EARTH SPIRIT PAGANS NEWSLETTER

Earth Spirit Pagans

MIDSUMMER 2009

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

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A Midsummer's Celebration

by Mike Nichols

The young maid stole through the cottage door,
And blushed as she sought the Plant of pow'r;--
'Thou silver glow-worm, O lend me thy light,
I must gather the mystic St. John's wort tonight,
The wonderful herb, whose leaf will decide
If the coming year shall make me a bride.

In addition to the four great festivals of the Pagan Celtic year, there are four lesser holidays as well: the two solstices, and the two equinoxes. In folklore, these are referred to as the four 'quarter-days' of the year, and modern Witches call them the four 'Lesser Sabbats', or the four 'Low Holidays'. The Summer Solstice is one of them.

Technically, a solstice is an astronomical point and, due to the procession of the equinox, the date may vary by a few days depending on the year. The summer solstice occurs when the sun reaches the Tropic of Cancer, and we experience the longest day and the shortest night of the year. Astrologers know this as the date on which the sun enters the sign of Cancer.

However, since most European peasants were not accomplished at reading an ephemeris or did not live close enough to Salisbury Plain to trot over to Stonehenge and sight down its main avenue, they celebrated the event on a fixed calendar date, June 24th. The slight forward displacement of the traditional date is the result of multitudinous calendrical changes down through the ages. It is analogous to the winter solstice celebration, which is astronomically on or about December 21st, but is celebrated on the traditional date of December 25th, Yule, later adopted by the Christians.

Again, it must be remembered that the Celts reckoned their days from sundown to sundown, so the June 24th festivities actually begin on the previous sundown (our June 23rd). This was Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Eve. Which brings up another point: our modern calendars are quite misguided in suggesting that 'summer begins' on the solstice. According to the old folk calendar, summer begins on May Day and ends on Lammas (August 1st), with the summer solstice, midway between the two, marking mid-summer. This makes more logical sense than suggesting that summer begins on the day when the sun's power begins to wane and the days grow shorter.

Although our Pagan ancestors probably preferred June 24th (and indeed most European folk festivals today use this date), the sensibility of modern Witches seems to prefer the actual solstice point, beginning the celebration on its eve, or the sunset

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immediately preceding the solstice point. Again, it gives modern Pagans a range of dates to choose from with, hopefully, a weekend embedded in it.

Just as the Pagan mid-winter celebration of Yule was adopted by Christians as Christmas (December 25th), so too the Pagan mid-summer celebration was adopted by them as the feast of John the Baptist (June 24th). Occurring 180 degrees apart on the wheel of the year, the mid-winter celebration commemorates the birth of Jesus, while the mid-summer celebration commemorates the birth of John, the prophet who was born six months before Jesus in order to announce his arrival.

Although modern Witches often refer to the holiday by the rather generic name of Midsummer's Eve, it is more probable that our Pagan ancestors of a few hundred years ago actually used the Christian name for the holiday, St. John's Eve. This is evident from the wealth of folklore that surrounds the summer solstice (i.e. that it is a night especially sacred to the faerie folk) but which is inevitably ascribed to 'St. John's Eve', with no mention of the sun's position. It could also be argued that a Coven's claim to antiquity might be judged by what name it gives the holidays. (Incidentally, the name 'Litha' for the holiday is a modern usage, possibly based on a Saxon word that means the opposite of Yule. Still, there is little historical justification for its use in this context.) But weren't our Pagan ancestors offended by the use of the name of a Christian saint for a pre-Christian holiday?

Well, to begin with, their theological sensibilities may not have been as finely honed as our own. But secondly and more importantly, St. John himself was often seen as a rather Pagan figure. He was, after all, called 'the Oak King'. His connection to the wilderness (from whence 'the voice cried out') was often emphasized by the rustic nature of his shrines. Many statues show him as a horned figure (as is also the case with Moses). Christian iconographers mumble embarrassed explanations about 'horns of light', while modern Pagans giggle and happily refer to such statues as 'Pan the Baptist'. And to clench matters, many depictions of John actually show him with the lower torso of a satyr, cloven hooves and all! Obviously, this kind of John the Baptist is more properly a Jack in the Green! Also obvious is that behind the medieval conception of St. John lies a distant, shadowy Pagan deity, perhaps the archetypal Wild Man of the Wood, whose face stares down at us through the foliate masks that adorn so much church architecture. Thus medieval Pagans may have had fewer problems adapting than we might suppose.

