


PLANET: SUN

SIGN: LEO

Glyph: 

**Key words and qualities:** Essence; radiance; expressiveness; magnanimity; confidence; fruitfulness; creativity; central self. The regenerated personality, identified with the source.

**Color:** Gold

**Metal:** Gold

**Physical body affinity:** Heart

**Day of the week:** Sunday

**Festivals:** Winter solstice, “the Return of the Sun”; Lammas (August 2), one of the four cross-quarter holidays—the festival of harvest.

**Way of honoring:** Heat or fire. Try inhaling golden energy from the six directions: above, below, east, west, north, and south. Then exhale golden light and bless all creatures in turn, in each direction, without the slightest sense of effort or depletion. Or we can honor the Sun by simply sitting and watching the sunrise and sunset.

**Shadow, when not honored:** Narcissism (“Enough about me, what do *you* think about me?”). The word *illusion* comes from the Latin *in ludo*, which means literally “in the game”; as opposed to *delusion* (from *de ludo*) which means “out of the game.” The Sun (and Leo) reminds us that when we playfully or ritually express ourselves—in other words, create theater—we are at least in the game. The Sun says, “Create theater or live melodrama.” When we are living melodrama, we are deluded, or “out of the game.”

# THE SUN



## THE CONFLUENCE OF ALLIES

*Hail to the Sun god  
He is a fun god  
Ra Ra Ra!*

**W**e have arrived at the central heartbeat, the energetic, animating force of all life: the Sun.

In his “Twelfth Lecture on Heat,” the nineteenth-century British scientist John Tyndall inadvertently summarized the innumerable odes to the Sun found in virtually all cultures:

“Every tree, plant, and flower, grows and flourishes by the grace and bounty of the sun.

“The sun comes to us as heat; he quits us as heat; and between his entrance and departure, the multiform powers of our globe appear. They are all special forms of solar power—the moulds into which his strength is temporarily poured in passing from its source through infinitude.” Scientists make great astrologers.

Through the metaphor of science, Tyndall states what human beings have been expressing since the dawn of time through art, pyramids, altars on mountaintops, fertility symbols, and the myriad depictions of the Sun associated with snakes, lions, reindeer, goats, and other animals. Everything that is, is a manifestation of the Sun.

The mudra of reassurance, the outstretched open hand found on statues of the Buddha in India, is identical to the open hand found in rock carvings in the Sahara. The hand represents the rising Sun. The fingers are the Sun's rays, which then also become antlers, reassuring us of the infinitely rich abundance of life energy. The Pattern on the Trestle Board, which is an ancient Hermetic series of affirmations about the Self, begins, "All the power that ever was or will be is here now." The vitality and creativity represented by the Sun are always present and always available, constantly assuming new forms. Creation and re-creation are the Sun's visible mysteries.

Shortly before he died, the mythologist Joseph Campbell queried, "What is the new mythology to be, the mythology of this unified earth as one harmonious being? One cannot predict the next mythology any more than one can predict tonight's dream; for a mythology is not an ideology." Yet we can participate in midwifing the emerging mythos, and co-create a culture of conscious kinship, through both a traditional and an innovative celebration of the Sun's journey.

The Sun's power is especially potent at times of seasonal transition, which all known cultures have celebrated. William Blake reminds us, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that "Eternity is in love with the productions of time." During these seasonal festivals, the power of eternity pours into the specific moment, quickening the tide of animism. At every stop on the Sun's journey, the world is reinvented.

As the Sun passes through each sign of the zodiac, it brings that image-force alive, as well as the presiding god of that sign and season. The planets all reflect the light of the Sun, so at each important solar celebration, the Sun shines most strongly through the presiding planetary force of that time. By joining in these celebrations, we have an opportunity to participate in remaking ourselves and re-creating the world.

