

“Maiden, Mother, Queen and Crone – Celebrating Women’s Lifespan”

November 7, 2010

Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church

Worship Committee

The ancient archetype of the triple goddess of Maiden, Mother and Crone can be a guide for modern women to reflect on the changing phases of their lives. The Queen is a new archetype for a woman in mid-life. In this service we will reflect on how we as modern women can celebrate our life passages.

Women & Religion is an exploration of feminist spirituality and goddess religions within the UU church. This service is planned and presented by a group of women affiliated with A2U2.

Chalice Lighting and Calling in the Four Aspects of the Goddess:

(written by Meret B.)

In the East, we call in the Maiden, the young woman who belongs only to herself: Kore, Hebe, Artemis, Diana, Nimue, Athena – the Goddess of the Waxing Moon. She represents the energy of youth, playfulness, discovery and carefree excitement. She is independent and full of possibilities.

In the South, we call in the Mother, the fertile woman who gives new life: Demeter, Gaia, Innana, Isis, Durga, Kuan Yin – the Goddess of the Full Moon. She represents sexuality, fertility, growth and ripeness. She nurtures and protects and is full of love.

In the West, we call in the Queen, the mature woman who reaps the fruits of her experience: Hera, Brigid, Lakshmi, Nut, Fortuna, Parvati – the Goddess of the Waning Moon. She represents maturity, self-reliance, dignity and power. She prospers and teaches and is full of strength.

In the North, we call in the Crone, the wise old woman who knows who she is: Hecate, Persephone, Kali, Hel, Pele, Baubo, Spider Woman – the Goddess of the Dark Moon. She represents age, wisdom, knowledge and stability - the culmination of a lifetime of experience. She is the keeper of the mysteries, the guide of her people, and she is full of wisdom.

Together we light this chalice – the symbol of our Unitarian-Universalist Faith and the ancient symbol of the womb of the Goddess.

(Maiden): May her light inspire us.

(Queen): May her flame spark our passion.

(Mother): May her warmth nurture us.  
(Crone): And may her never-ending fire sustain us through birth, life and death.  
(All): The Circle is Cast. Blessed Be.

## Lesson for all Ages: A Goddess for All Ages

Meret B.

We now invite the children to come forward and sit in the circle in the middle.  
Maybe you are noticing that some things are a little different here at church today – what have you noticed?

Well, today's service is led by a group of girls and women from our church, and they will be talking about their whole life cycle from childhood to old age.

They will also be talking about something important to them called the Goddess.  
In Unitarian Universalism, we believe that people can choose their own idea of religious worship. The religions of Pagans, many of whom are Unitarian Universalist, have the Goddess as the center of their worship.

So, for many women and girls it has become very important to remind themselves that there are goddesses or gods, and that god can be a woman for them. Many old religions in history were goddess religions.

And many modern pagan religions have taken their ideas from these old religions. They believe that we humans actually are all divine (or special), and that means that we are all goddesses and gods inside. This is what Unitarian Universalists believe, that all humans have inherent dignity and worth.

One other important aspect to the Pagan religion in respect to the Goddess is the MOON. How many of you have looked at the moon lately? What does it look like? How does it make you feel when you look at it? Last night was a new moon, and maybe tonight, when you look at the moon, you can see a tiny little crescent moon in the sky.

Pagans believe that some of the phases of the moon represent an aspect of the goddess.

1. When the moon is waxing (hold up a picture of moon waxing), this represents a young growing maiden goddess, who free, playful, adventuresome and full of new ideas. Waxing is an old-fashioned word for growing. You children are all in the waxing phase of your lives.

2. When the moon is full (hold up a picture of the moon full) this is called the mother goddess and she is fertile, full, round, creative and nurturing.

3. When the moon is waning, (hold up a picture of the waning moon), this moon advances past the full moon toward the dark moon. Waning is an old-fashioned word for shrinking, getting smaller.

This is a woman in mid-life and she enters the Queen phase of her life. The queen is a mature woman who has clear goals, and often she finds fulfillment in her work and in teaching younger women and girls.

