

Winter Solstice Celebration

1. **Chant and drumming as people form the circle:** The Earth, the Air, the Fire, the Water, Return, Return, Return, Return

2. Welcome

Welcome to this most ancient of celebrations

The Holy Day of the Winter Solstice when we join with the rest of the earth in looking for, hoping for and welcoming the sun's return.

We dedicate this ritual to the healing of the earth and to always honoring our sacred relationship with her.

We hold this holy ceremony. Where the sacred on the inside meets the sacred on the outside. Where the life of the spirit meets the life of the earth.

The ground where you stand is holy ground. Because it is the ground of the earth that gives us life. Life fed by the sun.

Be aware of your body

Rub your hands together

Take a deep breath

Feel your heart beating

Look up at the sky

Feel your feet on the earth

Feel yourself in the middle – perfectly balanced between heaven and earth – between spirit and physical – spirit in the earth and in the sky – physical in the earth and in the sky. And you - all of us – in the middle.

Be aware of being here – alive on planet earth. Joyous in our celebration together.

3. Song

Gathered Here in the Mystery of the Hour
Gathered here in one strong body
Gathered here in the struggle and the power
Spirit draw near

4. Crone

I am The Crone, the Old One who rules the time of Winter. Do you know my names? Hecate, Cerridwen, Spider Grandmother - I am midwife of life and death, the Changer, she who stands at the crossroads. I am the storyteller.

You know, of course, that time is circular. It is a Great Wheel. The Great Wheel of the Year. This season's name is Yule, it means Wheel.

This night I have brought the guardians of each direction to tell the story of the Sun God, a story of Life, Death, and Rebirth! Listen!

5. Invoke the Directions

EAST

I am East - I am the breath of Life, of speech and song. I watch over all the winged ones. I am the season of Spring, the season of birth and new creation surging forth.

With this feather we honor the spirit of the East and the time of Spring.

Can you remember the Spring? Life surges forth in buds and sprouts. The trees dress their branches in new leaves as the sap rises to rouse them from sleep. The birds return from the realms of the South to raise their children. New life comes forth and multiplies. The Earth warms and leans towards the Sun as she greens and blossoms. Each day the young Sun rises in the East and each day grows stronger. Each day the time of light lasts longer. Did you think it would last forever? The Wheel turns!

Spin in circle and point to the South.

SOUTH

I am South – I am the place of mid-day, ruled by the element of Fire. I am the passion and laughter of life. Keeper of Earth's fertility. Guardian of all that walks and crawls on the Earth. I hold the gift of fertile Earth from whence your crops come forth. I am the blessing of children, the keeper of truth and innocence. I am the season of Summer.

With this star we honor the spirit of the South and the time of Summer

Can you remember the Summer? The fruit sets upon the vines and the branches of the trees. The herds fatten on the thick grass of the upper pastures. Young animals scamper and play under the watchful eyes of the older animals. The young birds learn to fly. Your own children take shade under the glorious leaf canopy of the trees. The Earth leans nearest the Sun, radiant in her beauty. The Sun, strong and hot, is at the peak of His power. And the light exceeds the darkness. Did you think it would last forever? The Wheel turns! (Spin in circle and point to the West.)

WEST

I am West, place of dusk, ruled by the Element of Water. I am the guardian of life's water - from the oceans' depths to the waters of the womb that rocked you before your birth. I am the sweet rain satisfying the thirsty Earth, and keeper of all that swims and lives in water. I am the place of all that lies below the surface, of intuition and dreams. I am the season of Fall and I rule the time of Harvest.

With this sea shell we honor the spirit of the West and the time of Autumn.

Can you remember the time of Fall? Do you remember the backbreaking labor of harvesting the grains and fruits and vegetables? The vines and trees heavy with their bounty? Now the young animals take their places beside the elders and begin the great migrations to the realms of the South and the pastures of the lowlands.

The trees transform from deep green into glorious gold, orange, and red, - their true colors shine forth before they drop their finery, leaf by leaf, to the ground. Your own children must be dressed against the evening chill and you labor to make ready for the coming darkness. The Earth stands apart from the Sun who grows cooler, and the light begins to die. Did you think it would last forever? The Wheel turns! (Spin in circle and point to the North.)

NORTH

I am North, the place of midnight, ruled by the Element of Earth. I am the place of the ancestors and ancient wisdom, of all that has walked the Wheel through millennia and knows the way. I rule the time of Winter.

With this 300 million year old fossil rock we honor the spirit of the North and the time of Winter.

The time of Darkness is now upon us. A time of cold and scarcity when the northern-most Earth leans farthest from the Sun. The Sun gives brief light and little warmth. The life that was lies shattered and still - retreated like refugees in the migration of herds, the flight of the flocks. The trees stand stripped and naked in their poverty, imprisoned in ice, bowed and broken by storms. In suffering and hardship you learn what is essential.

