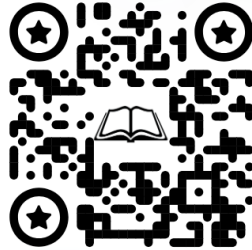


*May you find a path that fills your heart,
and sanctuary wherever you go.*



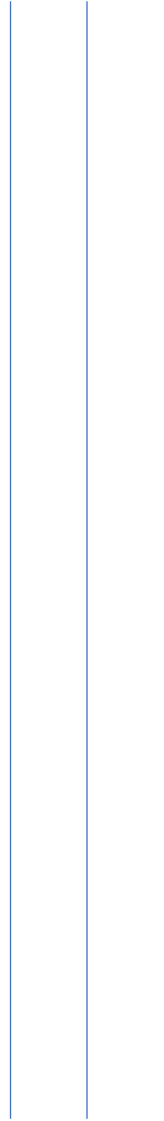
Bright Blessings, and Safe Travels!

Beltane
Beltane
Beltane

Beltane



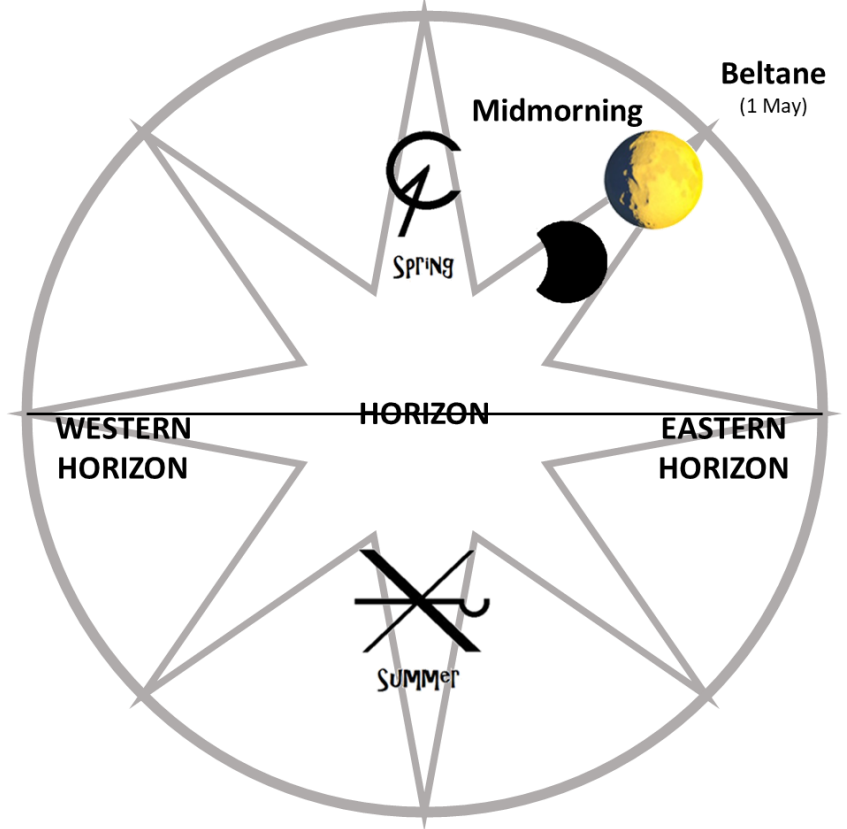
By Ryan Robinson



Bless, O Threefold, true and bountiful,
 Myself, my loves, and my household,
 All I have created and their toiling makers,
 Everything within my home or my possession,
 All kine and crops, all flocks and corn,
 From Beltane Eve to Hallow Eve,
 With health, growth, and gentle blessing,
 On the open plain, and at the high mountains,
 From sea to sea, and at every river mouth,
 From wave to wave, and in pools where water falls.

