

Hey listeners, I'm recording this near the end of January as we approach the Sabbat of Imbolc. Today we'll discuss why Neo-Pagans, witches, Wiccans, and the like celebrate Imbolc, which is part of the Wheel of the Year.

The Wheel of the Year recognizes season's movements, specifically the solstices, equinoxes, and in-between. If any of the terms that I've mentioned seem unfamiliar. Don't worry. I'll go through them in more detail in a bit.

However, you may have unasked questions if you are familiar with these terms. For instance, do we have to follow the wheel of the year rigidly on those specific days? What if you live in the southern hemisphere - do you still celebrate Imbolc, even though it's getting closer to fall than to spring where you're at? Or do you celebrate Lughnadsah, which is on the opposite end of the Wheel of the Year? How can we make the Wheel of the Year celebration relevant if your seasons don't align with those eight Sabbats? And then, last but not least, are they genuinely ancient, are they a modern invention, or are they a modern re-interpretation?

It's time to examine these questions and more. So sit back, get your favorite beverage, and prepare for this episode of Spiritual AF Sundays: Cheese and Bread - Examining Imbolc and Lughnadsah.

[Opening Credits]

Welcome back, listeners. This is Jessica, also known as The Mystic Geek. Today we'll be talking about the Wheel of the Year, precisely two points in the Wheel of the Year, known as Imbolc and Lughnadsah.

The Wheel of the Year

So if you're new to all this, you are probably asking, "What is the Wheel of the Year?"

In Pagan traditions - Pagan, Neo-pagan, various forms of witchcraft, and Wicca - the Wheel of the Year is a cycle of festivals marking the change of the seasons. They're known as the eight Sabbats, the four major points of the equinoxes, and the solstices, also called the cross quarters. Various groups will consider those cross quarters or the times between the seasons to be the Major Sabbats. In contrast, the solstices and equinoxes are known as the Minor Sabbats. Major and minor don't mean a lot when it comes to significance.

Why are they considered major and minor? I should look that up since I am studying some of this stuff, but whatever.

Where does this concept come from? I'm going to give you the apocryphal lore side of it. It's believed that the Wheel of the Year originated from the celebrations of ancient Celtic traditions

where they would look at and honor different seasonal events. And these celebrations mark the passages of time, with each Sabbat representing a point in the cycle.

The Wheel of the Year gained public awareness in the 1950s-1960s. We credit this shift to two individuals: Gerald Gardner and Ross Nichols. Gardner is known as the father of modern Wicca, and Nichols founded the order of Bard's Ovitz and Druids. The whole idea of these quarter and cross-quarter celebrations became public awareness through their writings. It helped fuel the celebrations within the Neo-pagan movement.

Connecting the Wheel of the Year to your everyday experiences

You may have questions if you're vaguely familiar with the Wheel of the Year. I'll share with you some of the things that I discovered through my own studies and through my own meditations.

The Wheel of the Year centers around celebrating the seasons within the Celtic culture. In addition, Gerald Gardner was from Britain, so that area's climate also exists. At the beginning of February, the British Isles reaches temperatures above freezing. If you live in that area, you recognize that spring is coming.

Here in Minnesota, it can snow and have blizzards up until mid-April or even early in May. Therefore, it's hard to consider the beginning of February as the weather is moving toward spring. For example, right now, my backyard has a foot of snow.

How do you reconcile these?

When it comes to these archetypal cycles like the Wheel of Year, it's more about a reminder that things are constantly changing and growing in our lives. It isn't associated with specific weather or climate changes - just an overall sense of progress! There are some Imbolc traditions that I can celebrate, and there are some that I can't because they are more weather-specific, and that's perfectly okay.

In addition, the Wheel of the Year has become synonymous with observing and celebrating seasonal weather cycles, typically in the Northern hemisphere. There are a lot of people in the Southern hemisphere who identify as Neo-Pagan or who are interested in Neo-Pagan spirituality. So that begs the question of where that leaves them, especially where your weather and seasons may not match up here in the Northern area. Those who live in the Northern Hemisphere experience winter going into spring. Whereas in the Southern hemisphere, it is summer going into fall.

