

WINTER SOLSTICE: When Darkness Gives Birth To Light

According to pagan lore, the Winter Solstice is not just an astronomical event; it's a spiritual awakening, a time when *darkness gives birth to light*. Various cultures have celebrated this pivotal turning point of the year throughout history, each weaving their own mythic narratives around themes of rebirth and renewal. In mythic terms, at the Winter Solstice these various cultures celebrate "*the birth of the light out of the womb of winter's darkness.*"

When you go outside on the longest night of the year, surrounded by the stillness of nature, the world seems to pause as if holding its breath in anticipation for what comes next. Thus, the Winter Solstice resonates with our deepest feelings about life, death, and everything in between.

Consider poet Mary Oliver's beautiful observation: "Snow was falling, so much like stars filling the dark trees that one could easily imagine its reason for being was nothing more than prettiness." In these lines lies an invitation to see beauty even amidst darkness and starkness—a reminder that there can be joy found within silence and solitude.

The ancient Pagans referred to this day as "Yule," celebrating not only the return of longer days but also honoring deities such as the sun gods and moon goddesses who presided over cycles of life. In

modern times too—amidst our secular holiday lights and festive gatherings—the essence of the mystery of what’s going on with the Winter Solstice remains unchanged. Rabbi and author Lawrence Kushner reflects on this beautifully: “Heading into the night of the winter solstice . . . every spiritual tradition has some kind of festival of light.” Whether through Christmas celebrations or other cultural observances across different faiths worldwide, they all share common threads woven from hope against despair; from the hope of rebirth against apparent the finality of death.

However, considering the pagan (Yule) and Christian (Christmas) traditions, it’s worth noting that Christmas is a holiday appropriated from the Northern, pagan Yule (or Winter Solstice) tradition. George Monbiot (English journalist, author, and environmental and political activist) bluntly and humorously quips: “The Christians stole the winter solstice from pagans.”

This year for the Winter Solstice, as you gather around your loved ones or take quiet moments alone beneath starry winter nights, it’s inspiring to remember the words of Ian Astbury, the founder member and lead vocalist of the rock band *The Cult*: “I celebrate spirit . . . rebirth and new possibilities.” These words from a rock star echo the words of mythologists and folklorists who explain what the Winter Solstice is essentially all about.

May this sentiment guide you through these long nights toward brighter tomorrows!

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