

LITURGY: CELEBRATING AIR

1. Greeting: All:

We are gathered together to be mindful of the riches of creation and our inter-dependence with it and with each other.

May our time together in sharing this ritual bring us renewal in our daily lives.

2. Song: Small Blue Planet

As we live on a small blue planet,
wrapped in air,
we breathe in safety,
clothed in love-
on a small blue planet.

As we care for a small blue planet,
wrapped in air,
we nurture justice,
clothed in love-
on a small blue planet.

3. Intentions and Hopes: Reader- with music:

May the earth, home to us and to the myriad of living and non-living creation, inspire us with wonder. May it lead us into the mysteries of Sophia, the wise and playful Creator, who is reflected in her creation. We pray that her wisdom may teach us to value her creatures and to live in right relationship with all of them, and with each other. May her playfulness lead us to joy. **(Music)**

At this time we seek to enter more fully into her life through the contemplation of the particular gift of air. Earth did not have an atmosphere to protect it from the destructive forces of deep space at its beginning- life has created it. Now it sustains life. **(Music)**

Of all the elements, air is the one that most clearly connects us with all creatures. None own it, and it is free to all. As green plants release oxygen, we breathe it in; as we breathe out carbon dioxide, plants inhale it. We breathe in air that others have created and passed on to us from far before our earliest human history. **(Music)**

Air carries many experiences to us: sound to our ears, rain to the land, warmth to our skins, delight in its breezes, terror in its gales. From birth to death we breathe easily, trusting to the secure presence of air. For this we wish to express our wonder and our thanks.

(Music)

4. Purification: Litany:

Speaker 1:

Carried on the air
the scent of
new mown grass
gathering rain
sun-warmed fruit
gum-trees in bloom
and the sea's fresh tang.

All: We rejoice in earth's bounty

Speaker 2:

Carried on the air
the stench of
rotting rubbish
poisoned water
belching fumes
smothering oil-spills
cattle's fear at slaughter.

All: We have polluted the earth.

Speaker 3:

Carried on the air
the noise of
bone-shattering bombs
living trees torn from earth
gut-wrenching hatred
sullen armies marching
smooth words of the power-hungry
deadly rant of loveless believers.

All: We have polluted the earth.

Speaker 4:

Carried on the air
the sound of
carefree children
generous laughter
music which stirs our longing
women weaving gentle wisdom

stories that flow in our veins
the blessed peace of silence.

**All: We rejoice in earth's bounty,
we cherish earth's bounty.**

Cleansing Ritual: (Light "gateway" of aroma-candles/oil- perhaps eucalyptus, and each walk through in turn)

Story Telling: (Reader:)

In the beginning, when Sophia played before God, there was a cloud of swirling gases, dust and meteorites, hot and dry. Over millions of years, this cloud coalesced into the body of our earth, and slowly cooled. But in the cooling, such violence- huge volcanoes spewed out noxious gases and water vapour, and carbon dioxide was ruler of air. There was no free oxygen.

Hundreds of millions of years later, after rain had formed the great oceans, the miracle of life occurred, tiny cells learned to use carbon dioxide in those warm seas, and to breathe out oxygen. Then a cosmic crisis took place- life created so much oxygen, that it almost choked itself to death. Another miracle- some cells learned to breathe in this new substance. Between many complex sources of different gases, air reached a fragile balance- yet one which has lasted for eons. Those cells which evolved into plants still depend on carbon dioxide; those cells that became animals, breathe the oxygen exhaled by plants. The great inter-dependence which underlies our world was established by life itself. And despite mighty upheavals, continents that swam across the globe, dived beneath its waters or reared themselves up from the sea-bed, air has maintained its vital balance. We live because we are bathed inside and out in this invisible life-giving element. Life has created it, and it sustains life- we must cherish the precious air so freely given to us.

All: This we acknowledge.

Song: Sustaining:

Enfolding our planet:
sustaining air;
ready for our first breath:
sustaining air.

Breathing through our spirit:
sustaining love;
receiving our last breath:
sustaining love.

Praise and Supplication:

Speaker 1:

We speak in praise of you,
earth-breath, giver of life,
sign of the living cosmos,
bearing Sophia's music,
her delighted laughter.

All: May we cherish the blessing of air.

Speaker 2:

O clouds and thunder, wind and rain,
air is your element,
it carries and releases you.
Sun-scorch itself is gentled for earth
through our watchful guardian, air.

All: May we cherish the blessing of air.

Speaker 3:

Blue globe wrapped in jewelled air,
words and songs and mating cries
meet eddying on your surface.
Countless mouths drink in air's blessing
from birth to sighing close.

All: May we cherish the blessing of air.

Guided Meditation:

[Please sit comfortably, with your feet flat on the floor.
Take off your shoes if you wish, and close your eyes.]

As you become still, become aware of the breath moving
in and out of your body. Don't change your breath: just
notice it gently moving into your body and then out again,
in a simple rhythm. I breathe in, I breathe out. I breathe
in life, I breathe out life.

This is air. It surrounds us, enters and enlivens us, connects us.

This is air, the essential.

This is air, the invisible and the forgotten. Unseen, unnoticed, but always present.

