

## Enactment of Myth

a service presented by Dick Merritt at UU Congregation of Hillsborough

**Gathering Chant** - *Gathered Here* - Singing The Living Tradition, Hymn 389

**Opening Words:** I invite you into the safety of myth –  
where truth is expressed through story and imagination, and  
the power is in the poetic,  
not the literal.

*Rev. Alane Cameron Miles at The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond,  
Virginia*

**Call Directions**

Singing The Living Tradition, # 446  
Light directional candles

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 of gestation.  
Ground us in the wisdom  
of the changing seasons  
As we celebrate the spiraling

Journey of our lives.

*Joan Goodwin*

### **Cast Circle**

Join hands – By our hands and with our hearts, the circle is cast

### **Light Chalice -**

*Rise Up O Flame - STLT Hymn #362*

**Chalice lighting:** I light this flame as a metaphor for the Creative Power of the Universe and as a reminder of all the metaphors which surround us.

### **Invite Divinity**

Charge of the Goddess

Welcome other visions of the divine

### **Explanation of Ritual**

The purpose of this morning's service is to give you an idea about Neo-Pagan worship. Since this is Midsummer or Litha, it is one of the Neo-Pagan Sabbats, an appropriate time to do this.

Pagans are as varied as are UUs – perhaps more so. But there are some things common to many rituals regardless of the participants' specific path.

We have gathered and created “sacred space” by calling the directions, casting the circle and invoking Deity. Since most of us believe that Earth is sacred, we are not creating sacred space but rather calling our attention to this being a special time and place.

The body of a ritual is often called the “working”. It might include a meditation, a sharing time, and/or an energy raising activity. Today, I will talk to you about Myth, Metaphor and Ritual. We will do a brief spiral dance if there is time.

At the end of the ritual, and this service, we will express our gratitude to Divinity for being a part of our ceremony and our lives. We will thank the Earth by thanking Her directions and say some closing words to open our sacred circle.

### **Joys and Concerns**

#### **Enactment of Myth - Talk by Dick Merritt**

**Reading:** CIRCLES by Black Elk (from BLACK ELK SPEAKS compiled by John Neihardt, New York: Pocket Books, 1931)

You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation, and so long as the hoop was unbroken, the

people flourished. The flowering tree was the living center of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it. The east gave peace and light, the south gave warmth, the west gave rain, and the north with its cold and mighty wind gave strength and endurance. This knowledge came to us from the outer world with our religion. Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours.

The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of (wo)man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves.

**Reading:** from Joseph Campbell, An Open Life, p. 21.

Michael Toms: *We tend to use the word "myth" to mean something that is untrue or an erroneously held belief. Why is that?*

Joseph Campbell: I can understand why that idea arose. Myth is metaphor. The imagery of mythology is symbolic of spiritual powers within us: when these are interpreted as referring to historical or natural events which science in turn shows could not have occurred, then you throw the whole thing out. You see, myths do not come from a concept system; they come from a life system; they come out of a deeper center. We must not confuse mythology with ideology. Myths come from where the heart is, even as the mind may wonder why people believe these things. The myth does not point to a fact; the myth points beyond facts to something that informs the fact.

### **The Enactment of Myth**

There are some people who have the gift of seeing the world with a clear understanding of the truth that lies behind the facades. Joseph Campbell was such a man. As a young boy, he was fascinated by the North American Indian legends. This interest expanded into a lifetime quest to learn all he could about world mythology and to share this knowledge freely. His books and interviews on the subject are numerous but he did not become widely known until the PBS television series, "The Power of Myth", which was filmed shortly before his death in October, 1987. These taped interviews between Bill Moyers and Campbell and the compilation of the interviews in a book by the same name were a surprising success. It is almost unbelievable that quiet, scholarly conversations between two men on an erudite subject like mythology would attract such a wide and devoted audience. But it did!

What is the appeal? Is it possible that his exploration of the universal truths behind the myths and religions of all cultures satisfies a basic need of humankind?

