

## “Contemplation on Ice-Out”

April 11, 2021

### Welcome and Lighting of Chalice - Rev. Betsy Tabor & UUFES Youth

Welcome. Here we seek justice and truth and understanding.  
Here we celebrate life and contemplate mystery.  
Here we seek healing and wholeness. Welcome, all.

This morning’s service is about what inland New Englanders call “ice-out.” Quickly, in a matter of days, sometimes hours, the thick ice of our lakes, ponds and rivers breaks up and melts. You look out the window, and what was still and solid and heavy has disappeared, the dance of moving water in its place.

Why talk about ice-out in a Sunday service? Well, because ice-out is exciting and appealing and inspiring. It’s *fun* to guess when it will happen. It *connects us* to the natural world. It’s *concerning*, as climate change research indicates how early in the year it seems to be occurring. And ice-out touches on our quest for justice, too: understanding what ice-out meant for the First Peoples who lived here is a form of reckoning with our history.

### Centering Music - “Ani Ma’amin” (*I Believe*)

In honor of Holocaust Remembrance Day on April 8

Recorded by Shana Aisenberg, UUFES Director of Music

**Statement of Recognition of Indigenous Peoples** - Unison Reading led by Jorge Dominguez  
We, members of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes, recognize that the lands we now call New Hampshire and New England, on which we live, work, play, and worship, were originally inhabited by indigenous nations. We are aware of the displacements, slaughter, and injustices that many members of those nations have suffered; many of those injustices were not remedied in the past, and some may endure to this day. As we remember these nations, long resident in this region, we acknowledge and celebrate their stewardship of these lands and waters, across many generations, and now for all of us. We are grateful for their dedication and perseverance in their love of the lands, the wider environment, their families, and their peoples. We recognize and honor their enduring presence amidst our communities today.

### Hymn - “Peace Like a River”

#### A Time for All Ages - Alice Posner

Hello gentle people, this is Lady Gertrude Yarrow. I realized it has been a year since I first came to meet you all, and I have been out on my adventures, but hearing the spring peepers this morning somehow made me want to come back and talk more about the wonderful world around us! Somehow I seem to connect with who I was a year ago at a particular time of year just as much as I do with myself a couple of months ago, in a different season, does it ever feel that way to you?

I think last time I saw you we discussed how to make friends with a plant. I hope if you did that

it went well for you and perhaps your plant was able to be a constant companion for you through this difficult year. Hopefully things are opening up a bit for some of you, and perhaps you can now introduce a human friend to your plant, and ask them to come and sit with you for a bit, a special kind of friend who understands this kind of thing, and has the heart to listen to your wonderful experiences.

Now as we are finishing the thaw, I wanted to tell you a little tale to remind you to be gentle on yourselves. The world is warming up, we are thawing out, you are perhaps venturing out a little more, but do not feel you need to rush yourselves.

I stepped out of my doorway last week, and I saw a plant, a bud growing up in between some strong green leaves out of the leaf mulch. It's about time! I thought. It was warm, very warm and the snow had mostly melted, with just a little bank left under my patch of *rosa rugosa*.

Looking around it seemed like a perfect day for a flower, I even saw a mosquito fly by! So I turned to the bud - come on now, it's April, I have made it through this long cold lonely winter! No response. Get up you lazy bones, "Time to bloom!" I said out loud! The bud sat there, and said nothing. An ant even ostentatiously crawled over the top.

The next day I stepped outside again, and found the bud still tight shut. Humm I thought, Perhaps the flower needs a bit of encouragement to bloom. Perhaps I was too hard on it last time. I knelt down next to it, "What a fine flower I have by my doorstep! What a cheerful bounce to your leaves! What a good spot to be growing!" The flower again said nothing.

The next day I decided to be practical and scientific. I brought it a little scoop full of compost and sprinkled it around the base of the leaves. I filled my favorite green watering can and gave it a good drench, followed by a gentle spray on its leaves with my spray bottle. I pruned a branch of my rosebush that was shading it in the late afternoon. There! I sat back and waited, but can you believe it! Still no flower!

