

The Controversial Cauldron

Imbolc ~ Candlemas 2009

Email
Witches



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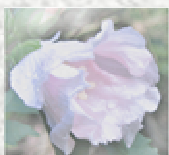
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Group Information:

- Members: 705
- Founded: Jul 17, 2002
- Language: English
- Representing:

Argentina, Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, England, France, Greenland, Hawaii, Hungary, India, Jamaica, Italy, Kuwait, Mexico, New Zealand, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Nova Scotia, Panama, the Philippines, Peru, South Africa, Scotland, Slovenia, the USA and Wales.



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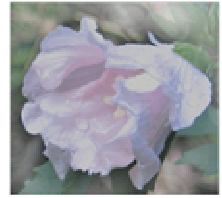
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Imbolc - Candlemas

Written and compiled by George Knowles



Imbolc is one of the four Greater Sabbats of the witch's calendar. A cross-quarter fire festival, Imbolc falls between "Yule" - the Winter Solstice, and "Ostara" - the Spring Equinox. Celebrated in the Northern Hemisphere on the 2nd February, in the Southern Hemisphere the equivalent Sabbat is Lammas. The main purpose of Imbolc is a celebration of the returning Sun, which daily grows stronger lengthening the days and reducing the night. As such, the main feature of this festival is the lighting of fires and candles in sympathetic imitation of the Sun's growing light.

Imbolc of old was traditionally a time of purification, both physically and mentally. After the enforced indoor living of the winter months, when the home was shutdown to guard against the cold, it was a welcome relief for many people to re-open the shutters and welcome in the sunlight. While still in the grip of the last ravages of winter, plant life is beginning to revive and shoot new buds, and farm animals, in particular sheep, are producing new lambs to add to the livestock. As the Sun grows in strength, a new cycle of life returns to the earth.



In pagan mythology Imbolc marks the recovery of the Goddess as she sleeps on after the birth of the Sun God, and acknowledges his growing maturity as he gains strength to become the new light of the year. After his rest and recuperation during winter's annual hibernation, the Sun god's light begins to purify the earth. Although he is still young, he is lusty and his growing power can be felt in the lengthening of the days. As his power grows and warms the earth, so too do the early beginnings of spring appear as nature rebirths itself again.

The name Imbolc is derived from the Gaelic word "Oimeic" (which means "ewes milk"), and appropriately so, for this is the lambing season, a time when many of our herd animals have either given birth or their wombs are expectantly swollen. Imbolc is also known by various other names, including: Bridget's Day (*Pagan*), Imbolge Brigantia (*Caledonni*), Disting (*Teutonic*), Lupercalia (*Roman* - 15th Feb), Groundhog Day

(*America*), Candlelaria (*Mexican*), the Snowdrop Festival, the Feast of Torches, the Feast of Lights, the Feast of Pan and Feast of the Waxing Light. However, when Christianity arrived, as they did with many of the old pagan rituals, Imbolc was re-invented and renamed "Candlemas" for when candles are lit as a symbolic reminder of the purification of the Virgin Mary. In Scotland it is known as: *Là Fhèill Brìghde*, in Ireland as: *Là Fhéile Bríde*, and in Wales as: *Gwyl Ffraed*.

Fire is the most important aspect of this celebration, for it was also a day dedicated to the pagan Goddess Bridget (also known as Brigid, Bride, Brigit or Brid). Bridget is a triple aspect Goddess (revered as Maiden, Mother and Crone), who as a Maiden ruled over - Poetry, Writing, Inspiration and Music, as a Mother over - Healing, Midwifery and Herbalism, and as a Crone over - Fire and the working arts of the Smithy. Again here Christianity intervenes, but instead of doing away with her as a pagan Goddess, they canonized her as "St. Bridget" the patron Saint of Ireland who founded a church and monastery at Kildare. It was here according to legend that the Priestesses of the Goddess constantly tended a sacred flame in her honour.

In Western Europe, Imbolc was time to start preparing the fields for the first planting, and to bless the crop seeds saved and stored from the last harvest. It was also a time to consecrate and bless all their agricultural tools ready for the planting season. Of old, the success of the new farming season was of greatest importance, and as the winter stores of food were beginning to run out, rituals were performed at Imbolc to ensure a steady supply of food until the first harvest was brought in later at Lammas (August 1st). One old tradition was to drag a decorated plough around the fields followed by the villagers dropping pieces of cheese and bread into the newly turned furrows as offerings to the nature spirits. As well as the seeds, Corn dollies saved from the last harvest would also be planted in the fields in a fertility rite to encourage new growth.



Another old custom was to make "Bridget's Crosses" woven from leftover wheat stalks. These would be hung

in barns and over doorways, in the home and over beds to encourage the blessings of the Goddess. Similar charm crosses were also made and exchanged as symbols of protection and prosperity for the coming year. The making of “Bridget Dollies” was another old tradition. Fashioned from leftover wheat stalks, dollies were made and dressed in women’s clothing, then placed in baskets of white flowers with a wand, candle or other phallic object to encourage fertility. Placed near the front door of the home, or sometimes near the hearth, a white candle would be lit nearby and left to burn as an invitation for Bridget to visit through the night and favour them with her blessings.



the church in a Festival of Light. After a service to honour the purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, candles to be used in the church during the following year would be blessed and consecrated by the priest. The church practice of celebrating Candlemas continued in England until the 16th century, at which time during the Reformation it was discontinued, being too closely allied to pagan practices and the veneration of magical accessories.

The use of candles in a Festival of Light never died out however, for in 1951 after the repeal of the old antiquated witchcraft laws still being enforced in England, there was a resurgence of interest in old pagan



Imbolc is all about new beginnings. On the eve of Imbolc all the home fires would have been put out, cleaned out, and re-lit symbolic of the returning light of the Sun, and in keeping with this symbolism, a broom made from three sacred woods, the handle from Ash, the brush from Birch twigs and the binding cord from Willow, symbolic of the three-fold aspects of the Goddess, was placed by the front door to symbolize sweeping out the old and welcoming in the new. During the evening, an especially large candle would have been lit and the family gathered around it for a feast, during which plans and promises to be kept through the new season would be discussed and debated until it burned out. It was also customary at Sunset to ritually light a candle in each room of the home in honour of the Sun’s return.

After the rise of Christianity in Britain, the old pagan custom of lighting candles at Imbolc was incorporated into the Roman Catholic Church and renamed Candlemas. On the eve of Candlemas, candles were distributed to church congregations and paraded around

practices. This was spearheaded by Gerald B. Gardner, who founded the contemporary form of Witchcraft known as the Gardnerian Tradition, which was quickly followed by numerous other traditions. Common among all such traditions are the initiation rituals, many of which take place at Imbolc - it being a traditional time of new beginnings. Today one of the main features of many coven initiations is a procession of candlelight leading the initiate into the circle, from which their new beginnings as a Witch will take place.

Imbolc then is a time to spring clean both your mental and physical abilities, to take stock of your life and make a fresh start. By planning ahead and planting new seeds (ideas) now for the future, who knows what new opportunities will grow from them. As the Sun grows stronger in the sky, so too should you look forward with optimism; and as your seeds (ideas) mature, so may you realise your hopes and dreams.

**“All thoughts, all passions, all delights
Whatever stirs this mortal frame
All are but ministers of Love
And feed his sacred flame”**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834)

“I feel again a spark of that ancient flame”

Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro) 70–19 BC - Aeneid

Spring Gods & Goddesses of Fertility

Written and compiled by Ardriana Cahill

Brigid (Irish/Celtic)~ Brigid gets top billing on her Feast Day. In her maiden aspect, this triple-faced Goddess is honoured at the festival of Imbolg which celebrates the first emergence of Spring; a fire/sun goddess she is goddess of the sacred fire, of home, hearth, the forge, healing, poets, inspiration and fertility. She was often seen as the maiden aspect of the Great Mother goddess Dana/ Danu. In her own right, she was also known as a Great Mother Goddess as the second face of her Three Brighids persona, being at once, maiden, mother and matron (crone).

[Editors note: There must be hundreds of fertility gods and goddesses: the following are just some of those classified as maiden aspects of more complex goddesses, fertility, vegetation and Spring gods and goddesses who may have more complex attributes, but are featured here in for Spring attributes.]

Adonis (Greek) Phoenecian/Syrian beautiful youth deity of rebirth and vegetation. His fertility cult belonged to women alone.

Ala (Nigerian) Mother Goddess in her aspect as goddess of fertility of both animals and humans.

Ama-arhus (Akkadian/ Babylonian) A fertility goddess.

Aphrodite (Greek) Goddess of beauty, love, sexual desire and passion. She represents fertility through the act of sexual intercourse.

Arianrhod (Wales) As a maiden, she is associated with fertility and beauty.

Ashur (Assyria) God of both war and fertility, and husband to Ishtar.

Attis (Phrygian) God adopted by the Greeks, tied to a fertility cult through the virgin birth of his mother.

Apollo (Greek) god in his aspect of fertility god.

Artio (Swiss) Bear Goddess who emerges from hibernation to herald the return of Spring.

Artemis (Greek) maiden goddess of fertility.

Bacchus (Roman) rustic wine god of lust and fertility.

Baal (Canaan) a fertility god - widely venerated throughout the Fertile Crescent and the Middle East.

Bast (Egyptian) Cat headed goddess associated with both fertility and childbirth.

Beive (Finnish/Sámi-the indigenous Nordic people) A Sun Goddess associated with the fertility of plants and animals, especially reindeer. With her daughter Beiwe-Neia, she pulls the green shoots from the winter earth so the reindeer can feed.

Bleudewedd (Welsh/Celtic) Her name means "flower face," since this Spring goddess was created by magic

from nine spring flowers.

Ceres (Roman) She was a grain Goddess, whose story is counterpart to the story of the Greek goddess Demeter, mother of the Proserpine/Proserpina. Also Terra Mater or Tellus Mater, the personification of Earth herself was associated with Ceres.

Chalchihuitlicue (Aztec) goddess of love, magic, spirits, flowers, and Spring growth. She was called "Precious Jewel" and was the goddess of gemstones, flowing water, storms, streams, and whirlpools.

Chloris (Greek) She was the wife of Zephyrus. Goddess of Spring (Flora was her Roman equivalent). To simply utter her name, which means "pale green," was to cause the earth to green. Zephyrus (Favonius, his Roman equivalent) was the Greek God of the west wind, who protector of flowers and plants drawn forth in his wife's name. That same name from which we get the name for Chlorophyll, the green pigment found in most plants.

Cybele (Phrygian/Greek/Roman) She was the personification of the Earth herself and thus the great goddess of fertility. Also known as Magna Mater.

Dagon (Philistinian) God vegetation and fertility.

Demeter (Greek) goddess of fertility, mother of Persphone.

Dionysus (Greek) God of lust and fertility. His flower festival for opening the new wine called Anthesteria was held in February.

Dziewanna (Eastern European) Polish Mother-Goddess of Spring and Agriculture.

Eros (Greek) god of lust, love, sex and fertility.

Epona (Celtic/Roman) Horse goddess, in her guise as a goddess of fertility, as shown by her attribute of being at the presence of Spring foals.

Freyja (Norse/Teutonic) Goddess of beauty, sexual desire and fertility.

Faunus (Roman) God of the wilds, mountain pastures and fertility, who was also seen as a protector of herdsmen and their herds.

Flora (Roman) goddess of flowering plants, especially those that bore fruit.

Her festival, the Floralia, took place in

April or early May and was marked with dancing, drinking, and flowers.