It did for me. Prior to my introduction to Campbell and the concept that myth is metaphor, I was a typical intolerant agnostic. I wondered how anyone could believe the BS contained in the variety of religious and mythological systems which surround us. Of all the things that Campbell said, the most significant to me is

Myth is Metaphor and Ritual is the Enactment of Myth (2 X)

Joseph Campbell saw similarities between the numerous mythologies and religions of mankind and called them the masks of god; an attempt to name the un-nameable. His primary thesis is that all religious beliefs are metaphors. He quotes the Vedas, "Truth is one; the sages speak of it by many names."

Diverse belief systems, both within the Unitarian Universalist denomination and without, often come in conflict with one another. We UUs (and Pagans) pride ourselves on our tolerance but actually are often skeptical and denigrating of other religious beliefs. The recognition of beliefs and mythological systems as metaphors is a way to reconcile our search for meaning with those of others.

A culture's creation story is substituted for the unknown reality of the beginning of the universe. These stories can have a tremendous effect on the nature of a society. We all know the one which drives this Western European, Judeo-Christian culture. It starts: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and earth. . ." And then it says, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over . . ." Well, you've got the idea.

These are metaphors for the Big Bang. In fact, the Big Bang itself is a metaphor for the unknown, and probably unknowable, reality which is the creation of the universe.

Many of the rational Humanists among us have trouble with the notion that real humans need myth and metaphor. I participated in a Humanist discussion at SUUSI some years ago as the token Pagan. Some of the humanists found it hard to understand why or how a rational person could do chants under the full moon to the Ancient Mother goddess. They contended that metaphors are unnecessary—I doubt that we could do without them.

Where would grade school history be without folksy stories like George Washington and his cherry tree and Daniel Boone's adventures?

Some people have difficulty with the idea, but even our most cherished scientific theories are metaphors. For example:

- Planetary theory of atomic structure: It was once the theory, the truth. Now we know better, but it is still a useful way to describe an atom to someone not ready for energy levels and pieces of subatomic particles.
- Bohr atom. Energy levels. Even now, scientists use obvious metaphors to try to describe in more concrete terms phenomena which can be pinned down only as a set of probability equations.
- Does it matter? I don't think so.

What is the connection between science and other mythological systems? Science and the physical world were products of human imagining. We were not the cool observers of that world. We were its passionate creators. The scientists were all poets and the universe was their metaphor.

Now I will turn to the metaphor we Pagans call the Wheel of the Year.

The Year is a wheel. It goes round and round. We go from winter to spring to summer to fall.

Many ways to look at this circle, wheel

- a. Physical - Earth sciences
- b. Agriculturally - crops, domestic animals  
(the wild plants and animals before that)
- c. Mythologically -
- d. Ritually

Physically

Relationship of the Sun to Earth. Amount of sunlight changes

a. Solstices:

Winter- longest night. North. Yin (open, reflective)

Summer- Shortest night. South. Yang (directed, focused)

b. Equinoxes - mid-points. Balance.

c. Cross-quarters: Subtle shifts at quarters become visible. For example, deepest winter is Feb rather than Dec, hottest summer is August not June.

Winter solstice to summer solstice is movement towards individuation, self actualization.

Summer solstice to winter solstice is movement toward reintegration. Hence, winter holidays are family times.

Agriculturally

a. Plant life cycle - Harvest, fallow, spring planting, growth, harvest (death).

b. Animal life cycle - Breeding, birthing, rearing young, death of some & breeding of others.

Mythologically

"In love, the Horned God, changing form and changing face, ever seeks the Goddess. In this world, the search and the seeking appear in the Wheel of the Year.

"She is the Great Mother who gives birth to Him as the Divine Child Sun at the Winter Solstice. In spring, He is sower and seed who grows with the growing light, green as the new shoots. She is the Initiatrix who teaches Him the mysteries.

