

THE WINTER SOLSTICE  
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As my family knows, I am the serious party-pooper when it comes to celebrating New Year's Eve. I can't remember when I last stayed up until Midnight to welcome in the New Year. It just never interests me. I much prefer to sleep that through and get up early and welcome the dawn. Sunrise is my time.

However, I feel very differently when it comes to the solstices. I am even quite reverent in regard to both the Winter and Summer Solstice and always observe them. To me they really are special times.

This word "observe" is a funny one and I only began to understand this use of it by studying the Tibetan Buddhist calendar. In Tibet, until recently, they did not observe Saturdays and Sundays as special or as days off. Instead they observed New and Full Moons plus various other solunar events in the month. They took these days off. Imagine that. No weekends, but days off based on natural astronomical events!

Setting aside a day like the New or Full Moon as a day for observation was a new concept for me. Well, by now it's been something like fifty years. The whole idea of setting time aside to observe your mindstream was simply a new idea, but one I intuitively warmed to. So much the more when it comes to the two great turning points in the year, the Winter and Summer Solstices. I measure my year by those two peaks.

If we study ancient civilizations, the year did not turn on the January 1st, but rather on the winter and summer solstices. There are hundreds of sites that celebrate the solstices, some of the more well-known ones being Glastonbury, Chichen Itza, the Temple of Karnak, Newgrange, and Easter Island.

If the Summer Solstice is equivalent to the Full Moon of the yearly cycle, then the Winter Solstice is the New Moon of the Year, a much more sensible point in time to indicate the start of a new yearly cycle since astronomically this is the actual turning point of the Sun's influence with the Earth. The winter solstice is the point of rebirth of the Sun each year.

In many traditions, the winter solstice marks the victory of the Sun over the increasing darkness and the beginning of its march northward toward summer and light. This is the turning point and it also marks the first day of winter. In most ancient societies the winter solstice was celebrated as the beginning of the New Year, often called winter's night -- the rebirth of the Sun. At the winter solstice is released the seed impulse for the next yearly cycle. It begins again.

This winter solstice will occur at 12:30 AM EST Thursday December 22nd, so Wednesday December 21st will be the New Year's Eve for rest of us, all the Wiccans, Druids, Celts, and the so-called pagans and heathens. I don't generally consider myself as belonging to those groups, but when it comes to artificial holidays and calendars, I can't use them.

I follow the ancient (and for me more natural) days of celebration like the New and Full Moons, the Equinoxes, and especially the Solstices. Every year I look forward to the moment when the Sun overpowers the darkness and begins its journey toward summer. I take joy in that event.