

The Significance of the Spring Equinox

March 21st 2004

Linda E. Savage, Ph.D.

www.goddesstherapy.com

The Vernal Equinox is a universally recognized astronomical event marking the crossing of the sun over the equator. Both the Northern and Southern hemispheres see the sun rise due east and the sunset due west. Night and day are in perfect balance, each lasting 12 hours. It is heralded worldwide as the beginning of spring and a time of new beginnings. Springtime is the season of renewal, where flowers blossom, all green things grow and people feel the renewal of energy within themselves.

In agrarian societies, the spring equinox signaled the time to plant a new cycle of crops. Planting is one of the most universal symbols of this season. It is also the beginning of the light half of the year. In the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, it is the time when the beloved daughter is returned to the mother and all of nature rejoices with her, by stimulating growth once again. The Celts celebrated the spring equinox as "Lady Day," the official return of the young Goddess from her winter hibernation.

There are many Youthful Goddesses associated with spring, Aphrodite, Astarte, Cybele, Diana, Ishtar, Isis, Lada, Ostara and Eostre. Lada is the Slavic Goddess of Spring and Love. She is known as the Lady of Flowers and presides over marriage and happiness. Ostara is the German Virgin Goddess of Spring and the Wiccan Sabbat of this time of year is called Ostara in her name.

Eostre was a Teutonic Goddess. The direction East (where the sun rises) and the festival of Easter come from the same linguistic root. Spring festivals were held all over northern Europe to honor her and thank her for the promise of new life.

Folk customs associated with the spring equinox festival include spring-cleaning for a fresh start, sunrise observances celebrating the growing light, sowing and planting, celebrating sexuality, making cakes similar to hot crossed buns and pouring cider on the newly turned over furrows of earth as a libation.

The Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, when the archangel Gabriel informed Mary that she was pregnant, coincides with the spring equinox. For the Hindus, the full moon near the vernal equinox, is called Holi. It is a day of frivolity and pranks. Celebrants throw colored powder or use water pistols to squirt colored water on each other as well as onlookers. The vast majority of the customs surrounding Easter come from these ancient festivities honoring the return of spring.

The hare, animal most sacred to the Spring Goddesses became the Easter Bunny. The modern tale of the Easter Bunny that delivers eggs comes from a legend of the Goddess Eostre. As the story goes, Eostre found a bird wounded in the snow and she transformed the bird into a hare, to ensure that the animal could survive the winter. The transformation was not complete, however, as the hare retained the ability to lay eggs. This newly transformed rabbit wished to please Eostre, so he laid the sacred eggs in her honor, decorated them in bright beautiful designs and humbly presented them to her. She was so pleased that she wished all humankind to share in her joy. To honor Eostre's wishes, the rabbit went through all the world and distributed these little decorated gifts of life.

Eggs are the most enduring and pervasive symbol of this season. They symbolize new beginnings, rebirth, continuity and growth. Eggs are a universal archetype of new life. In many cultures, they are decorated as gifts, prepared in dishes to promote fertility, and rolled on lawns or hidden and hunted as games.

The lamb is another symbol that was sacred to virtually all the Goddesses of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa and it was carried over to the spring religious rituals of Jewish Passover and Christian Easter.

The lily, which became the Christian symbol of Easter, adorned the Ostara altars and temples in Greece and Rome. Courting and sexual relations were considered obligatory on Ostara Eve to ensure fertile crops and when a maiden accepted a lily from a young man, it meant as much as accepting a diamond ring does today.

The idea of wearing new clothes at Easter came from an earlier Teutonic tradition. Families would work through the winter in secret, preparing elegant finery for the Ostara celebration. The entire community would gather together for games, feasting and rituals while showing off their new clothes.

Some of the metaphors we might think about for today are:

Planting new beginnings for a renewal of energy

Cleaning out the old to make space for the new

Decorating an egg to symbolize new life

Putting on our finery to represent our best intentions

Balancing the Light and the Dark

Expressing our sensuality/sexuality to honor the life force

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.