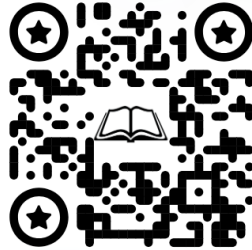


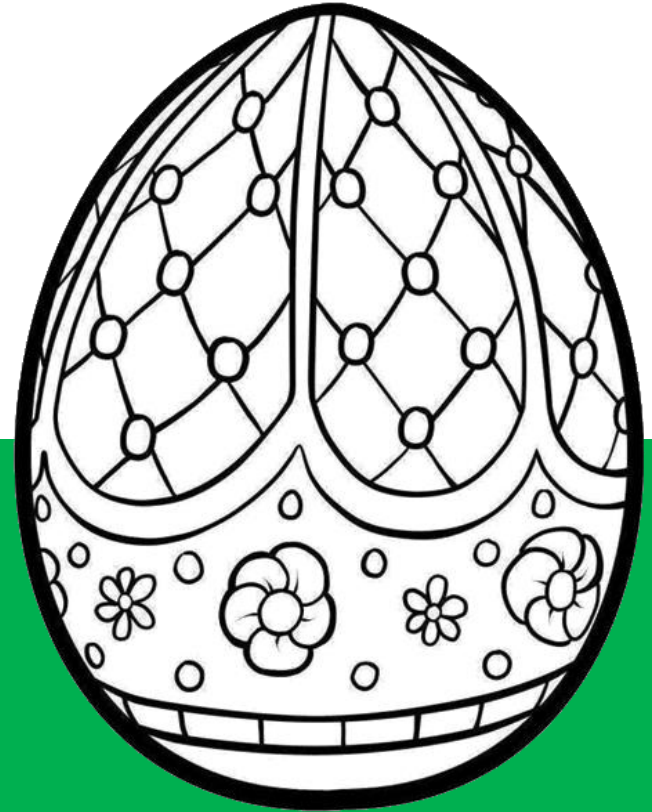
*May you find a path that fills your heart,
and sanctuary wherever you go.*



Bright Blessings, and Safe Travels!

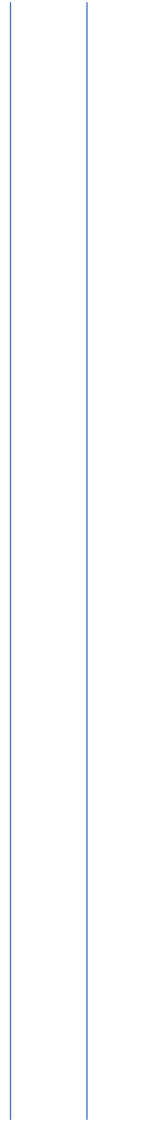
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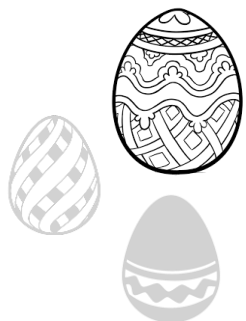


Pagans on the ROK

By Ryan Robinson



Season of spring, this Ostara fair,
 With balance of night and day, you bring new air.
 Renewal and growth, your gifts we hail,
 As the earth awakes and winter exhales.
 Bring us joy and abundance, hope and light,
 In this sabbat of beginnings, shining bright.
 We honor you, and celebrate with glee,
 This dawn morn, be forever with thee.



Ostara, come forth with flames aglow,
 Bringing life to fields and seeds below.
 Renewal's breath, with thy warmth embrace,
 The earth awakens with new life and grace.

With merriment and joy, thou art adored,
 May thy fire be kindled, and forever soar'd.
 As spring doth bloom, and all nature doth thrive,
 With love and laughter, this season comes alive.

