

## NOTES ON THE FESTIVAL OF BELTANE – OR MAY DAY

“*Beul Teine*” - the “mouth of the Fire” or “*Bel Teine*” – the “fire of Bel”. Bel, or Beli, is the Cosmic Father god of Druidism.

In Gaelic myth, many significant “historical” events take place at Beltane –

- It is the Time when the Tuatha De Dannan (The Gods of higher consciousness, approximate to the Jewish *Angels*) first came to Ireland from their realm in The Otherworld. Here, cosmologically, Ireland represents this world. Before the coming of the Tuatha, it is said the world was reigned over by The Fomhoire (lit. *under-sea phantoms*) – the forces of darkness and chaos.
- It is also the time when, much later, the first Gael set foot on Ireland. (Symbolising the first human being - or the human level of consciousness - arriving on Earth)

In pre-Christian times, Beltane was also the celebration of the union between the God and the Goddess on two levels -

### EARTHLY –

The dark half of the year (Samhain to Beltane) is over. Even today in parts of the Celtic countries, many old Beltane traditions are kept, such as the putting out of cattle from their byres or low pasture to the high pastures on the 1st of May.

The Land grows fertile and fat as the Sun warms Her. Everywhere we begin to experience the abundance of Her first fruits.

The Dagda, a horned God of skill and abundance mates at Beltane with Bofhind, Goddess of wisdom and fertility. The twins that are born of their union are Oenghus and Brighid. Deities who bear a significant archetypal resemblance to the Gnostic Christ and Sophia.

### OTHERWORLDLY –

Beltane is one of the times in the Celtic Calendar when the veil between the worlds is said to be particularly thin. There is much interchange between the worlds at this time. In this respect, the union that occurs is between the Sidhe (the children of the Goddess) and Humanity (the children of the God).

With later development, as Druidism gradually evolves into the Ceile De tradition, we see a new level of Beltane added to the existing mythos –

### HEAVENLY –

The transcendent, invisible aspect of Divinity (symbolised by the God) unites with the immanent, visible manifestation (symbolised by the Goddess).

The offspring of this union is the Divine Child, or Christ, prefigured by Oenghus, who will be born in the darkest time of the year – mid-winter solstice.

This union between the transcendent and immanent must also have its reconciliation in our own fractured consciousness. This too is offered at Beltane - by the Divine Child - and fulfils its mythic promise in real time - with the addition of a new Beltane event... Easter.

## **EASTER/ASCENSION/PENTECOST**

The early Celtic Christians celebrated Easter by a different reckoning than the Roman church and a very similar one to the Eastern Orthodox tradition. This meant that the Celtic Easter event usually took place much later than the current (Roman) reckoning – closer, in fact, to Beltane. Certainly the whole collective meaning of Easter, Ascension and Pentecost can be seen as ever intensifying levels of the same Beltane mystery.

### **THE BELTANE MYSTERY**

In Druid ritual, Beltane was a time of purification and sacrifice. The High King, a representative of both his people and of the God, was wedded to the Land – but was also sacrificed – or at least his “Dark Twin” was. The Dark Twin symbolises the shadow half of the perfection that was the High King. This death was on behalf of his people. It was believed that, with this sacrificial act, the Dark Twin would take with him all the ill fortune of his clan, leaving them with a clean slate for the next year. The figure of the Dark Twin is remembered in Mayday folklore as the “fool for the day” or the “scapegoat”.

The sacrifice was preceded by the victim being offered a drink from an intoxicating cup, called the cup of Madbh, offered by a representative of the Goddess. It was a ritual three-fold killing – a killing of not only body and mind, but also of connection to Spirit. Usually, after normal death, it was believed that the now discarnate soul would enter into the realms of the Otherworld (psyche) until it was time to be reborn back into the clan. The three-fold death ensured that the sacrifice would *never* be reincarnated. His transformed consciousness would however be released into the Earth, where, it was believed, he would be instantly deified. Thus the victim, who carried away with him the misfortunes of his people, would take those dark forces away forever. In Wales, even today, there continues the tradition of the “sin-eater”, an outcast on the edge of society who is believed to have the ability to ingest the bad luck or illness of his clients and take it into himself.

### **THE KING OF KINGS**

In the Christ story it becomes difficult to disregard the many identical motifs.

On Golgotha, Christ the Son of God and the Son of Man (Humanity...Earth) is offered wine drugged with Myrrh, which he refuses. He is effectively killed three times (beaten, crucified and stabbed by a spear). He dies so that he can take away the sins (the product of the false self) of the world, thus reuniting the consciousness of the people with their Father (transcendent God) and initiating the gradual creation of the new Kingdom here on Earth - called the *Pleroma* - the earthly world changed forever by the ongoing infusion - through our Christedness - of the Divine light into its every atom.

The Ceile De tradition says that we are all potential Christs. The part we play in the unfolding of creation is to realise the union, in perfect balance, of Heaven and Earth within our own consciousness. To achieve this we must have our “mid-winter rebirth” - our metanoia, or turning of the heart - we must realise in our

deepest darkness that we have a light inside us that will grow in stature if we forsake the forces of atrophy. We must walk relentlessly through the market place of every day existence toward the inevitable sacrifice of all that is false in us. We must be willing then to sacrifice all – even our attachment to our ideas of the spiritual – to be reborn into a new form that our minds cannot conceive – but our hearts have always known.

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