

Yule 2010



Yule, (pronounced EWE-elle) is when the dark half of the year relinquishes to the light half. Starting the next morning at sunrise, the sun climbs just a little higher and stays a little longer in the sky each day. Known as Solstice Night, or the longest night of the year, much celebration was to be had as the ancestors awaited the rebirth of the Oak King, the Sun King, the Giver of Life that warmed the frozen Earth and made her to bear forth from seeds protected through the fall and winter in her womb. Bonfires were lit in the fields, and crops and trees were "wassailed" with toasts of spiced cider.

Children were escorted from house to house with gifts of clove spiked apples and oranges which were laid in baskets of evergreen boughs and wheat stalks dusted with flour. The apples and oranges represented the sun, the boughs were symbolic of immortality, the wheat stalks portrayed the harvest, and the flour was accomplishment of triumph, light, and life. Holly, mistletoe, and ivy not only decorated the outside, but also the inside of homes. It was to extend invitation to Nature Sprites to come and join the celebration. A sprig of Holly was kept near the door all year long as a constant invitation for good fortune to pay visit to the residents.

The ceremonial Yule log was the highlight of the festival. In accordance to tradition, the log must either have been harvested from the householder's land, or given as a gift... it must never have been bought. Once dragged into the house and placed in the fireplace it was decorated in seasonal greenery, doused with cider or ale, and dusted with flour before set ablaze by a piece of last year's log, (held onto for just this purpose). The log would burn throughout the night, then smolder for 12 days after before being ceremonially put out. Ash is the traditional wood of the Yule log. It is the sacred world tree of the Teutons, known as Yggdrasil. An herb of the Sun, Ash brings light into the hearth at the Solstice.

A different type of Yule log, and perhaps one more suitable for modern practitioners would be the type that is used as a base to hold three candles. Find a smaller branch of oak or pine, and flatten one side so it sets upright. Drill three holes in the top side to hold red, green, and white (season), green, gold, and black (the Sun God), or white, red, and black (the Great Goddess). Continue to decorate with greenery, red and gold bows, rosebuds, cloves, and dust with flour.

Deities of Yule are all Newborn Gods, Sun Gods, Mother Goddesses, and Triple Goddesses. The best known would be the Dagda, and Brigid, the daughter of the Dagda. Brigid taught the

smiths the arts of fire tending and the secrets of metal work. Brighid's flame, like the flame of the new light, pierces the darkness of the spirit and mind, while the Dagda's cauldron assures that Nature will always provide for all the children.

Symbolism of Yule:

Rebirth of the Sun, The longest night of the year, The Winter Solstice, Introspect, Planning for the Future.

Symbols of Yule:

Yule log, or small Yule log with 3 candles, evergreen boughs or wreaths, holly, mistletoe hung in doorways, gold pillar candles, baskets of clove studded fruit, a simmering pot of wassail, poinsettias, Christmas cactus.

Herbs of Yule:

Bayberry, blessed thistle, evergreen, frankincense holly, laurel, mistletoe, oak, pine, sage, yellow cedar.

Foods of Yule:

Cookies and caraway cakes soaked in cider, fruits, nuts, pork dishes, turkey, eggnog, ginger tea, spiced cider, wassail, or lamb's wool (ale, sugar, nutmeg, roasted apples).

Incense of Yule:

Pine, cedar, bayberry, cinnamon.

Colors of Yule:

Red, green, gold, white, silver, yellow, orange.

Stones of Yule:

Rubies, bloodstones, garnets, emeralds, diamonds.

Activities of Yule:

Caroling, wassailing the trees, burning the Yule log, decorating the Yule tree, exchanging of presents, kissing under the mistletoe, honoring Kriss Kringle the Germanic Pagan God of Yule

Spellworkings of Yule:

Peace, harmony, love, and increased happiness.

Deities of Yule:

Goddesses-Brighid, Isis, Demeter, Gaea, Diana, The Great Mother. Gods-Apollo, Ra, Odin, Lugh, The Oak King, The Horned One, The Green Man, The Divine Child, Mabon.



Pagan/Wicca: Yule - occurs on the date of the winter solstice. It is also known as Winter Rite, Midwinter, and Alban Arthan. Yule is celebrated on the longest night of the year, and it is seen by many as the time when the sun begins its journey back from the darkness to the fullest light, celebrated at the Summer Solstice. It is the festival of the Sun's rebirth, and a time to honor the winter aspects of the God and Goddess. The festival of Yule was originally celebrated in Norse and Germanic countries, and many Pagans choose to honor those aspects of the God and Goddess at this time of year.

Celtic: Alban Arthuan (Winter Solstice)

Stregheria: La Festa dell' Inverno, Saturnalia

(Southern Hemisphere) Midsummer - Summer Solstice (also known as Alban, Hefin, and Letha) is the longest day of the year when the Sun is at its zenith. It is the celebration of the fullest light of the Sun, and the time when the Sun turns back towards the darkness of the year. In many Wiccan traditions, It is the ideal time for divinations, Healing rituals, and the cutting of divining rods, dowsing rods, and wands.

Pre-Solstice Ritual Bath

During the Winter Solstice, we often place emphasis on celebrating and sharing this joyous, but often difficult, holiday. For Witches, however, now may also serve as a time to attune to a quiet, internal spirituality. To begin to do so (with the solstice less than ten days away now), prepare a ritual bath with oils of rosemary, pine, and orange. Add a touch of patchouli for grounding. Light gold and green candles, and immerse yourself in watery solitude to refresh your weary holiday spirit. Meditate on the winter goddess and her lesson of stillness. Find the cool and clean space she offers, free of clutter and activity. It is the season for centering and grounding ourselves, and for defining who we really are. After the bath, take your journal and write down your goals by candlelight. Contemplate the coming rebirth, and identify which direction you wish to channel your energy and focus your intentions.



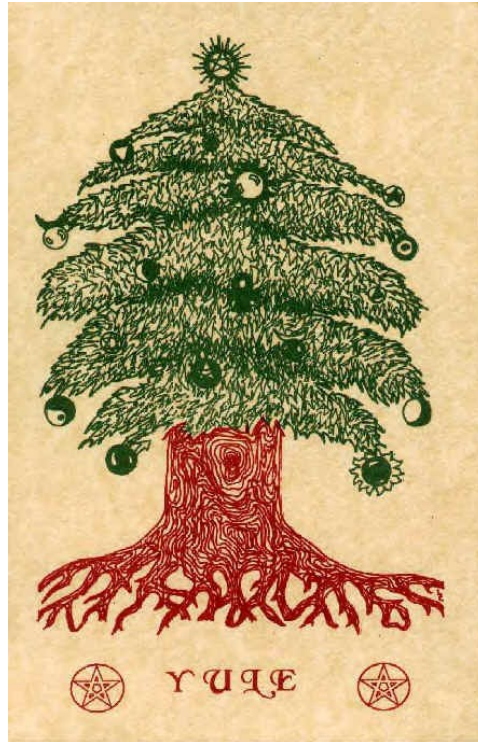
Winter Solstice

Mother earth, we feel your heart beat
Mother earth, bless this day
Turning wheel, with your life force
The Winter Solstice has come our way

Winter Solstice, shaft of light
Signifies the shortest day
Turning wheel, the coldest season
Has sprinkled snowflakes of a silver grey

Snowflakes dancing in the wind of change
Inspires within me the dreams of hope
The Winter Solstice is a magical day
Colorful visions in the kaleidoscope

Mother earth, we feel your heart beat
Mother earth, bless this day
Turning wheel, with your life force
The Winter Solstice has come our way



The Pine Tree

Eternal Love

The light of love cannot be extinguished from the heart or soul, because the light is eternal.

As I began to decorate my home for the Holidays I received messages about some of the traditions and why we do them and the importance of them. I've always loved the greenery I use throughout my home, year round and I've always known there's more meaning than just for the Yuletide. The Faeries, guides and other helpers, asked me to share throughout December the meanings and significance of these wonderful green traditions, folklore and magical ways we make our homes beautiful during the Holidays and all year long with evergreens and greenery~

Sunshine and Happiness, destined to fill your days, may begin with a celebration. The evergreen Pine, always decorated at Christmas time, anticipates Spring. News or a meeting will be as equally bright as the Yule log's pure white flame that represents eternal life. A new start is imminent and misunderstandings are resolved, signified by the purifying sap of the tree, which smells of fresh new life. You may expect permanence in love, as the evergreen needles appear in pairs. Even in old age the tree is green and vital, indicating long life and undiminished marriage bliss. Strength is on your side, represented by pine cones.



~From The Celtic Tree Oracle by Liz and Colin Murray~

I love pine trees and I've had them around me almost everywhere I've lived and still do.

I love the way some of them sway in the wind and the wonderful scent they share with us. I burn pine in my cauldron and take it around the house to cleanse and consecrate every area of my home. I like that they stay green all year round and share their greenery with us even when other trees are bare.

The Pine tree is an evergreen, its old title was "the sweetest of woods." It was known to the Druids as one of the seven chieftain trees of the Irish. A good magickal cleansing and stimulating bath is made by placing pine needles in a loose-woven bag and running bath water over it. To purify and sanctify an outdoor ritual area, brush the ground with a pine branch. Being an evergreen, the Pine stands for long life and prosperity. Pine is everlasting (from its evergreen properties). It induces clearness of thought with its scent and often symbolizes survival as it can grow even in sub-zero temperatures. Pine wood is useful in spells of preservation. Pine incense is helpful in divining/scrying rituals and rituals to clear the mind.

Remember the New Moon this week and Winter begins, so the energy will be high and wonderful!! A perfect time to use Pine to cleanse and clear!! With the Holidays upon us also, meet new people, make new beginnings, count your blessings, take the time to sit and ponder on the year that's past and how Winter is a time for rest, change and manifesting from within, living for now, but to also think ahead, but take like slower on these long wintry days!



Yule Wish Spell

*Now comes the Yule
The moment when
The aged Sun's
Reborn again
All things renewed
All things made whole
The promise of Spring
And rebirth for the Soul*

*The Wheel of the Year turns once again
And I most earnestly pray
For a Yuletide wish I cherish
And wish for on this day*

*I concentrate upon my wish
Imagine it clearly in my stride
Aligning myself to the energies
Which regenerate at Yuletide
For Yule is the longest night
And the power of the Sun's nadir
And the days will grow longer after
As we move into the New Year*

*And the Old God now at His height
Will diminish and pass away
While the Young God now reborn
Will very soon hold sway*

*And the Earth will pass from Winter
As the power of the Young God grows
So my wish will grow along with Him
Increasing just as He does
And as Winter must give way to Spring
So too my wish must manifest*

*For I've tied it to the Sun's rebirth
And by that rebirth shall it be blessed
So thanks I offer knowing
My wish shall come to be
Even as the Sun's light grows
my wish shall come to me*



Yule Circle Casting Spell

Dark the night and bright the Moon
Which casts its sheen upon the snow
The stars bear silent witness to
The sacred rite we start below
Yuletide marks the longest night
From out the Wheel of the Year
The Old God's power at its height
We look within for vision clear

I cleanse my space with shining light
To raise the vibe and transmute all
Which might distract from this my rite
Or confound my focused Will wicthal
I cast the Circle round about thus
Casting out a place apart
Between the worlds of light and darkness
To work my Will through magic art

I call the North Lord of Midwinter
Hallowed on this longest night
Shaman Lord of Visions, enter
Master of Winter's waning light
I call the East, the Sun reborn
At the very height of the Old Lord's power
Who heralds at Winter Springs return
Join us Sun Child at this hour

I call the South, the Lover bold
The Sun in might of Summer's heat
Opposite of the Old Lord's cold
Your warming Blessing we entreat
And now I call the West, the King
The Lord of Justice and of Fate
Twilit Lord of the harvesting
The grain His body which we eat

O Four Lords come and witness this
O Yuletide rite I now begin
To celebrate with graceful bliss
The holy Sun reborn again
I call the Throne of Transformation
Heeding Her Midwinter's Lesson
That the height of power and perfection
Is also the point of transmutation
Thus like the Sun reborn in darkness
May I be energized this night
And pray my own dreams grow no less
Than the lengthening days shall wax in might

December Moon Names: Cold Moon, Oak Moon, Moon of Long Nights, Long Night's Moon, Wintermonat (Winter Month), Heilagmonoth (Holy Month), Big Winter Moon, Moon of Popping Trees. December was the tenth month on the old Roman calendar, the month containing the care free Saturnalia. The Franks called it Heilagmanoth, or Holy Month, because of its large number of sacred festivals. On the old Tibetan calendar December 1 was the beginning of a new year.

The Goddess Companion

Wake up, people! Open your eyes! Wake up!
Move quickly, like people of light!
Draw clouds forth from the sky's quarters.
Draw clouds full of snow to us here!
Snow falling now means water in summer.
Come, ice, cover my fields!
In four days the festival starts, when we assemble
to call down snow in abundance.

