

Emerging Women The Magical Year

By Sophia

Each year we embrace and celebrate holidays of the seasons that surround us. Many holidays we understand, we grasp their special meanings and symbols, others we tend to carry on celebrating, not really understanding or knowing what some of the holidays mean. Others we celebrate thinking we know what the festival means, but in fact it means far more than most commonly know. We dance, we sing, we enjoy, each passing holiday with a spirit that goes beyond who we are and what we enjoy. Holiday spirit abounds and brings us to a full circle of celebrating the Year. In writing my column for this month, marking all the Solstice-centered Holidays of Giving and Love, I am pondering how to give all my readers a gift to show my appreciation of all the positive energy that I received throughout the year. I'm so pleased when someone calls or greets me, and says "Sophia, thanks I enjoyed your last article" or "I always enjoy reading your column." I really can't give you much, but I can at least give my words and pass on some wisdom kept by people from ancient times until today regarding the Sacred Year. Possibly my words will be a small but fitting gift that would be different and would last the whole year. Having a magical calendar of the festivals and what they mean struck me as a fitting 'gift' for you all and a good idea to just get down for myself and my family as well. I'm focused on the year now because I love divination and the Sophia deck has just been released. What does this have to do with seasons? The seasons are revealed in the playing cards, for each card has a season! A deck of cards has 52 cards (remember playing 52 pick up with a younger sibling?). The cards symbolize the 52 weeks in a year and the four suits represent the four seasons. Each card represents one week of the year, and they also represent the four elements; earth, air, fire, water.

Diamonds are Spring (earth), Hearts are Summer (water), Spades are Fall (air), Clubs are Winter (fire), and. Since the cards represent the year, in my deck I embellish the cards with the different colors and aspects of the magical year.

My Magical Year:

The beginning of the year is Yule, December 21 because it marks the return of the sun god. Ever wonder why we put lights on the tree? Ever thought of the symbolism of the Yule log (started with a piece of the old year's log)? Fire, life, Rebirth; the Sun begins to again approach the earth. One of the most popular traditions involve evergreen trees that we bring in our home, which we decorate to celebrate. Ever green trees means undying life, a reminder that Nature but sleeps. Cranberries and popcorn give a magical earthy touch. A Yule bonfire is important at this time of year a scared blaze to give life to the sun which is thought to be reborn at the winter solstice or Yule. Another way to bring in a Yule log is to make a Yule log cake with chocolate frosting and decorate it to look like a log, a candle completes the symbolism. A traditional drink with this is cider, mead or ale. Holly and ivy are used and so is mistletoe to bring warmth and light to this sacred day. All of these were holy to the ancient Celts, especially the mistletoe which was a symbol of the sun, especially if it had grown on an oak. Red candles in the home signify that the year will have plenty of bounty and warmth. My husband and I give each other card readings on this for fun, to see what new directions our own personal rebirths will take.

Groundhogs day is February 2 also known as Imbolc, Candlemas or Oimealc. Again fire and candles has much to do with this holiday in that it is a 'fire festival' and celebrates the stirring of the earth. In Japan it has another name (Setsubun) and you chase the winter devil out by throwing beans at him. Dad usually wears a devil mask and it is considered good luck to eat a bean for each year that you have lived. Candlemas celebrates the real return of the sun

after winter, especially here where flowers begin to bloom at this time. The Romans dedicated this night to Venus and all homes were lit and candles carried out into the streets to welcome back spring. We fill our house with candles, do candle magic and turn the garden earth, preparing it for the next phase.

February 14 is Valentine's day the day of love and friendship. This is the perfect days for doing love spells. The original Valentine's day was called Lupercalia and was celebrated by the Romans as a day of wild erotic celebration! February was sacred to the fertility goddess Juno who gave the 'fever' (febris) of love to all! One woman who was lonely for a long time did a spell to bring a special loved one into her life. This was her last Valentine's day alone, she met her match and they are still together: see what a little magic can do? This is a time for making love potions, potpourri, and burning lots of red candles. Stock up on those; hearts, red roses, and chocolates.

March 21st, Vernal Equinox, is the first day of spring and is a fertility festival that is celebrated around the world. Vernal Equinox is celebrated by getting rid of the old and bringing in the new. Spring cleaning and banishing the home is important before starting new projects. Any projects that you have not finished should be completed. Anything from the past year that is in a junk pile goes. If you have said to yourself; "I really need to thin my closet out." and you never got around to it, this is the time to complete that boring chore. This is also the seed planting time, the festival of Faunus the horned and happy god of animals shows himself in the rutting deer and the goddess Flora appears in our yard as new growth, sprouting flowers and an urge to plant plant plant! New greens and flowers like crocuses should be brought into the house, all the windows should be opened and all the musty Winter vibes should be swept out the door! A new sprig of rosemary or rowan can be pinned above the door for blessing and protection. Originally Easter eggs were dyed and given as presents

on the Vernal Equinox. Today this egg-giving is reserved for Easter. This holiday was originally called or Eostre (thus the name Easter) after a Celtic fertility goddess of the same name whose symbols are the Hare and eggs! So Eostre eggs, naturally colored with earth-tones, should be symbolically displayed in nests of new green grass, showing the new reborn life of earth. There are many natural dyes that you can use like Beet juice, grape juice and onion skins, to color eggs. Making baskets and having an egg hunt delights both the young and old and is a deeply symbolic game where we search for and find these symbols of new life with joy and happiness!