Behold Beltane fires high in the night,
 As fairies dance 'neath moon's silver light.
 The Maypole stands tall, bedecked in bright flowers,
 A symbol of life, love, and union's power.
 Oh, come ye all, and join in revelry,
 With joy and abandon, call blessed fertility.
 By the ancient rites let secrets unfold
 Of hope, rebirth, and blessings untold.

I have found the divine
 In the wind and in the rain.
 I see hope grow
 In the birds and in the trees.
 Wherever the spirits take me,
 I strive to light a fire,
 To show how these things may be found,
 And to remind myself;
 Wherever I stand,
 Is holy ground.



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

The second spring festival, or the first of summer by some counts, Beltane celebrations heralded the start of a new livestock cycle in ancient times. This was a time of purification, a major transition, the beginning of a season of relative plenty, and a key moment in the hope for a good harvest to come.

This holiday continues to be about coming together of the community after the winter, leaving behind the hardships of the seasons past, and setting out after your goals and intentions with whatever adventures that brings.

What is Beltane?

With the planting, fawning, and foaling of spring mostly complete, Beltane was the time for livestock to be driven into summer fields. During this festival special fires, called need-fires, were built. The herds were driven through the smoke of these fires to purify them of any clinging ills from the winter. Then, members of the community would follow the animals. This rite marked the beginning of a new livestock cycle, served as a transition heralding the season, and focused hopes of good harvests later in the year

Dance, food and drink would be plentiful around the bonfires, and given freely to members of the community who carried forth the blaze of rebirth. Yellow May flowers were abundantly displayed. The theme of fertility was rife as the promise of new crops and healthy herds had finally arrived after the cold, dark months.

Fairies, known in Gaelic as the aos sí, were believed to be particularly mischievous around Beltane and Samhain. The fairies were “supposed then to possess the power and inclination to do all sorts of mischief without the slightest restraint,” as Thomas Crofton Croker wrote in his 1825 text. One prank the aos sí were known to pull was poisoning milk and dairy products. (This is before mass pasteurization.) As a result, people were keen to placate them. So, offerings of food and milk were left on doorsteps in the hopes of appeasing the aos sí.

Like all of the fire festivals, Beltane’s date has become anchored on the calendar as May 1. However, some practitioners prefer to celebrate this Sabbats as either the midpoints astronomically (halfway between the Solstice and Equinox, about May 3rd) or astrologically (when the sun at 15° Taurus, about May 5th).

The greening woods, the burgeoning earth,
Announce the blossom of Beltane’s mirth.
In sparkling air, with bright burning fires,
We prepare the babes of the season’s birth.

Maidens dance for the joyful days,
With flowered hair under young sun’s rays.
She calls blessings to waiting flocks,
As they pass the Beltane blaze.

With holy fire we purify and renew,
Celebrating all that is bright and true.
As we bless our joy with Beltane rite,
May it bring our year a brighter hue.

Light to light
Shadow to shadow
Light to shadow
Shadow to light
May we hold high the torch of knowledge,
May we hold high the keys of discovery,
May we hold high the blade of truth.
We stand ever at the crossroads,
Paths of possibility leading beyond our sight.
May we find our way beyond the horizons,
And safely home again.
So shall it be.
So shall it be.
So shall it be.

Liminality

All sabbats are liminal times; times of transition and transformation set aside from the normal and mundane. The word holiday derives from the phrase “holy day.” It is in the spaces and times between that we often find the spiritual.

The concept of liminality was developed to describe the quality of ambiguity or disorientation in the middle stage of a rite of passage; when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet achieved the status they will hold when the rite is complete.

Much of religion is focused on the liminal. The places and times where people find themselves between their previous identity, status, time, community, way of thinking, or set of beliefs and something new. Everyone experiences events that place them in this state. New births, the grief of loss, and every transition in between can have a liminal quality. Often this is the state where humans are most likely to experience a sense of the divine in whatever form.