Fortuna (Roman) Grain goddess of abundance, of fortune and fate. The Festival of Faunalia celebrated in her honor and of Faunus in February.

Freja (Norse) This Nordic fertility Goddess is linked with spring growth and flowers.

Freyr (Norse) Goddess of agriculture.

Gefn (Norse) This is another name for the Nordic Goddess Freya.

Gefjon (Norse) handmaidens to Frigg, she is associated with fertility. Each year, a strip of ground was plowed in her name before the entire field to ensure fertility.



Ghede (Voudoun) The god of both fertility. His phallus is said to be carved along a gravedigger's tools.

Gou-Mang, Kou-Mang (Chinese) dragon-messenger of the Chinese Sky God, Gou-Mang comes from the East, bringing springtime and happiness.

The Green Man (Many cultures) his images are found around the world, as a man wearing a leafy mask or a man made entirely out of greenery. He is a vegetation deity representing rebirth, or "renaissance," of new growth each spring. Often associated by modern pagans with the Greek, Pan, and the Welsh, Kurnunnos.

Haumea (Hawaii) She was identified with her mother Papa. Haumea was said to be continually reborn.

Inanna (Sumerian) goddess of love, fertility and war. Her symbol is the eight-pointed star.

Inari (Japanese/Shinto) rice god, both male and female, depicted as either an old man sitting on a pile of rice with two foxes beside him or of a beautiful fox-woman. Inari descends from the mountains each Spring to watch over the rice fields and represents prosperity and friendship. S/he is venerated twice a year in Spring and Autumn.

Hare Ke (West African) Goddess of the spring rains that bring fertility back to the land.

Hebe (Greek) The Goddess of eternal youth and Spring.

Ishtar (Sumerian/Babylonian) goddess of love and fertility.

Juno Februa (Roman) One of the many faces of Juno (Queen of the gods). This is Juno as the goddess of love and fertility. Her orgiastic festival was held in February.

Kono-Hana-Sakuya-Hime (Japanese) She is associated with the Springtime and cherry blossom as her name means "Lady who makes the trees bloom."

Kore (Greek) an alternative name for the Greek Goddess Persephone.

Kostroma (Russian) fertility Goddess and personification of Spring. In Russian mythology she dies at the end of each Spring, only to arise once more at the end of the following winter.

Kokopelli - Native American fertility god.

Lada (Eastern European) goddess of Spring and Love, she was worshipped throughout Lithuania, Poland and Russia.

Laka (Hawaiian) Goddess identified with the hula and the red lehua blossom as is a deity of fertility.

Libera (Roman) Together with Ceres and Liber she formed part of a triad of ancient Roman Gods and Goddesses responsible for bringing fertility back to the land.

Lono (Hawaiian) god of fertility and music who descended to Earth on a rainbow to marry Laka.

Maia (Greek) fertility goddess accessible only to women associated with Vulcan and Fauna. Goddess of spring, rebirth and renewal. Identified in Roman mythology with Maia Maestas (also called Fauna, Bona Dea (the 'Good

Goddess') and Ops), she may be equivalent to an old Italic goddess of spring.

Marduk (Sumerian/Akkadian/ Babylonian) Marduk's was connected with fertility, air, earth, water, vegetation, judgment, and magic.

Mars (Roman) From the Etruscan agricultural god, Maris, he was originally a god of fertility and vegetation and protector of cattle, fields and boundaries.

Min (Egyptian) god of male virility and fertility, he is almost always depicted holding a flail in one hand and possessing an erect penis. His black skin represented the fertile black soil after the Nile's overflow. He is married to the goddess of love and fertility, Quetesh. Often identified with the Greek god Pan

Macha (Ireland) Fertility goddess who primarily concerned herself with male virility.

Myllita (Babylonian/Assyrian) goddess of fertility and childbirth.

Nanshe (Sumerian) water goddess of fertility and justice, she was also the patroness of dreams and prophecy.

Ninurta (Sumerian/Akkadian) God of rain, fertility, thunderstorms, the plow, floods, wells, & the south wind.

Olwen (Welsh/Celtic) maiden goddess of sunlight she reappeared every Spring. She possessed such magnificent beauty that wherever she walked a trail of white clover flowers grew beneath her feet.

Pan or Phaunos (Greek) god of nature, Pan is god of lust and male virility. God of shepherds and flocks.

Pax (Roman) goddess of Peace, whose birth is celebrated in February was often associated with the bucolic serenity of Spring.

Persephone (Greek) Her mother Demeter grieves as her daughter leaves to live in the underworld each Autumn causing the land to become cold and barren. When Persephone returns to her in the Spring, Demeter's joy blesses the earth with fertility and new growth.

Prosepina (Roman) She was the Roman counterpart to Persephone and daughter of the grain Goddess Ceres.

Quetesh (Egypt) Husband of Min, she is the goddess of love and fertility.

Rafu-Sen (Japanese) Goddess of plum blossoms.

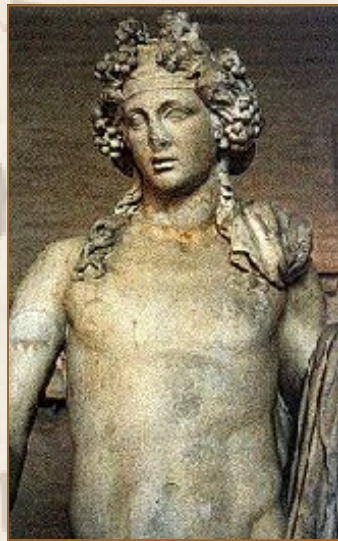
Renpet (Egyptian) personification of the year, beginning in spring. Depicted

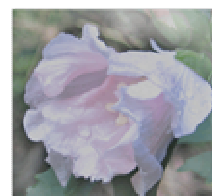
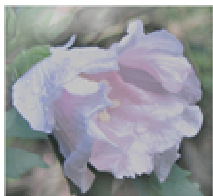
with a crown of palm leaves.

Sita (Hindu) Spring Goddess of agriculture and the earth.

Shiva (India) God of fertility, medicine, and physical love.

Venus (Roman) goddess mostly equivalent to Aphrodite. Venus was the goddess of love, beauty, sexuality, and fertility (but in her earliest age, Venus was also a goddess of war whose attributes were later given to Mars).





Imbolc Ritual 2009

by Crone

This ritual is written for use by a Solitary practitioner, but can easily be adopted for use by covens or groups simply by changing the first person to plural.

In addition to your usual altar setting, have a deep bowl of grain on the left as you face the altar, a deep bowl of earth on the right, many unlighted white candles, many candle holders, a pot of soil and a bulb or cluster of seeds. If you wish, use a white altar cloth, and decorate with evergreen boughs. A small statue of Bridget is a nice addition. Wear a light colored garment covered by a dark cloak or long coat.

Centering:

Take several deep breaths and focus on your altar and your center. When you are ready say: "I come to this space with a clear mind and an open heart."

Casting the Circle:

Cast the Circle with a broom, sweeping away the last of the cold of winter and any negativity it represents to you. Chant repeatedly while casting:

"I cast this Circle here today
by sweeping all my cares away."

Invoking the Directions:

Light a candle in the east and secure it in a holder either in the east of your Circle or the east corner of your altar with these words: "From the East comes the sweet breath of the goddess, warming the air and bringing messages of spring."

Light a candle in the South, in the same manner, saying: "From the South comes fire and the passion of the goddess to light my way and brighten my day with joy of the new season."

And a candle in the West: "From the West come cleansing and purifying waters, as the goddess washes away the dark of winter and purifies me with the spring."

And in the North: "From the North comes soft rich soil from the body of the goddess which is Earth itself, to accept the seeds of growth and change."

Invoking the goddess and the god:

"I invite the goddess Bridget to be with me.
I call her as the Maiden bride,
Fresh as spring which begins anew,
Bright as the flames which bring new light,
Gentle as the air which starts to warm,
Soft as the soil which receives new seed,
Open as my heart is
to receive her blessings. I light in her honor this candle
embedded in grain,
in seeds which will burst forth with the spring.
Her Son of the Sun
I invite to our Circle
Bringing his light and youth.
I light in his honor

This candle embedded in earth,
which will nurture the seeds of the season.
May the warmth and joy

Of the goddess and the god
Sweep away the remaining dark
And bring love and light
To me and to the world."

"I am between the worlds,
Beyond the bounds of time,
Where day and night,
Birth and death,
Joy and sorrow,
Meet as one."

Magickal Working:

Take up the pot of soil and the bulb or group of seeds. Make the soil ready to receive the impending growth. Plant your seed or bulb. While doing so, focus on a growth or change you wish to see within yourself. Keep that image of your refreshed and renewed self in your mind as you plant the seed with this chant which you repeat as you plant:

"End of winter. Start of spring. Honor every living thing. Growth for me is what they bring."

Cast off your dark covering and show your light garment, with these words:

"I cast aside the dark of night.
The goddess will restore the light."

Then light the candles remaining on the altar. Speak these words as you light each candle:

"This light will guide me on my way
as dark night moves into the day."



Closing:

Stand in front of your altar and take in the candles, the earth, the grain, the light, and the newly planted bulb or seed. Speak these words:

"I carry this light in my heart. I know that I am loved. I know that I am worthy of love. I will move forth into the spring renewed and refreshed. As I water my plant, so I will nurture my spirit in its growth. So mote it be."

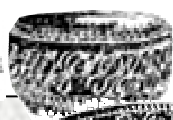
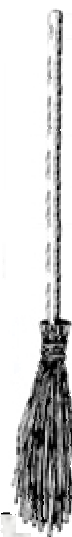
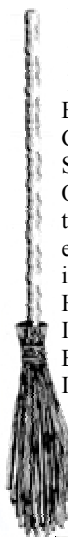
Extinguish all candles in silence. As they are all extinguished say:

"I extinguish the flames, but the light will remain and grow brighter in my heart."

Dismissing the goddess and the god:

"Sweet Bridget, bride of spring, with your Son of the Sun, my thanks for your presence and your refreshing guidance. Like the flames, you may be gone from this space, but you remain brighter in my heart."

"The Circle is open but unbroken.
The peace of the goddess
And the strength of the god
Be ever in my heart.
Blessed be."

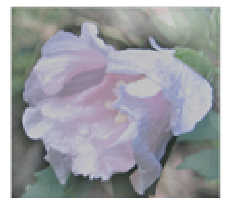


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Crone is an active member of the UU (CUUP's) and has been
a member of Email Witches since 2004

Animal Wisdom ~ Sheep

by Lil



In northern Europe, February was the traditional month of lambing. The ewe's milk came in before the time of giving birth and so we have the names, Imbolc, "in the belly," and Oimele, "ewe's milk," as the names of the festival we are celebrating at this time of year. What better time to look at our friend, Sheep, as Totem.

Sheep originated in Asia. We see them as totems in many early Asian civilizations. Sheep has been included in the Chinese zodiac as well as the sign of Aries in the Western zodiac. During the Stone Age, wild sheep were hunted for their meat. Toward the end of the Stone Age, about 10,000 years ago, sheep began to be domesticated. It is thought that this was because the human population had grown to such an extent that having a flock of sheep available provided a consistent source of both meat and milk, and was therefore an efficient means for survival.



Early sheep were hairy and didn't have much wool. As time passed, humans began to breed sheep with longer hair and eventually, about 3,500 BCE, the art of spinning wool for thread and yarn evolved. Interestingly, sheep were also being bred to be less intelligent than their predecessors so they would be easier to manage and less likely to escape. Today's sheep have smaller brains than their ancient ancestors. However, as we shall see, they are not as stupid as they are portrayed to be.

