

DRAWN BY THE MOON AND FED BY THE SUN¹
The Rev. Julie Stoneberg
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
April 22, 2018

OPENING WORDS *For Five Thousand Years, Or More* ~ Matthew Johnson

For five thousand years, or more,
more than fifteen thousand generations,
human beings have been invoking spiritual power.

My predecessors, and yours,
have gathered together
to make sense of their lives
and their place in the cosmos.

And they have spoken aloud,
and invited what they conceived as sacred and powerful to be with them.

They called upon the spirits of air and earth, fire and water.

They called the bear and deer.

They asked for the raven to protect them.

They pleaded for the heroes of old to slay the monsters of their fears.

They sang songs they learned from their grandparents, and moved in the appointed ways, or in ways that were new, but felt like the right thing to do.

And they imputed power to these spirits, and to the memories of those heroes.

They called them gods.

And they were invoked.

Vishnu and Kali,

Elohim, Odin, and a hundred million others.

Every group of people,

everywhere:

they gathered to make sense of their lives and to make sense of their place in the cosmos, and they called these spirits to be present to them.

And so do we.

So do we – we gather this morning

to make sense of ourselves and this universe in which we live, as best we are able.

And we call ourselves to worship together, and we invoke the power and wonder of life itself, that to which all those spirits of animals, and memories of heroes pointed the way.

We invoke that power,

which is, we know, always around, always with us, but which we sometimes forget about.

We forget that we are part of the whole of creation.

We forget that we are stardust.

¹ Words from “Gather the Spirit” by Jim Scott, #347 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

We forget that we are capable of miracles, first among them, that we can love.
We forget these things,
so we invoke the power of existence
so that we can remember.
So we can lift our eyes and open our ears to the true and beautiful.

For five thousand years, or more,
we have done this.
In many tongues, in many ways,
we have done this.

And so we continue that ancient tradition, in our way and in our time, and so let us now
worship together.

STORY FOR ALL AGES *I Wonder* ~ Annaka Harris

(A girl and her mother out on a walk wonder about the moon, about change, about butterflies, and about other mysteries. At the end of the story time, we looked at the video of a commercial in which a girl makes friends with a man on the moon: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMqMNV_raB4)

READING *Total Eclipse (Excerpts)* ~ Annie Dillard²

In her masterpiece "Total Eclipse," Annie Dillard describes her personal experience of a solar eclipse in Washington State. These excerpts do not do justice to the depth of her writing; we encourage you to find and read the whole piece.

To put ourselves in the path of the total eclipse, that day we had driven five hours inland ... When we tried to cross the Cascades range, an avalanche had blocked the pass....

We waited as highway crews bulldozed a passage through the avalanche. ... We drove through the avalanche tunnel, crossed the pass, and descended several thousand feet into ... the broad Yakima valley, ...

...We drove at random until we came to a range of unfenced hills. We pulled off the highway, bundled up, and climbed one of these hills....

Between the hills, far below, ... was the Yakima valley...justly famous for its beauty...

... More people were parking near the highway and climbing the hills....It looked as though we had all gathered on hilltops to pray for the world on its last day. It looked as though we had all crawled out of spaceships and were preparing to assault the valley below. It looked as though we were scattered on hilltops at dawn to sacrifice virgins, make rain, set stone stelae in a ring. ...

It began with no ado. It was odd that such a well advertised public event should have no starting gun, no overture, no introductory speaker. I should have known right then that I was out of my depth. Without pause or preamble, silent as orbits, a piece of the sun went away. ...

I had seen a partial eclipse in 1970. ...Seeing a partial eclipse bears the same relation to seeing a total eclipse as kissing a man does to marrying him, or as flying in an airplane does to falling out of an airplane. Although the one experience precedes the other, it in no way prepares you for it.

² <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/08/annie-dillards-total-eclipse/536148/>

You may read that the moon has something to do with eclipses. ... [but] You do not see the moon. ... What you see before your eyes is the sun going through phases. It gets narrower and narrower, as the waning moon does, and, like the ordinary moon, it travels alone in the simple sky. ... The sun simply shaves away; gradually, you see less sun and more sky....

[then] From all the hills came screams. ... The sky snapped over the sun like a lens cover. Abruptly it was dark night, on the land and in the sky. In the night sky was a tiny ring of light. The hole where the sun belongs is very small. A thin ring of light marked its place. There was no sound. There was no world. ... In the sky was something that should not be there. In the black sky was a ring of light. It was a thin ring, an old, thin silver wedding band, an old, worn ring....