The various branches of Paganism focus on transformation and discovery and often spend more focus on directly exploring liminality than other religions. Ritual is a way to help bring us into that state, perhaps to help us with the transitions of the moment, to make it easier when life puts us in that state, or simply seeking experiences with the divine.

All holidays come with a specific sense and set of associations. The Wheel of the Year encompasses the full range of the cycle of life by reflecting the natural cycle. Thus, by engaging with the traditions of each holiday and seeking experiences that bring us into these liminal states, we can help ourselves learn how to navigate the transitions throughout our lives.

Ostara and Beltane

Both of these holidays are joyous celebrations of the growing length of the day and warmth returning. Ostara is a time for starts and beginnings; first blossoms and the first stirring of wild things – but also infancy, when every day is a new first. Beltane is the joy and wonder of childhood, with all the learning and growth that comes with it, taking children on wild adventures in a whirlwind of development. Ostara is the time of planting and first buds and sprouts of perennial foliage. Beltane is the rich, verdant green of all of life returning.

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

Beltane and Litha

The transition from Beltane to Litha is some of the prime growing season for the year. In the cycle of life, it represents the joy and wonder of early childhood giving way to passion and a desire for self determination. It is a time of wild abandon, and for learning lessons both wondrous and terrible. The verdant green of spring brightens to the brilliant golds of summer.

Litha – Adolescence, light, power, leisure, and conflict.

Beltane and Samhain

Beltane and Samhain are echoes of one another; times of transformation and change outside the experience of most of our lives. Liminal times, when veils between worlds are said to be thin. Ancestor work is common, as is work with other types of spiritual beings and forces.

Samhain – Old age, ancestors, endings, passings, sacrifice, slaughter and butchery, winnowing, and wisdom.

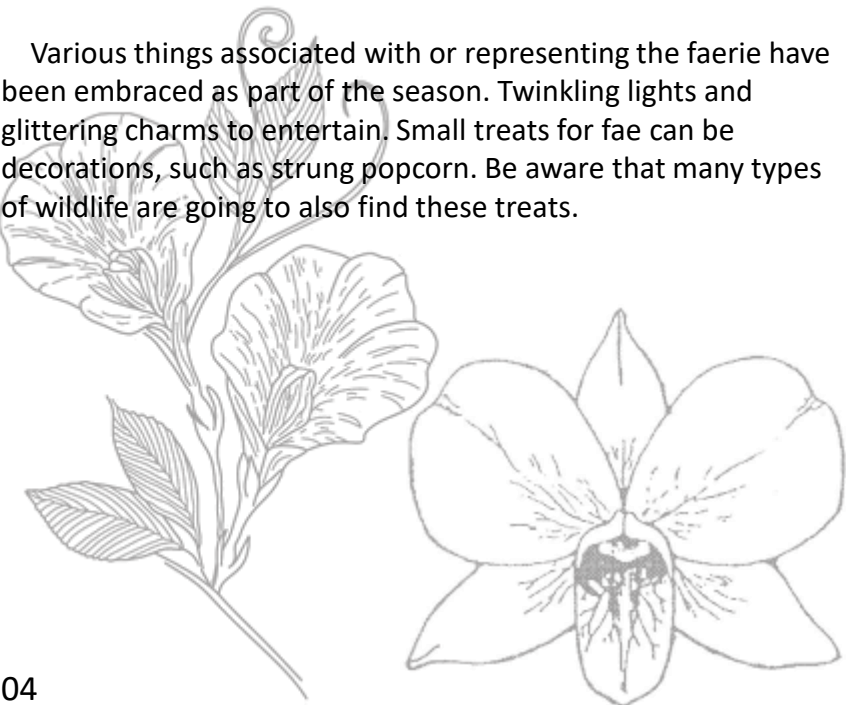
Decorating for Beltane

One of the most distinctive symbols of Beltane is the Maypole. Tall beams set into the ground and woven with streamers as people dance about them. Because these pillars take significant effort and space to set up, they are often represented with ribbons.