~Pueblo Dawn Call To Winter Feast

Throughout the world, the darkest time is also the time of the greatest celebration. One reason is simple: busy people, bustling about to gather enough food to survive through the winter, have less time to tell stories and to feast and to sing. But there is another reason that is not so obvious: the belief that the activities of human beings during the winter somehow empower the earth to keep turning on its axis, progressing slowly toward the new seasons yet to come. Stories have traditionally been vital in this quest for continued order in the universe. Each winter, people would gather to hear the old myths recited by the hearth-fire. This was the children's school, the time to learn the rules by which humankind was expected to live. It was a continuing education program for adults, too, who each year heard the familiar stories anew, with deeper meaning. But the stories did more than just educate people. In a mysterious and magickal way, they also linked humans to the cosmos. Just as the sun set at the anticipated time, so we were to tell the right story on the right night. We thus were bound to the cycle of the seasons in a deep and meaningful way.



You must remember in your heart that a tree is no less alive than you are.
But people do not understand that. They have forgotten the source of power.
They have forgotten that power comes from woman, from this great Mother Earth.
You understand in your heart and you protect her, but to protect her is to protect yourself.

~Grandmother, The Woman of Wyrrd, By Lynn Andrews.

Winter Solstice/Yule December 21 / 22 (approx.)

The Winter Solstice or Yule (ewe-elle/yool) is the shortest day of the year and the time when pagans celebrate the rebirth of the Sun. The date of this even tends to vary and falls sometime between Dec 20th and Dec 23rd. It is a fire festival and a quarter Sabbat. On this longest night of the year the now elderly Holly King makes way for the new born sun who will soon be the Oak King. This holiday is celebrated worldwide and is know as Alban Arthan (druids), Mid Winter and Yuletide.

Before Christianity rose to power, the Winter Solstice was associated with the birth of a Divine King. The reason for celebrating the Winter Solstice has also remained the same: rebirth and renewal, the return of hope and that life will continue. Jesus is not the only deity said to be born at this time, he's in the company of Pagan gods like Apollo. Mithras, and Horus.

The Church decided that it was easier to incorporate the pagan celebration into theirs than to change it altogether. As a result the pagan Sun God is born on the same day as the Christian Son of God, who is by the way also called "the light of the world". Here is an interesting tidbit....Did you know that mistletoe was banned from churches due it's pagan association?

Yule is also a festival of light and candles are a traditional item. Candles were lit at midnight as a symbol of birth of the Sun God. In Ireland oil lamps were left lit all night long. Special Yule candles were also popular and would lit every night throughout the Twelve Days of Christmas. As with any candle, blowing it out causes the accumulated luck that resides in the candle to "blow away". The purpose of the candle is to bless the house and family in the coming year.

Activities for Yule include, making treats and feeding our feathered friends. If you have access to the forest you can find a Yule log for your home and decorate it. Help those less fortunate by donating food or gifts to a good charity. Stay up all night and celebrate the rebirth of the sun at dawn. Create a special red Yule candle to burn, buying one is okay too! Decorate your candle with evergreens and holly. Activities, although I doubt our ancestors spent as much or gave as many gifts as we do today!

Colors:

Red, Green, White, Gold, Silver

Sacred Stones:

Turquoise, Peridot, Serpentine

Herbs:

All evergreens, holly, mistletoe, ivy, pine/fir cones, cinnamon

Symbols:

Yule Log or Tree, evergreen wreaths, holly/mistletoe, cinnamon sticks, bells,

Deities:

The Holly King, Odin. Osiris, Hathor, Ixchel, Hecate, the Norns, all winter fae

Food & Drink:

Roast fowl, ham, apples, oranges, nuts, mulled cider/wine

Blessed Yule!!!

*On this night so long, My Lady
Keep me in your loving care
I await the dawn, My Lady
And the Sun King who will bear
Light and warmth and love, My Lady
As he has in years before
So guide me to the dawn, My Lady
This Solstice Night and ever more.*

Cord Magick

There are numerous ways of working practical magic in Wicca, some highly ritualised and complicated, others very simple. Probably one of the most popular in the craft today is cord magic, not least because it is a very powerful method of working in a coven environment, but also it is easily adapted for use by the lone spell worker.

The cord as a magical tool certainly has its own characteristics and symbolism, it is particularly suitable for spells that involve for example binding and/or grounding; and certainly they generate an energy of their own, and are particularly useful for spells where other forms of magic may be inappropriate such as banishing spells. In the binding of the initiate in the first-degree initiation, the cords represent the restriction of the womb before the candidate is symbolically reborn, furthermore the blindfold represents the darkness therein. Powerful symbolism indeed!

In my parent coven, the main method of working cord magic was that after the power had been raised and everyone had fallen to the ground to welcome it and show respect, the assembled coven would then sit around the perimeter of the circle man/woman alternately as far as possible. Each brother or sister present would then name the petition. This would continue, with the invocation being repeated over and over again, faster and faster until the High Priestess decided that enough power had been raised, and all would release their end of the cord so that the cords would then collapse in a bundle in the centre of the circle whilst the coven concentrated on the power being discharged into the astral sphere and the universe. The cords were then gathered up and placed on the altar with the knots still intact; these were not undone until just before the next circle.

One advantage of this type of cord magic is that it is easily adapted for use by the solitary practitioner, with this mode the lone worker simply holds the cord at each end in each hand and ties the knots him/herself, but the method is essentially the same; the knots being tied not just as an aid to concentration, but to represent the accumulated power summoned and gathered together. The other main method of cord magic is by the use of the so-called Witches' Ladder, more of which later.

Another variation of cord working in a coven context was that sometimes the High Priestess may lie beneath the wheel of cords as the coven worked, with the hub of the

cords wrapped round her athame which then acted as a sort of lightning conductor. The will of the High Priestess then directed the power raised, amplified by the efforts of the rest of the group. This style of working however should only be attempted by an experienced coven as there can be side effects; indeed headaches, nausea, dizziness and extreme fatigue have all been reported, presumably the result of the energy not being directed properly or by a psychic overload of the mental, psychic and etheric bodies. Clearly a very experienced High Priestess is required as well as a skilled coven working completely in tune psychically with one another and in perfect harmony. Great care must be taken to ensure that the power is directed accurately and that no “residue” as it were remains.

Cords may also be used in the celebration of the Sabbats, where the coven may again gather around the perimeter of the circle; man-to-woman, with a witch of the opposite sex holding each end of the cord. Here the spokes created by the cords represent the wheel of the year. If the coven then performs a ritual or spiral dance, the symbolism of the working is further amplified. This form of sympathetic cord magic I feel is particularly potent at the solar festivals, i.e. the equinoxes and the solstices. I have even seen the cords released at the conclusion of the raising of the power so that the cords then fell into the burning cauldron on a bonfire. This was at Yule, and obviously the sacrificed cords represented the death of the Sun at this time of year. A new set off cords were then produced to represent his simultaneous rebirth during the remainder of the ceremony.

To return to the Solitary Practitioner; there is a very old method of cord working known as the “Witches’ Ladder” (mentioned earlier). The traditional length of cord for this mode of working is 18 inches, however any multiple of 3 may be used. Similarly any colour of cord may be employed, although red, white, or blue is traditional. Gold, however is a good general purpose colour. To begin, sit quiet in a contemplative / meditative state of mind. You must then visualise very strongly the end result of what you are trying to achieve. (First class visualisation and concentration skills are an absolute must for any practitioner of the craft or any magical discipline at all for that matter.) Next, take the cord in hand and recite a rune, preferably self-composed, as this will have more power and meaning to the spell worker.

A typical example would be something like:

“By the knot of one, the spell’s begun...
by the knot of two, it cometh true...
by the knot of three, my will shall be...
by the knot of four, the power is more...
by the knot of five, my spell’s alive...
by the knot of six, the energies mix...
by the knot of seven, the stars of heaven...
by the spell of eight, the power of fate...
by the power of nine, the (name object of spell) is mine!”

The first knot is tied in the centre of the cord, the next two are tied in the left and right ends respectively with the remaining knots tied in between, on the left and right sides of

the centre knot alternately. This method of working is therefore very similar to the mode of solo cord magic previously described, the chief difference being that more knots are used and in a specific pattern, and there is greater emphasis on a verbal spell recited in conjunction with it.

Having completed the knots, the operator then concentrates hard on the object to be accomplished before letting the cords go, again imagining the power dispersing in all directions into the universe, charged and ready to bring about the desired result.

Once the ladder spell is completed you may either put the cord safe if you intend to use it again or return it to the elements by burning it, burying it, throwing it into running water in the same direction that the water is flowing or abandoning it on a hilltop or other high place. This should be done after one full lunar phase.

If the spell is successful before the end of the lunar month, you may undo the knots within the circle, say a prayer of thanks to the gods and pass the cords through the elements once again to neutralise the cord so that it is ready to be used again.

If however the spell has not produced a result, undo one knot each day for nine days, again concentrating on your intent coming to pass. Sailors are believed to have used a spell similar to the Witches' Ladder many years ago to try and raise winds of sufficient force and correct direction to aid their journey. Cord magic may even be one of the oldest forms of magic to be practiced at all; it seems that prehistoric man may have used a form of sympathetic magic to bind clay models of animals, thus symbolising them being ensnared in traps. Legend has it that a form of Witches' Ladder was used by wives to inflict impotence on faithless husbands. But one of the first recorded historical accounts of cord magic is from Burchard, Bishop of Worms in the Rhineland of Germany who observed peasants placing knotted ropes in the branches of trees in order to divert harmful influences away from their cattle.

To return to the modern craft, however, many covens keep several sets of cords for practical magic purposes; some kabalistically inclined groups keep cords corresponding to the ten sephiroth of the Tree of Life for use in appropriate invocations. Furthermore binding parts of the body with cords restricts blood flow and alters consciousness which can lead to the opening of the third eye for clairvoyance and possibly even astral projection. Great care must be taken however for if the binding is too tight physical damage can occur.

Some witches wear a cord around the waist during coven meetings with the colour then denoting rank within the craft; e.g. white for first-degree; red for second-degree and blue for third-degree. Although there are reasons for each colour being assigned to a particular degree it would not be appropriate for me to reveal them here.

Cord magic can then be seen to be a simple and yet highly effective form of magic and indeed meditation on the cords in relation to colour can provide much food for thought and insight. The cord also links matter to spirit, the material world to the realm of the gods, and it binds not just the material base of the craft but the four elements and the four points of the compass.



History of Yule

A Festival of Light:

Many cultures have winter festivals that are in fact celebrations of light. In addition to Christmas, there's Hanukkah with its brightly lit menorahs, Kwanzaa candles, and any number of other holidays. The Pagan holiday called Yule takes place on the day of the winter solstice, around December 21. On that day (or close to it), an amazing thing happens in the sky. The earth's axis tilts away from the sun in the Northern Hemisphere, and the sun reaches at its greatest distance from the equatorial plane. As a festival of the Sun, the most important part of any Yule celebration is light -- candles, bonfires, and more.

Origins of Yule:

In the Northern hemisphere, the winter solstice has been celebrated for millennia. The Norse peoples viewed it as a time for much feasting, merrymaking, and, if the Icelandic sagas are to be believed, a time of sacrifice as well. Traditional customs such as the Yule log, the decorated tree, and wassailing can all be traced back to Norse origins.

Celtic Celebrations of Winter:

The Celts of the British Isles celebrated midwinter as well. Although little is known about the specifics of what they did, many traditions persist. According to the writings of Pliny the Elder, this is the time of year in which Druid priests sacrificed a white bull and gathered mistletoe in celebration.

Roman Saturnalia:

Few cultures knew how to party like the Romans. Saturnalia was a festival of general merrymaking and debauchery held around the time of the winter solstice. This week-long party was held in honor of the god Saturn, and involved sacrifices, gift-giving, special privileges for slaves, and a lot of feasting. Although this holiday was partly about giving presents, more importantly, it was to honor an agricultural god.

Welcoming the Sun Through the Ages:

Four thousand years ago, the Ancient Egyptians took the time to celebrate the daily rebirth of Horus - the god of the Sun. As their culture flourished and spread throughout Mesopotamia, other civilizations decided to get in on the sun-welcoming action. They found that things went really well... until the weather got cooler, and crops began to die. Each year, this cycle of birth, death and rebirth took place, and they began to realize that every year after a period of cold and darkness, the Sun did indeed return.

Winter festivals were also common in Greece and Rome, as well as in the British Isles. When a new religion called Christianity popped up, the new hierarchy had trouble converting the Pagans, and as such, folks didn't want to give up their old holidays. Christian churches were built on old Pagan worship sites, and Pagan symbols were incorporated into the symbolism of Christianity. Within a few centuries, the Christians had everyone worshipping a new holiday celebrated on December 25.