4. When the moon is a dark moon or a new moon (hold up a picture of the new moon) we refer to older women as Crones. Many people think of a crone as an old woman or hag, but in the Goddess tradition, the word “crone” has a positive meaning. A Crone is a wise old woman, a woman who really knows herself well, and draws from her long life experience. She is often a guide and teacher to her community whom people ask for advice.

Together, these four aspects represent the Goddess for Pagans– she is all of these and one Goddess at the same time. She is a Changing Woman, and she changes with the Moon,

And the moon is something that we can all share in looking at and find comfort in as we all grow and change into the best people we can be. So, go now in peace and remember to look out for the crescent moon tonight and think of the goddess inside of you.

## On Impossible Questions, the Asking of

Allison C.

I'm supposed to get up here and enlighten you as to what it's like to grow up female in this day and age. What's different from those who came before us? What's the same? How does this effect my experience personally--how do my female role model's change my view of the world?

I can't answer those questions.

I tried. Believe me, I tried. I have four drafts and a week of chasing my proverbial tail to prove it. But it got me nowhere, and that made me wonder, eventually, if it was even possible. It's all very well for the women who'll speak after me to come up here and tell you about their experience's growing up, and how today's generation's are different. They're out of this mess. But me? I'm still smack dab in the middle of it. I'm not done growing up: how can I answer a question about something that hasn't finished happening yet? How can I compare it to something I didn't experience? So I can't answer your questions: I think you can see far clearer than I can in that department.

But something I can talk about are my dreams. I don't have dreams as a woman: I have dreams as a person. And that...that's big. That's not something every generation can say.

Sure, I dream about meeting The One. About getting married and having kids, a white picket fence and more cats than is reasonably sane. But I also have dreams about getting a Master's in Museum Science's, about organizing exhibits and spending hours sorting through musty old archives, with just myself and ancient history for company. That's a major difference, one that I can put my thumb on. The Lines are blurring. The gender lines, the employment lines. Maybe that's why this is so hard, because there's so little gender specific in this day and age. Growing up female isn't that different from growing up male. The same pressures apply. Sure, there are some pervading stereotypes, that men can't cry and women make better sandwiches (opinion courtesy of my brother), but on the whole, the scales are pretty equal.

So really, growing up is growing up in the here and now. It's not growing up a girl or a guy--it's just getting older.

You make the comparisons, people. I'm 17 years old: I bow to your infinite wisdom.

## I was Dancing Before I was Born

Sybil Wilen

We dance the moment we are born as we wiggle and squirm down the birth canal. We dance as young children when the mood strikes. We dance as young women in our mating rituals. We dance through creating life, we dance through the birthing process and then we dance some more with our children as partners.

My other lives see me as a writer, a teacher of words, a mother of five and a step mother to one. Words come naturally to me. I play with them the way my mathematician father plays with numbers. It would appear that writing about what motherhood means to me would be a simple task. It would take no more thought than flipping open the laptop and setting down a few choice phrases that describe the physical and mental applications of nurturing my children.

But, when I was approached about becoming a part of the women's service by representing mother, I found I could not put anything on paper to describe the emotional sensation of the mothering process. To draw on the guttural feelings that motherhood produces to create a sense of clarity through word seemed daunting. The feelings that becoming a mother and mothering have ripened in me do not make much sense in written language. They would be grunts, gnashes, and abdominal growls. The only true way to show what Mother means to me is via movement.

Dancing is not only a means of meditation for me, but it is also a way to connect with my children. Today, I dance with my daughters as a means to express our love for each other and our journey through this world as we develop from maiden to mother. Someday, I will dance as crone.

Many scholars believe that belly dance stems from Middle Eastern fertility ceremonies and as such was a dance performed by women for women. The thought is that the dance's isolation techniques strengthen abdominal muscles in preparation for childbirth.

The piece I have choreographed weaves a young girl's shift into motherhood and demonstrates the bond between mother and daughter through dance.

