

Email
Witches



The Controversial Cauldron

Imbolc 2010

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Group Information:

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Argentina, Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, England, France, Greenland, Hawaii, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Italy, Jamaica, Kuwait, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Nova Scotia, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Scotland, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, St. Maarten in the Caribbean, Tenerife, USA and Wales.

Welcome to the Email Witches Newsletter

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, a 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.

Best Wishes

<http://www.controverscial.com/>

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Email_Witches/

Melting ice and the first buds of Spring



Welcome

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 that falls between "Yule" - the Winter Solstice, and "Ostara" - the Spring Equinox. This year in 2010, Imbolc is celebrated on the 2nd February in the Northern Hemisphere, with Lammas being the equivalent Sabbat in the Southern Hemisphere. Imbolc is a celebration of light after the dark. As the returning Sun grows stronger lengthening day time and reducing night times, the main feature of this festival is the lighting of fires and candles in sympathy of the Sun's growing strength.

Imbolc of old was traditionally a time of purification, both physically and mentally. After the dark 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 begins to revive as the first new buds of Spring appear. As the Sun grows in strength animals begin to mate and a new cycle of life returns to the earth.

In the mythology of the Sabbats, Imbolc marks the recovery of the Goddess as she sleeps on after the birth of the Sun God. Although he is still young his light purifies the earth 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.

Fire is one of the most important aspects of this celebration, for it was also a day dedicated to the pagan Goddess Brigid (also known as, Bride, Bridget, Brigit or Brid). Brigid is a triple aspect Goddess (revered as Maiden, Mother and Crone). As Maiden she ruled over Poetry, Writing, Inspiration and Music, as Mother over Healing, Midwifery and Herbalism, and as Crone over Fire and the working Arts of the Smithy. When Christianity arrived, instead of doing away with Brigid as a pagan Goddess, they canonized her as "St. Bridget" the patron Saint of Ireland, in which guise she 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 plantings, 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. The

success of the new farming season was of great importance to our ancestors, and as most their winter stores of food were beginning to run out, rituals were performed to ensure a steady supply of food until the first new harvest at Lammas (the Autumn Equinox). One old tradition was to drag decorated ploughs around the fields followed by villagers dropping pieces of cheese and bread mixed with seeds into the newly turned furrows as offerings to the spirits of nature. Corn dollies made and saved from the last harvest would also be planted to encourage new growth.

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. 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) acting as symbolic of the three-fold aspects of the Goddess, would be placed by the front door to symbolize sweeping out the old and welcoming in the new. During the evening, an especially large candle would be lit as the family gathered around it for a feast, and as the feast progressed, plans and promises would be made to sustain them through the new season. 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 custom of lighting candles at Imbolc was taken up by the Roman Catholic Church and renamed Candlemas. On the eve of Candlemas, candles would be lit all around the church in a Festival of Light. After a service to honour the purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, all candles to be used in the church during the following year would then be blessed and consecrated by the priest. This 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, and has returned to pagan practice. Today in contemporary witchcraft, one of the main features of many traditional covens is the initiation ritual. At Imbolc, members of traditional covens will form a procession of candlelight leading initiates into a circle, and from this circle their new beginnings as Witches will take place.

Imbolc then is the 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) for the future, who knows what new opportunities will grow from them. As the Sun grows stronger in the sky and the new buds of Spring appear, so too should you look forward with optimism, and as your seeds (ideas) mature, may you realise your hopes and dreams.

09th January 2010 © George Knowles

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<http://www.controversial.com>

Imbolc Ritual

By Crone

Use a white altar cloth accented with a red drape, and decorated with greenery. Place the Brighid's Cross you made* at the center to represent the goddess. Include a potted flower, just beginning to rise from the earth, and in your chalice, pour a bit of milk. Have a white libation bowl available. Light a large white pillar candle and votive candles in a mix of red or green, and keep them lit till you snuff them following the ritual. Add your usual altar tools. Have a broom nearby. If you use direction altars, place some red and white and greenery and candles on them as well.

Grounding and Centering:

The warmth of Brighid's hearth embraces me.
The light of Brighid's flame guides me.
The strength of Brighid's blessing protects me.

Cast the Circle by moving deosil with your broom, making sweeping motions, chanting as you go:

I cast the Circle and cleanse today
Sweeping the last of winter away.
Regrets from the past I sweep away, too.
As I move forth to begin anew.

Invoking the directions and the goddess. You may do this at your direction altars or face the directions while standing at your main altar.

As creatures of earth awaken today
North, please guide me on my way.

As winds blow gently through the air
East, breathe on me your breath so fair.

As the fiery sun comes to the sky
South, warm me as the cold does fly.

As gentle spring rains begin to fall
East, please bless us, one and all.

Brighid, of fire and flame so bright,
Bring Your blessed healing light.
Loving Mother, hear my plea,
Attend this Circle here with me!
Blessed Brighid, who tends the flame,
And hears Her children call Her name,
Goddess of music, poetry, art,
Bring inspiration to my heart.
Three Brighids--Maiden, Mother, Crone,
Loving light of hearth and home,
Maiden, bless this sacred space,
By Your will and by Your grace.
Let this moment be my start.
May I carry Your peace within my heart!
(adapted from Autumn Rose)
Earth and Water, Fire and Air
I invoke the Goddess fair!
I stand here now Between the Worlds

To celebrate the year unfurled!
Fire and Air, Earth and Water
May the God come forth to join Earth's Daughter.
I stand here now Between the Worlds
To celebrate the year unfurled!

Magickal Working

Imbolc is a time of new beginnings, of new growth. It is a time of divination to see the direction of that new growth. Hold your Brighid's Cross in your hands as you focus on the directions you have come from in the past year. In your own words, ask the Maiden Goddess to show you the direction that is best for you in the coming year. See that direction clearly in your mind and know that this is the time to set off in that direction. Pause and reflect on the message She sends you.

When you are ready, chant:

I give thanks for unknown blessings
Already on the way.
I give thanks for unknown blessings
Already on the way. (Dr. Christa Landon, editor
Pagan Institute Report, Twin Cities)

Now thank the Goddess for Her guidance. In Her honor, take a sip of milk from your chalice. Lift high the chalice, bring it down and pour a bit of milk into the libation bowl with these words:

My thanks for what You have let me see.
I know my direction is now up to me.
I will follow my path. Blessed be.

Opening the Circle:

Air of East that is Her sweet breath
Fire of South that is Her bright spirit;
Water of West that is Her living womb
Earth of North that is Her strong body,
I thank you for your presence here.
Stay if you will; go if you must.
May there be peace between us.

Brighid, Maid of fire and flame
Thank You. I am glad You came.
Earth and Water, Fire and Air
I now dismiss the Goddess fair.
Although You leave my Circle here
I know that You are ever near.

I go forth refreshed.
I go forth renewed.
I go forth in rejoicing.
I go forth with the Goddess ever in my heart.
Blessed be.

* Create your own Brighid's Cross as a meditative exercise, meditating on what the past year has held for you and on the direction you see for yourself in the new year. You can do this as a part of your grounding and centering, or you can do it prior to setting up your altar for the ritual. You may find help in creating the Brighid's Cross at <http://www.squidoo.com/brigidscrosshowto> or various other websites.

Legacy by *Ardrian Cahill*

On Brigid's day we celebrate the season of rebirth, regeneration and resurrection. In my family tradition, we write new goals on parchment and plant them with our flowers in the garden. We bless our candles to illuminate the coming year. We clean out the closets again and give to charity. We throw salt in the fireplace to read our fortunes in the fire. However, in my tradition, every season was an inspiration for a new course of study. With the themes of rebirth, regeneration and resurrection, it is a natural time to do past life studies, ancestral (racial) memory studies and family history studies.

My tradition likes to think that the memories of all our ancestors reside in the mind. They, like past life experiences, are closed off to us, so as not to give us too much knowledge before we are mature enough to understand it. This is a season to discover what hidden resources may lie deep within you that through relaxation, meditation or divination exercises might bring to the surface.

In the springtime of my mid-twenties, I began a series of studies with my sister, Susan, where we worked with Ouija boards to meditate on the memories of our ancestors. We would take turns working the board solo, one-handed, while the other transcribed what was discussed. Now, I know there are huge prejudices against the Ouija board as doorways to spirits both good and evil. In forty years of experience by numerous people in our circle, we have not found this to be true. (I do not deny that some may have. I only remind those of a critical tenet in my tradition: You find what you seek.) Since we were fearless, we decided that Ouija boards are psychological devices to reach the subconscious and unconscious minds. And so, they are. Working the board is like lucid dreaming where the dream takes us for a ride but we are still in control enough to ask questions. (For some of us, it is hard to sit still and wait passively for insight to bless us. The Ouija gives those for whom passivity is not a natural state, something to do, while meditating.) We were warned that as much fool's gold would be revealed to us as would true gold, but we wrote everything down and didn't give up. Working long enough, epiphany struck brightly and it was worth wading through the dross to find the gems!

