***The Summer Day***

*Who made the world?*

*Who made the swan, and the black bear?*

*Who made the grasshopper?*

*This grasshopper, I mean –*

*the one who has flung herself out of the grass,*

*the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,*

*who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down –*

*who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.*

*Now she lifts up her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.*

*Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.*

*I don’t know exactly what a prayer is.*

*I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down*

*into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,*

*how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,*

*which is what I have been doing all day.*

*Tell me, what else should I have done?*

*Doesn’t everything die at last, and too soon?*

*Tell me, what is it you plan to do*

*with your one wild and precious life?*

*- Mary Oliver*

**Circle Seven: Litha**

As Midsummer approaches, the days have stretched long - so long, that the Sun who now sets late in the evening also rises early in the morning.

We’ve had an unseasonably warm early Summer. Sweltering, in fact. Reminiscent of temperatures we usually don’t see until July. The Spring blossoms have withered, and the leaves of young plants are singed along their edges. It’s been weeks since the last rainfall, and the forecast shows no sign of any soon to come.

The cardinals sing me awake with the very first light of day. I take advantage of the cool, fresh dawn to venture outside and offer water to my gardens, to the Earth, and even to the trees on the boulevard. These mornings are quiet, except for the sounds of the critters: squirrels, birds, and bees, all busy with their own morning routines. I imagine, as I shower this small piece of the Earth, that the plants, the grass, and the organisms residing within are so grateful to have their thirst quenched. I am mindful to pray for all beings everywhere who may not have such luxury.

I admire the fullness of the world around me: the trees now donning their crowns of ever-deepening green; the animals and wildlife which have returned and multiplied since vacationing South all winter; the waters flowing freely, liberated from the long, deep freeze; flowers of every color blooming in turn. Even my human relatives fill the space, congregating again to celebrate and enjoy this time of bounty and abundance.

It is from this place of bounty and gratitude that I set my altar, gathering my bundle as well as medicines from nature. I ask each flower, each plant, each stone, each seed permission to join me in this ritual, festooning the altar with their beauty and brilliance. The Sun is rising slowly, and I have come to greet it, and all my relatives, as it rises above the hill by the lake nearby.

I take up my Buffalo drum - the first one I ever made, many moons ago - with its low, deep voice to sing along with my own. I have always loved the Sun - its light, its heat - and so this prayer is genuine and deeply felt:

*“Thank you, Tata Tonatiuh, Father Sun, for shining on us today. Thank you for making the journey home to us again. Thank you for this new day - the longest of the year - and for sharing your light, so brightly. I sing to you with all my heart. I sing to you with all my love. Thank you. I bless you, as you bless me, and all my relations.”*

It is bittersweet to know that from this day forward and until Yule, the light will wane once more. But such is this spiral of life: ever-ending, and beginning again. And so it is. So be it. Blessed be.

**An Introduction…**

We have now reached the halfway point in the year, the counterpoint to the Winter Solstice.

At Yule, the Moon reigns supreme in the sky, as those of us in the northern hemisphere experience the depths of darkness in Winter.

At Litha, it is the Sun who triumphs at Its apex. The light extends to create the longest day of the year. In some areas nearer to the Arctic Circle, the Sun never even appears to set. Imagine that - a world, or even just a season, ensconced in endless daylight.

Although the Summer Solstice marks the first day of Summer in our modern cultures, old folklore actually referred to Litha as “Midsummer.” Summer was thought to begin on the cross-quarter sabbat of Beltane, ending on Lughnasadh, with the Summer Solstice midway between the two, marking MID-Summer. This feels more sensible than suggesting that Summer begins on the day when the Sun’s power begins to wane and the days become shorter.

The name Litha (pronounced "LIH-tha") comes from a very old document written by a monk named Bede called *De temporum ratione* ("The Reckoning of Time"). The document describes a lot of Anglo-Saxon Pagan ideas, including their names for the months. It is here where we get the term Litha in reference to this time of year. Litha means "gentle" or "navigable," given because the breeze was very gentle and sailors could sail across a smooth sea.