I gave up. I went to bed defeated. I pulled my quilt up to my chin, blew out my candle and shut my eyes without even reading my evening entry of the Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds. But! That night I did dream that small trumpets were playing outside of my window! and

When I woke up I rushed outside into the morning sunlight and - yes! - The flower had opened to a bold yellow daffodil! It sparkled with dew! It nodded in the breeze! Spring is indeed a spring!

Now, I tell you my story, so you don't have to embarrass yourself and learn the hard way, as I did, that blooming just takes its own time! Perhaps it's better to kneel down in the grass this warm weather, and observe with curiosity your slow progression to a vibrant showy flower. It's a little silly to think we can rush it, is it not!

Before I go, I'd like to leave you with an image of a spiral, expanding and contracting in a constant flow of life. A spring!

## Reflections

*Sandra Carr:* I usually miss the moment when the ice on Silver Lake falls in on itself, but was here for it this year, here when the lake froze as well. We walked and snow shoed on it during this our first full New England winter in 20 years. Ice-out is a special moment. And this year it is even more meaningful. Ice-out marks the beginning of Spring. We made it through the long winter, loons are back, peepers are peeping, vernal ponds appear, bears are roaming! It is a new beginning...

After this pandemic year, ice-out is a most welcome and hopeful time. As new life returns to the lake, so it does to our world. Thick hard ice has given way to moving waters, and people are moving too, thanks to the miracle of the vaccine. Friends and family are spending time together face-to-face for the first time in months. We are beginning to return to the flow of life we have so longed for. This year, ice-out feels especially full of promise. Our hearts are full.

*David Wilkins:* As I look out on Silver Lake, I like to think about the dawning of human consciousness: when and how did early humans sort out how nature works, and what did they think it might mean? Who stood on this shore and what practical, emotional, spiritual thoughts did the lake inspire?

Many of our lakes and rivers bear indigenous names that refer to water: Squam, Sebago, Cocheco. A week ago the ice on Silver Lake that Ann and I had lived with for months disappeared suddenly, overnight, and within 24 hours the loons had returned. While the date of Easter is set by the passage of the moon, ice-out is always a surprise; because of this Silver Lakers host an annual New Year's Day party at which we bet on the date, with half the proceeds going to a local charity.

Now that the surface of Silver Lake has changed back from a solid — icy, white, snow-covered — to a liquid, our view has changed too. Now, in the early morning, we have two Mt. Chocoruas and two Mt. Whittiers, their silhouettes doubled and reversed as they are reflected in the still water.

Daylight now lasts until almost eight o'clock and the calls of loons promise nest-building, egg-laying, and then, baring disaster, the arrival of a loon-chick who will need to be taught to fish and fly. This new loon will stay here until late in the year, so late that ice will again be forming, our liquid turning solid once more, before he or she departs for the Maine coast at what often seems to be the last possible moment. And so the cycle will start again: refreshing, invigorating, inspiring.

*Beth Fox:* During ice-out, the lake ice, always changing, becomes honeycombed and weak, slabs of ice sinking, leaving crystals to float on top. The lake is transformed so quickly it's magical. That's when I like to slide my kayak into a sheltered cove, and glide through the tinkling ice that remains.

Other things happen around ice-out. Loons somehow arrive the same day. Smelt, suckerfish, and other fish begin running to their spawning areas. Smelt are first. Smelt used to be prevalent, and fishermen would get their nets, refreshment, and gather at brooks, fish all night. Smelt are less common now. (The local suckerfish arrive soon after ice-out, usually around Easter).

All this follows a very long process, the making of ice all winter. The other day, Meredith told about being on Moultonborough Neck one winter. I thought about that, how we adapt to ice all winter. Native Americans did, plying the waterways from Moultonborough Neck down to Rust Pond, south of Wolfeboro (they called Winniseekit), and on to ocean on the Sobagwa trail. Did they winter at the ocean, come back for smelt running, early fishing?

I like hearing the Native names, which describe local landmarks. I imagine our surroundings through Native eyes, at both ends of the season, watch ice form late fall, and follow its formations right through ice out. Part of the experience is described in this poem for two voices, with Barbara and me:

### **Seasons of Ice**

By Beth Fox

Freeze

Thaw.

Freeze

Thaw.

Freeze

Thaw

Freeze.

Freeze.

Thaw

Freeze.

Thaw

Freeze.

Thaw

Freeze

Thaw.

Thaw.

Awe.