In every film there is a back story to the characters. That back story may never be revealed in the film, but it informs the actor what would be natural for a character to do or to become. The character need not be a slave to that back story, but it better informs the actor where to draw the line of that character's nature or brazenly rail against that nature if it refuses to grow. We did not do these studies to find excuses for our bad behavior. As ancestor worshippers, we sought to find the strengths in our ancestral lines. We wanted to learn lessons by their

example so we didn't have to relearn them in this lifetime. We hoped that by standing on the shoulders of those who came before us, we might grow to exceed them. This is what we sought. This is what we found.

After weeks of researching, my mind was filled with images and energies that followed me like a waking dream. I was inspired to write poetically about what I learned. This following was the result.

The Portal

*In stillness, I have raced beyond the bounds
of all that time and space impose on man,
and lived a hundred thousand sights and sounds,
perceived before eternity began.*

*Once my whole world was restless wind and sea;
my only love, the ship on which I stood.
I followed each uncharted lure, times three.
'Neath cracking sail, I journeyed where I would.*

*When sifting, grain by grain, the Pharaoh's land,
the Valley of the Kings released a tomb.
My hand unlocked that ancient vault of sand.
My eyes, the first to peer within that gloom.*

*For freedom's loss, I could no longer weep,
so rode the crest of Paine's undaunted breath.
And though the cold steel blade of fear bit deep,
I fought the crush of tyranny's vain death.*

*I sang to heaven's gate the chanted tract,
still heard resounding through each pillared hall.
And simple toil was my earnest act
in answer to a sacred, brown-robed call.*

*I searched the velvet night in wondrous awe
for answers to the lights suspended there.
So faithfully, I charted what I saw,
the gods can navigate without a care.*

*In all that I have lived, what do I know
of man, from age to age, from first to last?
What progress have we made? Does history show
we used her map since Adam's die was cast?*

*Has magick's ageless wisdom made us wise?
Has beauty's eye found lasting ease in us?
To life's rejoicing need does our goal rise?
Has worth's sweet silence nestled deeply thus?*

*I dreamt last night, the portal beckoned me
To follow in again, and so I did
I dwelt someplace I knew, yet seemed to be
Pinned somewhere in the future's timely grid...*

*A scientist am I, and as I write
of Thought and Will in quantum Alchemy,
I prove that dark-aged wisdom brought us light
to conquer fear and free humanity.*

End.

**Article and background picture "Michelangelo Gate" © Ardriana Cahill - Jan 2010
Ardriana Cahill lives in Western USA and is a Hereditary Witch, den of Clan McCormick and a Kell of
Brigid since 1998. She has been a member of EW since 2004.**

On the Rocks

Chrysanthemum Stone



by Pari

A small flower seed sits silently in the cold, hard soil, listening to the creaks and snapping sounds of ice melting all around it ... and it senses that the thaw is near.

For Imbolc, I invite you to meet a stone that clearly relays the bright promise of that insightful seed ~ Chrysanthemum Stone!

Chrysanthemum Stone (a.k.a. Flower Stone) is an aggregate sedimentary rock composed most often of Limestone, Dolomite or Gypsum clay that holds a splay of radiant white crystals most often consisting of Celestite, Feldspar, Calcite or Andalusite. It is a stone that will begin to wake us up from our long winter's nap. It is a stone that can enliven and activate anything of importance that lies dormant within us and which is just waiting to bloom. It will feed our potential and expose our purpose.

Originally discovered in Japan but mainly found in China, Canada and the United States today, these rare and naturally occurring unique stones exhibit a duo of colors, the first of which ranges from black to gray to reddish-brown, and the second of which is a distinctive patterned display of white, making them easy to spot. The abstract white crystal designs, seemingly captured and frozen within the darker rock matrix, usually radiate outward making them resemble daisy-like flower petals similar to a chrysanthemum, and thus its name. These crystal "blooms" formed within ocean sediments over 200 million years ago. Their patterns have also been likened to snowflakes, which here in the North I can relate to, as real snowflakes are still falling and as the suspended seeds within the earth have just begun to have thoughts of germinating. Because of these unique patterns within this versatile rock, Chrysanthemum Stones symbolize both the beauty of Winter and the promise of Spring.

I call this beauty of a stone my "Ganesh Stone" for, like a magnet, Chrysanthemum Stone energetically pulls forth our courage and resolve, while increasing opportunities around us through a notable series of advantageous synchronicities which it helps provide. For this, Chrysanthemum Stone is well-known as a stone of "luck" and good fortune. By meditating or journeying with this stone, we are opened up to greater visionary prowess and made more aware of our natural abilities and all the opportunities that lay before us just ripe for the picking.

Called by others a "marvel of nature" and "rare and unparalleled", Chrysanthemum Stone is highly prized by collectors when the white "flower" is prominent. In being white, and through its birth by water, it symbolizes the presence of Goddess energy, purity and spiritual growth. It also adds a playfulness and a springy step to our walk as we



heed its central beacon light. This stone will also help us walk with grace and confidence. It nurtures and enhances all feminine attributes of intuition, insight, psychic ability and more. It teaches us that we need not lose our youthful innocence and optimistic exuberance as we tread through any dark shadow time that may attempt to stymie us along the way.

For health and healing, Chrysanthemum Stone helps with problems related to the skeletal system, skin, teeth and nails, and eyesight. It has been used to assist in dissolving abnormal growths as well as dispelling toxins from the body. Mentally, it is excellent for raising one's spirits and bringing joy back into one's life.

Chrysanthemum Stone is a soft stone, registering between 3 and 4 on the Mohs Scale. I see this stone as a transforming seeker stone for, to me, it acts as a water stone who now seeks the Sun. It brings about harmonious change by gently breaking through any barriers or obstacles in our way. It is a stone of abundance, love and joy - its flowering pattern representing the budding of inspiration, the blossoming of new endeavors, and the blushing bloom of new relationships. In love, Chrysanthemum Stone banishes jealousy and fear as it enhances trust and stability, and it adds dimension and depth to any relationship. It is a start-and-stamina stone - one that draws unexpected opportunities our way and then supplies the starbursts of energy needed to bring them to fruition. It enables us to follow our dreams and attain our deepest desires.



Inspiring and inventive, loving and generous Chrysanthemum Stone resonates with the astrological signs of Aquarius and Taurus. In the realm of Chakras it connects with all, but with its ability in helping us discover and manifest our soul's purpose, and with its encapsulated flower-like design not unlike a lotus, it is often associated with the Crown Chakra. To cleanse this stone, place it in a small bowl and then place that bowl into a shallow dish of water. (The splays of white crystals may be compromised and will continue transforming if left in water for extended periods of time.) Leave it for a full night and full day under the recharging rays of both the Moon and the Sun. And don't forget to program it to help do your bidding as you embark on a new journey or as you move from one aspect of your life to another. It is a wonderful turn-of-the-season stone!

As Winter slowly gives way to the blossoming buds of Spring, may we all rejoice in the essence of rebirth!

Sources:

Melody, *Love Is In The Earth*

R. Simmons & N. Ahsian, *The Book of Stones, Who They Are and What They Teach*

Chrysanthemum Stone, itself.



Divination Depot

An alternative way to consult the I Ching

By Graham D. Furnell

The I Ching (pronounced *ee jing*) or “Book of Changes” is an ancient Chinese text that has been used as the basis for a divinatory oracle and source of wisdom for generations – revered as a means of communing with the divine world of gods and spirits.

Consulting the I Ching typically involves conducting a ritual: Contemplating a question that one seeks advice on, while casting a set of coins or “yarrow stalks” six times. This process defines a hexagram, which will correspond to one of the 64 commentaries within the I Ching.

For those requiring more information on details of the I Ching and the consultation process, there are numerous books and websites available, such as “The Complete Idiot’s Guide To The I Ching” by Elizabeth Moran and Master Joseph Yu, or <http://www.dreamhawk.com/introchi.htm> and <http://www.sacred-texts.com/ich/index.htm>

What I would like to do here is to briefly present an alternative method for consulting the I Ching. This method maintains the full yin/yang ratio correctness of the traditional yarrow stalk method (which is quite a complex, time-consuming process), but can be achieved as quickly and easily as the more common, but less accurate, method involving the tossing of three coins. The alternative method uses marbles, and is described in the book “The Elements Of The I Ching” by Stephen Karcher. The following websites also provide details of this method: <http://uazu.net/notes/iching.html> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Ching_divination

Here is a summary...

