

Home Worship for August 2, 2020

The following material is offered for those who want to create a common at home service this Sunday with your families, a few friends, or individually. We wish you all good health, and we look forward to the day when we can greet one another in person once again.

This Sunday we join with our pagan members and friends to celebrate Lammas, also known as Lughnasadh, the first of three harvest festivals in earth-mother traditions. If you wish to continue your worship as part of the entire day you might consider a meal following your worship that includes some of the foods mentioned in this morning's homily. May you enjoy a bountiful season.

The Worship Committee

CENTERING THOUGHT: *To the Four Directions*, #446 in our Hymnal, written by Joan Goodwin. Our pagan celebrations are traditionally opened in this manner, welcoming the four directions:

Spirit of the East, spirit of air, of morning and springtime, Be with us as the sun rises, in time of beginning, times of planting. Inspire us with the fresh breath of courage as we go forth into new adventures.

Spirit of the South, spirit of fire, of noontime and summer: Be with us through the heat of the day and help us to be ever growing. Warm us with strength and energy for the work that awaits us.

Spirit of the West, spirit of water, of evening and autumn: Be with us as the sun sets and help us to enjoy a rich harvest. Flow through us with a cooling, healing quietness and bring us peace.

Spirit of the North, spirit of earth, of nighttime and winter: Be with us in the darkness, in the time gestations. Ground us in the wisdom of the changing seasons as we celebrate the spiraling journey of our lives.

And now, in this time and place, let us worship together.

CHALICE LIGHTING

At the beginning of our services we join Unitarian Universalists throughout the world to light our chalice, the symbol of our faith. Its flame reminds us that we are part of something much greater than ourselves.

This morning, we dedicate our chalices with ***The Symbol That is Our Vision*** written by Beatrice Hitchcock.

It is an everlasting flame for this community.
It offers its warmth to those who are cold.
It provides light to those who would see.
It purifies and transforms this sanctuary into sacred space,
this congregation into sacred community.
May its flame burn true and high and strong.

MEDITATION: *Let us Bless the Earth* by Eric Williams

We recommend that you follow our worship practice of reading the meditation aloud, then follow it with silence for contemplation, meditation or prayer according to your own spiritual practice.

Let us bless the Earth,
And all that is steady and firm.

Let us bless the Sky,
And all that is open and filled with light.

Let us bless their union,
Holy and without ceasing.

Let us bless their children,
The bounty of field and forest,
Stones, plants, animals, and all living things.

May the gifts of the Earth and Sky
Strengthen, refresh, nourish, and heal the peoples of the Earth

STEWARDSHIP OF OUR CHURCH:

Heather Christensen reminds us that “every congregation depends on each of its members by your commitment of time, energy and resources” to help make the Unitarian Universalist vision of a world filled with peace and justice, love and joy a reality.

Even though we cannot meet together at our church building during this time, our expenses are ongoing. Please remember to continue to honor your pledges, and if you are able to donate as you would have to the offering plate and First Sunday Lunch basket.

COMMUNITY—Joys and Sorrows. “Circle of Care” by Lisa Bovee-Kemper (adapted).

In religious community, we share our joys and our triumphs, our sorrows and our broken places. In this circle of care, we make space for the complexity of life, the myriad experiences that bless and break our hearts. The truth of human experience dictates that on any given day, we each come to the table with hearts in different places. It is especially so during this period of isolation from one another.

We set aside this time for the private concerns of our members and friends. Together in silence we send wishes of joy, comfort, and courage to those celebrating joyful events, or struggling with loneliness, loss or illness.

If you are able to please drop a stone for each of these in a bowl of water and let the ripples remind you that what affects one of us affects us all.

SERMON/HOMILY: *Lammas, Lughnasadh, First Harvest* by Anne Bailey.

August 1 or 2 is celebrated as Lammas, the first Harvest, a time for gathering in and giving thanks for abundance.

Lammas or Lughnasadh (LOO-nah-sah) fell on Saturday, August 1 this year. It is the first of the three Wiccan harvest festivals, the other two being the autumnal equinox (or Mabon) and Samhain, which is generally celebrated by almost everyone as Halloween.

Celebrations vary, as not all Pagans are Wiccans. The Irish name for this holiday, Lughnasadh, derives from Old Gaelic and is a combination of the name Lugh, a Celtic harvest god, and násad, or assembly. Feasting, market fairs, games and bonfire celebrations were the order of the day. Circle dancing, reflecting the movement of the sun was popular, as were all community gatherings.

Checking Wikipedia told me that Lammas is a Christian holiday celebrated in some English-speaking countries to mark the annual wheat harvest. The name originates from the word “loaf” in reference to bread and “Mass” in reference to the Christian liturgy celebrating Holy Communion. It is customary to bring to Church a loaf made from the new crop, which in Kanas has already been harvested, usually in June. Christians also have church processions to bakeries, where the bakers are blessed by the clergy.

Lammas falls at the halfway point between the summer solstice and the autumn equinox. We are now at the midpoint of the warm half of the year that began at Beltane on May 1 and will end with Samhain on November 1. We begin to realize that the bounty and energy of the Sun, is now beginning to wane. It is a time of change and shift. Active growth is slowing down and the darker days of winter and reflection are beckoning.

Grain is the most basic of foods, the staff of life, and the staple of our diet. Whatever form it takes, grain appears on our tables, in our lunch boxes and picnic

baskets, at our large lavish banquets and our lonely midnight snacks with comforting, nourishing regularity.

