

## Independence Day Service 2009:

*Please note that this ritual was presented to the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany NY as there one and only Sunday service on the weekend of July 4<sup>th</sup>. You will notice that some uniquely "UU" elements were incorporated into the ritual, but for the most part, this rite followed the standard liturgy we use in Tear of the Cloud Grove. It was attended by approximately 40 people, and was very well received.*

### Welcome and Announcements

#### Statement of Purpose

First, I would like to introduce myself and my co-celebrants this morning. My name is Gretchen Persbacher, and I am the Senior Druid of Tear of the Cloud Grove, our local ADF congregation. Leading the ritual with me today is our Grove's Scribe, Cary Carcuro, and the Rev. MJ Henion, from the Order of the Phoenix Rising, another local pagan group. In addition, Isabel Pottinger, of Albany, will be doing a number of readings for us throughout the service, and Satauna Howell will be leading the musical portions of our ritual on the piano.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with ADF, the initials stand for Ar nDraiocht Fein, a Gaelic phrase that roughly translates to "Our Own Druidry". We are an international fellowship dedicated to the creation of a public tradition of neo-pagan druidry. Today's service will follow the basic format of a standard ADF ritual as celebrated by our grove, but we have also incorporated some elements of this congregation's usual service, so you are likely to see some familiar things as well.

Most people who have some experience with neopagan ritual are familiar with wicca. ADF is a druidic tradition, not a wiccan one, so many of the common elements you might expect will be conspicuously absent. For example, we do not cast a circle or call quarters, and people are free to come and go at any time.

We hope that you will enjoy the service and we encourage you to participate to whatever extent you are comfortable. There will be singing, spoken responses, and towards the end of the rite, we will pass along some fresh fruit that will serve for us as a symbolic shared meal and blessing.

The purpose behind all of our rituals is to deepen our relationships with the kindred, to foster a sense of community and to celebrate important events in the wheel of the year as well as in our personal and civic lives.

Today's ritual is in honor of the American civic holiday, Independence Day. Today we give a place of honor in our rite to the spirits and memories of all the brave men and women who built this nation. Today, we celebrate the founders.

### Welcoming Guests and Visitors

#### Offering

*During the Offering, please join in singing the following variation of "America the Beautiful"*

O beautiful for spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!

America! America!  
Love shed its grace on thee,  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!

Oh beautiful for pilgrim feet  
Whose stern impassion'd stress  
A thoroughfare for freedom beat  
Across the wilderness

America! America!  
Faith mend thine ev'ry flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self-control,  
Thy liberty in law.

O beautiful for heroes prov'd  
In liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country loved,  
And mercy more than life

America! America!  
May truth thy gold refine  
Till all success be nobleness,  
And ev'ry gain divine.

O beautiful for patriot dream  
That sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam  
Undimmed by human tears.

America! America!  
Love shed its grace on thee,  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea.

### Purification and Preparation of our Sacred Space

While we use incense and water to symbolically purify and sanctify our ritual space, I ask you to focus your attention on this jar. We call this the ego jar, and we use it as a vessel in which we can deposit our egos for the duration of the ritual.

We all have titles, roles and positions in the mundane world, but when we come together in ritual, we set those aside. We come as equals, united in common cause.

So I ask you to take a moment to cast off your titles and set aside your egos, leaving them here, in this vessel, which I will then remove from our ritual space. The jar will be placed just outside the door, so anyone who wishes to retrieve their ego at the end of the service may do so.

### Guided Meditation

I now invite you to close your eyes, and open your ears, and open your minds, and open your hearts. Make yourselves comfortable, stretch if you need to. Place yourselves at ease.

Breath slowly, drawing the air deep into your lungs. With each indrawn breath, allow peace and calm to fill you. With each exhalation, expel all tension and worry. Allow yourself to relax, let go of all the cares and worries of the mundane world.

Think of this as a time outside of time. A place set apart from the bustle of the world. When we come together like this, we create sacred space with our very thoughts, and the power of our intentions is magnified a hundred fold.

Open yourself to your surroundings. With your eyes closed, allow your other senses to expand. Feel the floor, solid and strong, beneath your feet. Feel the air as it fills your lungs with each breath.

Hear the small sounds all around you. The slight movements of your neighbors, the sound of your own breath. If you listen closely enough, you may even hear the beating of your own heart.

Consider for a moment, our presence here today, and what it represents. We are gathered together in common purpose.

The signers of the Declaration of Independence also gathered in common purpose. They gathered to make what was likely the most difficult decision that any of them had ever had to make. They gathered on behalf of all the people of what would one day become the United States of America. But at the time, they were still British citizens with a list of serious and alarming grievances against their sovereign.

