



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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“Winter’s Heart”

© by Amber Fetner, UUFA Music Director

A service delivered on December 21, 2014

At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

Centering Thoughts

*I nød skal du lære dine venner å kenne. Norwegian Proverb
(English: A friend is known in need, like gold is known in fire.)*

We have to trust that the risk of loving is always worth taking. Henri Nouwen

Some people are worth melting for. Olaf the Snowman

Opening Words

Happy Winter Solstice. Thank you for coming to our musical celebration today. Be sure to stay after the service for coffee, cocoa, and conversation. We’ll also be having a bake sale to support the music program here.

I am the mother of a six year old and 8 year old, and so I have become very familiar with the music of the Disney movie Frozen. Last spring, I attended a Frozen sing-along with my kids and was overwhelmed to see how passionate the children were about singing these songs. There is something in this story and its music that resonates with children and adults. It’s about how we can open our hearts to love. It’s about love overcoming fear.

Let us light our chalice this morning for stories and songs that teach us more about ourselves and our relationships. Please join me in the unison response:

Let this be our affirmation: to be guided by the spirit of love,
to respect one another's search for truth,
to direct our energy towards greater love and justice,
and to foster peace and harmony in our hearts and in the world.

Hans Christian Anderson’s story, ‘The Snow Queen’, focuses on the relationship between two childhood friends, a boy and girl, Kai and Gerda. In the story, a wicked sprite drops an evil mirror down to Earth which breaks, sending broken shards of glass into Kai’s heart and eye. The glass poisons Kai, making him mean, unfeeling, and suddenly aware of all of the world’s imperfections. In the story, the Snow Queen eventually steals Kai away to her castle and Gerda, the loyal friend, goes on a quest to save him. In the Snow Queen’s castle, Kai’s heart freezes, but when Gerda finds him, her hot tears melt the ice in his heart. Kai begins to cry and releases the shard of glass from his eye. The two children go home together happily and summer begins. It is a story about the cycle of seasons, two friends, and a love that withstands the cold cruel world.

In Disney's loose adaptation of this story, the friends, Kai and Gerda, are transformed into royal sisters, Elsa and Anna. Elsa is the snow queen, in a sense. She possesses the power to create and shape snow and ice, and is told to keep these powers hidden after accidentally injuring her sister Anna. Elsa has difficulty controlling her powers-which are tied to her emotions. This need to hide her powers separates her from others and from her own feelings. Anna is a version of Gerda from the original tale. Her heart is an open door, ready to give and receive love. This makes Anna a rather poor judge of character, and she's so ready to fall in love that she falls for the first man she meets and agrees to marry him on the first date. Anna is confused and hurt by her sister's isolation, particularly because she does not know about Elsa's powers or the injury she sustained as a child.

In watching the film, I relate to my own relationship with my sister. We weren't always close. We're ten years apart with different dads, and although we lived together until I was 7, we didn't really connect with each other until I was an adult. At some point we realized that we actually had a lot in common and liked each other as people. Our relationship isn't always easy, we have very different views on religion and politics, but I'm glad that I have a sister. In reading a bit about the movie Frozen, I was interested to learn that in the development of the film, the studio convened a "Sister Summit," where women from the studio talked about their relationships with their sisters. Sibling relationships can be really complicated, and like all relationships, they can be painful, but being in relationship with each other is part of the gift of being alive. Please rise in body or spirit....

Congregational Hymn: #128, "For All That is our Life"

Elsa and Anna were the best of friends, but Elsa's powers changed the nature of that friendship. She could not bear hurting those she loved and retreated to safety of solitude. Sometimes relationships fall apart. Painful experiences, misunderstandings, distance and time can weaken or sever our connections with each other. There may be someone that comes to mind right now, maybe a sibling, an old friend, you miss them, remember what you once shared and hope someday you might reconnect and laugh together again. In the movie Frozen, doors are a recurring visual metaphor, the closed doors of the castle, of Elsa's bedroom, and the icy tower. Anna's song to her sister's closed bedroom door reflects her yearning for connection and reunion with her sister.

Choir Song: "Do You Want to Build a Snowman?"

There's a trend of retelling fairy tales with a sympathetic villain. The movie Oz, the Great and Powerful shows us the softer side of the Wicked Witch of the West. Malificent tells the other side of the Sleeping Beauty story. I like this trend because the bad characters are always more interesting and a perfect princess who does everything right is a really unrealistic role model. The original snow queen was a fairly one dimensional character. Why did she steal little boys and freeze their hearts? We don't know. In the development of the movie Frozen, they originally tried to make Elsa a true villain, but it just didn't work. Elsa's outlook on life has been influenced by circumstances beyond her control. She didn't ask for her powers and she tries desperately to hide them. We like Elsa. We all have a little Elsa in us, when we try to protect ourselves or others from

being hurt. There are times when we would all like to run away to the solitude of our icy tower. Winter is a time when we may want to withdraw from the world, turn in and reflect and rest. Nature is telling us to slow down, stay in, and chill out.

Choir Song: “Winter’s Heart”

If any of you have been to Frozen sing-alongs or any public place where the song “Let it Go” comes on over the speakers, you have probably noticed that this song is pretty popular. So what it is about this song? I can relate to Elsa’s well-meaning but totally wrong parents as they try to protect their daughter from herself. “Conceal, don’t feel”, says Elsa’s father as he tries to teach her to hide who she is and control her emotions. How many times do we as parents do stupid things like that? If only we could watch ourselves on a big screen and see the error of our ways in vivid color. Some of you may have felt like you have needed to hide who you were in your life and may even have been told to do this by parents and friends. People relate to the song “Let it Go” in many different ways; it’s a song about accepting who you are and shedding the expectations of others. How do you relate to this song? What do you need to let go? During this season of lights and celebrations, we can get easily overwhelmed by the needs and expectations of others and the often unrealistic expectations we have of ourselves. It can be a challenging time as we reflect on relationships with family and remember holidays from our past. Elsa’s song is for everyone who is ready to accept the gift of who we are.

Choir Song: “Let it Go!”

Kai and Gerda, Elsa and Anna, characters created to help us understand our world and how we relate to each other. When I was my daughter’s age, my favorite princess was Snow White. She was pure goodness, like a saint, animals flocked to her, birds perched on her fingertips. The world is a complex place. There is no pure good or pure evil. Some critics think it is a bad idea to offer our children villains as role models. I think these characters help our children develop empathy. It helps us learn to understand and forgive ourselves and others.

Today we observe the turning of the wheel, the gentle shift from dark to light. Unlike Elsa and Anna, snow and ice isn’t really a regular part of our landscape. The changing of the seasons may not be as meaningful in our daily lives. These traditions, the yule log, the evergreens, remind us of holidays past, of the hearths where loved ones gathered to sing songs and tell stories together. Stories and songs of hope and love to keep away the cold. As you prepare to gather with friends and family this season, may you be open to the gifts life offers you.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How did you relate to these character and songs?
2. Are you reluctant to share all of who you are with your family or friends? What holds you back?
3. Winter's cold often drives us inside, isolating us from others. How do you keep from being too isolated or lonely? How does UUFA help you?