With the arrival of Beltane many types of flowers are in blossom or bloom. Their cacophony of colors and forms is embraced in the decorations of the season. Either the flowers themselves or representations of them are everywhere. Along with ribbons and other items, these may be formed into wreaths, woven into hair, or turned into crowns to be worn.

Many symbols of fertility are closely associated with Beltane. Direct representations, such as phalluses and yoni, are included in some decorations. Other more symbolic imagery include antlers, acorns, seeds, and flowers.

Various things associated with or representing the faerie have been embraced as part of the season. Twinkling lights and glittering charms to entertain. Small treats for fae can be decorations, such as strung popcorn. Be aware that many types of wildlife are going to also find these treats.



Hawthorn

The Celts believed that wherever one finds oak, ash and hawthorn trees together, fairies are nearby. More, fairies were said to live beneath the hawthorn itself, so the tree was considered so sacred that it was a serious crime to cut one down.

This is because the fairies were believed to keep the connections between worlds alive, including those to the Underworld from which ancestors would seek to guide and protect the living still in the mundane world. Thus destroying the home of fairies risked severing the connection to those ancestors and their guidance and protection.

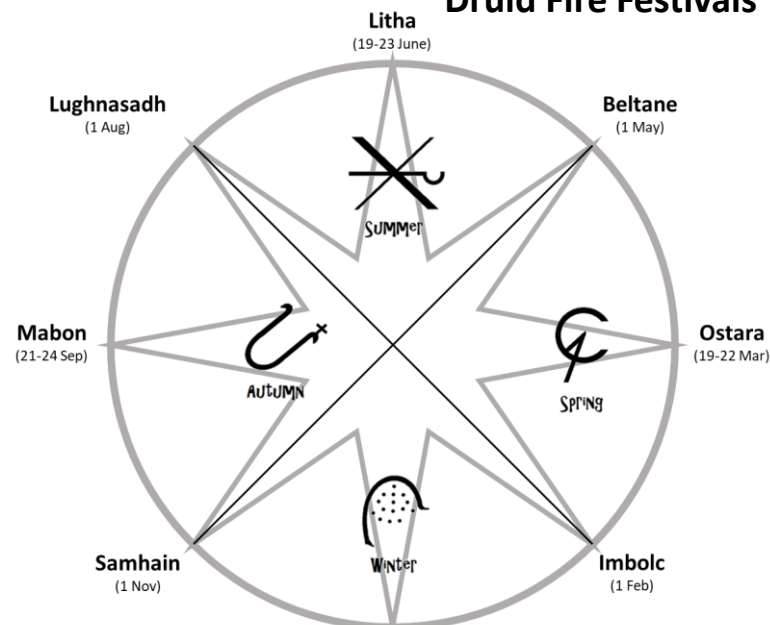
Children

In all human societies, children are celebrated and even revered. But they hold a special place in the spring. They represent the results of fertility, they contain all the abundant energy of the season, and they are the youth of the new year. As a result they are particularly celebrated during these holidays.