6. Elements Talk

East: Air (feather), spring, inspiration and beginnings

South: Fire (dragon), summer, passion, energy

West: Water (bowl), fall, changes

North: Earth (stones), winter, quiet, gestation, nurturing of new life

7. Connecting to the Elements: Earth My Body, Water My Blood, Air My Breath and Fire My Spirit

8. Intro to Solstice

Long before our modern religions – and by modern I mean thousands of years old – yes – long before Christmas or Hannukah or Diwali or anything with a name we would recognize – ancient peoples – our ancestors – ALL our ancestors understood two important things:

1. We humans depend on the earth – are part of the earth
2. Life on earth depends on the sun. Its rays keep us warm and grow our plants. Its energy runs through our veins. Its light lifts our spirits and gives us hope for a new day.

Today we gather to celebrate the sun's birthday on Earth.

Because the sun seems to have gone away? Right? But on the solstice it starts to come back. Little by little the days once again grow longer. For right now it's dark.

9. Darkness Talk

My children, there are many kinds of darkness - the darkness of death and suffering, of hatred and war, of bloodshed. The darkness of fear and despair, the darkness of cruelty and injustice. The darkness of sorrow and loss.

Yet, all these, as great and terrible as they are, are held within another and far greater darkness. The darkness which preceded all. The darkness from which all creation surges forth. This is the pregnant darkness - the womb darkness - the darkness of the Great Mother, She who is the Source of Creation.

And you, Her children, She does not forget. You are not abandoned nor forsaken. Even now the Goddess labors to birth the Sun. Trust the laboring darkness, for the time of Awakening and Light comes. A time when burdens shall be lifted, and refugees welcomed. Grief will be healed, dreams reborn, and all of life renewed. The slumbering animals are dreaming of it. The seeds in hardened shells know the time and push forward through darkness, seeking light. Reach with your life toward the Mother as She reaches with unconditional love toward you, Her children. The Winter Solstice promises new dreams, new hopes and new light...Be not afraid!

10. Call the Guardians of the Directions: Guardians light candles.

What hope do you hold in your heart that is lit with this candle?

And will you help the light to be reborn?

Do you hold the light in your hearts?

11. Introducing the Wheel

Burning Wheel represents the Sun

Ancient peoples watched the wheel roll down a hill as they celebrated the sun's life giving force.

USG began running the burning wheel more than 20 years ago in 1992.

12. Song: We Will Kindle A Fire

Spirit of fire come to us;

We will kindle a fire.

Spirit of fire come to us;

We will kindle a fire.

We will kindle a fire!

Dance the magic circle 'round,

We will kindle a fire!

We will kindle a fire.

13. Running of the Wheel

14. Return to circle

15. Re-Enchant the Earth

M: It's up to us to re-enchant this planet Earth.

D: We are the elves and giants

We are the shining ones

Daughters of the Moon and sons of the Sun.

M: We are the shape shifters

We are the mysterious light shrouded in mists at the dawn of our time

And it's up to us to re-enchant this living planet Earth.

D: Up to us to midwife at our own rebirth

Up to us to send our dead along their ancient pathways to the future

Up to us to re-enchant this living planet Earth.

It's up to us to break the spell that steals the colors from the world and leaves it
lifeless

It was our spell

We can break it

M: It's up to us to break the spell that steals music from the Wind and Rain

It is our spell

We can break it.

Both: We will dance the magic dance and our bodies will remember

We will sing the magic songs and together we'll remember

How to live together

How to love each other

How to ride the eagle

How to call the deer – Home.

16. Devoke the Directions

Spirit of the East – thank you for your presence and your blessings. Stay if you
will, go if you must. Hail and Farewell.

Extinguish the candle.

Spirit of the SOUTH – thank you for your presence and your blessings. Stay if you
will, go if you must. Hail and Farewell.

Extinguish the candle.

Spirit of the WEST – thank you for your presence and your blessings. Stay if you will, go if you must. Hail and Farewell.

Extinguish the candle.

Spirit of the NORTH – thank you for your presence and your blessings. Stay if you will, go if you must. Hail and Farewell.

Extinguish the candle.

17. Benediction

Deep peace of the flowing air to you
Deep peace of the shining star to you
Deep peace of the running wave to you
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you
Deep peace of the infinite deep peace, to you

18. May the Long Time Sun Shine Upon You - May the Long Time Sun shine on you. All Love Surround you And the pure light within you guide your way on.

The circle is open but unbroken. Merry meet, merry part, and merry meet again. Blessed Be!

19. Song: Hail and Farewell