

Voices from the Grain – Yule 2012

Edited and compiled by Patrick McCleary
With various authors contributing

SMASHWORDS EDITION

Voices from the Grain – Yule 2012
Copyright © 2012

An Exploration of Light

I look at the world around me and despite that I write this prior to the Winter Solstice, the season has clearly shifted. The colors of autumn – the vibrant reds, oranges, and yellows – have faded. Even the sky this morning is the foggy gray of clouds pregnant with snow. Perhaps it is only fitting that on the morning of the day I finished this article, the first accumulation of snow happened in my area of the United States; it was a small accumulation but it was apparent.

Winter can be a depressing time. Especially following the December holidays, which in so many cases are focused on family and light, the remaining months of the season can seem lonely and both literally and figuratively dark by comparison. But, we know that this is only our perception and that perhaps even by February but certainly by March, we'll start to recognize that the cycle of the seasons continues and that the light is returning.

Pagans are somewhat unique in the modern religious landscape. While I am certainly no scholar of religion, it seems to me that our willingness not only to accept but in some ways to promote the differences that we encounter philosophically, theologically, and liturgically within the Pagan community is something that hasn't been found within a religious community in quite some time. In short: we're a religious community made up largely of eclectics each of us empowered to discover a path individually meaningful and without necessarily requiring that any individual's path must be relevant to others. Further, we're asked to take the mythology of ancient cultures and apply it in a way that is meaningful in a modern context.

To that end, I've been working to develop and to deepen my own path – my own tradition – for some time now. This article and the others I hope to include in future issues of this periodical, will hopefully be thought provoking for you to read, but my intent in authoring them is primarily selfish: I hope that they will help me to set down in writing my thoughts with respect to the solar holidays. That I undertake this exploration somewhat publicly is not unusual for me. My tradition, even though it is in its infancy, sees the exchange of information as one of the highest forms of righteous social action.

More and more in our modern world, we exchange our thoughts and feelings with others in real time. Whether we're tweeting or updating our Facebook status, sending an email or voice-chatting in a Google hangout, we're transmitting ourselves through the Internet with capabilities our ancestors could only dream of. These capabilities can break down traditional separations between cultures and nations and empower us all to seek out others with whom we share common values regardless of where in the world they may live. If we consider the infrastructure on which these capabilities rely in a metaphorical fashion, it can be considered to be a giant web of light reaching around the globe.

Our Internet is a powerful thing. It has helped to spread the word of protests throughout the Middle East in recent years and toppled some of the governments therein. During the protests surrounding Iran's presidential election in 2009, Twitter was the method by which the Iranian people worked to organize their Green Revolution. When the company behind Twitter was prepared to perform scheduled maintenance during the height of that revolution, the US government stepped in and formerly requested that Twitter not take their services offline and Twitter rescheduled their maintenance. The Obama campaign, in 2012,

leveraged technology developed by Amazon and Netflix to facilitate a variety of technical operations including the online phone-calling system that allowed individual Americans to call others in their geographic region to poll their support for President Obama.

This exchange of information is facilitated - speaking metaphorically, but only slightly so - by an interconnected web of light. Literally, the fiber optic cables that make up the backbone of our Internet, and in many ways our entire world-wide telecommunications capabilities are used to transmit light from one place to another. But metaphorically we can consider our communicative prowess as a modern retelling of various light-brining tales (e.g. Prometheus). While it is undoubtedly arrogant of us to compare ourselves to a titan and to do so would be to patronize others who lack the technology that we use every day, it's undeniable that as Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to humankind in order to facilitate our growth and civilization, the spread of communications technology is now that fire that fuels the march of progress in the modern age.

These concepts - of light being a carrier of information and information as a catalyst for growth and change - are very important for me. Therefore, it is particularly appropriate that this exploration of the holidays begins with Yule as it is at this point within the solar calendar that light begins to return to my geographic region of the world. In that way, the realities of the solar calendar give rise to a time of the year that I feel is uniquely empowering for someone who reveres light in the way that I do.

