



WINTER SOLSTICE, YULE: NORTHERN HEMISPHERE

The Season

Winter, the time from Samhain (or Hallowe'en) October 31st, through the Winter Solstice and to Imbolc (or Candlemas) February 2, is the time of metaphoric death and renewal.

The seed-pod falls to the Earth, the deciduous trees look lifeless, everything appears to stop growing. The land is shrouded in fog or snow, the cold winds blow.

We live the shortest days and the longest darkest nights.

However, the seed lies dormant underground, gestating; for the trees, root growth is happening, deep within the Earth and the sap is moving through the trunk.

And then at Imbolc we see the moment of rebirth when the seed germinates, its life force breaking through the seed pod heading for the Earth's surface, life returns to the tree's branches with the beginnings of the buds forming and the light and heat of the sun increases.

The cycle goes on. Birth, growth, full bloom, harvest, decay, death, rebirth....

Winter is the final phase of the cycle of the Earth's seasons, although really there is no beginning or end, just one ongoing cycle, over and over.

Like all the parts of the cycle winter holds evidence and clues within it about what came before, what is and what will likely be.

The energy of winter; is an ending, a void and a new beginning.

We see this in the vegetation growth cycle, in the length of the days and nights, in our energy levels and we feel it metaphorically.

There is increasing darkness, the darkest point and then the shift toward increasing light.

Literally and metaphorically.

And herein lay the opportunity, the energy to be with, to recognise the effects of and to flow with on our life journey.

Winter Spiritual Practice

It is not wise to ignore and attempt to avoid any of the parts of the cycle, consciously or unconsciously, and one could say - especially winter. Now is the time for rest and all the other 're' words - rejuvenation, replenish, revitalise, renew. We all know the importance of this part of the cycle, *and* what happens if we *don't* honour it.

“You are alone in your responsibility for balance”

Tamara Slayton, *The Menstrual Matrix*

Midwinter is a time for deep contemplation, of traveling deep within, to the darkest place, the still point, to find the inner light that is there, to then bring it back out to increase and shine.

Make an altar with things from Nature that represent the season and take some time to rest, reflect and rejuvenate, or else!

Creating an altar is an ancient, cross cultural, human practice. It serves to bring our focus to a particular thing, time or event. By creating seasonal altars we can deepen our awareness of what the energy of the season holds and how that is reflected in our inner and outer worlds. Nature is a great teacher!!

Choose a place that you will see often on your movements through your home or somewhere that particularly lends itself to being an altar. You'll know the perfect place, maybe its outside. Decorate it with special things you have and things from nature that make you think of and feel all the different aspects of winter. Perhaps light a candle on the altar each evening or morning, making particular wishes or setting intentions that are in keeping with the energy of Winter – stillness, dormancy, gestation. For example “I give thanks for cultivating stillness, (etc.) and I let go of (such and such) to enable me to rest, rejuvenate, replenish and heal.”

Suggested Ceremony for the Winter Solstice

For the Winter Solstice, members of our community often gather to conduct a ceremony to mark and honour the specific energy of this time. Sometimes we gather in the dark outside and stand in a circle around a bonfire each holding unlit lanterns that we've made, and sometimes the ceremony happens inside. We walk, one by one, or in families, in a spiral to the fire, or lit candles, in the centre, enacting the journey within that winter represents and enables, to the point of stillness at our own centre. We walk in silence and contemplation to the fire, light our lanterns at the centre of the spiral and return out to the circle.

Journeying into the dark and back out, carrying back the ‘light found within’

It's a strong ceremony that poses the questions:

How are you changed when you return from your journey through the dark to your centre and bring forth your light?

Who or what is reborn in you anew, as the sun is at the Winter Solstice?

For the children we suggest that in the dark and the quiet they listen to what their heart is telling them. Listen to what's on the inside.

You could adapt this ceremony and do it with your family on December 21st in the evening before your dinner. Have some unlit candles on your dining table, one each. Take the time together for each person to go inside themselves, to feel the stillness within and to 'see' their inner light. Then, when in that place

inside, to pose oneself a question “what can I see if I shine light on my current situation?”

For the children perhaps something like “If I shine light on... (a current situation)... what will I see more clearly/ what will I know to do? (etc). Following that, and in as much silence and stillness as is possible with children, each person light their candle (bringing back/forth the light). Then have a talking circle to share the insights from the journey within, making sure each person speaks uninterrupted. Or do a ceremony alone, take your time, and reconnect with your inner light.

Blessed Be!