

# Festival Calendars

## CYCLE OF NATURE

- Measured by 8 major festival days:
  - 4 days are the **equinoxes and solstices** of the sun's year
    - ⇒ movable dates; defined by the apparent movement of the sun - the equinoxes are at the center of this movement, the solstices are at the endpoints of the sun's motion
    - ⇒ represent the inherent relationship between light and dark
    - ⇒ traditionally, masculine qualities are associated with these festivals – associated with the **sky** gods
  - 4 days are the cross-quarter days that come between them
    - ⇒ fixed dates
    - ⇒ earth-defined festivals related to the cycle of plant growth and the changes of the seasons
    - ⇒ traditionally, feminine qualities are associated with these festivals -
- These 8 festival days were observed by many of the ancient pagan cultures and in modern times are still observed by all NATURE RELIGIONS (Celtic, Wicca, many American Indian tribes, Australian Aborigines, New Age)
- **Samhain – also called Halloween** [SOW-in or SAM-hayne] means “end of summer”  
**STARTS THE NEW YEAR**
  - ⇒ Begins sunset Oct. 31<sup>st</sup> and ends sunset Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>
  - ⇒ Marks the beginning of winter and the celebration of *the third harvest* - it was customary to slaughter livestock and smoke or salt the meat for winter.
  - ⇒ It is one of 2 "spirit-nights" each year, the other being Beltane. Samhain, also known as “**Festival of the Dead**”, is a magical interval when the mundane laws of time and space are temporarily suspended, and the Thin Veil between the worlds is lifted (thus it is called a “festival of the dead”). Communicating with ancestors and departed loved ones is easy at this time, for they journey through this world on their way to the Summerlands (“**the Otherworld**”). It is a time to study the Dark Mysteries and honor the **Dark Mother (Goddess of Crone)** and the **Dark Father (Lord of Death and Resurrection)**.
- **Winter Solstice – or called Yule**
  - ⇒ The day of Yule is when the sun has reached its lowest ebb and is above the horizon for the shortest period in the year – making the shortest day flanked on both sides by the longest nights.
  - ⇒ Yule or Yuletide is composed of a number of separate, but related celebrations ... these begin with Mother Night, starting at sunset on Dec. 20<sup>th</sup>. This is one of the major festivals of Asatru, Odin and many others.
  - ⇒ Symbolically Yule marks the rebirth of the sun's power. In the Roman tradition it was the festival of Sol Invictus, the Undefeated Sun. The Egyptian sky goddess Nut was said to give birth to the sun at the winter solstice, and the birthday of the sun-son in many religions including Horus, Helios, Dionysos has been traditionally celebrated on Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>.
  - ⇒ The common feature of all these deities is that all are associated with concepts of rebirth and eternal life; festivals were a time for intense merrymaking.
  - ⇒ The Yule festival ends at Twelfth Night when all symbols of Yuletide must be removed.

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- **Imbolc [IM-bulk] or Oimelec [EE-mulk]** means “in the belly” referring to the pregnancy of ewes
  - ⇒ aka Candelmas – celebrated on Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup> (begins at sunset Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>)
  - ⇒ celebration of the transformation of the Goddess from Crone to the Maiden of Spring
  - ⇒ marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring
  - ⇒ time of renewal, cleansing, and rebirth
- **Spring (Vernal) Equinox – also called Ostara**
  - ⇒ Ostara is the changeover point between the dark and light halves of the year (exactly 12 hrs each), daylight begins to lengthen
  - ⇒ Occurs around March 21st
  - ⇒ The Vernal Equinox is the time of conceptions – light overcomes darkness
  - ⇒ Traditional food is plum pudding
- **Beltane**
  - ⇒ Celebrated May 1<sup>st</sup> (begins at sunset Apr. 30<sup>th</sup>) The divinity ruling Beltane is the solar fire deity – also the time of all deities of growth and fertility
  - ⇒ May Day celebrations include the maypole, cut from birch (tree of purification). The goddess Maia manifests as the May Queen and Flora. The god emerges as the May King and Jack in the Green. The danced Maypole represents their unity, with the pole itself being the god and the ribbons that encompass it, the goddess. The colors represent the rainbow.
- **Summer Solstice (Midsummer) – also called Litha**
  - ⇒ Celebrated around June 21<sup>st</sup>, the midpoint of summer when the sun is above the horizon for the longest period ... it is the apex of the sun’s splendor, the longest day and the shortest night
  - ⇒ The goddess is Mother Earth and god is the Sun King
  - ⇒ At Litha, it is customary to burn flaming sunwheels and burning torches are carried in a sun-wise direction around buildings, gardens, and fields to ensure good fortune
  - ⇒ Midsummer is the time of fairs and festivals
- **Lammas (or Lughnassadh)**
  - ⇒ The Celts celebrate this festival from sunset August 1 until sunset August 2 and is often called Lughnassadh after the God Lugh.
  - ⇒ It is the wake of the Celtic god of wisdom and illumination, Lugh, the Sun-King, whose light begins to dwindle after the summer solstice. Lammas celebrates the *first of three harvests* - the harvesting of the grain; the first sheaf of wheat is ceremonially reaped, threshed, milled and baked into a loaf. The grain dies so that the people might live. It is believed that eating this bread, the bread of the gods, gives us life.
  - ⇒ Lammas is akin to the Norse god Odin and the Anglo-Saxon god Woden
  - ⇒ At the beginning of autumn, it heralds the gradual transformation of the child-bearing mother into an old woman.
- **Autumn Equinox – also called Mabon [MAY-bun or MAY-bone]**
  - ⇒ Celebrated around Sept. 21<sup>st</sup>, it is the point of transition between the light and the dark halves of the year and the beginning of solar decrease.
  - ⇒ It is the time of *the second harvest* – that of fruits, marking the middle of the season of autumn ... thus it’s called the Festival of Thanksgiving.