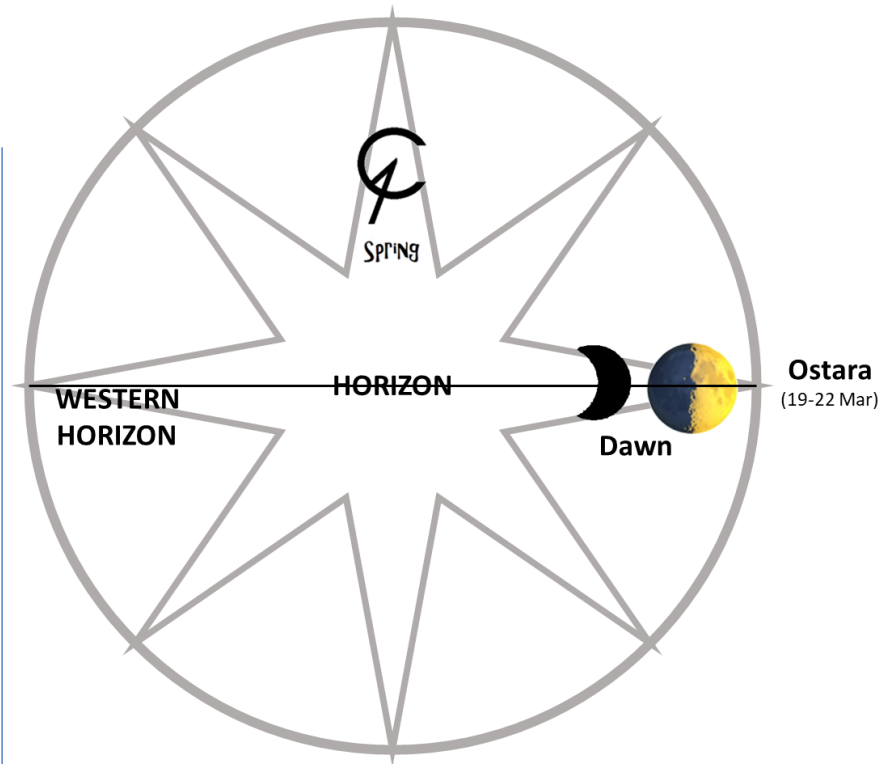
Oh maiden of spring,
 Goddess of new beginnings,
 With your warm embrace and radiant glow,
 Bring life to the earth and joy to our souls.
 As the sun grows stronger and days grow long,
 May we feel inspiration and renewal.
 May we be blessed with growth and happiness,
 In this season of new beginnings.



Oh gentle spring, thou bringer of new things,
 With thy soft touch, earth looses winter's strings.
 Thou art a muse, the tending of dreamed creation,
 And with thee come, hope sprouts from inspiration.

We plant the seeds of intention, seeking grace,
 With dawn, our dreams shall find a brightening place.
 New beginnings, fresh starts, and endless growth,
 This day, we find true joy and radiant worth.

So, we call to thee, spring, and all thy might,
 Guide us in growth, and show us the dawn's light.
 In earth's embrace, we shall find renewal,
 That all our hopes and dreams might become real.



Ostara – Birth, rebirth, awakenings, creation, new ideas, sowing, planting, and beginning new cycles.

Ostara, also known as Alban Eilir, is the spring equinox. One of the two points in the year when the length of day and night are equal. It is a moment of balance between light and dark. It marks the breaking of winter's hold and the coming of warmth that returns life to the lands.

This is a celebration of birth and rebirth. That which was dead lives again; trees and bulbs erupt into life, hibernating beasts from the bear and the squirrel down to the tiny bee come alive.

This is a festival of creation and new ideas. Sowing, planting, and beginning new cycles, both metaphorically and physically, for the year to come. It is opportunity to begin the things we want to bring to bloom in the seasons to come.

What is Ostara?

The frigid twilight of the year is breaking to dawn, and the promises of greener, warmer, more bountiful seasons are becoming apparent. The end of winter is finally a reality and being outdoors is pleasant again.

Ostara is when the wild begins to reawaken, called back not just by the growing length of the day, but by the warmth finally returning. As the fear of frost passes, buds and blossoms appear from the trees and shrubs, bees emerge to begin the pollination cycle, and fields of grass wake up from their winter slumber.

Now begins the time of sowing. The intentions nurtured through the winter are cast into the fields. We plant them in hopes they will enjoy the warmth and rains of the year until they can be harvested in their season.

Ostara is a period of youth, innocence, joy, and child-like wonder. The Oak King born in the dark of winter leads the way for the riot of life that now bursts forth. It is a warm, welcoming period when newborn animals are cradled and milk flows freely. The great green mother earth nurtures all the survivors of winter and nurses the newcomers into their strength. But, the wild abandon and passion of summer heat is still in the future.



The Spring equinox is a major astronomical event observable throughout the world and important to many cultures. Consequently, many places have ancient structures aligned to this date.