He is the young bull; She the nymph, seductress. In summer, when light is longest, they meet in union, and the strength of their passion sustains the world. But the God's face darkens as the sun grows weaker, until at last, when the grain is cut for harvest, He too sacrifices Himself to Self that all may be nourished. She is the reaper, the grave of earth to which all must return. Throughout the long nights and darkening days, He sleeps in her womb; in dreams, He is Lord of Death who rules the Land of Youth beyond the gates of night and day. His dark tomb becomes the womb of rebirth, for at Midwinter She again gives birth to Him. The cycle ends and begins again, and the Wheel of the Year turns, on and on."

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 2 ed, p 43.

a. **Samhain**, Halloween, Hallowmas:

End of year and beginning of new. Harvest over. Veil between the worlds is thinnest. Death and renewal.

"This is the night when the veil is thin that divides the worlds. It is the New Year and the time of the year's death, when the harvest is gathered and the fields lie fallow. For tonight the King of the Waning Year has sailed over the sunless sea that is the womb of the Mother, and steps ashore on the Shining Isle, the luminous world egg, becoming the seed of his own rebirth. The gates of life and death are opened; the Sun Child is conceived; the dead walk, and to the living is revealed the Mystery: that every ending is but a new beginning. We meet in time out of time, everywhere and nowhere, here and there, to greet the Lord of Death who is Lord of Life, and the Triple Goddess who is the circle of rebirth."

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 2 ed, p 193-4.

b. Winter Solstice, **Yule**, Midwinter:

"This is the night of Solstice, the longest night of the year. Now darkness triumphs; and yet, gives way and changes into light. The breath of nature is suspended: all waits while within the Cauldron, the Dark King is transformed into the Infant Light. We watch for the coming of dawn, when the Great Mother again gives birth to the Divine Child Sun, who is bringer of hope and the promise of summer. This is the stillness behind motion, when time itself stops; the center which is also the circumference of all. We are awake in the night. We turn the Wheel to bring the light. We call the sun from the womb of night. Blessed be."

*Starhawk*

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 2 ed, p 182.

c. Candlemas, **Imbolc**, Brigid:

"This is the feast of the waxing light. What was born at the Solstice begins to manifest, and we who were the midwives to the infant year now see the Child Sun grow strong as the days grow visibly longer. This is the time of individuation: within the measures of the spiral, we each light our own light, and become uniquely ourselves. It is the time of initiation, of beginning, when seeds that will later sprout and grow begin to stir from their dark sleep. We meet to share the light of inspiration, which will grow with the growing year."

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 2 ed, p 186.

d. Vernal Equinox, **Eöstar**:

"This is the time of the spring's return; the joyful time, the seed time, when life bursts forth from the earth and the chains of winter are broken. Light and dark are equal: it is the time of balance, when all the elements within us must be brought into a new harmony. The Prince of the Sun stretches out his hand, and Kore, the Dark Maiden, returns from the Land of the Dead, cloaked in the fresh rain, with the sweet scent of desire on her breath. Where They step, the wild flowers appear; as They dance, despair turns to hope, sorrow to joy, want to abundance. May our hearts open with the spring!"

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 2 ed, p 187.

e. **Beltane**, May Eve:

"This is the time when sweet desire weds wild delight. The Maiden of Spring and the Lord of the Waxing Year meet in the greening fields and rejoice together under the warm sun. The shaft of life is twined in a spiral web and all of nature is renewed. We meet in the time of flowering, to dance the dance of life."

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 2 ed, p 188.

f. Summer Solstice, Mid Summer's Eve, **Litha**:

"This is the time of the rose, blossom and thorn, fragrance and blood. Now is the longest day, light triumphs, and yet begins the decline into dark. The Sun King grown embraces the Queen of Summer in the love that is death because it is so complete that all dissolves into the single song of ecstasy that moves the worlds. So the Lord of Light dies to Himself, and sets sail across the dark seas of time, searching for the isle of light that is rebirth. We turn the Wheel and share his fate, for we have planted the seeds of our own changes, and to grow we must accept even the passing of the sun."

