

Session 7: Solstice Ritual

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Session Metadata	
Session	7
Title	Solstice Ritual
UU Source	Prophetic Women and Men
Unit	2nd Source: Prophetic Women and Men
Head / Hands / Heart	N/A
Has Exercise	No
Has Ritual	Yes
Has Spiritual Practice Presentation	No
Special Blocks	Ritual

Preparation

Note to Facilitator: If you are in the Southern Hemisphere, your Solstice celebration will be in June. If you are in the Northern Hemisphere your Solstice celebration occurs in December. Place this session accordingly.

Tip for Online Meeting: Some groups choose to skip this session if they are not able to meet in person. Instead you may choose to encourage participants to visit an online Solstice Ritual or create their own solstice ritual. However, those who have chosen to have a Solstice Session online have found it very meaningful. You might start out the session with lowered lights on everyone's screen and when you discuss the light later, have everyone add light to their spaces.

Email to Participants

Dear Wellspring Friends

At our next session on [xx], we are going to celebrate the winter solstice, a holiday centered on the experience of darkness and the return of the light. After the inspiring intensity of our sessions so far, it will be good to take some time to let our souls catch up and simply be together.

In the northern hemisphere, this is the season of light: the growing light of the Solstice, the candles of the Menorah, the Kinara bright with seven lights, and the starlight showing the way to the newborn Jesus. Solstice, Kwanzaa, Christmas, and Hanukkah all celebrate with light. The winter solstice is the longest night of the year. It is a time to call to mind the blessings of darkness and feel the promise of returning light. Together we will celebrate the winter solstice. There are no readings for this session, just the invitation to bring something to share: a favorite poem, a piece of music, a photograph, a memory, or anything that your spirit is calling you to pay attention to.

As you think about what you might bring to share, spend some time reflecting on these questions and perhaps writing about them in your UU Wellspring journal.

If you are interested in Summer Solstice, view the **workshop #618 from [General Assembly 2020 on Summer Solstice](#)**.

Reflection Questions

- What meaning does the darkness carry for you? How is it a blessing? How does it challenge you?
- What sustains you in times of darkness?
- What holiday traditions have meaning for you?
- Why do you value them?

[If you are meeting online:] Please also bring a candle or something to light to keep nearby. You are also warmly invited to bring a favorite drink or holiday food. If we were together in person, this would be a time to share favorite foods and drink. Since we cannot do that this time, we will share over zoom what we are enjoying.

[If you are meeting in person:] There are no readings for this session, just **the invitation to bring something to share**: a favorite poem, a piece of music, a photograph, a memory, or anything that your spirit is calling you to pay attention to. As you think about what you might bring to share, spend some time reflecting on these questions and perhaps writing about them in your UU Wellspring journal.

Also, take a moment to sign yourself up for a session during which you'll take ten minutes to share a spiritual practice with the group. Please let me know if you have questions about this or want to discuss further! [You might add a sign up link here.]

Also also, if you haven't had a chance to yet, please take the time to email me with your responses to these questions before our next session. This is a chance to weigh in on any concerns they have so your group can reset and refocus as needed. Please cut and paste the questions below when you email me.

1. What is working well?
2. What is not working well?
3. What would you like to change?

Blessings,

[your name]

Session Plan

Materials needed:

- Candles in holders — one for each group member including yourself (tea lights work fine)
- Decorations: greenery, sparkles, whatever makes the table look beautiful and festive
- Ability to share Solstice music (ideas listed below or choose your own)
- Flashlight (for reading in the darkness) if you are in person
- Small gifts for members - could be the candles (optional)
- Food to share or if online festive food or drink provided by each participant for themselves (optional)

****Facilitator Preparation:****In addition to the chalice, set up as many candles on the center table as there are people in your group. Light them, except the chalice, before people arrive. Turn off the rest of the lights in the room.

Add greenery, sparkles, whatever decorations you choose to make the table look festive. You may want to have small gifts or food to share with members of the group later in the ritual - something as simple as tangerines or chocolate.

Feel free to modify this session as you like - the goal is for you and your group to feel closer, more connected as a result of sharing stories and ritual. It's a break from the hard work of reading history and theology, and a time to connect from the heart.