... But I pray you will never see anything more awful in the sky.

... The sun was too small, and too cold, and too far away, to keep the world alive. The white ring was not enough. It was feeble and worthless...

... I have said that I heard screams. ... People on all the hillsides, including, I think, myself, screamed when the black body of the moon detached from the sky and rolled over the sun. But something else was happening at that same instant, and it was this, I believe, which made us scream.

The second before the sun went out we saw a wall of dark shadow come speeding at us. We no sooner saw it than it was upon us, like thunder. ... I have since read that this wave of shadow moves 1,800 miles an hour. ... hauling darkness like plague behind it. Seeing it, and knowing it was coming straight for you, ... You can feel the deadness race up your arm; you can feel the appalling, inhuman speed of your own blood. We saw the wall of shadow coming, and screamed before it hit.

Less than two minutes later, when the sun emerged, the trailing edge of the shadow cone sped away. ... It had clobbered us, and now it roared away. We blinked in the light. It was as though an enormous, loping god in the sky had reached down and slapped the Earth's face.

...When the sun appeared as a blinding bead on the ring's side, the eclipse was over. ... The real world began there. I remember now: We all hurried away. ... We rushed down the hill. We found our car; ... we joined the highway traffic and drove away.

We never looked back. ... enough is enough. One turns at last even from glory itself with a sigh of relief. From the depths of mystery, and even from the heights of splendor, we bounce back and hurry for the latitudes of home.

MESSAGE

Several summers ago, I spent a week on Star Island, an old Unitarian conference center out on the shoals along the coast of New Hampshire. The clapboard main building sits on a rock surrounded by the sea, and is itself wrapped around by an open porch lined with maybe 50 rocking chairs. One evening, a group of us rocked away in the moonlight, challenging each other to name and sing songs about the moon. We went on rocking and singing for hours...a magical time and a memory I cherish... proof-positive of the moon's draw upon us.

On Friday night, our Indigenous Allies Working Group hosted an evening with Alice Olsen Williams, an Anishinaabe-kwe from Trout Lake, north of Kenora.³ Alice, who now lives at Curve Lake, is known for her quilts...quilts that blend her personal history by using center images...like animals and birds and floral motifs which figure prominently in the lives of the Anishinaabeg...surrounded by the conventional quilting blocks introduced by the first European Settlers. A powerful juxtaposition.

While we didn't schedule Alice to come in connection with Earth Day, it was really a perfect alignment. What I find most compelling in her quilt design is the ever-present medicine wheel. A circle divided into four quadrants representing the four directions...red for the east, yellow for the south, black for the west, and white for the north. A 4-coloured circle encompassed by a band of green representing the earth. A circle at whose center lies the value of respect and spirit of the fire that resides in each of us.

She includes this medicine wheel in just about every quilt she makes...or maybe in all of them...as something of a signature...a symbol central to who she is. She calls it, not the medicine wheel, but the Pimaatiziwin Circle...pimattiziwin meaning the search for, and the hope of, living a good life on this earth.⁴

Alice spent quite a bit of time in her presentation talking about this circle and what it represents. She pointed out that while it has some resonance with the compass, as it contains the directions, it is different because it is not intended to be precise in the way that the compass is for the settler mind. It does not contain exact degrees, or a desire for accuracy. The north is not 'true' north, as set by a scientific measure of magnetic force, but rather, north is one set of teachings within a circle of equally meaningful teachings. The Pimaatiziwin Circle is imbedded with a world view that sees everything as a web of connections and relationships, and where wisdom and learning can be found in just about everything by studying the gifts and attributes of the seasons, the animals, the peoples, and the elements.

Well, today, we're studying, pondering, our presence on the earth in relationship to our moon and to the sun. We are wondering. Wondering about how the fact of living on a planet within a solar system, and on a planet around which a moon spins and tugs, can inform our living. And, what wisdom and learning can be found in our wondering that might contribute to our ability to live a good life on this earth.