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 2 ed, p 189.

g. Lughnasad, **Lammas**

"This is the wake of Lugh, the Sun King who dies with the waning year, the Corn King who dies when the grain is reaped. We stand now between hope and

fear, in the time of waiting. In the fields, the grain is ripe but not yet harvested. We have worked hard to bring many things to fruition, but the rewards are not yet certain. Now the Mother becomes the Reaper, the Implacable One who feeds on life that new life may grow. Light diminishes, the days shorten, summer passes. We gather to turn the Wheel, knowing that to harvest we must sacrifice, and warmth and light must pass into winter."

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 2 ed, p 191.

#### h. Autumnal Equinox, **Mabon**

"This is the time of harvest, of thanksgiving and joy, of leave taking and sorrow. Now day and night are equal, in perfect balance, and we give thought to the balance and flow within our own lives. The Sun King has become the Lord of Shadows, sailing West: we follow Him into the Dark. Life declines; the season of barrenness is on us, yet we give thanks for that which we have reaped and gathered. We meet to turn the Wheel and weave the cord of life that will sustain us through the dark."

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 2 ed, p 192.

The Wheel of the Year turns -

The Sun Child is born at the **Winter Solstice**, when, after the triumph of darkness throughout the year's longest night, the sun rises again. At the Winter Solstice, he is born as the embodiment of innocence and joy, of a childlike delight in all things. His is the triumph of the returning light.

At **Brigid** his growth is celebrated, as the days grow visibly longer.

At the **Spring Equinox**, he is the green, flourishing youth who dances with the Goddess in her Maiden aspect.

On **Beltane**, their marriage is celebrated with maypoles and bonfires, and on the **Summer Solstice** it is consummated, in a union so complete it becomes a death. He is named Summer-Crowned King instead of Winter-Born, and the crown is of roses: The bloom of culmination coupled with the stab of the thorn.

He is mourned at **Lughnasad**, and at the **Fall Equinox** He sleeps in the womb of the Goddess, sailing over the sunless sea that is her womb. At **Samhain**, He arrives at the Land of Youth, the Shining Land in which the souls of the dead grow young again, as they wait to be reborn. He opens the gates that they may return and visit their loved ones, and rules in the Dreamworld as He too grows young, until at the **Winter Solstice** He is again reborn.

after Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 2 ed, p 114.

Ritually we celebrate the changing of the seasons and our lives. We take cues from the myth so that we consider the various aspects of the human condition described therein.

Today is Mid Summer, Litha, the turning point. The weather is getting hotter, but the days begin to get shorter. It is time to get ready for the harvest and to think ahead toward the winter and spring. What will we gather? What will we need to get us through the fallow season? What must we retain to be able to start the next cycle?

Acceptance of the diverse beliefs and religious practices of others is much easier when we recognize them as metaphors for a larger reality. It is not useful to get deeply embroiled in the concept of TRUTH when others relate their myths and state that they "know" them to be "true".

You are free to use or even create all the metaphors that you need. The only danger comes when you start to believe that **your** metaphors represent the **whole** of truth, rather than an aspect of it.

I invite you to share Joseph Campbell's love of life and myth, and to use his liberal view of metaphor as a means of enhancing your enjoyment of your own metaphors and those of others.

**Conclusion:** The words of the Roman Symmachus, 384 C.E.:

"We gaze up at the same stars, the sky covers us all, and the same universe encompasses us. What does it matter what practical system we adopt in our search for the truth. Not by one avenue only can we arrive at so tremendous a secret."

**Hymn –**

Joy, Thou Goddess – Hymn 327

**Spiral Dance**

ground as needed

**Offering of gifts:** Since money is a metaphor for our time and creative energies, it is a way for us to share ourselves and sustain this Religious Institution.

**Announcements**

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**Thank Deity**

We thank the Great Goddess, The Lord and Lady, the other Divine Spirits called today, as well as the Great Metaphor itself, for being with us here and in our lives.

Extinguish chalice

**Thank Directions**

Singing The Living Tradition, #703

Spirit of the North, Be with us always.

Spirit of the West, Be with us always.

Spirit of the South, Be with us always.

Spirit of the East, Be with us always.

**Open Circle**

The circle is open, but unbroken.

May the peace of the Goddess go in our hearts.

We merry meet and merry part and merry meet again

Blessed be