

Beltane Lore from Celtic Realms

by Cellina Rhiannon Whiteflame

~ Villagers would dance naked in their fields under the moonlight on the eve of May 1st to safeguard crops and ultimately their livelihood.

~Pounding and scraping the soil of crop fields with a besom on Beltane made the ground more fertile

~Some would wait until just before dawn to bathe their faces in the first dew of May to render themselves beautiful and to help psychic vision by blessing the eyes.

~Skimming the surface of wells of wealthy folks was also characteristic of the May 1st morning. It was believed that it could bring you your fortune. Skimming your own well would grant a good year of butter-yield.

~Any breaking of Hawthorn branches (a tree of the White Goddess) or bringing them into the house previous to May 1st was considered bad luck. It was considered to bring good luck for the next year to cut them on the day of May 1st.

~ Drinking May Wine, made with the herb Sweet Woodruff was symbolic of the nectar of the Goddess and God and ensured fertility.

~A blessing to the "Guardian of the House" would be performed to honor and protect the inhabitants for the next year until the Bel-Fire was rekindled.

Info from: Janet and Stewart Farrar: The Witch's Bible Compleat, Phoenix Publishing.

Sacred Union and the Fire of Beltane

by Cellina Rhiannon Whiteflame

Traditionally celebrated on the 30th of April, modern day pagans celebrate this festival dedicated to the union of the Goddess and the God on the 1st of May. The name Beltane, now changed from its ancient Scottish name Bealtaine (pronounced: bee-yahl-tinn-uh) can be traced back to the Middle Eastern Baal, as "Lord" in translation. Originally celebrated as a dedicatory Celtic festival to the ancient god Bel, Beli, Balar, or Balor, who was a god of light and fire: it was also a time to revere the Green face of the God. Like Cernunnos, Bel was also the Horned God, known as well as the "Lord of the Greenwood", and He secured that the crops would grow tall and thick and the livestock would procreate and flourish in numbers. Beltane therefore had two prominent themes: fire and fertility.

These two themes survive today in the celebration of Beltane. One is the sacred union of the Goddess and the God in the form of the May Pole. The Pole is symbolic of the phallic male and the round wreath that sheathed the top of the pole is the female, recreating the Sacred Union. Ribbons representing wishes are suspended from the wreath and then woven around the pole by dancers who desire to weave something into their life. It is a time for marriage or "Handfasting" as the ancient tradition is named. This too, is symbolic of the commitment of the

Goddess and God have for each other. A celebration of their Sacred Union enables continuous growth and sustenance. A traditional game was to tease your partner with a scarf, alluding him/her until you are at last caught by their charms, and then sealed the "capture" with a kiss. It is a reflection of the primal procreative animal in us – wrapped up in the symbolic "chase/capture". Couples then pair off and celebrate in their own way, co-creating ecstatic connection with the interpersonal/intrapersonal Sacred Union of the Divine.

The second theme is the Bel-Fire. A bon-fire (bale-fire) was lit in honor of the God Bel, only after the old symbolic Bel-fire, usually a candle, was extinguished. Then the Oak King symbolically dies and the fields remain bare. To bring him back, the Bel-Fire must be re-kindled. This re-kindling correlates to relighting the passions within us. Not just the sexual nature of our being but the creative process, the ecstasy of union through prayer or meditation, dance or song. Another game was to "jump the fire" and release something as you pass over the flames, in contrast to "bringing in" as with weaving the May Pole.

Remember that no matter what you do on this day, let it be out of love and ecstasy. It is still a time of being with others, making solid community connections, and yet balancing that time with sacred union with your partner and with Divinity. If you have no partner, be good to yourself. You can honor your own sacred union with the Divine and/or the union of the masculine and feminine within yourself. Forces much larger than us will move through us at Beltane reminding us that "All acts of love and pleasure" are Her rituals. Honor the fire within you!