1. Gather together the following group of 16 colored marbles: 5 white marbles to signify Yang (---), 3 red marbles to signify Transforming Yang (-o-), 1 blue marble to signify Transforming Yin (-x-), 7 black marbles to signify Yin (- -). Note that you can choose your own corresponding marble colors if you want – I have only given the colors that I happen to use.
2. Place the marbles in a piece of cloth or bag, mix them while contemplating your question, and then draw one marble without looking, using your intuition only. Repeat this 6 times, recording the result of each draw and replacing the marble each time, to build up your primary hexagram (and related hexagram if you have transforming lines) from bottom to top.
3. Once you have your hexagram/s, consult the I Ching for the relevant advice from the oracle.

Happy casting, Graham.



January 2010 © Graham D. Furnell

Graham lives in South Australia and is a student of Wicca. He has been a member of EW since 2006.

Metaphysics
Within the Gray
Existing Between the Darkness and the Light
 By *Jamra L. Conbruck*

"I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain.

Frank Herbert, Bene Gesserit Litany Against Fear, "Dune"

US science fiction novelist (1920 - 1986)

In the midst of this season's wind and rain and snow along with the more chilling than usual temperatures, even in places like California it's easy to forget that spring is just around the corner. Imbolc, also known as Candlemas, is a welcomed reminder to start planting those seeds, make good on one or two of those so recently made resolutions, and perhaps do a bit of spring cleaning; both literally and figuratively. On this first day of February, many will be celebrating the slow waking of the sun - the earthly ascending journey from darkness into light. Spiritually, this is a road I am attempting to follow in my personal life. But with each obstacle I conquer, I find yet another blocking my path.

Is this spiritual journey from darkness into light an unreasonable goal? Can mere humans not only reach the light, but maintain residence within it? If we are able to take an honest look around us, at our world, both inside and out, how are we holding up as beings of light? How brightly and consistently do we shine? And how much time do we waste hiding our light in the darkness out of fear?

Polarity, duality, is all around us - indeed within us - in our lives, in what we see, feel, do, experience. It is a necessary component of our human learning experience. Without contrast could we truly experience and appreciate one end of the spectrum or another? Let's stop and think for a moment, observe our environment. What do we see and hear? We use terms of duality in regards to a majority of life situations, physically, psychologically and spiritually. We have darkness and light, black and white, positive and negative, good and evil, wisdom and folly, love and hate; what is one without the other?

There are plenty of unattractive thoughts and emotions, like hate that could very easily qualify as my own personal darkness. But underneath any number of these has always been fear. Complete and utter fear makes up the *real* shadows in this dusty old attic inside my mind. Hate, outrage, violation, bitterness are all simply ugly sheets thrown over these shadows to make them look more menacing. I learned hate as I learned fear. If it hurts - if it causes any humiliation, shame, guilt, discomfort or pain - I must hate it, or at least wear the persona of hate to cover my vulnerability. There is a quote from Benjamin Franklin: "*Make yourself sheep and the wolves will eat you.*" Hate can be a good cover. Hate can give the impression of formidability. Fear reveals me as a lamb and we all know where lambs are led. Those outside threats do not need to know I am merely a sheep in wolves clothing. This is the true darkness. Not hate, but fear.

It takes courage to face one's fear. But when one's greatest fear is of one's self, courage is hard to find. So my ugly sheet of self-hate bares much weight upon me. Hate can seem so much easier than fear. I am my own worst enemy. But I am *hating myself*; so at the very least, part of me has tapped into that illusion of power. But fear? To fear myself is to feel powerless. Courage can seem ethereal, and hard to tap into. Whether I am *in* fear, or fear *itself*, I am overwhelmed and often convinced I am powerless to separate myself from it.

It would be easy for me to blame my childhood, parents, caretakers, the occasional dirty old man, for not teaching me self-love, self-respect, self-reliance and self-confidence in my God/Goddess/energy source-given divine abilities. But as an adult I must take responsibility for my own evolution. We are each born from, into, and returned to the light. Each experience from birth to rebirth is a stepping-stone to wisdom. But just as I am to myself, so are we all our own worst enemies.

There are so many things I want to experience in this life, but fear and all the ugly sheets covering it shield me from my own potential, convincing me that I am protecting myself from the horrors of failure, rejection, ridicule, embarrassment - and, to quote *Inigo Montoya*, "*Humiliations galore.*" Who wants to jump into *that* cesspool?

I don't believe we can snuff out fear entirely. It was ingrained in our DNA over three million years ago to protect us. As we evolved, we slowly moved away from the terror of becoming some huge cave-dwelling mammal's main meal, to the paralyzing anxiety of being turned down from that new job position or loved one, or laughed at or ridiculed by family, friends, or strangers. It is the same mammoth fear we had back when Gigantor was chasing us up a prehistoric mountainside.

The weight of our fear is as strong and seemingly powerful now as it was then, even as we don our business suits, uniforms, jeans and work boots, protect our eyes from the UV rays of the sun and buy five dollar cups of coffee at *The Java Junkie* on the corner of Norwalk and Vine.

But our brains; our minds; our souls have evolved right along with our physical bodies as well as the material world around us. We have the ability to identify, relate to and reason with our fear; see it for what it really is. We can even overpower our fears with common sense and the steadfastness of our will. Hey it's possible. It's very possible. It just takes a little practice (or in my case a lot) and, well, faith. Christian, pagan and atheist alike understand, at least in theory, that humanity comes equipped with free will.

"Where there's a will, there's a way." And believe it or not we have the ability *and the will* to find the way. Have we not proven this fact over and over again since the beginning of civilized thought? Yet, in our three million years of evolution, why do so many of us continue to struggle just to exist within the gray; between the *Darkness and the Light*. During this same amount of lifetimes, we have been aware of, attracted to and reaching for the light, only occasionally discovering the light that is within us. What is light? Light is love. What is love? Everything.

In our physical bodies we forget that we are all one. We do not see past our separateness. And we don't always know how to tap into that divine talent that we, as outlets of the divine source, all possess. We fear what we don't know. We hate what we fear. If we can learn to let go of hate, face our fears and embrace them, move with them, each one of us is capable of making that journey from darkness into the light.

And as I gaze at the brightness from my Imbolc candle, I *will myself*, as I embrace each of my fears in turn, to continue on my own journey to the light at the end of the tunnel.

End.

8th January 2010 © by Tamra L. Consbruck

Tamra lives on the West Coast, USA and is an Eclectic/Metaphysical Witch. She has been an EW member since 2003.

Nature's Glory (Pic's from our members)



Pagan Kitchen

By ~ OwlOak

Greetings folks. Imbolc is again upon us. The days are growing longer and warmer as the Child of Light has gone from infancy to childhood and daily gains in strength, and Mother Earth is getting ready to burst forth her bounties.

Here in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts this is evidenced by the dwindling snow cover with patches of brown and some green showing. However, for us this is only a tease, as we know there are at least two more snowstorms and a bout of frigid weather before the fair weather comes to stay.

Imbolc is a feast of anticipation of fair weather and fresh crops, and a thank you to the Goddess for her continued nurturing of the Child of Light. We thank her for bringing us through the harsh winter, and for her continued blessings of our hearths and homes.

One of the ways to do this is to make an offering of milk as a token of her anticipated fertility. An easy way to do this is by pouring some milk on the ground while saying (or something similar):

"Winter is coming to an end and we offer this token to you, Brighid the Goddess of Hearth and Home, in thanks for your past blessings and in request for your continued blessings and protection."

Although there are no specific food requirements that I know of, some foods I consider suitable for an Imbolc feast would be grain based products, dairy products, dried fruit, seeds, cured and some fresh meats, and fish. Also, some type of greens to be symbolic of the coming spring along with crêpes and pancakes that are considered symbols of the sun because of their round shape and golden color.

So with this in mind let's get on with the feast.

One great way to start off the day is with a glass of OJ and a stack of pancakes:

Sunrise Orange Juice

By ~ OwlOak



Ingredients:

1 cup Orange Juice
1 jigger Grenadine (pomegranate syrup)
ice
Vodka to taste - optional

Directions:

Add the ice and vodka to a 12 oz. (3/4 pint) glass.

Place the orange juice into a blender and blend till frothy.

Pour into the glass and stir till mixed.

Gently add the grenadine and serve garnished with a slice of orange.

Makes 1 serving.