- Teotihuacan and Chichen Itza — Mexico; These sites, and several others in this region, have major architectural features oriented towards the spring equinox. In Teotihuacan there is a wall where the rising sun causes a shadow to travel upwards along figures etched and painted red. Chichen Itza is designed to create a series of triangular shadows against a balustrade that evokes the appearance of a serpent wriggling down the staircase. People gather at these sites, sometimes dressed in white with red accents, to celebrate the new season and welcome in the coming warmth of the sun.
- Angkor Wat — Cambodia; Someone standing in the western entrance to Angkor Wat can watch the spring equinox sunrise directly over the central lotus tower. This also causes the shadow of the central tower to be cast directly across the western entrance bridge.
- Stonehenge — England; Because of the northern European roots of the modern Pagan movement, this is one of the best known sites. However, it is aligned to the summer solstice rather than the equinox.



Liberalia was a Roman festival celebrated on March 17 for Liber Pater and his consort Libera. It was celebrated with sacrifices, processions, ribald and gauche songs, and masks hung on trees. The festival became associated with free speech and coming of age rites. Later, the cult, mythology, and functions of Liber Pater were associated with Bacchus and the Greek Dionysus.

The Dionysia consisted of two large Athenian festivals, the Rural Dionysia and the City Dionysia; which took place at the autumn and vernal equinoxes. These events were held in honor of Dionysus and were an essential part of the Dionysian Mysteries. The central events were theatrical performances, and they were second-most important festivals after the Panathenaia. The City Dionysia was also known as the Great Dionysia, taking place in the middle of the lunar month straddling the vernal equinox; Mar.-Apr in the solar calendar, and three months after the rural Dionysia. Part of the celebration each year was a procession of citizens carrying phalloi.

Bacchanalia were unofficial, privately funded, popular Roman festivals for Bacchus. They were based on ecstatic elements of the Greek Dionysia and Rome's native cult of Liber.

Imbolc and Ostara

Imbolc is when the weather is still cold and likely to bring sudden frosts, any of which will destroy plants and or fruits that start early. Because of this, Imbolc is when we hope, dream, and plan. As we reach the equinox the world has started to warm and only an unusually late frost could destroy crops. This makes Ostara the start of a season of striving and seeking; when the ideas, possibilities, and promise carefully tended during the winter are brought forth to be sown in the fields and allowed to grow.

Imbolc – Longing, hope, intention, and preparation.



Ostara and Beltane

Both of these holidays are joyous celebrations of the growing length of the day and return of warmth. Ostara starts the season for birth, awakening, planting, first blossoms, and the stirring of wild things. Beltane is a holiday of youth, growth, fertility, unions, and transitions. The holiday marks when livestock would be driven out to the pastures and fields would be ripe with their season's growth.

Beltane – Youth, fertility, unions, exploration, discovery, new beginnings, purification, and transition.

Ostara and Mabon

The equinoxes are about balance. Mabon is the dusk to Ostara's dawn. As these moments are the beginning and end of the day, the equinoxes are the major endpoints of the year's growing season. Ostara is the beginning of the arc that ends with Mabon's harvest celebrations.

Mabon – Maturity, fullness, completion, plenty, gratitude, gathering, harvest, family, and community.



Decorating for Ostara

Ostara is marked by the riot of color that comes with the first flowering of life. Pastels are common especially greens, yellows, and blues. Colored eggs are a popular symbol, marking the birth and rebirth of the season. This can be as simple as dyeing them a solid color. Though, incredibly complex designs, such as the pre-Christian Slavic patterns, are still practiced. Ceramic eggs have been unearthed that appear to have religious symbolism from pre-Christian eras.

Rabbits are another symbol of all the awakening life of spring. Their mating season starts early, symbolized by the mad March Hare, and their prodigious ability to multiply means their young are numerous during the season.

Another symbol of the season is a shed snake skin. While snakes generally shed their skin multiple times a year, they always represent the renewal and rebirth, which is particularly appropriate in this season.

Many early plants are symbols of the season. Fresh grass, flowers, blooming bulbs, and willow branches all demonstrate the new life of the holiday.

Freed from winter dormancy, a host of small insects returns to the world. Among the most notable is the emergence of bees, those critical creatures pollinating the plants on which we depend. Another noticed appearance are butterflies, adding a burst of floating color to the season.