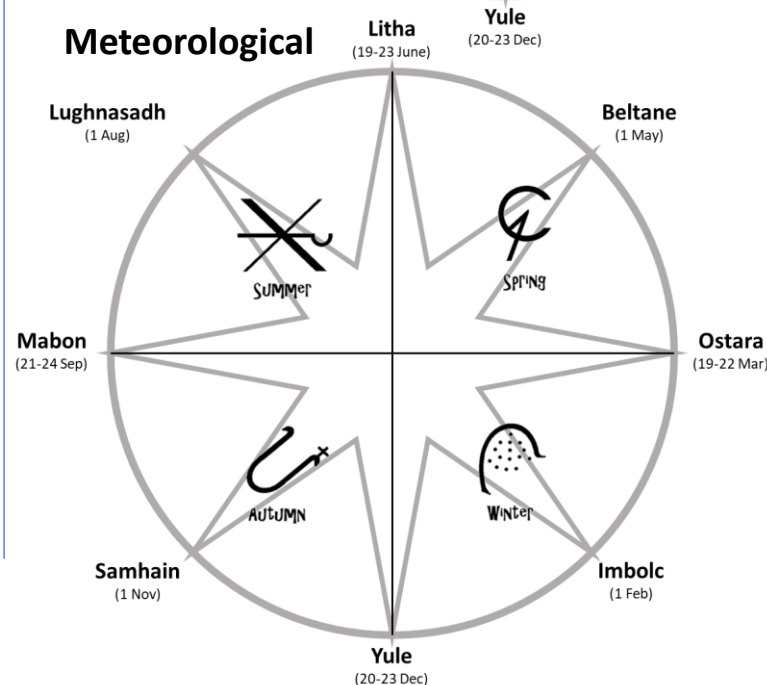
In much lore there are two large groups who have particular connections to the spirit world – the elderly who are closer to passing into it, and children who have most recently returned from it. In recent decades science has found that young children and the geriatric are very similar medically, and surprisingly different from any of the ages in between. This has long been echoed in spirituality.

Children conceived during Beltane might be referred to as ‘merry-be-gots’ and thought to have a particularly special connection to the faerie realm. While they were born around Imbolc, the fact that these individuals were conceived at Beltane and youth when Beltane came again was significant.

Druid Fire Festivals



Meteorological



Spring Spirits

In the light of spring energy is high; the sun is bright and days growing longer. The weather is warm and continues to grow warmer. Plants are lush, green, and blossoming. Animals wild and domesticated are living the best parts of their lives.

In this environment it is believed that spirits of all sorts seek communion and connection. Like Samhain, ancestor work is common, including guardian ancestors who have helped bring individuals and families through the winter. This is also a time to focus on past life reconnection and other aspects of rebirth and reincarnation.

Many types of fae and nature spirits are also considered to thrive in growing life of spring. These beings may create passages between the mundane and spiritual world or be drawn to open passages. It is common to leave offerings for potentially mischievous spirits, such as gifts of food and milk on the doorstep for the aos sí.

Unlike Samhain, spirits interacting with the mundane world in this season are less interested in short and passing visits to and interactions with the mundane world. Around Beltane such beings are more interested in reincarnation, intercourse, or other deep forms of communion, closeness, and connection.

Celebrations for Beltane

Perhaps the most widely discussed way to honor Beltane is through celebrations of sex and sexuality. One of the central activities of Beltane is the beginning of new unions, and this is one of the most frequent ways people express that. However, it can just as much be a new joint business venture; such as the formation of a corporation. Another significant way to celebrate new unions and commitments is to hold marriages and handfastings.

While modern Pagans may or may not light a true 'need-fire,' Beltane is one of the most fire-oriented of the festivals. They do often dance around (or even over) bonfires.

Celebrants might weave flowers into their hair, or create a floral wreath to wear on their head as a celebration of spring.

Cooking bannock cakes over fires and sharing them with the community is another common celebration.

Maypoles take a significant investment in work and space, but are a popular way to celebrate. This is a tall post placed in an open field with ribbons attached at the top. Each person grabs a ribbon and dances around the pole in a set pattern which weaves the ribbons into a specific design. The winding of a maypoles is believed to have started as a fertility ritual.

Some people prepare "May baskets." These baskets are filled with flowers, goodwill, and the hope of the season. The baskets are given to those needing care, such as elderly friends, or those recovering from illness.

Ranching vs Farming

The modern age is a time of eternal bounty. The availability of fresh food has little or nothing to do with the season. The cycles of plant and livestock management have little direct impact on most people's everyday existence. Few of us have any familiarity with the personal experiences of farming and ranching. We are content to find our food through the convenience of the grocery store. Modern buildings insulate us from the cycles of heat, cold, rain, snow, and other weather. But the Pagan wheel of the year and its eight sabbats are rooted in the waxing and waning cycle of life through the seasons.