Buttermilk Pancakes

By ~ OwlOak



Ingredients:

1 cup flour
1/2 tsp. salt
1 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. baking soda
2 Tbs. sugar
1 egg
1-1/8 cups buttermilk
1/4 tsp. vanilla
2 Tbs. unsalted butter, melted
cooking oil - as needed

Directions:

Lightly oil a large skillet or frying pan and preheat over medium-high heat. Mix the flour, salt, sugar, baking

powder and soda together in a bowl. Add the egg, buttermilk, vanilla, and butter and stir together lightly. The batter should be lumpy. Drop 1/4 - 1/3 cup of the batter onto the cooking surface, and allow to spread out. Cook until lightly browned, 1 to 2 minutes, on each side.

Serve with your favorite topping like jam, jelly, a preserve, a pat of butter, honey or syrup, along with some sausage, bacon, or ham.

For lunch is a treat for all seafood lovers; seafood crêpes and long grain wild rice. Although it sounds complicated it is much easier than it looks so please don't be daunted by it:

Seafood Crêpes

by ~ OwlOak



For the crêpes*:

1 cup all-purpose flour
2 eggs
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup water
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons butter, melted
cooking oil or spray

Directions:

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour and the eggs. Gradually add in the milk and water, stirring to combine. Add the salt and butter; beat until smooth.

Heat a lightly oiled 8-9 inch (20-23 cm) frying pan over medium high heat. Pour 1/4 cup (2 oz.) of the batter into the pan for each crêpe. Lift from the heat and tilt the pan with a circular motion so that the batter coats the surface evenly.

Cook until the top appears dry (about 2 minutes); flip and cook 15-20 seconds longer. Remove to a wire rack. Repeat with remaining batter, coating skillet with cooking oil or spray as needed. When cool, stack crêpes with waxed paper or paper towels in between them.

For the Seafood Filling:

1/2 cup white wine or chicken broth
1/2 lb. white fish fillets, cut into 1/2 inch (1.4 cm.) pieces
1/4 lb. scallops, quartered
1/4 cup butter
1/4 cup flour
3/4 cup crème fraîche or heavy cream
1/2 lb. cooked small shrimp, chopped - these may be called "salad shrimp"
1 can chunk crab meat - optional
1 can lobster meat - optional
2 green onions (just the white part) or shallots, minced
8 oz. fresh mushrooms, sliced
juice of 1 lemon - about 2 Tbs.
salt and white pepper
Old Bay Seasoning ®
1 pinch nutmeg
fresh parsley - chopped
fresh chives

Directions for the fish:

Place the wine or chicken broth in a pan on the stove along with a pinch of salt, pepper, nutmeg, scallions, and mushrooms. Add the fish and bring to a boil and cook until it flakes with a fork. Lift out all the contents with a slotted spoon and place in a bowl.

Add the scallops and shrimp to the broth and cook about 1 minute. Lift out with a slotted spoon and add to the fish. Do the same for the crab and lobster meat, if used. Strain and reserve the stock.

Directions for the sauce:

Melt the butter in a medium saucepan and whisk in the flour. Cook about 1 minute. Cool slightly, then add the reserved stock. Return to the heat and bring to a boil, whisking constantly until the sauce thickens. Simmer 2 minutes then add half of the crème fraîche and cook an additional 2 minutes.

Directions for the filling:

Add half of the sauce to the seafood mixture. Turn gently to combine. Season to taste with the lemon juice, salt, pepper, and Old Bay Seasoning ®. Thin the remaining sauce by adding the rest of the crème fraîche and reheat it gently - do not boil. Taste and adjust seasoning.

To assemble the dish:

Place each crêpe on a serving plate and, depending on the size of the crêpe, fill it lengthwise with 1-2 serving spoons of the filling - some will spill out each end but that's ok. Carefully fold one half lengthwise over the filling, then fold the other half over the first half. Repeat for the second crêpe so you have 2 crêpes per serving.

Top each crêpe with some of the sauce, sprinkle with some chopped parsley, 3-4 fresh chives, and serve with long grain wild rice (recipe below).

*Store-bought crêpes can be used in place of the home made ones. They are usually found in the refrigerator section of your supermarket that has the biscuits and rolls.

Long Grain Wild Rice

By ~ OwlOak



Ingredients:

2 cups water
2 cups long grain wild rice
8 oz. mushrooms, coarsely chopped
1 small onion, diced
1 tsp. garlic powder
1 tsp. celery seed
2 Tbs. Butter
salt and pepper, to taste

Directions:

Bring water to boil in a medium saucepan. Add the wild rice, cover*, reduce the heat and simmer for 50 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and let sit for 10 minutes. While the rice is sitting, lightly brown the onion and mushrooms in the butter, remove from the heat and reserve. When the rice is done, add the garlic powder, celery seed, onion, mushrooms, salt and pepper. Fluff and serve.

*Do not remove the cover until ready to fluff and serve. The wild rice (and all rice) needs the steam generated from the heat to properly cook. Lifting the lid, and the resulting loss of steam, will result in improperly cooked rice.

For our evening meal we have pesto chicken and pasta, Swiss chard with feta cheese, rosemary cheese biscuits, and molten chocolate cakes:

Pesto Chicken and Pasta

By ~ OwlOak



Ingredients:

1 lb. (454 grams) pasta
2 Tbs. olive oil
2 cloves garlic, crushed
4 boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into bite-size pieces
1/2 cup half-and-half
1/2 cup pesto sauce (see basil article for recipe)
crushed red pepper flakes – optional and to taste

Directions:

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Sauté garlic until tender, then add the chicken and cook until it is golden and cooked through. Stir in the half-and-half, pesto, and red pepper flakes. Continue to cook, and stir, on low heat until sauce thickens to taste.

Serve over your favorite pasta.

Sautéed Swiss Chard with Feta Cheese

By ~ OwlOak



Ingredients:

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 bunch Swiss chard, or your favorite greens, coarsely chopped
2 Tbs. butter
1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
1 medium tomato, chopped
Feta Cheese - as needed
salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and sauté about 2 minutes. Add the Swiss chard, tomato, and balsamic vinegar. Cook and stir until the chard is wilted and tender, about 5 minutes. Add the butter and season with the salt and pepper, then gently stir to mix it in.

Place into individual bowls, sprinkle with crumbled feta cheese and serve.

Rosemary Cheese Biscuits

By ~ OwlOak



Ingredients:

2 cups all purpose flour
 1 cup grated Parmesan or Romano cheese
 2 1/2 tsp. baking powder
 1 heavy pinch of salt*
 1 tsp. fresh rosemary, minced
 1 pinch fresh ground black pepper*
 1 stick unsalted butter, chilled
 1/2 cup half-and-half, or as needed
 2-3 Tbs. table grade dry sherry - not cooking sherry**

Directions:

Preheat oven to 425F/220C

In a large bowl combine the flour, cheese, baking powder, salt, rosemary and black pepper. Cut the chilled butter into pieces and mix into the flour mixture until you have a crumbly dough. Add the half-and-half and sherry and quickly mix the dough just until the ingredients are moistened. Work the dough into a ball and place on a floured surface. Roll out the dough with a floured rolling pin to about 1/2 inch (1.3 cm) thick. Cut out rounds with a cookie cutter or jelly glass and place them on a baking sheet. Bake them for 10 to 12 minutes, until they are golden brown. Serve warm.

This recipe will make between a dozen and a dozen and a half biscuits.

*I consider a pinch to be the amount that you can grab with your thumb and first finger. A heavy pinch is the amount that you can grab with your thumb and first two fingers.

**My rule is...I don't cook with an alcoholic product I wouldn't drink out of the bottle or serve to guests that way.

Molten Chocolate Cakes

By ~ Pillsbury



1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
 1/2 cup butter
 3 eggs
 3 egg yolks
 1 15 oz. pkg. thick 'n fudgy brownie mix
 2 Tbsp. coffee-flavored liqueur OR brewed coffee

Preheat oven to 400F/204C degrees. Grease 12 nonstick muffin cups and set aside. In a medium microwave-safe bowl, combine chocolate chips and butter. Microwave on high power for 45 to 60 seconds, stirring twice during cooking, or until chocolate and butter are melted and mixture is smooth. Cool 5 minutes.

In a large bowl, combine eggs and egg yolks and beat with a mixer at high speed for 4 to 6 minutes until foamy and doubled in size.

Set aside the chocolate syrup packet from brownie mix. Gradually add dry brownie mix to the beaten egg mixture, stirring until well blended. Fold in melted chocolate chip mixture and liqueur or coffee. Carefully pour batter into prepared muffin cups.

