

‘Summer School Epilogue: Waxing and Waning’

By Louise Reeve, 17 August 2025

Opening Words

Hello everyone and welcome to this, our Epilogue service for today.
I will now light our chalice with these words.

Chalice Lighting – “As we reach the end of this day”

“As we reach the end of this day
We light this, the gentle flickering flame
Not the orange shimmer of sunrise
Nor the blaze of the sun at noon
Not the window light shining on the morning coffee
Nor the lightbulb overhead during the day’s work
The light of the candle now symbolises the turning of the day towards its end.
Be with it, with each other, and with the divine unity within us all, as we reach
the day of this day together.
Amen.”

Let us sing together to mark the ending of the day.

Hymn – No. 286, ‘Vesper Hymn’

A reading from Ecclesiastes (next page).

Reading – From Ecclesiastes, books 1 and 3

“5 The sun rises and the sun sets,
and hurries back to where it rises.

6 The wind blows to the south
and turns to the north;
round and round it goes,
ever returning on its course.

7 All streams flow into the sea,
yet the sea is never full.

To the place the streams come from,
there they return again.

1 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:

2 a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,

3 a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,

4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,

5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,

6 a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,

7 a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,

8 a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.”

Opening Thoughts – The Third Quarter-Moon

One of the things I think many of us love about Hucklow is the incredible view we have of the night sky. That memory, combined with being sent some words by Rev. Tony McNeile which we'll hear shortly, inspired me to see if I could seek inspiration from the phases of the moon. I checked, and this week we have the Third Quarter of the Moon, also called the Last Quarter Moon, as of yesterday, as the Full Moon – the Sturgeon Moon, to give it its title – was last Saturday.

Which is a bit of an issue, since I like to draw inspiration from the world of art and literature for my services, and having searched far and wide, I can tell you that the overwhelming response of the artistic world to the quarter-moon is "...it's just... sort of... there?" You will find many waxing poetic about the full moon, and a few references to the new moon, but very little about anything in the middle. In fairness, I suppose that song by the Waterboys wouldn't have worked too well if it was "you saw the quarter of the moon".

Tony McNeile is one of the founders of the Earth Spirit Network, so, inspired by him, I then turned to the world of nature-inspired spirituality, and there I found more light. We'll hear a little of that soon, but first, here are his words.

Reading – Rev. Tony McNeile – ‘The Shining Satellite’

“When Neil Armstrong stepped down on to the surface of the moon on this day over fifty years ago, did he expect to learn the mystery behind its presence?

The moon is separate from us and yet tied to us.

It seems lifeless, yet it gives us life.

It has no power of its own, yet it drives the tides of the world to ebb and flow. Thus turbulent oceans then carry the heat of the sun around the world releasing storms, cyclones and weather systems.

The lifeless moon entices leaves to grow and roots to burrow.

It also tugs at human emotions as it waxes and wanes on its 28-day journey around us, thirteen times in a year.

Civilisations measured time and date by the journey of the moon.

This shining satellite is part of our lives and like an engine to the world.

There are endless theories of how the moon came to be where it is, perfectly sized and perfectly placed to keep the world in balance.

It might have been created in some catastrophe like a planetary collision, or a huge eruption. It might have been a wanderer captured by earth’s gravity to be held forever.

And some will say, it is there by design, not accident.

We look at its silver light and wonder if we are being held in the destiny of the divine, leaping slowly towards the truth.”

More Thoughts – Waxing and Waning

We all know that the symbol of our Unitarian faith is a candle, so you will note that there is a moon phase candle here at the front, serving as our chalice. I was searching for inspiration for this service, and decided to visit Elula, Newcastle's local 'alternative' shop, catering to everyone from Catholics wanting statues of the Virgin Mary, to pagans looking for a crystal skull for the mantelpiece. Most large cities and towns have an Elula, although Newcastle's is an especially fine example – it may be the only place in the city where icons of the Sacred Heart sit alongside witches riding crystal dragons in the window.

I ambled in, scenting incense on the breeze, and was asked by the proprietor if I needed any help. I replied, "I intend to walk around looking for inspiration and a focal point based upon the moon. I do not quite know what I am looking for-" [*pause, stare off thoughtfully into the distance*] "-but I shall know when I find it."