The encroaching darkness on our daily lives curtails a lot of the activities that we take for granted during other parts of the year. Personally, I've had to move my daily walks with my dogs up to 4:00 PM in order to make it around the block and back before it gets too dark. As a result, many of us are driven to remain indoors and this may give rise to the feelings of loneliness that many feel during the winter months.

But, during these months we are afforded the opportunity for introspection and reflection where, during the warmer months, we may be inclined to be outside enjoying the nicer weather. Further, here in America, we have just completed two holidays - Samhain and Thanksgiving - that focus on the past (i.e. those that we have lost) and the things for which we are thankful in the present. Thus, it is Yule that is almost perfectly situated to begin a time during which life almost seems to stand still as we contemplate the direction in which we should move.

In many Pagan traditions, Samhain is considered a spiritual new year, but I contend that Yule is a better suited for this role for the reasons stated above. It is in this capacity that Yule speaks to me: a time of new beginnings and of the opportunity to reinvent or reorient one's life. The energy that surrounds us at this time can assist in these endeavors. It is a time during which just about everything begins a process of rebirth in the coming months and this process can, and I think should, be recognized in both our secular and spiritual lives.

With respect to our secular lives, I think the winter is a good time to begin to learn about a new skill or to hone or perfect an aspect of one we already have. We're likely already stuck inside, so studious activities seem appropriate for the season. This doesn't mean we all need to rush out to earn a new degree every winter, but simply that maybe it's a good time to fix a leaky faucet, tune up the car in the garage, redesign a web site, to read a favorite author, or watch some movies that are personally significant.

Spiritually, I think we can use the energies of this season in a similar way. Take this time to reflect on your theology and how it calls you to act toward others. Examine your actions over the previous year and seek ways that you can be a more virtuous individual in the coming one. For me, I intend to make this next year one in which I more completely define my tradition and seek ways to further integrate my theological and spiritual philosophies into my daily life.

As the light returns to the northern hemisphere, let that light shine on the hidden places within you. Blow some of that dust off of your mental shelves and take a look at what you've kept there without thinking about it. See if you still agree with the things you previously held to be true and maybe re-evaluate some of the things you determined to be false. I hope that this year, you use this Yule and the days that follow it to reflect on your physical and metaphysical health and to be sure that you are walking the path you want to tread.

In short: take some time this winter to figure out where you want to go. As the light returns, it will illuminate your path and you can begin the process of your life.

About the Author -

"David Dashifen Kees is a mild mannered web application developer recently transplanted from the Midwest into New England. He is the technical director of the Pagan Newswire Collective, the lead coordinator of the Hail Columbia Project, and a blogger at the Pagan Activist blog. In addition to these online activities, he can often be found working on interfaith projects with people of other faiths and he dreams of one day helping to create a team of Pagans throughout America who will help create and interface between his religious community and others. His personal blog can be found at technowitch.org where he explores theological and personal thoughts and resolves to be a more regular blogger. He can be found there, or at both [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) with the username "dashifen."

Solstice Connections

It was recently revealed that Richard Dawkins, arguably the world's most prominent atheist, loves to sing carols at Christmas time. But the songs he loves the most are not the modern secular ones. Dawkins writes: "I recoil from such secular carols as 'White Christmas,' 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,' and the loathsome 'Jingle Bells,' but I'm happy to sing real carols." He prefers the older songs, which tend to have explicitly Christian religious themes.

This makes perfect sense to me. As a child, those old songs were one of my few direct connections to an older time and an older culture. Many of the carols I grew up singing were authored in the 1800s. The lyrics of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" go back to at least 1739. The tune to "Adeste Fideles" may well go back to the 13th century.

It's not only the music. I was enchanted by the old customs. Bringing a tree inside the house seemed unaccountably weird and magical and very much out of character for my sedate middle-class parents in our standard-issue suburban home. I didn't understand it – but I liked it.