In some traditions of Wicca and Paganism, the Yule celebration comes from the Celtic legend of the battle between the young Oak King and the Holly King. The Oak King, representing the light of the new year, tries each year to usurp the old Holly King, who is the symbol of darkness. Re-enactment of the battle is popular in some Wiccan rituals

The Oak King and The Holly King

In many Celtic-based traditions of Neopaganism, there is the enduring legend of the battle between the Oak King and the Holly King. These two mighty rulers fight for supremacy as the Wheel of the Year turns each season. At the Winter Solstice, or Yule, the Oak King kills the Holly King, and then reigns until Midsummer, or Litha. Once the Summer Solstice arrives, the Holly King returns to do battle with the old king, and defeats him. The Holly King then rules until Yule.

In some Wiccan traditions, the Oak King and the Holly King are seen as dual aspects of the Horned God. Each of these twin aspects rules for half the year, battles for the favor of the Goddess, and then retires to nurse his wounds for the next six months, until it is time for him to reign once more.

Often, these two entities are portrayed in familiar ways - the Holly King frequently appears as a woodsy version of Santa Claus. He dresses in red, wears a sprig of holly in his tangled hair, and is sometimes depicted driving a team of eight stags. The Oak King is portrayed as a fertility god, and occasionally appears as the Green Man or other lord of the forest.

Ultimately, while these two beings do battle all year long, they are two essential parts of a whole. Despite being enemies, without one, the other would no longer exist.

The Holly King and Oak King

The Wiccan God is the Lord of the Greenwood, consort to the Lady of the Greenwood. Known also as Cernunnos, the Green Man, Herne the Hunter, and Lord of the Wild Hunt, he is a god of fertility, growth, death, and rebirth.

Two God-themes figure predominantly in Wiccan Sabbats: the Sun-God theme and that of the Holly King and Oak King.

The Sun-God rules the seasons. At Yule, he is the new babe, the embodiment of innocence and joy. He represents the infancy of the returning light. At Imbolg, his growth is celebrated, as the days are growing longer and light stronger. At Ostara, he is a green, flourishing youth whose eye is taken by the Maiden Goddess. On Beltane, he is the young man in love who takes the Goddess as his bride. Their consummated marriage is celebrated with maypoles and bonfires. At Midsummer, he consummates his marriage in a union so complete that it becomes a death. He is mourned at Lammas, and at Mabon, he sleeps in the womb of the Goddess. At Samhain, he waits in the Shining Land to be reborn.

The symbolism of the Horned God is also played out the theme of the Holly King and Oak King. The Horned God is the Holly King and the Oak King, two twin gods seen as one complete entity. Each of the twin gods rule for half of a year, fights for the favor of the Goddess, and dies. But the defeated twin is not truly dead, he merely withdraws for six months, some say to Caer Arianrhod, the Castle of the ever-turning Silver Wheel, which is also known as the Wheel of the Stars. This is the enchanted realm of the Goddess Arianrhod where the god must wait and learn before being born again. Arianrhod means "silver wheel" and the castle is the Aurora Borealis. She is the goddess of the astral skies and there she rules as goddess of reincarnation.

The golden Oak King, who is the light twin, rules from midwinter to midsummer. The darksome Holly King rules the dark half of the year from Midsummer to Midwinter.

Mistletoe: Myths, Mysteries and Medicine



A modern Druid blesses Christmas mistletoe in a celebration Tenbury Wells, England.

In 50 C.E., the Greek physician Dioscorides wrote his *Materia Medica*, establishing himself a place in medical history. As one of the ancient world's most knowledgeable herbalists, Dioscorides found that mistletoe helped cure his patients of external tumors. He wrote that it "has the power to disperse, soften, drawing and assisting tumors of the parotid gland and other lesions..." Some forty or so years later, Pliny the Elder wrote of the treatment of sores and epilepsy with mistletoe in his *Natural History*. He also described its use in magic and ritual.

The Druids and Abundance Rituals:

Pliny wrote that Druid elders performed rituals in which they harvested mistletoe -- a botanical parasite -- from oak trees with golden sickles. It was collected under a waxing moon phase, and then fed to animals to guarantee their fertility. As part of the rite, a pair of white bulls were sacrificed, and if prayers were answered, prosperity would be visited upon the villages.

Those Wild Romans and Saturnalia:

No one loves a party like the ancient Romans, and their festival of Saturnalia is one of the most well-documented celebrations of the Winter Solstice. This week-long bacchanal included exchanging of gifts, lots of food and wine, dancing and music. Slaves got the week off work, courts were closed, and all kinds of debauchery took place. This festival honored Saturn, of course, and he was an agricultural god. To keep him happy, fertility rituals took place under the mistletoe. Today, we don't quite go that far under our mistletoe (at least not usually) but it does explain where the kissing tradition comes from.

Jesus and the Naughty Mistletoe:

As the Roman Empire crumbled and Christianity spread, a rumor began in France that the cross upon which Jesus died was made of mistletoe. As punishment for its involvement in the crucifixion, the plant was forbidden to grow out of the earth, and was demoted to being a botanical parasite. It now has to have a host plant, such as the oak or the ash, apparently more well-behaved and virtuous trees.

Mistletoe as Medicine Once More:

During medieval times mistletoe was again recognized for its medicinal properties, and appears in several folk remedies. To ward off demons, twigs of mistletoe could be hung in bundles over a door. In some countries, springs were placed in the stable to protect livestock safe from local witches. Mistletoe was also known to rural people as the best cure for barren women; in fact, mistletoe seems to have been a cure-all for any problems with conception, because early societies were baffled by its method of propagation. Interestingly, the Cherokee people used the North American strain of mistletoe as an abortifacient.

Mistletoe as a Parasite:

The plant we know today as mistletoe has no roots of its own. What it does have is tiny extensions called holdfasts, that grip onto the bark of the host plant. They also serve as a sort of umbilical cord, and suck the nutrients from the host. Because of its dependence on the host, mistletoe is only found on living trees. Mistletoe plants can be either female or male; only the female has the beautiful but highly toxic berries.

Grow Your Own Mistletoe:

Because mistletoe is a parasite, you can grow your own fairly simply -- as long as you're willing to sacrifice another plant as a host. The kind available in the stores at Christmas is harvested while immature, so don't bother trying to use those berries as starters for your plants. Instead, wait until spring, when you can pick some plump, white, mature berries.

Be sure to get one from a host plant similar to the one you wish to use as a host for the new growth. Choose a hardy branch on a healthy mature tree, and make a few small incisions in the bark. the further up you can go, the better -- it allows for more sunlight to reach your seedlings. Remove the skins from the seeds, and place them inside the tree bark. Cover the seeds with some jute or other protective covering, or you'll end up with a big bird feeder and no mistletoe.

Plant lots of seeds, because you need both males and females to propagate the new growth, and only about ten percent of seeds actually germinate properly. It takes about five years, but eventually your mistletoe will reach berry-producing size.

Remember, mistletoe berries are poisonous. Consuming large quantities of leaves or berries can be fatal – especially to young children, who have been known to ingest berries. If someone is suffering from mistletoe poisoning, get them to an emergency room -- do not try to treat this yourself. Mistletoe should not be used by nursing moms or pregnant women.

The great thing about mistletoe is that if you use it magically, you don't have to worry about taking it internal. Considering all of its wonderful magical properties, it can be used in many different ways.

- Place leaves in a pouch for an ill person to carry on their person.
- To draw love to you, hang mistletoe over your door.
- Place leaves in a sachet for a woman having trouble conceiving.
- The Norsemen laid down their arms if they met beneath a growth of mistletoe -- why not use it in a working to end strife and discord in your life?
- Follow the ways of the Druids, and hang mistletoe to bring abundance your way.

Deities of the Winter Solstice

While it may be mostly Pagans and Wiccans who celebrate the Yule holiday, nearly all cultures and faiths have some sort of winter solstice celebration or festival. Because of the theme of endless birth, life, death, and rebirth, the time of the solstice is often associated with deity and other legendary figures. No matter which path you follow, chances are good that one of your gods or goddesses has a winter solstice connection.

•Alcyone (Greek): Alcyone is the Kingfisher goddess. She nests every winter for two weeks, and while she does, the wild seas become calm and peaceful.

•Ameratasu (Japan): In feudal Japan, worshippers celebrated the return of Ameratasu, the sun goddess, who slept in a cold, remote cave. When the other gods woke her with a loud celebration, she looked out of the cave and saw an image of herself in a mirror. The other gods convinced her to emerge from her seclusion and return sunlight to the universe.

•Baldur (Norse): Baldur is associated with the legend of the mistletoe. His mother, Frigga, honored Baldur and asked all of nature to promise not to harm him. Unfortunately, in her haste, Frigga overlooked the mistletoe plant, so Loki - the resident trickster - took advantage of the opportunity and fooled Baldur's blind twin, Hod, into killing him with a spear made of mistletoe. Baldur was later restored to life.

•Bona Dea (Roman): This fertility goddess was worshipped in a secret temple on the Aventine hill in Rome, and only women were permitted to attend her rites. Her annual festival was held early in December.

•Cailleach Bheur (Celtic): In Scotland, she is also called Beira, the Queen of Winter. She is the hag aspect of the Triple Goddess, and rules the dark days between Samhain and Beltaine.

•Demeter (Greek): Through her daughter, Persephone, Demeter is linked strongly to the changing of the seasons and is often connected to the image of the Dark Mother in winter. When Persephone was abducted by Hades, Demeter's grief caused the earth to die for six months, until her daughter's return.

•Dionysus (Greek): A festival called Brumalia was held every December in honor of Dionysus and his fermented grape wine. The event proved so popular that the Romans adopted it as well in their celebrations of Bacchus.

•Frau Holle (Norse): Frau Holle appears in many different forms in Scandinavian mythology and legend. She is associated with both the evergreen plants of the Yule season, and with snowfall, which is said to be Frau Holle shaking out her feathery mattresses.

•Frigga (Norse): Frigga honored her son, Baldur, by asking all of nature not to harm him, but in her haste overlooked the mistletoe plant. Loki fooled Baldur's blind twin, Hod, into killing him with a spear made of mistletoe but Odin later restored him to life. As thanks, Frigga declared that mistletoe must be regarded as a plant of love, rather than death.

•Holly King (British/Celtic): The Holly King is a figure found in British tales and folklore. He is similar to the Green Man, the archetype of the forest. In modern Pagan religion, the Holly King battles the Oak King for supremacy throughout the year. At the winter solstice, the Holly King is defeated.

•Horus (Egyptian): Horus was one of the solar deities of the ancient Egyptians. He rose and set every day, and is often associated with Nut, the sky god. Horus later became connected with another sun god, Ra.

•La Befana (Italian): This character from Italian folklore is similar to St. Nicholas, in that she flies around delivering candy to well-behaved children in early January. She is depicted as an old woman on a broomstick, wearing a black shawl.

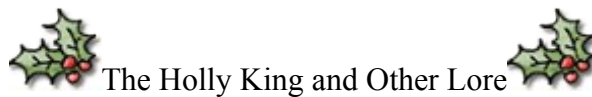
•Lord of Misrule (British): The custom of appointing a Lord of Misrule to preside over winter holiday festivities actually has its roots in antiquity, during the Roman week of Saturnalia.

•Mithras (Roman): Mithras was celebrated as part of a mystery religion in ancient Rome. He was a god of the sun, who was born around the time of the winter solstice and then experienced a resurrection around the spring equinox.

•Odin (Norse): In some legends, Odin bestowed gifts at Yuletide upon his people, riding a magical flying horse across the sky. This legend may have combined with that of St. Nicholas to create the modern Santa Claus.

•Saturn (Roman): Every December, the Romans threw a week-long celebration of debauchery and fun, called Saturnalia in honor of their agricultural god, Saturn. Roles were reversed, and slaves became the masters, at least temporarily. This is where the tradition of the Lord of Misrule originated.

•Spider Woman (Hopi): Soyal is the Hopi festival of the winter solstice. It honors the Spider Woman and the Hawk Maiden, and celebrates the sun's victory over winter's darkness.



The Holly King and Other Lore

THE HOLLY KING Continued by MJ

From the Celtic tradition, we get a pair of ancient pagan images who fight for supremacy at Yule. The Holly King and the Oak King are probably constructs of the Druids to whom these two trees were highly sacred. The Oak King (king of the waxing year) kills the Holly King (king of the waning year) at Yule. The Oak King then reigns until Midsummer when the two battle again, this time with the Holly King as the victor. The Holly King, who has evolved into the present day Santa Claus, wears red, dons a sprig of holly in his hat, and drives a team of eight (total number of solar sabbats) deer, an animal sacred to the Celtic Gods. Holly and mistletoe are traditional to the season through commemoration of the battle. The holly was hung in honor of the Holly King; the mistletoe (which grows high in the branches of oak trees) in honor of the Oak King.

