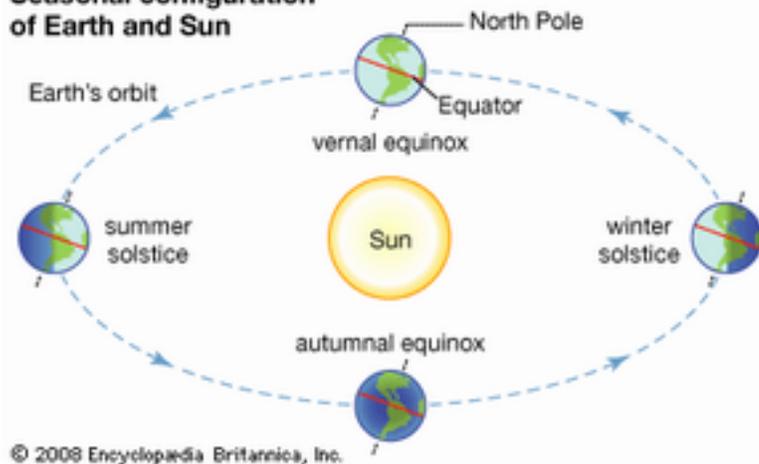


Happy Solstice! Merry Yuletide! Yule On!

December 21st is the winter solstice, (a.k.a. Yule). It is the shortest day and longest night of the year. On the morning after Yuletide, the sun is said to “rise again”. The tradition of burning a Yule log at Christmastime predates modern commemorations of the birth of Christ. It began as a pagan observance and adopted later into Christian holidays, burned on Christmas Eve. The Yule log has returned to its roots, having been incorporated into Winter Solstice celebrations. However, the log itself is often not burned, but candles placed on it are ignited.

Seasonal configuration of Earth and Sun



As the story goes, on the darkest day of year, the Winter Solstice, peasants would light a large log on fire to help keep away the evil spirits as they waited through the longest night for the sun to rise. Different woods were burned to produce varying effects:

Aspen: invokes understanding of the grand design

Birch: signifies new beginnings

Holly: inspires visions and reveals past lives

Oak: brings healing, strength, and wisdom

Pine: signifies prosperity and growth

Willow: invokes the Goddess to achieve desires

“The Yule log symbolizes the light returning to conquer the darkness,” whether burned in whole or just its candle. Traditionally, it would burn throughout the night, or 12 hours, and hopefully smolder for 12 days. Also, some families write bad habits or a wish for the upcoming year on slips of paper and burn it in the Yule log’s candle’s flames.

Making Your Own Yuletide Tradition

Begin by having parent(s) or some other family member describe the tradition of the Yule Log. The tale of the Oak King and Holly King from Celtic mythology can be shared as a story, or can be summarized with a statement that the Oak represents the waxing solar year, Winter Solstice to Summer Solstice, and the Holly represents the waning solar year, Summer Solstice to Winter Solstice.

Lights are extinguished as much as possible. The family is quiet together in the darkness. Family members quietly contemplate the change in the solar year. Each in her/his own way contemplates the past calendar year, the challenges as well as the good times.

Then the Yule Log fire is lit. As it begins to burn, each family member throws in one or more dried holly sprigs and says farewell to the old calendar year. Farewells can take the form of thanksgiving and appreciation and/or a banishment of old habits or personal pains.

Once the Yule Log itself starts blazing, then the facilitator invites family members to contemplate the year ahead and the power of possibilities. Each member then throws in an oak twig or acorn into the fire to represent the year ahead, and calls out a resolution and/or a hope.