

Moving through the seasons with wisdom and grace

by Dolores Whelan

An introduction to Celtic Calendar

Ireland has a rich spiritual heritage with ancient roots. Today, when we speak of “celtic” we refer to the culture of our ancestors as it has been described by anglo Irish scholars of the late nineteenth century. And yet, the practical wisdom that is available to us in this, our “celtic” heritage, can be of great relevance to us today.

Today we recognise such marvellous and astrologically synchronised structures as Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth as expressions of the profound knowledge of our ancestors. An insight into their world view can be found in the Celtic Spiritual tradition in it's vision of the sun, the moon and the seasons of the year. In the Celtic Calendar, the year begins in November (Samhain) and then travels through eight seasons back again to Samhain.

Much of the core wisdom of the Celtic and pre-Celtic spiritual tradition is held within this yearly calendar with its eight festivals which mark the important transition times of the year. The Celtic year calendar is both an internal and an external reality. **Just as a seed is sown in the dark earth, the darkness of Samhain and wintertime can be a time for us to explore new ideas for the year ahead**

The Celtic year begins with the festival of Samhain (which is the most important festival of the year) which occurs over 3 days and represents the gap between one year and the next year. It has been called a “time out of time”. Eight festivals and seasons of the year chart the passage of the year within this calendar: Samhain , Imbolc, Bealtaine and Lughnasadh, Winter and Summer Solstices, and Spring and Autumn Equinoxes .

Each of the eight seasons flow into and out of the season before and after each other, connecting them and our lives in a flowing river of different themes and experiences, none of which are better than

another but dance together to create the tapestry of life. The calendar highlights the changing nature of life and the rhythms and flow that create all seasons, each with their own gifts and challenges.

Journeying through the Celtic year with festivals and rituals to mark the transitional times, allows us to consciously engage with the themes present in each season. **Just as Samhain marks a season of death and letting go of the past at the beginning of winter, Bealtaine celebrates the fullness of the light at the height of summer. Our culture's fear of death and darkness can be challenged through an exploration of the season of Samhain and the myth of regeneration which is central in this tradition.**

Since this calendar has both a cosmic and personal dimension this interaction enables us to live with more awareness and understanding of ourselves and the rhythm of our lives. We learn that each season has specific qualities, energies and rhythms that bring gifts and challenges into our lives. We learn that no season is better than another but that all are part of the dance of our lives.

Through a special understanding of our passage through time, the Calendar links human beings to the earthly and cosmic drama that is being played out each day and night.

The only constant is change!

In the world view from which this calendar emerges, *stability* is understood as dynamic equilibrium rather than a fixed static position. The only constant is change! As soon as stability is achieved the movement begins again e. g when the moment of greatest darkness (winter solstice) is reached the journey begins again to towards the time of greatest light (the summer solstice).

Within the changing seasons we can identify times of expansion, of growth and blossoming; as well as times of rest, reflection and decay. In recognising also that these two modes – which can be further described as the energies of both “feminine” and “masculine”, are present in our lives, we can allow our own creativity to flourish.

The wisdom contained within the Celtic calendar is a very useful spiritual tool and still has much relevance for us living in 21st Century.

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