Sheep were one of the earliest animals to be domesticated. Long has been the relationship between sheep and humankind as evidenced by the intertwining of sheep into various cultures, their religions and astrology. The trading of wool and sheep products led to the first international trade. Today sheep farming is a key industry for countries such as New Zealand, Australia, South America and the British Isles.

Gregariousness, or the tendency to gather in social groups of like kind, is a word commonly used to describe sheep behavior. Sheep have strong flocking instincts. It is this flocking instinct that causes them to stick together. It is much more difficult to attack a sheep in a large group than it is a lone stray. They also have an instinct to follow each other. It doesn't matter who's leading. There is a story of a flock falling off a cliff to their deaths because one random sheep decided to take a walk. They are a prey animal and will run from what frightens them.

As a prey animal, the sheep depends greatly on its senses for survival, relying heavily upon its sense of sight. If it doesn't keep other sheep in view at all times, it will become upset and agitated. A sheep's field of vision ranges from 190-306 degrees with just a slight turn of the head. Sheep can recognize and remember up to fifty sheep faces, and even human ones, for years.

Sheep have a keen sense of hearing and become frightened with loud noises. Their sense of smell is highly developed as they can distinguish between their fellow sheep and predators, another necessary defense mechanism. The rams use their sense of smell to locate available females and the ewes use their sense of smell to locate their young. The sense of touch is important for sheep. Group animals stay close together and the sense of touching each other calms the sheep. Lambs stay in close physical contact with their mothers. Taste helps

sheep to distinguish between food stuffs. They have been known to choose foods that will make them feel better, a sort of self-medication.

Because of their strong flocking instinct, and their flight response when threatened, sheep are often thought to be unintelligent. This, however, has been disproved. As previously mentioned, sheep have excellent memories. They can also problem solve. It has been reported that they found their way over a cattle grid to get to better food. They have also demonstrated the ability to learn to navigate mazes.

Although mostly docile, sheep can be aggressive and dangerous. A male during rutting season, for example, will show aggressive behavior in an effort to dominate the flock. A ewe will show aggressive and protective behavior when their lambs are threatened.

Baby lambs love to play. They like to run, jump and climb on things. Their cousins in the wild, Big Horn Sheep, Cashmere Goats and Tibetan Sheep live and climb in the highest of mountains portraying a sense of loftiness and being sure footed.

Sheep like their food. Often they are moved with enticements of food instead of being herded with



dogs. They are grazers, cud chewers, ruminants. By definition, ruminants graze and regurgitate already chewed and swallowed food to have another go at it. Relaxation is a key ingredient to feeding this way as opposed to the adrenalin rush experienced by predatory



carnivores during their hunt and kill. Rumination also has another definition, one that was derived from the behavior of sheep, which is to think at length, to contemplate, consider, study; to think deeply or ponder; to reflect on over and over again.

When Sheep enters your life, perhaps it is an indication that you have been dwelling on an issue or situation too long and it is time to seek resolution and move on. The other side of that coin to consider is that perhaps you may have been too hasty in a decision or action and need to think deeply, ponder, study or meditate more on a particular situation or issue.

Sheep can indicate balance in precarious situations, lofty ideals, perseverance, status and inspiration. When Sheep shows up, beware of going with the general flow. Look at all sides of the situation before making a decision. Don't follow the flock off a cliff to your detriment.

However, there are times when there is safety in numbers, and when Sheep shows up, it might be an

indication to identify your resources and allies and stick close by them to weather out whatever storm may be on the horizon. It may also be a time to think about developing a sense of community and cooperation.

Sheep as Totem reminds us to use all of our senses, internal as well as external, and our intellectual capacity as we go about our daily lives. Sheep reminds us that staying calm and relaxed will help us to better digest, understand and problem-solve what is put in front of us.

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Sheep herself



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Lil lives in northeast Ohio and is a solitary pagan witch. She has been a member of EW since 2005.

Totem Awareness

"In the past shamans, priests, and priestesses were the keepers of the sacred knowledge of life. These individuals were tied to the rhythms and forces of nature. They were capable of walking the threads that link the invisible and visible worlds. They helped people remember that all trees are divine and that all animals speak to those who listen."

There is a shaman and priest or priestess in all of us. It is our job to realize and reconnect to that fact. And it is through the expressions of Nature that we can enhance and hasten the realization and reconnection.

"When we see one aspect of the world with new eyes, we begin to see ourselves with new eyes as well."

It is very common during our celebrations of the Sabbats and Esbats, our Dedications or Initiations, that animals will make themselves known. Animal Spirit understands the sacred journey we are on, and comes to join us in celebration as we explore and discover our truest selves. Many wish to impart their wisdom, if we will but hear. Are you listening?

"Nature teaches to those who will learn from Her."

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All quotations attributed to Ted Andrews: *Animal-Speak: the Spiritual & Magical Powers of Creatures Great & Small*



A Gift From the Sheep

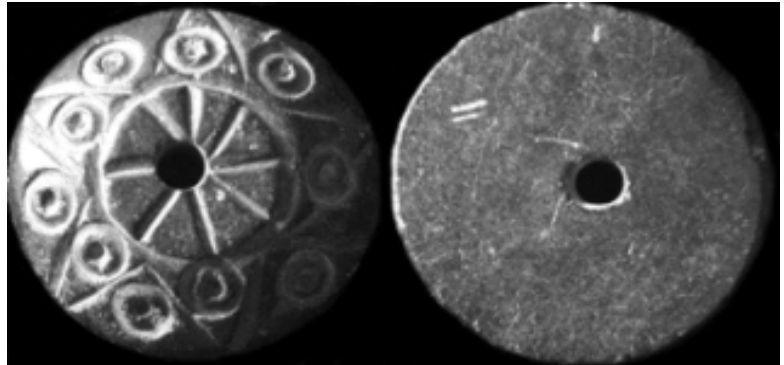
Wool, and the Spinning Thereof

By Lil



The first spinning was done without tools. People noticed that they could twist wool fibers between the palms of their hands and their thighs and make a thread. As time passed, that thread was fastened to a stick and the stick was twirled to make the yarn. Still, over more time a weight was added to the stick to give it momentum as it spun making spinning wool more efficient. The weight is called a whorl and the whorl and stick give us the drop spindles of today. The earliest whorls date back to the Neolithic age, but the exact time and place the spinning of fleece for yarn was “discovered” remains a mystery.

As the centuries passed and people became less nomadic, spinning became more efficient with the spinning stick, or spindle being placed horizontally and the addition of a wheel to put the twist into the fibers more quickly. In the late middle ages, or Renaissance, the spinning wheel with a flyer came into being, and finally, in the 17th century a treadle was added creating the spinning wheel as we know it today. These spinning tools are said to have originated in the middle east and, over time, made their way to Europe. There are, however, myriads of ways to spin and myriads of spinning tools still in use today by indigenous peoples all over the globe.



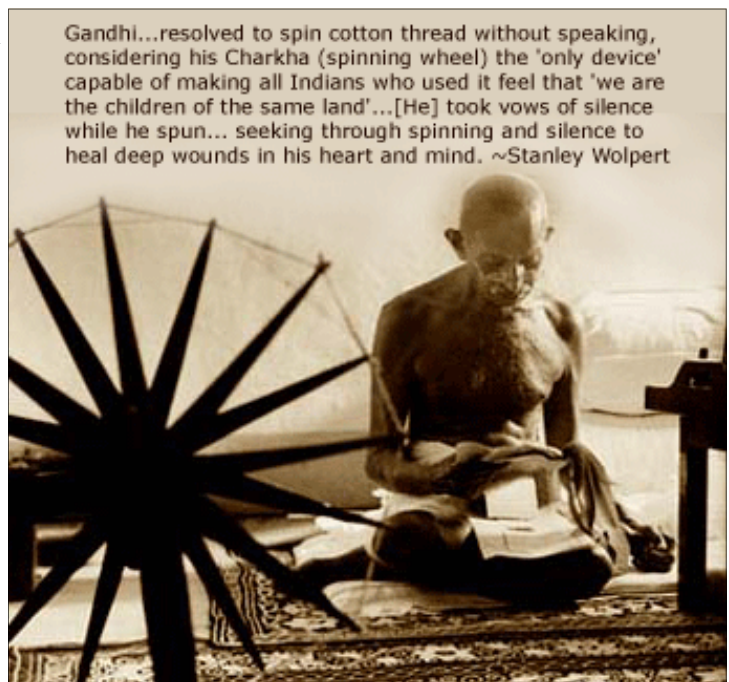
This is an example of a Coptic whorl circa 5th-7th century AD

After the sheep were shorn, the fleece needed to be prepared for spinning. Off times the wool was spun, “in the grease,” which means unwashed. The unwashed wool retained the lanolin thereby making the finished thread more waterproof. This was ideal for outer garments. However, for bedding and garments worn close to the skin, the wool needed to be cleansed and then combed or carded. Combing and carding are ways to arrange the fibers so they are ready to be spun into the desired yarn.

Many people shun wool saying it's too scratchy or that they're allergic. While anyone can be allergic to anything, I give you this pearl. A wool's scratchiness is directly related to the amount of processing it undergoes. Wool fibers have scales on them that lift up and cause the fibers to stick to each other during processing. The more a wool is processed, the scratchier it becomes because the fibers are subjected to more abrasion. The less a wool fiber has to endure during processing, the softer and loftier it will be. This is a strong persuasion for processing your own wool and spinning your own yarn.



Examples of ancient whorls and spindles

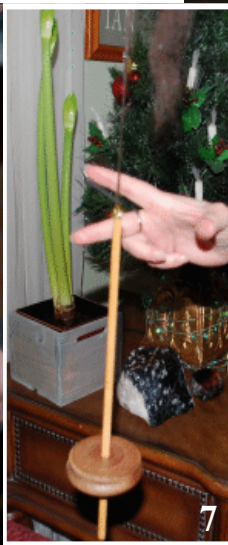
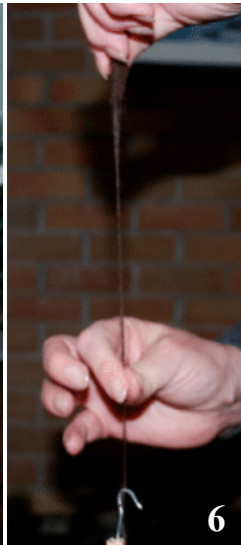


(1) Modern day low whorl drop spindle

(2) Turkish Spindle. Some cultures used crossed sticks instead of stones to balance their spindles

(3) Quick and easy CD drop spindle. A dowel is inserted into the hole in the CD, affixed with a grommet and topped off with a cup hook. Easy as 1, 2, 3, you're up and spinning.

(4) Support spindle for spinning ultra fine fibers like this beautiful cashmere.



(5) After twisting some fibers between your fingers, you will have a small amount of thread. Grab it with the hook end of the spindle and give it a spin. This is the beginning of the "leader yarn."

(6) Draft fibers out of the wool bundle held in the upper hand. The lower hand controls the amount of twist that runs up the thread toward the fiber bundle.

(7) The first spin of the spindle. Here we have the beginning of the leader yarn that we will attach our wool to later.

(8) Once there is about 14 inches of leader yarn, remove it from the hook and attach it to the spindle just below the whorl.

(9) Wind it up the spindle and through the hook and you are ready to spin with your drop spindle. You're happily drafting fibers out of the wool bundle and spinning away, and soon you have a very long thread and your spindle threatens to hit the ground...