The original feast of Lughnasadh was the celebration of Lugh, one of the most powerful and popular of the Celtic gods. He was patron of the arts and crafts and an accomplished blacksmith, and carpenter, as well as a talented harpist, gifted poet, sorcerer, physician, and champion chess player. Some say he invented the game. Beyond this, he was a handsome young athlete and a warrior who defended his people against their enemies and protected the wheat crops against disease.

At the Festival of Lughnasadh, the first of the grain was ritually harvested and taken to a hilltop, where it was offered to the deity. Everyone ate a meal that included bread made with the new grain as well as blueberries and the meat of a sacrificial bull. Dancers enacted a play that may have dramatized the struggle of rivals for a goddess. There were dance contests as well. Other plays may have reenacted Lugh's victory over the rival tribe or his defeat of blight or famine.

At Lammas the Goddess is in her aspect as Grain Mother and Harvest Queen. Demeter, as Corn Mother, represents the ripe corn of this year's harvest and her daughter Persephone represents the grain - the seed which drops back deep into the dark earth, hidden throughout the winter, and re-appears in the spring as new growth. This is the deep core meaning of Lammas and comes in different guises. The fullness and fulfillment of the present harvest already holds at its very heart the seed of all future harvests.

So, as the grain harvest is gathered in, there is food to feed the community through the winter and within that harvest is the seed of next year's rebirth, regeneration and harvest. The Grain Mother is ripe and full, heavily pregnant she carries the seed of the New Year's Sun God within her. There is tension here. For the Sun God, the God of the Harvest surrenders his life with the cutting of the corn. By celebrating Lammas as a harvest holiday, we honor our ancestors and the hard work they had to do in order to survive.

Nearly all mythologies celebrate goddesses who supply humans with life-sustaining grains. The Sumerians relied on Ashnan for their grain, the Aztecs on Chicomeco-atl, and the Norse on Freya. The Cambodians called their giver of rice Po Ino Nogar. The ancient Peruvians believed their Corn Mother, Zaramama, sometimes came to earth in cornstalks. Among the tribes of North America, the origin of maize is attributed to the Corn Mother, whose story has as many variations as there are tribes.

Although grain goddesses abound, there are male grain deities as well and include the Aztec Cin-te-otl, the Mayan Gha-nan, the Egyptian Neper, and the Phoenician Da-gon, the Greek Adonis and the Christian Jesus – all experience an annual death and resurrection, like the seed of life they personify.

The vegetation god, who dies and is buried (planted), rises in due time (sprouts) and grows to maturity – only to be slain again (reaped), for the cycles of his life are the cycles of the agricultural seasons. As such they are the sustenance of our own cycles of birth, growth, and death.

Our spiritual and emotional crops are ready for first harvest, too – the fruit of those sacred intentions we set in the darkness of winter and early spring. Remember your New Year’s resolutions?

The week of Lammas is the time to take a moment to reflect. Let us look back upon the first half of this year, and upon the seeds we planted. Ask yourself: Did I plant them with mindful intention, or did I drop them carelessly as I walked? Either way, you’ve sown something, and now, as the first harvest begins, it is time to reap what you’ve sown. What will you pull from the Earth with your hands? What have your seeds of intention grown into? Did they flourish or wilt? Harvest time is a deep grounding period. Diving deep and taking honest stock here will help us navigate the remainder of the year. Lammas is also a holiday of remembrance and releasing, a time of acknowledging the crops that didn’t make it to fruition. This is a time that asks: What do you need to let go of right now, so that you can be fully present to what is ahead of you? We are reminded that not everything survives in the grand cycle of life.

This is a time for us to put our hands in the Earth in a very figurative sense. We can do this by consciously attending to what’s in our spirit-soil, visualizing ourselves putting into our baskets whatever we set out to grow this past spring. Or we can do something more literal and cathartic by gathering our physical harvests and celebrating the growth of the year. Our children, getting bigger by the day. Our business ventures, growing incrementally, even if only in the intentions and plans we’re setting. Our relationships, maturing like ripe fruit. Our friendships, deepening with time. Our own personal growth and efforts towards deepening our spiritual connection. Celebrate the growth; celebrate the bounty of your efforts and your deep work during the first part of the year.

Our delight in the taste of seasonal flavors is matched only by our joy in the first fruits of the grain harvest. Let us celebrate the many forms of grain and the richness they bring to our lives.

Let us rejoice in wheat and corn, oats and barley, rye, rice, and quinoa.

Let us rejoice in whole wheat, cracked wheat, sour dough, and pumpernickel.

Let us rejoice in corn chips, cornflakes, tacos, tortillas, and popcorn.

Let us rejoice in oatmeal, bran flakes, wheat flakes, and grits.

Let us rejoice in rice cakes, rice pudding, fried rice, and sushi.

Let us rejoice in spaghetti, macaroni, lasagna, fettuccine, and ravioli.

Let us rejoice in layer cakes, shortcake, pound cake, and jelly rolls.

Let us rejoice in beer, bourbon, scotch, Irish whiskey, and vodka.

Let us rejoice in all the bountiful gifts from our mother earth.

Amen and blessed be.

CLOSING: *Spirit of Love* by Eric Williams

My friends, may the Spirit of Love be
A living flame before you,
A guiding star above you,
A firm path below you,
And a gentle presence behind you.

Amen, and Blessed be.