May 1st is May Day or, as it was called long ago, Beltane. As children we would make paper baskets and put flowers in them and hang them on the door knobs of the crones of the neighborhood and ring the doorbell and run. This festival is to welcome the sun as a growing and powerful presence again in our magical year. The name Beltane comes from Bel the Sky God and the Welsh word tan which means fire. May comes from the name of the young goddess of Spring Maia, in Northern Europe she was called Maj or Mai. This is the time to wear lots of green, decorate with green and (traditionally) to make love outside! The fields or gardens should be cultivated and robust projects started.

Midsummer Day or Summer Solstice- usually this is somewhere around June 21. The sun has reached its peak as has the flow of live and living earth energy; now the sun will start to lose brightness as the months continue. My family normally does a private ritual focusing on this very powerful time to ask that the land and water of this our Mother Earth always be protected. In this way you can really heal the earth with spirit fairy energy. Traditionally birch boughs and roses should decorate the house. Sachets, incenses, candles, perfumes, charms and the like should be created at this time. This is the big charge time, a great holiday to send healing energy to people or the accomplish some great

task. It is also the time we soak up the solar energy ourselves, store it away for Winter. For this reasons may people harvest herbs and flowers at this time and keep them (and that energy) in their house.

Lammas (feast of bread) is on August 1-2 a time to say thank you to the earth for the beginning of harvest. Traditionally this is when you make the first grain or bread from the first harvest. This is a day when you can make husk dolls and give them to others. In our home we make a green man out of reeds and sheath of corn. We place him in our garden to say thank-you for the harvest. Also it is a sacred time in this area because Native American traditions celebrate the salmon return. It is blackberry season, a time to begin the task of storing away for the next year, for canning, drying and freezing food. Bright yellow flowers and grain are often displayed in the home. This is a great holiday to do money or prosperity magic, to increase bounty or secure magical protection for one's home and family.

The Autumnal Equinox 22-23 September, sometimes called Michaelmas. We say thank-you to the harvest and good-bye to the warmth of the sun in this festival. It is said that the 'Green Man' is slain on this day, this means the crops are killed and harvested so that we may partake of and store that solar energy in the form of food. This is the time when we gather apples, berries and other foods to stock food in order to have plenty for the winter. Myself, I just buy cans of food on sale from the grocery store and start to restock my pantry. Some of us start to winterize our gardens and in many other ways get ready for the coming winter. A big family feast is called for, hunting season is open and game is plentiful. Many Thanksgiving traditions derive from Fall Equinox festival, but who says you can't do it both times? The key is to thank the Earth for her bounty, to be grateful for the plenty you have and to prepare for the cold ahead. Pumpkins, gourds, squash and other round feminine symbols of plenty are displayed and sacred corn, the body of the earth energy, is hung on the door or placed on the

table. I put my garden to sleep about this time and start to plant bulbs for a big show of spring flowers. Hawthorn can be hung over the door to bless and protect. My grandmother use to tell us not to pick blackberries after Michaelmas day because they were no good. One bit of folklore says that on this day the devil fell from heaven and into a blackberry bush. He was so angry that he spat at the blackberries bush and curse the berries left after this day.

Samhain or Halloween, October 31. This is time of reflection on what the year has brought us because we have we have come full circle and we look at where we are and what we should accomplish for the year is almost over. Do we still have time to set life right and to continue on? This is the time to tie things up, to enjoy the finished projects, to evaluate work almost complete and to ponder the mysteries of decline and coming darkness. It is a very still and quiet time, as we head to the darkest most shadow-filled time of year. Rather than be depressed, the Fall season should make us meditative and introspective. For me this is fall book season when I am at my busiest making public appearances to help promote my books. This is, in many cultures, also the time when the 'veil between the two worlds' is at its thinnest and guests will come to visit from the other side. Called Obon in Japan and The Day of the Dead in Mexico, the time of year is when the departed ancestors can communicate with the living. At this time I entertain with my beloved our remembered departed ones and thank them for watching over us. It is traditional to light a lantern (or Jack O'Lantern) to guide the way of the spirits. This is, of course, why we have ghosts and goblins; Trick or Treat was long ago a food offering to the memory of the ancestors. I also do divination to see how the my year will be and what I need to do to make it better.

Symbols of the dead are appropriately shown about the house as are Jack O Lanterns (an old symbol of the Green Man or the spirit of earth) and colorful leaves, especially oak leaves, should be displayed. Nuts, the last flowers and dark beer or wine should be offered to one another and to one's unseen friends. Now the

pumpkins, decorative corn and excessive feasts are behind us, the costumes have been put away and the last leaves raked up. Winter is upon us but the end of darkness also approaches in the form of another Yule! Let us remember and give honor to all the sacred seasons and elements of the natural year. Celebrating the holidays in our own magical ways and picking the ones we most enjoy, or the ones that make us feel more centered with Self, truly makes every year an enjoyable year. In this way we become more centered in who we are and we grow a little, like a tree symbolically adding a ring each cycle. May you have the best of Yules, the brightest of New Years and the most prosperous of times!