## THE SOLAR CALENDAR'S INVITATION TO RE-CREATE THE WORLD

If we got up before dawn throughout the year, we'd be pretty tired, but we would also see that the point of sunrise is not the same every day, but gradually moves across the horizon. From the perspective of the northern hemisphere, the winter solstice is when the sunrise is the farthest to our right, in the southeast. *Sol* means "Sun," and *stice* means "stands still." At this wedding of time and geographic space, the Sun looks as if it were standing still for a day, and then it begins to journey north. Ancient standing stones found in the British Isles and Mesoamerica mark this moment, as well as the other equinoctial and solstice points. The winter solstice is the longest night of the year, signifying the beginning of winter. This night represents the height of the power of darkness, after which the light returns and the days grow longer, culminating in the summer solstice.

As the days grow longer, hopeful possibilities are rekindled. Thus the winter solstice has long been associated with the birth of the world redeemer. This is the birthday of King Arthur, Jesus, and all saviors associated with the return of the light. Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, was, according to Maccabees (the First and Second Books of Maccabees are still to be found in the Catholic Bible, but are part of the Apocrypha, which are books not included in the Protestant Bible), originally timed to coincide with the winter solstice.

The Sun enters Capricorn on the winter solstice, also called the Saturnalia, animating the presiding deity, Saturn. Traditionally, this is a night when we cast off our chains, all our constraints and fears, and gather force for the coming season. One winter solstice motto is, "When in doubt, throw out!" meaning old, outworn clothes, habits, relationships, modes of thought. At this time we invite the highest imaginative concept of Saturn—the "cool" guy, the responsible teacher—into our lives and our culture. We have an opportu-

nity to cast out the old order and allow the new to be rekindled in our hearts.

The cross-quarter holidays, which occur in midseason, are called the four gates of power. These dates are determined by the Sun's arrival at the middle of the fixed signs—15 degrees of Aquarius, Taurus, Leo, or Scorpio. Candlemas is the Christian name for the midwinter festival occurring in the middle of Aquarius, around February 2. The Celtic name for this is the Feast of Imbolg. Midwinter is the time when the Goddess lights her candle and begins her slow ascent from the Underworld. While February 2 is known to us (somewhat diminished in its imagery) as Groundhog Day, this is in keeping with an ancient tradition of animals coming out of hibernation to provide useful predictions. Midwinter has always been considered a day of omens. A traditional rhyme said:

*If Candlemas Day be fair and bright,  
Winter will have another flight;  
If Candlemas Day be shower and rain,  
Winter is gone and will not come again.*

At the midpoint of Aquarius, the Sun shines through Saturn and Uranus, the dual rulers of this sign. They urge us to expand our definition of the Aquarian realm of community to include all of creation—from animals to galaxies. We participate in the initial stirrings of nature's emergence from winter's dormancy by giving innovative expression (Uranus) to the Saturnian domain of traditional structures. We align with the force of this moment by asking ourselves, "What will be our unique contribution to the community of creation?"

The Sun continues its journey from Candlemas to the next solar holiday, the vernal equinox, around March 21, the moment at which the Sun has journeyed halfway to its northernmost point. This is the time of equal night and day: *equi* means "equal"; *nox* means "night."

The vernal equinox marks the beginning of spring, when we pause to regain our equilibrium and connect with the presiding god of all emergent erotic life force, Mars, now animated by the rays of the Sun. We remember that all the gods, regardless of their names, have a masculine and feminine expression.

As with the winter solstice, behind the orthodox holidays lie hidden ones. The beginning of spring is the Persian New Year and the Christian Easter. Easter is always the first Sunday after the first full Moon after the equinox. The term "Easter" comes from the Saxon goddess Oestre or Ester (meaning "eggs"), from which we ultimately get the word *estrogen*. The Moon hare, a fertility totem sacred to the goddess, has become our "ester" bunny.

The Christian holiday of Easter is, in fact, an ancient celebration of springtime fertility: eggs, rabbits, and breeding. It is also a celebration of the annual resurrection of the life force. In Bohemia on Easter Monday, village girls sacrifice the Lord of Death by throwing him in the water. (One thing about Death—he hates wet socks!) The Jewish festival of Passover is timed to coordinate with both the equinox and the mid-spring full Moon as a celebration of the rebirth of creativity.