Shunki kōreisai (春季皇霊祭) are Shinto holidays that occur on the spring and autumn equinoxes. Shunbun no Hi (春分の日, Vernal Equinox Day) is a modern Japanese official holiday that occurs on the date of the Northward equinox in Japan Standard Time. These holidays are part of a seven-day festival called Haru no Higan; celebrating the two points during the year where the daylight and night hours are of equal length and mark the official change of the seasons. Before the modern era, the holiday was called Higan no Nakaba, “Middle of the Equinoctial Week.”

These are days to pay respects to honored ancestors, both familial and cultural. People visit loved ones' grave sites to sweep gravestones clear of debris and leave offerings of food or fresh cut flowers. Many return to their ancestral homes to spend the day with their families.

The Japanese would also take the occasion to renew their lives by cleaning their homes and making life changes, such as finding a new hobby or starting or finishing a school curriculum. The Japanese school year ends in March.

The day is celebrated to bring in the spring season and to appreciate the nature blooming after a long winter. Practitioners pray for good harvest in the spring and say thank you for the harvest in autumn. The holiday is particularly special for farmers and gardeners, who pray for good fortune for the crops to grow during the coming year.



Druid Fire Festivals

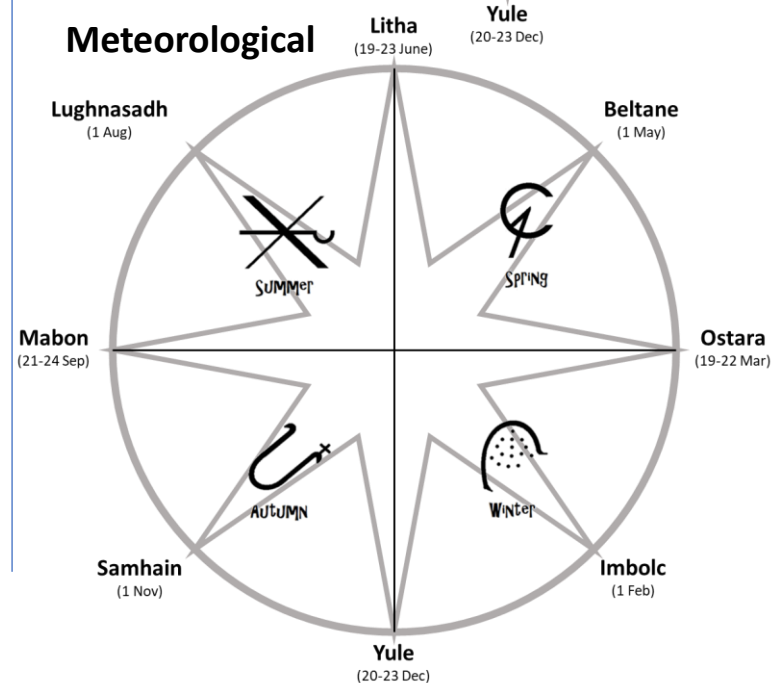
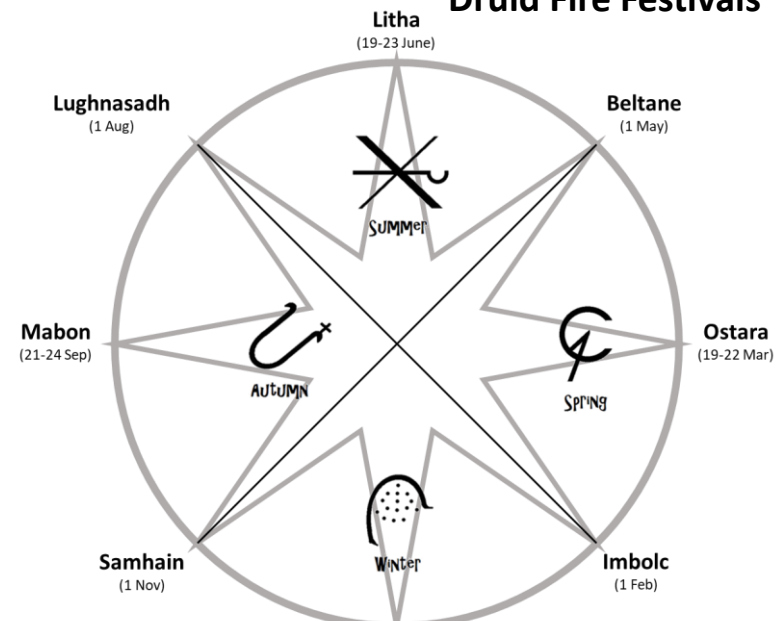
The Hindu festival of Holi originated and is predominantly celebrated on the Indian subcontinent. It has spread to other regions of Asia and parts of the Western world through the Indian diaspora.

