

The Wheel of the Year

“Remember, remember, remember: a time when the Earth was new, when the moon was full and the [people] gathered.” Do you remember feeling the dirt beneath your bare feet, the warmth of the fire? Do you remember hearing the beat of the drum? “By the Earth which is Her body, and the wind which is Her breath, the fire of Her passionate spirit, and the birth waters of Her blood--She is Gaia. Mother Earth. She comes from a time of knowing, a time before words, when we were the watchers of the tides and the winds, and the phases of the moon. Remember?”¹

We who try remembering are UUCJ’s pagan circle, Treibh na Tintean, that’s Gaelic for “the Clan of the Hearth.” Our name reflects that we feel like a family inside a family. It is here at UUCJ that we have the gift of two worlds—a church family and the freedom to explore our ancient, pagan heritage. As Pagans, Wiccans, Druids, Heathens and explorers, we image the Divine as female and male; we call them the Lady and Lord; they are partners in our spiritual quest. We seek to balance our experience of the sacred with our everyday. Unlike other traditions, we see the sacred in the ordinary—the ordinary IS the sacred.

One of the important ways we seek the sacred in everyday life is to follow the Wheel of the Year. As children of the Technological Age, we do not have to cast spells to protect our crops before the fall harvest; nor do we fear being burned at the stake (most of the time!). We do not spend all our waking moments working in the fields; however, we realize the need to dance in step with Nature’s rhythms, as they are our own.

Our group is predominantly Celtic, we tend to follow that tradition; as U.U.s, though, we incorporate elements from many traditions that speak to us. The Wheel of the Year is an exploration of Pagan holidays, referred to as Sabbats.

SAMHAIN

We begin our new year at what you call Halloween, Samhain, according to the Celtic calendar. Those Celts! Always beginning something new when everyone else thinks its over! Even now, though, the clock tells us that the new day begins at midnight—the middle of the night. So it’s not so unusual, perhaps, that we would celebrate the beginning of a new year at the dark part of the sun’s cycle.

Samhain is a time of mourning those who have passed. It is the season when the veil between the worlds of the living and the dead is the thinnest, and we can greet our loved ones who have gone on.

It's also a time to mourn those endeavors and friendships that have gone by the wayside—time to take stock of our lives: where are we? Do we need to clean out our houses, and what about our thought processes? Samhain is the time to plan our inside work—the physical and the spiritual. It's when we make our resolutions, laying out the blueprints for our future.

It is also a time to celebrate the harvest. We Pagans like to party—we have three harvest festivals and Samhain is the last, just as the new year begins. We realize that way we celebrate, and that which we share with others is a reflection of the abundance we hope to draw to ourselves in the new year.² So, as you can imagine, we celebrate abundantly.

YULE/WINTER SOLSTICE

Yule is a popular holiday in many religious traditions. As the Winter Solstice, we celebrate the rebirth of the Sun/Son. It is the shortest day of the year, occurring around Dec. 21. We know that after the Solstice, the days will seem longer as the sun sets a little bit later every day. It is on Yule that we celebrate the Goddess giving birth to the God/the Sun; it is a reminder that with death comes rebirth. In the darkest night, we create light to acknowledge our faith that spring will come again. It is a celebration of family and friends, of peace and love for all. We light candles and fire up the Yule log to welcome the Sun's return.³

In very old traditions, the Oak King (of the waxing sun) battles the dying Holly King and defeats him, thus guaranteeing that spring will return. We recently had wonderful ritual theater of the Kings' battle right here in this room.

Following the celebrations, Yule is also a time of looking inward, a “time of personal retreat.”² In a season where the weather forces us indoors, we go inside ourselves to meditate and take care of spiritual business.

IMBOLC

Imbolc, next on our Wheel, falls on Groundhog's Day, Feb. 2. This Sabbat was adopted by the Christian church as St. Brigid's Day, a holy day in Ireland where many wells and temples are dedicated to the goddess Brigid—the triple goddess of poetry, healing and smith craft.