The Sun continues its journey from the vernal equinox to mid-spring, which falls around May 1. Called May Day, or Beltane, it is a celebration of renewed kinship with the passion of nature. The Sun now illuminates a new expression of the presiding deity, Venus. The Taurus season of Venus follows the Aries season of Mars, reminding us that it is through union with Venus that the wild force of Mars is brought to grace and happiness.

People in Celtic and northern European countries still celebrate mid-spring by dancing around a Maypole, a phallic symbol planted in the fertile earth. Often bells are tied around the dancers' ankles to awaken the earth in order to catalyze the fertility of nature. Traditionally, people would make love in their fields as an act of sympathetic magic. Beltane, a holiday about passionate courtship, alliance

with nature's emphatic sensuality, and equal sharing of nature's beauty and bounty, was celebrated with bonfires and dancing on hilltops.

These solar celebrations still live within us and insist on being expressed. Our ancestral blood remembers the intrinsic beauty and abundance available in the midst of spring's democratic generosity. But if our world is not in accord with Venus, not beautiful and fair, and we do not perform any rituals of redress, then her scales will be violently tipped in an effort to regain balance. For instance, on Beltane in Washington, D.C., we have had riots where, instead of bonfires, real fires have been set. The fiery Los Angeles riot of 1992 was also within days of Beltane. And let us not forget the Russian Revolution, which is celebrated on May 1. One of the Sun's lessons is that if we no longer have a ritual way to celebrate the heat of our passion, we end up with arson.

The next solar holiday is the summer solstice, around June 21, which is the height of the Sun's northern journey. It marks the longest day of the year and the beginning of summer; afterward, the days grow shorter. Whereas Beltane was a celebration of courtship, summer solstice is the wedding. The presiding Moon goddess takes center stage and invites us to rededicate ourselves to life by choosing what we will protect and cultivate in the garden of our personal and community lives.

Many people choose to get married in June, which is sacred to Juno, the goddess of marriage, who presides over the summer solstice and the wedding of the Sun and the Moon. The marriage of two people reflects this divine union and is meant to be an opportunity to wed those things that have been previously estranged: Heaven and Earth, and physics and metaphysics, whose offspring would be Reverent Science.

Even though it occurs at the beginning of summer, the summer solstice is referred to as Midsummer's Eve. In his play, *A Midsum-*

*mer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare draws upon the traditional belief that on the summer solstice, nature spirits become visible and magic is at its most potent. As the Sun pauses at the northernmost tip of its arc, we are invited to pause with it in order to find the still point from which the dance of the visible and invisible emerge.

The Sun journeys forth from the summer solstice, bringing us to the midsummer festival, August 2. In some traditions, it is the festival of the great goddess of the grain, the Sun in its feminine expression of abundance. In Celtic culture this midsummer harvest festival is called Lughnasadh, celebrating the death and resurrection of Lugh, the grain god. It is more commonly known as Lammas, after the old solar harvest god who is ritually sacrificed by pulling in the harvest and determining what to keep and what to throw out. We celebrate Lammas by baking loaves of bread in the shape of grains of wheat and holding bonfires in which the dross of the harvest is burned.

The Sun moves on from Lammas to the autumnal equinox, around September 21, where once again the days and nights are of equal length. This is the beginning of fall, when the nights grow longer than the days. The Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah and the festival of the goddess Durga in India are both timed to the first new Moon after the autumnal equinox. Both of these celebrations are intended to restore balance and right relationship within oneself and between oneself and the world. The book of our life is open for us to read, inspiring us to rededicate ourselves to a life of greater mercy and kinship, where every stranger is considered a messenger. This is the season when Venus takes her second incarnation, inviting us to align with the autumnal rhythm of deep descent in order to gather our vision.

In ancient Greece, the autumnal equinox marked the beginning of the annual revival of the Eleusinian mysteries, ritual reenactments of Persephone's descent to the Underworld. The founding of these mysteries is based on the story of Demeter and her daughter,

Persephone, who, in a late version of the myth, was kidnapped by Pluto, the god of the Underworld. Part of the mystery is that Pluto, meaning "Abundance," was originally another name for Demeter.