They were not rebels by nature, and bore no ill will towards their brethren across the sea, but they had endured far too many injustices to do nothing. They had to act. They realized that the King would not sit back and let them go without a fight. They knew that they were facing war.

Imagine what it must have felt like. The history books talk about their bravery and determination, but there was likely also fear and doubt. Though the magnitude of the challenge they faced was enormous, the feelings accompanying it were not unlike the feelings that each of us may experience when presented with a difficult choice.

Over the course of our lives, each of us will be challenged in one way or another. How we face those challenges ultimately defines our character. We remember those who signed the Declaration of Independence as men of vision and principle. How we will one day be remembered is up to us. I invite you to pause now and reflect for moment on the challenges that you each face in your own lives, and to draw from the spirit of the founders the inspiration and strength to persevere.

Breathe deeply and slowly. Feel the air filling your lungs. Feel the presence of your neighbors around you, warm and supportive. When you are ready, I invite you to once again open your eyes, and join me in this Independence Day Ritual.

### Earth Mother Offering

Celebrant: Mother of all, as is our custom, to you we make the first offering of our rite. It is by your bounty that we are sustained throughout our lives, and it is into your warm embrace that we each return upon death. We call upon you now to come and join with us in our celebration this day. As a gesture of welcome, and a symbol of our love and devotion, we make this offering to you. Earth Mother, accept our offering!

All Respond: Earth Mother, accept our offering!

### Bardic Inspiration

Celebrant: I call upon the spirit of Robert Frost as a source of inspiration for our rite. To this end, we will now have a reading of “The Road Not Taken”, one of your often-quoted poems which holds special meaning for all of those here gathered:

*Reading of “The Road Not Taken”*

Robert Frost, poet of this land, grant us silver tongues this day. Inspire us to speak the deeper truths and to share what it is our hearts. Accept this small token as a symbol of our appreciation and regard. Robert Frost, accept our offering!

All Respond: Robert Frost, accept our offering!

Chalice Lighting

Celebrant: As we light this chalice, let it stand as a symbol of all those qualities that unite this congregation. Let this flame burn pure and true, a spark of the same fire that burns within each one of us, the fire of inspiration, of devotion, and of perseverance. We give this flame a place of honor, at the heart of our sacred space.

All:

Welcoming all free seekers of truth and meaning,  
We gather to excite the human spirit,  
To inspire its growth and development,  
To respond morally and ethically to a troubled world,  
And to sustain a vital and nurturing religious community.

Recreating the Cosmos: Hallowing the Fire, the Well and the Tree

Celebrant: We now hallow the sacred symbols of our cosmos: the well that is the gateway to the underworld, the fire that lights the skies, and the world tree that becomes for us the crossroads uniting all realms.

*Please join in singing our “Portal Song”*

*Words and music by Ian Corrigan*

By fire and by water, between the earth and sky  
We stand like the world tree, rooted deep, crowned high  
By fire and by water, between the earth and sky  
We stand like the world tree, rooted deep, crowned high

Come we now to the well, the eye and the mouth of earth  
Come we now to the well, and silver we bring  
Come we now to the well, the waters of rebirth  
Come we now to the well, together we sing

We will kindle a fire, bless all and with harm to none

We will kindle a fire, and offerings pour  
We will kindle a fire, our light 'neath the moon and sun  
We will kindle a fire, our spirits will soar

Gather we at the tree, the root and the crown of all  
Gather we at the tree, below and above  
Gather we at the tree, together we make our call  
Gather we at the tree, in wisdom and love

#### Offering to the Gatekeeper: The Statue of Liberty

Celebrant: I call upon the spirit of the Statue of Liberty, guardian of the gateway to this great nation. In your honor, "The New Colossus" penned by Emma Lazarus, and displayed on the pedestal upon which you so nobly stand will now be read.

*Reading of "The New Colossus"*

Great Lady Liberty, we call upon you to stand as our gatekeeper for this rite. We ask you to open the ways for us, that the kindreds may hear us and speak to us in turn. We seek your guidance and guarding as we open the gates between the worlds. As a symbol of our appreciation and our affection, we offer you this token of our high regard. Great Lady Liberty, accept our offering!

All Respond: Lady Liberty, accept our offering!

#### Open the Gates

Celebrant: Now, Lady Liberty, please join your magic with mine. Let this fire, flames reaching towards the skies, open as a gate! Let this well, waters spiraling into the underworld, open as a gate! Let this tree, symbolic of the tree of life become for us the crossroads between all worlds, open to our voices and to the spirits of the kindred. Let the gates be open!

All Respond: Let the gates be open!