Luckily, Elula is the type of shop where you can say this sort of thing, and the staff will immediately nod understandingly and reply "Yes. Yes, *of course*," [*approving and supportive nod*] "carry on".

I strolled thoughtfully through the shop, and towards the end, came upon this beautiful moon phases candle, which was clearly The One, and which I purchased immediately. It's Fairtrade as well, so clearly it was meant to be! And we can all use it as a focal point in our meditation in a few minutes.

For many people whose spirituality is inspired by nature, the phases of the moon are regarded as a source of inspiration for moving through our lives. One author writes:

"The Last Quarter Moon appears as another half-lit sphere, but this time with the left side illuminated and the right side in shadow. It symbolises a time of reflection, reassessment, and forgiveness. It is a period to release remaining burdens and prepare for a new beginning.

It is best for reflecting on the past cycle of life, forgiving yourself and others, and letting go of remaining burdens. You may like to engage in calming activities such as reading, taking a relaxing bath, or spending quiet time in nature, or repeat this affirmation: "I release with love and prepare for new beginnings."

(Source – 'Slow North': <https://www.slownorth.com/blogs/journal/moon-phase-ritual-guide>)

Another author suggests that: “The spiritual meaning of this moon phase is that of restoring balance. As the cycle of the moon continues, and light begins to dim, there can be a sense of letting down, of letting go. In this energy, it’s important to stay strong in your resolve to do the steps that lead you toward what you really want in your life, and also to fully release what is no longer serving you.” (Author, Kalia Kelmenson; link:

<https://www.spiritualityhealth.com/the-spiritual-meaning-of-moon-phases>).

I wanted to bring that to this, our Epilogue service for Sunday. Too often, it seems, our lives are always ‘on’, like the moon shining at full intensity in its brightest phases, or briefly ‘off’ completely, like the new moon, so that we can recharge to go back ‘on’ again. But I feel that the quarter moon is right for us right now. Sometimes, we need our moments when we are not unconscious in the grip of sleep, or deep in prayer or meditation, but... just sort of there. Time for reflection, time to be conscious and thoughtful, times of low energy but not no energy. Time to think about what has happened, what we value about it, and what we want to let go of.

As part of this, I have a meditation for us all.

Children and young people

Alternative activities for children to do during the meditation (bring colouring supplies!):

- Moon-themed colouring pages, download here: <https://www.homemade-gifts-made-easy.com/moon-coloring-pages.html>
- Moon-themed puzzle sheet, download here: <https://www.puzzles-to-print.com/word-searches-for-kids/phases-of-the-moon-word-search.shtml>

‘Last Quarter Moon Meditation’ – Kirsten Tucker (adapted)

“Welcome to the last quarter moon meditation.
You may sit or lie down with your spine straight,
And if you feel comfortable,
Gently close your eyes.
Take a few deep breaths,
Inhaling calmness and exhaling any tension.
Breathe in through your nose,
Then pause for a moment.
Now slowly breathe out through your mouth,
Releasing all of the air.
Breathe in through your nose again,
Then pause for a moment.
Slowly breathe out through your mouth,
Releasing the air.
Now relax and breathe normally.

As you settle into this moment,
Acknowledge the energy of the last quarter moon,
A phase of reflection,
Release,
And preparation for new beginnings.

Bring your attention back to your breath.
Inhale deeply,
Allowing the air to fill your lungs,
And exhale slowly,
Letting go of any stress or concerns.

With each breath,
Feel a sense of grounding and presence in the current moment.
As you continue to breathe,
Let go of thoughts about the past or the future.
Centre yourself in the now.

Picture the last quarter moon in the night sky,
Casting a gentle and fading light.
Envision its subdued glow,
Creating a peaceful atmosphere around you.

Feel the soft illumination of the moon touching your skin and calming your mind.

Allow the fading light to symbolise the completion of a cycle.
Embrace the waning energy of the moon,
Preparing for a period of rest and reflection.

Take a moment to reflect on the lessons learned during this lunar cycle.
What challenges have you faced?
What insights have you gained?
Acknowledge the growth and evolution that have occurred,
Accepting the wisdom gained through experiences.
Express gratitude for the opportunity to learn and transform.

With the energy of the last quarter moon,
Consciously release any remaining tensions or attachments.
Imagine these energies as gentle streams flowing away from you,
Returning to the universe.
Feel a sense of lightness as you let go.

