

Celebrate Women's History Month

March 2012

A Ritual from WATER



(L to R) Harriet Tubman, Amelia Earhart, Michelle Obama, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Leymah Gbowee

Gather a globe, candle, pitcher of water, bowl, chimes, flowers, bread, glass of water, glass of wine, news articles of women.

Welcome

Telling the Story

- March 8, 1857: Hundreds of women workers in garment and textile factories in New York City staged a strike against low wages, long working hours, and inhumane working conditions – one of the first organized labor actions by women in the world. They were attacked and dispersed by police but returned two years later to form their first labor union.
- 1908: 15,000 women laborers marched through New York City with the slogan “Bread and Roses,” demanding shorter work hours, better pay, voting rights, and an end to child labor.
- 1910: Clara Zetkin, a German Socialist, proposed the observance of International Women’s Day to mark the 1857 strike, and it was accepted by the Women’s Socialist International at its meeting in Copenhagen.
- March 8, 1911: Over a million women in Germany, 45,000 in Berlin alone, marched to

demand the right to vote.

- 1917: Russian women call for a strike on February 23rd for “bread and peace” to protest poor living conditions and food shortages. This date in the Julian calendar (then used in Russia) falls on March 8 in the Georgian calendar.
- 1975: International Women’s Year proclaimed.
- 1977: The United Nations proclaimed a United Nations Day for Women’s Rights and International Peace that is observed on March 8.
- 2000: The World March of Women 2000 demanded that the UN and its member States take concrete measures to eliminate poverty and ensure a fair distribution of the planet’s wealth between rich and poor, between men and women, eliminate violence against women, and ensure equality between women and men.
- 2005: In *Jackson v. Birmingham Board of Education* , the Supreme Court rules that Title IX, which prohibits discrimination based on sex, also inherently prohibits disciplining someone for complaining about sex-based discrimination. It further holds that this is the case even when the person complaining is not among those being discriminated against.
- 2009: President Obama signed the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act, which allows victims of pay discrimination to file a complaint with the government against their employer within 180 days of their last paycheck. Previously, victims (most often women) were only allowed 180 days from the date of the first unfair paycheck.
- 2012: Solidarity with women sets the tone for our ritual.

Source Facts: United Nations Department of Public Information, *Susan B. Anthony Slept Here* by Lynn Sherr and Jurate Kazickas, and POWR-L email from Susan Franzblau. Some rewording by Diann L. Neu.

Lifting Up Women’s Lives

What women come to your mind and heart as you think about March, Women's History Month?

Bring specific women from around the world into your consciousness. We will pass the globe around. When you receive it, speak your name, name the woman, and tell us a piece of her story as you locate her on the globe. Let us assume that among us we cover this globe, country by country, though some say women have no country. Begin with, "I am part of a world which includes...."
(Naming)

Blessing of Solidarity

In solidarity with women around the world, we bless the four elements.

As the world needs earth, air, water and sun, so the world needs women.

We unite with you, Sisters of the South, and share our hearth. (*Light a candle.*)

We unite with you, Sisters of the East, and share our music. (*Play the chimes.*)

We unite with you, Sisters of the North, and share our soil. (*Place flowers on the altar.*)

We unite with you, Sisters of the West, and share our wells. (*Pour water into the bowl.*)

Song: "We are a Wheel," words Hildegard of Bingen, musical round, by Betty Wendelborn, *Sing Green*, © 1988.

We are a wheel, a circle of life.

We are a wheel, a circle of power.

We are a wheel, a circle of light,

Circling the world this sacred hour.

Women around the World

We all brought women we know into the circle. Now let us take a little time to stretch to women we do not know. Take one of the news clips from the last week or so. Read it and learn something about women you may not know. Bring a brief prayer about them to the circle. (*Sharing*)

Blessing Bread

(One woman holds bread and prays:)

We bless this bread in solidarity with our sisters in Africa. From the land of the Nile in Egypt to the land of apartheid in South Africa, women struggle with famines and wars and unite to work the fields.

Women of Africa, we are in solidarity with you.

(Another woman holds bread and prays:)

We bless this bread in solidarity with our sisters in Central and South America. From the highlands of Guatemala to the rim of Antarctica, women struggle against U.S. domination of their lands and unite in demanding democracy and justice of their own governments.

Women of Central and South America, we are in solidarity with you.

(Another woman holds bread and prays:)

We bless this bread in solidarity with our sisters in Eastern Europe. From the land of the former Berlin Wall to the highlands of the new Russia, women struggle to exercise their reproductive rights in this new time.

Women of Eastern Europe, we are in solidarity with you.

Blessing Drink

(One woman holds the water and prays:)

We bless this water in solidarity with our sisters in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific. From the outback to the seaside, women struggle to retain their ancient cultures and their dreamtime.

Women of Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific, we are in solidarity with you.

(Another woman holds the juice and prays:)

We bless this juice in solidarity with our sisters in Asia. From the Middle East to Beijing, from the Islands of Japan to the Philippines, women toil in rice fields, sew in sweatshops, and now struggle to live after the destruction of the earthquake and tsunami.

Women of Asia, we are in solidarity with you.

(Another woman holds wine and prays:)

We bless this wine in solidarity with our sisters in North America. From the tip of Mexico to the Arctic Ocean, indigenous women struggle against racism and call all to care for the earth.

Women of North America, we are in solidarity with you.

(Share Bread and Drink)

Praising Women of the Seven Continents

Let us praise women of the seven continents for the unique resources they bring to the world.

Praise to you, sisters of Asia, for your strong resistance to oppression.

Praise to you, sisters of Africa, for raising your voices in public squares.

Praise to you, sisters of Europe, for your leadership in peacekeeping.

Praise to you, sisters of North America, for confronting inequities of race and class.

Praise to you, sisters of South America, for struggles that bring about equality.

Praise to you, sisters in Antarctica, for your scientific research.

Praise to you, sisters of Australia, for your steadfast demands for justice.

Greeting of Peace

Breathe deeply. Take in the energy of the candlelight. Play the chimes.

Smell the flowers. Bless yourself with the water. Send peace to women in your family, in your community, in your country, and around the world. Blessings to you during Women's History Month!

Closing Song: "Dancing Sophia's Circle," by Colleen Fulmer, *Dancing Sophia's Circle*, © 1994.

Ring us round O ancient circle,
Great Mother dancing free,
Beauty, strength and Holy Wisdom,
Blessing you and blessing me.

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