

Ostara to Beltane: Touching Earth

by Judy Harrow and Mevlannen Beshderen

Whan that Aprille with his shores sote
The drought of March hath perced to the rote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Sephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the night with open eye,
(So pricketh hem nature in hir corages):
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages ...

Geoffrey Chaucer

At Ostara, light and dark come into balance, in what is nearly everywhere a season of storms. It seems as if the Sun must fight for a greater place in the sky. Then the storms subside as April unfolds, and the returning sun warms the land and sky. Buds open. Birds return. The Earth wakes into flower. People, from long before Chaucer's time to our own, have taken any excuse -- definitely including religious devotion -- to get themselves out of doors.

Since our spirituality centers on Mother Earth Herself, this is not an excuse but an imperative: *touch the Earth!*

During the winter, we were housebound, literally insulated from the Earth. Now, as Spring releases us, our very first priority should be to renew our connection with Nature. There are many ways of fulfilling this most pleasant need. Here are a few of the possibilities:

- First, and always, do no harm. Take a good hard look at your own consumption patterns. Are you doing all you can to reduce, reuse and recycle? And, hardest of all, have you *rethought* your assumptions as a consumer?
- Then make an active contribution. Offer your love and energy to the Earth through volunteer service. Some of us will participate in environmental activist groups, tend community gardens or guide nature walks in local parks as a long-term commitment. Even if this is not feasible for you, or not where your own calling leads, there are one-shot activities such as park and seashore cleanup days. Or just carry a shopping bag when you go for a walk in Nature and pick up the trash along your way. Such simple acts can be done as devotions to the Land and the Gods; after all, we have all of the Great Outdoors as our temple.
- If you are a gardener, you know the chores of Spring. As you do them, hold the consciousness that you are lovingly grooming the Earth. Take time to enjoy the smells, sounds and textures that surround you.

- In a pinch, you can invite the outdoors inside. Consider a window-box or kitchen-counter herb garden. Many herbs will grow well by window-light, given some soil and water. Watch the changes in your young plants, and see the marvel that is all life.
- If you live in an apartment, visit your local park at least once a week. Observe the changes as the season advances. Photograph or draw the same tree once or twice a week throughout the Spring. Also pay attention to the more subtle, but very real, seasonal changes in the ordinary city streets.
- In this season of returning light, watch the pattern of light and shadow that comes through your window at sunset and sunrise. How does it change as the days lengthen? (you can use this observation as a daily meditation and repeat it in the Fall.)
- Take up a Nature study project. Pick a category: trees, grasses, birds, etc. Get a good field guide and take it with you on your walks. Try to identify one or two new species each time you go out.
- Try this Earth meditation: seat yourself comfortably on the ground. A folded-up old blanket or sleeping bag will both cushion your seat and insulate you against heat loss if the ground is still cool. Look at the square foot or so of ground that is directly in front of you. For an hour, quietly observe all the tiny, intricate life activity in that one small patch.
- Hug a tree. Yes, really. Open your senses -- physical and empathic -- as you do this. Hug the same tree every day from Ostara to Beltane. Consider making your libations to this same tree every time, watering it during dry spells, and generally establishing a mutually nurturing relationship with one particular tree.

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