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Meet Liz Fisher, **RISE UP** Author

*Interviewed by the Reverend Shirley Ranck, author of *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven*, UUA's adult religious education program on feminist theology.*

Elizabeth Fisher is the author of *Rise Up and Call Her Name: A Woman-honoring Journey into Earth-based Spiritualities*, the new multicultural, multimedia curriculum published by the UUWF. Liz is a professional writer and editor and teaches seminars on non-hierarchical forms of shared leadership. She has been an active Unitarian Universalist for over a dozen years, participating in denominational organizations at the local, district and continental level, and is a life member of UUWF. She holds a degree in psychology from the University of Michigan, a certificate in publishing from the University of California, and has studied law, creative writing, and feminist spirituality.

Shirley: What inspired you, Liz, to develop this very extensive multicultural curriculum?

Liz: The work you did on *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven* was certainly an inspiration. In the early '70s, I had also done some of my own studying of the feminine in various religious traditions before there were very many books or magazines in the field. At that time, I searched out the few sources I could find that presented evidence of the divine feminine in a variety of world religions. I was very interested in finding out more about them. When I came into the UU family in the early '80s, I was fortunate enough to meet you and experience your curriculum before it was published by the UUA. I found it very exciting that this material was being explored in such an innovative way. One of the areas, as you know, that was not covered in *Cakes* was goddesses in world religions and earth-centered spiritual traditions. At the 1988 General Assembly, I was on a panel to debate the virtues and weaknesses of *Cakes*. While the enthusiasm for what you had done was overwhelming, disappointment that a wider ethnic and cultural range of material had not been included in *Cakes* was also voiced. I was aware of what you had gone through to create this cutting-edge work. I knew that for you to add these areas would have required considerable effort, delaying the publication of *Cakes* which, in my mind, would have been a mistake. Instead, I suggested we move forward

and build on the success of *Cakes*. This is where the idea for *Rise Up* was born.

Shirley: Who were some of the other people who contributed to the development of this curriculum?

Liz: Initially several people, including you and Carol Graywing, then a UUWF board member, as well as others in the Pacific Central District and around the country, helped to pinpoint key elements to include. As I got further into the material, I felt I also needed to collaborate with women who trace their ancestry to the ethnic and racial groups that were to be the focus of sessions. So I got in contact with several women of color who agreed to work together with me to determine activities and insights from their spiritual and religious experiences that had deeply affected them. Several of these women's voices are included in the curriculum. Some tell their personal stories and share their feelings on tape, while others are featured in the visuals.

Shirley: What was the most rewarding part of the curriculum's development for you?

Liz: I cherish most working with these women of color, exploring together a variety of aspects of our individual spiritual outlooks, recognizing the commonalities between us and acknowledging the differences.



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Shirley: What do you think were the most challenging issues you've had to deal with when developing your curriculum?

Liz: Establishing the difference between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation was one. For me, knowing about the richness of a variety of cultures is key to developing respect and appreciation for those who are identified with those cultures. This is what I tried to keep in mind when shaping the sessions in *Rise Up*. On the other hand, cultural appropriation, for me, is partaking of aspects of cultures with no concern for or interest in those who developed and currently identify with these wondrous philosophies, sacred arts and spiritual practices. By presenting the voices, art, and literature of women of color as integral parts of each session, I am hoping respect and a desire to form cross-cultural relationships will be outgrowths of *Rise Up*.

Another challenge was to provide material that enables women and men to interact while focusing on honoring the female—both in religious imagery and in considering the valuable qualities often attributed to the female—like the need for nurturing, compassion, and community building. Men who participated in several of the test groups seemed interested and enthusiastic, while the women seemed to value the mixed group experience.

One of my hopes is that we'll see women and men in our churches more frequently relating together about things that honor the female, with men genuinely interested and respectful and women becoming more comfortable about exploring this material together with men.

Shirley: Tell me more about your hopes for the curriculum. What can it bring to the religious life of the UU community?

Liz: It seems to me that we UUs are constantly examining how we want to define ourselves as well as present our-

selves to the world. I think the Principles and Purposes that we adopted in 1985 are a major step toward the most inclusive statement we could craft about who we think we are. I feel there are many tie-ins between what *Rise Up* presents and those purposes and principles. One that comes to mind is the desire to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. What I hope is that UUs will see the relationship between Unitarian Universalism and earth-based spiritualities around the globe that affirm the worth of the female and promote the formation of more diverse, inclusive communities built on respect for the dignity of every person.

Shirley: The other UU Principle that fits in so well is the one about respect for the interdependent web of all existence because of the emphasis in your curriculum on honoring the earth.

Liz: Right. One interesting aspect of earth-based spiritual traditions is the way they conceptualize the interaction of all the varied elements that make up the universe. They are not human-centered. In many, there is not a hierarchical value placed on the life of any particular species. Emphasis is on an interconnected system and a cyclical process of life, death and regeneration. For me, the UU Principles and Purposes affirm our desire to identify with this view. I hope this curriculum will be a helpful tool for expanding and deepening what this principle means to us.

Shirley: Well, Liz, I'm very excited about the curriculum and for you. I know that people in our congregations are hungry for this kind of material and for the tools, as you call them, for making this global spiritual journey. You have done a tremendously creative piece of work and I know that when more people experience the curriculum you will receive well-deserved praise.