Something about all this archaic stuff resonated deeply with me as a child. It filled an inner yearning which I could not identify, but which I now recognize as a need to connect to a larger whole: to previous generations of humanity, and to Mother Earth.

That yearning need remains with me as an adult. Yet over the years, the religious aspects of Christmas have been difficult for me to ignore. As a non-Christian, I found that celebrating a Christian holiday created increasing levels of cognitive dissonance. Many folks seem to slough this off and focus on the secular aspects, but I could not. Perhaps it's how I was raised. It is a tradition in my extended family to sing "Happy Birthday Jesus" at Christmas gatherings. Or maybe I'm just a stickler for details: I knew that Jesus was not actually born at this time. More to the point, the image and story of Jesus meant less to me each year.

At the same time, I'm turned off by the rampant commercialization of the holiday, just as many Christians are. (We often imagine this commercialization to be a process that happened in the last generation or two, but this trend actually goes back to the early 1800s.) The economic pressure – buy, buy, buy, consume, consume, consume – not only leaves me cold, it actively distresses me.

There has to be something more. There has to be something real to celebrate.

And of course, there is. But what is it?

Like many who have wondered about such things, I latched onto the idea of the Winter Solstice. I wanted to shout, "The solstice is the reason for the season!" After all, there are many similar mid-winter holidays all over the world, clustered around this celestial event.

Unfortunately, I didn't know what more to do with this idea. It was an empty sort of "gotcha" moment. I focused on the mechanics of the solar orb and kind of stopped there, out in space somewhere. I had a vague idea that something more

was possible, even necessary, but I didn't know what. Something was still missing.

The more I've studied and learned on the subject, the more I've come to realize how simplistic my initial thoughts were. Yes, the solstice is the reason, but then again, no – not exactly.

Let me expand on that. An excellent example comes in the question of why the Christmas holiday was fixed at this time of year by the early church. For the first two centuries after the crucifixion, Christians did not celebrate the birth of Jesus at all. When the custom finally did begin, some observed it in May, others in April, others in March, still others in January. Indeed, according to the Catholic Encyclopedia, "there is no month in the year to which respectable authorities have not assigned Christ's birth." December finally won out, for Roman Catholics at least; December 25 was the date of Dies Natalis Solis Invicti, a Roman festival celebrating the birth (or rebirth) of the sun god Sol Invictus. Accordingly, "the same instinct which set Natalis Invicti at the winter solstice will have sufficed... to set the Christian feast there too."

So, yes, the solstice, but not exactly. It's not the solstice per se but the instinct behind it. It's "the same instinct" behind Natalis Invicti. What is that instinct?

It wasn't until I encountered the Wheel of the Year that I started making the necessary connections. In fact, I'd say that the solstice was my key to the Wheel. The Winter Solstice or Yule is often placed at the top in illustrations of the Wheel, and from a calendrical view this makes intuitive sense. (It would be cool if the word "Yule" actually derived from "wheel," as some aver; however, students of etymology will note there's no evidence for this.) The other contender for the top spot is Samhain, but I'm not trying to start a contest here. The point of the wheel is its cyclical nature. It has no beginning, and no end. Conversely, one can jump in and start anywhere. (In terms of actual celebration, Lammas was my jumping-in point, but that's a story for another day.) The cycle of eight holidays arranged equally throughout the year asserts the natural rhythm of the seasons as a supreme value.

The solstice is a discrete moment, but its significance stems from its context in this cycle of the seasons, in the course of Earth's orbit. Seeing the solstice in the context of the Wheel made all the difference.

This shift in perspective was a shift from fragments to wholeness. It seems so blindingly obvious now, so simple in retrospect. It's indicative of how limited my earlier perspective was.

Instead of looking at the solstice as a remote event "out there" in space somewhere, I saw that it was intimately connected to life here on Earth. Though we often speak of "solar holidays," the solstice is not a strictly solar event. It's an Earth-sun event. Nothing happens to the sun, after all; nothing changes there, though we seem to see changes from our place here on Earth.