In England, it was the ancient custom on St. John's Eve to light large bonfires after sundown, which served the double purpose of providing light to the revelers and warding off evil spirits. This was known as 'setting the watch'. People often jumped through the fires for good luck. In addition to these fires, the streets were lined with lanterns, and people carried cressets (pivoted lanterns atop poles) as they wandered from one bonfire to another. These wandering, garland-bedecked bands were called a 'marching watch'. Often they were attended by morris dancers, and traditional players dressed as a unicorn, a dragon, and six hobby-horse riders. Just asMay Day was a time to renew the boundary on one's own property, so Midsummer's Eve was a time to ward the boundary of the city.

Customs surrounding St. John's Eve are many and varied. At the very least, most young folk plan to stay up throughout the whole of this shortest night. Certain courageous souls might spend the night keeping watch in the center of a circle of standing stones. To do so would certainly result in either death, madness, or (hopefully) the power of inspiration to become a great poet or bard. (This is, by the way, identical to certain incidents in the first branch of the 'Mabinogion'.) This was also the night when the serpents of the island would roll themselves into a hissing, writhing ball in order to engender the 'glain', also called the 'serpent's egg', 'snake stone', or 'Druid's egg'. Anyone in possession of this hard glass bubble would wield incredible magical powers. Even Merlyn himself (accompanied by his black dog) went in search of it, according to one ancient Welsh story.

Snakes were not the only creatures active on Midsummer's Eve. According to British faery lore, this night was second only to Halloween for its importance to the wee folk, who especially enjoyed a ridling on such a fine summer's night. In order to see them, you had only to gather fern seed at the stroke of midnight

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and rub it onto your eyelids. But be sure to carry a little bit of rue in your pocket, or you might well be 'pixie-led'. Or, failing the rue, you might simply turn your jacket inside-out, which should keep you from harm's way. But if even this fails, you must seek out one of the 'ley lines', the old straight tracks, and stay upon it to your destination. This will keep you safe from any malevolent power, as will crossing a stream of 'living' (running) water.

Other customs included decking the house (especially over the front door) with birch, fennel, St. John's wort, orpin, and white lilies. Five plants were thought to have special magical properties on this night: rue, roses, St. John's wort, vervain and trefoil. Indeed, Midsummer's Eve in Spain is called the 'Night of the Verbena (Vervain)'. St. John's wort was especially honored by young maidens who picked it in the hopes of divining a future lover.

And the glow-worm came
With its silvery flame,
And sparkled and shone
Through the night of St. John,
And soon has the young maid her love-knot tied.

There are also many mythical associations with the summer solstice, not the least of which concerns the seasonal life of the God of the sun. Inasmuch as I believe that I have recently discovered certain associations and correspondences not hitherto realized, I have elected to treat this subject in some depth in another essay. Suffice it to say here, that I disagree with the generally accepted idea that the Sun-God meets his death at the summer solstice. I believe there is good reason to see the Sun-God at his zenith -- his peak of power -- on this day, and that his death at the hands of his rival would not occur for another quarter of a year. Material drawn from the Welsh mythos seems to support this thesis. In Irish mythology, Midsummer is the occasion of the first battle between the Fir Bolgs and the Tuatha De Danaan.

Altogether, Midsummer is a favorite holiday for many Witches in that it is so hospitable to outdoor celebrations. The warm summer night seems to invite it. And if the celebrants are not in fact skyclad, then you may be fairly certain that the long ritual robes of winter have yielded place to short, tunic-style apparel. As with the longer gowns, tradition dictates that one should wear nothing underneath -- the next best thing to skyclad, to be sure. (Incidentally, now you know the real answer to the old Scottish joke, 'What is worn beneath the kilt?')

The two chief icons of the holiday are the spear (symbol of the Sun-God in his glory) and the summer cauldron (symbol of the Goddess in her bounty). The precise meaning of these two symbols, which I believe I have recently discovered, will be explored in the essay on the death of Llew. But it is interesting to note here that modern Witches often use these same symbols in the Midsummer rituals. And one occasionally hears the alternative consecration formula, 'As the spear is to the male, so the cauldron is to the female...' With these mythic associations, it is no wonder that Midsummer is such a joyous and magical occasion!