The movements in this piece are drawn from Khaleeji dancing, a folk dance from Saudi Arabia. This type of dancing would be found at weddings and gatherings of women. If we were dancing in the Middle East, we would be wearing a heavily embroidered "Thobe Nashal" that is easily pulled over whatever clothing one is already wearing. The music we have chosen is Hossam Ramzy's "Sallam Allay".

## Motherless, Childless, Aspiring Crone

Erica B.

Almost twenty years ago, I spoke at the first maiden/mother/crone service as the voice of the maiden. At sixteen I had no question of where I fit in that trinity – I wasn't a mother and the potential of crone-hood was many long years away.

Recently, though, I've been uncertain which of those three aspects I represent.

While I know that women older than I still have children, at 34 I have to face the reality that I may not. It's harder to accept than I once would have thought. As a teenager, I considered the idea of having kids in an abstract sort of way; only when my niece was born did I begin to understand the realities of what it might be like, both the challenges and the rewards. But it wasn't until my mother's death that part of me – a part only recently acknowledged – longed for a child of my own, especially a daughter. I want so much to have that mother/child connection, a continuity with my own mother.

If I don't experience that, where does it leave me?

As for being a crone, I don't know if I'll ever get there, something else I only understood when my mom died at 48. What surprised me then was discovering how much I would *like* to be a crone. As an adolescent, I subscribed to the thought that it was romantic to live fast and die young. Who wanted to get old and feeble? (Bear in mind that, at the time, I considered old to be somewhere around forty.) Then, shortly before I first spoke here, I met Nancy Hutchison, a former church member who will forever epitomize for me the definition of a crone.

She walked with a cane due to a bad leg, but it didn't slow her down at all. In fact, I will never forget the time that she sped past my family on the way to church, considerably surprising my dad given her handicapped license plate, her car easily recognizable by its bumper sticker: "My Other Car Is A Broom". She was intelligent, fierce at times, fearless in her beliefs and convictions, not at all hesitant to do what she wanted and believed was right. She was also kind, encouraging, compassionate, and if you weren't as brave as she wanted you to be, she let you know so on no uncertain terms. Nancy challenged all my ideas about what being old meant, making me realize I didn't have to stop living just because of age. My heart aches when I think now that I might not achieve that for myself.

Remembering how Nancy made me re-imagine my idea of a crone, I realize that I also need to re-envision my idea of being a Mother. Is a woman a mother only if she bears or raises children? What of those whose creative children speak for them in the world, be it through words, paint, music, or some other artistic expression? Or what of us who fit neither of those categories? Is there more to defining motherhood?

Asking the questions, I realize that yes, there *is* more. I remember a college roommate telling me once that I would make a good mom because I was so responsible. That made sense to me, and so responsibility is part of what I equate with motherhood. So is protectiveness, strength, unconditional love, and, perhaps most significantly for me,

nurturing. In retrospect, I moved out of maidenhood when I started to recognize that the world *didn't* revolve around me, that other people had their own pains and sorrows. When I began to nurture those people, to give them shelter, aid, comfort, embraces, that is when I moved into the Mother role – perhaps especially when it was my own mother I had to nurture.

I have finally come to peace with that. I do not know what the rest of my life will bring, but I do know that right now I am a strong, passionate, compassionate, mothering woman, and I am reaffirmed in knowing that the goddess is and always will be within me. Blessed be.

## Queen – Reflection

Harriet Hill

When I sat down to write this, images of famous queens popped into my mind. Boadicea, the warrior queen. Cleopatra, the consummate femme fatale and politician. The queen of Sheba and Katherine the Great. Marie Antoinette. Queen Elizabeth II.

What can I write that will encompass all the qualities a righteous queen might possess? That she be strong and determined to take care of her own? That she be willing to lay down her life for her justice? That she be compassionate, understanding, and loving to all who are under her domain?