There are two ways that you can handle it. You could still go through the Wheel of the Year cycle based on how it's celebrated through the Northern hemisphere. You can switch up your

seasons and do something a little different - rather than celebrating Imbolc, halfway between winter and spring, try Lughnadsah instead! It marks that midway point right before autumn.

Book recommendations

Disclosure: The links below are affiliate links, meaning I get a commission if you decide to make a purchase through my links at no additional cost to you.

Before we go further, there are two books that I want to share with you. If you're looking to incorporate the Wheel of the Year into your day-to-day life, regardless of where in the world that may be, two books have come highly recommended - ["Weave The Liminal: Living Modern Traditional Witchcraft" by Laura Tempest Zakroff](#) and ["Year Of The Witch: Connecting With Nature's Seasons Through Intuitive Magick" By Temperance Alden](#). Both works explore how to get in touch with each Sabbat through modern traditional witchcraft, no matter what season it is outside! I've read both. I actually have "Year of the Witch" in both Kindle and audiobook formats so that I can listen to it while handling various things. Reconciling the changing seasons with my craft has been challenging. These books have put me on track to pay homage to nature's seasonal shifts. I'm now learning how subtle energy flow is vital in molding our relationship with time and place!

I covered what I consider to be my big sticking points. If you have any, feel free to follow up. My contact info is in the show notes. Otherwise, you can hit me up on social media. And with that, we're ready to talk about Imbolc.

Imbolc

So what is Imbolc? This is the Sabbat that happens between the winter solstice and the spring equinox, so February 1st is the calendar date. If you really want to be stringent astrologically, it is the day the sun is at 15 degrees Aquarius. If you feel lost trying to interpret astrological charts, never fear! Plenty of resources online can easily do the math for you.

The way that I would introduce Imbolc is to bring up what I consider to be the mythic mindset. So thinking back to before we had heaters, before we had furnaces, before we had central air. When we were very rural. What was winter like? How did our ancestors survive the winter? When you think about it, most of us have lived far removed from what our ancestors experienced. For those living in an agricultural society up until the early 1800s, they would stock away food during harvest season. That way, their families could survive winters when grocery stores weren't even a concept!

Hunting is hit or miss, literally. You didn't know if snow storms would be ongoing and if it would be possible to even hunt. You had to fill up these storehouses of dried, smoked, salt-cured foods. Your family probably cared for animals such as cows, chickens, and goats. Some chose to keep their livestock in the home they lived in instead of a detached barn. Your humble abode has gotten a bit crowded with all the extra members of our household - not only us humans but also four-legged friends and their sustenance!

These houses were kept warm by a mix of body heat and fire. You could imagine what would happen if that fire went out and no one knew how to bring it back, or on the flip side, if it went out of control and burnt the house. That's peril for everyone. That's basically certain death if they weren't able to get help. With all these different things, there was a lot of uncertainty. Getting through the winter was a big deal. And, when we start getting towards springtime, and we started getting closer to that, you're seeing the daylight increase. You're seeing the weather get warmer. If you have livestock, many of that livestock, including sheep, are considered late-term breeders, meaning that they breed in the fall. And have their babies in late winter/early spring. So, what would happen is in these households; their animals would give birth, and they, the animals, would lactate. So after months of only having the dried food, the dried meat, the dried vegetables, the fermented foods, the salted foods, when your animals gave birth. There was finally fresh milk for you and your family. This was like the first fresh food that you had after months.

For those who live in the modern world, it's hard to fathom surviving off only things like dried meat and vegetables- no fresh food or canned goodies available! Can you even imagine what that would be like? Canning as we know it became popularized in the 19th century, a modern innovation.

