This is the year
when shawled refugees deport judges
who stare at the floor...as files are stamped
with their destination…

This is the year
that those who swim the border’s undertow
are greeted with trumpets and drums...
on the other side…

(Martin Espada)

The winter seems so fierce: startling snow where it never falls; frigid cold endangering human life; dams bursting; infernos raging; droughts and melting icefloes… climate catastrophe.

What kind of year is this?

So too the human cataclysm: an unrelenting blizzard of wars resulting in famine and starvation; the children of Yemen an avalanche of preventable tragedy; a dam-bursting flood of refugees fleeing for their lives, for safety, for freedom… some 25 million world-wide as the billionaire-borne bubble of wealth bursts the hopes of the poor. What kind of year is this?

And within our own “borders”? A chilling storm of numbers, words and letters: Travel Ban and TPS… deportation and ICE; caravan, invasion and detention. And surely worst of all: separation (some 14,300 children living – and some dying – in detention). Here in our own household of friends from Burundi, Uganda, Syria and Iraq legal phrases seem to become prayerful petitions: asylum, visa application, reunification, humanitarian parole and, of course, sanctuary.

A structure of a morally deprived obsession would seem to emerge from all this: a Ceiling… (no more than 30,000 will enter this vast land of the free); a Wall… (built to ensure that the most brave find no home here); all built along a Border… “that line that birds cannot see...a rusted hinge that does not bend... the blood clot in the river’s veins that says STOP to the wind, but the wind speaks another language, and keeps on going....” (Alberto Rios)

What kind of year is this? Yes, a time of moral shutdown and National Emergency…. But we think and hope for a time of “Great Awakening”… a surge of souls set to gather with new vision… new imagination… a new idea of humanity. The poet sees it best:

If the abolition of slave manacles
began as a vision of
hands without manacles
then this is the year

And if the shutdown of extermination camps
began as imagination of a land
without barbed wire or the crematorium,
then this is the year….

SO MAY EVERY HUMILIATED MOUTH NOW FILL WITH THE ANGELS OF BREAD.
WAIT WITH US FOR MARWA

There is a girl from Syria. She is called Marwa, named after a holy mountain in Mecca. In 2016 Marwa suffered extreme burns during a bombing. With her family she fled to Turkey and then was taken into Germany where she and her family now reside as refugees. In Germany, Marwa has had multiple surgeries for her extensive injuries. However her doctors have strongly advised that Marwa would greatly benefit from treatment at Shriners Hospital for Children in Boston where an advanced level of treatment for her disfigurement is available.

With the help of her advocates in Germany, Marwa and her father, who would accompany her, applied for visas and prepared to come to the US. Shriners set dates for surgeries, all care being offered with no cost as is their practice. The House of Peace, which had been contacted for hospitality, prepared to welcome Marwa. Then came the long weeks, and then months of delay after the initial Embassy interview. Finally, in December, 2018 Marwa received notification that her visa was denied on the basis of inadequate proof that she intended to return to her home in Germany… to her family… to her friends… to her school… to her new country.

Dates have significance. As we received this shocking news the House of Peace was sharing in world-wide observances of the 70th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. We were with others focusing our attention on Article 25 which emphasizes the right to well-being, to health, to special protection for women and children. Suddenly Marwa”s rights were suspended, violated, obstructed. She has become another victim of the Ban that would keep Muslims from our country and victim of a Paper Wall that would deny entry to a child in dire need of medical care.

But Marwa has courageous family advocates and an ever-growing international circle of support. Joining their efforts the House of Peace has deepened our ties with Marwa and her family, written to the Embassy, been interviewed by newspapers and radio, and added to a petition to the US State Department these words:

Marwa has taken on a great burden in this hour of destiny that would deprive a child of her internationally recognized human rights. Her wounds become her strength. Her unspeakable injuries become a resounding voice for justice. The House of Peace waits with open arms to welcome her when that voice is finally heard.

Heartbeat – Song for Syria
(Zade Dirani, UNICEF)

Amid destruction and fire, our wound is deep
We want to say it loud, but our voice is weak
We want to say it loud: everything is possible.

Someone listen, someone hear
We want our childhood back
Together we can hope
We will be stronger and grow
With pain, fear and tears we write this song
Our hearts beat back to life.

Our faces will glow and light this long darkness
Dreams we built together will all come true
We want to say it loud: everything is possible.

Together we can hope
We will be stronger and grow
Our hearts beat back to life.

...and with us welcome Safeh – another child of Syria,
Now living at the House of Peace.
How is it that this 16th century mandate from the religious community of a Spanish mystic can resonate with such clarity in our 21st century House of Peace? Maybe the laws and legends of life in community are, after all, timeless and the rules for sharing life together without bounds. Whatever the case we take these guidelines for hospitality seriously and never cease to marvel at the creative ways they are fulfilled by our host of volunteers, interns and helpers of all kinds.