A queen on the world's stage must be all of those things, to greater or lesser degrees. And so it would seem to be for the everyday citizen of the world who has attained the age to be called 'queen'. Our modern queen may be through her childbearing years and may or may not have had her own children. She may have chosen to make her work her child, either by carefully nurturing a corporate career or by dedicating herself to causes she cares most about. She may be mistress of the boardroom, proprietress of her garden, or a firebrand for her causes.

This wonderful stage of a woman's life comes with the freedom to be who she wants to be and the responsibility to do that carefully and conscientiously. I would seem to me that a queen has the moral imperative to be an example for good in the world, wherever she wants to show her example.

Warm, funny, thoughtful, strong, righteous, honest, are all words she could own. She may choose to be the yearly winner of the apple pie contest at the fair or the pilot of a commercial airliner because she's earned the right to do so.

And so I humbly suggest that the role of queen in our modern world is a unique one in all of history. At no other time have there been so many choices for a woman. As she's passed through the joys and sorrows of the stages before hers, the choices she's made have given her the right to be called a queen.

## Respect, Love and Goals

Marge K.

As my body ages new life goals emerge and old ones vanish. I need respect, love and a purpose or goal to fulfill. Respect dictates that I be treated as a competent contributing person.

I am well past my child bearing years and in the middle of my productive years. It bothers me when someone calls me 'hun' - a term I was told not to use because it demeans older people. At the time I was a young aid working in a nursing home. I took it to heart and never called anyone 'hun'.

When someone would call me 'hun' I used to explain to them how I felt in hope of correcting them. I usually left with anger clinging to me. In order to leave feeling positive, I decided to fight fire with fire. The next time someone, a middle aged woman, called me 'hun', I returned the favor—not once but many times. I then used hun in every sentence of the several I replied to her. When I finished she did not call me 'hun' again.

Why does 'hun' strike such a nerve in me? Am I afraid of becoming feeble? Perhaps it is. I don't want people to treat me older than I feel. I would not be content to retire to a rocking chair. I want to stay young and complete my goals.

But now what do I really want? I want to be happy and I want my work to be rewarding, I want to have a loving relationship with my son, a good relationship with my friends and significant others. I want to enjoy this time, my time. I am energetic, productive, free - and definitely not HUN!

## Matriarchal Musings

B. C.

Good Morning. I am (full name), an 83 year-old wife, mother, stepmother, mother-in law, grandmother and great-grandmother. My father was born in 1894, in the nineteenth century, and my great-grandchildren may very well still be alive in the 22nd century. How do I make sense of all these years, and how do I understand my place in them?

My guides to understanding are many. With age I am learning to respect that old adage about changing the things you can change, accepting those you can't, and learning to know the difference.....

I studied Anthropology in graduate school but instead of completing my doctoral dissertation I produced my first child. Margaret Mead was an advisor on my dissertation and I met with her several times and benefitted greatly from her remarkable wisdom and kindness. My studies in Anthropology, including fieldwork on an Indian reservation, plus my years of teaching plus several jobs in the business world and especially my 50 years of being a Unitarian-Universalist have given me much helpful guidance. I consider myself to be a secular humanist.

I have always believed that I was a citizen of the entire world and have tried my best to keep abreast of what was going on in different parts of the globe. I knew people who suffered great losses as a result of World War 2, but thankfully my husband Glen was never even wounded though he was a paratrooper who jumped behind German lines. After the Holocaust it was said "never again," but it has happened again and again. I have watched the nations of Africa shake off their colonial masters which has given me a great sense of hope. I have felt part of the civil rights movement, through my UU churches. One of my ministers was standing next to UU minister James Reeb in Selma, Alabama, when Reeb was killed.

I have been part of the pro-choice movement and remember the miracle of bringing my own two babies into a welcoming world, participating in their deliveries through natural childbirth. Because of having been actively involved in four UU churches, and two UUA regional Districts, I have gotten to know many wonderful UU's from different parts of the country and I know I am part of our historically significant Liberal Religious movement. I try to live my belief in the seven UU principles as best I can. I am a member of my family, of my church and denomination, a citizen of my state and nation and world, and along with Emily in Thornton Wilder's play, Our Town, I also feel that I am part of the Universe. I am terribly busy at age 83 just trying to keep up.