To think of Imbolc, think of a cold, clear day in late winter: we have the light, but no warmth yet as the Wheel turns. In ancient times, this was the first festival of spring as the sheep began to lactate—a sign of birth soon to come, the quickening time of the year.³ These days we celebrate this as a festival of creative spirit with an art project before ritual, often one in honor of Brigid and the coming spring. Imbolc is also called Candlemas, a time for purification, initiation and self-dedication. In our tradition, we “sweep” our circle clean; we also bless our homes and candles for use in the year to come.

OSTARA/SPRING EQUINOX

Ostara is the Spring Equinox. The name for this Sabbat actually comes from that of a Teutonic lunar Goddess, Eostre. Her chief symbols were the bunny (for fertility), and the egg (representing the cosmic egg of creation). This is where the customs of "Easter Eggs" and the "Easter Bunny" originated.

Ostara/Eostre is an ancient goddess of spring; we celebrate her at the Equinox where there is equal light and dark, around March 21. The Wheel turns the Earth towards equal parts warmth and rain, bringing back visible signs of life. We celebrate the rites of spring, the god courts the goddess, the sunlight becomes golden, the smell of wet dirt is everywhere, bulbs are blooming, and trees are budding. Ostara is when we begin the active time of the year, a time to bless and plant the seeds for the garden.³ A time when we welcome our Persephone's return from the underworld of winter.

BELTANE

Beltane is May Day, May 1. It is the earthiest of Sabbats, a fertility festival where we celebrate the marriage of the Goddess and the God and the consummation of their relationship. In ancient times, twelve fires were lit from twelve hilltops; the people danced from noon when the fires were lit, until the following noon. There were dancers, men and women twirling flaming torches, and the consummation of more than one relationship. We at Treibh na Tintean are a bit short on hilltops, so we crown a Queen and King to play the role of Goddess and God. We dance the May Pole and identify it as an ancient phallic symbol; hey—creation begets more creation. One of our favorite rites of Beltane is jumping the fire to conceive creative energy.

Beltane is passion in the Earth and all her creatures, including us. We rejoice in the act of creation. Beltane can also be remembered by the sharing of May baskets and random acts of kindness towards strangers.² It is spring in full bloom, with all the warmth and generosity that entails.

LITHA/SUMMER SOLSTICE

Litha is the Summer Solstice, occurring around June 21. Litha marks the longest day of the year, when powers in nature reach their highest point, when the Sun is at His strongest. It is the beginning of high summer, called, oddly enough, Midsummer. The Earth is awash with the fertility of the pregnant Goddess, and the God is at the height of his power. Fire is lit to reflect the longest day. It is a great time for handfastings, workings of empowerment, consummation, culmination and magick.³

In ancient lore, once again the Holly King and the Oak King battle. This time, it is the Holly King who is victorious, and from this point on, the days grow shorter.

Those of you familiar with Shakespeare might remember "A Midsummer's Night's Dream." It is believed that Midsummer Night is a special time for those who believe in the Faerie traditions. This is the day when the veil is thin between the realms of the Sidhe (the Faeries) and the world of mortals. It is a time for merriment and the making of wishes.³

LAMMAS/LUGHNASA

August 1 is the festival of first fruits and grain, Lammas. It is when we begin to gather the nourishment we will need for the winter. In the old Celtic tradition, it is also Lughnasa, the last party time sacred to the god Lugh who is dying as the Wheel turns towards winter, the sun burns lower in the sky, and the rain is cooler.

Lammas is a festival of regrets and farewells, of harvest and preserves; a harvest festival, but, with enough time to "weed the garden" before the New Year at Samhain. We think first of the things we planned to do over summer that are not coming to fruition. What do we regret? Or, perhaps something is passing from our lives. To what do we need to say goodbye? We take a moment to ponder these issues before the Wheel turns on.

Lammas is finally a time to take care of tribal business—the resolution of disputes, the beginning or ending of contracts. Because we could not decide between using the ancient words, “moot” or “tuatha,” to describe our gathering at Lammas, we at Treibh na Tintean call this meeting the moot-toot! You will find copies of the Agreements we update annually at the moot-toot over on the coffee hour table. But the Wheel turns on....