It's here, Earth, our home and Mother, that I've come to understand as both a sacred place and a divine being. Divinity is not "out there" but right here. As Glenys Livingstone writes in PaGaian Cosmology, "When I speak of Mother, I understand Her as Holy Context, Place to Be." We are not separate from the Mother; we are a part of her. She is the place where all humanity lives, and a being in which we all participate.

But even this immense context of the Earth has a greater context. Even this awesome living planet exists in relation to the sun, the stars, the universe. The solstice, then, is that day when the sun appears to "stand still" from our vantage point here on Earth. (That's what solstice means in Latin: sol + sistere = sun-standing.) In the summer, it's the longest day, after which days get shorter; in the winter, it's the shortest day, after which days get longer. Thus at the Winter Solstice our world seems to emerge from darkening night.

The solstices are one way, perhaps the best way, for us Earth-bound creatures to mark the fact that a year has elapsed.

A year on our planet is 365 and $\frac{1}{4}$ days, more or less. We take much for granted, but it is interesting to contemplate how ancient people figured this out. To compute the passage of time, without high-tech tools, what is needed? It's easy to observe the passage of a single day. It's also easy to track the waxing and waning of the moon, which marks a period of time which we might call a month. But the year? We can all see the passage of the seasons, and the recurrence of annual natural phenomenon. But to pin the year down more precisely, one has to observe the stars, or the track the sun more closely.

There is evidence that ancient people did this. For example, the Newgrange monument in Ireland is aligned in such a way that the interior room is illuminated on the Winter Solstice. It was built around 3200 BC, which is pretty damn old. That means it was built before Stonehenge. It was already old when the great pyramids were constructed at Giza. So clearly people have been noticing this event for a long, long time.

Indeed, astronomy is considered the oldest of the natural sciences. Way back when, it was a key to power. Whoever could predict annual recurrence was obviously onto something. Priesthoods were built around this. Letting people know when to plant was vitally important to agricultural societies.

I used to think of the solstice as a transcendently cosmic event. Once again, I was wrong. Just as my understanding of the solstice was enhanced by bringing it back "down to Earth," restoring its proper context in the relation of Earth and sun, so too I now recognize the solstice as a fundamentally human phenomenon. To animals and plants, it's just another day. The days get longer after the Winter Solstice, and the attendant changes will eventually come to our ecosystems. But to notice the event itself, to mark the day, and to understand its significance, to realize what it means, is very human indeed.

Thus, to contemplate the solstice is to meditate upon the very origins of science and religion and the essence of humanity. Can you feel the resonance echoing through the corridors of time? That's a main purpose of ritual to me: to evoke that resonance. People around the world and throughout recorded history have celebrated this time of the year, as light re-emerges from the darkness, through the use of bonfires, candles, colorful electrical bulbs strewn on a wire, it matters not. When people do this they are participating in an ancient ritual, even if they don't explicitly acknowledge the solstice.

And so, when I stare into that flame we kindle on the longest night of the year, I'm thinking about so many things: science, religion, light, dark, birth, rebirth, conception, the Big Bang, cosmogenesis, sun, Earth, recurrence, seasons, the calendar, the Wheel of the Year, the passage of time, ritual, nature, Gaia, life, hope.

In thinking about the solstice this way, I'm aiming for what might be called a meta-perspective. That is, I'm focusing my attention on a natural phenomenon which has inspired many celebrations, religious and otherwise, over millennia of human existence. While the phenomenon of the solstice may not be known or directly observed by all, the poetry of the season is undeniable; I strongly suspect that most if not all mid-winter festivals found their original source in these poetics of light and darkness. By focusing on the solstice, an Earth-sun event seen from a human perspective, I am directly acknowledging a primal source of these multifarious celebrations.

Think of it this way: The solstice is like the Tannenbaum. Our various celebrations are like the ornaments. By celebrating the solstice, we are aiming to see the real tree for what it really is.