The Oak King and Holly King are mortal enemies at Midsummer and Yule, but they are two sides of a whole, and neither could exist without the other.



SANTA CLAUS

Today's Santa is a folk figure with multicultural roots. He embodies characteristics of Saturn (Roman agricultural god), Cronos (Greek god, also known as Father Time), the Holly King (Celtic god of the dying year), Father Ice/Grandfather Frost (Russian winter god), Odin/Wotan (Scandinavian/Teutonic All-Father who rides the sky on an eight-legged horse), Frey (Norse fertility god), the Tomte (a Norse Land Spirit known for giving gifts to children at this time of year), and Thor (Norse sky god who rides the sky in a chariot drawn by goats). Julbock or Julbukk, the Yule goat, from Sweden and Norway, had his beginnings as carrier for the god Thor. Now he carries the Yule elf when he makes his rounds to deliver presents and receive his offering of porridge.



When Early Christians co-opted the Yule holiday, they replaced the ancient Holly King with religious figures like St. Nicholas, who was said to live in Myra (Turkey) in about 300 A.D. Born an only child of a wealthy family, he was orphaned at an early age when both parents died of the plague. He grew up in a monastery and at the age of 17 became one of the youngest priests ever. Many stories are told of his generosity as he gave his wealth away in the form of gifts to those in need, especially children. Legends tell of him either dropping bags of gold down chimneys or throwing the bags through the windows where they landed in the stockings hung from the fireplace to dry. Some years later Nicholas became a bishop--hence the bishop's hat or miter, long flowing gown, white beard and red cape.

When the Reformation took place, the new Protestants no longer desired St. Nicholas as their gift-giver as he was too closely tied to the Catholic Church. Therefore, each country or region developed their own gift-giver. In France he was known as Pare Noel. In England he was Father Christmas (always depicted with sprigs of holly, ivy, or mistletoe). Germany knew him as Weihnachtsmann (Christmas man). When the communists took over in Russia and outlawed Christianity, the Russians began to call him Grandfather Frost, who wore blue instead of the traditional red. To the Dutch, he was Sinterklaas (which eventually was mispronounced in America and became Santa Claus). La Befana, a kindly witch, rides a broomstick down the chimney to deliver toys into the stockings of Italian children. These Santas were arrayed in every color of the rainbow--sometimes even in black. But they all had long white beards and carried gifts for the children.

All of these Santas, however, never stray far from his earliest beginnings as god of the waning year. As witches, we reclaim Santa's Pagan heritage.



REINDEER

Santa's reindeer most probably evolved from Herne, the Celtic Horned God. Eight reindeer pull Santa's sleigh, representative of the eight solar sabbats. In British lore, the stag is one of the five oldest and wisest animals in the world, embodying dignity, power and integrity. From their late Autumn dramatic rutting displays, stags represented strength, sexuality and fertility. As evidenced by multiple prehistoric excavations of stag antler ritual costumes, the wearing of stag antlers in folk dance recreated the sacred male shaman figure called Lord of the Wild Hunt, Cernunnos, or Herne the Hunter, among others--he who travels between worlds, escorting animal spirits to the afterlife and sparking wisdom and fertility in this world. Likewise, the stag's branching antlers echo the growth of vegetation. In America, the stag represents the ability to "walk



one's talk," and powerfully, peacefully blend stewardship and care of the tribe with sexual and spiritual integrity.

In Northern European myth, the Mother Goddess lives in a cave, gives birth to the sun child, and can shape shift into a white hind, or doe. Therefore, the white hind was magical, to be protected and never hunted. In myth, graceful running women of the forest--who were actually magical white hinds--brought instant old age or death to hunters who chased them.

To the Celts, all deer were especially symbolic of nurturing, gentle and loving femaleness. White deer hide was used to make tribal women's clothing. White deer called "faery cattle" were commonly believed to offer milk to fairies. In Britain amongst the Druids, some men experienced life-transforming epiphanies from spiritual visions or visitations by white hinds, balancing and healing their inner feminine energy. In Europe white hinds truly exist, and are many shades of warm white cream-colors, with pale lashes--otherworldly in their peaceful and modest behavior. To many Native American tribes, deer are models of the graceful and patient mother who exhibits unconditional love and healthy, integrated female energy.

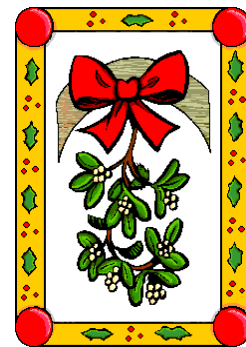


WREATHS

The Wheel of the Year is often symbolized by the wreath. Its circle has no beginning and no end, illustrating that everything in its time comes back to its point of origin and travels onward, over and over again. Scandinavians began the tradition of hanging the wreath at Yule, the beginning of their new year, to commemorate new beginnings in the cycle of life. Today in rural Germany, a giant wreath, known as St. Catherine's Wheel, is a holdover from another pagan custom which involved sympathetic magick to lure the sun's warmth back to the earth. A giant four-spoked wheel with an effigy of a person bound to it, is lighted on fire and rolled down a hill. (The effigy probably hearkens back to a time when human sacrifices were made in plea to the sun.) In some traditions, Yule was a more important holiday for honoring the Sun God than Midsummer. In Winter, Mother Earth was cold and barren without the fertilizing power of Father Sun.



MISTLETOE



Mistletoe was also known as the golden bough and was held sacred by both the Celtic Druids and the Norse. Mistletoe was used by the Druid priesthood in a very special ceremony held around this time...five days after the New Moon following winter solstice, to be precise. The Druid priests would cut mistletoe from a holy oak tree with a golden sickle. The branches had to be caught before they touched the ground.

Celts believed this parasitic plant held the soul of the host tree. The priest then divided the branches into many sprigs and distributed them to the people, who hung them over doorways as protection against thunder, lightning and other evils. The folklore, and the magical powers of this plant, blossomed over the centuries. A sprig placed in a baby's cradle would protect the child from faeries. Giving a sprig to the first cow calving after New Year would protect the entire herd. Now for the kissing part. Although many sources say that kissing under the mistletoe is a purely English custom, there's another, more charming explanation for its origin that extends back into Norse mythology. It's the story of a loving, if overprotective, mother.

The Norse god Balder was the best loved of all the gods. His mother was Frigga, goddess of love and beauty. She loved her son so much that she wanted to make sure no harm would come to him. So she went through the world, securing promises from everything that sprang from the four elements--fire, water, air, and earth--that they would not harm her beloved Balder.

Leave it to Loki, a sly, trickster spirit, to find the loophole. The loophole was mistletoe. He made an arrow from its wood. To make the prank even nastier, he took the arrow to Hoder, Balder's brother, who was blind. Guiding Hoder's hand, Loki directed the arrow at Balder's heart, and he fell dead.

Frigga's tears became the mistletoe's white berries. In the version of the story with a happy ending, Balder is restored to life, and Frigga is so grateful that she reverses the reputation of the offending plant--making it a symbol of love and promising to bestow a kiss upon anyone who passes under it.

Balder is sometimes seen as the sacrificed and resurrected god, who is restored to his people after the Battle of Ragnarok.



LIGHTS

Winter was a time of death and stagnation in the eyes of early humans. The earth was barren and unproductive, shelter was drafty, disease was common, and food was scarce. Little wonder they did all in their power to assure the Sun's return each year. During the festivals of the waning year, fire became a form of sympathetic magick to entice the Sun back to the earth. Bonfires were lit; Flaming wheels rolled down hillsides; Burning

candles were placed in windows. Candles were later placed in the boughs of evergreen trees, later evolving into lights on our holiday trees.

Honor the new solar year with light. Do a Solstice Eve ritual in which you meditate in darkness and then welcome the birth of the sun by lighting candles and singing chants and Pagan carols. If you have an indoor fireplace or an outdoor fire circle, burn an oak log as a Yule log and save a bit to start next year's fire. Decorate the inside and/or outside of your home with electric colored lights. Because of the popularity of five pointed stars as holiday symbols, this is a good time to display a pentagram of blue or white lights.

THE YULE LOG



The Yule Log, an ancient symbol of the season, came to us from the Celts. The log, a phallic symbol, is usually cut from an Oak tree, symbolic of the god. The entire log was decorated with holly, mistletoe, and evergreens to represent the intertwining of the god and goddess who are reunited on this sabbat. The log was burned in the hearth or fireplace. Modern pagans also have the option of using pieces of oak small enough to be burned in the cauldron.

In modern times, another tradition has emerged since not everyone has fireplaces. Three holes are bored in the top of the log for three candles, representing the goddess in her three aspects -- maiden, mother, and crone. Normally these candles are white, red, and black in honor of this triple aspect. This log may be reused year after year, with the candles changed each year.

An ancient rhyme of unknown origin reflects the importance of the Yule Log on this sabbat:

May the log burn,
May the wheel turn,
May evil spurn,
May the Sun return.

The ashes of the Yule log or spent wax from candles are tied up in a cloth for the entire year as a charm for protection, fertility, strength, and health.

Yule Log Magick



The Yule log is a remnant of the bonfires that the European pagans would set ablaze at the time of winter solstice. These bonfires symbolized the return of the Sun.

An oak log, plus a fireplace or bonfire area is needed for this form of celebration. The oak log should be very dry so that it will blaze well. On the night of Yule, carve a symbol of your hopes for the coming year into the log. Burn the log to release it's power. It can be decorated with burnable red ribbons of natural fiber and dried holly leaves. In the fireplace or bonfire area, dried kindling should be set to facilitate the burning of the log. The Yule log can be made of any wood (Oak is traditional). Each releases its own kind of magick.

Ash -- brings protection, prosperity, and health

Aspen -- invokes understanding of the grand design

Birch -- signifies new beginnings

Holly -- inspires visions and reveals past lives

Oak -- brings healing, strength, and wisdom

Pine -- signifies prosperity and growth

Willow -- invokes the Goddess to achieve desires

The burning of the Yule Log can easily become a family tradition. Begin by having parent(s) or some other family member describe the tradition of the Yule Log. The tale of the Oak King and Holly King from Celtic mythology can be shared as a story, or can be summarized with a statement that the Oak represents the waxing solar year, Winter Solstice to Summer Solstice, and the Holly represents the waning solar year, Summer Solstice to Winter Solstice.

Lights are extinguished as much as possible. The family is quiet together in the darkness. Family members quietly contemplate the change in the solar year. Each in her/his own way contemplates the past calendar year, the challenges as well as the good times.

Then the Yule Log fire is lit. As it begins to burn, each family member throws in one or more dried holly sprigs and says farewell to the old calendar year. Farewells can take the form of thanksgiving and appreciation and/or a banishment of old habits or personal pains.

Once the Yule Log itself starts blazing, then the facilitator invites family members to contemplate the year ahead and the power of possibilities. Each member then throws in an oak twig or acorn into the fire to represent the year ahead, and calls out a resolution and/or a hope.

Families using a Yule Log with candles each family member can write a bad habit and/or a wish for the upcoming year on a slip of paper and burn it in the candle flame.

When this process is done, the family sings a song together. The traditional carol, "Deck the Halls," is good because it mentions the Solstice, the change in the solar year, and the Yule Log.

Let the Yule Log burn down to a few chunks of charred wood and ashes (or candles burn down). Following an ancient tradition, save remnants of the fire and use them to start the Yule Log fire the following year.

(from the Llewellyn's Witch's Calendar 1998)



MAKE A YULE LOG

To make a Yule Log, simply choose a dried piece of oak and decorate with burnable ribbons, evergreens, holly, and mistletoe. To make a Yule Log with candles (suitable for indoor observances when a fireplace is not available), you will need a round log at least thirteen inches long and five inches thick. Flatten the bottom of the log with a saw (preferably a power saw) by trimming off an inch or two so the log will sit without wobbling. Next determine where the three candle holes should be drilled along the top of the log. They should be evenly spaced. The size of the holes will be determined by the size candles you are using. Drill the holes 1/2 to 3/4 of an inch to accommodate the candles.

The log with candles may be painted or sprayed with varnish or shellac to keep it from drying out. When the varnish is dry, insert candles and decorate it with holly, evergreens, and mistletoe. Candles may be green, red, and silver or white to represent the Oak King, the Holly King, and the Goddess; or white, red, and black to represent the Triple Goddess.