The name also appears in South African vernacular as a word meaning “to illuminate” or “to shine,” “light shining brightly,” “ray of light,” or “sun/sunshine.” In Hungary, the word means “ray of light.” There are also claims the word means “richness” and is of Persian/Iranian origin. In each dialect, the meanings align perfectly with the sabbat for which it was named.

This light of the Sun illuminates and reveals the fullness of the world around us, as well as the fullness of life itself. Litha is a time to celebrate both work and leisure, the ending of the waxing year and the beginning of the waning year. It is a time of connection - with the natural world around us, as well as our own human interactions. The heat allows us to slow down, even as our lives pick up pace with abundant activity. The duality of life and nature are omnipresent at Litha, and we relish in that wholeness.

This is a time for passion, curiosity, and play. There is abundant energy available to us via the Sun’s light, and as the days have lengthened, we have more waking hours to accomplish that which is in our heart to do. Centering ourselves in love with integrity and clarity is a proper ritual for honoring this sabbat. We can see clearly now. We are out from the shadows. Acting in accordance with the energies of Litha, we ensure more abundance to come, in every way.

**The Oak King and the Holly King**

One of the prominent myths at Litha focuses on the Horned God. During this time, he and the Goddess are living in married contentment, and together they bring abundance and growth to the land. But this day marks the beginning of the end. As the months progress and the days grow shorter, the Horned God will grow old. He will lose his power and stamina, and symbolically die at Samhain. He will then be born anew at Yule.

There is another god-myth relevant to Litha, expressed beautifully in this short parable:

*“The story is told that in the beginning, there were two gods who were brothers. And like many brothers, they struggled with each other for ascendance and power. One brother was the king of the forces of life, light, and warmth. He wore a crown made of green oak branches and brought with him all growth and vitality, fertility and abundance. He was called the Oak King.*

*His brother was the king of the forces of death, cold, and darkness. He wore a crown made of the prickly holly branches and brought with him all withering and decay, stillness and hibernation. He was called the Holly King.*

*The brothers were identical in strength, and so year after year the same pattern was repeated. Each year, the Oak King would grow strong and mighty and during his time of dominance, the light would gradually increase, bringing with it warmth and abundance. But each year, at the height of his power, he would be thrown down by the Holly King.*

*In the wake of the Holly King’s victory, the light would gradually wane, and as it did, cold would come and the land would go dormant. But at the height of the Holly King’s power, he would be challenged again by the Oak King and would fall. And the cycle would repeat again and again and again.*

*Alone, the brothers were equals, but soon there came a race of beings known as people. The people watched this cycle, and pretty soon, they began to take sides. The people loved light and warmth, and they feared darkness and cold. And so, each year, they would celebrate the victory of the Oak King, but they would mourn the victory of the Holly King.*

*When the two struggled with each other, the people would lend the strength of their voices and their bodies, their minds and their spirits to the Oak King, but the Holly King was without their support. And so time went by.*

*Over time, the people’s adoration of warmth and light only grew, and so they began to invent ever-new ways to find light in the darkness and warmth in the cold. And finally, if they wished it, they could spend all of their time in the light they had created, and they could be warm all year long.*

*But their efforts to stay always in the light and the warmth were not without consequences.*

*Generations passed and generations again, and the people did not at first notice the shifts in the balance. But finally, they could ignore it no longer. The people began to notice that darkness was disappearing from the land, driven out by millions of lights the people had created. Animals, birds, plants, even people began to suffer the effects of light unbalanced by darkness.*

*But it was not just darkness that was disappearing. Cold began to flee, too.*

*The whole world began to get warmer. Summer began sooner and lasted longer. Ice that had been frozen far longer than the longest memory of the oldest person in the land began to melt. Migrating birds and animals began to be confused about when to begin the migration. Plants found themselves rooted in climates that no longer supplied their needs. The air was changing, and the winds that had brought rain and taken it away again began to flow in unexpected directions, causing drought here and flood there.*

*The people began to see that their support of warmth and light over cold and darkness had altered the balance of the whole world. They began, slowly, one at a time, to realize that the Holly King was dying. And for the first time, this thought filled them with fear. What would happen if the balance continued to be destroyed? Could they even survive in a world without the Holly King?*