I encourage everyone to learn a few solstice facts. It's not necessary to become a scholar on the subject overnight. Take your time. Learn a little every year. Talk about it with your friends and neighbors. After all, it's their solstice too.

This special moment is available to all the people of Earth, no matter their religion, no matter their country or continent. Those in the opposite hemisphere will be experiencing the opposite solstice, of course, but at the exact same moment; six months later our situations will be reversed. Even at the equator the solstice can be observed by the angle of the sun. It is truly a global event. Any opportunity that invites us to recall our connections to one another and to the natural universe is worthy of celebration.

The Winter Solstice is the ultimate holiday. Maybe not for you personally, or even for me, but for all of us in common – for humanity.

REFERENCES

History of the Calendar

<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ac06>

PaGaian Cosmology by Glenys Livingstone

<http://pagaian.org/book/>

Catholic Encyclopedia article on Christmas

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>

The Battle for Christmas by Stephen Nissenbaum

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/280722.The_Battle_for_Christmas

For Richard Dawkins, Traditional Christmas Carols Trump Atheism

<http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/16/for-richard-dawkins-traditional-christmas-carols-trump-atheism/>

Voices from the Dawn: Newgrange

<http://www.voicesfromthedawn.com/newgrange/>

About the Author -

Bart Everson is a writer, a photographer, a baker of bread, a husband and a father. An award-winning videographer, he is co-creator of ROX, the first TV show on the internet. As a media artist and an advocate for faculty development

in higher education, he is interested in current and emerging trends in social media, blogging, podcasting, et cetera, as well as non-technological subjects such as contemplative pedagogy and integrative learning. He is a founding member of the Green Party of Louisiana, past president of Friends of Lafitte Corridor, sometime contributor to Rising Tide, and a participant in New Orleans Lamplight Circle."

Yule Around the World

Introduction

I spent time in thought trying to decide the best idea for my individual interpretation of the Yuletide. It came to me to try to explain here, as best i can, the different traditions celebrated throughout the world. While this will not be a complete account of all the world's traditions, it will give an account of the major traditions celebrated around the world.

Islam

The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar, similar to the Jewish calendar. It has 12 months with 29 or 30 days for a total of 354 days. Since it does not align with the solar calendar, the holidays occur at different times each year and not always within the same season as the year before.

Al Hijra

This is the Islamic new years. It is the first day of the New Year and is celebrated on the first day of Muharram. This is the day when Mohammed began his migration from Mecca to Medina in the Islamic Year 1 (1 AH), 622 CE. This day has fallen from January to November over the course of the last few years.

Ashura

This is a day of mourning, observed on the 10th of Muharram, which is the first month of the Islamic year. On this day Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of The Prophet Muhammad. It also commemorates Moses and the Israelites being saved from the Pharaoh of Egypt by crossing the Red Sea.

Judaism

In Judaism they have two holidays or celebrations that fall within the same time as Yule. One is Hanukkah, the other is 10 Tevet.

Hanukkah

This is a festival of lights that lasts for 8 days. One candle is lit in a home on the first night, then two on the second night and so on for all 8 days of the celebration. Hanukkah means dedication and marks the re-dedication of the Temple after it was desecrated. Hanukkah commemorates the Miracle of the Oil. When the Temple was being re-dedicated it was found there was only enough consecrated oil to burn the Eternal Flame for one day. It burned for eight days despite this and was considered a miracle as it took eight days to create more oil to feed the flame.

Hanukkah is not mentioned in the bible and was a minor holiday until more recent times. It has now gained a lot of recognition and is practiced as a major holiday. It falls on December 8th and lasts until the 16th.

10Tevet

10 Tevet is a holy day of fasting, repentance and mourning. It was on this day in Jewish history that Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem, and after 30 months, breached the walls and destroyed the Temple. It is also a day when the martyrs of the holocaust are mourned and recognized. This holiday falls on December 23rd.

Christianity

There are two religious celebrations that fall into this time frame, one is Advent, the other, Christmas.

