

Goddess/Earth Circles  
February 25, 2024 1:00-2:30pm by UUCC Zoom  
*Pagan and Earth-Centered Voices in Unitarian Universalism*  
Jerry Kishpaugh Hildebrand and Shirley Ann Ranck, Editors, Skinner House Books, 2017

The 23 essays in the book bring out common areas of earth-centered/Pagan traditions and Unitarian Universalist spirituality. The focus of Goddess tradition in Unitarian Universalism is presented in the chapters by Shirley Ranck, author of “Cakes for the Queen of Heaven”, expanded by “Rise Up and Call Her Name” by Elizabeth Fisher. We have expanded our focus to include the broader aspects of earth-centered traditions that have enriched –and been enriched by—our Unitarian Universalism. Please join us on our ongoing spiritual journeys. If you would like to purchase or borrow a book, contact Helen Zidowecki 207-582-5308 or [hjzidowecki@gmail.com](mailto:hjidowecki@gmail.com). The book is published by Skinner House.

### ENTERING

**Three Breaths:** Preparation for entering sacred space

**Reader**

--Inhale the first breath as you *approach* the threshold, being aware of what you are *leaving behind*. As you exhale, let go of that which would hold you from *moving forward*.

--Inhale the second breath as you *prepare for crossing* the threshold, feeling the *anticipation* of something new. As you exhale, feel the *assurance* of what is before you.

--Inhale the third breath as you *step over the threshold* into the space and time that is new. As you exhale, let your spirit embrace the *adventure* that is ahead of you.

**Chimes or bells: With brief words.**

### Honoring the Elements

**Reader**

Air (communication and intuition) May our communications with each other and in the universe around us be caring and healing, aided by deep intuition of our place and contribution.

Fire (passion and change) May we have a passion for life that enhances growth and change throughout our lifetime.

Water (dreams) May our dreams give flow and direction for our lives.

Earth (roots and grounding) May we understand our roots and feel the solid grounding of Mother Earth as we walk through life.

Center (spirit) May the Spirit of Life enter the elements to enrich the wholeness of our lives.

### Casting the circle

**Reader**

Putting hands together palm to palm (virtual, reach to camera)

Feel the energy of the circle enter through your left hand and pass out through your right hand.

*Wisdom of the Above* that enters through our head. We call for understanding for ourselves and for others. May we feel gratitude for all that is. May we enhance our wisdom as we use it.

*Wisdom of the Below* that enters on root energies of nature through our feet. We call on the power of darkness to reveal the hidden lights beneath our daily routines. Help us know the shadows as they reveal the shape of things we had not seen. May we stay grounded in the ways of the universe.

*Wisdom of the Within* that holds the essential energies of the sacred, the heartfelt essence of love. Help us trust our belonging to one another and to the world. May our hearts expand as we open to the spirit within — and without.

Feel your heart expand as you open to the wisdom within.

Feel the flow of energy intensify around the circle, bonding us for the time of this gathering.

You are invited to speak the names of ancestors, goddesses or other beings whose presence you call into the circle. *Pause*

We welcome you all and thank you for being with us in spirit and inspiration.

The circle is cast. We are between the worlds of our lives as we came in and the world of our lives when we leave; the world of light and the world of dark, the physical world and the energy beyond the physical. What we do here between the worlds affects all worlds.

### **Cleansing and Covenant:**

### **Reader**

May we banish from this Circle all things that would do us harm, be they real or imagined, from this world or another. By the power of the Great Mother of all, only love shall enter this circle and only love shall leave it.

We value our time together and revere each being that is present. We share and we are silence to accept the sharing of others. We speak from our hearts and for ourselves only, without needing to respond or give advice. We hold our sharing and presence in confidence within our circle. So Mote It Be!

### **SHARING HOW YOU ARE TODAY**

THEME FOR THE SESSION: *Pagan and Earth-Centered Voices in Unitarian Universalism*, Readings for this gathering are taken mainly from the Introduction (p. ix-xvi) and “Changing Unitarian Universalist Thea/ology” (p.173-180)

### **Invocation**

### **Reader**

Hear the words of the Star Goddess, the dust of whose feet are the hosts of heaven, whose body encircles the universe: "I who am the beauty of the green Earth and the white moon among the stars and the mysteries of the waters, I call upon your soul to arise and come unto me. For I am the soul of the nature that gives life to the universe.

From Me all things proceed and unto Me they must return.

Let My worship be in the heart that rejoices, for behold—all acts of love and pleasure are My rituals.

Let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honor and humility, mirth and reverence within you.

And you who seek to know Me, know that your seeking and yearning will avail you not, unless you know the Mystery: for if that which you seek, you find not within yourself, you will never find it without.

For behold, I have been with you from the beginning, and I am that which is attained at the end of desire." —Starhawk (Intro p.ix)

## Introduction (p.xi-xii)

Reader

What unites everyone with different belief systems and practices who identify with either of these terms (Pagan or earth-centered) within Unitarian Universalism? Broadly stated, we place a special emphasis in our spiritual lives on the feminine aspect of divinity, the cycles of nature, the honoring of our ancestors, and the inherent divine and creative potential in all people. Each person is encouraged to explore their own experience and to find there the basis for values and commitments.

Folks who call themselves Pagan or Earth-centered tend to believe that, just as the divine is within human beings in the shape of our creativity, so too is it in all of nature. We see ourselves as interdependent or connected with every part of the natural world.

