

**I am grey.**

**I am fluid**

**I am diffuse and pervasive.**

**I hide what is known and make it mysterious and holy again.**

**I will rise from the water of life**

**I rise from the snow.**

**I rise to the sun, even though I can be blind to it and I can be translated by it.**

**Evanescent**

**I allow possibilities**

**I blur the lines.**

**I stand between the children and the storm.**

**God walks through me into sight**

**I clothe the goddess.**

**Molecules indestructible, fleeting of form.**

**Touching every where, every thing,**

**Cloud**

**Fog**

**Mist**

**Freezing to diamond dust in the November pre-dawn**

**Hushing the sound**

**Hiding the deer**

**I am grey and peace and separate from time.**

**I dance.**

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**Fog.**

**It's *all* shadow-side, baby.**

**Mist and dark and occult and revelation**

**Interdependent**

**Dancing**

**The grey cloak**

**The cloaked one with hands of starlight and a voice like the sea.**

**The sacred**

**I love the cloak - the truth which may or may not be hidden and which may  
or may not be revealed**

**is not important.**

**It's the dance.**

**Immanent god, touch me, almost imperceptibly,**

**Yet! Barely and truly perceptibly!**

**If and only if I listen with my skin.**

**If and only if I dance with you and within you.**

**Fog by day is visual! Yes! Dramatic!**

**And by night - oh, my beloved - by night! By night, fog is smelled, touched,  
tasted, felt.**

**And by night - Oh!**

**In darkness, Fog is revealed.**

**Lover, Parent, Child- one who has my permission to intimately touch.**

**Immanent sacred**

**Inner sacred.**

**Inherent sacred.**

**Breathing in, I breathe in god.**

**Breathing out, I breathe out god.**

**Inspiration.**

**Expiration.**

**Cycle of life**

**Perfect balance.**

**Grey.**

**Second Reading:**

**I could sing the Tree for you, if that were acceptable.**

**I could dance the Tree, I *do* dance the tree. I breathe the Tree, I am the Tree.**

**The life flows beneath my barkskin cool, palpable, beautiful, flow, dance,  
move, circle round and round**

**The life flows in heat light leaf cell skin inward  
Breathe inward leaf nose cool moist.**

**The life flows outward leaf mouth skin color bark.**

**The life flows up root toes legs trunk hip power center mineral water cool  
moving dancing, breathing, breathing, breathe in the stars!!**

**Breathe in the stars!!**

**Wind dance in my hair branches**

**Stars dance just beyond my reach**

**The life flows down, down, solid, stone, center, strength.**

**Reach down, nourish truffles**

**Reach my root toes to my neighbor's root toes**

**Touch.**

**Touch is communicate**

**Communicate is community**

**Community is system**

**System is organism**

**One**

**One**

**One**

**Gaia**

**Roots down, Touch stars**

**Sing with them**

**Cosmos**

## **Sermon - "Seeds Under the Snow" - Sparrow F. Alden**

### **Imbolc - anciently celebrated**

In a strictly linear sense, the child holding the dirty sock may be near the dirty laundry hamper. But the space between those two fixed points is full of possibility - questions, complaints, nagging, asteroids, the next chapter of the book...

The precision of the sun holidays, the solstices and equinoxes, is mathematically precise, elegant. Stand there, look that way, and if the sky is clear of clouds, you'll see the sun exactly there! Get out your stopwatch, your measuring stick, your sextant, and you can predict and then verify that it will be so! Even the moon, the inconstant moon, has a precise cycle, and all you need is recording equipment and nineteen years of cloudless skies from the last time the new moon came on summer solstice!

Aside - This is the tenth anniversary gift my mother created for me and Joshua. I treasure it for the love she showed with her patience and attention to detail, as well as the symbols which my spouse and I asked her to use. The device on the shield - which is our wedding rings joined together by Ouroboros, the World Dragon, shows those spaces-between, as does a traditional wedding ring quilt. While the exactness of these individuals might be nice, it's in the space between where magic happens.

All this to say that if February first is not the halfway mark between Winter solstice and Spring equinox in a strictly algebraic sense, I'm asking you to allow for the possibility that January can be a little long.

The Celtic holy days between the solstices and equinoxes are invitations to participate in non-linear reality, to slip between the worlds. To the OtherWorld on Beltane, the Heroic World on Lúnasdal, the AfterWorld on Samhain. And on Imbolc - the Inner World.

February first in the northern hemisphere finds neopagans with a Celtic bent celebrating Imbolc (or August first for our friends in the southern hemisphere). Imbolc, Candlemas, Saint Bridget's Day, Bride, different names in different

cultures and languages. On Bride, in Scottish tradition, one watches the woods for Cailleach, the Crone figure. If it's a fair day, she will gather much, much firewood on February first or second, thereby causing six more weeks of winter!

“Imbolc” means something like “Lactation of the ewes,” and can be understood as the celebration of the first signs of spring. All we may have for a sign here in northern New England is that the sun is up before the school bus arrives and turtlenecks go on sale at LLBean, but I'll take anything as progress.

Also, goat's milk is less available at the coop - that was my sign that the kids have been born and they needed their nanny's milk more than my cow-milk-intolerant toddler did.

The patron goddess of this holy day is Bridget, triple-goddess of fire, and so well loved by her people that she has been folded as a saint into the tapestry of Catholic tradition.

Brigid as the 'Fire of the Hearth', is the goddess of family, childbirth and healing. Brigid, the 'Fire of the Forge', is patroness of the crafts, especially metalsmithing, and by extension concerned with justice and law. Brigid, the 'Fire of Inspiration', is the protector and progenitor of that third realm, just as indispensable to the people as medicine and metalcraft - poetry.