The solstices and equinoxes are more closely bound to the agrarian planting and harvesting cycles.

The cross days are more closely linked to the rearing and husbandry of livestock.

However, the two cycles also overlap. Obviously, each of these progressions continue without pause through the year. Further, most farmers keep some amount of livestock, such as chickens, rabbits, or goats. Similarly, even if ranchers don't focus on tilling and planting tidy fields they are tied to the cycle of sprouting, growth, and withering of their pastures.

Raising fawns and calves demands a lot of energy from their mother; producing enough milk to nurse is intensive. Generally, the larger a mammal the longer its gestation; often such animals have evolved to time their birthing to coincide with return of spring and its nutritional abundance. Offspring born too early have a greater risk of mortality as their mother may not be able to find enough to eat. Offspring born too late run the risk of going into their first winter with too little body weight to survive the demands the cold places on their bodies.

Purification

Whether we talk about the beginning of ritual or the start of a new year, purification or cleansing is often discussed. There are two main ways people approach this idea:

The first is what we mostly think of from the Western, Christian dominated lens; the removal of “evil.” However, unlike some religions, Paganism doesn’t see the mundane, everyday world as inherently “dirty.” When we want to remove “evils” we should have specific things in mind. Illness and bad luck are common things that we typically seek to purify ourselves of in this sense. In Paganism we talk about these sorts of things with Beltane need-fires. On the other hand, many aspects of life that other traditions seek to wash away are things we accept as part of our existence. For example, some religions may seek to remove specific emotions through this sort of purification. However, Paganism generally only does this when they reach excess and start interfering with other parts of life. Grief, for example, is a part of the process of dealing with any change, however unpleasant it may feel. It is only when such emotions stop being processed and becomes a block to further growth and change that they become “evils.”

The second type of purification is less used in broader society. However, it is probably the more useful idea in Pagan contexts. While we don’t see the mundane world as “evil” or “dirty,” specific aspects of it are sometimes not what we want at a specific moment. If someone is cooking spicy food and switches to baking cookies they will wash their hands and clean their work space. This is a purification, and they do it not because they don’t like spicy foods or because they think any of the components are dirty. They do it because, generally, you don’t make cookies with the same things you make spicy food with. These things aren’t “wrong” they’re just “wrong for this situation,” so we remove them.

Holy wells were often visited at Beltane. Visitors to holy wells prayed for health while walking doesil (clockwise) around the well. They would leave offerings; typically coins or clooties. The first water drawn from a well on Beltane was thought to be especially potent, bringing good luck and health to the person who drew it, as was morning dew gathered on Beltane.

One variation on bonfires is the construction of a wicker man. This idea largely entered most people’s awareness directly or indirectly via several horror movies which indicate that these were fertility rites that involve live, sometimes human, sacrifice. These are based on ancient Roman attempts to discredit Celtic religious practices. Both sources ignore significant practical issues with this method of sacrifice. Still, some practitioners do create dolls or figures with remains or last harvests from the fields for burning. Such an item is more often a straw man or corn doll than made from wicker. These may be burned during autumn celebrations such as Mabon, or kept through the winter until Beltane. These figures may represent the King of the Harvest or the King of Winter. While weaving corn dolls or straw men are relatively easy, the expenditure of effort and resources to build a wicker man is substantial. Consequently constructing one for burning would be a significant sacrifice for fertility, purification, or other purposes suitable to Beltane rituals.

Other Celebrations

Sham Ennessim is an Egyptian festival marking the beginning of spring. It originates from the Ancient Egyptian Shemu festival, which marked the Season of the Harvest, or Low Water. This was the third and final season of the lunar and civil Egyptian calendars. This season fell after the Season of Emergence and before a spiritually dangerous period outside the regular months. This non-calendar period ended at the New Year's festivities which began the Season of Inundation.

