

Ostara, Lady of the Radiant Dawn

by Tilly

The Anglo-Saxons knew her as Ostara. To the Germans she was Eostre. Undoubtedly both cultures greeted her joyously. Ostara was the dawn. She was Spring and everything that went with it: joy, blessings, youth, up-springing light, fertility and procreation. She could even be found in that extra bounce you find in your step on a bright, lovely spring day.

April was the month belonging to Ostara and her name lends itself to our English word "Easter". Though it's always difficult finding information on many of the older deities, this seems pretty good evidence of just how important and revered she was to her followers. Jacob Grimm writes that only the Anglo-Saxons ("*Eastre*") and the Germans ("*Ostara*" or "*Ostern*") referred to the day as anything other than "*Pasha*," the Biblical word used in neighboring countries. In an area known for its cold, dark winters, the goddess of the dawn would be most welcomed indeed and it's no surprise that she survived the coming of the Christians.

On Easter, bonfires were lit to Eostre in the mountains of Germany. Probably they were originally lit at the beginning of May. The fire would be sparked with a flint and steel and was considered quite powerful. People brought crosses, or even crossed sticks, which were set afire and then kept for the year, possibly as a form of protection. In a connection with Bel and Beltain, the crosses and sticks were usually of oak. These fires were so important to people that Grimm gives this as one reason that midsummer fires never gained any popularity in Germany.

Other symbols connected to Ostara/Eostre include rabbits, eggs, and buns. Rabbits were sacred to her undoubtedly because of their fertility, and the "Easter bunny" is often thought to be a survivor of her worship. The same can be said for eggs, yet another popular Easter symbol that has little to do with the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. Hot cross buns were eaten in her honor. Either the cross was added later to make them more Christian or it originally was an equal-armed solar cross representing the sun.

References:

Grimm, Jacob. *Teutonic mythology: translated from the fourth edition with notes and appendix by James Steven Stallybrass*. New York: Dover Publications, 1966. (See all four volumes.)

Lindeman, Micha. *Encyclopedia Mythica* [<http://www.pantheon.org/mythica/>] (See articles on Ostara and Eostre.)

Sykes, Egerton. *Who's who in non-classical mythology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Thompson, Sue Ellen. *Holiday symbols*. Detroit, Mich. : Omnigraphics, 1998.



Rituals

Most CUUPS rituals are usually held at the Unitarian Fellowship on Fridays at 7:30 p.m. They are followed with a potluck. Rituals are open to anyone interested and we would love to have you join us!



Classes/Workshops

Most classes and workshops are held on Tuesday evenings at the Fellowship, usually running from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Please note that beginning in May, many of these will be craft-related (as opposed to Craft-related) in some way and we will be charging a small materials fee, usually around \$5. This is to help defray costs and enable us to offer a more diverse selection of events.

Business/Planning Meetings

Regular meetings of CUUPS are held at the Unitarian Fellowship on the 1st Sunday of the month at noon - usually. (We sometimes have to make adjustments for other fellowship goings-on. If you would like to become involved in the planning and organizing of CUUPS events and rituals, we would love to hear from you. Meetings are open to anyone interested in CUUPS.