This holiday falls around the middle of March in the Gregorian calendar and celebrates the arrival of spring, the end of winter, and the blossoming of love. For many, it is a day to meet others, play and laugh, forget and forgive, and repair broken relationships. Holi celebrations are also known as the Festival of Colours, the Festival of Spring, and the Festival of Love.

This celebration lasts for a night and a day. It starts in the Hindu calendar month of Phalguna on the evening of the Purnima (Full Moon Day). On this evening, people gather and perform Holika Dahan religious rituals in front of a bonfire; praying that their internal evil be destroyed the same way Holika, the sister of the demon king Hiranyakashipu, was killed in the fire.

The morning of Holi is celebrated as Rangwali Holi (Dhuleti) where people cover each other with bright colors. Powdered colors are common, and water guns and water-filled balloons are often used to color each other amidst fun and play. Anyone and anyplace is considered fair game to color. The atmosphere is much like color runs, but everywhere and involving everyone.

Groups often carry drums and other musical instruments going from place to place singing and dancing. Throughout the day people visit family, friends, and rivals; coming together to chat, enjoy food and drink, and partake in Holi delicacies.





Pysanka

The tradition of egg decorating is common for the season. In few places is it as developed and documented as the Slavic cultures, where these decorative wax-resist techniques date back to the pre-Christian era and are called Pysanky. While no intact examples of these complex and beautiful works exist due to their fragility, ancient eggshell fragments showing this decoration have been found.

In the pre-Christian eras, the sun god Dazhboh was one of the major deities in the Slavic pantheon. Birds were his chosen creations; they were the only ones who could get near him. Humans could not catch the birds, but they did manage to obtain the eggs the birds laid. Thus, the eggs were seen as magical objects, a source of life. The egg was honored during Spring festivals as a representation of the rebirth of the earth. The long, hard winter was over; the earth burst forth and was reborn just as the egg miraculously burst forth with life. The egg therefore, was believed to have special powers. Eggs decorated with nature symbols became an integral part of spring rituals, serving as benevolent talismans.



The Haftsin table is an arrangement of seven symbolic items considered to represent nature. They relate to the four elements of Fire, Earth, Air, Water, and the three life forms of Humans, Animals, and Plants. By tradition, those who create Haft-Seen tables take great pains to create the most beautiful displays they can. Doing so embodies traditional and spiritual values and is also appreciated by visitors as a reflection of the families' aesthetic sense and good taste. Each item symbolizes something particular. Some of the items chosen are:

- Sabzeh, Sprouting Grass: rebirth and growth.
- Samanu, a sweet paste made from young wheatgrass: power and strength.
- Senjed, a bush commonly called Russian olive, silver berry, oleaster, or wild olive: love.
- Somāq, the Sumac flowering plant: sunrise.
- Serkeh, Vinegar: patience.
- Seeb, Apple: beauty.
- Seer, Garlic: health and medicine.
- Sonbol, Hyacinth: spring's arrival.
- Sekkeh, Coin: wealth and prosperity.
- Saat, Clock: time.
- Tokhm-e Morg Rangi, Eggs (often painted): fertility.
- Ayina, Mirror: self-reflection.
- Shem'a, Candle: enlightenment.
- Maahi-ye Qirmız, Goldfish: progress.
- Ketaab, Book: wisdom.



Nowruz, which translates to English as 'new day,' is the Persian-language term for the day of the Iranian and Persian New Year, which falls on the spring equinox. This holiday has its origins in Zoroastrianism, but has been celebrated by diverse communities for over 3,000 years in Western Asia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Black Sea Basin, the Balkans, and South Asia. While it is presently a secular holiday for most celebrant and enjoyed by people of several different faiths and backgrounds, Nowruz remains a holy day for Zoroastrians, Bahá'ís, and some Muslim communities.