Bake at 400F/204C degrees for 10 to 14 minutes or just until edges are set. The centers of the little cakes will still be soft. Cool on wire rack for 2 minutes. Meanwhile, drizzle chocolate syrup from packet onto each serving plate. Run knife around edge of each cake to loosen, then invert warm cake over chocolate syrup on each plate.

12 servings

And for beverages we have a couple that will please both young and old:

Chocolate Malted Milkshake

By ~ OwlOak

Ingredients:

1 cup milk
 2 cups chocolate ice cream, softened
 3 Tbs. malted milk powder*

Directions:

In a blender, combine the milk, chocolate ice cream, and malted milk powder. Cover and process until blended. Pour into chilled glasses. Garnish with whipped cream, grated chocolate or sprinkles, and a cherry.

Makes two servings.



White Russian By ~ Kahlua®



*Trivia fact – Malted milk powder was patented in 1873 by J & W Horlicks of Racine, Wisconsin, USA.

Originally developed as an infant formula and weight-gain aid for children, it was also a staple for the early North and South Pole expeditions. In 1935, Admiral Byrd named the Horlick Mountains on the edge of the Ross Ice Shelf in Antarctica after William Horlick, one of the founding brothers, in appreciation of his product and support.

During WWI and WWII their malted milk, in tablet form, was distributed to the Allied soldiers as an energy boosting treat and supplement.

In 1945, the company was purchased by its British subsidiary which currently has manufacturing facilities throughout the world.

Who would have thought that such an innocent creation would have such an impact on the world? So, in my eyes, it would not be inappropriate to raise your glass of malted in a toast to the Horlick brothers for their incredible and “magickal” powder. Salute, boys!!! You did well.

Source: www.wikipedia.org

Ingredients:

- 2 fluid ounces Kahlua®
- 1 fluid ounce vodka
- 1 fluid ounce cream or milk

Directions:

1. Pour over ice in a rocks glass.

Well folks, there we have it. Another delicious feast which pays respect to the Lord and Lady and leaves us full, happy, and ready to face the next six weeks of inclement weather in anticipation of the coming Ostara.

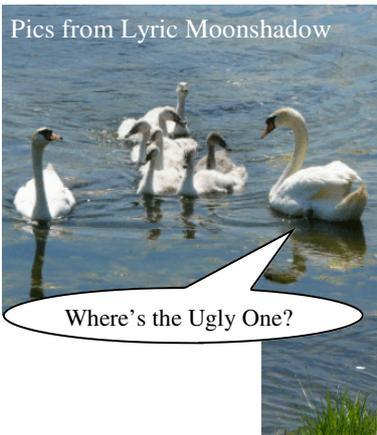
Until then, from my Circle to yours, a very merry, and festive Imbolc.

Huggs & B*B ~ OwlOak

© 2009 James Rancourt, aka OwlOak
OwlOak lives in New England, USA and is a Wiccan High Priest.
He has been an EW member since 2003.

Nature's Glory (Pic's from our members)

Pics from Lyric Moonshadow



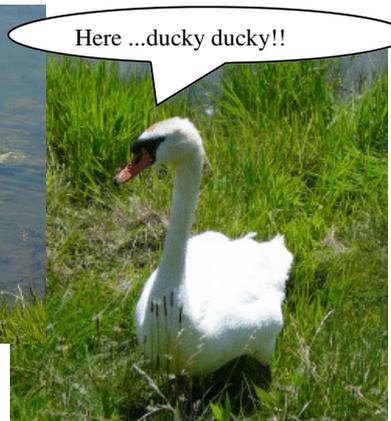
Where's the Ugly One?

Must be here somewhere?



I'll go find him!!

Here ...ducky ducky!!



Herb Garden

Basil

By Lillian Norman

With this turn of the Wheel of the Year we find ourselves mid-way through the dark half of the year at Imbolc. Baby animals have been born, or are about to be, and milk is flowing. The first greenery is pushing its way up from the cold earth and through the crust of snow that still dusts the landscape. The ploughs are being readied to till the earth and prepare it for the growing season to come, and the Goddess has finished her rest after the birth of the Sun God at Yule. Imbolc is a fire festival. Hail the light to come! What better herb to include in this Imbolc newsletter than Basil.

Basil is an herb so ancient that no one truly knows from where it originated. The best evidence we have is that it originated in India where it is a sacred herb of Vishnu. Indian Basil is called Tulsi, “the incomparable one.” No Hindu household is complete without a potted Tulsi plant in the courtyard. In fact, many households have a collection of Tulsi plants, which form a Tusli-Van, or miniature Tulsi forest. Its presence signifies the religious bent of the Hindu family.

In use, the Tulsi plant was made into an elixir and thought to promote longevity. It was also considered an herb of purification, an insect repellent and a fever cure. Tulsi, or sacred basil, was also used to cure headaches, cough and other respiratory disorders, kidney stones, mouth infections and stress.



Magickal Basil Bath by Trickydame

Ingredients: 1 large sprig of basil, or as much as you want. Three tablespoons of Olive Oil or your favorite carrier oil

While you are filling the bath tub at any temperature that feels just right for you ... pour in and stir olive oil with your hand. You want a little bit of oil on your hands. Take your stems of BASIL and take off each leaf. Squish it in your hands so it's all gooey – put your hand under the running water and let the water flow over your hand and the basil. It will start to smell. Drop the basil leaf in the water. Take each leaf and repeat this – until all the leaves are floating in the water.

While you're squishing and letting the water flow over the basil in your hands – this is a good time to quiet the mind and just allow your nose to smell the basil. Feel it ...as it's filling up the entire room with the power to aid and strengthen love. – -then this is the best part. Once the water is full, and you get yourself comfortable, grab a handful of leaves and rub them all over your body! You can't even imagine how your body is going to react – it's amazing and then ... when you get out. Smell your skin!

In our culture today basil is associated with the male gender, but in Hindu culture, it is considered female. In one legend, Tulsi was the incarnation of a Princess who fell in love with the Lord Krishna. In another legend, Tulsi is ceremonially married to Lord Vishnu in a five-day ceremony concluding with the full moon in October.

As basil traveled its way west, over the years it came to the Mediterranean countries where it was strewn on the floor to purify and protect the home. It is said that where basil is, no evil can be. A tradition of gifting a basil plant to a new home will bring the home and its family good luck. The name, basil, is derived from the Greek *basileus* meaning King because its aroma was fit for a King's house. There are also stories that basil was named for the mythological creature the basilisk, and hence its association with snakes. The basilisk was considered the King of snakes.

As basil traveled even further west, we find citations that it existed only to cause insanity, that it could be used to induce a cheerful and merry heart and that it could cure bee and scorpion stings. On the more negative side, basil was said to cause spontaneous growth of scorpions in one's brain. In Italy it was used as an herb of love. A sprig of basil was worn in the hair to signify courtship. In Mexico it was used to keep a lover's eye from roving.

Today, in popular lore, basil is considered a masculine herb and is associated with Krishna, Vishnu, Ares and Mars. Its element is Fire and its astrological sign is Scorpio. Basil's wide uses are culinary, medicinal and magickal.

Correspondences:

Basil's Magical Powers: Love, exorcism, wealth, flying and

protection, attracting money, fertility

Folk Names: Our Herb, American Dittany, St. Joseph's Wort, Witches Herb, Sweet Basil

Caribbean Natural Remedies:

Traditional uses include: To ease menstrual pain and facilitate childbirth - Boil 1 entire plant in 3 cups of water for 2 minutes; steep for 20 minutes and drink warm. Use as a "vaginal steam bath" (maybe douche?) after delivery.

Drink for stomach ache, intestinal parasites and to induce perspiration in fever. Place tiny dried seed in the eye and leave overnight to discourage the formation of cataracts. Crush leaves and drop the fluid in the ear to ease earache.

Dried leaves can be powdered and placed in sores, especially those containing worms or larvae.

Charms and Spells:

*Place a basil leaf in your wallet to attract money

*If you have a fight with your partner, wear basil oil and have him/her smell it. Both tempers will be calmed and soothed

*Fast Money Oil:
4drops Basil oil
2drops Ginger oil
1drop Tonka Bouquet

Wear, rub on the hands or anoint green candles to bring money. Also, anoint money before spending to ensure its return.

End.

References:

Lyric Moonshadow

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Plus websites:

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<http://www.herbsociety.org/basil/bhistory.php>

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<http://hinduism.about.com/od/ayurveda/a/tulsibenefits.htm>

Lyric's Quick and Easy Pesto Recipe

I have only made this in a food processor, but if you don't have one I think you could probably make it in a blender if you know how to work a blender for this sort of thing. Take as much basil as you have. Remove the stems and wash the leaves. Pat dry with paper towel. Put in a processor. Add some finely chopped garlic - I use the stuff in the jar with olive oil. Add olive oil and pine nuts and process until it is the right consistency spreadable but not runny.