BAKE A YULE LOG CAKE

Yvonne's Favorite Yule Log Cake

CAKE

1 cup cake flour
1-1/4 tsp baking soda
1/4 tsp salt
6 Tbl cocoa
1/3 cup boiling water
1-1/2 tsp vanilla extract
1/4 cup butter, softened
1/4 cup vegetable shortening
1 cup granulated sugar, divided
2 eggs, separated
1/2 cup buttermilk

CREAM FILLING

1 cup whipping cream
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1-1/2 tsp vanilla extract

GLAZE

2 cups semisweet chocolate chips
1/2 cup butter, softened
1/2 cup whipping cream
Confectioner's sugar

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

For cake, combine flour, baking soda, and salt in a medium bowl. In a small bowl, combine cocoa, water, and vanilla, whisking until smooth. In a large bowl, cream butter and shortening. Gradually beat in the egg yolks one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat until mixture is light and fluffy, about 2-3 minutes.

Beginning with the butter and egg mixture, alternately beat in the flour mixture and buttermilk, beating well after each addition. Beat in cocoa mixture until smooth.

In a medium bowl, beat egg whites until soft peaks form. Gradually beat the remaining 2 Tbl. sugar until mixture is stiff. Fold 1/4 of the egg white mixture into the chocolate mixture. Carefully fold in the remaining egg white mixture. Pour the batter into a greased and floured 15X10X1 inch foil-lined jelly roll pan. Smooth top with a spatula. Bake 15 to 20 minutes until the cake is slightly puffed and just begins to pull away from the sides of the pan. Cake will be underdone. Place on wire rack to cool.

For filling, beat cream, sugar, and vanilla in a large mixing bowl until stiff peaks form. Using a knife, loosen the cake from the edges of the pan. Place a second jelly roll pan on

top of the first pan and invert cake on to top of the second pan. Peel off foil. Invert cake again so it is right side up. Spread the cream filling over the cake, leaving a one-inch border around the edges of the cake. Beginning with one long edge, roll up the cake. Wrap the cake tightly with aluminum foil and freeze overnight.

For glaze, melt chocolate chips in the top of a double broiler over warm water. Remove from heat and cool slightly. Beat in butter and cream. Allow mixture to sit at room temperature until slightly thickened. Remove cake from freezer and unwrap. Place cake, seam side down, on a wire rack placed over wax paper. Pour the glaze over the cake -- spread evenly over tops and sides. Transfer to serving platter. Use a fork to make the "bark." Refrigerate until served. Prior to serving, sprinkle confectioner's sugar on top to simulate snow and top with a sprig of holly.

Easy Yule Log Cake

(from Sabbats by Edain McCoy)

1 package commercial cake mix, preferably chocolate
2 cans (24 oz.) pre-made frosting in a dark brown color
Several tubes of cake decoration frosting in green, white, and red
Several toothpicks

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and line a jelly roll pan with waxed paper. Mix the cake according to package instructions and pour a thin layer -- no more than 1/4-inch thick -- into the prepared jelly roll pan. Bake the cake until just underdone. If you can't tell by looking, then use the knife test. When the knife emerges not quite clean from the center of the cake, and when a light touch does not bounce back easily, it needs to come out. Check the cake at 7 minutes, and then every 2 minutes past that. DO NOT over bake or the cake will be hard to work with. Remove the cake from the oven and let it cool slightly. Remove the cake from the pan by lifting out the wax paper. With the dark frosting, coat the top of the cake. Carefully lift one end of the cake and begin rolling it up as if you were rolling up a map. When you are done, anchor the cake with toothpicks and let it cook 5 more minutes. Let it cool for 30 minutes, then frost it with the dark brown icing. Next take the tubes of icing and make holly and mistletoe on the top. To finish, use toothpicks to etch lines in the log. You can decorate with artificial greenery until time to eat.





THE YULE TREE



Lore

The Celtic Druids venerated evergreen trees as manifestations of deity and as symbols of the universe. To the Celts, these trees were sacred because they did not die from year to year like deciduous trees. Therefore they represented the eternal aspect of the Goddess who also never dies. Their greenery was symbolic of the hope for the sun's return.

The Druids decorated the evergreen trees at Yule with all the images of the things they wished the waxing year to bring. Fruits for a successful harvest, love charms for happiness, nuts for fertility, and coins for wealth adorned the trees. These were forerunners to many of the images on today's Christmas trees. Candles were the forerunners of today's electric tree lights.

In Scandinavia, Yule trees were brought inside to provide a warm and festive place for tree elementals who inhabited the woodland. This was also a good way to coax the native faery folk to participate in Solstice rituals. Some believed the Saxons were the first to place candles in the tree.

Gradually sacred tree imagery was absorbed and minimized by the Christian church--but it was never able to destroy trees' resonance within our collective unconscious completely. We realize when we plant a tree we are encouraging the Earth to breathe. And when we decorate our evergreen trees at Yule, we are making a symbol of our dream world with the objects we hang upon it. Perhaps a chain or garland, reflecting the linking of all together on Earth. Lights--for the light of human consciousness, animal figures who serve as our totems, fruits and colors that nourish and give beauty to our world, gold and silver for prosperity, treats and nuts that blend sweet and bitter--just as in real life. The trees we decorate now with symbols of our perfect worlds actually animate what we esteem and what we hope for in the coming year; as from this night, the light returns, reborn.



Decorating the Tree

It's best to use a live tree, but if you can't, you can perform an outdoor ritual thanking a tree, making sure to leave it a gift when you're finished (either some herbs or food for the animals and birds). Start a seedling for a new tree to be planted at Beltane.

If apartment rules or other conditions prevent you from using a live tree indoors, be sure to bring live evergreen garlands or wreaths into the house as decorations.

- * String popcorn and cranberries and hang them on the Yule tree or an outdoor tree for birds.
- * Decorate pine cones with glue and glitter as symbols of the faeries and place them in the Yule tree.
- * Glue the caps onto acorns and attach with a red string to hang on the Yule tree.
- * Hang little bells on the Yule tree to call the spirits and faeries.
- * Hang robin and wren ornaments on the tree. The robin is the animal equivalent of the Oak King, the wren of the Holly King. Each Yule and Midsummer they play out the same battle as the two kings.
- * Hang 6-spoked snowflakes on the branches of the tree. The Witches Rune, or Hagalaz, has 6 spokes.
- * Hang sun, moon, star, Holly King, faery, or fruit decorations.
- * String electric lights on your tree to encourage the return of the Sun.



Consecrating the Tree

Consecrate the Yule tree by sprinkling it with salted water, passing the smoke of incense (bayberry, pine, spruce, pine, spice, cedar, or cinnamon) through the branches, and walking around the tree with a lighted candle saying:

By fire and water, air and earth,
I consecrate this tree of rebirth.



Correspondences

EVERGREENS

Symbolizing: Continuity of Life, Protection, Prosperity

Types: Pine, Fir, Cedar, Juniper, other evergreens

Forms: boughs, wreaths, garlands, trees

Divinities: Green Goddesses & Gods; Hertha; Cybele, Attis, Dionysius (Pine); Woodland Spirits

Traditions: Roman, Celtic, Teutonic, Christian

OAK

Symbolizing: New Solar Year; Waxing Sun; Endurance, Strength, Triumph, Protection, Good Luck

Forms: Yule log, acorns, wood for sacred fires

Divinities: Oak King; Oak Spirit; Sky Gods including Thor, Jupiter, Zeus

Traditions: Teutonic, Celtic, Christian

SACRED TREES OF WINTER SOLSTICE from the Celtic Tree Calendar

Yew: Last Day of Solar Year; Death.

Silver Fir: Winter Solstice Day; Birth.

Birch: Month following Winter Solstice; Beginnings.

written by Selena Fox



The Yule Faeries - A Winter Solstice Story

A group of little Faeries huddled in their home deep under the roots of a giant oak tree. They were safe and snug in their tiny underground cave lined with dandelion fluff, bird feathers, and dried moss.

Outside, the wind blew cold and the snow fell softly down to cover the ground. "I saw the Sun King today," the faerie named Rose said as she pulled her mossy cloak tighter about her. "He looked so old and tired as he walked off through the forest. What is wrong with him? The great oak said he's dying" answered Daffodil. Dying? Oh, what will we do now?" Little Meadow Grass started to cry "If the sun King dies, our little plant friends will not grow. The Birds will not come and sing again. Everything will be winter for

ever!" Lilac, Dandelion and Elder Blossom tried to comfort their friend, but they were all very sad. As they huddled together, there was a knock on the tiny door.

"Open up, Faeries," called out a loud voice. "Why are you hiding instead of joining us in our Solstice celebration?" Rose opened the door and the little gnome Brown Knobby pushed inside, shaking the glistening snowflakes off his brown coat and hat.

"We are too sad to celebrate," Daffodil said wiping her eyes, "the Sun King is dying, haven't you heard?"

"He is dead you silly Faeries." Brown Knobby's round dark eyes sparkled with laughter. "now hurry, or we'll be late for the celebration!"

"How can you be happy and laughing?!" Elder Blossom stamped her little foot and frowned at the gnome. "If the Sun King IS dead, it will be winter always. We will never see the Sun again!"

"Silly little child-Faeries." Brown Knobby grabbed Dandelion by the hand and pulled her to her feet. "There is a secret to the Winter Solstice. Don't you want to know what it is?"

The Faeries looked at him in surprise. "Secret?" they all said. "What secret? We are only new little Faeries, you silly gnome. We've never been to a Solstice celebration before."

"Come and see. Come and see. Get your capes and come with me." Brown Knobby danced and jiggled around the room. "Hurry, Hurry, don't be slow! To the sacred oak grove through the snow!"

He danced out of the door and disappeared.

"What did that gnome mean?" Rose asked as she gathered up her cloak of dried rose petals held together with cobwebs and lined with goose down.

"I don't know, but the Lady lives in the sacred grove." Meadow Grass pulled on her hat.

"Perhaps if we go to see the Goddess, She can explain what Brown Knobby was talking about".

The Faeries left their snug little home and trudged off through the snow toward the sacred oak grove. The forest was dark with only the light of the Moon shining down through the thick fir branches and bare limbs of maple and hawthorn. It was very difficult for them to get through the snow because they were very, very small. As they waded through the wet snow and shivered in the cold wind, they met a fox.

"Where are you going, Faeries?" the fox asked.

"To the sacred grove," they answered, they were cold and shivering.

"Climb on my back and I will take you there swiftly."

The fox knelt down so the Faeries could climb up. Then he raced off through the dark.

"Listen!" Lilac said as they neared the grove of sacred trees. "Someone is singing happy songs. A LOT of someones."

The beautiful music carried over the cold, still, moonlit air. It was the most beautiful music the Faeries had ever heard. The fox carried the Faeries right to the edge of the stone altar in the center of the grove, then knelt down.

"Look!" said Elder Blossom as they slid to the snow covered ground. "There is the Maiden and the Mother and the OLD Wise One, And many other Little People."

"They are all smiling and happy," said Lilac as she looked around at all the creatures.

"All the animals are here too," whispered Dandelion. "why are they all looking at the Mother?"

The Faeries moved closer to the three Ladies seated on the altar stone. The Mother held a bundle close in Her arms, smiling down at it. The Maiden reached down and took the Faeries gently in her Hands. She held them close to the Mother so they could see what She held.

"A Baby!" the Faeries cried. " A new little Baby! Look how he glows!"

"He is the newborn Sun King," said the Maiden smiling.

"But Brown Knobby and the old oak tree said the Sun King was dead," the Faeries answered her. "How can this little baby be the Sun King?"

"That is the secret of the Winter Solstice." The Old Wise One touched the baby's cheek with her wrinkled hand. "Every year the Sun King must come to the sacred grove during the darkest days of winter where he dies. I take his spirit to the Mother who gives him new life again. This is the way for all creatures, not just the Sun King."

" You mean everything lives and dies and lives again? the Faeries looked down in wonder at the baby Sun King, nestled in the arms of the Mother.

" Yes Little Ones," answered the Old Wise One. "There is never an end to life. This is the great mystical secret of the Winter Solstice."

The Faeries laughed because they were so happy.

"I think the little Sun King should have gifts," said Rose. "I will show him where the wild roses bloom in the early summer."

"And, I will teach him to call the birds and listen to the songs of the wind," exclaimed Dandelion.

"When he is older and stronger, " said the Mother, "then the flowers will bloom at his touch, the birds will return to sing their songs, and the air will be warm from his breath, and winter will be gone for a time. Then the Sun King will run and play with you in the forest."

The little Faeries sang to the Baby Sun King, songs of the coming spring, the sweet smelling flowers, the bumbling bees, and all the secrets of the forest. And all the creatures within the sacred grove sang with them. Then the fox took them back to their snug home under the roots of the giant oak tree where they dreamed wonderful dreams, waiting for the warmth of spring and the fun they would have with the little Sun King.