Like many spring celebrations, Nowruz is celebrated with house cleaning, shopping, visiting family and friends, and food preparation. One particular tradition is the Haft-Seen or Haft-Sin table. Haft-sin's origins are not clear. The practice is believed to have been popularized over the past 100 years. Family members gather around the Haft-sin table and await the exact moment of the March equinox to celebrate the New Year.




Berehynia



Goddess motifs are commonly found in Pysanky. In Ukrainian tradition, the goddess Berehynia was believed to be the source of life and death. She is a life giving mother, the creator of heaven and all living things, and the mistress of heavenly water (rain), upon which the world relies for fertility and fruitfulness. She was also the merciless controller of destinies and final fates.

The goddess can be depicted with arms upraised, and the arms vary in number but are always in pairs: 2, 4 or 6. Pysanky with this motif were called "bohyn'ky" (little goddesses) or "zhuchky" (beetles), the latter because the key shapes are similar in appearance to the Cyrillic letter that starts the word. Sometimes, the goddess becomes abstracted and is represented by the tree of life (the motif "vazon"). Her arms become the branches and flowers, and she is firmly rooted in a flowerpot.

The most common depiction of the great goddess is a composition containing "kucheri" (curls).  The Berehynia may be seen perched on a curl, or a curl may be given wings; the symbol may be doubled, end-to-end. There is usually a crown on the Berehynia's head. Common variations of this composition are given folk names of "queen," "princess," "rooster," "scythe," "drake," or simply "wings."

"vazon"



Curls



Celebrations for Ostara

Planting seeds: Perhaps the single most appropriate celebration of Ostara. These can be a deliberate garden, rooting new trees among landscaping, scattering wildflower seeds in an ignored space, or some other type of planting. This is the season of beginnings, and while we should be planting metaphorical seeds for the year, few things can symbolize that intention as well as literally planting seeds. It is possible to make (or buy) paper with seeds embedded in it, allowing you to write an intention for the season or year and literally plant it. It is also possible to have seed-embedded confetti, allowing celebratory bursts of color that bring flowers. One particular method of spreading such things is with casacarones; hollowed out eggshells filled with confetti, seeds, herbs, powdered color, and other symbols of spring.

Greeting the dawn: This equinox starts the warm season; a breaking of cold for the year that mirrors the breaking of day.

Sweets and treats: Due to the return of available food that often came with early-season delights, this season is one of the best known for such small indulgences. Some types of confection still carry echoes of ancient symbolism such as the egg-shaped jelly bean, which comes from the gumdrop or Turkish Delight.

Create new goals or projects: Spring equinox is a moment for balance and beginnings. Start a project with balance, clear head, and an open plane of possibilities.

Go outside: Start hiking, or exploring new parts of your city you haven't seen before. Historically, spring equinox is a great opportunity to travel and explore. Roads once closed from snow are now open with a brand new world of growth awaiting you. Even if the natural world is far from your doorstep, find a new tree in your city to sit under, or a fun part of town you haven't explored.

In Annapolis, Maryland, United States, boatyard employees and sailboat owners celebrate the spring equinox with the "Burning of the Socks" festival. Traditionally, the boating community wears socks only during the winter. These are burned at the approach of warmer weather, which brings more customers and work to the area. Officially, nobody wears socks until the fall equinox.

The Babylonian calendar began with the first new moon after the March equinox; this was the day after the return of the Sumerian goddess Inanna / Ishtar from the underworld. Celebrated in the Akitu ceremony, with parades through the Ishtar Gate to the Eanna temple and the ritual re-enactment of the marriage to Tammuz / Dummuzi.

Songkran is a term derived from the Sanskrit word, saṅkrānti. It is used to refer to the traditional New Year celebrated in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, parts India, parts of Vietnam, and parts of China. This is the northward equinox, and is related to the equivalent Hindu calendar-based New Year festivals in most parts of South Asia which are collectively referred to as Mesha Sankranti. The Songkran Water Festival of Thailand is celebrated with street wide water "fights" or splashing.

Other Celebrations

Some traditions mark the new year with the return of life. While some mark the day from sunset to sunset, others prefer to count from sunrise to sunrise. The stress of whether food stores will last is broken and those who reach the dawn of the year are most likely to see another set of seasons. Many cultures mark this sense of birth and rebirth in their own way.

Easter is a Christainized version of the Ostara celebration; aligning the rebirth of their god-incarnate with the larger themes of rebirth and restoration which were historically celebrated at this time of year. Much of the imagery and pageantry of the modern holiday is directly copied from earlier Pagan celebrations that were absorbed or displaced.