(10) At this point, it's time to wind the yarn onto the spindle above the whorl. Continue this process, drafting, spinning and winding on until the spindle is full. Then the yarn can be plied, that is spun back on itself so you have a two ply yarn, or used as a single thread.



Drop spindles are wonderful for travel as they are extremely portable.



A wheel is great for those who like to spin lots of yarn quickly and have room for a wheel in their home. Above is a picture of a Saxony wheel (1). It is but one of many types of wheels.

Another type of wheel is an upright wheel (2). The one featured actually folds down and is easy to travel with. I just strap it in the shotgun seat and off we go.



(3) is a Saxony wheel in motion. The foot treadles below drive the larger wheel which in turn drives the smaller wheel which holds the flyer. (Small bobbin looking thing to the right of the picture) (4) shows detail of drafting out fibres with the left hand and controlling the twist with the right. (5) is a picture of the wheel at rest so you can see more detail.



Wool is a wonderful fiber! It has memory, that is, you can stretch it all out of shape and it goes right back into shape. It can hold up to 50 % of its weight in water without feeling wet. Its loftiness traps air making it an excellent insulator that keeps us warm in the cold and cool in the heat. Wool has gotten a bad rap over the years because of its reported scratchiness. However, the less it is processed, the softer it remains. Pictured left is a hat and scarf made from hand spun yarn along with various spindles. From left to right, a low whorl drop spindle with rambouillet wool, a support spindle with yummy cashmere, a Turkish spindle with dyed corriedale wool, and a Navajo spindle with dyed mohair. The yarn hanks and skeins are spun from shetland wool and is the yarn used for the hat and scarf. Spinning is relaxing, meditative and creative. For me, spinning creates a feeling of gratitude to the Mother for her care and her bounty.



Legacy

Initiation ~ Dedication

by **Ardriana Cahill**



If the following story isn't enough to confirm that something magickal had happened at my Initiation / Dedication when I became a Kell of the triple-faced goddess, Brighid, what met me the morning after should. I'm not good at reading totem messengers. I'm often unable to see the messenger for the animal. Our own Pari awakened me to the deep meaning of being greeted at dawn by three Mule Deer fawns. Calm eyed and standing shoulder to shoulder, they were waiting for me as I came out of the campsite bathroom. I stopped abruptly but they did not move. I greeted them out loud. They stood silently for several heartbeats and then casually turned to walk back into the forest; a triple-faced blessing from My Lady coming to me in the form of the Stag Lord.



Spring is traditionally the Wiccan season for Initiations. (Although mine all happened in the Fall for some unknown reason.) And whether one is initiated or self-dedicated, it is also the season to retake one's vows.

Much of witchcraft training is a process of waking to the full consciousness of who you are and what you are capable of, (and perhaps even learning what you should be doing with all that you are). That often requires consciousness-altering practices between the mundane (what you have always been and done) and the rare (what you are capable of becoming and doing). Initiations can aid in this new consciousness. Whether you are Initiated by an elder or Self-Dedicated, both rituals have the potential to pull exactly the same natural talents and inclinations to the forefront.

Secular initiations are a social construct; a society's formal acceptance of someone crossing a threshold into an age, a stage in life, a union, a group, a position or office of authority, an achievement or a particular change in status. The initiation is conducted by a person of honor or authority. Society often marks achievement in education with diplomas and titled degrees. Like, those notches on the door frame to see how tall you've grown. They help you remember how far you've come. I know that when I look at that notch on the door frame, it astounds me how small I was outside, when I felt so much taller inside. In America, a party is celebrated on the 16th, 21st, 50th, 75th, and 100th birthdays with great pomp because these are major threshold years of youth, young adulthood, adulthood, saging and elderhood. However, initiations can create or

acknowledge or celebrate one crossing a threshold with great, little or no ritual at all. A wish on a birthday candle is a simple ritual to honor the birth of a person.

Witchcraft initiations are much older than Gardnerian Wicca. They are mystery rites that are transformational in nature, opening the initiate to greater experience or as preparation for facing a new course of events. Initiation takes one from not-knowing to knowing. It is a form of birth, transition from one state of being or understanding to another. A test or a set of questions are asked to evaluate the initiate. Oath-taking is usually a central feature of initiations. Acceptance into a community or inner circle is achieved.

Dedications are self-guided commitment rituals where you bind yourself to a course of action, to a spiritual path, a magickal study, a particular god or goddess, or a pantheon of gods. Dedications can be transformational too, however, due to the intrinsic lack of mystery in the ritual, that transformation is usually not felt immediately and takes more time to observe the evidence of this transformation.

I am a natural, dedicated and initiated witch. Coming from a Family Tradition, I was initiated into a course of training by Mother but the first spells I ever did were those taught to me by Grandmother whose initiation requirements were no more than my birth into her family. My first initiation was unceremonious, but I was not casual. I was made very aware of the gravity of Mother's request for undisturbed time with me. We met several times over a period of several days, after school but before Daddy got home from work. There was something that Mother needed to tell me about our family. There was something she needed to tell me about her. There was something she needed to tell me about me -- and about my children. (I didn't have any children; I was barely 14, so THAT got my attention!) I was asked a series of questions to evaluate the quality of my character and the level of my maturation. I was asked a series of questions to evaluate the type and quality of my talents. As a result of my answers, I was asked if I would like to learn to use them better. I was asked to take an oath of dedication to a course of study that would take years of commitment to accomplish. Specific to my Family Tradition, I was not bound to a particular belief system. Belief was not required. Work was. For two reasons, I also took an oath of silence about what I would





be studying. One reason was magickal: I was forbidden to “talk away” the magickal energy of my newly gained knowledge. (Secrets give you power.) The other reason was mundane: for my self-protection and for the protection of my family (“There are those who would hurt

us or even kill us for being who we are.”) At the end of all those questions my answers were weighed and measured. One final question and with the proper answer, it was done. I'd define that “talk” as the most pivotal moment of my life.

Although I agree with those who say that no initiation made them a witch, I will say that my initiations were all transformational, threshold crossings, opening me up to become a better witch. Even though my first one was done TO me by Mother (a coven experience); the second one was done BY me as a solitary, self-dedication (with almost no guidance – and similar to every new witch’s experience without a coven). My dedication was devoid of any great spiritual connection or emotional tectonics. It was purely tactile. I dedicated my tools, took a new oath of study, retook my vows of secrecy under a beautiful starry sky by a lake under a cottonwood tree. It was lovely and renewing but...no surprises. However, within a few months, I realized that my dedication had manifested amazing growth and insights of which I was becoming more and more aware as the days passed.

Thirteen years later...I loosely wrote my second dedication to a priestess path, between work, raising a family, starting a new romance and still suffering the grief of the loss of my sister. Intended only as metaphors, I decided to call Grandmother, Mother, Godmother and Sister to represent the four elements, after I had a sudden epiphany about their characters and personalities each falling naturally into a quarter of prominence. It would give me the opportunity to include them in the ritual by getting to say their names as representatives of the Elements. Boy, was I surprised when they actually showed up! With questions! The ritual from that moment was completely out of my control. I have tried my best to rewrite the ritual from memory but I'm sure that some of it was completely wordless. When they and my gods arrived, it was hard to think of them as metaphors or illusions or imagination after hearing the brush rustle with their approach.

(Excerpt from my BoS)...

Feeling unprepared, with no new garment, no symbol of position, the ritual slapped together, with the days, the stars, and the elements against me, (it had rained for two days and the sky promised to hide the moon), I had been thrust like a child in the wilderness, unworthy, unprepared and anxious.

As a solitary, frustrated at every turn to try and plan every detail, a soft whisper finally spoke to me: *Transformation should be a little scary. One should not know exactly what*

is about to happen. Birth must have the element of coming from the unknown to the known. And all births are painful.

So, I released my frustration and insecurity and I surrendered to the night. Let it be as it will. The night was frosty, the moon was high shining through the newly parted clouds . . . and from the shadows of the trees, I stepped into the light. In a circle of trees . . . where a white flower grew in the center, I seated myself on a blanket just before it. A huge, ancient, lightning-struck tree guarded my back. Facing East, there was an opening in the circle, allowing a moonlit path of high grass and wildflowers which guided the moon to my circle....

“Earth, my Sister. Bring with you the spirits of the North, of laughter and tears, of birth and growth, of hearth and home.” (Susan arrives with the snap of several twigs. She’s wearing a deep green velvet pants suit. I can smell the scent of Almond oil. Her hair is medium short, dark with bright blonde highlights. She’s smirking.)

“Air, my Mother. Bring with you the spirits of the East, of memory and inspiration, of adventure and enchantment, of potential and encouragement.” (She arrives silently as with Indian-trained footfalls. Her hair is dark and just touching her shoulders. She wears a radiant, metallic gold Grecian gown. Many folds clinging to her slim 40-ish body. Her face is hard to see with the bright full moon shining behind her head. But not enough to obscure her soft smile and shining Irish eyes.)

“Fire, my Godmother. Bring with you the spirits of the South, of passion and energy, of warmth and illumination, of courage and confidence.” (She comes dressed in a mid 30’s, tailored, bright red wool suit, her hair is medium brown shot with a small streak of premature gray. It hangs in a vampish wave over one eye to just below her shoulders. She has no cane and her shoulders are thus relaxed as I have never seen her. She smiles proudly, for I carry her name and she is happy to see me. Excitement dances in her eyes.)



Flower:

Photo by: Lil

Photoshopped by **Ardriana** to look like a watercolor.

“Water, my Grandmother. Bring with you the spirits of the West, of love and devotion, of dreams and empathy, of peace and initiation.” (She stands before the lightning struck tree. I feel the pressure of her touch as she rests her hand on my right shoulder, as if to reassure me. I turn to look at her and am stunned to see her 40-ish - looking so much like my mother - like me! I’ve seen that face younger and older, but not this age. She’s so lovely in a midnight blue floor length dress. A curious smile lingers on her face.)

I want to ask a dozen questions but know to remain silent. Instead, they ask me questions. Some that I expected and some that I didn’t expect. Then, they ask me what I seek from them.

I did not invoke the gods, Mother did. She stands next to Susan to make way in the East.

The gods stand before me, blocking the silver light of the moon, yet emanating their own soft golden sparkling radiance. They both are adorned in gold armor, heavily robed in dark velvets and heavy fur trims. She wears a silver circlet and fall leaves and flowers entwine in her long wavy hair. He wears a horned helmet but takes it off and places it at his feet. She holds a spear in her right hand and a blue flame burns in the palm of her left. (See her thus, I believe is exclusive to my Family Tradition) He holds a sword in his right hand and a shield dropped low on his left side. They are smiling . . . She, brightly . . . He, as if he knows a secret.

(They speak to me in a language(s) that I don’t understand. I don’t know how I know . . . but there is a blessing . . . a welcome. And a name . . . that I memorize and can mimic but do not understand.)

I think I was softly crying the entire time. What happened thereafter was pure mystery and joy and wonder and awe and completely unexpected. The ritual continued without my input whatsoever. She reaches into my chest and places the blue flame into my heart which she now calls a Kell of Brighid. (I later discovered that Kell means kiln, an oven or furnace.) I no longer need to keep the candle vigil of Brighid’s flame, I AM a flame of Brighid. Brighid of the Blue Flame.