The Good Wife and the Silver Pine Cones

A very long time ago in a land far away lived a elderly woodcutter and his wife amidst a grand forest. The woodcutter had a good life chopping firewood from the surrounding forest to sell to the nearby town for food and money for him and his wife. Until one day when the tree he was cutting fell the wrong way and he was very badly injured and unable to continue working. Which soon made life very hard for them as there was no longer any money for food or any other necessity that they needed. What money that the good wife could find she would use on medicines for her husband to make him more comfortable. The good wife struggled to feed her husband and herself from her garden until winter made it impossible to continue growing food and their stores of food were soon gone. But, still she tried to find ways to make money for food by helping others by doing small chores, and by gathering roots in the forest to stipend her meager food that she could buy. She continued working hard until one day when the good wife discovered an abundance of pinecones scattered around the many pine trees throughout the forest amidst the winter snow. She realized that even though she could not carry, cut or bring enough large pieces of wood to sell to the town that people would buy pinecones for kindling for their fireplaces. So each day she would load up a bag with an apple and a

small sandwich for her lunch so that she could make a trip into the grand forest to search for pinecones.

One day after she had gathered a apron full of pine cones and her back was sore from bending she decided to sit down underneath a huge oak tree to eat her lunch and to gather her strength for the long walk home. She had just pulled out her apple and sandwich when she realized that she was no longer alone. Looking up she found a very small, strangely dressed little man standing before her. Noticing that he seemed to be hungry she asked him if he would like her apple from her lunch. He quickly nodded and took the apple from her open palm and within a wink the apple was eaten. Thinking to herself that someone who would eat something so quickly must be in more strife than her little family she offered him her sandwich as well. She knew that giving him all her food would make her very hungry as this was all the food that she could spare for herself that day, but she could not allow anyone to go hungry. The little man took the sandwich with a grateful smile and quickly ate the sandwich with much relish and enjoyment. The good wife watched his enjoyment of her offering with a kind smile even though her empty stomach grumbled with hunger. As soon as the little man finished his little meal he picked off each crumb and each morsel of food off of his clothing and ate them. He then licked his hands of all the tasty apple nectar and sighed with contentment patting his now full stomach. He then sat down beside the good wife and looked at her apron filled to spilling of gathered pinecones. He smiled at the good wife and touched the apron with one tiny hand and said..

"Good wife I thank thee for the wonderful food you gave with such a giving heart and without asking for anything in return. I have a gift for thee in your apron, however, do not look within your apron until you are home again with your husband."

Then with a wink and a lilting giggle the little man bounded away deeper into the forest. The good wife smiled and shook her head thinking that the little man must be "touched in the head" and got up and started her long journey home. She was curious at what gift he had put into her apron as she knew that he hadn't placed anything in with the pinecones, but decided to do as he said and not look until she was home with her husband. Once she arrived home she went to her husband's bedside and quickly told him about her adventure in the forest with the strange little man. He was very upset with his wife as he had warned her of the dangers of the forest and to speak to a strange man was worth his worry. But, his good wife just smiled and touched his hand and told him that she knew of his worries and that she had been careful. Shaking her head she smiled and told him of his promise of a gift as she reached into her apron and pulled out a pinecone. The woodcutter gasped in amazement at the pinecone that his wife held in her shocked grasp for instead of a pinecone of wood she held a pinecone made out of solid silver. Quickly she stood up and emptied her apron onto her husband's bed and looked in amazement at the large pile of silver pinecones. With one kind gesture of giving food to someone less fortunate than herself the good wife had gained enough treasure to allow her and her husband to live very comfortably for the rest of their days amidst the forest that they both loved. Thus it is taught in the three fold law that what you do in kindness without expectations of gain you receive bounty back three fold more. Blessed Yule to you and yours!



Meagan & The Yule Solstice

by Kathryn Dyer ©1991

Once upon a time there was a little girl named Meagan. She lived in a house that had lots of woods behind it. She lived with her Mommy and daddy, her big brother Corwin and her beautiful cat named Starweaver.

Meagan loved to watch Starweaver play with the snow in the winter. He would try to catch the flakes as they came down from the sky. Sometimes he would get mad when the flakes would melt and then his tail would start swishing from side to side. Meagan's parents told her not to mess with Starweaver when his tail was swishing like that.

"When Star swishes his tail back and forth it means that he is mad or frustrated," said her father Michael, "and playing with him would be like someone teasing you when you're mad or don't feel good." Meagan could sure understand that! "What does frustrated mean Daddy?" she asked. "Frustrated is how you feel when you are trying very hard to do something and it won't work right. Like when you were learning how to dress yourself and you couldn't get your head through the neck of a shirt." explained Michael. Meagan knew just how that felt and she promised never to bother the cat when his tail swished.

But today Starweaver wasn't swishing his tail. He was following Meagan and Corwin into the woods and chasing shadows. Meagan and Corwin had gone down the path into the woods to gather green fir branches, mistletoe and holly. It was Christmas time and they were helping to decorate the house. Later they would go with their parents to pick out a live tree to decorate and then plant in the Circle behind the house. Meagan's family was Pagan, but they also celebrated Christmas when Santa Claus came.

Meagan's mother Elizabeth told her that many people would celebrate a God's birthday at the middle of the winter or the Yule Solstice. Meagan knew that the Yule Solstice was the longest night of the year. Of course, many Christians celebrated the birthday of Jesus at Christmas. But before there were Christians some people would celebrate the birthday of Mithras, one of the old Gods, or some of the other Solar Gods. Solar means that the God is in charge of the Sun and Light. Meagan could see how the sun would be very important in the cold of winter.

Meagan's family celebrated two holidays in the winter. They would celebrate Christmas, which her mother said was Santa Claus's birthday and they would celebrate the beginning of winter, which they called the Yule Solstice. Meagan thought that Santa Claus must be a very nice person to give other people presents on his birthday so she and Corwin always left him a piece of cake and some eggnog to drink.

Meagan and Corwin picked lots of branches to decorate the house with. They tried to get fallen branches when they could but when they had to take them off a live plant they would ask the plant first and then thank it when they were done. Meagan had some crystals in her pocket to leave for the plants as a thank-you present. Corwin used the scissors when they had to cut something because he was older and Meagan's safety scissors might hurt the plant more.

Corwin was always very careful not to cut more than they needed. They put all their branches into baskets that Elizabeth's mother Nana had made. "Don't let Starweaver eat anything!" said Corwin, "Many plants can make cats and people sick." Meagan held her basket up higher. She didn't want Star to get sick! Corwin told her that soon she would get to go on walks with their father into the woods to learn about which plants were safe to eat and which were not. "Yes," said Meagan, "and then maybe Cindy's mom will show me how to make medicines!" Cindy was Meagan's best friend and her mother was an herbalist. Cindy's mother Anna made medicine, incense, make-up and lots of other things with all kinds of plants and flowers. Sometimes Meagan would go with her mother when Elizabeth went to trade herbs with Anna. Then she and Cindy would have fun smelling all the herbs in Anna's workshop.

Soon Meagan's house was full of decorations. They made popcorn and cranberry strings to decorate the tree. Each year Meagan and Corwin would make a special ornament to put on the tree. This year Nana helped them make ornaments out of clay. Nana put the ornaments in her kiln, which is a kind of oven, so that they would get hard. Meagan loved her Nana very much. She always brought Meagan a surprise when she came to visit. One time she had brought a little black kitten that grew up to be Starweaver! One time Meagan asked Nana if she was a Pagan too. Nana said, "Oh, I'm half of one and a dozen of the other". Meagan couldn't talk about it to her other grandparents. Her daddy's parents Gramma Lee and Granpa Scott were very Christian and always asked where the children were going to Sunday school. Meagan had been to Sunday school a few times with Cindy because her parents wanted her to know about all religions. But she didn't tell Gramma Lee and Granpa Scott about the time she went to the Jewish temple or talked to her parents' Buddhist friend. She knew that they wouldn't understand and she didn't want to make them feel bad.

It seemed like no time at all before it was the night before Yule Solstice. Meagan's family had found a dead tree in the woods to use for a Yule log. They decorated it with greenery after Michael carved little suns onto it. When it was ready they put it in the fireplace and put the piece of Yule log they had saved from last year on top of it. This year Jeremy, the Coven's High Priest, had to work on the Solstice so the Coven had decided to hold their

ritual on the next Saturday. Meagan was excited, they would celebrate three days this year!

That night, Meagan's family had a big dinner and Nana came to stay the night. Elizabeth had talked to Cindy's mother Anna and she let Cindy come to spend the night too! Soon Elizabeth lit the Yule log and many candles around the room. Cindy and Meagan lay on the rug in front of the fire while Michael played his harp. They sang some songs that people in their Coven had written about the Yule. Cindy didn't know very many of the songs they sang but she tried to sing them anyway. This made Meagan giggle and so Cindy started to tickle her. They had a great tickle fight until Nana said that they were too close to the fire even if it had a screen.

Cindy and Meagan got to stay up past their bedtime and even got to have a cookie before they went to bed. They promised each other to meet after Santa came to play with their new toys. Meagan could hardly wait for Santa to get there! On Christmas Eve she and Corwin left out some coconut cake and eggnog for Santa. They left him a note wishing him a happy birthday and thanking him in advance for anything he might leave for them if he thought that they had been good. Meagan had tried to be good all year but it was very hard for her to go to sleep that night. She kept thinking that she heard reindeer on the roof.

The next morning Meagan got up and brushed her teeth. She could hardly wait to go downstairs but she had to wait until her parents and Nana were ready. Because Corwin was old enough he had gone down to the kitchen to heat water for tea and coffee. Meagan's mother and Nana would only drink herb tea but Michael said he had to jump-start his mornings, which always made Elizabeth laugh and tease him. Once they got downstairs Corwin and Meagan rushed to see what Santa had left them while their parent's took pictures. After they were done, the whole family exchanged presents. Then it was time to visit Gramma Lee and Granpa Scott. It wasn't until the next day that Meagan had time to play with Cindy.

Since the Coven had chosen to meet on Saturday they decided to have a party all day. People began arriving early in the morning. Some of them had brought gifts for Meagan and her family who also had gifts for them. Meagan had made Jeremy a plate with a pentagram and runes around it spelling out his name with the clay her Nana had brought to make the Christmas decorations with.

"Thank you so much Meagan!" said Jeremy, "I will put this on my altar at home and every time I see it I will think of you." Meagan felt very happy that Jeremy liked her present. Everyone had a good time. They all played games and sang songs. Michael played his harp. Corwin had gotten a new recorder for Christmas and played it for everyone. Sometimes people would stop for a little bit and go for a walk in the woods. Not everyone had woods behind their house like Meagan's family did.

It was getting to be time for the Circle to gather. Everyone took turns taking quick showers and baths to purify themselves. Meagan and Corwin helped decorate the Circle

with greens and candles before it was their turn. They took their baths and put on their robes. The Coven was starting to gather in the Circle. There was a bonfire ready to light and two unlit candles waiting on the Altar. They would light the bonfire and the candles to help light the Horned Lord's way through the dark months of winter.

Robert blew a Horn and the ceremony started. When it came time for Cakes and Ale they passed out some special cookies that Nana had made for them. "I may not come worship with you," Nana said, "but I respect what you do and I would like to share a little part of it with you."

All too soon the ritual was over. Meagan was going to help clean up the Circle but her mother saw her yawning and sent her to bed. "Don't worry Meagan," said Elizabeth, "the grown-ups are going to stay up until the bonfire goes out and we'll clean up then. Go brush your teeth and get ready for bed and one of us will come tuck you in, in a minute, O.K.?" "O.K. Momma," yawned Meagan, "it's all been so much fun this week, I just can't stay awake any longer."

When Michael came up to tuck Meagan in she was already sound asleep and dreaming about the wonderful week she had had.

More Yule Activities and Rituals:

Decorating the Yule tree/bush, celebration of the return of the Sun and the Sun King/God, banishing disease, habits & addictions, seeking past lives, introspection, meditation, reading, & magickal exercises designed to renew the magician for the coming spring, Rest, contemplation of the prior year, goals and accomplishments, preparing for the new "planting" of ideas and goals, preparation, friendship, story telling or singing around the hearth fire, family

Incense : bayberry, pine, cedar, rosemary, juniper, frankincense, sandalwood, myrrh

Tools: bells

Stones/Gems: Blue zircon, turquoise, serpentine, jacinth, peridot.

Colors :Red, Green, White, Silver, Gold

Symbols & Decorations: Yule log, mistletoe (for protection throughout the year, best burned at Samhain the following year), wreaths, fire, garlands of dried flowers, popcorn, cinnamon sticks etc., apples, oranges, Yule tree. holly, ivy, wheel, fir or pine bows,

Foods: nuts, apples, oranges, caraway nuts, mulled wine, mulled cider, roast turkey, goose or ham ,popcorn, roasts (especially pork)

Deities: Athena, Attis, Dionysus, Fates, Frey , Freyja, Hathor, Hecate, Ixchel, Kris Kringle (as the Pagan God of Yule), Lucina, Minerva, Neith, Norns, Odin, Osiris, Woden, and the Horned God

Nature Spirits: snow faeries, storm faeries, winter tree faeries.