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- ⇒ Mabon was sacred to the Greed goddesses Demeter and Persephone and the Celtic goddess Carman, patroness of poetry

### JEWISH HOLIDAYS

- In Leviticus (**Lev. 23:2**) the Lord tells Moses: *"Speak to the Israelites and tell them: The following are the festivals of the LORD, my feast days, which you shall celebrate with a sacred assembly.*
- **Pesach, The Feast of Unleavened Bread, First Fruits**
  - ⇒ Celebrated in the first month of the Jewish **Liturgical** calendar, NISSAN it is actually 1 festival with 3 separate feasts: Peasch (Passover), the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of First Fruits.
  - ⇒ It is celebrated for 7 or 8 days, depending on branch of Judaism. Always begins on the night of the full moon in April.
  - ⇒ Like religions of nature, the Jewish "day" starts at sunset – and holidays start the evening before the day on the secular calendar. **So if Passover starts on April 3rd, then the family Seder actually begins at sundown on the 2nd! This is a big deal to Jews.**
  - ⇒ Passover celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt (also called the Festival of Liberation).
  - ⇒ A major requirement during this time is the prohibition against eating any unleavened products (hence the Feast of Unleavened Bread).
  - ⇒ Because it's Spring, the Feast of First Fruits commemorates the first harvest in the Promised Land.
- **Shavu'ot – Feast of Weeks**
  - ⇒ Occurs 1 day past 7 weeks after First Fruits → 7 x 7 days + 1 day = 50 days ... and so the Feast of Weeks is also called **Pentecost**
  - ⇒ Can last for 1 or 2 days depending on the branch of Judaism
  - ⇒ Shavu'ot celebrates both the full harvest and the giving of the law (the Torah) at Mount Sinai and is actually considered as important as Passover, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, however many American Jews do not celebrate it. The Ten Commandments are always read in synagogue.
- **Rosh Hashanah – The Feast of Trumpets**
  - ⇒ Occurring on the first day of the month TISHRI (thus New Year's Day for the civil calendar) and the day when the year number on the Jewish calendar increases. The holiday lasts for either 1 or 2 days depending on the branch of Judaism.
  - ⇒ It is a happy, festive holiday but not quite the same as our "New Year's Day". Many Jews who do not go to synagogue any other time of the year – go on Rosh Hashanah. You know how some Christians only go to church Christmas and Easter? Many Jews only go twice-a-year ... Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.
  - ⇒ Like our New Year's Day, Rosh Hashanah is a time to look back at the past year and make resolutions for the following year. The day is considered a wake-up call, and begins the "ten days of awe" which is a period of mental preparation and repentance leading up to Yom Kippur.
- **Yom Kippur – Day of Atonement**
  - ⇒ Jews celebrate this day as a day of fasting and repentance to reconcile themselves with the Creator for the mistakes made in the past year.

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- ⇒ Occurs on the 9<sup>th</sup> day after the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Rosh Hashanah (meaning on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month).
- ⇒ Jewish tradition has it that those who are neither in the book of the righteous, nor the book of the unrighteous, have 10 days to reform before the books and their fate are sealed on the Day of Atonement.
- ⇒ On this day the High Priest offered sacrifices of atonement for sins for himself, his family, and for the whole people of God, entering the holy of holies for the only time during the year to offer incense and to sprinkle the blood of the animal sacrifices on the Mercy Seat. Afterwards the High Priest would bless the people, pronouncing the divine name YHWH – a name which was reserved for this feast alone.

- **Sukkot (or Sukkoth) – Feast of Tabernacles**

- ⇒ Begins 5 days after the Day of Atonement and is a 7-day memorial festival commemorating the Exodus. On the 8<sup>th</sup> day – a solemn rest is reserved.
- ⇒ In ancient Israel massive menorahs were erected in the Court of the Women, illuminating the Temple Mount. The High Priest would pour water from Siloam the altar as a prayer for the fall rains.
- ⇒ This feast also celebrates the ingathering from the threshing floor and the wine press (Deut. 16:13) and takes on an eschatological significance as a figure for the gathering of all of God's people in the messianic age – and for the judgment at the end of time (Rev. 14:14-20)

### THE FOLLOWING 2 FESTIVALS ARE ACUTALLY CONSIDERED MINOR HOLIDAYS

- **Chanukkah – Festival of Lights**

- ⇒ Coming between our Thanksgiving and Christmas, about half the time it overlaps Christmas and many years it ends long after Christmas.
- ⇒ The Festival of Lights commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after a successful revolt against the Seleucid Greeks. As part of the rededication, the victorious Jews needed to light the Temple's menorah (candelabrum), but they only had enough oil to last 1 day – and it would take 8 days to prepare more oil. Miraculously the 1-day supply of oil lasted for 8 days.
- ⇒ Almost all Jews light candles with their families for at least some nights of the holiday.
- ⇒ The most important thing to remember is that it is NOT Jewish Christmas. Chanukkah is a very minor holiday; it is not about joy to the world and peach on Earth and giving presents – it is about lighting candles and playing games for chocolate coins and eating potato pancakes. Many Jewish parents give their children gifts during Chanukkah because they don't want their children to feel left out of Christmas, but Chanukkah gift-giving rarely extends beyond one's own children.

- **Purim**

- ⇒ Occurs in March a month before Passover and lasts for only 1 day.
- ⇒ The best way to describe this feast is Mardi Gras. It is a time for partying celebrating the rescue of the Jews from Harmon (in the days of Queen Esther of Persia); Harmon was a Hitler-like figure bent on finding and destroying all Jews (345 BC or Jewish year 3405)