Celebrating the stages of a woman's life provides wonderful recognition for what is so often overlooked. Many of us don't appreciate the importance and universality of these stages and ignore our changing energy levels and broadening perspectives. As an elderly woman my energy level is frustratingly lower than it was years ago but is fortunately

balanced by the satisfaction found in my much broader perspective and deeper understanding of my own place in the world. That is consolation for the challenges I and the rest of my generation face as we grow old together.

## What's In Between

Jeannine Rabinowitz

We three friends  
Sit upon the rocky shore  
Bathing suits drying,  
Eyes narrowed against the sun.

This is our summer rendezvous,  
Over decades a custom observed  
Sometimes by its absence,  
Yet the bond remains.

We are constant, but appear different.  
Hair that was once blonde, dark, or red  
Is silvered over.  
Profiles that were lithe or curvaceous now sag.

The season is turning again to harvest, and we are  
Like pumpkins that have grown a bit lop-sided.  
It doesn't matter to us; we are strong  
And we stretch our limbs gratefully  
In the sweet heat of afternoon.

Our spirits have been shaped as well,  
Honed by rubbing up against the inevitable.  
By changes, meetings and losses  
We have been pitted and polished,  
Sculpted, tuned and stretched,  
The grain of our being now apparent.

What was once sharp is now soft;  
Fiery clashes have mellowed like an autumn sunset.  
We regard each other with affection,  
Survivors in a cosmic hopscotch game.  
Our joy is in our being and our doing  
And we say not "I was" but "I am".

## Stone Fruit Heart

Minty Hyslop

When my heart was young and green,  
its tendril roots made a home place  
to anchor all its love.

My heart flowering  
gloried in the colors of each affection,  
bloomed visitors to the scent  
of its giving,  
learned the moods of weather  
where it thrived.

My ripe heart hung succulent and secure,  
full of the mellow taste  
it gave without restraint,  
Consumed.

Then, then there was only a stone, a pit,  
dropped far from where it knew  
how to be,  
given, giving nothing.  
Without expectation.

My heart did not choose  
the braking that came next.  
It could not know yet a while  
that this shattering is seasonal  
and necessary gift:  
the wounding  
into new life  
of dormant seed blessing.

## Closing Words

By the Earth that is Her Body  
By the Air that is Her Breath  
By the Waters of her Living Womb  
And by the Fire of Her Bright Spirit  
This Circle is Open, But Unbroken  
May the Love of the Goddess be ever in your hearts.  
Merry Meet, and Merry Part, and Merry Meet Again.  
Blessed Be.

## About Women and Religion

Women & Religion is an exploration of feminist spirituality within the UU church. In 1977 the UUA General Assembly had passed the Women and Religion Resolution, calling UUs to explore and eliminate religious roots of sexism in myths, traditions and beliefs. The UUA Women & Religion Committee worked until 1996. In 2002, UU Women & Religion became an independent affiliate organization of UUA. District groups continued to meet and hold retreats. Many UU congregations hold Women & Religion Sundays. For more information, go to [www.uuwr.org](http://www.uuwr.org)  
UU Women and Religion of Northern New England has been sponsoring spring and fall retreats for women since 1982.  
FMI go to [www.uuwomenandreligion.org](http://www.uuwomenandreligion.org)

## About Maiden, Mother, Queen and Crone

Since the feminist spiritual movement of the 1970ies, women have identified with the archetype of the Triple Goddess of Maiden, Mother and Crone, inspired by the teachings of Robert Graves in "The White Goddess".  
Donna Henes, an urban shaman and writer, added a fourth archetype of the Queen in her 2005 book "The Queen of My Self" for middle-aged women between motherhood and cronehood and women who are not mothers.  
These aspects of the Goddess are also associated with the changing phases of the moon: waxing, full, waning, dark.  
Women celebrate their life transitions with rituals.  
Last fall, A2U2 women held a "crowning" ritual to celebrate the passage of becoming a "crone" or wise old woman.