MIDSUMMER (circa June 21)

Before the rite, make up a small cloth pouch filled with herbs such as lavender, chamomile, St. John's Wort, vervain, or any of the Midsummer herbs listed in "An Herbal Grimoire." Mentally pour all your troubles, problems, pains, sorrows and illness es, if any, into this petition as you construct it. Tie it shut with a red string. Place this on the altar for use during the rite. The cauldron should also be there or nearby. Even if you use candles to mark the quarters, the red candle in a holder s hould also be on the altar. For outdoor rituals, light a fire (however small) and drop the pouch into this.

Arrange the altar, light the candles and censer, and cast the Circle of Stones.

Recite the Blessing Chant.

Invoke the Goddess and God.

Stand before the altar and say, with wand upraised:

I celebrate the noon of summer with mystic rites.
O great Goddess and God,
all nature vibrates with Your energies and the Earth is bathed with warmth and life.
Now is the time of forgetting past cares and banes;
O fiery Sun,
burn away the un-useful,
the hurtful,
the bane,
in Your omnipotent power.
Purify me!
Purify me!
Purify me!

Lay the wand on the altar. Take up the herbal petition and light it in the red candle on the altar (or, if outdoors, the ritual fire). When it is burning drop it into the cauldron (or some other heat proof container) and say:

I banish you by the powers of the Goddess and God!
I banish you by the powers of the Sun, Moon and Stars!
I banish you by the powers of the Earth, Air, Fire and Water!

Pause, seeing the hurts and pains burning into nothingness. Then say:

O Gracious Goddess,
O Gracious God,
on this night of Midsummer magick I pray
that You charge my life with wonder and
joy.

Help me in attuning with the energies adrift
on the enchanted night air.
I give thanks.

Reflect upon the purification you have undergone. Feel the powers of nature flowing through you, washing you clean with divine energy.

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Midsummer Recipes

APFELPFANNKUCHEN
(German Apple Pancake)

2 large Apples, any cooking variety
1/4 cup Butter
1 cup Flour
1 cup Milk
1 teaspoon Vanilla Extract
1/2 teaspoon Salt
1/4 teaspoon Nutmeg,
Confectioners sugar

Preheat oven to 475. Peel, core and very thinly slice the apples: you should have approximately 1-1/2 cups.
Melt 3 Tablespoons of the butter over medium low heat in a small fry pan, and sauté the apples until they are just tender. Keep apples warm while preparing the batter.
Place a 9 or 10 inch cast-iron skillet in the oven to heat for at least 5 minutes--the pan has to be very hot for this to work. When it is well heated, add the remaining 2 T sp. of butter to melt and put the skillet back in the oven; the butter should be very hot buy not brown when you add the apples and the batter.
Place the flour, milk, vanilla, salt and nutmeg in a blender and whirl until smooth. Remove the skillet from the oven, quickly arrange the warm apple slices over the melted butter, and pour the batter evenly over all. Bake for 15 min., reduce heat to 375 and bake 10 minutes longer. The pancake will puff and climb up the sides of the pan. Sprinkle with confectioner's sugar, then cut in wedges and serve with maple syrup.

CUCUMBER SOUP WITH LEMONGRASS AND SPINACH

2 Tablespoons Unsalted Butter
2 Ribs Celery, strings removed; chopped
1 small Onion, minced
2 stalks fresh Lemongrass, tender middle chopped
2 medium Cucumbers, peeled & seeded - chopped
2 cups Chicken stock or broth
1 1/2 cups Spinach leaves
1/4 cup Fresh Cilantro leaves
3 Tablespoons Whipping cream
fresh ground Black Pepper to taste

Melt butter in a large saucepan. Add celery, onion and lemongrass. Cook gently until onion is tender, 15 minutes. Add cucumbers and stock. Heat to a boil; reduce heat, cover and simmer until cucumber is tender, 10 minutes.
Strain solids from liquid, reserving both. Puree solids with spinach and cilantro in a blender or food processor. Add reserved liquid, cream, salt and pepper; mix until smooth. Serve warm or chilled.
Makes 4 ~ 1 1/2 cup servings