The Floralia was a festival in ancient Roman religious practice in honor of the goddess Flora. It was held April 27 during the Republican era and April 28 in the Julian calendar. The festival included Ludi Florae, the "Games of Flora", which lasted for six days under the empire. The festival had a licentious, pleasure-seeking atmosphere. Multi-colored clothing was customary and some observances happened after dark.

Calan Mai or Calan Haf is a celebration in Wales held on 1 May. Events start the evening before with bonfires. As with Calan Gaeaf (1 November) the night before is considered an Ysbrydnos or "spirit night" when spirits are out and about and divination is possible.

Walpurgis Night is a traditional holiday in northern Europe and Scandinavia. In Germany the holiday is celebrated by dressing in costumes, playing pranks on people, and creating loud noises meant to keep evil at bay. Many people also hang blessed sprigs of foliage from houses and barns to ward off evil spirits, or leave pieces of bread spread with butter and honey, called ankenschnitt, as offerings for phantom hounds.

Need-fire

Need-fire, nied-fire, wild-fire, or force-fire are terms used in folklore, superstition, and folk magic to denote a fire produced by friction between two pieces of wood. Often, this is done with a rope around a stake. A similar customary practice still exists in India, where fire-churning is used for kindling sacrificial fires.

Need-fire is most common among people who tend herds and flocks. Its use is believed to ward off disease from livestock and humans. In addition to specific events like Beltane, need-fire may be kindled when there is special distress. The effectiveness of a need-fire as a curative and ward is believed to depend on all other fires being extinguished.

Before the advent of matches and lighters, creating new fire was a significant event. Producing fire by friction takes skill and work. As a result, hearth fires were carefully tended to ensure they would not go out. Nearly all fires were spawned from other fires, so if a hearth was allowed to grow cold the light was shared from someone else's fire. This meant that the extinguishing of fires to create a need-fire was worrying and emotional, and a clear break with the past.

When a need-fire was lit, home hearth fires would be relit using a torch from the main fire. This passing of fire brought people together after the harsh, unfarmable, isolating winter as communities gathered around central bonfires, then neighbors passed the torch from home to home.

Age Appropriate Messaging

Paganism faces many aspects of life and living in a head-on way that some other religions and many people can find disconcerting. At few points does this come as directly into juxtaposition as Beltane, where discussions of childlike wonder and sexuality can seem to share space.

Above all else: ***no healthy, modern expression of Paganism endorses pedophilia, pederasty, sexual abuse, or any other similar activity.*** We recognize such activities as damaging to those involved and far outside the bounds of tolerated practice.

In any religion or spiritual practice, an individual's understanding of its features and mysteries should grow with experience and age. Paganism is the same. Every Beltane should be reached with the wonder of new discovery and experience while inspiring fresh exploration and growth. As a child this is the wonder of the plants in spring, the faeries in the hawthorn, and the ideas of purification as separating parts of life rather than rejecting them. As a teenager, this is the discovery that life comes with a wider range of experiences than are necessarily shared with children and the idea that, while there is knowledge to be gained from those experiences, there are risks and sometimes costs in doing so. Only as an adult do we consider sex as a feature of life to fully and freely engage with.

We endorse honest, healthy, open discussion of gender, sex, and development at age appropriate times. At all ages we encourage everyone to understand their own body and experiences; communicating without the shame, discomfort, or secrecy in which abuse can thrive. For adults we embrace enjoying mature experiences in wonder and joy ***to the extent desired and only with other consenting adults.***

Many religions have activities and rites that are well known and widely discussed but restricted by age.

The Maiouma or Maiuma was a Roman festival celebrating Dionysus and Aphrodite held every three years during the month of May. Described as a "nocturnal dramatic festival, held every three years and known as Orgies." During this time enough money was set aside by the government for torches, lights, and other expenses to cover a thirty-day festival of "all-night revels." The Maiouma was also celebrated with grand banquets and offerings. Its reputation for licentiousness and debauchery caused it to be suppressed after Christianization.