The Jewish holiday of Passover usually falls on the first full moon after the northern hemisphere's vernal equinox. Because of the specifics of the Jewish lunar calendar it is occasionally celebrated on the second full moon after the equinox. (Currently, this happens three times every 19 years.) The holiday commemorates mystical events leading up to the Jewish people's escape after 200 years of slavery in Egypt, and celebrates the new dawning of their freedom.

The spring equinox is called Chunfen in China, where the equinoxes were days of ancestor veneration.

In many Arab countries, Mother's Day is celebrated on the northward equinox. In Norse paganism, the Dísablót was celebrated on the vernal equinox. This feast and festival honors female spirits and ancestors.

There are several rituals around eggs that are common to Ostara. Painting eggs is one of the most well-known. This can be a fun family ritual producing simply colored and decorated eggs, or intense individual practice with intricate workmanship.

Another common celebration of Ostara is the hunting of eggs. Typically done with colored and decorated eggs, the hiding and finding of eggs is a popular game for the season, especially for children. This activity has a variety of explanations, one of the favorite being the German Osterhase tale, which resembles the Easter Bunny.

Egg rolling is a race where participants push an egg through the grass with a long-handled spoon.

An egg dance is a traditional game where eggs are laid on the ground and the goal is to dance among them damaging as few as possible. Blindfolded egg dances were popular musical acts in both Europe and the United States during the 18th century.

Another game is for one person to use their feet to roll an egg out of a bowl, keeping it within a circle, then flip the bowl to cover the egg, and do so without touching other objects on the floor.

Egg tossing or egg throwing is a game with many variants. Common versions involve throwing an egg so that it lands on the ground without breaking.

Egg tapping, egg fight, egg knocking, egg pacqueing, egg boxing, egg picking, egg chucking are all names for a game which was once extremely popular. In English folk traditions, the game has also been known as "shackling", "jarping" or "dumping." The rule of the game is simple. Each participant holds a hard-boiled egg and takes turns tapping their egg against another participant's, seeking to break the other's without breaking their own. The winner gets both eggs.

Northward Equinox

The March equinox is known as the vernal equinox (spring equinox) in the Northern Hemisphere and as the autumnal equinox in the Southern Hemisphere. It may be taken to mark the beginning of astronomical spring and the end of astronomical winter in the Northern Hemisphere, or vice versa in the Southern Hemisphere.

The March equinox is also called the northward equinox. The equal length of night and day of an equinox happens because the point at which its sun is at it's zenith (perceived to be directly overhead) is at the equator. Some track the precise moment of an equinox; which is when that zenith point, also called the subsolar point, appears to leave the Southern Hemisphere and cross the equator (0° longitude).

The northward equinox occurs as early as 19 March or as late as 21 March in the common western (Gregorian) calendar. Each common year the equinox is about 5 hours 49 minutes later than the previous year. As with many calculations, leap years serve to reset this, making it about 18 hours 11 minutes earlier than the previous year. This system balances the increases of the common years against the losses of the leap years to keep the calendar date from drifting more than one day from 20 March.

From the surface of the Earth the subsolar point appears to move west, completing a circuit around the globe each day. It also moves north and south between the tropics over the course of a year; spiraling like a helix. The subsolar point contacts the Tropic of Cancer on the June solstice and the Tropic of Capricorn on the December solstice. The subsolar point crosses the Equator on the March and September equinoxes.

The March equinox serves as the “zero point,” or starting reference, for calendars and celebrations in many cultures and religions. One system that uses it is “sidereal time.” The term “sidereal” is derived from the Latin “sidus,” meaning "star." This is a timekeeping system that astronomers use to find celestial objects.

Sidereal time is based on Earth's rate of rotation measured relative to the fixed stars. Use of this system makes it easy to point a telescope to a desired object in the night sky. Viewed from the same location, a star seen at one position in the sky will be seen at the same position on another night at the same sidereal time. This is similar to how the clock kept by a sundial (Solar time) can be used to find the location of the Sun.

The sidereal time at any given place will gain about four minutes against local civil time every 24 hours until, after a year has passed, one additional sidereal "day" has elapsed compared to the number of solar days that have gone by. The location of March equinox itself moves slowly westward relative to the stars, completing one revolution in about 25,800 years.