MABON/AUTUMNAL EQUINOX

Mabon, the patron god of innocence and justice, is also the god of the first “dark” holiday. The Autumnal Equinox is the time when the god prepares to leave the goddess and enter the Underworld. He will be reborn at Yule for he is the sun. At Equinox, all things are in balance. Night and day are equal. Goddess and God are equal. Life and death are equal. But at Mabon we enter the dark of the year, a time to reflect on those passed over, and on those who are yet to come.

This Sabbat is when we celebrate the second Harvest of fruits, nuts and vines. We also remember our neighbors who struggle without. We remember that what was sown is now reaped. This is a time of offerings, payment of dues, and enjoyment of rewards. We also need to share what we have with those who have need. The Wheel of the Year is ever turning from life to death to life again. The God guides us in a dance of balance and harmony. He travels the path of Nature so that we know without fear the cycles of our own being. As the poem goes, "now the darkness is descending. Light our way, oh love unending. From his dance, let life be reborn, for his death is a beginning. For his dance is just beginning."

The Wheel turns us back to the dark time and the celebration of a new year at Samhain!

Because we are life-long learners, our tradition is ever-moving, growing and changing. By reminding ourselves of the modern meanings that can be found in ancient traditions, the cycles of life—within and without, we grow with it. An Old Religion can thrive in a modern world.²

We who follow the Wheel of the Year are the children of circles, the children of spirals, the children of portals, the children of memory. Remember, remember, remember...we can see, may see, could see, shall see.⁴

East: The Air moves us...

South: the Fire transforms us...

West: Water shapes us...

North: Earth heals us.

Spirit: And the balance of the Wheel goes 'round and 'round...

ALL: And the balance of the Wheel goes round.⁶

Sources:

1. Angie Buchanan from the Gaia's Womb website *www.gaiaswomb.com*
 2. Breid Foxsong from Llewellyn's Witches' Calendar, 2001
 3. *www.bewitchingways.com/wicca/year*
 4. from "Call to the Clear Winds" by Lucy A.E. Ward, CIRCLE magazine, Spring 2002
 5. Treibh na Tintean's rituals
 6. Chant from Cathleen Shell, Cybele, Moonsea, Prune on the "Chants—Ritual Music from Reclaiming and Friends" CD
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Directions (somewhat modified by me from Savannah Skye's *The Powers of the Four Directions* found in "Seasons of the Witch: on the wall," 2008 calendar. Ed. Victoria David Danann. Spirit comes from Raven's Wing)

Opening—

EAST: East, who reigns over the element of Air / Who moves in the hawk and Eagle / Who resides in Gaia's wind, sky and tornadoes / Who instills within us the properties of intellect, psychic powers and knowledge...
Come into this perfect circle. So mote it be.

NORTH: North, who reigns over the element Earth / Who moves in the wolf and Bear / Who resides in Gaia's mountains, trees and earth / Who instills the properties of grounding, the material world, focus & endings...
Come into this perfect circle. So mote it be.

WEST: West, who reigns over the element Water / Who moves in the dolphin, whale and fish / Who resides in Gaia's oceans, lakes, rivers and rain
Who instills within us the properties of our emotions, rebirth and intuition... / Come into this perfect circle. So mote it be.

SOUTH: South, who reigns over the element Fire / Who moves in the panther, tiger and lion / Who resides in Gaia's volcanoes and flaming fires
Who instills within us the properties of passion, courage and energy...
Come into this perfect circle. So mote it be.

SPIRIT: Dance and sing the Birth of Sun, / For Holly's reign is gone and done.
From this death rebirth we heed / as bread is found from grinding seed.
Deep within the frozen earth, / Feel the stirring of rebirth.
'Tis the light's first flickering, / feel the Mother quickening.

Closing (winged by me from above sources)—

EAST: East, who brings us the powers of intellect, second sight and knowledge, thank you for being in this circle. Blessed Be.

NORTH: North, who brings us the powers of grounding, the material world, focus & endings, thank you for being in this circle. Blessed be.

WEST: West, who brings us the powers of our emotions, rebirth and intuition, thank you for being in this circle. Blessed be.

SOUTH: South, who brings us the powers of passion, courage and energy, thank you for being in this circle. Blessed be.

SPIRIT: Light the candles and the flames, / “Life returns!” the world proclaims.
Now’s the time and now’s the hour, / We prepare our seeds for an
earthly arbor. Blessed be.