Advent

Advent is the beginning of the church year. In Western churches four Sundays before Christmas eve are used for this observance of fasting. In the Eastern or Orthodox church it begins a little sooner, around mid November. Historically Advent was a time of fasting and repentance in preparation of the return of the Christ on Judgement day. In more modern celebrations it is seen as the time before Christ returns on Christmas. Fasting does not occur any longer except in some of the Eastern church's. It is more commonly known by those not strong in their faith or non christians in the form of the Advent calendar, which is not a religious celebration or item in any way, but is a calendar full of chocolate or toys for children leading up to Christmas. A little gift each day. I would assume it was designed to help keep children calm and patient while awaiting the opening of gifts on the 25th. It would also give them something to look forward to everyday while they wait.

I have one of these calendars myself.

Boxing Day

This day is usually observed on December 26th or, if the 25th falls on a weekend, the Monday following the holiday weekend. It was traditionally a day when the poor and servants were given gifts as they had to work on the 25th so their employers could observe the holiday. This day has been observed in Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Today, this is still observed in the form of bonuses to workers given to them by their employers but generally takes place before the 25th.

Christmas

Christmas has been celebrated by Christians since the 3rd century. It falls in line with the Pagan winter holidays and was most likely Chosen in accordance with the Pagan holidays to help with their conversion to the new religion. The Romans of the time celebrated the 25th as the birthday of the Sun God. The Christians of the time claimed they chose this day not to celebrate the Pagan holiday of the Sun God, but to celebrate the birth of he who made the Sun.

Many other aspects of this day can be traced back to Pagan religious beliefs Such as the Yule log, the tree, gift giving and the lights. All of this was done in an attempt to convert Pagans. Today it is viewed upon under much scrutiny, however, when it began it was considered a victory for the church in the conversion of souls.

Midnight Mass is celebrated with much candle light throughout most of the Christian world. In Bethlehem, the mass is celebrated at the place of Jesus's birth, in the ancient church of the nativity.

The modern Christmas tree began in Germany in the 18th century. It was then brought to England and the America's by German immigrants. Traditionally, Evergreen boughs were used by the Pagans in the continuance of their tree worship. The use of the Christmas tree by Christians marks another religious icon of the Pagans used for the benefit of conversion by the Christians.

Winter Solstice

The Winter Solstice is the time of the year we celebrate the Rebirth of the Sun God. It usually falls on the 21st or 22nd of December. On this day the sun is at its weakest point and the night is the longest of the year. There are many traditions within Paganism for this day. All view it as a religious holiday.

Mistletoe grows on the most sacred of tree's, the Oak. In the old practice, an Oak would be ceremonially cut down and sprays given to the people for luck. The Druids would cut the mistletoe from the Oaks using a golden sickle and pass it to the people as the "All-Heal" as it was believed to have enormous medicinal properties.

Today, we celebrate it as a time to reflect and to welcome the return of the Sun God. Many people still give gifts as well as set up evergreen trees and lights. As these practices were Pagan in origin to begin with, it makes sense to continue to follow them. This is a time to spend it with family and friends. The lights on the tree are a representation of the Sun God . Giving gifts is not so far from the religious practice as it may sound, for the Sun Gods return has once again given the Earth the gift of life. Giving gifts to each other is just an extension of this, our feeble way to try to follow in the footsteps of our Lord. Here is a Celtic Solstice prayer i found on about.com

*The food is put away for the winter,
the crops are set aside to feed us,
the cattle are come down from their fields,
and the sheep are in from the pasture.
The land is cold, the sea is stormy, the sky is gray.
The nights are dark, but we have our family,
kin and clan around the hearth,
staying warm in the midst of darkness,
our spirit and love a flame
a beacon burning brightly
in the night.*

As you can see it is also celebrated as a form of Thanksgiving as well. The knowledge that the Earth is sleeping is not nor was not lost on people both then and now. Laying dormant under the ground is the seeds to spring new life after the Sun God has made his triumphant march back into the sky.