Serving suggestions: Add to mayo for a little extra zip on your sandwich. Cook and drain your favorite pasta and stir in a spoonful of pesto and top with your favorite cheese yum. Or just spread some on some toasted Italian bread. Enjoy.

PS. Stays good in the refrigerator for at least two weeks, and keeps in the freezer for at least 3 months.

January 2010 © Lillian Norman

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

Swans



Written and compiled by George Knowles

As days gradually lengthen and the last vestiges of Winter recede, ice and snow begin to melt and the first buds of Spring appear. In many parts of the world the Swan is a symbol of light and considered the harbinger of Spring, and to me one of the most wonderful sights at this time of year are swans floating serenely on village ponds, in parks and on rivers. With their long serpentine necks and pure white plumage, throughout the ages their grace and beauty have inspired the imaginations of poets, artists and musicians alike.

In some cultures the swan is a feminine symbol associated with the Moon, and in others a masculine symbol associated with the Sun. In Greek mythology, swans are associated with Apollo, the God of the Sun, and with Zeus who took on the shape of a swan to get close to Leda with whom he had fallen in love. Greek Goddesses associated with swans include Artemis and Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love who travelled in a swan-drawn chariot.

In Celtic mythology the pagan Goddess Brighid celebrated at Imbolc (02nd February) is also associated with swans. Brighid 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. So what better this Inbolc, than to consider the attributes and teachings of the Swan?

The swan is one of the largest flying birds in the world and belongs to the duck and geese family *Anatidae*. There are 7 main species of swans with several subspecies, but not all swans are white. In the Northern Hemisphere most swans are white, but each species has minor distinguishing features and differ in size and behaviour depending on the area they live in. In the Southern Hemisphere there are both black and white swans. The main species of swans include: the Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*), the Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus bewickii*), the Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*), the Tundra ("Whistling") swan (*Cygnus columbianus*), the Australian Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*), the Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) of North American, the Black-necked Swan (*Cygnus melancoryphus*) of South America, and the Coscoroba Swan (*Coscoroba coscoroba*) also from South America.

Perhaps the most commonly recognised and famous of all the swans is the Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*), an all white swan distinguished by a black knob at the base of an orange bill. The Mute Swan is found mainly in the Northern Hemisphere where for centuries it was semi-domesticated in Britain and Europe. More recently they have also been established in parts of the United States. It was the Mute Swan that the Russian composer Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) made famous when he immortalized it in his ballet "Swan Lake" (1876).



Mute Swan



Bewick's Swan



Whooper Swan



Swan Lake dancer



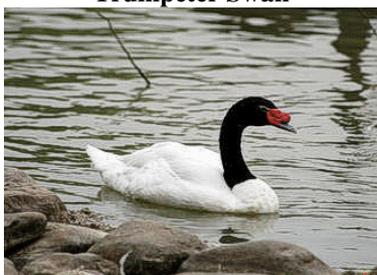
Tundra swan



Australian Black Swan



Trumpeter Swan



Black-necked Swan



Coscoroba Swan

In Britain, Mute Swans are owned and protected by the Crown, however in the late 15th century some ownership rights were granted to the City of London's most distinguished Livery Companies, the Dyers and the Vintners, a privilege confirmed by statute in 1483. Since then "swan-herders" have been employed by the Crown and the two Companies to mind and protect them. Today in the last full week of July an annual ceremony is held on the Thames called "Swan Upping". On a journey upriver from Sunbury Lock to Abingdon Bridge, all new cygnets born during the year are counted. Those owned by the Livery Companies are marked on the bill, and those left unmarked remain the property of the Crown.

The adult male swan is known as a *cob*, the female as a *pen*, while young swans are called *cygnets*. An average swan, with slight variations between species, can grow to a size of over 1.5 m (60 inches) in body length, weigh over 15 kg (33 pounds), and have a wingspan of up to 3 m (10 ft). A swan's legs are normally dark grey to black with webbed feet, except for the two South American species, which have pink legs. Male and female swans are alike in plumage, but males are generally bigger and heavier than the female. Bill colours can vary from black, orange, red and yellow, with some swans having bills of mixed colours. Swans are generally long living birds that can survive up to 20 years in the wild, while in captivity they have been known to live as long as 50 years.

Swans generally mate for life and remain together throughout the year caring for their young. If one of a pair dies, the survivor will then take on a new mate. Swans usually begin to mate from the age of 3-4 years. Land near water is their preferred habitat, in which the female will build a large nest out of twigs and leaves. During the breeding season the female will lay an average of 5-10 eggs, which take roughly 30 days to incubate. When born, cygnets are a grey colour before turning brownish to white as they mature. After hatching, cygnets are encouraged onto the water within a couple of days and develop to the flying stage after 60-75 days. In the Northern Hemisphere during winter, flocks of up to 20-30 swans can be seen migrating as they fly in V-formation high in the sky.

Swans are normally a fairly placid bird, but during the breeding season females can be very territorial and aggressive to intruders and won't hesitate to threaten other animals who venture too close to their nests, including humans. There are many accounts of people who have been injured by swans; some have even sustained broken limbs from a powerful blow of its wing or beak. Due to their large size however, swans have few natural predators in the wild. The swan's main predator has always been man who hunted the swan for its meat and feathers. A single adult swan can have up to 25,000 plumage feathers, which includes a fine insulating coat that provides a much sought after filling material called "swansdown", once used to make expensive quilted garments and bedding of the aristocracy.

Swans in Mythology and Folklore

In the Northern Hemisphere as Winter ends and days begin to lengthen, as snows begin to melt and the first buds of Spring appear, swans can be seen returning from their Winter migrations. Flying high in the sky out of the path of the rising Sun, they gently float down to resume their places on lands surrounded by water. To our ancestors, swans were thought not only to accompany Spring, but also to usher it in. Therefore, throughout the ages swans have symbolized aspects of the divine, and were often viewed as Gods in disguise or else pulling the vehicles of Gods and Goddesses.

In Greek Mythology the Swan is the symbol of the Muses who provided inspiration for poets and artists. When Zeus fell in love with the mortal Leda, he transformed himself into a swan in his efforts to seduce her. From their union she gave birth to Helen of Troy and the twins Castor and Pollux. When Apollo, a son of Zeus and God of the Sun was born, it is said that his birth was marked by a flight of circling swans, and his twin sister Aphrodite, the Goddess

of Love, is said to have travelled in a swan-drawn chariot.

In Germanic myths the Valkyries had the power to transform into swans. They were the 12 maiden attendants of Odin, Goddesses who presided over wars allowing victory to one side and defeat to the other. After a war was over they would select the most valiant of warriors to die in battle and escorted them to an afterlife of feasting in the halls of Valhalla. In another myth they would sometimes take off their swan-plumage and appear to men in human form, but if a man then stole their plumage they would be bound to do his bidding until it was returned. They could also react with a man through love. The Valkyrie Kara is said to have accompanied her lover Helgi to war, where flying over the battlefield in her swan's plumage she sang a song so sweet and soothing that the enemy lost the will to fight.

In Norse mythology, two swans drank from the sacred Well of Urd situated in the realm of Asgard, home of the Gods. According to the Prose Edda, the water of this well was so pure and holy that all things that touch it turn white, including the original pair of swans and all others descended from them.

In a Japanese folk tale about the Ainu, the swan was a divine bird that lived in heaven. When a feudal war broke out amongst differing Ainu tribes, all were killed but for one small boy. A swan descended from heaven and transformed itself into a woman, and reared the small boy to manhood. She later married him to preserve the Ainu race.

Perhaps one of the most enduring tales about swans is that of "*The Ugly Duckling*" by Hans Christian Andersen. In it he portrays a young cygnet that gets lost from his mother. While swimming around a lake frantically searching for her, he joins a group of other young birds and ducks. Sadly however, because of his grey-brownish colour they consider him ugly and refuse to play with him. Being rejected and then seeing his own reflection on the water's surface, he can't but help to agree with them and feel shame for his appearance. Eventually his mother finds him and reassures him, he is still young and this is merely a transitional phase, he will later grow into the most beautiful of all birds - a beautiful snow white swan like herself. Sure enough as time passes, he does.

