

## Summer Solstice – Season of Passion and Social Justice

July 6, 2015 by [Liz Fisher](#)



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Sekhmet is an Egyptian goddess of the sun and one who is appropriate to honor at this time both because of Summer Solstice and because of the happenings in the world.

I have learned to appreciate Sekhmet by listening to Karen Tate, author, ritualist, scholar, and host of the entertaining radio show *Voices of The Sacred Feminine* on blog talk radio. Karen feels that not only is she a powerful presence, Sekhmet shows us how to claim our own confidence. She is that energy and power down deep inside that we can call upon when we must stand up and be counted, speak out, make things happen. In these times it is important for us to find our voices and to raise them even if



Sekhmet head – courtesy of Karen Tate

we feel that we are in the minority because of our spiritual beliefs; or that we will be excluded because of our passion for equal treatment, compassion, and the demand that a diverse society be supported.

Social Justice activism and advocacy is an important Unitarian Universalist tradition and current practice. As UU pagans we weave our spirituality with our concern for social justice. We hold up the Female Divine and the Male Divine in our spiritual practices within the Unitarian Universalist Association where the beliefs of both liberal monotheistic traditions and ethical humanistic atheism are abundant. Yet we have found common ground. How do we bridge to monotheistic religions and secular ones that hold the same social justice values that we do? How do we bridge to pagan traditions that feel at odds with Christian traditions, even progressive ones, because of their theology? There is an opportunity here.

The last three weeks have seen many events that make this a season of great transformational energies in the world. A horrendous massacre of nine African American socially engaged citizens in a church in South Carolina by a white racist terrorist was followed by an outpouring of advocacy for love and forgiveness on the part of those related to the victims. At the same time, calls for removing the Confederate Flag which historically represents those advocating slavery were equally forceful. During his eulogy honoring the slain Rev. Clementa Pinckney, President Obama clearly outlined the racism that still exists in the United States. He also acknowledged the Mother Emmanuel church was an important institution: “Not just for blacks, not just for Christians, but for every American who cares about the steady expansion of human rights and human dignity in this country; a foundation stone for liberty and justice for all.”

On June 26, the same day as the service was held, the Supreme Court announced its decision to legalize marriage regardless of gender, reasserted that love is the basis of this sacred union. Commenting on the marriage ruling, President Obama said: “This decision affirms what millions of Americans already believe in our hearts. When all Americans are treated as people, we are all more free.”

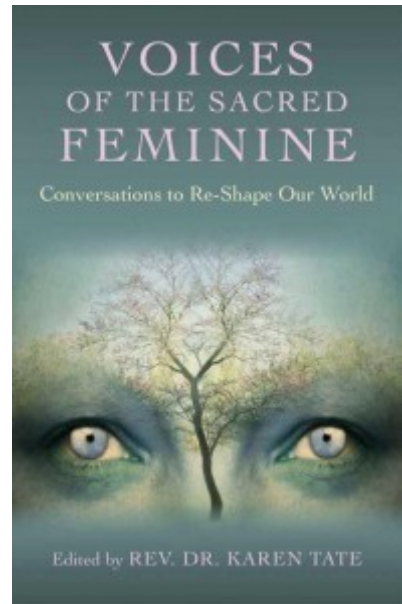
On June 27, a flag that is the emblem of the slave-holding South is removed from a monument of South Carolina Statehouse grounds by an African American woman, Bree Newsome, who climbed the flag pole. She does her action “in the name of God” and quotes the Bible. In an interview later, she also claims affinity with those who are not Christian who protest racism because of their ethical values.

In developing *Rise Up and Call Her Name: A Woman-honoring Journey into Global Earth-based Spiritualities* I collaborated with several African American women. The title is derived from a ritual written by Adele Smith an African American UU minister to honor ancestors who fought for freedom for African Americans. We then go on to honor women of all races who fought for racial and sexual equality and ones who honor the divine feminine. By dialoging with African Americans committed to honoring Jesus as well as ones who are agnostic or atheistic but who appreciate African American cultural contributions, we found ways for overcoming historical prejudices based on theologies that are exclusive of one another.

In the *Rise Up* course Ancestral Outraged Mother is introduced. Joanne Braxton, Distinguished Professor of American Studies at the College of William and Mary and a minister, believes the ancestral figure most common in the world of contemporary black women writers is an outraged mother. This ancestral mother embodies the values of sacrifice, nurturance, and personal courage. She employs reserves of spiritual strength while she protects her children as she fights for justice for the community. Prof. Braxton feels the great African American female writers – including Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker – all represent this maternal ancestor in their works. I couldn’t help but think of Bree Newsome and the African American women who supported her action. They were demonstrating the strength and commitment of black women and they were outraged.

In my study of the diverse African American religious traditions, social history and cultural movements, I see the earth-honoring, pantheistic traditions of Africa being carried in the African diaspora and continuing to influence African American religious expression as well as the wider culture. As liberal religious pagans, we can create bridges cross-culturally by focusing on values while never abandoning our spiritual beliefs and practices. I have found numerous openings where we can form understandings that will lead to working together across racial and religious divides.

We can also benefit from bridging to other pagans who care about working against racism and sexism. Karen Tate is a leader in this regard. She is tenacious in recruiting provocative and thoughtful people to interview on her radio show. Recently she edited a book of forty essays by people she interviewed entitled *Voices of the Sacred Feminine: Conversations to Re-Shape Our World*. Rev. Shirley Ranck and myself have essays in this book that deal with material we included in our UU curricula *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven* and *Rise Up and Call Her Name*. Karen has spoken numerous times to Unitarian Universalist groups. Her books are great sources of ritual ideas, well researched information and inspiring wisdom.



[Voices of the Sacred Feminine \(cover\)](#)



Sekhmet statue in Temple – courtesy of Karen Tate

She has loaned her magnificent icon of Sekhmet that is over 15 feet high and resides in the Goddess Temple and Museum of Orange County, California where Ava Park, founder of the Temple, is the presiding priestess. I had the opportunity to spend time in this Temple with Sekhmet and could feel her protection, empowerment, and her encouragement to persevere and to carry the fire of determination in my own life. If you have the opportunity, I encourage you to visit the Temple and Museum which is both gorgeous and informative. You will not be disappointed. Ava Park has combined in the gatherings she hosts at the Temple, in the educational exhibits she offers which are now becoming a museum, and in her services both beautiful rituals and programs on important social perspectives. The upcoming ecofeminist conference at the Temple, to be held on

July 25- 26, is a perfect example of this. For information about both of these women who are doing inspiring and important work check their websites.

If we connect across the divides and keep the Conversations going, we are much stronger, feel more supported and are able to open our hearts to the larger truths of peace, love and justice that we all seek.