Herbs and Flowers : holly, mistletoe, rosemary, oak, spruce and pine cones,
ivy, fir, pine and spruce boughs, poinsettia, "Christmas" flowering cactus

Animals: reindeer, the stag, mouse, deer, horse, bear



Ideas for Yule

- Grains and seeds, and the feeding of creatures have been associated with Yuletide holidays for hundred of years in Europe. To continue this tradition why not feed our feathered friends as a family project? See who comes to visit your little sanctuary and identify them with a field guide. For ideas to feed our feathered friends see the craft section or try stringing peanuts in the shell and popcorn garlands for the trees. See our Kids section below for more ideas

- Hang popcorn balls made with honey on trees for wild birds or string a popcorn chain and drape it around the trees.

- Make a wreath out of pine boughs that the family collects on a family outing. Put the wreath in a visible location, such as on the front door, on an inside wall, or in the center of the dining table. When summer solstice arrives it may be burned in the bonfire.

- Make or decorate a special red candle to light on Yule

- Start making tree decorations for family as gifts

- **Make a Yule log. Drill three holes in it to hold three candles of white, red, and black. (Don't let the candles burn down *into* the wood!) Or go to our craft section where we give even more ideas for the Yule log including types of woods, herbs and flowers to decorate with all their correspondences. For more ideas see the craft section below.**
- **Make your very own Yule cards to send to friends and family**
- **Go out and find a special log to decorate and light on Yule night **see below**
- **Explain the concept of the holiday to your child. Using crayons or markers ask him or her to draw you a picture of the sun being born, or try other mediums like clay or finger paints**
- **Let your child stay up with you all night, and watch the Yule log burn. If your child (or you!) can't make it all night long, wake up extra early and plan a dawn picnic in a park, or on a hill, or somewhere where you can watch the sun rise.**
- **Keep a candle lit throughout the night to encourage the Sun to keep it company. Make sure the candle is in a safe place where it can't accidentally set your home ablaze.**
- **Create a ritual of re-birth. Let it begin with all in darkness, and, throughout the ritual, light candles until you are surrounded by warmth and brightness. Move from the womb to the full light of a summer's day!**
- **Volunteer at a soup kitchen, and make a commitment to be there at other times throughout the year; there are those less fortunate than you... share what you can with them.**
- **Donate to food-banks. Be an anonymous giver.**

Yule Incenses and Oil

Yule Incense #1

From Incense Oils and Brews by Scott Cunningham

- 2 Parts Frankincense**
- 2 Parts Pine needles or resin**
- 1 Part Cedar**
- 1 Part Juniper Berries**

Mix & smolder at Wiccan rites on Yule or during the winter months

Yule Incense #2

From

<http://paganwiccan.about.com/religion/paganwiccan/library/weekly/aa122798.html>

**1 teaspoon cedar
1 teaspoon pine
1 teaspoon cloves
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon frankincense
1 teaspoon myrrh
Several drops of Mulberry Oil**

Grind each herb by itself and enchant them, giving them the energies for your incense and thanks to the God and the Goddess. This incense has a distinct piney, wintry smell, and makes a lovely scent.

Yule Prosperity Potpourri

**3 cups water
4 tablespoons cardamom seeds
2 tablespoons whole cloves
3 cinnamon sticks
3 nutmeg berries
1 teaspoon ginger**
Simmer ingredients together on a stovetop or in a potpourri pot.

Yule Oil

**1/4 cup almond or other carrier oil
8 drops pine oil
8 drops cedar
5 drops juniper
ground myrrh-approx 5 or 6 small lumps
ground frankincense-approximately 5 or 6 small lumps**

Be sure the resins are ground into a very fine powder. You may wish to heat them with the carrier oil over very low heat or in a small potpourri cooker for about an hour or so-when the fragrance is released you will know it is time. Once that is done add your essential oils and combine all ingredients. May be used for anointing purposes

WINTER SOLSTICE Shamanistic HERBAL CEREMONY 1996

Once again, the Winter Solstice of the year is upon us. The season when we honor the closing of circles, the Northern Quadrant of the Medicine Wheel, we honor the closing of circles, the Northern Quadrant of the Medicine Wheel, the White Buffalo, the White Owl, the Ancient Spirits and Wisdom among us and within us. The season when we learn, from nature, how to honor the darkness of Life's Mysteries without losing faith...how to recognize the seeds of growth and nurture them in our own inner warmth until the Light returns...how to dignify the elder who lives always within us, and to face our own old age with serenity and faith and power. Once again we learn, that even in the darkest moments, health, serenity, and healing energy are available when we focus on them with positive intent.

Sanctification

I tune the hearth song of my soul, loving words upon my lips...
light-giving songs upon my heart...
life-bringing praises upon my eyes...
The music of comfort resound in the souls of all beings,
Preserving them in peace,
As the sun and moon renew themselves this night.

I give thanks to the Wise Powers of the Universe that have protected me this day, this season, this year; may their blessings attend me wherever I go, and a special blessings to those who have touched my life, who are now in need.

I look to the unfulfilled places in my life, may my Ancient Wisdom Teachers show me how best to prepare these as fields where I may sow seeds of hope, especially.....I ask, both for myself and others, may self blame, disappointment, disappear, self-doubt be transformed by self-confidence, hopefulness, an awareness of my potential, and Love.

DECEMBER 21, the shortest day of the year

A ceremony that honors any aspect of the natural world, honors us as well, for we are each a mini universe, a microcosm of the cosmos we live in.

The winter solstice, the shortest sunlit day of the year, the day when the sun is farthest away from us and his light is most remote, has been celebrated in ceremony the world over for as long as human memory exists. The celebration was most enthusiastic in areas of the earth where the winter is very dark and very long, and the yearning for sun and light was so passionate. Although we now have electricity, and can "see" with the a light flick of a switch, we still honor the power and mystery of darkness, both literally and symbolically. We recognize it as a mighty contender to our sense of safety and equilibrium, and we are always anxious until we can see the first flicker of light, the first ray of hope, the first seeds of solution, to any darkness that has invaded our life light. For this reason, celebrating the winter solstice, and the sun's return to our atmosphere, and the longer hours of light, is as appropriate now as ever...maybe more so...regardless of whether or not you follow a more traditional religious observance at this time of the year.

PURPOSES OF THE WINTER SOLSTICE CEREMONY

- 1. To lure the sun back to our atmosphere and welcome his return and the longer hours of light he brings with him. (In many beliefs the sun's gender is male, to the moon's female.)**
- 2. To honor the growth, energy, and life force of things and concepts we cannot see, and recognize that they are manifesting even when hidden.**
- 3. To honor our FAITH in the silence, darkness, and mystery of life, from which new creation emerges. To honor the places of dark, silent, safe incubation: the earth, the sea, the human heart, the human mind, the womb...where life, solutions, and inspirations find the nourishment and fertile space in which to begin their journeys.**
- 4. To reclaim HOPE in the face of troubles, knowing that the seeds of changes are always present...to honor our own STAYING POWER, collectively and individually...for having the energy to "see" something through until the end, despite the darkness.**
- 5. To say, 'Thank You' for all the stages of the seasons and of our lives.**

THE NORTH QUADRANT OF THE LAKOTA MEDICINE WHEEL

Because the Lakota Medicine Wheel concept of life is so meaningful to me, I use it, with the deepest respect, in many ceremonies. To the Lakota, as to many tribal peoples, life is circular, rather than linear. We walk around the big circle once each lifetime, yet, with every project we complete, we walk around a smaller hoop, within the circle again.

In terms of the Medicine Wheel, the Winter Season in the universe and in our lives is in the North quadrant of the circle. Traditionally, its animal totems are the Sacred White Buffalo, who is to bring peace to this planet, if we humans learn to cooperate with each other and the Great White Owl. Its color is white or clear, and its stone is quartz crystal, although the book, **DANCING WITH THE SUN**, mentions the rich blue sodalite stone, for calm courage and old knowledge; Peridot, for the balance and courage of renewal; and Herkimer Diamonds, the exquisitely clear crystals found only in upper New York State.

In human terms, it is symbolized by revered old age which has brought wisdom, understanding, and closure...and the ability to pass knowledge onto the next group of people. It is the time when we come to the end of a project, of a season, or of this earth walk, with true insight, love, and compassion, and with the ability to share this knowledge. It is an honored segment because it shows completion, hope in endings and yet-unknown beginnings, and courage in the face of universal mystery and closure. It represents the faith that is required to go into that darkness and mystery, before the spring brings new light and rebirth. It combines incredible joy and incredible somberness. It is a Sacred Direction and a Sacred Season.

MAKING YOUR WINTER SOLSTICE CEREMONY

SPACE

Be aware that the space you move in is **ALWAYS** sacred, to begin with. But frequently, we contaminate it with our own negative thoughts or negative baggage we are carrying. We want to make sure that a Ceremony is done in a space that we have remembered with Sacredness, not to make the space more sacred, because it was sacred to begin with, but to **REMIND OURSELVES THAT ALL THE SPACE WE MOVE IN IS SACRED, ALL THE TIME.**

Once you decide where you are going to hold your Ceremony, accumulate the herbs or essences to cleanse its atmosphere or aura and rededicate it. Some herbs have traditionally been used to do this. The Druids often used Cedar boughs or Arborvitae boughs. The Native Americans still use Sage for smudging and cleansing. The scent of Pine and Rosemary has often been used in actual cleansers because of their abilities to cleanse and purify. Lavender used to be used, and is still popular, everywhere from hospital rooms to church, because its scent is so purifying, stabilizing and relaxing on the nervous system, while the plant actually has antibiotic ability. **DANCING WITH THE WHEEL** also mentions Echinacea, the purple coneflower that at one time covered so many pastures, because of its proven ability to medically eliminate infection in the human system; the

common, sweet Red Clover, which offers not only nourishment to human beings, but is one of the herbs thought to help remove tumors and stagnation from the blood, and Trillium, the three-petalled flowering herb, for its purity.

When I do a Winter Solstice Ceremony, the participants and I go out into our own yards and our own neighborhoods and look for the herbs and plants that grow locally that are still green. Whatever is still green in the midst of December, has Life Energy. That is what we bring into the Ceremony place to cleanse it. Right now, I can still find Chickweed, Lavender, Thyme, some Parsley, some Lambs Ears, some Hollyhock leaves, and some Lemon Balm. Some of my Ceremony friends still have Sage, Mint, Birch, Barberry berries, and Sumac Berries. Select what you can find that speaks to you, or use the traditional Sage leaves, or buy a bundle of Sage Smudge Leaves in a New Age or Health Food store.

REMEMBER: WHEN YOU TAKE AN HERB FROM ITS GROWING PLACE, REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE DISTURBING ANOTHER LIFE FORM. DO IT WITH AWE AND REVERENCE. IT IS TRADITIONAL TO OFFER SOMETHING IN RETURN BY SPRINKLING SOME TOBACCO LEAVES, DRIED CORN, SAGE, OR SWEETGRASS, OR FLOUR, AND THANKING THE HERB FOR COMING WITH YOU TO ENRICH YOUR LIFE.

In some places you can buy special coals which you can light, and then when you throw some of the dried herbs on them, they flare up and the scent fills the room. If you cannot get your hands on any fresh herbs, buy some dried ones, or buy some essential oils, such as Sage or Lavender, and add a few drops to some pure water in a spray bottle. Or use incense sticks, but make sure they were made with the pure essential oils of the plants, and not synthetic scents, which can cause headaches, and have no plant power at all.

Remember, that the plants bring full universal power with them: the earth they grew in, the water that cleansed them, the minerals that fed them, the sun that energized them, and the winds that caressed them all come in with them to grace our homes and our lives.

Then, using fresh herbs, or spraying your scented water into the air, or holding your incense stick, start by cleansing the air around the ceiling of your space. Then work your way down the corners of the room, from the ceilings to the floor, then around the baseboards and the windows, and, especially, the doorways. Tune in to the feelings of energy you get as you do this. Wherever you sense that special attention is needed, give it. If you are using a lit Sage Smudge, the smoke is often wafted around with a feather. Be sure you have fire-extinguishers on hand if you are indoors, or

that you keep anything lit in a fire-safe location or in sand, etc. Keep little children away from any flames, as always. It is appropriate to say, "With these members of the Green Standing People, or with these herbs, I purify this space and remember that it is sacred. Together we drive away any negative energy from this place, and rededicate it to whole and positive energy."

When you are finished cleansing and purifying the greater space you live in, it is appropriate to cleanse and purify the space around your person and around each other. This is a moving and centering experience and helps create the ceremonial mood that is necessary. I like to start at a person's head, and circle the herbs around him to her, from top to bottom, saying, "The Sacred space around you is now cleared of any negative energy. You are standing in a Sacred space that is pure and healthy and that supports your Physical and Spiritual Energy, right here, right now."