If your group meets during the daytime, think about trying to schedule a time for this ritual when it will be dark outside. Although it's not absolutely necessary, it adds greatly to the ritual to have candles bringing back the light in the darkness.

Music suggestions:

- *Lisa Thiel, "[Yule](#)"* Note: this is a great song and perfect for Solstice, but it's long; you may want to fade the music out after a couple of minutes instead of playing the whole thing.
- *Winter Solstice III album "Of the Father's Love Begotten"*
- *Will Ackerman, "Conferring with the Moon."*
- *"Winter Solstice," by Robert Mirabal from the album Pueblo Christmas.*
- *For closing: "Here Comes the Sun" by James Taylor/Yo-yo Ma*

Chalice Lighting and Silence

(10 minutes)

We'll take a few minutes of silence to bring ourselves fully into this moment. Our opening words are from "Winter Solstice" by Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker.

“ At this winter’s turning of the year let us go gently – for once – into the night, its dream-drenched, glittering stillness a haven for our souls. Let us breathe deeply and settle into this glittering stillness of darkness and light.

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker

Check-In

What are you carrying in your heart tonight? How is your spiritual practice or spiritual companioning going?

Covenant Review

Use whatever process your group has established to stay current with the covenant.

Is there anything about the covenant that we should address?

Spiritual Practice Presentation

Ritual

*Transition to the solstice ritual by **extinguishing all candles except chalice****. (Lights in the room should already be off.)*

Begin: At this darkest time of the year, when the sun is farthest from us and the night is longest, we come together, as our ancestors have for generations, to honor both the darkness and the return of the light.

We start in darkness, with poetry and song. I'll read the poem "Blessing for the Longest Night" by Jan Richardson, and then we will hear the song [song choice].

Blessing for the Longest Night

All throughout these months

as the shadows

have lengthened,

this blessing has been

gathering itself,

making ready,

preparing for

this night.

It has practiced

walking in the dark,

traveling with

its eyes closed,

feeling its way

by memory

by touch

by the pull of the moon

even as it wanes.

So believe me

when I tell you

this blessing will

reach you

even if you

have not light enough

to read it;
it will find you
even though you cannot
see it coming.

You will know
the moment of its
arriving
by your release
of the breath
you have held
so long;

a loosening
of the clenching
in your hands,
of the clutch
around your heart;
a thinning
of the darkness
that had drawn itself
around you.

This blessing
does not mean
to take the night away
but it knows

its hidden roads,
knows the resting spots
along the path,
knows what it means
to travel
in the company
of a friend.

So when
this blessing comes,
take its hand.

Get up.

Set out on the road
you cannot see.

This is the night
when you can trust
that any direction

you go,

you will be walking

toward the dawn.

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****Note to Facilitator.****Play music in the darkness. Use music suggested in facilitator notes or choose your own. When the music ends, say into the darkness:

This part of our ritual is a chance for us to talk about the blessings and the challenges of darkness. This is not yet the time to share what you have brought with you, but rather a chance to say out loud what this moment is bringing up for you. As you are so moved, I invite you to briefly share what darkness has meant to you:

When have you felt like you were most “in the darkness”? What challenges does darkness hold? What lessons does darkness teach?

After people have responded:

We now bring back the light. You are invited to tell us about what you brought to share with the group — a favorite poem, a piece of music, a photograph, a memory, or anything that your spirit is calling you to pay attention to.

As you share, light a candle, a sign of your own inner light. We will hold one another in loving silence as people speak and will allow space between offerings to honor what has been spoken.

After everyone has shared, if there is time, ask:

- How does your own life shine?
- This is the season of light: the light of the Solstice, the candles of the Menorah, Kwanzaa, the Christmas celebration of divine love being born into this world. But it can also be a season filled with stress and feelings of loss. What does this season mean to you?

So What?

How does this ritual relate to your spiritual journey? What are you inspired or challenged to do next?

Gratitude and Closing

Have everyone focus on the chalice. Each person, as moved, says one or two words about something from this session for which they are grateful or how they are feeling in this moment. Closing words: May the true light within you guide you on your way. Play “Here Comes the Sun” and celebrate the return of the light.

Revision #2

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