Solstice Reflection, Dana Lusk

The word solstice comes from Latin, Solstitium, meaning “sun stands still.’ For those of us in the Northern Hemisphere, the Winter Solstice or Mid-Winter occurred this morning at 7:03am CT, and now sun appears to have ceased its journey across the sky. The farther North you live, the longer you are in darkness during this time of the year. Beginning tomorrow at dawn, the days will gradually grow longer, in increments of approximately 1 minute per day. The returning light will become more obvious to us as we approach Imbolc on February 1st, marking the halfway point between Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox (more on that later). Having grown up in Southeast Texas, this turning of the darkness to light was never more obvious and apparent to me than my time as a young Army medic stationed in Fairbanks, Alaska. I experienced total 24-hour darkness for the first time. I understood and could imagine how our ancient ancestors may have begun to worry, in the lengthening darkness, as food in the winter stores were diminishing and the cold was deepening, that the sun god Lugh may not return from his time in the Otherworld called Annwn. So, what does any self-respecting ancient peoples do in such a frightening time? *PARTY!!* They lit candles, brought sacred evergreens into their homes, sang, chanted, and danced, to lure the Sun God Lugh back and call on the Oak King to return to his reign in the “Wild Hunt”, (which is the 4th day of the 12 days of Yule). Practitioners of witchcraft, Pagans, and spiritual seekers of all stripes continue to this day of preparing to celebrate this most magical time of year –The 12 Days of Yule. Tonight is Day 1.

If anyone is interested in a quick guide to the 12 days of Yule, I have brought copies of “The Ultimate Witch’s Guide to the 12 Days of Yule” by Moonfall Metaphysical. See me after the service and I’ll give you a copy.

Day one of the 12 days, is known as Mother’s Night. It is my favorite and really, the only one of the 12 days I truly celebrate. This night is to honor the goddesses. In the Norse Heathen tradition they honor Frigg the Mother Goddess, give homage to their female ancestors, and meditate on the divine feminine. For me, coming from Celtic ancestry, and having celebrated becoming a crone, I will honor the Divine Crone and Old Hag of Winter and death, Cailleach. While the Celts believed the Sun God Lugh had left for the Otherworld and took the sun with him, they also believed in Cailleach, the Goddess of Winter. She is particularly worshipped in Scotland, Ireland and the Isle of Man. She was depicted as an old, veiled woman and creator of the earth, cliffs, and mountains by dropping stones from her apron onto the ground. On the Wheel of the Year, Cailleach begins her reign at the end of Samhain until she is overthrown by Bridgid on Imbolc, which is February 1st. The Cailleach is complex as she is depicted as death, and yet she is a creator of the earth, she is not evil, but she is wild and potentially destructive. Although she may be destructive, she is also a protector of animals particularly wolfs and deer.

So just as Winter Solstice represents death and rebirth with the return of the Sun, the stories of Cailleach are closely identified with the natural cycles of death and rebirth.

The return of the light is the most prominent feature of most religious midwinter festivals. Earlier traditions focused on the battle between the dark and the light, while acknowledging that both are equally valuable and necessary in the circle of life and death. In Pagan/Earth-based traditions the Darkness must be honored before calling in the Light. This is the season when animals hibernate and nature sleeps and we may turn inward too. Perhaps some of the depression people experience during the holidays comes from not allowing a space for feeling the sadness associated with this season. Perhaps we could aside time away from the frenzy and busyness of the holidays to sit in stillness in the dark and quiet in silence and reflection.

For me, the reason for the Solstice Season is a time for letting go and saying farewell to those things that no longer serve us. I try to release my resentments and regrets into the darkness; with the intent they will be transcended by the coming of the light in the turning of the year. How can you and I celebrate the darkness while also welcoming the return of the light? How do you and I bring light into the lives of those around us? Perhaps, when you and I light our candles and our Yuletide fires, we do so with the intention of bringing light into the world by increasing our own internal light we personally create.

May we find comfort in the returning light, for without darkness, there is no light; without death, there is no life.

I'll close with these words from Ravenna Angelline:

As the darkness grows, I felt the passing of the Sun King,

Yet in the darkest hour of Winter, He is reborn as the light of the Infant Sun.

The Great Mother who gives birth to Him, who brought the Child of Promise to the Earth.

It is the Lord of Light and Life who is born once more!

Awake now Mother – Awake now goddess of Life, Death, and Rebirth! Awaken, Lady, look upon Your Devine Child, His rebirth while you slept was subtle and silent. The Sun Lord awaits Your wakening!

WELCOME YULE!