Contemporary Pagans speak of the God or Goddess within each of us. Since the divine is experienced as internal, it is described in female as well as male terms.

Myths are accepted as ways of telling the story of our inner journeys.

Another characteristic of Pagan and Earth-based religions is our *non-authoritarian attitude*. "Do as you will as long as you harm no one" is the rule of Pagan religion.

Leadership is shared and there is no hierarchy.

Freedom and responsibility for one's own life and beliefs are central, allowing the creativity within each person to be tapped and fostering the creation of new poetry, new meditations, new stories.

The leadership and creativity of women is valued equally with that of men.

Reflections on:

When/how you heard about or connected with earth-based or earth-centered spirituality.

The comparisons reflected in the readings.

Internalization of religion

Male and female participation (5 of the 23 essays are written by men.)

Non-authoritarian attitude

## Changing Unitarian Universalist Theology (p.176-179)

Reader

"Perhaps the most important religious task of our time has been learning to take pluralism seriously. It has been necessary for each of us to begin to see our own tradition as one among many and to understand that no one tradition has the whole truth." Shirley Ranck

### *Shift from Outer to Inner*

Patriarchal societies all over the world have for centuries promulgated a worldview that can be imagined in the form of a ladder. God is at the top, below God are the angels, below them is man, below him is woman, below her are children, and below them is the Earth and its creatures. In this scheme, higher is better, more important, and in control of what is below. We have all learned to look upon the Earth as a bundle of resources at the bottom of the ladder, resources to be exploited. Those at the top of the ladder believe that they have to fight to control everyone and everything below them. Those below feel resentment or participate in their own degradation by believing themselves to be inferior.

Scholar and author Naomi Goldenberg (University of Ottawa) suggests that what is needed and is currently happening is the *internalization of religion*, not only in humans but also in the natural world. As individuals we seek awareness of an immanent divinity or creativity within us as well as to experience an inner spiritual journey toward value and meaning as adults.

Rituals are intended to awaken a heightened sense of wholeness and selfhood. Myths are accepted as ways of telling the story of our inner journeys.

This transformation of religion from outer to inner makes each of us responsible for our values. It requires us to become fully aware of our personal and social situation and to articulate that experience. It gives validity to female as well as male experience. It challenges us to alter society whenever it fails to support harmony within the self, among selves, and in relation to nature.

## Reflections

### ***Shift from the Supernatural to the Natural***

### **Reader**

The Earth today is in a severe crisis because of the damage and pollution caused by human beings. Such damage and exploitation flows directly from the biblical belief that nature is fallen and sinful. Our problem with the Earth has much to do with our fear of death. In the old agrarian traditions, death was a natural part of the life cycle. The dead were thought to become part of the rocks and the trees and the rivers.

As male gods took over in mythology and men took over in society, they perceived the goddess of transformation and death to be the most dangerous aspect of the old religions. She was the crone, symbol of the fierce old woman. She had to be destroyed so that death could be conquered. We had to escape the cycle and live forever in some supernatural realm. Earthly life became but a preparation for eternal life. Gradually the Earth, this life, our physical bodies, all became denigrated, compared unfavorably with the life of our so-called immortal souls.

The Earth was no longer sacred.

We humans were seen as separate from the rest of life, more important because of our immortal souls. The Earth could be exploited, used, and the loss of our resources not even included in the costs of doing our business. This attitude is carved so deeply into our imaginations that we have been unable even to admit that the holes in the ozone layer, or the pollution of our water and air, will affect us. These were after all only lowly material things. Only our disembodied souls were considered sacred.

Our challenge is to reclaim this Earthly, bodily life as sacred, as the only precious life we have. We are trying to stop seeing ourselves as immortal, separate from the rest of life. To destroy the resources of the planet is ultimately to destroy our own life-support system.

To perceive the Earth as sacred means that we celebrate the cycles of nature, the seasons, the waxing and waning of the moon, the life stages of human beings, the potential for creativity and goodness within all. In moving away from the idea of a divine savior, we too have returned to the more ancient awareness of religion as our relationship with the cycles of the natural world

## Reflections

### **CLOSING**

### **Reader**

#### **Words**

"I guess I chose Unitarian Universalism because I need to live in balance. I can do all those wonderful, Earth-centered spiritual things: sing under the stars, drum for hours, create moving ceremonies for the changes of seasons or the passage of time in the lives of men and women. But I also need to be a worldly, down-to-Earth person in complicated world—someone who believes oppression real, that tragedies happen, that chaos happens, that not everything is for a purpose. Unitarian Universalism gives me a place to be at home with some of my closest friends: my doubts. Of course, there are many rationalists with the Earth-centered community, but somehow I feel most centered in this denomination. And I think, in turn, the Pagan community has brought to Unitarian Universalism the joy of ceremony, and a lot of creative and artistic ability that will leave the denomination with a richer liturgy and a bit more juice and mystery." Margo Adler, "Vibrant, Juicy, Contemporary" (p.20)

## Ritual

We extinguish our candle(s), release the energy of the directions and open the circle. We return to the world changed by our time together.

To the spirits that have joined us, we thank you for your presence today. Go if you must, stay if you will. Tis with great love and gratitude we bid you farewell.

The circle is open, but not broken.

*Response:* By the earth that is her body, And the air that is her breath, By the fire of her bright spirit, And the waters of her living womb, May the peace of the goddess be ever in your heart. Merry meet, merry part, And merry meet again. Blessed be.