When everything has been purified and sanctified, it is good to stand quietly for a few seconds, probably in a circle, and breathe deeply three times, envisioning the purity entering and lodging in your inner space.

ALTAR AND SYMBOLS FOR WINTER SOLSTICE

Caves, crystals or other appropriate minerals or stones, sunflowers, owls, white buffalos, winter herbs, sun figures or pictures, seeds, earth, rocks (because they are the most patient and enduring "people" in the Sacred Circle of Life. They teach us how to just BE.), yellow round fruits like lemons or grapefruits, lemon flavors, figurines or dolls capturing old age, photos of ancestors or grandparents, etc. Be aware that any symbol that is meaningful to you, in keeping with the meaning of the winter solstice, is appropriate. I try to create the mixture of the darkness and coldness of winter and the promise of the arriving sun by placing a mirror or aluminum foil...something reflective, on a low bench, such as a piano bench, and standing crystals and geodes on it. I surround it with white candles which will be lit during the ceremony. People place their own symbols on it as they enter, because the Altar needs to be representative of everybody. Nearby, we have baskets of lemons and sun hangings to add at an appropriate time.

SYMBOLIC HERBS AND GREENERY

According to the book *A DRUID'S HERBAL*, plants are brought into the house at the time of the Winter Solstice to assure the Woodland Spirits that they can find safe refuge with us during this period of darkness and cold. Plants that were, and often still are, brought in at this time, include:

1. Yellow Cedar (Arborvitae) for cleansing and purity.
2. Ash, considered an herb of the sun, for protection.
3. Bay Laurel, to bring the light of the sun into the house and ward off illness.
4. Blessed Thistle, an herb still used to cleanse the blood, for protection, joy, and prosperity.
5. Chamomile, an herb still used for its ability to soothe and cleanse, for love and purification.
6. Frankincense, an antiseptic herb, used symbolically to bring purification and protection.
7. Holly, for protection and to symbolize the co-existence of human and plant spirit and life.
8. Juniper, for love and protection.
9. Mistletoe, for healing, peace, and beautiful dreams.
10. Pine, for peace, healing, and joy.

The Altar can be a low table or a bridge table. It does not have to be fancy. It can be a board on the floor or a windowsill. It can be the floor itself. It can, of course, be the earth. If you are re-creating a Medicine Wheel on the floor to do your Ceremony (more on that at a later date), you might want to place the Altar within it, in the North section of the room.

LIGHT AND SOUND

The Winter Solstice is a Ceremony honoring both darkness and light. Some like to refer to it as the battle between darkness and the sun, but I prefer not to think of it in terms of war but in terms of natural, peaceful, progression. In terms of yet another example of the oscillation of all life forms, swinging from one aspect to the other and then back again, over and over again, just as we inhale and exhale over and over again, and sleep and wake and sleep again, and live and die and live again.

Traditionally, in many part of Europe, the Ceremony included lighting huge bonfires to lure the sun back to earth, perhaps in the hope that if he, Grandfather Sun, were happier among his own heat and light, he would find it here, or perhaps to show how the puny attempt at temporary heat and light was not enough. At any rate, to this day, members of Scandinavian communities still light the fires at Winter Solstice to express hope, joy, and a sense of Community effort. In many places, keeping the fires burning through the nights or through the dark times was considered a sacred thing to do, just as the Yule log is still lit in many fireplaces today. Eleanor Roosevelt felt that it is better to light one candle than to curse the dark, and that is what people have tried to do for centuries, during the darkest part of the year.

For our Winter Solstice Ceremonies, I once bought 13 inexpensive glass candle holders. I always have a dozen white candles and one bright yellow or golden-colored one. Each person lights one of the white candles, making his or her own relevant statement or wish. Then one person lights the yellow one, in tribute to the returning sun, to hope, to life, to the Wisdom and Silence of Winter and the Return of Light and Growing Things Manifesting.

If you have people who can supply live music, that is wonderful. I like to use heartbeat drumming on a drum. There are also wonderful tapes or CDs with fitting music, perhaps with bells, or winter sounds. Favorite seasonal music is often appropriate. However, I avoid music with definite connections to particular religions or holidays because people of many different beliefs or non beliefs are often present, and the Winter Solstice celebrates a part of our Natural World, rather than a particular doctrine.

MAKING CEREMONY

The two most difficult times of a Ceremony are settling down to actually begin, because most people feel a little silly about creating Ceremony in the familiar surroundings of an apartment or den... and then to give up its power, and actually end. I suggest people leave all outer garments, purses, packages, etc. in a room other than the Ceremony Room. Make sure they have everything they will need: glasses, pens, etc. in the Ceremony Room, so they will be able to relax and concentrate. IT IS UP TO THE LEADER TO SET THE MOOD AND BEGIN THE CEREMONY. If you have set up a Medicine Wheel, you will probably want to sit around it or inside it, depending on how large it is and how many people you are. It is always appropriate to sit in a circle of some kind, although you will need to adapt to the space available.

Ritual

Priestess/Priest:

We are here to honor and celebrate the Winter Solstice. We are open and receptive to the Positive Energy that resides within us and all around us, that keeps us whole and balanced, and surrounds us with love and safekeeping. Only good can come from our activities here, for ourselves, for our community, for the world.....Does anybody want to add something to that before we begin a meditation?....

A MEDITATION for WINTER SOLSTICE

Find a comfortable position. Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Release all pent up energy and stress. Inhale and exhale again, and sense

the Sacred Space that surrounds you. Draw its pure white love light close to you. Feel it spread out to touch your neighbor's Sacred Space. Feel it spread out and fill this room with Love and Light and Peace. See or sense that you are in the woods, on the coldest, darkest, night of the year. You feel perfectly safe and protected. See the pine trees around you are standing guard with their green, icy boughs. See the lake in front of you is frozen. Hear the ground crackle as you walk. Your nose is cold, but you feel fine... alive, and brisk, and well. The cold sharpens your senses.

You feel as though you can hear sounds you have never heard before. Ssssh. Listen for them. What do you hear? (silence). You can see wonderful things you have never seen before, both with your outer vision and your inner vision. Watch them. What do you see? (silence. allow time).

In the darkness wonderful visions and ideas and solutions come to you...answers to problems you are facing. Remedies for distress. Cures for diseases are arriving. If you are looking for an answer to a problem, now is the time to be open to its arrival Tell it that it is welcome, and that it can find safe lodging with you. (silence) Now sit quietly and appreciate the darkness and the clarity of the cold. Be aware of the energy of life beneath the dark, cold ground. Feel your connection with the seeds sleeping there, gathering strength and storing nourishment for their coming appearance on earth. Feel the connection with the seeds of your life getting ready to blossom in good health and vibrancy. In the safety of the dark and the cold, new healthy life is getting ready to appear.

Breathe deeply and exhale. Focus on your midriff now. Notice the golden spot that is forming there. Feel it warming you, providing inner heat. See or sense its golden sphere spreading inside you. Feel its golden rays reaching up to, like an inner sun, to touch your heart and down to warm your navel area. And down some more into your legs, and down your arms, and up into your neck and head. Inhale and enjoy this inner warmth. Feel the heat warm your feet. Feel your hands and feet tingle with warmth, as you stand in the dark, cold woods on this dark, cold night. Sense the halo of warm, nurturing heat that is now surrounding your head. Feel the sphere of comforting, healing heat move down outside you, encircling your entire body.

Know that you have the safety and healing powers of both heat and cold. Know that you are balanced and whole. Feel that you are safely rooted into the ground, but that your spirit is free. Know that both the darkness and the light are safe for you. Focus on any area that needs healing. Allow the darkness and light to penetrate that area with healing power.

Take a deep breath and feel both alert and relaxed. Feel Safe. Take a deep breath and say thank you to the powers that be for this feeling of safety

and well-being. (silence) Take a deep breath and ask for continued protection for you and your safety and well-being, and for anyone about whom you are concerned. (silence)

Take a deep breath and envision world peace. (silence) When you are ready, gently open your eyes, and we will begin our Ceremony. (Give people a chance to re-acustom themselves to the here-and-now reality. I always make sure that everybody is well-grounded and at ease, before I continue. For some people, meditation creates a sense of unease because there is too much unfinished business in their lives, so make sure everybody is centered and okay.)

TRIBUTE TO THE WINTER AND NORTHERN DIRECTION

Anyone from the Group: (FACING NORTH, HOLDING SOMETHING TO PLACE IN THE NORTH)

Great spirits of the Winter and of the North Direction. (Some people prefer to use the word, "God" instead. Do whatever you are comfortable with.) Hear us as we come asking for the wisdom and the courage to age gracefully in our lives and in our endeavors. Honor us with your presence as we stand in your Sacred section of our Season and of our Earth walk. Permit the crystal clarity of winter snow to bring purity to our lives and thoughts, and healing to our bodies and to our world. Spirit of the White Buffalo, help us to turn the lessons we have learned and the knowledge we have gained into wisdom and abundance, spiritually and physically. Allow us to understand the DIGNITY OF BEING. Help us to learn the truth and beauty of NOT DOING. Spirit of the Great White Owl, teach us to fly with quiet grace and seeing eyes through the dark times of our lives. Give us the patience to share ourselves and our knowledge with those who can use them. Give us the faith and the courage to continue our journeys to the end, in dignity, so that our energy may once again arrive in the Dawn of the East. **SHOW US HOW TO FIND JOY IN DARKNESS AND IN ENDINGS, AS WELL AS IN LIGHT AND IN BEGINNINGS.**

CANDLE LIGHTING

In a darkened room, taking necessary fire safety precautions, have each participant come up to the altar, or prescribed place, to light a white candle, saying whatever wish or statement or tribute they have prepared or choose to adlib, as they do so. It is a good idea to have one person seated at the candles to make sure everything is stable. When all the candles are lit, have a chosen person come up to pay tribute to the returning sun and light into our earth space and into our personal spaces, as he/she lights the yellow candle.

ACTIVITY

Sitting in the candlelight is a good time for people to "breathe in the energy" of whatever they want to internalize, as the days lengthen and the seeds begin growing and to "exhale the energy" of whatever they want to remove from their lives. Explain to people that, in breathing the breath of life, we will each choose and express an exchange of energies. For example, we might exchange sickness for health, sadness for joy, poverty for prosperity, depression for hope, battle for peace, this job for a new job, etc.

As you go around the circle, each person will say, "At this time, I choose to exhale sadness and inhale joy," then she will say, "exhale sadness" and the entire group will exhale the sadness with her, for her and, if they choose, for themselves. "And inhale joy," and together the group will help him or her inhale joy. This group energy strengthens each individual's effort.

GROUP TALK

This is the time when each person might want to share a tale from his or her own myth/life about a time when darkness descended in his/her life, and what was done to relieve it or how somebody else brought light to the darkness. It is a good idea to use a time-limit, so each person gets an appropriate time to speak, and not to allow any interruptions until the person has finished his/her tale. In the tradition of many speaking circles, you might want to present the speaker with a Speaking Stick. This gives him or her the right to speak, uninterrupted, as long as the stick is held.

When all discussion is finished, ask the group if they are ready to end the ceremony and begin the celebration. If they are, this closing is usually effective. Preferably sitting on the floor, close enough to reach out for each other's hands, the first person looks at the person to her right and says, by name, "Jane, I want to share my energy with you and wish you.... (whatever). Jane takes her hand and says, "thank you." Jane then turns to the person on her right and says, "Bob, I want to share my energy with you and wish you...." Bob says, "Thank you," and continues the process. When everybody has spoken, everybody should be holding hands.

Priest/Priestess:

If you hold hands gently enough, and offer your positive energy to this Circle, we will feel the energy traveling from one person to the other, from one hand to the other, as each person's energy joins forces with the next, and together we create a great power for good. (People will usually nod or smile or voice their sense of tingling or energy in their hands or arms). Let us enjoy this sense of mutual energy, love, and togetherness. (silence) If

you choose close your eyes now and send that energy out to create a world of health and peace for all. Take a moment to envision or sense the world at peace.

LET THE PARTY BEGIN

Ask if everybody is ready for the entrance of light, and with great hoops and hollering, say goodbye to the darkness and turn on the lights. Sometimes people attach sun symbols or herb sprigs to their clothes or to the walls.

Bring in the food, which I often make sure includes something with "seeds" to represent beginnings...such as fruit, cookies or cakes with sesame or poppy seeds, etc. I think a great punch in which are floating great rounds of orange and lemon slices, and one grand lemon floating, whole, in its center is appropriate, as is Jello Shots, Rum and Coke, etc.. Turn up the music. Tap your feet. Clap your hands. Time to Celebrate! It would be nice to send each person home with some seeds to plant or a small pot of earth in which a seed has already been planted.

**Hugs
MJ**

Solstice