*And in the world of the gods, the Oak King realized it, too. And though they had been competitors all these many centuries, he also realized that he loved his brother deeply, and could not live without him. The longest night came, and the Oak King and the Holly King met again, but this time, the Oak King had no heart for the fight. He lay down his sword and spear. He came, openhanded, to his brother, who was struggling just to stay on his feet. The Oak King wrapped the Holly King in a tight embrace, and he promised to set aside their enmity and to help his brother heal.*

*On the night when he usually claimed ascendance, the Oak King realized that the world was already too warm and too light. And so, he laid the great oak crown on the head of his brother, took his hand, and each supporting the other, they went out into the world to see what could be done to restore balance.” [[1]](#footnote-0)*

**Goddesses of Litha**

The Goddess, who was impregnated at Beltane, is now fully pregnant at Litha. Her belly is swollen with the life she is now preparing to birth upon this world. We see her creations everywhere, and honor her fertility and life-giving powers. For this reason, Litha is associated with all Mother and Father deities, as well as pregnant goddesses and Sun gods.

Particular emphasis might be placed on the Goddesses Aphrodite, Astarte, Freya, Hathor, Ishtar, and Venus, as well as other Goddesses who preside over love, passion and beauty. Other Litha deities include Athena, Artemis, Dana, Kali, Isis, Apollo, Dagda, Gwydion, Helios, Llew, Oak/Holly King, Lugh, Ra, Sol, Zeus, Prometheus, Ares, and Thor.

Here are more detailed examples of Goddesses to celebrate and honor at Litha:

* [**Amaterasu (Shinto)**](https://www.learnreligions.com/japanese-gods-and-goddesses-117170): This solar goddess is the sister of the moon deity and the storm god of Japan, and is known as the goddess "from which all light comes". She is much loved by her worshippers and treats them with warmth and compassion. Every year in July, she is celebrated in the streets of Japan.
* [**Hestia (Greek)**](https://www.learnreligions.com/hestia-greek-goddess-of-the-hearth-2561993): This goddess watched over domesticity and the family. She was given the first offering at any sacrifice made in the home. On a public level, the local town hall served as a [shrine](https://www.learnreligions.com/what-is-a-shrine-2561918) for her - any time a new settlement was formed, a flame from the public hearth was taken to the new village from the old one.
* **Juno (Roman)**: She is also called *Juno Luna* and blesses women with the privilege of menstruation. The month of June was named for her, and because Juno was the patroness of marriage, her month remains an ever-popular time for [weddings and handfasting](https://www.learnreligions.com/paganism-wicca-rituals-and-ceremonies-4684803).
* [**Sulis Minerva (Celtic, Roman)**](http://www.thaliatook.com/AMGG/sulis.php): When the Romans occupied the British Isles, they took the aspects of the Celtic sun goddess, Sulis, and blended her with their own goddess of wisdom, Minerva. The resulting combination was Sulis Minerva, who watched over the hot springs and sacred waters in the town of Bath.
* **Sunna or Sol (Germanic)**: This Norse goddess of the sun appears in the Poetic Eddas as the sister of the moon god. [Author Thalia Took says](http://www.thaliatook.com/AMGG/sunna.php), "Sól (''Mistress Sun"), drives the chariot of the Sun across the sky every day. Pulled by the horses Allsvinn (''Very Fast") and Arvak ("Early Rising"), the Sun-chariot is pursued by the wolf Skoll... She is the sister of Måni, the Moon-god, and the wife of Glaur or Glen (''Shine"). As Sunna, She is a healer."[[2]](#footnote-1)
* **Traditions and Honoring Ways**

There are a myriad of Summer Solstice rituals and traditions to recreate or make into your own.

Traditionally, a candle is lit as a reminder of the power of fire and the Sun. Fire is the Element of honor on this sabbat, and lighting bonfires on the night before Litha is an old custom, honoring the White Goddess by holding a vigil at midnight. People leap over the bonfire as an act of purification and renewed energy. Herbs are also collected and ritually dried by the sacred Fire.