Imbolc - personally celebrated -

Fire is vital! Spring is vital! Both of them literally so, and I earnestly celebrate them in my personal spiritual practice. I gather all the candle-ends accumulated over the year and light them in an outdoor cauldron to burn away. I put out every light in the house, even the oven's pilot light, and leave burning only one lovely pillar candle which was lit from a candle lit from a candle, et cetera, lit by the World Peace Flame in Snowdonia, Wales. The stove, oven, and regular household candles - even the oil lamps - are relit from that one, and I give thanks to Bride for the gifts of fire.

*In fact, I used that candle to light these small ones this morning, please feel free to take one and re-light the fires of your own hearth from it.*

But the places between. The Inner World, where we \*could\* go on Imbolc. This is the deeper meaning of that holy day.

Any time is good for self-examination. What's the big deal? What's this Inner World? It's about possibilities. I can look at myself in this season not as an accumulation of personal history, but more malleable, more hidden, more open to course changes, to adventure and surprise.

As Unitarian Universalists, the sixth source of our spiritual study is the cycles of nature - Don't demand fruit of yourself in February. The seeds are lying there under the snow.\* (Linda Hoover sings one clear, sweet verse of "I Know this Rose will Open")

Our efficient, everyday minds are not sure exactly what seeds! but that's all right, whispers Bride, whispers the sleeping bear, the flowers will be beautiful. How do you know? I ask! Because they're flowers.

They need this rest, this time when no one knows exactly what they will be.

I don't believe in destiny. I believe in choice. I believe in possibility. I believe in the seeds under the snow. In this season of ice and glitter, I believe in letting the seeds absorb my dreams. Not my *plans!* My dreams.

The meditation which goes with this holy day is a visualization of those seeds. Watching them lie safely under the insulating blanket of white, just letting them be. We don't weed, in this season, we don't thin the plants, we allow them to be what they are and to absorb our dreams.

### **Finding the Voice inside.**

Our writing group - Tuesday nights at the Meeting House at 6 PM, we take some nights off so check the congregational calendar - does not focus on writing our personal projects and offering supportive readers or commentary - that's a different, very useful kind of writing group.

The Tuesday night folks read short essays from a book called "Finding the Voice Inside". Each essay ends with a writing prompt, such as "recapture an image from a real night-dream you have had. Write about it, extending the dream if you wish. Read aloud what you have written."

This writing group has become my Imbolc sacred practice. It has brought me to explore and witness my Inner World from new perspectives, with new words to describe the newly-glimpsed images.

Writing about the hidden things, the bits under the snow, is writing poetry. Experience, feeling, heart-on-your-sleeve time. Condensed, verbalized feeling. Fire, passion.

The book which we use for the prompts is intended for groups of women-only, which makes me personally uncomfortable. I love the company of women, these gals in particular, but I always feel out-of-kilter and unwelcoming when I don't say, "Yes! Of course! The door is wide open!" So this is my personal challenge, and I'm OK with that. I understand that there are broad, cultural brush-strokes of gender-identified behavior and the group's feeling would change, better or worse, but different, if there were men in the group. So I feel all catty-wumpuss, and Bridget whispers to me, "Sit with this. Learn from it."

I love to write, I'm writing stories all the time - but I hadn't written more than a handful of pages of poetry in 30 years. Now it comes - so thank you, Voice Inside group, for creating the sacred time away from this Middle Earth for the fire of poetry to re-ignite. And, yes, we've been meeting for many weeks now, so perhaps Imbolc doesn't all happen on February first-ish in a strictly linear sense. Maybe it can be a season. Or an unnamed Time of exactly the duration which is right and apt.

The book is available through the UUA bookstore - if you're present on Tuesday nights, we all share a couple of books, and you can write along with us from home on Tuesday nights if you like. Just call the office, ask to be put on the class list, and I'll send emails letting you know which pages we're up to. We even have a gal in Massachusetts and one in Washington state who are writing with us on Tuesday nights.

And I've made them both promise to read aloud when they're done. Novels are for curling up under a grey fleece blankie. Poetry is intended for the spoken word, the fireside, the cold, dark nights huddling together.

**Oft him an-haga are gebideþ  
Metodes mildse þeah-þe he mod-cearig**

**Geond lagu-lade lange scolde**

**Hreran mid handum hrim-cealde sæ**

## **Wadan wræc-lastas. Wyrð biþ ful aræd.**

That's what our language was born to be. Poetry! Fire! It does not matter what those words meant! Let them be, let them lie under the snow, let them absorb our dreams.

As I say, if someone will hold still long enough, I'll religiously educate them - this is my chance with you: get out that fountain pen and all-linen paper. The feel of the action makes a difference. Keyboards are for emails. Use your roller-ball pen, your mechanical pencil, your whole shoulder, the sound of your sleeve against the blank white page.

Courage! Step into that adventure in that country where no one else can go. Poetry! Fire!

## **Cycles of congregational life**

So. The future is not set in stone. If we take seriously our admonition to learn from the cycles of nature, I suggest that we have had a full and rich autumn in this congregation. Now is the quiet time of winter, of glittering sunrises and seeds lying under the snow. At this very moment, season, Time of unnamed duration, it's all about the possibilities.

I suggest that we examine them without judgement. That we open the doors wide for every voice in this system to speak or be silent. That we let the seeds absorb our dreams.

My job is to unlock the door, put the kettle on, and bring the extra pens and legal pads. I accept these responsibilities with joy. Your job is to take up your poetry-creation-tools of choice.

Bride, fire, inspire us. And with every breath, may we inspire you.