

READINGS FROM *Cycles of Reflection* by Robert Senghas, used at the Installation of Mara Dowdall as Senior Minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington, Vermont on March 30, 2014:

This is not a religious society of the elect in a world of lost souls, nor is it a community of the saved in a world of the damned. This is not an island of the pure in heart in a sea of the impure, nor of saints among sinners. This is not a group of rationalists in an ocean of superstition, nor of those who are free of self-deception among a multitude of hypocrites.

Each of us from time to time is saved and lost in this world; each of us is pure and defiled, rational and irrational, self-serving and selfless, cruel and compassionate. We seek to remember who we are, when we are saint and when we are sinner; we must decide, each for himself or herself, what our religious and moral way will be. We seek to be surprised: to rejoice when we are on the right road, and to turn when we stray.

* * *

We believe that each of us is the final arbiter of himself or herself as to what that personal faith should be. No clergy, no tradition, no authority is superior to our own judgment; but we believe we must challenge our own judgment, testing it always against our temptations to self-deception and our prejudices of class, race, circumstance, and history. We are liable to faults of judgment and prejudice, but the remedy to those faults is our constant vigilance and resolve to be honest with our deepest selves.

* * *

We believe that we are more when we are in a community of seekers and believers than we are separately. In religious community and worship we can challenge one another in our self-deceptions, deepen our personal faith, elevate our moral aspirations, heighten our joy, and sustain one another in our sorrow.

By our faith, by our faiths, we shall live, bear our mortality, honor the human beings who have given us our existence, and leave the world a little better place than we found it.