The rain soaked clouds had parted to allow the full moon’s light. The frigid air did not chill my bare skin. The damp all around me, barely wet the bottoms of my shoes. Time stood still as if it was all an illusion passing in a heartbeat. My dedication turned into a full-fledged Initiation by the mystery of the four women I honor most, taking charge of my ritual. The fact that they all were dead seemed to get in their way, not at all. I was introduced to the gods in a way I



had never known before. (I was so breathless and stunned, that afterwards I realized that my skin was warm with nothing on but a light gown in near freezing temperatures... I ran to my husband (who had been standing guard a discrete distance away). I made him feel my chest, my nose, my hands, to witness that they were not even cool but warm!

Since all my elders are dead, I believed that there was to be no more initiations for me. Or so I thought. My ritual initiating me as Priestess of my clan, which began as any other solitary self-dedication, became one of the most profoundly spiritual events of my life. Now at Imbolg, I rekindle the blue flame of Brighid within me, with the vows I took in her honor.

Brighid, of the Blue Fire

My patroness...
Legacy of my mother...

Bright Lady
Fiery Arrow
Triple flame of Irish hearts
Both blood and fostered...

Mistress of magick and poetry
Spark of love and fertility
Giver of knowledge and wisdom
And skill in healing and the martial arts...

Keeper of the hearth fire
Flame that feeds the forge
Goddess of transformation...

Accept me now as one of
Your Sacred Kells

And I will kindle your Sacred Fire
All the days of my life

Lead me in the ways of the kind.
Lead me in the ways of the wise.
Lead me in the ways of my ancestors.



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On the Rocks ~Amber

by Pari



Yellow & Cognac Amber
Photo by: **Ardriana**
(EW member since 2004)

I've chosen Amber as the stone for Imbolc, even though this attractive gem is not a stone at all, but is, rather, an ancient fossilized tree resin that once flowed from the wound of a conifer. The pine trees from which Amber hails are no longer in existence, and the specimens of their once life-giving resins which we hold today are roughly between 25 - 50 million years old. I think it fitting that just as Imbolc which means "in the belly" and Oimele (or Oimele) which means "ewe's milk" which has begun to flow... so, too, was Amber once in the belly of the tree whose essence flowed forth to gift us in its new form.

The name Amber derives from the Arabic word "ambar" which refers to ambergris, a secretion from the sperm whale which is used in making perfume. The only similarity between the two, though, is color, for they are without a doubt two totally separate things. Although both are often transported on the waves of the sea, it

is this, along with their color similarity, which was most likely how the two may have been once confused. Amber registers only 2 to 2½ on the Mohs Scale and is light enough that it can float on salt water. And it does...for Amber is often found in or near the ocean, with its deposits existing in sediments along the shore. Its most prevalent locales are on the shores of the Baltic Sea, predominantly in Russia, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Germany. Other prominent Amber findings are in Mexico and the Dominican Republic.

Amber (also known as Succinite) is most often a transparent yellow to orange color, but can be found in shades of brown, red, green (often enhanced), clear, and even a highly sought after Dominican blue. This Sabbat, though, we concentrate on the golden yellow variety, called "Gold of the North" by the ancient Greeks and Romans. For, likened to the Sun and once thought by the Greco-Romans to actually *be* sunlight trapped within the resin, Amber personifies the warmth and renewal aspects of the Sun God at this time of year. This interesting mineraloid, with its often small insects and/or other bits of organic material that *are* literally trapped inside it, nicely mimics our own current situation of still being somewhat immobilized and imprisoned by the cold grip of Winter, but at the same time allows us to see the promise of what lies within - and that is, the hope of renewal and the first breath of Spring, as we sense new life beginning to stir beneath the still-frozen topsoils. I see Amber as an excellent window into the past that keeps an optimistic eye on the future.



Even though this organic gem can be found riding the ocean currents, Amber's Element is Fire. It is one of the sacred stones of Helios, the god who chariots the Sun across the sky. But Amber has also always been associated with the feminine, and is often called the "Stone of the Mother Goddess." This dual association makes Amber quite relative to both the Sun God and the Goddess Brigid who holds the blue flame, both of whom we acknowledge and honor during Imbolc.



Amber Fire
Photo by: **Ardriana**

Within its Fire attributes of vitality, courage and purification, there are many legends surrounding Amber. To those in the Far East it was thought to be drops of solidified dragon's blood. To the Vikings it was known as "Freyja's Tears" and was said that the goddess once traded her favors to the Dwarves in exchange for an Amber necklace. In ancient Greek mythology, Amber was created when Helios' son, Phaeton, was killed as a result of Zeus' lightning that flung him off his father's chariot and into the river Eridanus where he drowned. So grief-stricken were his sisters that they simply transformed into trees but continued to weep golden tears of Amber. The early Christians saw Amber as tears that were shed by the birds during Christ's crucifixion. The Chinese believed this golden gem held the "souls of many tigers and many suns". And in several cultures

around the globe, a general Old World legend was that Amber was formed by the setting rays of the sun as they touched the ocean's horizon.



One of the earliest records that refers to Amber was found carved on a stone obelisk in Egypt and dates back to 883 BCE. It reads: "*Ashur-Nasir-Apal, the ruler of Assyria, sent his people to the land of amber where the seas wash amber ashore like copper...*". But the use of Amber goes back much farther than that. The discovery of Amber beads, amulets and artifacts in various locations and burial sites have shown that this magnificent resinous gem was revered throughout the ages—the earliest known, being the Paleolithic Era.

Some ancient uses of Amber (many of which are still used today) included... burning it in fire ceremonies to release its light and to protect from and clear negativity; as a gateway to the Astral during shamanic ritual; as an amulet by Roman gladiators to instill courage, drive away fear, and to protect against danger; in love potions and rituals due to Amber's attracting qualities, for when rubbed, Amber emits an electrical magnetic charge (and in fact, "elektron" was the ancient Greek term for Amber, from which our word "electricity" is derived); and for healing of many kinds worldwide. Amber has been used as an antibiotic, usually in an elixir. Physically, it is also known to be good for alleviating stomach and digestive disorders, throat, thyroid and glandular problems, kidney dysfunctions, and for uplifting and relieving depression. For the latter, this magickal 'stone' brings with it a sense of renewal, sunny thoughts, and recharges one's energy and stamina...things usually very much needed at this time of year. Known as the "Honey Stone" or "Petrified Sunlight", Amber does bring soothing light and warmth to those who use or wear it.

Magickally, Amber is used in spells or ritual for luck, love, protection, purification, personal power, prosperity, sexual energy, and multiple forms of healing. It is also used to connect with the Ancestors and to retrieve knowledge and wisdom from the Otherworlds. Amber is associated with the astrological signs of Leo and Aquarius, the Sun-ruled Lion and the Water-Bearer. Often paired with Jet, Amber is an excellent choice for Fire Sabbats.

Just as Imbolc is the time when milk flows...so, too, does Amber represent that which flows. May love and peace, health and prosperity, and the renewal of life, ever-flow to each and all.



Amber Treasure Photo by: **Ardriana**

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Amber, itself

© Patricia J. Martin, January 10, 2009

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<http://www.peacefulpaths.com>

The Rowan Tree

Written and compiled by George Knowles



The Rowan tree (*Sorbus aucuparia*) is one of the sacred trees of Wicca/Witchcraft and of old was a favoured tree of the ancient Druids. According to the Beth-Luis-Nion calendar, a reconstruction by Robert “von Ranke” Graves (author of *The White Goddess*), the Rowan tree is the second tree of the ancient Celtic Tree Calendar (21st January – 17th February). As such it is associated with Imbolc (2nd February) one of the four Greater Sabbats sacred to the Goddess Bridget.

Native to the cooler temperate regions of the Northern Hemisphere, the greatest density of the species (over 100) can be found up in the mountainous areas of western China, the Himalayas, Russia and the Caucasus mountain ranges - for this reason the Rowan tree is more commonly known as the Mountain Ash. It is also known by many other names: Lady of the Mountains, Delight of the Eye, Ran Tree, Roynetree, Roden Quicken, Quickbane, Sorb Apple, Thor’s Helper, Whitty, Wicken-Tree, Wiky, Wiggin, Wiggy, Wild Ash, Witchwood, Witchbane and Witchen. Botanically the Rowan tree is of the rose family *Rosaceae*, and of the genus *Sorbus*.

Rowan trees are mostly small deciduous trees and while some of its species may be considered a shrub, as a tree it typically grows to between 4-12 m (13-39 ft) in height. In its common form the Rowan grows as a slim multi-stemmed tree with upwardly pointing branches, the bark of which is a shiny greyish-brown with raised dots or lenticels scattered across it.

The leaves of the Rowan arrange themselves alternately on either side of a central stem, and they are pinnate in form with a terminal leaflet at the end. Commonly the stem grows to about 20 cm (7 in) in length and comprises 9-15 leaflets that are serrated with small teeth. Being a deciduous tree, after shedding its leaves in the winter, new green leaves begin to appear in April, and by autumn turn to a bright orangey red colour, before again being shed for the winter.

The five-petalled creamy-white flowers of the Rowan tree appear and blossom after its leaves in April, usually in May or early June. Individually they grow in dense domed clusters of up to 250, which can measure up to 8-15 cm (3-6 in) across. Cross-pollination is effected by insects, such as flies, bees and beetles, after which by the end of June the flowers fade to be replaced by berry-like fruits measuring 6 to 9 mm ($\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ in) in diameter. The seed bearing fruits ripen in August or early September, when their brilliant bright red colour lends a stark contrast to the surrounding green foliage. Birds primarily feed on the berries and disperse the seeds in their droppings aiding propagation.



The wood of the Rowan tree is dense and tough, and used in the past for making ship’s masts, poles and whips. Being dense, it is a useful wood for carving and turning, and of old, tool handles, spindles, spinning-wheels, barrel hoops and walking sticks were all commonly made from its wood. Magically, Rowan wood has traditionally been used for making Druid’s staffs, and its branches used for dowsing or divining. Magic wands made from Rowan are thought to be especially effective in ritual when psychic intuition is required. The bark was used for tanning and as a dye, usually black.

The berries of the Rowan are edible and are used to make a bitter tasting jelly, which in Britain was traditionally eaten as an accompaniment to game. They can also be used to make jams and other preserves, eaten on their own or combined with other fruits. At one time they were used as a substitute for coffee beans, but today are more commonly used in alcoholic beverages for added flavour or producing country wines.

Folklore and Mythology

Of old, during the month of May, farmers passed all their livestock through a large hoop made of Rowan to protect them and ensure fertility. Benevolent fairies are said to have inhabited the Rowan, which if grown near the home would protect its occupants from evil spirits. A piece of Rowan was often sown into the clothing of small children to protect them from capture by evil fairies. Often red berries, after being left to soak in water, were sprinkled around areas one wished to protect.

In Scandinavian myths, the first woman was formed from the Rowan tree and the first man from Alder tree. The red berries of the Rowan were considered sacred by most cultures and are symbolic of the forces of creation - blood, life, death and renewal. The old peoples of Ireland believed that the Rowan possessed the power to restore lost youth and was guarded by serpents and dragons. They also associated Rowan with Bridget and Brigantia whose arrows were made from Rowan wood.



In Aegean/Mediterranean myths, the Rowan is connected to a tale about the drinking cup of Zeus, which was stolen from Olympus. An eagle was sent to recover the cup and a battle raged with the creatures that stole it. The legend has it that wherever a drop of blood or feather fell during the battle, a Rowan tree subsequently sprouted. Similarly, the red berries of the Rowan are symbolically associated with droplets of blood and are used by many contemporary pagans and witches as such during ritual and magick. Gone are the days when real sacrificial blood was used.