It does not need our attention, but let us spend some time now to notice the unnoticed. In the stillness, become aware of the presence of air around you. It fills spaces, corners, nooks and crannies. It sits in the curl of your left ear, in the spaces between your toes, rests against the skin of your face. It moves gently away as you breathe out, or rushes out in a cough or a sneeze. It carries into our lungs the oxygen that feeds our blood, that nurtures our life. It carries away the carbon dioxide we do not need.

Air is not apart from my body, it is part of it. My body dwells in air. Air dwells in my body.

Imagine now that you walk outside into the open air. Notice what is around you. Is it daytime or night-time? Is it dark or light? Is it sunny or cloudy? Is the light changing? Is it brighter or clearer? Be aware of the air that brings the light, the sun and the darkness to us. Let us notice the unnoticed.

Can you feel the air moving? Is there any breeze? Feel the air move in your hair, feel it move across your face, your arms, your hands, ruffling the tiny hairs on your skin. Feel it carry warmth or coldness to you.

What can you hear? [Pause]. The air, forgotten and unseen, carries these sounds to us. Let us notice the unnoticed.

The leaves rustle in the trees. They shift lightly, or they sway or toss or dance as air moves through them.

Now imagine that you have become light enough to be carried on the air. Your body is lifted gently from the ground to travel on air, to move amongst the leaves of the trees or to ride, birdlike, on a thermal. Your body is light, lifted above the earth. Earthly weight drops away from you, but you remain a body. [Pause]

Air reminds us that we are bodies, and we are more than bodies. This life that runs through us affirms our bodies, supports our creaturely life, and calls us on to something more. We hear and feel glimpses of this 'more' in a whisper, in breeze and wind and tornado

As the air lifts you, it takes you where it will. How does that feel? Are you afraid? Are you annoyed? Are you released, able to let go? How does it feel to lose control, to let go of planning and deciding and taking responsibility? Simply notice how you feel. Do not judge- there is no 'right' way to feel.

As you are carried, you look down at your hands. Yes, you still have the scar where you scratched yourself on a rose thorn, you still have that blue stain from the leaking pen. You notice the criss-cross of lines on your palm, a record of your life so far. You are still you. This moment of airiness, of letting go, does not offer escape or denial. It reminds you of the 'more' that lives around you and in you. It reminds you to notice the unnoticed.

This moment of quietness offers a space to sit quietly with the life that runs through you and around you. You do not need to struggle, to catch it, to 'do' anything with it. You simply need to be in this moment. Let the air carry you gently in the silence. [Pause]

Now slowly, almost without you noticing, the air begins to carry you down to the ground again, for this is where you dwell. See the ground come closer to you. Feel it support your feet as you become aware of your weight again. Take a moment to feel your body's weight on the ground below your feet. Your legs, your buttocks, your belly, your shoulders, your arms, your neck and finally your head. You are an earth creature. Yet there is more. Feel the air that flows through you. This has not changed.

Now move back into this room. The light is a little duller, there is less movement, and as the door closes, sounds become muted.

Be aware of yourself in this room. Feel your feet on the floor, your weight on the chair beneath you. Now notice again your breath that moves in and out of your body, effortlessly, quietly, invisible, unnoticed. Now imagine that

the air from everyone around you is moving in the same rhythm, in and out, moving into the room. This air that sustains us draws us together, affirms us as people, connected. In a moment you will return to the circle of people around you. But before you do, spend some moments considering the 'more' that you experienced, the unnoticed that you noticed. See it dance before you. Know that it does not leave you. And know, too, that it cannot be held. That is its life. [Pause]

I breathe in life. I breathe out life.

[Now slowly return to the room around you. Feel your weight on the chair. Wriggle your fingers and toes. Become aware of yourself in this room. In your own time, as you are ready, open your eyes...]

Prayer:

Sophia God, friend of creation, ground of reality, wellspring of wisdom, we praise you for the life-giving gift of air. Strengthen our efforts to work with you in cherishing, respecting and sharing your gift.

Ritual:

Quiet music may be played, while those present take long slow breaths - 10 or 20 - thinking about the nature of air.

6. Transformation and Thanksgiving: All:

Sophia God, in the Hebrew *ruah*,
we hear the rush of your breath.
Your breath is spirit, life.
We give you thanks.

As the baby emerges
from her origin
in her mother's waters,
she gasps, opens lungs,
breathes in your life-giving air.
We give you thanks.

Life-long we take for granted
the rhythm of our breathing,
while waking, while sleeping.
We give you thanks.

As life comes to an end
each sighs out
a last breath,
one with the world.
We give you thanks.

7. Blessing:

In company with all creatures,
we rest in the order of air
and delight in the sustaining air,
playing about our planet.

We give thanks to Sophia-God
for blessing us with this airy element
invisible, essential and infinitely various.
We go out, breathing the spirit of life,
honouring air, the sustainer of all.

Song:

Breezes cooling the brow of a hill,
showers borne on the wings of the wind-
sing in praise of life that is given.

When gales destroy our dear creations,
or harsh heat shimmers over the plains-
we reshape the life that is given.

We know so little of cause and end,
our brief lives weaving both grief and joy-
we cherish the life that is given.

Developed by the Sophia Liturgy Group, February 2004. Sophia is an ecumenical feminist spirituality centre honouring women's experiences, nurturing wisdom in all people and working for justice in our world. If you wish to use all or part of this liturgy, we make it freely available to you. We ask only that you acknowledge its source at Sophia.

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