Yule

*Beneath the tree of light and life,
a blessing at this season of Jul!
To all that sit at my hearth,
today we are brothers, we are family,
and I drink to your health!*

*Today is a day to offer hospitality
to all that cross my threshold
in the name of the season.*

This prayer is from an old Nordic Yule Tradition. The Scandanavian people have celebrated Yule for many centuries. Many records show the tradition came from the Germanic peoples, while others the Nordic peoples. Either way, it is celebrated the same way.

Yule begins on the winter solstice and goes until the second of January. It is a time for merriment and reflection. This is a time for gathering and celebration. Large feasts would be prepared. The Yule Boar is still represented today as the Ham we prepare for the holidays. There were sacrifices and singing. Yule singing has followed along as the Christmas carol but today's Christians.

The Yule log was a large log of hard wood set to blaze in the hearth. It was meant to keep burning for the duration of the celebrations. This tradition was popular in Germanic regions. In the British Isles it was not believed to be practiced until it was brought in and adopted by the Britian Celts. Once burned, a piece was kept as a good luck charm throughout the year and was then used to start the fire for the following years Yule celebration.

The practice of burning the Yule log has largely died out, however, we do still have the baked Yule log made of chocolate!

There is a belief in many Pagan traditions of the great battle between the Oak King and the Holly King. Both are considered dual aspects of the Great Horned God. On the Solstice they do battle for supremacy with the Oak King wining. Until the Summer Solstice, when the Holly King returns and Defeats the Oak King and he then reins for the next six months while the other nurse's his wounds waiting for the Solstice to once again rise up and fight. It is said the reason for the battle is to win the hand of the Lady, or the Goddess.

The Holly King often appears in the Guise of a woodsman like Santa Clause while the Oak king is akin to the fertility God or better reffered to as the Green Man. Either way, they are both part of the same whole and one can not live without the other.

The tradition used within my own family is a mix of all the pagan beliefs following much of the modern thoughts on Christmas. We love to have a fire burn and crackle and a decorated tree sitting in the corner. The giving of gifts is of course followed as it was an original practice amongst the Pagans. We have a large feast, if with my parents, who are Christian, we have the common fixings with turkey and ham. If just myself and my family we will have a ham and a snow goose. The origins of why i chose goose i can no longer remember. We burn candles of the holidays, hang stockings and decorate the outside. We try to use more traditional decorations for the tree, home made looking if not in fact and lacking in most of the glitter and dazzle of the more modern tree decorations. We always say a prayer to the Lord and the Lady and once we leave an offering outside as a show of our love and affection as well as our gratitude for allowing us the bounty we are eating while asking for the bounty to continue the following year.

There are many other celebrations throughout the world from the Orient to the American Indians and all other pagan practices throughout history. If you are interested in furthering your knowledge check out ask.com as much of my information came from there.

About the Author -

The Author ,Killian, Was Born in 1972 and grew up in a small Texas town around agriculture. He began his search for a different path fueled by his love for reading books. Through years of searching and traveling he came upon the Pagan Path and found the Lord and the Lady waiting for him with open arms. He currently works as a welder and is working on writing a fantasy book of his own.

In the past he has been published in Zoo magazines on the breeding and raising of endangered species of reptiles and amphibians. Currently, he authors a column called The Celtic Male for [the Pagan Household](#) and resides in central Illinois.

Ideas for Yule

I know that many of us already have an idea of what Yule is. Whether it is the 'traditional' view of the Sabbat or your own spin on it, or both. So I won't go into some long diatribe about what Yule is and what it means.

But I want to do is talk about the energy at this time of the year.

Many years ago I had a newcomer to the Craft try to figure out why we did ritual. For him it seemed that ritual was an arcane idea. One that didn't apply to the modern world. Especially since so many of our rituals are based upon an older agricultural cycle that we don't follow today.

My response was that regardless of whether we follow those cycles or not, they are still very present and hardwired into our bodies after so many generations. This is why the idea of eating locally and seasonally makes so much sense to us Pagans, we already follow the cycle of the Wheel of the Year with all of its agricultural significance.

