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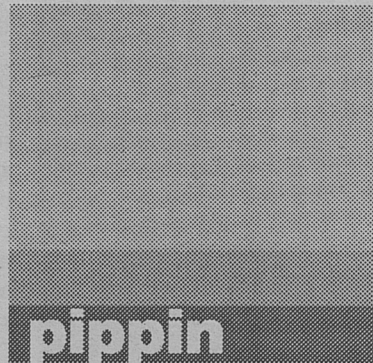
Spiritual Essence: You Say Easter, I Say Estrogen

“Here comes Peter Cottontail, hopping down the bunny trail...” Why is that so many of our modern holidays are associated with animals? Reindeer at Christmas, Turkeys at Thanksgiving, and don't forget the briefly ubiquitous groundhog who sends us scurrying back into our burrows for six more weeks every February.

Animals have long been symbolic of greater anthropomorphic concepts in world religions. Br'er Rabbit is an example of African religion coming down to the modern world. The Trickster Coyote is of Native American origin. And Peter Cottontail, the infamous Easter Bunny? Well, before he made millions for Russell Stover every year, he (or perhaps I should say she) was a harbinger of spring devoted to the Germanic goddess Ostara, from whom we now take the words Easter, East and Estrogen. She was a goddess of spring and of the dawn (hence the name of the direction East). Her symbols were rabbits and eggs. As a young catholic lad, I remember being told that the Easter Eggs were symbolic of the resurrection of Christ, the bright yellow yolk inside the egg representing the Sun or Son of God.

The Spring Equinox is a time of hope and renewal for pagans. The lambs born at Candlemas (February 2), are now romping playfully through newly green fields in England if not New England. In many parts of the Old World, though sadly not here in New England, the Spring Equinox on March 21st is meteorologically consistent with the arrival of Spring. Here in Vermont we might do a bit better to have a walking Maple Tree serve as our Equinox symbol, rather than the bunnies and chicks of Ostara. Both the rabbit and the eggs that are so common at Easter celebrations around the United States are actually symbols of that ancient pagan goddess and her fertility rights, co-opted into the Christian system of holy-days to serve as symbols of the resurrection of Christ.

But Easter is an amalgamation of a number of different ancient religious traditions. The date of Easter, the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the Spring Equinox, is taken from the ancient celebration of the resurrection of Adonis, a Greek Sun God. The name and symbols of Easter are from the Germanic Goddess Ostara. The concept of the celebration, resurrection



from death and the change from the dark to the light, reflects the dualism of Gnosticism and harkens back to the cult of Mithras. There are other Greek associations with the Spring Equinox as well: the Lesser Eluessinian mysteries are celebrated near the time of the equinox. They commemorate the return of Persephone from the underworld of

northern reaches of Vermont, meeting in Windham County is often our first taste of spring. We sometimes arrive to find crocuses peering out of the mud at us. Almost always, the meeting will encompass at least one sunny day and we are able to walk through the village to the music of sap dripping into traditional buckets hanging from the trees.

The Equinoxes and Solstices really are universal spiritual days from which modern people draw from many different traditions. Easter draws on Middle-Eastern, Roman, Greek and Teutonic tradition. Neo-pagan celebrations of the other four sabbats (Beltaine, Lammas, Samhain and Imbolc) are Celtic in origin and show little incursion from other spiritual traditions. This is likely due to the fact that Equinoxes and Solstices are solar holidays and have been marked with

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Hades and her reunification with her mother, Demeter, goddess of agriculture.

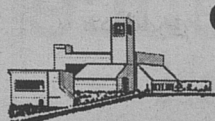
Here in Vermont, the Spring Equinox is celebrated by the Radical Faeries as the beginning (or dawn or spring) of our year together. Our annual business meeting to settle our calendar of events, work through our land-use plan and figure out how to pay for it all happens at the Spring Equinox. We spend our first time of the year together at the Eastern Star Grange Hall in Dummerston, Vermont. It is an appropriate place to begin our stewardship each year because it brings us back to the agricultural tradition of our state.

We say we do this simply because it is still too cold to meet on our land at Faerie Camp Destiny, but it is a lovely continuation of the long tradition of the Grange supporting thoughtful stewardship of the land. And for those of us from the frozen

precision in almost all cultures giving modern people a much wider spiritual range to choose from.

In any case, the coming of spring, the Equinox and the celebration of Ostara is the time when the world is balanced for a moment. As is also true during the fall equinox (or Mabon), the Equinox is an excellent time for reflection on the dark days just past and a moment to look over the horizon and see what is coming in the light days that are just around the corner. Because, if nothing else is certain, change is. Pagans use the opportunity of the Equinox to chant in honor of Persephone's return from the dark, reminding us, “She changes everything she touches, everything she touches changes.”

Spring is here, the snow gives way to mud, the mud gives way to green. Get out your chocolate bunnies, your bonnets and your colored eggs. Tip your Easter bonnet to an ancient goddess >>>



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Sunday Services

8:00 Holy Eucharist & sermon
9:15 Holy Eucharist & sermon with children's choir
10:15 Education for All Ages
11:15 Holy Eucharist & sermon with full choir

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