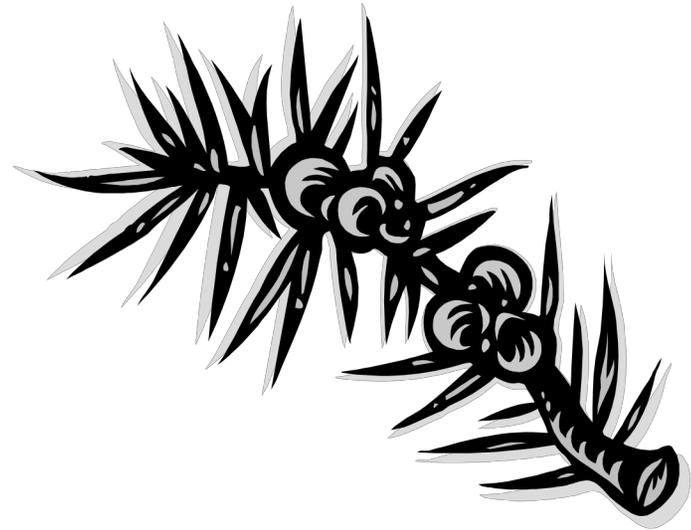
# *Covenant Groups*

## The New Year

### *The Covenant*

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group.
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent and to come to the group one last time and say goodbye if I need to quit.
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others.
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people's stories.
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn.



## Leader Notes: The New Year

For this session, you will need a piece of red ribbon for each person in your group. You'll need for this session some container about the size of a mixing bowl. It could be a basket, vase, or something similar. If you feel adventurous and have a way to accomplish this, you can plan to let people burn their evergreen sprigs.

You will also need a piece of cloth, scarf, or napkin, to contain the grains of something that people were supposed to bring. You might bring some extras in case anyone forgot. Finally, you'll need a clean glass jar with a lid to put all the grains in.

Open in the usual way: Light the chalice, ask for joys and concerns, sit in silence.

Explain to the group that we are going to add a bit of ritual to the gathering. The task before us will be to speak of some of the things we would like to leave behind in the New Year...bad habits, old grudges, unfulfilled plans, unskillful behaviors...whatever we think we'd be better off without. We'll use the sprig of evergreen and the ribbon to symbolize those things, and each person, after they have spoken, will drop their branch in the basket in the center.

(You might like to say that ritual is the purposeful enacting of the possible in order to bring it into being in the real. Tell them that it has been shown that the part of the brain that is active during ritual behavior is a child-like part of the brain that makes no differentiation between what is real and what is fantasy. Part of the power of ritual is that something which the adult whole of ourselves knows is fantasy is emplaced in one part of our brains as real.)

Pass out red ribbons, and ask the group to think about the things they would like to leave behind in the old year, and, as they are thinking, to tie the ribbon around their sprig.

When everyone is done, invite sharing. Remind each group member to drop their evergreen into the basket when they are done. It is possible that someone will decide, after speaking, to keep their sprig. This is ok.

When everyone has spoken once, take the basket away. Tell the group that you will burn them together (if you have arranged to do that) at the end of the meeting, or solicit a group member to take them home and burn them for the group.

Spread a cloth on the table where the basket was.

Now the task is to think of the hopes, strengths, plans, and bright spots they are aware of in the next year. Everyone should have brought 10 grains of some little thing.

The second round of sharing will be simply the sharing of words. Ask people to count out ten of whatever they have brought, and to identify some strengths, plans, hopes...up to 10.

Have someone read the Levertov poem.

Go around and share one by one, letting people share one thing and add a grain. They can simply add a grain if they can't think of anything or don't want to say it aloud. When all the grains are gone

When all have shared or at least contributed their grains, invite everyone to take one back...one of someone else's hopes.

Read the Kuniz poem

Close in your usual way.

## **The New Year: Homework:**

**Please bring to this session:**

**a sprig of evergreen...from your holiday decorations, your yard, or someone else's yard! Along with it, think about some of the things, attitudes, habits, which you intend to leave behind in the "old year".**

**about 10 or something very small, like grains of rice, tiny pebbles, bird seed...use your imagination! Put a few pinches of this item in a baggie. Along with that, think about your hopes for next year.**