FRESH HERB SOUP

1 Tablespoon Butter or margarine, unsalted
2 Tablespoons Fresh chives, minced
2 Tablespoons Fresh chervil, minced
2 Tablespoons Lemon sorrel leaves, minced
2 teaspoons Fresh tarragon, minced
1 cup Celery ribs -- finely chopped
4 cups Vegetable broth
Salt and Pepper
1 pinch Sugar
4 slices Whole wheat bread , toasted
1 dash Freshly ground nutmeg
Grated cheddar cheese

Melt the butter over medium heat in a large heavy pot. Add the herbs and celery and cook, stirring, until wilted and soft, about 3 minutes. Add the broth, salt, pepper, and sugar. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes.
Place a slice of toast in each soup bowl and pour the soup over. Dust with nutmeg and sprinkle with

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Works of magick, if necessary, may follow.

Celebrate the Simple Feast.

The circle is released.

Faeries, Elves & Other kin: The Fae and their Origin.

The name fairy comes from the Old French word faerie. The word faerie as we commonly know it has been hackneyed by using it to describe paranormal beings and the like. Never the less, there is an enormous amount of differentiation in categorizing a faerie from today's modern literature and those of literature from the middle ages, particularly those of the Celtic tradition as well as from other faerie traditions such as those from Germany, England and many Slavic countries.

Oftentimes when one thinks about the Fae, they envision them as tiny winged creatures flittering around a glittering unearthly light in some children's fairy tale or a Disney movie (Tinkerbelle and Thumbelina). These modern Faeries found their origins in the oral traditions, which began to be written down throughout the 18th and 20th centuries.

Faeries can be best described as spirits. They are not divine beings because they are not goddess or gods (as some of them would like us to believe,) nonetheless, they are not corporeal (mortal); and for this reason, the Fae are oftentimes, classified as minor divinities or lesser gods.

Nevertheless, if one would for a moment consider the idea of faeries, then they would find that faery folk have been around far longer than most would have expected.

Here's a little ritual to make faerie allies:

Air Fairy– Nature: Cloud, Storm Elemental: Slyph

The power of the eagle
the power of the storm
And the hand of valor
Which a blade well becomes~
Come now breath of Dana

The air fairy is easiest to make contact with during sunset, or on a foggy or misty day. To connect with this ally means allowing time for cloud watching. The air fairy is the sculptor of the imaginary world and will reveal itself through the a cloud formation, in a thunder cloud or a glittering glimpse from the corner of the eye. To call this ally, you must go outside in an open space, turn 3 times in a deosil circle, each time throwing up a handful of glitter into the air. On the completion of the third round, lay down and say the chant above while looking at the clouds. The use of a flute or whistle will help call the slyph. They love music and vibrations. The whistle or flute will help you attune yourself with the air fairy. Once an Air ally has been found, theirs is the energy of inspiration. They will help free the mind by drawing you into the imaginary realm, floating you into unfettered territory so the mind disengages the ego, and your inner child can dance freely. You will know you have made an ally if you return from your day dream feeling refreshed and inspired. Don't forget to ask the air fairy to identify themselves, providing instructions on how to further communicate with it. It is also important to present their realm with a gift (the glitter won't work). I would encourage leaving a decorated feather which is to be tossed in the air and left behind for your new Ally.

Partial source: Michele Burke

Midsummer images and pictures

Suggested Reading List

Litha 2008 by Daniel Bran Griffith
Cooking To The Wheel of the Year by Lynn Riggs Palfi
Waters of Life: A Devotional Anthology for Isis and Serapis by Bibliotheca Alexandrina
Forbidden Rites: Your Complete Introduction to Traditional Witchcraft by Jeanette Ellis
The Sorcerer's Secrets: Strategies in Practical Magick by Jason Miller

Pagan Chants

***Radiant Sun**

Come Children Come To The Radiant Sun

Oh, Oh Horned One

Can also be sung as "Come Brothers" or "Come Sisters" or "Come Loved Ones", etc.

***Spirit of Fire**

Spirit of fire come to us
we will kindle the fire

Spirit of fire come to us
we will kindle the fire

We will kindle the fire
dance the magic circle 'round

We will kindle the fire
we will kindle the fire

Newsletter Submission Due Dates

Imbolc Issue—January 2nd
Ostara Issue—February 22nd
Beltane Issue—April 2nd
Midsummer Issue—May 20th
Lammas Issue—July 2nd
Mabon Issue—August 21st
Samhain Issue—October 2nd
Yule Issue—November 21st

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