*Meredith Morten:* Wintering on the tip of Long Island in Moultonborough, I loved watching the lake change from liquid to solid and back again.

The period just before Ice-Out was like a delicate breath suspended in time, impregnated with anticipation.

Early spring mornings were palpably fragile, visceral, and fleeting. Winnepesaukee was morphing from a solid mass to a slurry of floating ice and debris.

Ice fishers returned in small boats stealthily navigating the bay in fog and dawning light.

Mergansers trolled. The resident weasel outwitted seagulls by diving below ice patches with her piscine meal.

Along the shore young spiders – Charlottes! – spun delicate charts in branches overstretching the water’s edge.

Winter’s beautiful silence was on a precipice.

**Joys and Concerns** - “Rustles of Spring” by Christian Sinding, 1896  
Played by Eve Goss

**Hymn** - “Spirit of Life”

**Meditation/Prayer**

We give thanks for movement  
for spring’s breeze  
for tender shoots from under last year’s leaves  
we are grateful for ice breaking up, for waters flowing  
for fish spawning - for birds and peepers singing love songs

We give thanks for movement toward our goals – toward being  
more loving,  
more curious  
more mindful  
more healthy  
more brave  
more engaged

In our community, we pray for resilience and healing  
for Mark Allen, recovering from recent surgeries and now in rehab  
for Ingrid Albee, living a new life with beauty and resilience  
for Ed Parsons, recuperating from a fall at Tuckerman’s  
We also hold Ted Hoyt in our hearts, scheduled to receive a new hip tomorrow

We pray for resilience and healing in the world at large  
for all those who are left out, left behind and turned against  
May love guide us. Amen.

**A Story** - “The Return” by Barbara Bald

In her Native wisdom, our friend said they’d be there, certain as rain. Just after ice out, they’d make their way from the big lake (beautiful water in a high place) upstream into small streams that threaded their way deep into forested land.

We traveled up a long, windy, dirt road to a dead end. Locating the narrow path, lined on both sides by massive pines and new growth, we climbed as Abenaki peoples must have years earlier. Up, up, over one knoll, then another; until we reached the edges of a high banked stream. Upstream, water cascaded over granite boulders and a web of up-rooted trees. Downstream it flowed gently into two forked rivulets.

At first glance the tea-colored water revealed nothing to our civilized eyes. The glistening sunlight further hampered the view. We stood in disappointment. How could she have been wrong? Where were they? Then she knelt to the water’s edge, reached in, and lifted a long, wriggling fish up to the sunlight. Following her lead, we knelt and saw hundreds, maybe thousands of suckerfish, frenzied in love. They’d made their way upstream to their birth place, as they do every spring, after every ice-out to spawn in protected waters.

Under the water’s scrim, their brown, speckled skin shown like liquid silk. Packed together, no room to move, their tails undulating in the current. Some hovered in quiet pools; others thrashed, jockeying for space.

Their focus on the task at hand made it easy to stroke them under water. Not so easy to catch, lift one out and marvel at its earthly colors. Not so easy to hold the slippery, squirming body, to feel the power of rigging muscles.

Returning our slimy brothers to the water, we lingered to witness this rite of spring, the inland passage that ice-out had allowed. Native peoples might have come for an easy catch of this boney fish. Or perhaps, like us, they came to bear witness to the blessing of this arrival, this welcoming of a new season and the letting go of ice.

**Musical Interlude** - “Seeds of Life” (English folk, late 1800s)

**Reflection** - Rev. Betsy Tabor

Suddenly, as if God has flicked a great switch, the miracle of ice-out thrills us. The unchanging, world – hard, solid, frozen – becomes, almost in a flash, dancing waves and currents, fish swimming upstream, movement everywhere! And the season of ice-out sets the world back in the flow again.

Science can explain what happens when the sun shines longer and brighter, how the wind breaks up the ice, how it melts or sinks, and what makes it white then silver then dark gray. But the

world in motion, change happening all at once, the quickening we feel, awes the most rational among us.

With ice-out, the rhythms of life change. We see each other more outside. We brush off our kayaks and canoes. Get ready to plant peas. BBQ's are on the horizon.

Rhythms around us change, too. We see it in ducks, geese and heron, wriggling fish in their beaks. We hear it in the loons' calls, the peepers' peeping, the wood frogs' quacks, the birds' songs. We breathe in the fragrance of water in the air.