When the givers and receivers of hospitality span cultures and continents and represent generational, intellectual and physical differences the challenges are vast. But all who come to this House of Peace seem to carry an innate reverence for the other and a lively willingness to meet, person to person, in new ways. The young seem to excel in this! High schoolers and college students, individuals (many still coming from Germany) and youth groups from schools and churches offer their enthusiasm and energy to the household and all its projects. Learning from the many seasoned volunteers who have helped us in so many ways for so many years, these earnest interns take on every form of task… from land, garden and people-care to cooking, cleaning and house care; from setting up for events to accompanying us to concerts, cafes and carnivals! The spirited, fun-loving conversations… German to Arabic… Persian to Swahili… and the cross-cultural cooking marathons nurture the friendships which continue long after folks leave.

Yes, there is a very real and enduring “holding dear” that can make all the difference. The House of Peace is humbly grateful for all the people who constantly teach us new ways to each other.
**FROM THE PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSES OF THE HOUSE OF PEACE**

The House of Peace intends to confront the suffering of the earth and its displaced peoples with a thought of the heart manifested in community life where some of the givers of healing are themselves bearing mental and physical handicaps. In this effort we turn to the wisdom of anthroposophically-oriented social therapy and to the work of a leader in that field, Dr. Karl Konig (1902-1966):

*We have only to grasp the idea of curative work in a sufficiently comprehensive way to become aware of its true vocation....Healing community wants to become a worldwide activity and helpfully confront the threat to the individual person. This attitude must express itself in every social service: in the care of souls, in the guidance of orphans and refugees and in aid for the underdeveloped.... It is the only answer we can offer today...inasmuch as we still want to be human beings...to mankind dancing at the abyss.*

There is some daring involved in community life. In fact, quite a fair amount of risk is required. But honest sharing and the trusting acceptance, each one of the other, pave the way for an exciting journey, a vibrant life. So much can come about when at the heart of the effort the Social Artist is at work. To be healing, hospitality must be genuine and unconditional, heart-filled and warm.

And so it is no great surprise to discover daily at the House of Peace that we fully rely on the masterful gifts of our specially enabled members to create this community. It is a true “breath of magic” when those in need of special care are empowered, enabled and encouraged to give special care...when those who bear “handicaps” can offer their gifts of openness and acceptance to those we call refugees, victims of war...war which is, we sadly discover, the ultimate handicapping condition.

The moments sparkle. The exchanges enliven. The rhythm of sharing flows on:...when Mary Ellen turns 80 and from her wheelcahir welcomes each person each day with her irrepressible enthusiasm... ...when Geraldine shares her gourmet techniques in our multi-national kitchen whose walls are adorned with her vivid paintings... ...when Nick with inspiring perseverance continues to pursue his post-stroke recovery, engaging in spirited dialogue in a multi-lingual collage of conversation.

With so much life and laughter the bearing of the stress and pain and trauma become possible. And isn’t that what we all cling to, these somewhat apocalyptic days: The Possible? The often unexpected, usually mundane, extraordinarily ordinary, hallowed and ultimately triumphant Possible!
FROM THE CHAOS OF WAR TO A CULTURE FOR PEACE

The House of Peace finds itself as a microcosm for world service in union with a vast web of inter-related people who would transform the anguish of war into the substance for peace. (Principles and Purposes of the House of Peace)

What can really be said of the bonds that deepen among such people who would, by their life work, transform the chaos of war into a culture of peace? Our souls stand in awe before our co-workers and colleagues who tirelessly walk the web-stretching, peace-building path in these hard times.

Over monthly breakfasts with Veterans for Peace, in front of encouraging fires at the House of Peace hearth for bi-weekly sharing with the North Shore Coalition for Peace and Justice, at vigils, meetings, walks and conferences together with friends in many peace organizations we experience real unity, strengthened by lively dialogue and debate. We join in prayerful ponderings with the monks and nuns of the New England Peace Pagoda deepening our solidarity with world-wide coalitions committed to the abolition of nuclear weapons. And in historic Concord, at Hanscom Air Force Base, now Nuclear Command Control and Communications “modernization” headquarters, John joins with silent strength those whose cry for a nuclear-free life would be a “Shout heard round the world,” even as the handcuffs tighten and the arrest is completed.

These are the ones that we, a microcosmic presence, embrace in our community life even as the macrocosm of militarism threatens to destroy essential weapons treaties, and thereby even the sacred works of Genesis. In its horrific clarity the truth remains: War creates refugees. And so if we are to serve with all our soul forces those peoples displaced by war, violence and catastrophe we must devote ourselves in every way we can to the abolition of war and the weapons of war.
FESTIVALS AT THE HOUSE OF PEACE

There is a unique power in the rhythm of the seasons and the cycle of the year. In a global environment of climate change and unsustainable disaster—so much of it connected to war and all violence against nature—the steady flow of the Festivals and the accompanying seasons of the soul must give us some sense of place and possibility.