The longest-running theatrical act in history, the Eleusinian mysteries were performed for four hundred years. In addition to theater and feasting, the celebrations included rites of initiation for women, men, children, and slaves; the only people who could not be initiated were those who had so irredeemably violated kinship with others as to have murdered someone.

The Sun then continues on to the middle of Scorpio, around October 31. We call this festival Halloween, when the Sun puts on its Mars and Pluto costumes, since they are the co-rulers of this Scorpionic season. The Celts call it Samhain. Halloween allows us to enter the domain of the taboo through humor and wit, and restore it to the sacred. This is also the festival of the invisible, the Day of the Dead, and All Souls' Day, in which we are invited to have a humorously intimate relationship to death. Mars and Pluto seek incarnation through us at this time. We offer ourselves as incarnational vessels to ancestors and allies who have died, strengthening our reciprocal relationship with the invisible by leaving them offerings.

The Sun then continues on to its rendezvous with Saturn at the winter solstice, and the cycle begins anew.

Years ago, I began to anchor my astrology lectures and celebrations to the year's holy days. The question they pose to all of us, both individually and societally, is, "In what manner do we want to celebrate now?" We are allowed and encouraged to reinvent the rites of our celebrations and we need to do so. All forms of celebration are temporal. Uninformed enthusiasm for the past has created ceremonies that feel hokey. We remember Nietzsche's admonition, the gist of which was "If you want me to join your religion, you must have better music."

## S O L A R F L A I R

The Sun now speaks to each aspect of our personality, awakening its loving and magical potency. The Sun calls to:

- the Mars part of us, for there is much heroic action needed that only you can do
- the Venus part of us, for there is much to be loved and created that can only be created by you
- the Mercury part of us, for there are many ideas to be exchanged
- the Moon part of us, for there is much to be protected and cared for
- the Jupiter part of us, for there are many heartening stories to be told, and new theatrical venues to be created
- the Saturn part of us, for there is much work to do in building the structure of a sustainable future
- the Uranus part of us, for there are many ingenious solutions to be invented that only you can invent
- the Neptune part of us, for there is much that only you can envision as we co-create a new culture
- the Pluto part of us, for there is much to be transformed as we become social change artists, public alchemists

The Sun sets the torch to the tinder of our work together, and we are alight. We have traveled far, awakened much. The gods want to work through us.

*Ashé* is thought of as coming from the Sun, the central god. Say *ashé*, and let the magic begin.

T H E P A T H O F L O V E A S A N A N T I D O T E  
T O B I T T E R N E S S

As Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us at the very beginning of our journey together, "Behind the harsh appearance of the world there

is a benign power.” Certainly the Sun can cast a harsh shadow. If we do not have a profusion of gods from whom to draw sustenance and to whom we are in turn devoted, then the Sun beats down upon us in harsh and simplistic certainty, searing the necessary and cooling mists of complexity and mystery.

Cruelty and bitterness are natural responses to being treated badly. The Sun challenges us to rekindle the loving heart of generosity from those who have truly earned the right to be bitter, and yet have refused the cup of poison. Like Saint Patrick, they have held the poisoned cup to the light, allowed the poison to rise to the surface, blown it off, and blessed and toasted all of creation, even those who would have poisoned them.

Creina Alcock is a white South African woman who, through a lifetime of betrayal and hardship on the African veldt, has earned the right to be bitter. Although she has teetered on the edge, feeling the temptations of cruelty and murderous revenge in her own heart, she has not succumbed.

When asked how and why she has not become bitter, she replies, “The path of love is not the path of comfort. It means going forward into the unknown, with no guarantees of safety, even though you’re afraid. Trusting is dangerous, but without trust there is no hope for love, and love is all we ever have to hold against the dark. . . . Love is worth nothing until it has been tested by its own defeat.”<sup>22</sup>

Cultivating the capacity to transcend the harsh realities of life and the natural response of bitterness requires making an offering of oneself to the benign force of the Sun, which animates our hearts. We are called upon to create a culture of conscious kinship by living a ritualistic life that brings us into right relationship with the gods, our visible and invisible allies. We are not meant to do it alone.