We feel new rhythm within, too. It's more than observing nature out the window, as if separate from us. Who doesn't know the shift from frozen stillness to thawing movement? Who hasn't longed for it at one time or another?

When life slows us down or brings us to our knees, we can't imagine moving again. Being ill or laid up, bereaved, depressed or disappointed, we feel heavy and without energy...and starting up again feels impossible. Then comes a stirring, a faint thawing, just a hint at possibility. We might recall moments of our own when life called us – just a whisper at first – and we turned toward life again and began to soften.

Ice-out gives us images of welcome change, of being back in the flow – or maybe re-entering the flow this year, after Covid has kept us reined in and stilled in so many ways for so long. Today, the world is beginning to thaw. The pace of movement is picking up. We *will* be in the flow again – the possibility of a future we look forward to living feels closer by the day.

Also this year, maybe because we've come through a time of more contemplation than usual...and certainly because Covid has targeted people on the margins, such as Indigenous Americans, ice-out feels thought-provoking this time around. As David said, it brings to mind the dawn of human consciousness, the generations of people who once lived on these lands and waters long before the Europeans arrived and to whom ice-out meant so much.

Ice-out connects us to the history of this place – not just the familiar colonial history, but the thousands of years of Native history. Imagine how the annual change-over from ice to water affected life's rhythms for the Abenaki, Pennacook and Wabanaki Natives of New England. The waters we enjoy for beauty and sport were their highways and a source of food.

Local indigenous New Englanders have created a video called "An Indigenous Tour of Lake Winnepesaukee." In it, they call themselves "water people" and describe Native sites on the lake's shores: stone prayer seats that face east for observing the solstice; dugout canoes found on the lake bottom, sunk there deliberately by ancestors with the intention of returning for them; a flat, grooved boulder called Pitch Rock, where Native people mixed pine pitch with charcoal and with bear grease to create sealants for birch bark canoes and to waterproof baskets and buckets. Here's where they made glues to secure arrowheads, spear points, knife blades.

"There are pieces of us everywhere," the narrator says. "Our mountains, our street names, our place names. Everything comes back to the original inhabitants and the indigenous people of this

land.” Today’s Natives want to document these sites and this history of a culture. “It’s time,” she says, “for New Hampshire to stop ignoring us....In order to have a common future, we have to have a common past. The only way we can have a common past is by accepting everyone’s story, not just the colonial story.”<sup>1</sup>

It is the season of ice-out. An in-between season of changing rhythms. A season when the flow of life – and our connections past and present– are visible and compelling. Ice-out is a season of gratitude and of awe for all that is.

### **The Morning Offering** - “Ancient Mother”

**Community Response:** *What is moving in your life?*

**Hymn** - “For the Earth Forever Turning”

### **Extinguishing of Chalice**

#### **Reminders**

- Directory: We have a brand new directory of UUFES friends and members. As soon as the office has received your pledge or donation for next year, no matter the amount, we’ll send it to you.
- Coffee hour

**Benediction** - Inspired by fUU Rev. Jane Rzepka

We have wintered and mourned and contained ourselves all winter! Our souls are cold, our dreams flickering. In this, the season of rebirth, we awaken to a power, abundant and holy, that returns each year through earth and water and sky. We will find our hearts again, our good spirits. We will love, and believe and give and wonder, and feel again the eternal powers. The flow of life moves ever onward through one faithful spring, and another, and another.

**Postlude** - “Ancient Mother” ( Shana on guitar, Betsy Ginsberg on bass recorder)

This service can be viewed until July 11 at:

[https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/TR49dSep0WqAnrFpbnjiZ7x0iAeMazLnANlaEkfG4JwcLallRbpd0Xr3ZeMp\\_M.5Fp51oRhvk4QjZtP](https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/TR49dSep0WqAnrFpbnjiZ7x0iAeMazLnANlaEkfG4JwcLallRbpd0Xr3ZeMp_M.5Fp51oRhvk4QjZtP)

Passcode: @#gT.KX7

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<sup>1</sup> “An Indigenous Tour of Lake Winnepesaukee” by the Indigenous NH Collaborative Collective (2019): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ATIwQK6i74>