Rest in the process of release and recognise that letting go creates space for new beginnings.
Allow the calm energy of the moon to guide you through this releasing process.

Now gently bring your awareness back to the present moment.
Wiggle your fingers and toes,
Gradually returning to the physical space around you.
Take a final deep breath,
Inhaling a sense of release and exhaling any remaining tension.
When you are ready,
Open your eyes.”

Link: <https://insighttimer.com/rosemaryapothecaryaz/guided-meditations/last-quarter-moon-meditation>

A few moments of silence.

(Extra material if needed – next page.)

Closing words – ‘Like the Light of the Moon’

“As the moon is always present in the sky, even though we can’t always see it
So the chalice light is always present in our lives
The light of community, love, and divine guidance.
Go now into the evening, carrying within you the light of the chalice, the light
of the moon,
And the light of the love and community we share.
May it be so, blessed be, amen.”

Closing music – ‘Clair de Lune’ by Debussy

Extra material

Chalice Contemplation, invoking Thoreau [adapted]

“Henry David Thoreau wrote in his journal on February 2nd, 1841:

“A child asked his father what became of the old moon, and he said it was cut up into stars.”

Consider the light. Light out of darkness. Light begets light.

The light which the God of Genesis brought out of the darkness is the light that became our world.

Our sun's light reflecting off our moon is eclipsed but then returns to us as our earth quietly moves out of its way.

In our current scientific understanding of the origins of the universe, the light-of-everything that exploded from not-quite-nothing is the light that became the maybe-everything of which we are barely a part. This light we contemplate here will become a light for each of us to carry forth,

as we find our way through the shadows on our path.

Let us be grateful for the light in our lives,
even as we honour the dark from which the light came.”

By Ben Soule

Story The Moon and the Cherry Blossom – Rev. Bill Darlison

Rengetsu, a Buddhist nun, was making a long journey alone and on foot through dangerous and difficult territory. There were bandits and wild animals to avoid, rivers to cross, steep hills to climb. At the end of the first day she had walked many miles and was feeling hungry and weary when she came across a small hamlet at the foot of a mountain. ‘I need to rest,’ she said to herself. ‘Perhaps some kind person will give me some bread and water and let me stay in their cottage.’ She knocked hopefully on the doors, but was met by indifference or even hostility.

‘We’ve no room,’ said one man, curtly, as he slammed the door in her face.

‘We’ve barely enough to feed our own family,’ said another.

‘How do I know you won’t rob me if I let you stay here?’ asked a woman, before she, too refused.

By now the sun was setting and Rengetsu disappointedly and wearily trudged up the hillside and made her bed under a cherry tree. She was so tired that she fell asleep immediately, but she awoke to find that the cherry tree had

blossomed during the night , and the big golden moon was shining through the branches. It was an incredible sight, more beautiful than anything Rengetsu had ever seen before, so she stood up and faced in the direction of the houses which had refused to give her food and shelter and said, 'I want to thank you for your kindness. By refusing me lodging I found myself beneath these beautiful blossoms on the night of the misty moon.'

Bowl Ritual

This simple ritual provides a quiet time during our Sunday service. We set up a small table at the front of the dais. There is a large bowl partially filled with water in the centre of the table. On either side is a smaller bowl filled with pebbles that feel nice in the hand. I read the words below [adapted] while our pianist plays quietly.

“During this quiet time, please feel free to come forward and place a pebble in the water. A kind word or a thoughtful act, like a pebble dropped in water, sends ripples out into the world. Should you wish to make a promise or let go of one, remember someone, release a bit of pain, or otherwise mark some important event or occasion, please step forward and quietly send your thoughts outward as you drop a pebble into the water, mingling the ripples of your intention with the ripples of other people in our community.”

I set the example by coming down from the dais to put a pebble in the water. Then I return to the dais and stand near the pebbles and the water while people come up to silently put pebbles in the water. After the last person has put pebble in the water I pick up the large bowl as if to present it to the congregation. I hold it up so they can see the pebbles that have been added.

Then I take the bowl and place it directly in front of our chalice.

Note: In an effort to make a simple, appropriate ritual I try to be explicit that people are invited, and not obligated, to participate. I also try to be explicit that the participants are invited to impress their own meaning on their participation.

REFLECTIONS

By Eric Kaminetzky