With this in mind what I wanted to talk about today is this underlying energy found at Yule and the lessons that we can take from it. We will touch on some of the other Sabbats as well but it is only to either lay framework or to establish a context for our discussion.

So I guess I'm going to have go a little against my early statement and talk a little about what the Sabbat of Yule is about but I promise only a little. The last thing I want to do is to be boring. So please bear with me.

Yule is unique as a holiday since it marks both a beginning and an ending. While, to some traditions, Samhain marks the end of the year and Yule the beginning. Yule is also the end of that waiting period between the end of one year and the start of the next.

It is a moment when the world holds it's breath. In days past our Ancestors would have been genuinely worried that the Sun would not have returned, but with all of our modern science we know that the Sun isn't going anywhere for quite a while. But we still hold our breath, the underlying energy is in a holding pattern, waiting for that moment to start forward on new projects.

But what does any of this have to do with us today?

Well we should realize that our personal energy can be in a kind of holding pattern. While we are still able to get stuff done. The period from Samhain to Yule is a time for reflection and introspection. A time to learn some new crafts and to spend time with family.

We should also be preparing for new projects. Laying the groundwork so to speak. For those of us who garden in the Northern states, the last frost is just a few months away. So it is a good time to start seedlings indoors, to get a little jump on our growing season. The same applies to us in our own lives. This is where the idea of New Year's Resolutions come from.

It is also a time to reach out to family and reconnect. Whether it is kith or kin (blood or spirit), family is important and we should keep those connections strong. And with so many holidays (Thanksgiving is just past us when I am sitting down to write this) both secular and spiritual, there are plenty of excuses to prepare a feast and toast our family.

But Yule is about more than the end of the resting period that started at Samhain. It also marks the rebirth of the Sun King - Oak King - Greenman etc. I know that he has many names, but no matter what you call him it is the time of his rebirth. So in our own rituals and personal practice it would be good to mark this.

Where do we go from here?

Now I could go into a ritual to mark the holiday but I already do that on my blog and I don't want to just appeal to the beginner here. Instead I would like to illustrate some things to include in your personal practice for both the time leading up to this Sabbat and on Yule itself.

Daily Practice

Rise up a little earlier each morning and try to greet the sun. Spend some moments watching it rise and take a few breaths before we jump into the rush of work and the holiday season.

Meditate on the things in the New Year you want to achieve. Then start to write them down and lay the framework for them to happen.

New Moon

In my family's tradition the Crone as Mother is pregnant with the returning child, so we like to send her some energy and keep her in mind as we do a ritual dedicated to the Crone.

This also a good time to do some divination in relation to your goals.

Yule

This year, like many years before, we are going to be spending the night in vigil awaiting the return of the Sun. I know with work this can be tough for everyone but it is a good time to reconnect with kith and kin.

In the morning just as the Sun is rising, we will be doing our Silent ritual opening. I say silent because there are no words until we shout welcome to the newborn Sun. Our circle opening is based upon The Ritual of Gestures by Scott Cunningham. Found in Wicca; A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner.

After ritual be sure to feast and to feast often. We will be having a huge breakfast to start the day and a huge dinner to end it. In the meantime we plan to get some rest and to spend time with family.

Full Moon

With the Full Moon falling a week after Yule this year, it is a good time to do magick to boost the goals you set at Yule. And to ask for the Gods to bless your projects and your home for the coming change in the physical calendar.

I hope that this helps you to plan for a festive and a productive upcoming Yule. And I hope that you and your family have a blessed one as well.

Blessed Be!

About the Author -

Patrick McCleary is a PaganDad and as such he runs the blog PaganDad.com. Dedicated to the idea of raising up the next generation in faith. He is also the founder of [The Pagan Village](#), the go-to place for Pagan families on the web to network and begin the important task of building their Tribes. Also started by Patrick is the columnist driven site The Pagan Household, started with the idea of beginning to define what exactly a magickal home is.