You've all had a moment like this one, I assume. Hopefully many of them. I was walking home on Friday night. The city was quiet. The sky was clear, and due to light pollution, appeared sparsely starlit. I was tired and on a beeline for bed, but then I suddenly felt a call to stop. Standing on an insignificant piece of sidewalk, I looked up at the sky. I searched for Orion, not finding him, knowing that he was beginning to lay down in the sky, now perhaps below the horizon. Turning slightly, I searched for the Little Dipper, but without the help of the pointer stars of the Big Dipper, I could only guess at identifying the sparkling Polaris. Turning again, the moon came into view...a bold crescent of light, and I stared at her for several moments, unable to pull my eyes away. With my feet firmly planted on earth, my spirit was pulled

³ <http://www.pimaatiziwin-quilts.com/bio.html>

⁴ <http://www.pimaatiziwin-quilts.com/>

heavenward... uplifted... mesmerized... and I knew in those moments that I am indeed made of stardust. I was looking at a distant relative.

You've had moments like that, haven't you? It hardly matters where the moon is in its cycle, or where the earth is in its orbit, a night sky offers a feeling of transcendence like none other. For me, the starrier the sky, the more intense the experience. There's nothing like that awareness that we are spinning through space, surrounded by a galaxy of stars, to create a feeling of both wonder and belonging.

Of course, living in a galaxy is a constant truth...when the sun is present, as Wendell Berry has put it, the day-blind stars are still there waiting with their light.⁵ And, conversely, in the darkness, the night-blind sun is still shining. We are...earth, moon, and sun...always in it together. The moon is right there with us in our spinning around the sun, together weaving connections aided by the pull and tug of gravity.

It's a lesson in interdependence, isn't it? Both outside and deep within us, sometimes oblivious to us yet deeply imbedded in our DNA, both acting on us and being acted upon by us...we exist on a planet that wheels and turns, around which our moon wheels and turns, all the while together wheeling and turning around a sun, which is spinning through an outer galaxy... how can we not be aware of our own wheeling and turning through the cycles of time and seasons? How can we not be aware of how our wheeling and turning is part of the larger patterns of birth and death, beginnings and endings?

Ojibwe spirituality and worldview uses a lunar calendar...cycles of 28 days between each new moon and thirteen moons within each year.⁶ Each moon with a distinct personality, and a unique lesson, just as each direction has its individual teachings. As the moon ebbs and wanes, it teaches us about forward momentum and quietness, about starting and stopping.

And, it's fascinating that the pattern of scales on a turtle's back replicates this calendar...28 circles around the edge, surrounding 13 larger circles. While I have no proof of this, maybe this synchronicity led to the turtle coming to signify the land on which we reside...the land on which the moon shines.

Or maybe the turtle's shell evolved into this pattern influenced by the power of the cycles of our moon.

So, I was reading about tides...because even though I've never lived right on the ocean or been regularly exposed to their cycle, tides are what come to mind when I think of the draw of the moon. I have always subscribed to the notion that there is something in the draw of the moon, in its gravitational pull, that directly affects us...that more babies are born, more lunacies encouraged, more accidents occur, more menstrual cycles begun, when the moon is full. And yet, while I can't allow that everything I read on the internet is fact, my shallow research for today says that there is no scientific basis for this. Apparently, study after study indicate that there are no more births, no more emergency room visits, no more psychic breaks, when the moon is full than at other time.⁷ I find that rather disappointing.

⁵ <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-peace-of-wild-things/>

⁶ <https://onlc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/13-Moon-curriculum2.pdf>

⁷ <http://earthsky.org/space/does-the-supermoon-have-a-super-effect-on-us>
<https://www.livescience.com/7899-moon-myths-truth-lunar-effects.html>

The same shallow research tells me that while our bodies are mostly water, the amount of water that each body possesses is too small to be affected, given how far we are from the moon. There is a size/distance equation which also explains why there are no more than imperceptible tides in the Great Lakes, even though they contain huge masses of water. Therefore, the pull and effect of the moon's cycles on one human body is not seen as scientifically significant. I read that even on the occasion of a supermoon, the effect of its pull on an average body is no more than 1/9th the mass of a paperclip.

Is this just a need for precision? I mean, I really don't get it. If we can talk about the butterfly effect as plausible, if we believe that everything is interconnected and has the potential to affect everything else, then don't we also have to believe that the moon and its ongoing cycles of change directly affect us as well?

