

## **Family Festivals: Coming Full Circle, Part II**

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### **Easter: Transforming the earth and humanity from dying to living**

As Christmas passed and Valentine's Day came and went, we began working on Easter. By this time we were well into our study of *Theosophy* in the study group and we interrupted this study to read "Easter: The Festival of Warning", "The Death of a God and its Fruits in Humanity", and "Spirit Triumphant". Easter, of course, is the celebration of the Mystery of Golgotha in which the Christ Being that had incarnated in Jesus died and then resurrected. For young children the appropriate emphasis for the festival is on resurrection and the continuing of life. We realized the power of holding the understanding that Christ continues in his connection with the earth, that Christ is the force that has kept the earth alive.

Again, we had the problem of conflicts with established traditions in our families. We could not celebrate Easter before Easter Sunday because the days that precede Easter Sunday have their own significance. So we had our family celebrations on Easter Sunday, including a hunt for eggs brought by the Easter Hare and stories of the Hare. The group festival was the following Tuesday, just after the celebration time for the resurrection. The mothers and children met in a large open park on a perfect spring day -- clear and breezy with puffy white clouds. We had chosen to work with butterflies because they give us the image of the spirit rising from the body. We made tissue paper butterflies with the children, they scouted out sticks, we attached the butterflies and they ran through the park. So many beautiful butterflies flying! We then gathered in a circle with the storyteller in the center, children in a circle and mother in an outer circle holding a silk for their children. The storyteller concealed rainbow silk butterfly wings beneath a white cloth and then told the simple story from Spring:

*Caterpillar wind about  
round and round and in and out  
when you have fed  
come spin your bed  
go to sleep deep, deep  
as a caterpillar die  
waken as a butterfly*

She wound around the circle, pretending to eat leaves on a branch. Then came to the center and was wound up in a long length of white cheese cloth, ending crouched on the ground with a loose end of the cloth over her head for "go to sleep, deep, deep". Then standing, gradually unwinding, and then freeing the wings for the last two lines. The mothers placed silks over their children then, who were crouching down "asleep", and all the mothers sang "Waken sleeping butterfly" from *Spring* while the storyteller slowly circled fluttering her wings. After we sang the song twice, she said, "butterflies fly free now". And they all took off over the open grass -- a rainbow of butterflies flying free with their silk wings. (This part of the festival was inspired by a description of Easter in the kindergarten in *An Overview of the Waldorf Kindergarten*.) We then shared a meal and played circle games. The games brought us together as a group, and we left laughing and refreshed.

## **St. John's Tide: Transforming ourselves to prepare for the Christ Being**

The St. John's festival seemed as though it would be the simplest. We would gather on the beach, sing songs around a fire, jump over the fire after saying a verse, and go home. Not so! The elements turned out to be an almost overwhelming force, and our resolve to change our hearts and thinking was tested almost before it was made.

We gathered not on St. John's Tide, June 24, but just before the summer solstice on June 20. The moon happened to be full that night, so sun and moon were both very strong. We forgot to take into account the effect of the moon on the tides and as the waves came closer and closer to the fire we retreated back further and further toward the safety of the rocks above the sand.

After the children had played on the beach (amazingly harmoniously) and gathered treasures for the baskets they would leave out for the fairies, we gathered around the fire, held hands, and said

grace -- forgetting that one of us had planned to recite the "Sunlight flooding" poem from Steiner (in *Festivals with Children*, p. 80). It *is* difficult to concentrate in the summer when the sun is so strong and the earth is breathing out, and breathing us out. We had a wonderful meal watching a glorious sunset complete with rose-colored rays projecting into the dome of the dark blue sky.

As darkness began to fall, we gathered around the **fire** to sing. We had forgotten how loud the waves can be, especially when they are so near, and we could barely hear each other above the crashing waves. One mother, sitting in a beach chair with dulcimer on her lap, was singing away when a large wave came up behind her back. Those of us squatting on the opposite side of the fire saw the wave coming and ran. She calmly lifted up her feet and went on playing. To us it looked as though she would be washed out on the silver evening sea sitting in her chair, singing and playing the dulcimer! When we all regrouped we listened to another mother recite part of "Midsummer Night" (by Elisabeth Gould, in *Families, Festivals, and Food*, p. 51). Just as she said "the fairies are dancing beneath the moon" the clouds parted and the full moon shown down. We felt "yes the moon is with us to light our way (across the dark beach where water was rising steadily between us and our road home)". Then we recited the soul calendar verse adapted for Children in the book *In the Light of the Child*. Four people spoke two lines each, so that the verse was spoken in a distributed chorus. Finally, we sang a St. John's song from *Summer*.

Then the excitement began -- it was time to jump over the **fire**. A few adults first said the lines given by Steiner in his lecture on St. John's Tide (The St. John Imagination in *The Four Archangels and the Seasons*):

*substance is densified  
errors are judged and rectified  
hearts are sifted*

The older children could not wait to meet the challenge of jumping over the fire, and they loved it, especially with the double challenge of jumping over the fire to meet the advancing waves, which were reaching to within inches of the fire. We all went over at least once and we did feel a transition and shift.

Finally, it was time to clear the fire and leave before the tide got so high it cut off our egress. We took the coals to the water, but the remaining sand was very hot. One mother thought she would warm her feet by jumping into the hole where the fire had been. She screamed and jumped out, but one foot had been badly burned. We tried to help her and get all of us and our equipment back off the beach. We had to wade through a channel of water in the dark to get back to our cars.

At last we all got home quite late -- awed at the power of nature, exhilarated, determined, and a little unsettled because of the injury. As I awoke the next morning the image of Parzifal at the court of the wounded king came strongly to my mind. We had had an opportunity to find caring and sympathy in our hearts, and the will to take action to help someone who had been hurt. Looking back on it, in celebrating this festival we took on more than we ever had, and we felt the power of the elements at midsummer and of the exhortation to change our ways. Indeed, the challenges to our resolve presented themselves almost immediately.

## **Festivals and schooling**

These festivals have immeasurably enriched our homeschool work this year. My meditation on the festival makes the stories and art and handwork very specifically linked to the seasons. The festival work has also made me more conscious in my storytelling and handwork, which is always a benefit to young children. When we are conscious then they do not have to incarnate prematurely. Finally, the festival work children that we work and play with closely. What a deepening of our lives, as individuals and as families, has come of that first thought less than a year ago that we read and study the festivals!

This first year of celebrations has been breaking new ground and we know that we will strengthen our festival work each year. And the festival celebrations will strengthen us and our families in our effort to think truthfully, to love beauty, and to do good. As my six-year-old said "It's hard to find the beginning of the year -- it just goes on and on". The years go on and on, but our connection with the earth as a being and with the larger cosmos does grow stronger through the repeated cycle of seasonal celebrations.

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