

12 The Wheel of the Year



Between the Worlds:

THE SABBATS¹

Winter, Spring, Summer, Autumn—birth, growth, fading, death—the Wheel turns, on and on. Ideas are born, projects are consummated, plans prove impractical and die. We fall in love; we suffer loss; we consummate relationships; we give birth; we grow old; we decay.

The Sabbats are the eight points at which we connect the inner and the outer cycles: the interstices where the seasonal, the celestial, the communal, the creative, and the personal all meet. As we enact each drama in its time, we transform ourselves. We are renewed, we are reborn even as we decay and die. We are not separate from each other, from the broader world around us; we are one with the Goddess, with the God. As the Cone of Power rises, as the season changes, we arouse the power from within, the power to heal, the power to change our society, the power to renew the earth.

Yule (Winter Solstice, December 20–23)²

The altar is decorated with mistletoe and holly. A fire of oak roots is laid, but not lit. The room is dark.

Y
Lisa Thiel
to you who teachers
die. We reborn
and rise again

The circle gathers. All meditate together, linking breaths. The High Priestess* says,

"This is the night of Solstice, the longest night of the year. Now darkness triumphs; and yet, gives way and changes into light. The breath of nature is suspended: all waits while within the Cauldron, the Dark King is transformed into the Infant Light. We watch for the coming of dawn, when the Great Mother again gives birth to the Divine Child Sun, who is bringer of hope and the promise of summer. This is the stillness behind motion, when time itself stops; the center which is also the circumference of all. We are awake in the night. We turn the Wheel to bring the light. We call the sun from the womb of night. Blessed be!"

Purify, cast the circle, but do not light the candles. Invoke the Goddess and God. All sit down, and begin an antiphonal chant.

All:

To die and be reborn,
The Wheel is turning,
What must you lose to the night? (Repeat.)

Covener: "Fear."

All:

Fear is lost to the night.
Fear is lost to the night.
To die and be reborn,
The Wheel is turning,
What must you lose to the night?

Continue interjecting lines and echoing each other, until the energy dies away. Stand up, and link hands. The High Priest* stands before the altar, holding an animal skull filled with salt. The High Priestess leads a slow, spiral procession, that first snakes outward so that each member is brought to face the High Priest. They are chanting,

The light was born,
And the light has died. (Continue repeating.)

Another Priestess whispers,

Everything passes,
All fades away.

The High Priest places a pinch of salt on each member's tongue, saying,

*Parts may be taken by any coveners: High Priestess and High Priest are given here for simplicity.

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each member's tongue,

High Priest are given here for

My body is salt,
Taste the breath of death.

The High Priestess leads the spiral inward, until the members are huddled together. She leads an improvised trance induction, slowly suggesting that they crumble to the earth and sleep. As all lie down, they are sent into a deeper trance with a multivoiced induction. As it fades out, they are told,

"You are entering a space of perfect freedom."

Time is allowed for trance in the state of suspension before birth.

The High Priestess approaches one of the coveners, stands by her head with her legs apart, and pulls her through, symbolically giving her birth. She becomes part of the birth canal; they continue the process with the other coveners, the birth canal growing longer. The men of the coven take the newborns one by one and lay them back down to sleep, telling them,

"Sleep the sleep of the newborn."

As all sink back into trance, they are guided into a visualization of their hopes for their new life to come. Priestesses smear honey on their tongues, one by one, saying,

"Taste the sweetness of life."

A new chant begins softly, builds in power as it gradually wakes the sleepers, who join in on repeating lines:

Set sail, set sail,
Follow the twilight to the West,
Where you may rest, where you may rest.

Set sail, set sail,
Turn your face where the sun grows dim,
Beyond the rim, beyond the rim.

Set sail, set sail,
One thing becomes another,
In the Mother, in the Mother.

Set sail, set sail,
Make of your heart a burning fire,
Build it higher, build it higher.

Set sail, set sail,
Pass in an instant through the open gate,
It will not wait, it will not wait.

Set sail, set sail,
Over the dark of the sunless sea,
You are free, you are free.

Set sail, set sail,
Guiding the ship of the rising sun,
You are the one, you are the one.

Set sail, set sail,
Into the raging wind and storm,
To be reborn, to be reborn.

Set sail, set sail,
Over the waves where the spray blows white,
To bring the light, to bring the light.

All:

We are awake in the night!
We turn the Wheel, to bring the light!
We call the sun from the womb of night!

High Priestess:

He sets his face to the West, but in the East arises!

All: Who is that?

Priestess: Who goes down in darkness?

All: Who is that?

P: Who sails?

A: Who is that?

P: The Renewer.

A: Who is that?

P: Who brings the golden fruit.

A: Who is that?

P: Unstained.

A: Who is that?

P: Whose hands are open?

A: Who is that?

P: Whose eyes are bright!

A: Who is that?

P: Whose face is shining?

A: Who is that?

P: Morning's hope!

A: Who is that?

P: Who passes the gate?

A: Who is that?

P: Who returns in light?

A: Who is that?

P: A glow between twin pillars.

A: Who is that?

P: A cry between thighs!

All: "Io! Evohe! Io! Evohe! Io! Evohe!"

High Priestess: (leading, repeated by all):

Queen of the sun!
Queen of the Moon!
Queen of the horns!
Queen of the fires!
Bring to us the Child of promise!

It is the Great Mother
Who gives birth to Him,
It is the Lord of Life,
Who is born again!
Darkness and tears
Are set aside,
When the sun comes up again!

Golden sun,
Of hill and field,
Light the earth!
Light the skies!
Light the waters!
Light the fires!

All: "Io! Evohe! Io! Evohe! Io! Evohe!"

The High Priest lights the fire and point candles, and all begin chanting:

I who have died am alive again today,
And this is the sun's birthday! (Repeat.)

This is the birthday of life and love and wings,
And the gay great happening illimitably earth.³

We are born again, we shall live again!⁴ (Repeat).

The Sun Child, the Winter-born King!

Build a Power Chant, focused on reawakening life. Share feasting, and friendship, ideally, until dawn. Before ending, the High Priestess says,

The Dark God has passed the Gate,
He has been reborn through the Mother,
With Him we are each reborn!

All:

The tide has turned!
The light will come again!
In a new dawn, in a new day,
The sun is rising!
Io! Evohe! Blessed be!

Open the circle.