An altar is set up in the home to celebrate the sun at the highest point in the sky. Colors to incorporate include white, red, maize or golden yellow, green, blue and gold. A cauldron placed on the altar and ringed with flowers is traditional, sometimes with an athame (sacred knife or dagger) plunged into it. Stones representing Litha include all green gemstones, especially emeralds and jade. Tigers eye, sunstone, lapis lazuli and diamonds are also associated with this sabbat.

Plants associated with Midsummer are oak, St John's wort, frankincense, lemon, sandalwood, heliotrope, copal, saffron, galangal, laurel and ylang-ylang. Herbs associated with this Sabbat are chamomile, cinquefoil, elder, fennel, hemp, larkspur, lavender, male fern, mugwort, pine, roses, Saint John's wort, wild thyme, wisteria and verbena. Traditionally, herbs gathered on this day are extremely powerful. Incense for the Litha Sabbat Ritual might be a combination of any of the following or simply one of them by itself... frankincense, myrrh, sandalwood, lemon, pine, jasmine, rose, lotus, or wisteria.

Traditional Pagan foods for Litha include fresh vegetables of all kinds, and fresh fruits such as lemons, oranges, watermelon and berries. Other standard fare may be pumpernickel bread as well as Summer squash and any yellow or orange colored foods. Flaming foods are also appropriate. Traditional drinks are ale, mead, and fresh fruit juice of any kind.

On Midsummer Night, field and forest elves, sprites, and fairies abound in great numbers - making this a great time to commune with them. Litha is considered one of the best times to perform magic of all kinds, for it is considered a time of great magical power.

Especially effective magic and spells at this time include the performance of those for love, healing and prosperity. A wreath can be made for your door with yellow feathers for prosperity and red feathers for sexuality - intertwined and tied together with ivy. This is also a very good time to perform blessings and protection spells for your pets or other animals. You may want to choose to include your pet within your cast Circle at this Sabbat celebration, and even present him or her with a special gift (such as a tiny pentacle to attach to his or her collar). [[3]](#footnote-2)

**Cultural Celebrations of the Summer Solstice**

Almost every culture has its own traditions to honor Litha, when the Sun reaches its zenith in the sky. In fact, many ancient civilizations utilized advanced astronomical wisdoms to construct grand architecture, like pyramids and standing stone circles, in order to properly frame the path of the Sun at this juncture in the year.

Here are some examples of various cultural traditions and celebrations of Summer Solstice:

**Niman Katsina/Kachina - Hopi**

This is the time of year that the Hopi peoples celebrate Niman to say goodbye to the cooler winter and spring seasons, and welcome in the warmer weather. It is a 16 day festival, complete with shared meals and ceremonial dances. Family members gather from far and wide to reconnect. This is the time of corn planting, and gardens are brimming with sustenance by this time of year.

**Celebration of Isis - Egypt**

This was considered the New Year in ancient Egypt. The Nile river is at its peak height during this time of year, and so flood levels for the year are analyzed, based on observations of the waterline. The Nile's yearly floods promised abundant harvests. Ancient Egyptians believed that Sirius was responsible for the flooding of the Nile river, because its appearance in the night sky corresponded with this Midsummer time of year. Isis is associated with Sirius. One of the most revered of Goddesses, Isis was celebrated as the giver of life sustaining water.

**Yellow Corn Mother Celebrations - Taino (Caribbean)**

The Taino are the peoples indigenous to the Caribbean, Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, the Antilles, Bahamas and Puerto Rico. Celebrations and ceremonies honoring Yellow Corn Mother are still held each year in Midsummer. Traditionally, these rituals and celebrations were held in the central plazas of Taino villages, and many of these plazas were designed to identify the changing seasons, much like Stonehenge and the pyramids.