Rowan Craft Tools: Staff - Futhark Runes - Amulet - Pendant - Wand

Magical Uses:

Rowan wood can be carried and used to increase psychic powers, and its branches used for making dowsing rods or magical wands. The leaves and berries of the Rowan can be added to incense to aid divination and increase psychic powers. The bark and berries carried on the person will also aid in recuperation, and was added to health and healing sachets, as well as power, luck and success charms.

Tying two small twigs of Rowan together with red thread in the form of an equal-armed cross is an age-old protective amulet. Cornish peasants carried these in their pockets for protection; as did Scottish Highlanders sew them into the lining of their kilts before going into battle. Walking sticks and staffs made from Rowan are excellent tools for those who roam the fields or woods by night, as well as an aid to walking; they offer protection from lightning. Similarly, when traveling across water, carrying a piece of Rowan will protect the ship from storms at sea.

When a family member dies, planting a Rowan tree over their grave would prevent their souls from haunting the place. The red berries of the Rowan have a five-pointed star (pentagram) from where it was attached to the stalk. The pentagram is an ancient symbol of protection and so carrying the berries in a pocket would protect a person from harm. Highland women made necklaces of the berries threaded with red thread for protection. The Rowan was thought to help a person distinguish good from bad, help from harm, and friend from foe.

Spiritually, it protected you from unwanted influences and symbolized beauty, privacy, peace and sanctuary.

The Rowan has deity associations with the gods: Dagda, Thor, Vulcan, Pan and Herne, and with the goddess: Bridget, Brigantia, Aphrodite, Cerridwen and Hecate. Its gender type is Masculine. Its planetary ruler is the Sun and its associated elements Earth and Fire. Rowan is used to attract the powers needed for: Protection, Healing, Success and Psychic Powers.

Astrologically, Rowan people (i.e. those people born during the period 21st Jan – 17th Feb) are protective and full of charm, cheerful, gifted and without egoism. They like to draw attention, love life, motion, unrest and even complications. They are both dependent and independent, have good taste and are artistic and passionate. While sociable and good company, they can also be emotional, and do not forgive or forget.

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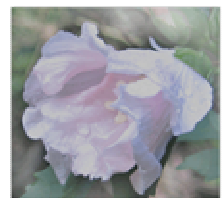
Plus many websites too numerous to mention.

First published February 2002 - Updated December 2008 © George Knowles



Herb Garden ~ Angelica

by Lyric



There are many herbs associated with Imbolc, among them Basil, Blackberry, Celandine, Coltsfoot, and Heather. The herb I have selected to write about is the Imbolc herb Angelica. I chose Angelica because I have grown it in the past with relative success. However, once I delved deeper into this project my head began to spin, my eyes crossed and tiny puffs of smoke began emerging from my ears. You may well ask Why? Well, there are more than SIXTY VARIETIES OF ANGELICA!!! Among them, Chinese Angelica more commonly known as Dong Quai (Angelica Sinensis), American Angelica, Angelica Acutioba, Angelica Archangelica, Angelica Edulis, and European Angelica just to name a few (head begins to spin again). There is also the very close cousin Peucedanum Ostruthium, or Masterwort (not to be confused with Great Masterwort), which has the exact same medicinal properties as Angelica AND looks exactly the SAME (head begins to spin faster). Now that you are all aware of my dilemma, and desperate to make a decision for this article, I have chosen Angelica Archangelica aka Garden Angelica.

Originally Angelica was grown as a vegetable and used as a medicinal plant. It was extremely popular in the Scandinavian countries and is used even today. Due to its hollow stem, it was used by children as a musical instrument and sounds much like a flute. It was used as a flavoring agent in reindeer milk, liqueurs and fish. Because it normally blooms on May 8th, which is the Christian feast of St. Michael, it was believed that it was an herb sacred to the angels – thus, the name Angelica. It is sometimes referred to as Holy Ghost.

Elemental Properties:

Planetary Rule: Sun
Gender: Masculine
Astrological sign: Leo
Element: Fire

Deities associated with:
Hestia, Hecate, Sophia,
Atlantis and Michael

Medicinal Uses:

The root, leaves and seeds are used. The root should be dug up in the Fall of the first year. The whole plant should be harvested in June, the leaves stripped and dried along with the stems. The stems may also be kept and candied (see recipe). The seedpods should be harvested when ripe and the seeds removed and dried in the sun before storing. A tea can be made from the

dried leaves to treat gastrointestinal disorders such as gas, indigestion and heartburn. Because Angelica promotes circulation and energy, it is also used to treat respiratory difficulties and to stimulate circulation in the pelvic region – to stimulate or suppress menstruation. The dried root is used in a decoction to treat alcohol addiction, rheumatic pain and rashes. Simmer two teaspoons of dried Angelica root in two cups of water for 20 minutes. Drink one cup twice a day. As a tincture, 10 drops should be used four times a day. Angelica should not be used by diabetics, people taking blood thinners, and pregnant or nursing moms. It may cause photosensitivity, so excessive sun exposure should be avoided while taking Angelica.

Magickal Uses:

Angelica is known primarily for its very strong proactive qualities. Grow it in your garden to protect your home and to banish negative energy and attract positive energy within the home. Bathing in Angelica water encourages a healthy aura and a positive, joyful psychic self. It will also break spells and hexes. Add the root to any protective amulet to increase protection and banish evil by burning leaves in and about your home. Sprinkle dried leaves in the four corners of your temple or your home to purify and ward off negativity. Burn the leaves during meditation, divination, and exorcism to encourage vision. The leaves can also be smoked to increase ones ability to see into other times and realities.

Angelica Banishing Spell:

Works best on the first day of the waning moon.

Gather:

A chalice of cold water
Shavings from Angelica Root
1 old Brick
Salt

Put the brick in a hot oven until hot to the touch. Remove from the oven (using oven mitts – it will be very hot) and place on a fireproof surface. Sprinkle the top of the brick with the Angelica and salt. Pour some water from the chalice until steam begins to rise.

Chant seven times:

“I call on the Eye of Horus to protect this home. Invasion of evil be gone to none.

Once the brick has cooled down, place it in front of your home as a warning to any other evil or negative energies!!

Now that you know all about one of the many varieties of Angelica, that being Angelica Archangelica, (and I bet your head didn't spin even once!) I hope you will consider growing this wonderful Imbolc herb in your own garden. It does need some space, but it has wonderful leaves, a very pleasant flower and a clean, fresh fragrance!!!



Angelica Archangelica
Original art by Lyric

Candied Angelica Recipe:

Ingredients:

2 lbs [angelica](#) (young, tender stalks and stems)
2 cups [water](#)
2 tablespoons [salt](#)
3 cups [sugar](#)
3 cups [water](#)

Directions:

- (1) Working in dry weather, start with about 2 pounds young, tender angelica stalks and stems. Cut them into even lengths and put them into a glass or ceramic bowl.
- (2) Bring 2 cups water and 2 tablespoons salt to a boil and pour over the angelica, weighting with a plate so it's fully submerged. Cover and let soak 2 hours.
- (3) Drain the angelica, peel off and discard the stringy outer celery-like layer, then rinse under cold water.
- (4) Make sugar syrup by bringing 3 cups sugar and 3 cups water to a boil.
- (5) Simmer the angelica in the syrup for 20 minutes, or until tender and transparent. Remove and drain, reserving the syrup. Spread the angelica in a single layer on a wire rack and leave to drain and dry for 4 days.
- (6) Boil the angelica in the syrup again for 10 minutes, adding water if the syrup is too thick, and drain on a wire rack for 4 days longer.
- (7) Dust with granulated sugar and store in an airtight container, cutting into decorative bits as needed. This recipe may also be used to candy fennel stalks.



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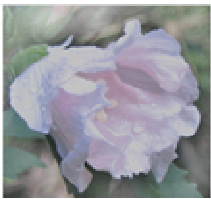
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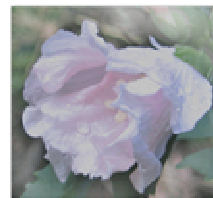


Winter Thaw:
Photo by: Lil



The Pagan Kitchen

by OwlOak



MM Folks, Well...

Another turn of the wheel has occurred and here we are at Imbolc, the time of the year where the Goddess arises from her rest after giving birth to The Child of Promise. In some places, this is noted by the budding of trees, the greening of the grasses, and the ewes becoming fat with unborn young and full of milk in the anticipation of their birth.

However, here in New England, it is hard to conceive this concept as the landscape is awash in brown and barren trees from which a few withered leaves precariously dangle, the pine boughs are bending low from the weight of the accumulated snow, icicles as long as a man is tall hang from the eaves, and the sub-zero temperatures have the ground frozen solid. Nevermind the fact that you know that at least one or two more Nor'easter's, dumping 1-2 feet of snow each, have to be endured before the thought of a leaf blossom can even be considered. The only solace is in knowing that this deep blanket of snow is providing a degree of protection from the Arctic winds and temperatures to the dormant vegetation just below.

Because of this, at this time of year, we in New England look to some warming and stick-to-your-ribs dishes to keep out the bone-chilling cold of the season. To put it in perspective, imagine spending a couple of hours shoveling, or snow blowing, a snow-drifted yard in single digit F or less temperatures accompanied by a frigid wind and you'll have a fair understanding as to what I am referring to. So, with that in mind, here is an Imbolc menu to warm you to the core. I hope you enjoy these recipes as much as those who submitted them, and I do.

The aroma of my first recipe, coupled with that of a fresh brewed pot of coffee, is enough to rouse the most stubborn body from the warmth of the comforters and to the breakfast table:

Sunny Morning Egg Casserole by OwlOak

This recipe is not an unusual one and variations, including name and content, can be found in most cookbooks and on most recipe web sites. I used to make this on special occasions for my sons when they were young. They loved it...hope you do too.

Ingredients:

1 pound bulk pork breakfast sausage
1-2 cooked white potatoes - peeled and diced
1/4 pound fresh white mushrooms - cleaned and sliced lengthwise
1 bunch scallions - trimmed and chopped, tops and all**
1/2 green bell pepper - chopped
1/2 red bell pepper - chopped
1-8 ounce package shredded Mozzarella cheese
Salt and fresh ground black pepper - to taste
1 1/4 cups biscuit mix
1 cup milk
1 dozen eggs
1 tablespoon fresh curly parsley tops - minced

Directions:

Crumble and brown the sausage and drain off the grease. Combine the cooked sausage and potatoes with the uncooked mushrooms, red and green bell peppers, scallions, cheese, salt and pepper. Place this mixture in the bottom of a well greased 13"x9"x2" baking dish and smooth out. Beat together the eggs, milk, biscuit mix and parsley. Pour over sausage mixture. Bake, covered, in a 350° F (177° C) oven for about 1/2 hour or until the top is golden brown and the eggs have become firm. Remove from the oven and cool for 5-10 minutes to let it set up a bit more, then cut into 6 or 12 squares, depending on how hungry the crowd is, and serve.*

* 1 medium sized chopped yellow onion may be substituted if a stronger onion flavor is desired

**I have found that a spatula works the best for removing the square reasonably intact, but, as with a pie, that first piece is a doozie to get out right. <VBG>



As lunchtime comes around and the winter chill begins to creep back in, what could be better than one of these

delicious meals:

Chant's Quick Chili and Cornbread (To light the fires within)

by Chant

(EW member since 2008)

Ingredients:

1-2 Cans Red Kidney Beans, drained
1-2 Cans Black Beans, drained and rinsed
1-2 Cans Diced Peppers
1 12 oz. Jar Salsa Tomatoes with Chili
1 Lb. Ground Turkey or Ground Beef (Optional)
1 Tbsp. Chili Powder
1 Tsp. Cumin
1-2 Cloves Garlic minced

Directions:

Sauté the garlic until lightly browned. Add the meat, chili powder and cumin. Stir, and cook until the meat is no longer pink. Put the meat and all the other ingredients into a 5-7 Qt. Crock Pot, mix well, and cook on low 4-6 hours. Note: If not using meat, then just put the spices into the mixture of canned items.