In the late 19th century, May 1 was chosen as the date for International Workers' Day by the Socialists and Communists of the Second International to commemorate the Haymarket affair in Chicago. This is sometimes referred to as "May day."

In Bulgaria, May 1 is Irminden, associated with snakes and lizards, and more importantly, the rituals the locals have to perform to protect people from them. By Bulgarian tradition snakes are believed to begin to emerge on 25 March, and on May 1 their king comes out. As a result, it is believed that if people work in the fields on May 1 they will almost certainly be bitten by a snake in the summer. To avoid this, fires are lit for people to jump over and people make noise to scare the snakes away.

In Italy, the three days from Thursday to Saturday of the first week of May are called Calendimaggio or Cantar Maggio. Singers called Maggerini go from house to house, singing songs about Spring in exchange for small gifts like eggs, wine, and sweets. Some places have public festivals with public performances.

Sex, fertility, virility, and power

For many adults, Beltane is a celebration that comes to center on sex and sexuality. In some cases this is metaphorical, in others it is literal. Across ancient cultures and modern Paganism, there is a common understanding of sex as one of the primary experiences of life and languages of power.

In some cases, this is interpreted through the lenses of fertility and virility. This can lead to expressions that carry tones of dominance and submission, giving and receiving, or genesis and creation. In some cases these tones are intended, varying with the practice and practitioners. However, at its core these things are still about union, communion, and cooperation to make something greater.

The Great Rite

The Great Rite is a Wiccan ritual involving either symbolic or actual sexual intercourse with the purpose of drawing energy from powerful connections. In the original symbolic version of the Rite the high priestess plunges the athame, representing the masculine, into a cup or chalice filled with wine and held by the high priest, which represents the feminine.

The Great Rite is based on the idea of "hieros gamos," meaning "holy marriage." Also called Hierogamy, this has been referenced in alchemy, Jungian psychology, Sumerian and Greek mythology and practice, as well as Tantric Buddhism. Some view hieros gamos as an archetype of fertility ritual.

Continued use and variation of the Great Rite is a topic of discussion among Wiccans, including considerations of gender, sexuality, and consent. However, it has traditionally been included in several Wiccan rituals, including commonly for Beltane. Enacting the ritual is also one form of initiation to Third, highest, Degree of Wicca representing the Mystery of Love and Sex. In any use, it is an invocation of creation through the union of the Goddess with the God; a reflection of how the joining together can create something greater than the sum of its parts.

Fertility Rites

Fertility rites are rituals intended to stimulate reproduction and growth. The subjects for fertility may be plants, livestock, or even humans. Beltane exists as a fertility rite which occurs because of expected weather. Other fertility rites arise as ceremonial rites of passage or as rituals engaged in pursuit of particular desires.

These are a form of magic where the participants seek to influence the forces of nature. This may be done through exchange, such as offering a sacrifice, or sympathetic effect with an example acted out in the ritual; as in the Great Rite. The drawing of ancient cave pictures showing animals mating may have served as fertility rites, as would ceremonies involving phallic or yoni symbols.

Prosperity and abundance in the current age reduce the apparent need of fertility rites for agriculture. It has been suggested that modern fertility rites include activities to ensure the continued fruitfulness of technological innovation.

Marriage

Spring has been the time for weddings, handfastings, and new romance for ages. The coming together of families, the celebration of starting new households, and the historical assumption this would soon be followed by new children. Freud saw the modern wedding ceremony as a kind of ritual orgy, enacted to guarantee the fertility and virility of the newlyweds.

Business

One of the central activities of Beltane is the beginning of new unions. Most frequently, this is taken as sex or romance. However, it can be a forming new alliances, joint ventures, founding a new organization, starting a corporation, undertaking a merger, or any other similar activity. Beltane is about new beginnings, creation, and combining things to make something greater than the sum of its parts, and this extends to all aspects of life.