**Celebration of Ishtar/Funeral for Tammuz - Ancient Mesopotamia**

The Summer Solstice was "celebrated" by ancient Babylonians by observing 6 days of mourning. Ishtar, Goddess of fertility, love and war, would mourn the annual death of her partner, Tammuz. Tammuz is the Mesopotamian God of plants and of food. He is said to die every Summer and to be reborn every Winter, much like Inanna passes into the underworld each fall, and Louis the Sun King dies each Winter Solstice, and rises again at Summer Solstice. This dramatic reenactment of the six-day wake for Tammuz involved a heartfully sung dirge. They honored their fallen god by placing his statue on a funeral pyre, and with processions of mourners weeping and wailing as they recited the dirge.

**Midsummer Festival - Sweden**

Despite holidays at all times of the year, the Summer Solstice is when Swedes really celebrate. The Midsummer (or Midsommar) Festival takes place across the country, but most Swedes flee the city and head to the countryside to gather with loved ones during this time. The day is brimming with ancient agrarian symbolism, from walking barefoot in the morning dew for good health to ringing floral crowns around women’s hair to celebrate beauty and fertility. Some Swedes even dance around the summer maypole, similar to the [May Day](https://www.rd.com/article/what-is-may-day/) poles in other European countries.

**Sunrise at Stonehenge - England**

Perhaps one of the most coveted seats in the world for the northern hemisphere’s Summer Solstice traditions is on the grounds of the Neolithic structures at Stonehenge in the U.K. Ingeniously designed to showcase the ascending light of the solstice, the sunrise on this occasion aligns perfectly with a circle carved in stone at the site. Theories of its origin vary, but both mystical seekers and history buffs convene here on the Solstice to witness an architectural wonder built, some say, to worship deities of the Earth and the Sun.

## **Kronia - Greece**

In ancient Greece, the Summer Solstice was the most egalitarian day of the year. During the Greek festival of Kronia, social hierarchy was largely abandoned in favor of a level playing field for all classes. According to Britannica, slaves and lords celebrated side by side on the Solstice, and certain legal and moral restrictions were lifted. The day was meant to emulate the Golden Age of Kronos, when no one had to labor for a living and all humanity was considered equal. A tenacious group of modern Greeks still follow another 2,500-year-old tradition by trekking 9,573 feet to the peak of Mt. Olympus on the Summer Solstice.

## **Chichén Itzá - México**

Another wonder of ancient architecture, the pyramids of Chichén Itzá on Mexico’s Yucatán Peninsula are a wonderful place to celebrate the longest day of the year. The precise construction and engineering of the pyramids create a visual display twice a year in which the central pyramid of El Castillo is bathed in pure sunlight on one side and full shadow on the other. Thousands of spectators, both religious and pagan, come from near and far to celebrate the Summer Solstice in view of this ethereal spectacle, in which the pyramid appears to be cut in two.

## **Solstice Bonfires - Austria**

High in the mountains that comprise the beautiful Tyrolean region of Austria, the long hours of sunlight are celebrated with bonfires inspired by ancient tribal customs. Lit across rural areas in an incarnation of earth worship, the fires attract revelers drawn by both mysticism and paganism—though modern-day bonfire attendees may be most interested in an excellent party around a campfire with a panoramic view.

## **Juhannus - Finland**

If you’ve suffered a relentless winter far from the equator’s warmth, you’ll understand why cold-climate countries truly rejoice around the Summer Solstice. Scandinavians celebrate one of their main holidays at this time. Referred to as *Juhannus*, or Midsummer in Finland, friends and family members gather at cottages in the countryside to fish, boat, relax in saunas, and light bonfires. Locals once cast spells on Midsummer to find a spouse and increase fertility, and the holiday is still a popular day for marriages to take place.

## **Vestalia - Ancient Rome, Italy**

In the gentler climate of the Mediterranean, the Romans once celebrated Vesta, the Goddess of the Earth, on the June Solstice. During the ancient festival known as Vestalia, Roman women traditionally visited the Vestal Temple and made offerings to the Goddess and to the Vestal Virgins. During the week of Vestalia, only women were permitted to enter the temple, and a cake was baked using consecrated waters from a spring considered sacred. Modern Italians still embrace the Solstice as a time of new beginnings, and the country comes alive with celebrations. *La Festa di San Giovanni* is still observed with similar rites of water and fire as the ones performed in ancient times.

