



Imbolc Day Song Ritual

Imbolc is a pagan holiday that marks the beginning of spring. Celebrated sundown February 1 to sundown February 2, it is a time for purity, growth and renewal. It is particularly important to the Celtic Fire Goddess, Brigit, “patron of smithcraft, healing, midwifery and poetry.” One scholar believes the word Imbolc has a Proto-Indian-European root meaning both “cleansing” and “milk.”¹ What a day for a daysong!

In his essay “The Opening of the True Plum Blossom: Reflections on Dōgen and Zen Aesthetics”, Jason Wirth puts the season into a Zen perspective:

Realizing spring, however, is not being liberated from a bad season and delivered to a preferable season. In awakening from the winter of our ignorant delusions and their concomitant attachments and aversions, we awaken to all things now and here. It is not to awaken to a particular season, but rather to the local seasonality of all things.

How to cleanse ourselves from the accumulation of innumerable delusions that are a byproduct of the human condition and require a systematic review and purge? How to be now and here?

Denise Levertov knew that composing organically was a “method of apperception, i.e., of recognizing what we perceive, and is based on an intuition of an order, a form beyond forms, in which forms partake... Such poetry is exploratory.” When we allow ourselves to be fully in the moment of composition, there are perceptions available to us that bypass the

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imbolc#cite_note-Hamp-15

intellect (reason) and proceed straight to the *intellectus*. This is why Charles Olson said that his method of composing spontaneously is a “use of speech at its least careless and least logical.”

The Imbolc DaySong can be an opportunity to review the hectic nature of the last few months of one’s life (including obligations of the holidays), take advantage of the freshness of a new year and align with ancient practices to write a poem all day. A use of this holiday as a temporal restriction to see what the muses have to offer in terms of perceptions.



PREPARATION

The daysong works best when you have the full attention of the muses. Pets, spouses and children will not serve your best interests in this ritual, so best to free yourself for 24 hours. If you can’t get this isolation on February 1, within 48 hours before or after can work.

For hundreds if not thousands of years the holiday has included certain colors, foods, herbs and scents. Among them:

Colors: White, Pink, Red, Yellow, Light Green, Brown

Herbs: Angelica, Basil, Bay Laurel, Blackberry, Celandine, Coltsfoot, Heather, Iris, Myrrh, Tansy, Violets, and all white or yellow flowers

Traditional Foods: Pumpkin seeds, Sunflower seeds, Poppyseed Cakes, muffins, scones, and breads, all dairy products, Peppers, Onions, Garlic, Raisins, Spiced Wines and Herbal Teas

Incense: Basil, Bay, Wisteria, Cinnamon, Violet, Vanilla, Myrrh

Stones: Amethyst, Bloodstone, Garnet, Ruby, Onyx, Turquoise²

Make an altar (or add to your current home altar) elements from the list above. You may be able to do this in advance of the ritual day. You may even have some of these materials already in your cupboard. A white cloth to suggest the clarity of the intention is recommended and a candle to honor the fire goddess, is also recommended. As always, use extreme care in this and never leave a fire unattended. A tea light will do, along with any flowers from the above list you can obtain. If none, a drawing of such a flower would work. Adding some of the foods, having herbal tea on hand and festooning the altar with stones is also important.

Because of the strong commitment to poetry found in Irish culture, and the tradition of the Imbolc holiday itself, going to Irish sources for inspiration could prove beneficial.

Imbolc is mentioned in the Metrical Dindsenchas: "iar n-imbule, ba garb a ngeilt" "after Candlemas, rough was their herding".³ This class of Irish literature is sometimes translated as "lore of places." What are the enchantments of the place in which you live? Some time in favorite spots near your home before your writing ritual, or during breaks in writing on the day of the daysong, can help provide fresh nature imagery for your project. When you go out with the intention of getting imagery for poems, you'd be surprised by what you might manifest. (Bring a pocket journal!) Reports on the condition of certain plants, maybe some that are already blooming, is excellent material for such a poem. Here in Cascadia, the Indian Plum should be starting to come alive at that time and that might play a role in what a Cascadian poet might write, but be open to what the muse is offering and go where it is warm, content-wise.

² <https://www.wicca.com/pagan-holidays/imbolc.html>

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dindsenchas>



On The Day of the DaySong

Wake up, do what you do each morning, set an intention at your altar and write all day, taking breaks for all of your human needs. Pay attention to dreams and if you can write down your dream upon waking, you may find that material helpful for your effort.

When stuck, use the alluvial technique. Read a previous stanza, or two or three above where you are in the poem, or go all the way back to the beginning until you get a hit. It will feel like something that had passed through your mind as a possibility pops back into consciousness and you're off & running again. (It works.)

When stuck, use quotes from other poets. This is why being in your own study is helpful. Robin Blaser believed quotes from other poets and writers was consistent with *The Practice of Outside*, his phrase for the received poem. Best to use quotation marks or italics, but note the poet, book and page perhaps at the end of your document if you are composing on the mac.

Add sensory input from the world around you. Nothing happens by accident. One time police were arresting someone when participants from a workshop I was facilitating went outside to write. In the moment you'll know whether it fits in the poem or not. Sketch the details of the scene in words, i.e., what color is the coat, what kind of hat, &c.

Use the Personal Universe Deck McClure perfected. Best done as a divination. It is ok to reject the first or second card if you don't get an immediate idea from that card.

An autoresponder message attached to your email address is one smart thing you can do to give yourself the gift of attention and the free creative time human beings need to be truly healthy and happy. The clarification of the mind and the blessings of the muse can be yours on this day. Write



as long as you can. The ending will be clear and natural. You are halfway through the dark time of year (in the Northern Hemisphere.)

As Diane di Prima said in her poem “Rant”:

*intellectus means "light of the mind"
it is not discourse it is not even language
the inner sun*

*the polis is constellated around the sun
the fire is central*

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8:14pm
12-JAN-2024
Casa del Colibrî

Works Cited

“The Opening of the True Plum Blossom: Reflections on Dōgen and Zen Aesthetics” by Jason M. Wirth

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“Rant” by Diane di Prima from "Pieces of a Song: Selected Poems"