#### Outdweller Offering

I call now to the spirits of the outer dark, to all who abide beyond the light of this work's fire. Know that we hold no ill will towards you, and pray that you hold none towards us. We present to you the promise of this offering, as a token of our appreciation for troubling not our rite.

*The celebrant will take an offering outside of the sanctuary, to be poured in honor of the outdwellers at the conclusion of the rite*

#### Offerings To The Kindred

#### Nature Spirits:

Celebrant: I call to the spirits of the land, to all those beings, both seen and unseen, who share this world with us. I call to all the beings that are strands upon the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. To the spirits of rock and soil, stone and stream we offer you welcome. To the spirits of tree and flower, grass and moss, we offer you welcome. To the spirits of fur and feather, of skin and scale, we offer you welcome. And to all those unseen spirits, the fey and the sidhe, we offer you welcome.

Nature spirits, accept our offering!

All Respond: Nature spirits, we offer you welcome!

#### Ancestors:

Celebrant: I call to the ancestors, to all those who walked this world before us. To the ancestors of all those gathered here, great-grandfathers and grandmothers of our blood, we offer you welcome. To the ancestors of the spiritual paths we now walk, prophetic women and men whose words challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love, we offer you welcome. And to all the ancestors of this land, known to us or unknown, whose blood and spirits are bound to this piece of earth, we offer you welcome.

Ancestors, accept our offering!

All Respond: Ancestors, accept our offering!

#### Shining Ones:

Celebrant: I call now to the shining ones, to the gods and goddesses. To the deities of all those gathered here, patrons and patronesses, I offer you welcome. To the deities of the paths we travel, those who make up the pantheons of our faiths, we offer you welcome. To the deities of this land, known to us or unknown, whose spirits still look over this piece of the earth, we offer you welcome.

Shining Ones, accept our offering!

All Respond: Shining Ones, accept our offering!

#### Patrons of the Rite

Celebrant: I call now to the founders of this nation, to those whose efforts built the country we live in today. I call to the great men and women who faced untold hardships that we may enjoy the liberty we all too often take for granted.

I call not only to those who signed their names to the Declaration of Independence, but also to the countless leaders who came before and after the creation of that great document. For though we celebrate the Fourth of July as the founding of our nation, this country was not built in a day. Indeed,

it continues to grow and evolve even now, and so we call to the all those women and men who came before us to join with us and lend to us your strength and resolve.

To you who called for the recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of every person, who called for justice, equity and compassion in human relations, and who held aloft the most worthy goal of a world community with peace, liberty and justice for all, I call upon you to join us in our rite. Inspire us to follow in your footsteps that we may continue to improve this great nation, that when our days are done, we may leave this country, and this world, a little better than we found it.

In your honor, an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence will now be read:

### Reflections on Independence Day

Independence Day is most commonly celebrated with picnics, barbeques, retail sales and of course, fireworks displays. Many of us make a point of flying the American flag or wearing red, white and blue as a sign of patriotism and civic pride. At some point during the festivities, we may pause for a moment to think about what it means to be American, and to count our blessings. But for the most part, we celebrate without giving much thought as to what we are celebrating—and why it is so important.

There is a story about Benjamin Franklin that describes how he watched the United States Constitution being signed. The president's chair was at the front of the hall, and there was a sun painted on the back of it. Franklin told some of the representatives sitting near him that it was always difficult for painters to depict the difference between a rising and setting sun. He said that during the convention, he had often looked at the painted sun and wondered whether it was rising or setting. He is quoted as saying at the end, "But now at length I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting sun."

I think that Franklin's quote reflects an important truth. This nation was not created in a day, or a month, or a year. What Franklin witnessed was just the beginning, and he knew it. This nation continues to create and recreate itself every day. As a people, we continue to grow and evolve, and the direction of that growth depends upon us, and upon the choices we make.

Robert Frost's poem, the Road not Taken, is frequently quoted, often in reference to someone making a difficult and unpopular choice when the majority were taking the easier way. It has become a touchstone for non-conformists, rebels and visionaries, and I believe that it has special significance for all of us.

Many of us gathered here today are Unitarian Universalists, neopagans, or both at the same time. Others here may not identify with these labels, but feel some connection to the ideals behind them. I think it safe to say that most of us know what it means to be in a minority, and while we all certainly have our differences, we also have much in common.

We see the world from a slightly different perspective, we explore avenues of thought most people don't contemplate and we embrace spiritual beliefs that many consider unusual. We have, in short, chosen to take the road less traveled.

Many of us have had to explain to others what our faith is about and why we believe the way we do. Many of us have found ourselves taking unpopular positions on issues because the principles we hold dear demanded it. It isn't easy, but we are fortunate to live in a country where our right to take such positions is protected. Others aren't nearly so lucky.

