

# Yule to Oimelec: The Dreaming Time

by Judy Harrow

The natural world bottoms out at Yule. The long plunge into darkness finally ends, and the light begins its slow return. At the bottom point, which is the turning point, many cultures have established a season of festivity. Although explained by many different stories in different religions, all solstice revelry distracts us from winter-borne fears, and perhaps maintains our hope.

[This "holiday season" is notoriously hard on the lonely, who feel their isolation even more bitterly in contrast. Is there someone lonely near you that you could include in your hearth's warmth? Do you need to find a welcoming hearth? Consider creating one by inviting other solitary friends to a "strays' and waifs' Yule feast."]

In the secular world, Yule is considered the start of winter, rather than the mid-point. The temperature cycle lags behind the cycle of light. Although light slowly begins to return, the coldest days come in January. Vegetation is still dormant; many wild animals are in hibernation or away at their winter habitats. People are still far more comfortable indoors. But still, as the light begins to grow, so does our sense of anticipation. Spring is coming. Spring is halfway here!

After the festivities -- and the social demands -- of Yule comes the quiet month of January. For many people, this is a difficult and risky time. Our bodies, misled by the growing light, expect warmer temperatures. The continuing and increasing cold can be hard to take. Winter lengthens without social distraction, bringing seasonal depression and cabin fever to some. For others, winter brings an opportunity for inner work. In these depths of winter we can seek the wisdom of our own deep minds, the transpersonal, and the Sacred.

In the old world, this was the time for telling the great stories. Imagine small houses with central firepits and central smoke holes, the interiors blackened with years of soot -- the "black houses" of our Celtic predecessors, dimly lit by flickering firelight. Imagine going out into the cold only when absolutely necessary, spending many hours repairing and sharpening farm tools, or spinning, weaving and sewing, monotonous hand chores that bring you to a light trance state, open and receptive.

At the fireside sits the shanachie, the story-teller or the ballad-singer, telling again the long, long tales that carry the history, the values, the important symbols of your community. As you hear them, the stories root deep into your mind, molding you and molding your community.

We live more separately now. Our dreams are far more personal. Still, late winter is the time for long dreams, for old dreams and perhaps for new dreams as well.

A great deal has been written about divination, dreamwork, meditation and similar techniques for inner exploration. We all have our own favorite books, our own favorite practices. Now is the time to indulge in yours. And here are a few more possibilities:

- **Dreamwork:** in the winter, Nature's life processes slow down or go to sleep. Try it yourself. As many evenings as you can, take a warm, relaxing bath and go to bed an hour or more earlier than usual. If you're less fatigued, you'll sleep more lightly -- and lighter sleep helps with dream recall. Also, the extra rest will protect and nurture a winter-stressed body, helping us resist the cold, as Northern tribal peoples have long known.
- **Reading:** Curl up with a warm drink and a good book. Now is a good time for a long, slow, dreamy read of poetry, myth or contemporary fantasy literature -- works that feed your imagination, material written more for delight and for the deep mind than for informational content. There's a traditional Catholic technique for meditative reading, called "lectio divina" (sacred reading), which is easily adaptable to any mythic material. For more information, see Dysinger, Luke "How to Practice Lectio Divina"
- **Divination:** in addition to whatever question-driven readings you may be doing, spend some quiet and unstructured time with your favorite oracle. Perhaps you could pick one Tarot card, rune or hexagram at random and just sit with it for an hour, ruminating and daydreaming on the symbolism. If you do this at bedtime, you may induce dreams that deepen your understanding of your oracle.
- **Meditation:** Take some time to be non-verbal. In that time, do not converse, read, write, listen to radio or watch television. Instead, listen (and stretch and dance) to instrumental music, prepare and eat delicious meals, take long, warm, scented baths, paint pictures, crochet ... or simply drift and dream.

What these activities have in common is that they are *unstructured*. There are no pre-set questions, nor are we seeking contact with any particular Goddess or God. We are simply putting ourselves into a receptive state, open to whatever comes, even if all that comes is simple relaxation. There is no immediate or practical purpose to any of these activities. We can do them for their own sake, simply for the pleasure.

Paradoxically, they are also gentle and effective ways of opening the inner pathways. In the longer view, our spirituality and our magic will develop depth and richness through practices such as these, which train us in mindfulness, an intense, open appreciation of the Sacred that dwells within and all around us.

Within and all around us -- that's important. Please notice that these exercises are as much about immediate sensuality as they are about deep insight or Sacred contact. Indeed, any sensate focus exercises would work for the purpose. Ours is a religion of immanence, a geocentric spiritual path. The religions of transcendence often prescribe spiritual practices designed to help people dissociate mind or spirit from body and senses. Our Path is opposite. We seek and find beauty, meaning and value within this life, on this Earth, in these bodies, here and now. So there is no conflict at all for us between sensory and spiritual mindfulness.

One more exercise, deceptively simple, that takes us to the very heart of Pagan spirituality: eat a piece of fruit. In this description, an orange. (This exercise will work with any food you like. Oranges, obvious sun symbols, are particularly appropriate for this season. In American folk traditions, they were commonly given as "stocking stuffers.") Eat an orange.

"That's all. Do absolutely nothing else. Do not allow yourself to dwell on any extraneous thought. All your attention should be on the color, texture, the weight of the fruit, the feeling of separating the peel from the fruit, the smell that hits your nose when it is opened, the act of separating the sections, the feel and the taste of the juicy fruit in your mouth. Do this exercise correctly, and you may realize that you probably haven't actually tasted anything in a long time, if ever. Try to carry that sense of mindfulness into the other things you do."  
from Jennifer Hunter's book, *21st Century Wicca*; Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1997 p. 111.

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