## **Mayan Solstice - Guatemala**

The Summer Solstice in Guatemala is an excellent time to observe present Mayan culture, as well as get a glimpse into the country’s past. Tikal is one of the most famous Mayan ruins in Central America, and rituals surrounding altars like the Temple of the Moon and the Temple of the Grand Jaguar take place around the Summer Solstice. Spiritual rituals from the past are still performed at sunrise and sunset, highlighting architectural aspects of the temples’ construction that were created to showcase the light of the Solstice.

## **Celebration of Yin - China**

In ancient China, masculine “yang” forces and the heavens were honored on the Winter Solstice, while feminine “yin” forces and the earth were worshiped on the longest day of the year every June. To celebrate the latter, women gave colorful fans and perfumed sachets to one another. In the south of China, the *Independent* describes a controversial tradition that still exists today, wherein dog meat and lychees are eaten. A less contentious culinary tradition continues in Beijing and Shandong, where it’s considered auspicious to eat noodles on the Summer Solstice and dumplings on the Winter Solstice.

## **Rasa, Lithuania**

According to the Lithuania State Department of Tourism, dew drops were considered a sacred manifestation of life by worshipers in ancient Lithuania, and on the morning of the Summer Solstice, the dewdrops were thought to have mystical divining qualities. The Solstice holiday of Rasa (alternatively known as Joninės/Rasos) was traditionally celebrated by searching for a blooming fern in the forest and making wreaths. Ancient Lithuanians had their own version of the maypole, a three-branched pole whose branches represented the sun, moon, and stars. Today, one of the best places in Lithuania to celebrate Joninės/Rasos is at the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė, a [UNESCO World Heritage site](https://www.rd.com/list/unesco-world-heritage-sites-everyone-needs-to-visit/) where one still walks through a gate (to symbolize rebirth) in Lithuania’s sacred ancient capital.

## **Ivan Kupala, Russia**

Slavic countries like Russia and Ukraine also have ample reason to celebrate the end of a long, harsh Winter. An event called Ivan Kupala takes place shortly after the longest day of the year, traditionally in early July. An effigy is erected out of plants and grasses and later burned to ensure that Summer will have a bountiful harvest. Today, children still have water fights and throw water at passersby on the Solstice.

These examples (all from the Northern Hemisphere) demonstrate how important it has been, both historically and presently, to honor the time of the year when there is great light, great warmth, and great abundance. As many ancient festivals and traditions were thought to ensure the harvest and overall survival of the peoples through the coming winter, we carry on with these celebrations today, honoring those who came before us, and preserving traditions for those who will come after us.

**Sharing the Wisdom: Preparing Your Ritual**

Use this space to consider how you would honor this sabbat in a ritual way, whether for yourself or for others. This is meant to be a loose guide to inspire you, and to build confidence in your own intuition, vision, and abilities to incorporate more ritual in your life.

1. **What would your ritual space look like/what environment do you envision?**
2. **What items would you include on your altar? What do they represent to you?**
3. **What Elements would you include? How will you include them? And why?**
4. **What words do you feel should be spoken or sung? You might jot down your ideas, and create a loose outline to follow.**
5. **What is the best way for you, personally, to connect with this sabbat? How will you demonstrate that through ritual action?**

**Reflections and Integration**

Going back through your life in increments of 5 years, reflect upon this season/sabbat in the Wheel of the Year and what it has meant to you in those various stages of life. Use these questions as a guide:

* **What memories stand out to me the most about this season in each stage of life?**
* **How did this season/sabbat make me feel emotionally? Physically?**
* **How do my past experiences of the season/sabbat correlate to the present?**
* **In my highest vision, how would I best connect with this season/sabbat?**
* **From this year forward, what changes might I make to align myself more with the energies of this season/sabbat?**
1. From “Yule Story,” by Erica Baron [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. From "10 Deities of Litha: Summer Solstice Gods and Goddesses,” by Patti Wigington [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. From “Summer Solstice and Litha Lore” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)