In Celtic mythology having mastered life on land, air and water, swans are also associated with healing, growth and fertility. Among the Druids, the swan represents the soul and is thought to aid travelling in the Otherworld. Swans are also sacred to the Bards, and their feathers were used to make the *tugen*, the ceremonial Bardic Cloak. In Ireland today, there is still the belief that to kill a swan will bring misfortune or death on the perpetrator, and in County Mayo, the souls of virtuous maidens are said to dwell in swans.

Swan Totem

There is much to be learned from the attributes, characteristics and symbolism of the Swan. As a totem animal, if the swan enters our life it can teach us all about inner-beauty, grace, purity, fidelity, love, music, poetry and transformation. As a bird of the air, land and water, they make excellent guides to the therapeutic powers of the same elements. Swan teaches us that there is beauty in all things, for as they begin life as "ugly ducklings"; they emerge full-grown into beauty personified. Its message is quite clear, things are not always as they appear outwardly, and teaches that we should look inside for our own inner beauty.

Swans are graceful, strong and live long lives, often with the same partner. Could a swan showing up in your life indicate that the person you are with, or someone you are about to meet is a long time soul mate?

The swan totem is all about change and transformation, and if swan enters your life, you will be given the ability to handle such changes with grace and dignity. A white swan entering your dreams is symbolic of the need to cleanse and purify yourself and your life, while a black swan would indicate deep mysteries longing to be set free to express themselves - perhaps as the Goddess Brighid would have us do in poetry or music, for it is the mysteries of song and poetry that touch the child and the beauty within.

End.



**Leda and the Swan
by Leonardo da Vinci**

The Magic of Mandalas

Part 2

By Graham and Pari

In Part 1 of this article, we examined the origins, characteristics and applications of mandalas in various religious and mystical traditions. In doing so, we came to appreciate the power and beauty of this ancient art-form and its ability to bring energy, insight and transformation to our lives. In this, the second part of the article, we will direct our attention to the creation of our own expressions of the mandala form. We will take two approaches to this. Firstly, Graham will present a basic approach that is based on his recent experiences and research in this area. Secondly, Pari will present a more generalist and free-flowing approach that reflects her experience and expertise in shamanic journeying and creative drawing.

Graham's approach:

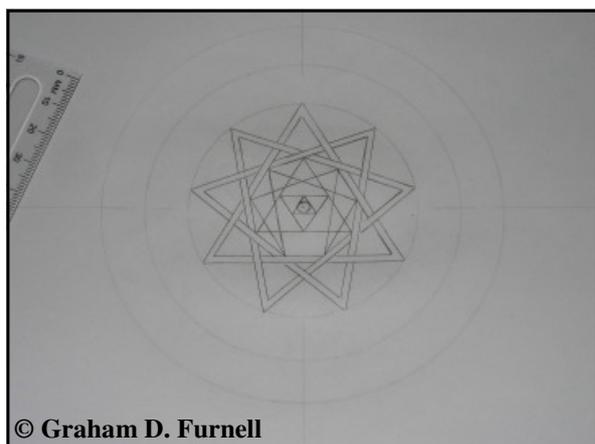
Drawing a mandala is an act that engages our body, mind and spirit; and brings benefits that far outweigh the associated costs. All that is required to commence your creative journey are some blank sheets of paper (copy paper is fine), a drawing set that includes a ruler, compass and protractor; an eraser; a set of good pencils including both lead and colored; and a pencil sharpener. A number of excellent books are available that can help you develop your mandala drawing skills, and I have included some of these in the list of sources below (Tomlinson, Grace, Cornell). Many of these books include templates of pre-drawn mandalas that you can copy and then apply your own coloring to (e.g. Grace). However, I recommend taking an approach where you draw the entire mandala from scratch, creating the outline and then applying your choice of colors and shading to it. An excellent book that will give you advice on this complete process is the one by Tomlinson.



© Graham D. Furnell

There are a number of techniques that come from studies of classical geometry that enable one to accurately draw angles, subdivide circles and line segments, etc. using only a straight-edge and compass. This fundamental approach to drawing has many fascinating links to the wonders of Sacred Geometry, and can lead to the mandala becoming an expression of ancient esoteric symbolism. For those interested in pursuing such an approach, I can recommend Book 1 of Euclid's "The Elements" (see <http://sites.google.com/site/ancienttexts/>), and the book on Sacred Geometry by Lundy, that is listed in the sources. Otherwise, a protractor will do just fine for creating triangles, squares, or any other regular geometrical features in your mandala.

The simplest advice I can offer to someone getting started is to search for examples of mandalas and yantras in books or on the internet, and to use the ideas gained from those to inspire you to create your own versions. Some excellent examples of various mandala designs can be found at the following website: <http://www.mandalaproject.org/>



© Graham D. Furnell

Traditional methods suggest that when drawing a yantra, one should work from the outside inwards. For example, according to the book by Tomlinson, one should commence by drawing the outermost bhupur, then proceed to work your way inwards to the circle, the ring of petals, the central geometric shapes - finally arriving at the central bindu point. Each step should be undertaken in a mindful manner and ideally, with an appropriate mantra being toned. For me personally, I take an approach that is similar to the creation of a sand mandala – working my way from the centre outwards. I begin by defining my central point through drawing light vertical and horizontal lines which serve as the cross-hairs for my mandala. I then draw a light circle that will enclose my inner-most geometric shape, and draw that

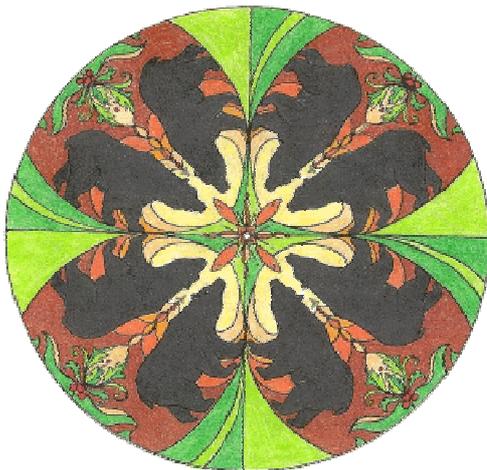
shape in full detail and boldness. I continue to work my way out, guided by ever-larger circles which serve as boundaries for the surrounding shapes, until I have reached the point where I draw the outermost square border and gates – the bhupur. During this process, to restore the quality of the paper, which may have a number of prick-holes in it from the compass, I photocopy the outline as it stands. I then continue to draw on the photocopied image, repeating the copying process as necessary, until the full outline is complete. Following completion of the outline, I then photocopy this outline before applying my colors, so that I avoid any costly mistakes that may occur on the way to finishing the mandala.

Finally, regarding the selection of colors for my mandalas, I usually rely on intuition, and Pari will say more about taking this approach in her discussion below. However, should I be seeking formal correspondences, I try to consult relevant references, such as the books on auras by Edwards and Shumsky listed in the sources, that will provide me with insight into the generally accepted symbolic meanings of colors.

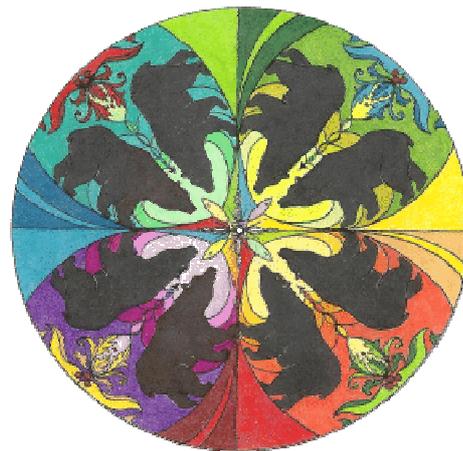
Pari's approach:

Totem Mandalas have a two-fold purpose. In one way, they act as a normal mandala does - as a meditation tool that can lead us to our sacred Center. In their secondary function, they open us up to the world of the chosen creature worked with, drawing forth the wisdom contained there.

When drawing a Totem Mandala it is, for the most part, an intuitive endeavor - one that taps into the essence of the animal being drawn, and one that melds it with our own. This means a form of shamanic journeying is necessary. As we venture into their world, we can then record what information we receive, and it usually comes in a very symbolic manner. The mandala can be both simplistic and profound. As an example, I offer you Bear Totem.



Bear Mandala 1 © Patricia J. Martin
Depicted in shades related to the Element Earth.



Bear Mandala 2 © Patricia J. Martin
Depicted in shades of all Four Elements.

