

TURNING OF THE YEAR READINGS—2008
January 5-6, 2008

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Marking Births: “On Children” by Kahlil Gibran

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth...¹

Marking Deaths: “The Long Boat” by Stanley Kunitz

When his boat snapped loose
from its mooring, under
the screaming of the gulls,
he tried at first to wave
to his dear ones on shore,
but in the rolling fog
they had already lost their faces.
Too tired even to choose
between jumping and calling,
somehow he felt absolved and free
of his burdens, those mottoes
stamped on his name-tag:
conscience, ambition, and all
that caring.
He was content to lie down
with the family ghosts

¹ Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1923), p. 17.

in the slop of his cradle,
buffeted by the storm,
endlessly drifting.
Peace! Peace!
To be rocked by the Infinite!
As if it didn't matter
which way was home;
as if he didn't know
he loved the earth so much
he wanted to stay forever.²

Marking Marriages From Sobonfu Somé

Marriage is a way of taking the call of the spirit further. It brings two souls, two purposes, two worlds together and allows them to bring their gifts forward to benefit the community.

Marriage is a way for spirit to bring its support for two people into one greater energy. It brings together two or many lines of ancestors, two cultures, and many different ways of looking at the world.

Marriage is two souls coming into one soul – still distinct but forming one entity. It is a way of bringing two people's gifts together in order to strengthen them and make them even better. It acknowledges that two people are embarking on something that is bigger than them and bigger than the tribe. ...

When we come together as a couple, we bring two worlds together....³

Marking Other Significant Events “The Layers” by Stanley Kunitz

I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle
not to stray.
When I look behind,
as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength
to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling
toward the horizon
and the slow fires trailing
from the abandoned camp-sites,

² <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-long-boat/>.

³ Sobonfu Somé, *The Spirit of Intimacy – Ancient African Teachings in the Ways of Relationships* (New York: Quill-HarperCollins, 2002), pp. 67-68.

over which scavenger angels
wheel on heavy wings.
Oh, I have made myself a tribe
out of my true affections,
and my tribe is scattered!
How shall the heart be reconciled
to its feast of losses?
In a rising wind
the manic dust of my friends,
those who fell along the way,
bitterly stings my face.
Yet I turn, I turn,
exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go
wherever I need to go,
and every stone on the road
precious to me.
In my darkest night,
when the moon was covered
and I roamed through wreckage,
a nimbus-clouded voice
directed me:
"Live in the layers,
not on the litter."
Though I lack the art
to decipher it,
no doubt the next chapter
in my book of transformations
is already written.
I am not done with my changes.⁴

Closing Words

from *Meditations of the Heart* by Howard Thurman

The old song of my spirit has wearied itself out.

It has long ago been learned by heart;

It repeats itself over and over,

Bringing no added joy to my days or lift to my spirit.

It is a good song, measured to a rhythm to which I am bound by ties of habit
and timidity of mind.

⁴ <https://notes.utk.edu/bio/greenberg.nsf/0/4102acfe55837f6a85256b4100365916?OpenDocument>.

But my life has passed beyond to other levels where the old song is
meaningless.

And I know that the old song, perfect in its place, is not for the new demand!

I will sing a new song.

I must learn the new song for the new needs.

I must fashion new words born of all the new growth of my life –
of my mind – of my spirit.

I must prepare for new melodies that have never been mine before.

That all that is within me may lift my voice unto God.

Therefore, I shall rejoice with each new day

And delight my spirit in each fresh unfolding.

I will sing, this day, a new song unto the Lord.⁵

⁵ Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart*.