Imagine being on all these different things: no refrigerator, freezer, microwave, or delivery service. You're living on all these things day in and day out, and all of a sudden, now, you have something fresh that you have available? You become grateful for surviving winter's harshness and seeing spring's newness on the horizon. That is a reason to celebrate. I can see why our ancestors had these feelings and celebrations: "Congrats! We made it through the harshness of winter".

The other aspect of this is not just the animals giving birth. If you follow the Celtic celebrations, Beltane, in May, is the romance time. That's the time of coupling. Couples that consummated during that timeframe, nine months later, we're hitting up on the beginning of February, beginning of Imbolc. So right as the weather is getting warmer, that is when the babies are being born. If they had been born earlier, they might not survive the harshness of winter. So it's that timing that's coming into play as well. So you have a lot of birth that's going on during that timeframe. You have the renewal, the new life that's coming through, the new seasons. A lot is going on in that day-to-day life that you can look at and just be marveled at and want to celebrate and honor those moments.

Imbolc is a time of growth and renewal in Celtic lore, so it's no surprise that the goddess Brigid makes an appearance. She is known as the goddess of the eternal flame. Brigid does have three aspects to herself. She is the goddess of the hearth, which in this type of situation fits cause the hearth is what keeps everyone alive during the winter. She is the goddess of the forge, and then she's also the goddess of creative and transforming fire. We're talking about new beginnings, transformations, and new births.

We witness children's birth, whether we're talking about human children or livestock. We observe the days becoming longer, the weather becoming warmer, and that transformation of the world from being cold and barren to full of life. These changes are all aspects of Brigid as a goddess. This is why she is one of the central figures, if not the central figure, for Imbolc.

Brigid was so significant to Irish culture that when the Christians arrived to try and Christianize the area, they had to canonize her as a saint. They had to develop this rewritten lore around her, where she was the midwife to Mary when Jesus was born. That's how we have St. Brigid in Christian mythology.

Now with Imbolc, a couple of different practices come up.

If we're looking purely at the Neo-Pagan side, there are the corn (grain) dollies. So if you're wondering where you got the corn (grain), you got the corn during the previous harvest season. You build a little poppet or dolly to represent Brigid and put her in a bed. You have the corn dolly in the bed as a way of basically having your altar to honor her.

Because the time is symbolically fresh, we can finally open the doors. It is seen as the start of spring cleaning season. So at that point, it is decluttering time. For everything we don't want, it is a perfect time to move it out so we can freshen our space and open things up for the new year.

In addition to that, because of Brigid's affinity to flame, another way of honoring her is by lighting candles and bringing in light to remind ourselves of the increase of light. It's no coincidence that Candlemass, the Christian holiday of Candlemass, is February 2nd, so it's right in line with Imbolc.

Lughnadsah

Now that we've talked about Imbolc let's talk about its counterpart on the Wheel of the Year, known as Lughnadsah.

Lughnadsah is halfway between summer and fall, so we're looking at around August 1st. Though if you want to be astrologically nitpicky, you're looking at about 15 degrees Leo. The name comes from the Celtic God Lugh, a solar deity. He's also a harvest deity known for many traditionally masculine things, such as feats of strength. He is quite a figure when you look at

him in Celtic mythology, and so is his son/incarnation Cú Chulainn. Definitely recommend if you want some fun reading, check out the Táin. I don't know how to pronounce the rest of it. I just called the Táin. "The Cattle Raid of Cooley," where Cú Chulainn, who is Lugh's son/incarnation, is one of the central figures, all sorts of fun there, but anyways, back to Lughnadsah.

Lughnadsah is one of the three harvest festivals within the Celtic culture. The other two are Mabon, the fall equinox, and Samhain, the halfway point between the fall equinox and the winter solstice. With Lughnadsah, this is that first harvest.