In this mandala, Bear faces inward in an attempt to teach that going within is often a necessary prerequisite for gaining knowledge that applies to all that we perceive outwardly. They show it is okay to hibernate at intervals in order to rest, reflect, and to feed on the Spirit as opposed to merely residing in the physical. At the outer rim of the mandala there are three fruits at the base root of the plant, symbolizing the Triple Goddess, or Holy Trinity, that is inherent in us all. The plant releases a small bit of its fruit and yet is still encapsulated within the heart of the plant, but there is a general direction that the holy fruit travels, and that is toward the center where it will be open for further inspection. The path it travels may be a bit winding though as we weave our way inward. Beneath each bear is a path leading the way; one, a brightly laid out and obstacle-free path; the other being a darker path, yet one which still always contains a core of light. Behind the bears are heart shapes in variegated layers of density and color, signifying Bear's greatest attribute - that all things of value need be connected to one's heart of hearts. As the heart layers travel toward the Center, they brighten, and if you allow your eyes to drift to the negative space between the bears, it becomes a brightly lit central flower. As your eye follows the flowered heart, Bear's food awaits you. It is not only enriched food for the mind, but is the uplifting and enlightened food of Spirit, symbolized in the fish. It should be noted that for every two inward travelers in this picture, there is only one fish. The meaning here is that every journey will, in its best form, ultimately teach the lesson of sharing with each other the goodness, light and love that is at the Center of all - even the sharing of obstacle lessons along the way. It is also good to contemplate the alternate color of each bear's path as they near the Center. These are a reminder that, though it may be easy for one to

embark on such a journey inward for the one whose path was free of obstacles, as it approaches the Center it may produce an outcome which is not quite as vibrant as what will be noted by the one whose initial path was darker and fraught with obstacles, trepidation or fear. To the latter it may seem a brighter revelation, though this is just an illusion, as neither path is truly any different at its core. It is only our perceptions that differ in intensity along the way. At the Center lies a bright spot of clarity and wisdom, and we are encouraged to bask and dwell there in our shared Divine radiance.

Though the above is my own interpretation of my own drawing and journey, what is so wonderful and awe-inspiring about mandalas is that each of us are apt to gain and come away with something different and unique from our personal journey within. It will also be something uniquely suited to each of our individual paths, while simultaneously keeping us connected to the Whole.

My mandalas - while often leading the eye (and mind's eye) directly to the Center - may also integrate both an inside and outside force which encourages the viewer to meander back and forth in an effort to best incorporate into their daily lives whatever knowledge and wisdom they pick up along the way. In Raven Mandala this is evident. Not only does it show the power and ability of Raven to traverse all worlds past, present and future, but as the dark image of Raven seeks inward, its Spirit in the form of White Raven sheds its wisdom outward. In this way the mind's eye is able to do the same. We are transported inward to our sparkling Sacred Center, but are at the same time ever-mindful of our own ability to live in balance, not unlike The Star in the Tarot, with one foot in and one foot out and reaping the rewards of both, or "as above, so below".



Raven Mandala © Patricia J. Martin

Within one of my Butterfly Mandalas in which I chose to depict the yellow Swallowtail, they sit on an orange base to symbolize transformation through the Elements Air and Fire, and also are meant to have the viewer meander around the Center in order to receive the blessings of wisdom from the four Quarter Goddess figures depicted in blue. Within each Goddess form, we are sensually directed from the Root Chakra to the Heart. Two of the Goddess forms are open and two are cloaked, again symbolizing we must "seek Her within in order to know Her without". Beneath each butterfly lies its egg-shaped chrysalis, and I will leave its interpretation up to you.



Butterfly Mandala © Patricia J. Martin

I construct many of my Totem Mandalas by utilizing a quadrant design, thereby only having to replicate the other three after the first is drawn. The quadrants are meant to represent the Four Elements (or Four Quarters) with the center representing the Fifth (Spirit). To add further dimension to any mandala, it is a common practice to add color, as stated earlier in Part 1 of this article (found in our Yule 2009 issue). While color holds intrinsic qualities we can find common to us all, I find color interpretation can nonetheless be as personal as anything else can be, and below I will list my own feelings about a few of them.

Red ~ Vitality. Life-force. Survival. Action. Energy. Stimulation. Love. Identity. - Projective.

Orange ~ Sexuality. Desire. Emotions. Feelings. - Projective.

Yellow ~ Personal Power. Will. Inspiration. Joy. Wealth. - Projective.

Green ~ Abundance. Renewal. Compassion. Well-being. - Balance of projective & receptive.

Blue ~ Creativity. Communication. Expression. Tranquility. - Receptive.

Indigo ~ Intuition. Insight. Vision. Meditative. Imagination. - Receptive.

Purple ~ Spirituality. Wisdom. Connection. Higher realms. - Receptive.

Brown ~ Earthy. Stable. Order. Warmth. Dependability. - Neutral.

Black ~ Protective. The Void. Mystery. Magick. - All colors projected, then received.

White ~ Divinity. Spirit. Openness. Magick. - All colors received, then projected.

As an artist and shamanic Witch, I personally find Totem Mandalas thoroughly enjoyable and extremely helpful. But any type or form of Mandala can be of great assistance to us all.

Let the inner wisdom and magick of the Mandala bring greater enlightenment your way! And may your Mandala journey be as bright as our Imbolc candlelight here in the North, illuminating the way to your most brilliant Self. And may your Mandala journey also be as enriching as our Lammas First Harvest here in the South, bringing inner celebration, abundance and prosperity to your radiant heart.

Brightest Blessings & Happy Magick Mandala Journeying!

Sources:

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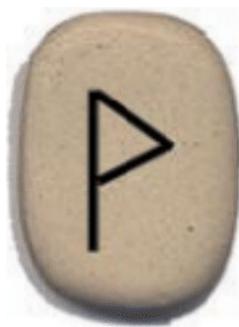


10 January 2010 © Graham D. Furnell and Patricia J. Martin

Graham lives in South Australia and is a student of Wicca. He has been a member of EW since 2006.
Pari lives on the East Coast, USA and is a Shamanic Witch. She has been a member of EW since 2002.

February Rune

By Runeman



Wunjo

This might be a short one, but nonetheless important and promising.

This is Wunjo; it is a rune of joy, celebration, success, and more importantly kinship. It is a pictograph of a flag held high. Among the Norse, in times of celebration, in family gatherings and the like, the flag of a tribe was hoisted high to signify the union of the family.

This upcoming month it is important to strengthen the ties that bind kinship. Be it a group, a clan, a family; this is the time where we cherish, assist, and show respect, love and support to our family members and those deeply close to us.

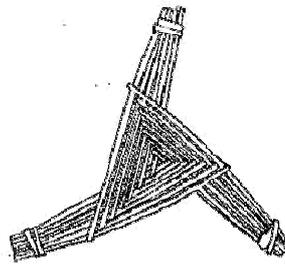
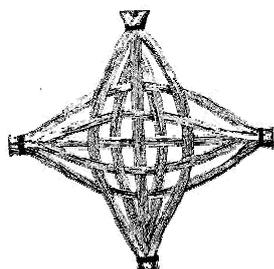
It is also a time of celebration and joy with those near us, quite fitting in winter; especially shortly after the Yuletide season. Make sure to bid well wishes to family and friends.

Rune Reading by: Diancécht Óndulfr Pálsson - aka Rune Man

Rune Man has been a member of Email Witches since the 17th Aug 2009

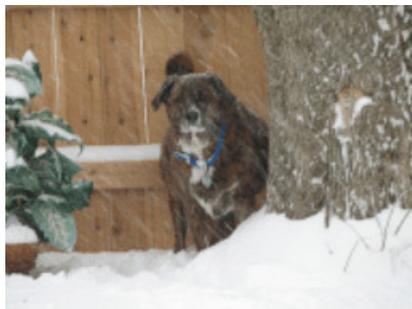
Brighid's Crosses

The making a Brighid's crosses was a tradition started in Ireland to honour one of pagan Ireland's most important Goddesses Brighid. Brighid who is associated with fire, healing and holy wells, is celebrated during the pagan sabbat festival of Imbolc marking the earliest stirrings of Spring. Traditionally the crosses were made from rushes, but today wheat stalks, straw or other synthetic materials are used. Typically they are woven into a square centre with four extending radial arms tied at the ends. Once made they are hung by doors or in the rafters of the home and other out-buildings to protect a families property from fire and evil.



Nature's Glory
(Pic's from our members)

January snow fall in the US - from SilkyRose



Geronimo loves it - Merlin hides from it - The garden is covered in it

January snow fall in the UK - from George Knowles



Max loves it - On guard regardless - The garden is covered in it.

Yet life in nature revives - captured by Martin Cox



As the ice melts a Crocus pokes up through the receding snow and Blue Bells appear in the fields and meadows.

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, a 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.



The Controversial Cauldron is published each Sabbat

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

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

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Rising Sun © George Knowles