### THE FIFTH FLOWER

In the tarot, the Sun depicts a boy and a girl who symbolize transformed and regenerated humanity. “Be ye transformed by the

renewing of your mind,” says this card, which also shows five sunflowers, four in full bloom, one yet to bloom. The four are the four kingdoms of evolutionary form—mineral, vegetable, animal, and human—all of which originate from solar energy. The fifth flower is the next evolutionary step of consciously reverent humanity, which we undertake now together with the help of the gods, who work for us so that we may work for them. Let us imagine the fifth flower blooming.

We can strengthen and reverence the compassionate kindness of the Sun through a traditional exercise in which we align with the bodhisattvas, those who have a deep commitment to taking on and transforming the world’s pain. First we strengthen ourselves by inhaling golden light into our hearts and exhaling the dark smoke of sorrowful bitterness, like dragons. Take a few moments to do so now.

Now, in contrast, imagine inhaling the world’s darkness and exhaling golden light.

In this way we become allied with the forces of creation, including the great Wrathful Demon, Mahakala. The demons of Tibet were considered the most fearsome of all of the Sun’s children, and Mahakala, the most terrifyingly destructive, until Padmasambhava journeyed to Tibet and converted them all to Buddhism. Then, out of compassion, they turned their wrathful, destructive talents to the slaying of greed and ignorance. They, too, began to inhale the world’s darkness and exhale the golden fire of blessing.

In alchemy, the Great Work is called the Operation of the Sun, which is the full cultivation of the human personality as a translucent vessel through which life can shine. The living gold of which the alchemists spoke is manifest in the radiant energy of the Sun. The Sun is our guiding light, reminding us that we are incarnations of all the gods. All the planets, gods, and forces of our psyche reflect the light of the Sun. It is the same life force that animates all of creation. We invite this golden force to infuse our personalities that we may better serve the world.

## MAKING THE GODS YOU

In gratitude for the work you have done, the planetary gods would like to offer you one last invocative gift so that you can keep in touch with them. In accordance with Mercury's magic, we use the powerfully invocative phrase "I am," which is a magical invocation. If you feel moved by intuitive whimsy, and you *really* want the gods to work for you, read the planetary messages aloud, followed by an enthusiastic

Pluto sizzles: "I am willing to be cooked and refined in the alchemical furnace of life. Remember that whatever I do in life, it's my cover. I am an undercover agent for transformation." *Ashé!*

Neptune sings: "Through my vivid and infinitely creative imagination, I am constantly co-creating with the divine the myriad richness of life's possibilities. I am dreaming the universe into being." *Ashé!*

Uranus invokes, "I welcome the enlivening, illuminating, lightning bolt of revelation that zaps the circle of habit, turning it into the spiral of life's experimental evolutionary drive." *Ashé!*

Saturn intones, "I am aligned with the power of focused concentration, realizing that freedom lies on the other side of responsibility. I will go to the movies *after* I finish the task before me. I aspire to mystic coolness." *Ashé!*

Jupiter encourages, "I am filled with an abundant enthusiasm for my heroic journey. Open my path before me and grant me the opportunity to be of maximum good in the world." *Ashé!*

Mars exhorts, "I am filled with spirited, bold, courageous, energetic bravado and desire, which inspire me to dance passionately with life." *Ashé!*

Venus croons, "I am attracting all the love, beauty, and creative inspiration needed for my full ecstatic bloom." *Ashé!*

Mercury proclaims, "I am the witty, clear, articulate brilliance of

life, which expresses itself through me and grants me the confidence to say the truth with a kind heart." *Ashé!*

The Moon reassures, "I am always safe enough to take the intuitively guided risks, and strong enough to care tenderly and fiercely for all of life, which deserves protection." *Ashé!*

The Sun cheers, "I am always fully radiantly myself, whether I know it or not. I embrace the divine experiment of my own uniqueness, remembering that the world needs my gift." *Ashé!*

Let us dream a more loving world into being. Vital images will save the culture. And we are the storytellers. *Ashé!*