To truly understand this festival, remember that before we had supermarkets back before we had supply chains, your food came from the land you are on. This means that once those seeds went into the ground, you had to wait until those seeds had fully grown. Those plants came out of the ground, and those plants matured. So until then, you were eating a lot of dairy from the cows. You're eating the last stock of the prior year's grain. You had meat and other plants but needed fresh grain. Lughnadsah recognized that the harvest had come and was still coming. There was still more of the growing season that your bounty was going through.

Celebrants honored the god Lugh through games of strength and competitions. They also sacrificed some of the first fruits to honor the deities that the people saw as the ones who helped bring this forward. Their perspective was that they needed divine favor, and they feared what would happen if there was suddenly a blight. A blight would cause hardship in the short term and could lead to starvation in the winter. Surviving the harsh winter required having enough food to last the season, so people were concerned about having a bountiful harvest. Lughnadsah was a time to recognize your efforts and express gratitude for the results of your labor. You likely planted the seeds during Imbolc - 6 months ago - and can now reap the harvest.

Lughnadsah is also one of the holidays that got adopted by Christianity. It's a Christian holiday that celebrates the first fruits of the harvest. Go figure.

Neo-pagan traditions around Lughnadsah give thanks to more than just the gods; they also honor the sacrifice of the plants. During the autumnal season, we personify the harvest as John Barleycorn. These plants are harvested in a symbolic death - some pulled from the earth, and others cut down - to provide sustenance for our community. In this selfless act of sacrifice, they gave of themselves so that others may have nourishment.

Lughnadsah is about honoring and recognizing our connection to the land. Nowadays, we can go to a supermarket. Our food can come from all over the country, heck, all over the world. So, it's hard for us to recognize what it was like back then when those luxuries did not exist. And it's also important to have gratitude for what is available to us; that is one of the most significant aspects of Lughnadsah. Unlike the Americanized Thanksgiving, Lughnadsah shows us the results of our efforts while acknowledging we don't act alone. The harvest results from our labor and the efforts of the gods and the land.

Concluding Thoughts

I feel it's important to reiterate the Wheel of the Year that it's not 100% "Thou must do it this way" or "thou must do it that way to be a good pagan or a good witch." When it comes down to it, it's a "you do you" type of thing.

It's an excellent framework for understanding the subtle energies of the world around us. As a pagan occultist, I believe in "As Above, So Below," or "As Within, So Without." These principles state that what goes on in our Inner World is mirrored in the Outer World and vice versa. Just because the weather outside is not aligned with what a tradition says for a rural, seasonal holiday cycle, it's not the end of the world. Focus more on what's going on within versus what's going on outside of your house.

By recognizing the cycles in our lives and recognizing that the world is ever-changing, we can attune to the subtle energy of those times of the year. We can break free of this hustle where we just live day in and day out. We don't feel connected to the world, and to that point where we can fully embrace the world around us or at least be more aware of what is happening there.

I hope that made sense. I've been more rambling here because I went with an outline instead of a script. So we'll see how this model goes. I'd like your thoughts on the Wheel of the Year, Imbolc, Lughnadsah, or my speaking style.

There are a couple of ways that you can get ahold of me. One is by going and emailing me at jess@themysticgeek.com, and the other is by going to speakpipe.com/themysticgeek. That is where you can leave me a voicemail without necessarily having to call because calling is weird. This gives you that chance to rehearse a couple of times before hitting send because I know sometimes we all get weird about that.

So what is coming up in the future? February 5th, which is a week from now, I'm going to be nerding out about "The Secret." I've been slowly slogging through this book, so you don't have to share a witch's perspective on what is in there. Spoiler alert: this came up in the first few pages. It deals with the Law of Attraction, and I hope there's more to it. But we will see, and you will hear my thoughts on it. And then we will be on episode number nine, and for that, I still need to figure it out. I will let you know when I figure it out. I am still determining whether I will be soapboxing or I will figure out another topic.

I hope you enjoyed this episode. Go out, and enjoy the weather and seasons. Have a great day. Thank you for joining us for Spiritual AF Sundays.

[Closing Credits]