Corn Bread

Ingredients:

2 Pkgs. Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix, or equivalent
1 Cup Cheddar Cheese - shredded
1/4 cup Green Chilies or, if you like it hot, 1/4 cup pickled jalapenos - chopped fine

Directions:

Mix corn muffin mix according to package directions, add the cheese and chilies. Stir to combine. Pour into a greased bread pan and bake 20-25 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Place a slice of the cornbread in a bowl and spoon the chili over the top. Delicious!!!!



Or, for those who would prefer an alternative meal which can be served with a number of side dishes like potatoes, rice, and other vegetables, or a nice pasta with a rich marinara sauce:

Connie's Breaded Chicken Cutlets

by Connie

(EW member since 2005)

This is a simple recipe and turns out well each and every time I make it, and can also be used with veal. ~ Connie

Ingredients:

1 lb. boneless & skinless chicken breasts - trimmed of fat and gristle.*
1-2 eggs - beaten
1-2 cups Italian flavored bread crumbs

Directions:

Beat up an egg or two (depending on how much you make). Dip the cutlet in the egg on both sides. Place Italian flavored bread crumbs in a dish. Dip the cutlet into the bread crumbs, making sure both sides are covered. (adding grated cheese and extra parsley is optional). Fry in Canola oil in frying pan...make sure oil is hot before placing cutlets in. Cook on medium (gas or electric stove) watching carefully until they are golden brown on both sides and cooked through. So easy to do and so good!

*Try to buy thin cutlets....if not possible then you need to filet the cutlets lengthwise to make two out of one. You don't have to do this with veal...veal is usually thin.

For the evening meal, there is one which can be started early in the day and cooks itself as you go about your chores:



Lamb Stew
by OwlOak

Ingredients:

2 lbs lamb - cut into 1-1 1/2 inch chunks
Salt and pepper - to taste
2 tablespoons cooking oil
2 cups white flour
3-4 unpeeled potatoes - quartered
3 carrots - cut into 2 inch pieces
1 wedge cabbage - cored and shredded (optional)
1 onion - chopped
1 leek bottom (the white part) - well-rinsed and thinly sliced (leeks need to be super washed as they get grit in between the layers)
12 pearl onions (optional)
1 1/2 cups celery - diced (leaves and all)
1 cup fresh or frozen peas (optional)
1 fresh sprig each of parsley, thyme, rosemary, and a bay leaf
1 tablespoon peppercorns



Directions:

Dredge the lamb in the flour seasoned with the salt and pepper and brown in the heated oil in a Dutch Oven. Drain off the grease and add enough water to cover the lamb and bring to a boil. Place parsley, bay leaf, peppercorns, thyme and rosemary in a piece of cheesecloth and tie with a piece of thread. Put this bundle of herbs into the water with the lamb. Lower the heat, cover, and simmer* for 1 hour, adding more water if necessary to keep it above the lamb. Add the potatoes, carrots, cabbage, onion, leek, pearl onions and celery to the lamb. Simmer, covered, an additional 20 minutes. Add the peas and more water if necessary and continue to simmer, covered, for an additional 15-20 minutes, or until potatoes are tender. Taste and adjust seasoning if needed. Turn off the heat and allow to sit for a few minutes. Remove the herb bundle, stir and serve.

To serve - spoon into bowls and garnish with chopped fresh parsley. Warm fresh bread and butter on the side turn this into a feast.

*Note - here is how I determine the difference between a simmer, boil, and hard boil.

A simmer is at or just below boiling and has a couple of bubbles breaking the surface every few minutes.

A boil is the continuous rising of bubbles, but stops when stirred.

A hard boil is a continuous stream of bubbles which doesn't stop when stirred.

A traditional and easy to make bread to go with this is one that is not my own recipe, but which I have found to be quite good:

Imbolc Bannock
© Llewellyn's Magical Almanac 2005
Submitted for your enjoyment by OwlOak

The original bread of the Scots was an unleavened oatcake cooked in a hot skillet called a bannock. Ancient Scots served a special bannock for each of the holidays.

Imbolc Bannock

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 1/2 cups flour | |
| 2 cups rolled oats | 1/2 cup raisins |
| 1/2 cup sugar | 1 egg |
| 4 tsp. baking powder | 1/2 cup butter |
| 1/2 tsp. salt | 1/3 cup buttermilk |



Mix together flour, oats, sugar, baking powder, salt and raisins. Make a well in the center. In a separate bowl whip egg, butter and buttermilk. Add to dry ingredients and stir until a batter is formed. Scrape onto a well-floured surface and knead lightly. Shape into a ball, then place on a greased baking sheet. Mark a Bridget's cross in the center, using a sharp knife. Bake in a preheated 425 degree oven for fifteen minutes. Serve Warm.

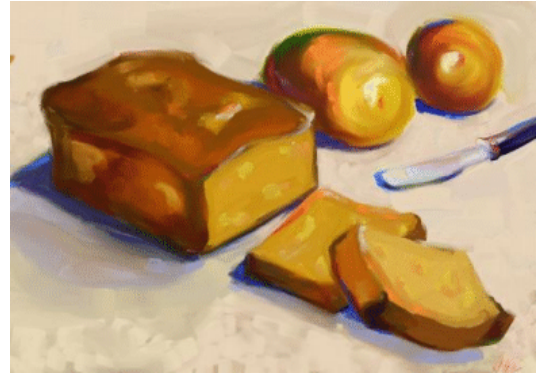
And, for a delicious dessert, what could be better than this:

**Punky's Magickal Mango Bread
by PunkyRabit**

This bread is pretty dense and sweet but goes well with peanut butter, jam or honey. Sometimes I will frost it with a buttercream frosting or just dust it with powdered sugar and cinnamon. ~ PunkyRabit

Ingredients:

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| 2 cups all-purpose flour | Dash or two of ginger |
| 2 teaspoons baking soda | 3/4 cup vegetable oil |
| 1/4 teaspoon salt | 1 1/4 cups white sugar |
| 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon | 3 eggs |
| 1 teaspoon vanilla extract | |
| 2-3 cups peeled, seeded and chopped mango (about 3-4 mangos) | |
| About a 1/2 cup each of raisins, walnuts and shredded sweetened coconut | |



Mango Bread

Original Art by © 2008 **PunkyRabit**
(EW member since 2007)

Directions:

Grease or butter two 8x4x2 loaf pans, then line with parchment paper. * Combine flour, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and ginger together. Make a well in the center of the mixture and add the oil, sugar, eggs, mango, vanilla, raisins, walnuts and coconut. Mix well and then put into loaf pans. Let sit in the pans for about 15-20 minutes before baking in a 350 degree (177°C) oven for about 1 hour.

* On occasion I will put it in 2 brownie pans instead and not bake it as long. Either way, it comes great!

After dinner is the time to retire to the parlor and savor a good drink:

Rowan Schnapps

<http://www.danish-schnapps-recipes.com/rowan.html>
Submitted for your enjoyment by George Knowles

Use fresh and fully ripe rowan berries.

Pick them right after the first frost, but before the birds eat them. Put them in the freezer for a couple of days. Or do as I do - pick them when they are fully ripe but BEFORE the frost and freeze them for a week or more. Frost makes rowan berries milder and sweeter.



Directions:

Rinse the berries carefully and remove all stems. Leave them to dry in the shadow - on paper towel. Freeze them for a week or more. Put 80 centiliter (about 1 1/2 pint) frozen berries in a clean glass jar with tight-fitting lid. Cover the berries with approx. 35 centiliter (about 3/4 pint) clear, unflavoured vodka - 40% alcohol content (80 proof). Steep for 1-4 weeks or more in a dark place at room temperature, 18-20°C (64-68°F). Shake lightly and taste it from time to time. Strain and filter your infusion into a clean glass bottle or jar with tight-fitting lid. Store (age) for at least 2 months in a dark place at room temperature before serving.

Cheers!!!!

Well, there you have it folks. A menu to keep you warm, happy, and well fed on this Major Sabbat. Till the next issue, I wish you and yours a very Merry Imbolc!!! and all the best the Old Gods can bestow.

Huggs & B*B ~ OwlOak

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OwlOak lives in New England, USA and is a Wiccan High Priest.
He has been an EW member since 2003.



The Bard's Corner

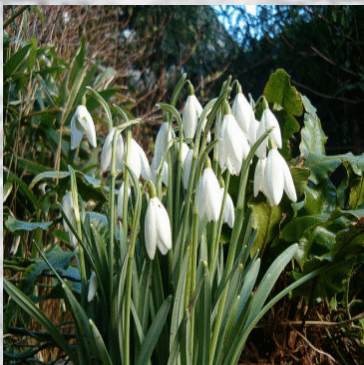
Imbolc

*The first signs of the plant life come along as the sun shines its weaker glow.
Snowdrop flowers are the first to show, revealing their shoots in the Imbolc snow.
The ivy roots ascend their twine around the trunks of the barren trees.
In clouds up above, is the gaze of mother love, as she sees all things the forest needs.*

*The pathway that Mother Nature shows, is the one the people know,
As they carry forth her wishes as the Imbolc snow doth blow.
Shepherds spend a weary day that begins at the break of dawn.
Their workload is one of plenty as the lambs are being born.*

*The sun has grown a little stronger since Yuletide days gone past.
Visions of the coming Spring Equinox come from the icy winds that blast.
The future shows some healthy signs with observations done.
The first festival of spring has now been witnessed with the promise of the sun.*

© Mike - Nature1



The Divination Depot (Tools of the Trade) Tarot

(The Crescent-Crowned Goddess & The Key)



The Tarot...its true origins are unknown, but there are stories that a form of Tarot was used by the ancient Egyptians. Another story tells of it being conceived by the Gypsies. And yet another tells of Atlantis being its birthplace. No one knows for sure, but what we do know is that there was once a social card-playing game with a strong resemblance to the Tarot that is said to have originated in northern Italy (some say France) in the mid-fifteenth century. Wherever it originated, today the Tarot is often used by many as a divination tool. The typical Tarot deck most often consists of 78 cards, 22 of which are called the Major Arcana (21 plus The Fool) and the remaining 56, or Minor Arcana, consist of four suits - Wands, Swords, Cups and Pentacles (or Coins) - each containing 10 pips and 4 face cards. The four suits correspond to the four Directions and four Elements - Air/East/Wands, Fire/South/Swords, Water/West/Cups, and Earth/North/Pentacles. Wands and Swords are sometimes interchanged between Air and Fire, depending on personal preference. In the Southern Hemisphere, North and South correspondences are reversed, and according to some, sometimes also East and West.

The divinatory meanings of the cards have their roots in the Kabbalah (a Jewish mystical tradition and school of thought) and Hermetics, Alchemy, Astrology, Magick, Numerology, and often Color association, and more.

From a typical Tarot deck, there are several cards that could well relate to Imbolc, such as: The Star, which signifies that hope springs eternal...or that there is hope in Spring; or The Empress, who signifies love and nurturing, and who opens the gates for new growth. But the two cards chosen here are "The Crescent-Crowned Goddess" and "The Key"—both cards from "The Well Worn Path" divination deck by Raven Grimassi and Stephanie Taylor. In this deck, although not the typical Tarot deck of old, we find an easily followed storyline and a pathway that follows the footsteps of our Ancestors.

