



PART NINE:

THE TWENTY-ONE FESTIVALS.

by ALEX SANDERS

Let them that know look to the skies and to the Earth, for they are the measure of a man and of a woman. Let them that know the changing seasons be wise in the mysteries of their own being, for that which is without and can be seen, is also that which is invisible within.

The Sacred King of the Witches shows this every year, when he lays his body within the Great Circle of the year. In doing this, he becomes symbolically one with Nature and shows us the true secret of Immortality. From the points of his body are taken the festivals of the Witches throughout the year, twenty-one in all. Thirteen of these are sacred to the Goddess and to the moon which is her symbol. The other eight belong to the God and are solar in nature, corresponding to the seasons.

The Thirteen Esbats, as they are called, are decreed by the Goddess in the following words:-

"Once in the month and better it be when the moon is full,
there shall ye assemble, ye who are fain to learn all
sorcery, yet have not won its deepest secrets."

The Esbats take place on the night of the full moon when the Goddess has her greatest power, the High Priestess as the representative of the Goddess casts the Magic Circle and purifies it. If candidates for initiation are present, they will have been led to the place of working, blindfold, now they are put through the ceremony that will make them Witches and those that are still in the first degree of their training must be shown how to perform the rites. All works of Magic, healing, clairvoyance and help for petitioners are also carried out at the Esbat for this is the time that they will be most successful. When the ritual is finished, the High Priestess and Priest bless the food and the wine and the coven eats and drinks. Before the meeting ends the first degree members may receive instruction in the practical working of magic from the elders. The High Priestess then banishes the Lords of the Watchtowers and the meeting is concluded.

The eight festivals other than the Esbats are known as Sabbats and are celebrations rather than working ceremonies. The Sabbats bring down good fortune and prosperity for that part of the year to which each refers. In these ceremonies the God predominates and the Sun which is his symbol is set above them, the fire of Lust is in his loins, he is the Great Bestower, dying and being reborn continually.

The two most important of the Sabbats are the November Eve (Samhein) and the May Eve (Beltane),

May Eve celebrates the birth of the summer and the time of plenty and thus fires are burned to bring back the heat of the Sun. The Witches make music and dance until the sun appears upon the horizon, for them it is the festival of birth, the earth becomes pregnant and the flower of the spirit unfolds.

November Eve is the opposite, it celebrates the dying sun seeking the gateway to the other-world, to some it is a time of sadness but those that are wise know that death can bring the greatest treasure if one has the wit to find it. Samhein is the time when the doors of the Underworld are open for the Witches and they can communicate with the dead and those ancestors to whom they look for guidance.

To these two Sabbats are added those of the cross quarter days, February 2nd (Candlemas) and August 1st (Lammas).
Candlemas is a feast of conception when the icy bitterness of winter first begins to abate and plans must be made for the growing of crops and feeding of cattle.

Lammas gives thanks for the fruits of the summer, those things that were requested at Candlemas have now been made manifest, thus the Witches bring offerings of bread and wine to the Goddess who has brought forth their livelihood from out of her womb.

These four are the major Sabbats of the year, there are four more which make up the eight. These lesser festivals mark the height of their respective seasons and rather than being the gateways of the year where one season changes into another, they represent transition points where the influence of the season is most pronounced and from which point is must decline.

The first is Yuletide, the depth of the winter season. Prospects at this time may not appear at all hopeful, yet in the darkest hour comes the promise of the Mabon as a breath upon the frosty air, dispelling doubt and fear with hope.

The Spring Equinox on the 21st of March shows the old man of winter finally slain as the youthful warrior reaches his prime.

The Summer solstice is the high noon of the year when the sun is at its hottest, the young warrior is triumphant, horned, and crowned with the sun. All of nature now reaches its highest ebb.

The Autumn Equinox is held on September 21st, the young warrior is worshipped and has been deified by his people, all is accomplished and the transition from light into death begins. The mission of the God is complete and he offers himself for sacrifice. The eight-spoked wheel of the year is complete, from death to life from life to death.

For the initiate there are two types of death: the death of the body and the death of initiation, of these the death of the body is the lesser, for it frees the spirit, while the death of initiation binds it. The bonds placed upon the initiate are more than cords about his hands and feet, they are the bonds that keep his spirit in the Underworld until such time as he shall sever them with the sword of Truth and right endeavour. Then shall he rise up and harrow the dark fields of Hell to emerge victorious with the Sun before him.

The lifetime of the God is the eightfold year within which the Goddess lives near thirteenfold, she it is that gives the gift of wisdom to man and she that initiates for she is change itself. Kill off outdated conceptions! Make the mind as fluid and changeable as Nature herself if it is Wisdom that you seek. The God cannot be understood without the Goddess, death cannot be understood without life, man without woman, he who denies this is cursed of the Gods for there is no place where he may lay his head.

Refuse to die to yourself and you cut off the source of life that feeds you. For this reason the Witches pay regard to the changing seasons, they are the body of Nature eternally renewing itself.

So it has been, so shall it always be!

TWO INVOCATIONS

We have taken two of the invocations from the Book of Shadows to give an example of how the deities are invoked, you will be able to make up the others according to your own ingenuity, and providing that you are true in spirit, they will work for you.

Beltane (The Witches chanting:)

'O tell not the Priest of our Art,
For he would call it sin,
We are a-dancing in the woods all night,
Conjuring summer in.
We bring you joy by word of mouth
For women, cattle, corn,
For the Lord is arising from the south,
With Oak, and Ash and Thorn.'

Samhein (The High Priestess says:)

'Dread Lord of the Shadows, Lord of Life and the Giver of
Life.
Dread Lord of the Shadows, even so, the knowledge of Thee
is the knowledge of Death.
Open wide I pray Thee the gates through which all must pass.

Let our dear ones who have gone before, return this night to make merry with us; and when our time comes as it must be Thou the Comforter, the Consoler, the Giver of Peace and rest.

We will enter Thy realms gladly and unafraid, for we know that when rested and refreshed among our dear ones, we will be reborn again by Thy Grace, and the Grace of the Great Mother.

Let it be in the same place and at the same time as our beloved ones, and may we meet and know, and remember them again.

Descend we pray Thee on Thy servant and priest.!

