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inter Solstice is the Seasonal Moment of the year when Earth's tilt leans us furthest away from the Sun – when the dark part of the day is at its longest. The stories of Old tell of the Great Mother giving birth to the Divine Child on this night, as henceforth the Sun's light and warmth begin to return, and the ongoing creativity of Earth is assured. This Earth holy-day was adapted by Christianity as the time to celebrate

that the seasonal Wheel of the Year expresses, and that this site records.*

Winter Solstice is the time for the lighting of candles, for embracing the miracle of being, for choosing a joyful response to the awesome fact of existence, for celebrating the gift of birth. Birthing is not often an easy process – for the birthgiver, nor for the birthed one: it is a shamanic act requiring strength of bodymind, attention and focus of the mother, and courage to be of the new young one.



By Glenys Livingstone Ph.D.

Winter-Spring Earth Wisdom

In the Southern Hemisphere we have just passed the Earth holy-day of Winter Solstice, which was in late June; and are moving into Early Spring which may be celebrated in early August and is traditionally named as “Imbolc”.

the birth of its Divine Child, but the Divine Child of more ancient Earth-based religious practice was understood as renewed Being itself, the promise of never-ending renewal – apparent eternal Creativity itself. And just so, may we re-story it again in our times, with our own renewed understandings. From this point of the year on, for the next few seasons, Sun's strength will grow, until it peaks at Summer Solstice and turns yet again.

At the sacred site of Newgrange in Ireland - known by its indigenous name as “Bru na Boinne” - where the megalithic mound is dated at 3200 B.C.E. , the Winter Solstice dawn lights up a Triple Spiral motif that is engraved on the inner chamber wall. It is thought that this Triple Spiral represents the Triple Goddess as She was known by the ancients in that place, and also that it represents the heart of the sacred heritage of ritual celebration of eternal creation,

Birthgiving is the original place of “heroics”. Many cultures of the world have never forgotten that: perhaps therefore better termed as “heroics.”(In pre-Olympian times, Hera was Amazon Queen of the Land and not the “wife of Zeus”. Heracles was her hero, because he did her bidding, thus the term “hero” is derivative of “Hera”).

Patriarchal adaptations of the story of this Seasonal Moment usually miss the Creative Act of birthing completely – pre-occupied as they often are with the “virgin” nature of the Mother being interpreted as an “intact hymen”, and the focus being the Child as “saviour”: even the Mother gazes at the Child in Christian icons, while in more ancient images Her eyes are direct and expressive of her integrity as Creator.

Winter Solstice and Early Spring rituals may be a contemplation of the Creativity of the Cosmos –

Cosmogogenesis ... how it all unfolds. When told from within a “Mother-mind” – a mind that connects the biological creativity of the female body to Cosmic Creativity, to our “Navel” lineage, to the Nativity of every being, then we are all the Holy Ones. And we all – female and male – may know the skill and care required for “birthing” the New, whether that is physical, psychological or however one categorizes it.

In Earth-based religious practice, the ubiquitous icon of Mother and Child – Creator and Created – expresses something essential about the Universe itself ... the “motherhood” we are all born within (not simply a “brotherhood”). It expresses the essential Communion experience that this Cosmos is, the innate and holy Care that it takes, and the reciprocal nature of it: that is, how one is always Creator and Created at the same time. We cannot touch without being touched at the same time. We may realize that Cosmogogenesis – the entire Unfolding of the Cosmos – is essentially relational: our experience tells us this is so.

EARLY SPRING/IMBOLC

The Early Spring/Imbolc celebration is traditionally a time of dedication to the nurturance of the New Young Being. Once again, this is no wimpy task: it is for the brave and courageous, whether one is committing to the new being in another, or in one’s self. The Great Goddess Brigid of the Celtic peoples is traditionally invoked for such a task. She has been understood for millennia as the ‘One Who tends the Flame of Being’: a Brigid-ine commitment is one that is unwavering in its devotion to the central truth of each unique particular self. The stories of old speak of Brigid in three primary capacities – that may need spelling out in our times, as they are almost forgotten skills: She is imagined as blacksmith, physician and poet ... all three.

Blacksmith is one who takes the unshapely lump of raw metal, melts

it, then takes the fiery hot form and shapes it. This is no stereotypical “feminine” act: the Goddess of old is not bound by such patriarchal dualisms. She is spiritual warrior, shaman – this is her eternal virgin quality, never separate from the ‘mother’ quality or the ‘Old One’ quality, and no need to characterize such power as “masculine” or dissociate it from “nursery” activity.

Physician is one who understands the “physics” of Being, of matter - how a body relates within itself and within its context, functions harmoniously and thus may heal/ become whole. In this role, Brigid is scientist, healer - none of it is separate. Her physics are biologically connected - an understanding of dwelling within a whole and seamless Universe.

Poet of Old is one who speaks the metaphors, the stories of cultural knowledge, the sacred language of creativity – one who “spells” what may be so. It is a power of spirit: the voice enabled by air, resonant with the winged ones – the birds - whose perspective transcends boundaries. The ancients knew Poetry as a sacred and powerful task – that with our words, we do create what is so. Brigid’s “motherhood statements” are statements of the Mother/Creator, Who once again is never separate from her whole self – the Young One and the Old One - represented in the Triple Spiral dynamic.

The coming into Being that Winter Solstice and Early Spring

celebrates, is an awesome thing. It takes courage and daring. It has taken courage and daring – always. In these times of change, it is perhaps particularly so. Our times require the melting down of so much that no longer works, that will not carry us through. These times require the re-shaping and speaking of new realities - an aboriginal magic of new connections, with what is already present within us, if we can but plumb it, open to it deep within. This is a great seasonal moment to get with the plot of Creativity, to align ourselves with our Native Wisdom ... the Wisdom that in fact brings us all into being. We may respond to the gift of being by receiving it graciously – and thus become responsible. Though we may feel inadequate, we are not – and we need to begin.

It can be a useful exercise to re-write prayers or songs learned (perhaps too well), as a child or later, to re-speak them and imbue them with new understandings. It is a way of spelling one’s self, of changing one’s mind – to articulate with each word and phrase what one truly believes to be so. And besides, many of the prayers and praises that are found in patriarchal religions of recent human history are often founded upon the expressions of some earlier Earth-based Goddess religion that is now unmentioned and buried. So any re-writing and listening to one’s own interpretations of the pattern of the prayer may end up being closer to its original sense, as well as speaking a new moment.



I offer the following, addressing the Universe as Mother:

*Our Mother
Who is with us,
Holy is our Being.
Thy Kin-dom is present.
Thy Desire is felt throughout the Cosmos.
We graciously receive your infinite daily abundance.
May we forgive each other our lack of skill and insensitivity.
May we understand our inner guidance, and perceive each other’s needs.
For Thine is the Kin-dom, the Power and the Story,
forever and ever.
Blessed Be. ***

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* See Martin Brennan, *The Stones of Time: Calendars, Sundials, and Stone Chambers of Ancient Ireland*. Rochester Vermont, Inner Traditions International, 1994.

** Glenys Livingstone, *PaGaian Cosmology: Re-inventing Earth-based Goddess Religion*. IUniverse 2005, p. 259, with acknowledgement of Karen Davis’ term “Kin-dom”, from “A Peacable Kin-dom and the Ethics of Eating”, *EarthLight*, Issue 51 Vol 14 No.2., Autumn 2004, p.54.