The Crescent-Crowned Goddess symbolizes "divine feminine expression" and is here used as a symbol for the cycles of life and renewal. She stands at the mouth of a cave, which symbolizes the inner mysteries that can be associated with the season of Winter. The serpent around Her arm represents transformation and the shedding of the old for the new; he is the "protector of the seed of new life." In Her hand She holds a torch, symbolizing Her power in birthing the light. And in Her other hand, a spindle, representing the woven tapestry of life. She "directs you to walk up the path that leads to the light." This card is related to finding the Light.

The Key symbolizes that "tools are available for your understanding"...you who are "the seeker of hidden truths and hidden knowledge." The Key is a gift from the Goddess who speaks to you in whispers ~ "This is for you, and for all who seek that which cannot yet be seen." This card is related to Initiation.

Featured Cards: *The Well Worn Path*, Raven Grimassi & Stephanie Taylor, Art by Mickie Mueller. Llewellyn Publications, Woodbury, Minnesota. 2005.



© Patricia J. Martin, January 10, 2009

Pari lives on the East Coast, USA and is a Shamanic Witch. She has been a member of EW since 2003.

<http://www.peacefulpaths.com>



Seasonal Festival ~ Losar

By Graham & Pari



It is a few nights before the second New Moon following the Winter Solstice. The mountainous landscape is stark and still gripped in the bleak, cold hands of Winter. Off in the distance amidst the mighty Himalayas, Chomolungma (more commonly known to the modern world as Mt. Everest) spires up into the night sky, as an old woman named Belma sits by her fire and gazes up at the Moon. For years now she has taken note of this silvery orb's ever-changing face, and has always mapped in her mind the pattern that it weaves night after night. She's understood those patterns as they relate to many things around her, and even to herself; but tonight she has a brilliant idea - as brilliant as the Moon is dark. In the morning she takes her news to her clan, suggesting that they use these mysterious but constant phases of the Moon as a calendar - a way of keeping track of time. The Elders are impressed and declare the commencement of a rural festival to mark the old woman's revelation. And as it coincided with the time of year when their lands would soon begin to emerge from the death-grip of Winter, and as the Sun had already begun to give small promises each day to note its return, the Tibetan New Year was born.

The above is the legend behind Losar. In Belma's day, the shamanic religion of Bön was practiced, and during the festival large quantities of incense was burnt to appease local spirits and deities and to promote protection for the coming year. Today, that ancient festival has evolved into the major Buddhist festival, Losar, which literally means Year [Lo] New {Sar}, and which continues to traditionally mark the start of the Tibetan New Year.

Still to this day Losar generally commences on the second New Moon after the Winter Solstice (often in February) and normally lasts for 3 days; however, the festivities can last for 15 days or more in some parts of Tibet. In the monasteries, preparations for the festival commence the day before with the hanging of fine decorations and the conduct of special rituals

appealing for protection during the approaching year.

Included is the offering of a "sacrificial cake" called Tor Ma to the supreme protective goddess Palden Lhamo, followed by the recitation of incantations and contemplative prayers. The monks then partake in a formal ceremony where the traditional words of greeting "Tashi Delek" are exchanged. At this time, Tibetans clean and decorate their houses with images of the Sun and Moon, hang prayer flags, prepare new clothes, settle debts and quarrels, feast, and drink an alcoholic brew called Chang - all with the hope that bad omens will not be carried over into the coming year. The first few days of the festival itself tend to be private affairs, but after that the festival becomes more communal, with events such as staged ceremonial fights between good and evil, horse racing and archery contests being conducted. Burning torches are also carried through the streets at night and fireworks are lit, all with the intent of warding off evil spirits at this special time. The Dalai Lama (currently the 14th, Tenzin Gyatso), who heads the largest school of Tibetan Buddhism, plays an important role during the festivities of Losar. This includes a consultation of the revered Nechung Oracle in order to gain insight into important influences that may affect Tibet and its people during the year ahead.

Tibetan Buddhism, being an amalgam of the ancient shamanic Bön religion and Indian Buddhism, has many fascinating aspects that become evident during major festivals such as Losar. Sound is used to great effect during religious ceremonies through chanting and the employment of a large variety of instruments such as drums, bells and horns. The long horn, which is more properly called a dung chen, is a prime example, with its deep penetrating sound playing an important role in many ceremonies. Other ritual implements may be more subtle in their operation, yet in their own way, are just as powerful. Some of these plus some interesting aspects of Tibetan religious culture are briefly presented here:



Prayer Flag

Tibetans believe that messages can be carried on the wind. Because of this, coloured flags are block-printed with invocations and blessings and strung out in windswept mountain passes and sacred sites. As the flags flutter, they transmit their wind-borne message. The flags may be further empowered by aligning them with the four cardinal directions of the compass as it is believed that the messages will then be sent to the four corners of the world.



Singing Bowl

Traditionally made of a special alloy of seven metals, singing bowls produce a long, entrancing, ringing tone when they are struck or are played by running a wooden puja around the rim. The sound from these bowls is used for meditation and to aid access to higher realms of the mind and spirit.



Tingsha

Looking like a small pair of cymbals, tingshas produce a crisp ringing sound when struck together. They are traditionally used in ceremonies to summon spirits or deities, or in meditation to mark the start and finish of a session.



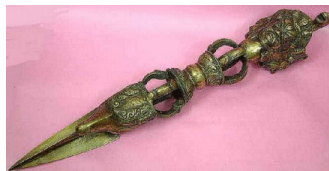
Bell and Vajra

These are iconic implements of Tantric Buddhism. Similarly to the singing bowl, it is believed that the pure tone of a bell can aid access to the realm of spirit. Symbolically, the bell represents the feminine principle of wisdom. The vajra (sometimes called the "diamond thunderbolt" or in Tibetan the dorje) is symbolic of the masculine principles of compassion and skillful means. Together, the bell and vajra represent the inseparability of the masculine and feminine poles of experience. They lead to the realization that both the path and goal are the same, and remind followers that in order to gain enlightenment, both feminine and masculine principles must be combined.



Phurpa

A ritual dagger, the phurpa is a symbol of the ability of wisdom to subjugate evil forces. Its triangular shaped tip is used to pin down and bind evil spirits when it is stabbed into the earth. The three sides of the tip symbolize its power over the three root poisons of ignorance, desire and hatred. These sides also represent the instrument's control over the three phases of Time - past, present and future.



Gtum-mo

This term refers to a special type of "psychic heat" that can be generated by adepts engaging in ecstatic or mystical experience. It forms the basis of amazing stories of monks who are able to survive in icy conditions though clad only in thin cotton robes. The source of the warming energy is thought to be the base chakra, with visualization being used to subtly manipulate energy flows within the body. Traditional training in the art of gtum-mo takes three years, three months and three days.

Tulpa

According to Tibetan mystical teachings, mind and matter are connected and thoughts possess a reality that matches stones, trees and living creatures. It is believed that through the application of great effort and concentration, tulpas or "thought forms" may be manifested to such a degree that they are visible to others, and may perform tasks as directed. However, it is advised that great respect and caution must be exercised when commanding these phantom spirits to ensure that they bring no harm to their creators or others.

Located on the world's highest plateau and in the world's most mountainous region, the country of Tibet has uniquely evolved to become the hub of one of the most mystical and intensely spiritual regions on Earth. It is a place where the sacred connection between mind, body and spirit has been preserved through the centuries - offering much to the seemingly more advanced societies in the West, and to those who are seekers of the old ways.

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Lammas in Australia

By Nan

My seeds have germinated and are unfurling their fluffy green heads under a little purpose-built “sweat box” – I have planted lettuce, cherry tomatoes, mint and parsley this time – and by Lammas, here in the southern hemisphere, the lettuce and parsley should be ready to eat – my first harvest this year! For me it’s all about my environment, and if the plants aren’t ready by a certain date, then I’ll wait to savour them and then celebrate them. My annual Lammas observances don’t often happen on the “right” day, but they do happen at the right time – for me.

In the past I have used a handful of grain plucked at Litha – usually stolen from a wheat crop which has ventured too close to the roadside for me to resist. The grain is left to dry on my windowsill, and then at Lammas I grind it in my mortar and add it to a home made dough, which I’ve stirred in the breadmaker and allowed to rise, but not cook. I know I should be doing it by hand, and I used to, but my wrists now get too sore, and the breadmaker’s handy. When the dough is ready it’s tipped out and divided into three, rolled into sausages and plaited before being baked. It’s this loaf which I will use in my Lammas ritual.



The leftover stalks from my Lammas grain are usually fashioned into a scary kind of corn dolly – I’ve never been good at making them – which often looks like a stiff legged and armed zombie. The dolly sits in my kitchen, decorated with ribbons. The new doll is crafted in ritual during Lammas, and when it is done, I burn last year’s dusty effigy and thank it for its 12 months of protection of my hearth and home.

The climate is changing, and where once Lammas heralded the beginning of cooler days, it’s now usually in the middle of a heatwave. Corn and grain are the predominant features of Lammas because they symbolize the fertility of the earth, the awakening of life, and life coming from death. The paddocks around me are still golden with stubble from the grains harvested and so the drying season is still upon us.

In Australia the threat of fire is all too real right now, so it is a good time for me to study how fire-safe my home and surrounding environment is. The grasses and undergrowth are dry from the prolonged drought, even though the weather hasn’t been particularly hot yet – hardly any days over 90°F, and usually we’ve had several by now. December was cool and pleasant, and January has begun much the same, but the land is still a perfect tinderbox for the Dragon to ignite.

In the north of the country and in the tropical regions of the central to north eastern coast, it is the wet season. Instead of being yellow to brown, the grass is greener, the air is heavy with humidity, cicadas deafening, ticks and fleas abound and creeks and rivers flow steadily. This is, of course, unless they are in the midst of drought. Blueberries are a sacred plant for this time of year and grow well in the sub tropic regions of the southern Queensland coast. Here in the south, school goes back and snakes and lizards are catching the heat from the sun before they return to their hibernations, while butterflies and bees search relentlessly for the last of the summer flowers and their rich pollens.



My ritual will look at planting the seeds of endeavour for the coming year. It’s a time for me to look inside and analyse my life and check on my future plans to make sure they are going where I want them to. I’ll meditate in the circle and think of these things and more.

I have a “significant” birthday coming on in the middle of this year and I am planning a special “Croning” celebration – not that I consider myself to be a crone in the “elder” sense, but it’s more a rite of passage for me from one phase of my life to another. Lammas will be a time where I will begin thinking about the form of this celebration and the ritual which will accompany it and how I will prepare.

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Nan Berrett lives in rural South Australia, is an eclectic Wiccan, hereditary hedgewitch and healer. She has been an EW member since 2008.

Email Witches is a pagan friendly email group attracting people from all walks of life, from all spectrums of society and from all around the world. Most are individuals seeking a personal practical religion that can be adapted to their own needs and criteria, and Wicca is a wonderfully diverse religion that meets these needs. Email Witches (Yahoo Group) is set up as a place where those of same interest can meet, discuss, share and gain more information about their chosen paths. All visitors to my website Controverscial.com are welcome, so feel free to join us and make new friends.



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***October (Samhain)
December (Yule)
February (Imbolc)
March (Ostara)***

***May (Beltane)
June (Litha)
August (Lammas)
September (Mabon)***

***Next Issue:
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Ostara
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