The hush of early winter’s Advent with its mysteries of silence and seed burst with Solstice strength into the Christmas chorus of light and promise fulfilled. All religious traditions under our roof seem to resonate with such celebration and the universal heralding of peace. On into the mid-winter with its crystalline challenges which stir our awakening faculties even as Candlemas (February 2) finds us warming together at the kitchen hearth, sharing stories and recipes and blessings and meals and so much more.

Lent would have us slow down, seeking the balance of the Spring Equinox, deepening the spirit’s pace as we grope in too dark a world for Easter light. At nearby Crane Beach, in the chill of every Easter morn, we stand in “infinite expectation of the dawn”, usually some twenty of us, awestruck at the Rising Sun and all that will come from the power of Paschal Fire.

In Summer’s Solstice time with the flames of the St. John’s fire, we embrace the forces of nature, the Divine Mothering Earth, and we gather often at the House of Peace, hosting a Summer Series of lectures and presentations that broaden our awareness of and appreciation for an active seeking undertaken in groups with open, honest conversation. Our hillside Upper Room (formerly Ipswich Grange Hall) is a worthy meeting place for such gatherings and we are nourished by these special times of sharing that includes art, music, eurythmy, poetry, and group exercises.

Autumn brings another Equinox…and the season we have know as “Michaelmas”. It is all so ancient, this connecting with an archangelic being of a spiritual world. And yet it is all so future-bearing, this universal force of truth, justice and courage. We delve deeply into all this, in the return to regular Study Groups, readings, meetings and celebrations within a culture that would keep us human… keep us searching for what it means in these times to become ever more human.

These are the Festivals we celebrate at the House of Peace, each one enriched by the presence of other rites and rituals of other approaches to the deepest truths. We cherish all that we experience together in our diversity and unity at these sacred times. Where would we be midst the disorienting forces of this tech-mad world if we couldn’t meet each other, face to face, in simple ceremonies and holy rituals, honoring age-old yet ever-new mysteries of our human/divine odyssey?
IN MEMORIAM

There is yet another Festival that lies at the very heart of this House of Peace. Each year in early November we gather to remember those who have died. This Festival of All Souls draws us deep into the mysteries of the Threshold, mysteries that permeate each day in our community life, touched as we are by the crossing over of friends and colleagues, relatives of our refugee guests, souls with whom we are somehow connected in very real ways.

Such a one recently made her journey “over the rainbow bridge,” her sudden passing a grief for her parents, sisters and large extended family in Uganda and Kenya. Little Bridget began her life six years ago at the House of Peace, sheltering here with her Mother until return to their home in Africa was possible. Bridget and her Mother remained close to us over huge oceans of separation, our godparenthood binding us to this smiling child in special ways. Malaria came suddenly and took Bridget from us all. Extending our deepest accompaniment over so many miles can only be done in ways we slowly have learned as our community spans not only time and space, but even those realms beyond the portals of birth and death.

Let us hope that you light our lives, far and near, unlost, a soul-star in the spiritual firmament.

The chaos of our national condition is creating a true universal catastrophe. Along with all the most vulnerable people in our society, the lives of immigrants and refugees are impacted in indescribable ways. The resources of our small community in the face of giant upheavals are called upon in new ways. We turn for help to an ever-widening circle of supporters to sustain our efforts, both inwardly and outwardly. Because of you the work of healing can persevere and expand and we are deeply grateful.

Enclosed is my gift for the House of Peace:

Name
___________________________________
Address _____________________________________                         Amount     ___________

978-356-9395 1 High Street, Ipswich, Massachusetts  01938  thehouseofpeace@yahoo.com
House of Peace, Inc. is a therapeutic community serving victims of war, in companionship with adults with disabilities and offering education for peace and moral awakening, incorporated in Massachusetts in 1990 as a 501(c)3 tax-exempt charitable and educational corporation supported by voluntary contributions.  www.houseofpeaceinc.org
The following excerpts from the famous Irish folk singer, peace activist and close friend, Tommy Sands, are true songs of the human heart.

_Songs of sorrow sent to help us mourn_  
_Can draw the sadness out and let the light return_  
_To feel the others' fears and tears and pain_  
_And free the heart to learn to dance again_  
_(History Song)_

*Don't beat the drum that frightens the children.*  
*Don't sing the songs about winning and losing.*  
*Sit down beside me. The green fields are bleeding.*  
*Sing me the music of healing...*  

_All the lonely years of sorrow_  
*Let the tears be not in vain_  
*We can build a new tomorrow_  
*And everyone can gain...*_

_Somehow the cycle of vengeance keeps turning_  
_'Til each other's sorrow and songs we start learning._  
_Peace is the prize for those who are daring._  
*Sing me the music of healing._

_Don't betray your children's birthright_  
_That's the right to stay alive_  
_For there is no greater treachery_  
_Than to let your children die._

_Ah, the heart's a wonder,_  
_Stronger than the guns of thunder._  
_Even when we're torn asunder._  
_Love will come again._  
_(The Music of Healing)_

_Carry on carry on,_  
_you can hear the people singing_  
_Carry on carry on,_  
_'till peace will come again_  
_(From Arising from the Troubles)_