Maybe we're trying to measure the wrong things. Or maybe thinking we can scientifically measure it is wrong-headed. I can accept the hypothesis that the moon doesn't cause perceptible tides within my body, but I cannot accept that it doesn't affect me at all. The proof is in the countless beautiful songs sung about the moon, and in the poetry that humans have written. One of my favorite lines of all time is Whitman's in his poem about miracles...that being 'the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new moon in spring.'⁸

What scientific measure doesn't take into account are the ways in which our spirits interact with the moon. What accounts for my stopping in my tracks on the sidewalk to commune with the moon...with its light and its simple and powerful beauty? What accounts for the many times we 'lock eyes' with the moon and are filled up with peace or longing or some melancholic combination? If the moon doesn't actually pull on us, how can we explain those long, magical hours of singing about, or howling at, the moon?

Again, there's no science in this, and I don't need for there to be any science in it. Can you picture the magnetic filings that are inside of an Etch-a-Sketch? If we are made of stardust, and moondust, and sundust, then I can imagine us composed of minute particles of attraction...and that, just like pulling a stylus across the Etch-a-Sketch screen, lines of energy draw us out to the moon, and back down into the earth. Lines of energy radiate out from us and back to us, and in this way each of us is affected by all that we come into contact with. We are pulled inexorably to the sidewalk while being pulled mysteriously toward the stars. It's all connection. Me to you, and you to the moon, and the moon to the sun, and the sun to you, and the moon to me...all connected. All related. The draw of the moon is simply a reminder of that connection. It has a very important lesson to teach us.

The imprint of all-that-is is etched within each of us, in all that we are. The fact that we are of this earth holds us here, grounds us, give us roots. We can try to explain it, or find proof of our connections, and that exploration is to be expected as we expand our consciousness. But the more we simply accept the fact of our connection to the earth, the more we can walk the pimaatsiwin way...the search for the good life.

The fact that we are also part of the sky and the stars is what lifts us, inspires us, and gives us wings. We can try to explain it, or find proof of that connection, and that exploration is also a natural outgrowth of our expanding consciousness. But the more we simply accept the fact that we are drawn by the moon and fed by the sun, the more we can live in wondrous mystery, grateful to be a part of this ever-spinning universe.

⁸ <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/miracles-0>

And living in that mystery, in our everyday lives, we exist up close and personal. While wondering at the draw of the moon, we know that the greatest affect we have is on that which is closest to us. "Researchers have calculated that a mother holding her baby exerts 12 million times the tide-raising force on the child than the moon does, simply by virtue of being closer."⁹ May we listen to the teachings of the moon and the sun, feel the intimacy of our connections, and apply that power in our everyday lives...understanding that we are drawn one to another, and with that magical and magnetic force, have the power to live 'right' with, and among, all our relations.

Happy Earth Day to you and to all-that-is.

Amen.

READING *As If to Demonstrate an Eclipse* ~ Billy Collins

I pick an orange from a wicker basket
and place it on the table
to represent the sun.
Then down at the other end
a blue and white marble
becomes the earth
and nearby I lay the little moon of an aspirin.
I get a glass from a cabinet,
open a bottle of wine,
then I sit in a ladder-back chair,
a benevolent god presiding
over a miniature creation myth,
and I begin to sing
a homemade canticle of thanks
for this perfect little arrangement,
for not making the earth too hot or cold
not making it spin too fast or slow
so that the grove of orange trees
and the owl become possible,
not to mention the rolling wave,
the play of clouds, geese in flight,
and the Z of lightning on a dark lake.

⁹ <https://www.livescience.com/7899-moon-myths-truth-lunar-effects.html>

Then I fill my glass again
and give thanks for the trout,
the oak, and the yellow feather,
singing the room full of shadows,
as sun and earth and moon
circle one another in their impeccable orbits
and I get more and more cockeyed with gratitude.

CLOSING WORDS

from In Praise of the Earth ~ John O'Donohue

Please remain standing for our closing words. Once again feel yourself as stardust, feel how you are connected to the earth, know that you drawn by power of the moon, and fed by the warmth of the sun. Let's join hands for our closing words, which come from John O'Donohue's poem, "In Praise of the Earth":

Let us remember within us
The ancient clay,
Holding the memory of seasons,
The passion of the wind,
The fluency of water,
The warmth of fire,
The quiver-touch of the sun - And shadowed sureness of the moon.
That we may awaken,
To live to the full
The dream of the Earth
Who chose us to emerge
And incarnate its hidden night
In mind, spirit, and light.

Go in peace. Go in love. Go in celebration of the earth and its many gifts.
Amen.