But it is of utmost importance that we remember that the price of this liberty is constant vigilance. If we are to continue to be a free nation, we must continue to fight for those freedoms, in ways both large and small. Some people would argue that it is unpatriotic to criticize one's government. Perhaps in some countries, this is the case, but not so here. In the United States, it is actually the opposite. As citizens, we define our government. When we exercise our right to vote, when we protest a policy we deem unjust, even when we do something as simple as sign our name to a petition, we take an active role in shaping this nation.

Those of us who take the road less traveled face challenges, but we can take comfort in the knowledge that while these paths may not be well-worn, we are not walking them entirely alone. Look around you, at the men and women who have chosen to take this particular spiritual journey. Though we are each individuals, and it might well be argued that we each walk our own unique path, it is clear that our paths cross again and again, and it is clear that we share the same goals.

It is impossible to know what the founders may have envisioned this nation would be like in the year 2009, or even if they thought that far ahead. The world has changed a great deal since their time, but the beliefs that they fought for remain just as relevant today—that we are all created equal and endowed with certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. May we continue to cherish and defend those rights, for ourselves and for people throughout the world. And may we promote the values that make us truly worthy of the legacy left to us by our founders.

### Personal Joys and Sorrows and Praise Offerings

*In addition to FUUSA's standard tradition for Joys and Sorrows, we also invite you to come up, select an offering from those available, imbue it with your intentions and place it in the offering bowl. According to your preference, you may speak your intentions aloud, or speak them only in your own heart.*

### Taking of the Omen

*Using tarot, an omen will be taken, asking the kindred and the patrons of the rite what blessings they bestow upon us.*

### Hallow the Waters – Sharing the Blessing



*We will ask that bowls of fruit be symbolically imbued with the blessings bestowed upon us. The bowls will then be passed around the congregation so that all may partake.*

Celebrant: Mighty ones, we have honored you, and now we ask for your blessings in return, for in true ghosti tradition, a gift calls for a gift. I call upon the spirits gathered here today to bless these bowls of fruit as vessels of the sacred waters of life. Fill them with your wisdom, your resolve, and your compassion, that we may strengthen these qualities within ourselves.

Blessed kindred, beloved founders, we are honored by your many blessings, and we will now share this gift in joyous communion with you and with one another.

(Cary and MJ will pass the bowls)

Thanks to the Patrons of the Rite:

Celebrant: To the founders of our nation, men and women of foresight and fortitude, we thank you for your many blessings and for sharing in our celebration this day. Honored founders, we thank you!

All Respond: We thank you!

Thanks to the Shining Ones

Celebrant: To the Shining Ones, first children of the Mother, patrons and patronesses, we thank you for your presence in our rite, and in our lives. Shining Ones, we thank you!

All Respond: We thank you!

Thanks to the Ancestors:

Celebrant: To our beloved Ancestors, those women and men who came before us and whose wisdom and vision continues to guide us, we thank you for sharing in our rite, and for the legacy which you have left us. Ancestors, we thank you!

All Respond: We thank you!

Thanks to the Nature Spirits:

Celebrant: To the noble Nature Spirits, fellow children of the earth, we thank you for partaking in our rite, and for the beauty and wonder that your presence lends to our lives. Nature Spirits, we thank you!

All Respond: We thank you!

### Closing the Gates

Lady Liberty, I call upon you once again to aid us and join your magic with mine. Let this well become again but water. Let this fire become again but flame. Let this tree become again but leaf and twig, symbol of life, yet no longer the crossroads of all realms. Let the gates be closed!

All Respond: Let the gates be closed!

### Thanks to the Gatekeeper

Celebrant: Statue of Liberty, Mother of Exiles, we thank you for your guiding and guarding during our rite, and we thank you for the hope that your torch kindles within the hearts of so many. Lady Liberty, we thank you!

All Respond: We thank you!

### Thanks to Spirit of Inspiration

Celebrant: Robert Frost, poet of this land, we thank you for the inspiration you have granted us during our rite, and for the inspiration your words have given to so many. Robert Frost, poet and bard, we thank you!

All Respond: We thank you!

### Thanks to the Earth Mother

Celebrant: Mother of all, it is to you that we call upon first, and to you we give last thanks, for you are there with us, from beginning to end, in life as in our ritual. As is our custom, to you we present all that we leave unused, a final tribute that is but a small token of our devotion. Earth mother, we thank you!

All Respond: We thank you!

### Recessional:

*Please join in singing "Walk with Wisdom" (repeat verse three times)*

Walk with wisdom, from this hallowed place  
Walk not in sorrow, our roots shall e're embrace  
May strength be your brother, and honor be your friend  
And luck be your lover, until we meet again.