

## *The VERNAL EQUINOX*

We entered the season of Spring this year this past Wednesday, March 20, 2019 at 2:58 pm PDT! You all probably noticed the immediate change in the weather! Of course, on the Equinoxes, the nights and days are approximately equal (with some variance for distance from the equator) and I have been noticing the days getting longer. The Spring and Fall Equinoxes, like the Winter and Summer Solstices are observable physical events that have been marked by humans over the last several millennia. They have held a place in the beliefs of earth-centered religions for thousands of years, but can be explained scientifically by the rotation of the earth, its orbit around the Sun, and its tilt toward or away from the Sun. The likelihood of the conjunction of all those factors along with being the right distance from a yellow star takes us into serious probabilities, but let's just agree for now that it has worked to the favor of humans and other animals and plants. Which leads us back to Springtime!

Springtime is a time for planting, a time for enjoying the flowering of trees and bushes and flowers. In the animal world, it is a time for new birth in many species, a time for baby critters large and small. It is a time to walk in the woods and along the shore and into the hills as the snows melt, the storms begin to calm down, and the temperatures warm to a comfortable level. In this area Spring temperatures too quickly will turn into summer heat, but for a short while we will have a wonderful opportunity to be outdoors enjoying the natural world. And this is very good, for the world we live in is very beautiful & amazing in so many ways!

This world is also endangered by ignorance and greed and a failure to think of the longer-term impacts of pollution and the abuse of natural resources.

Nobody knows what the earth itself can really withstand or recover from, but we have some pretty good ideas when all the current species on earth will be killed off by changes in temperature, greenhouse gases, pollution, disease, poisons, fires, floods, and drought.

The Equinox is a reminder of the natural cycles and seasons of the Earth. Even those seasons associated with the cycles of Earth are being affected by the changing temperatures across many parts of the Earth. Drought and increasing fire risks are affecting some areas, while other areas are experiencing unusual increases in precipitation, and soon there will be additional flooding from rising sea levels as a result of melting icepacks near the poles as overall temperatures increase. One recent report suggests that sea temperatures are rising 40% faster even than what had come to be expected. Many climate scientists believe we have already passed a point of no return, from which temperatures will continue to rise for at least the next century or longer, no matter what we do.

Pagan or Earth-Centered religions have long celebrated the changing of the seasons, with the Vernal or Spring Equinox being a time of fertility rites, planting, celebrating births, and welcoming the warming of the earth with the lengthening of the days. The coming of Spring meant that the harsh weather of winter was mostly past and that the earth would bloom again preparing soon to bear the fruits of summer. Though Pagans named and thanked Gods and Goddesses for the changing of the seasons, their beliefs honored what they saw in the world, the flowering of plants and trees and the births of animals.

As mostly urban or suburban dwellers, our awareness of the changing seasons is not as rich or deep as that of those who are closer to the Earth. We notice the temperature and whether it is raining or sunny. Many of us are not really that aware of changing temperature and precipitation patterns unless we hear about them on the news or read about them in newspapers or magazines. We can always add or subtract a layer of clothing or a coat if we need to and our cars will run rain or shine, warm or cold (with a few exceptions, like Fords & Chryslers who really don't like cold wet days).

It is easy for humans to ignore small changes in the weather and even easier to ignore the longer term changes in climate.

I like to think about the changing seasons, and especially the beginning of Spring, as a new opportunity. Yes, many of us have been here before and not taken much advantage of the changing seasons, but it gives one time to ponder what changes we might make in patterns in our lives, homes, and work. I'm seriously thinking about not planting Tomatoes this year! I have planted them most of the last 20-30 years and have never gotten enough Tomatoes to justify the expense. I always have urges to garden, at least to plant things, not so much the weeding part, but always the planting and watering! But the return on investment just isn't there with tomatoes! And the heartache is there almost every year with tomatoes, the might have-beens....We'll have to see, because I can easily be tempted, but I might just forego the Tomatoes this year! Of course there are also more serious changes that we can make in our usual patterns and ways of being in the world. We can choose to make changes in the way we spend our time and money, in the people we share time with, in the ways that we seek to make the world better. Spring is always a good time to make changes for the better!

There are many celebrations of the coming of Spring. One of the better known is that to honor Ostara, the German Virgin Goddess of Spring. Colored eggs, pastel flowers, and rabbits are all part of the celebration. It is a time for personal renewal, new beginnings, and fertility. Easter as a Spring celebration likely took on several aspects of the celebration of Ostara at the Equinox.

The Persian Spring Equinox celebration of No Ruz, meaning New Day, is one of hope and renewal with its roots in Zoroastrianism.

There is also a celebration at the Mayan city of Chichen Itza as the shadow of a snake descends the pyramid of Kukulcan to merge with a large serpent head sculpture.

In Rome, followers of Cybele believed that their Goddess's Consort, Attis, who was born of a Virgin, died and was resurrected each Vernal Equinox.

The Roman God Mithras was also thought to be resurrected in the Spring to help his followers ascend to the realm of light after death.

How will we each celebrate the coming of Spring this year? How will we find renewal or rebirth this Spring? Where will we find hope?

People in ancient times believed that their lives were controlled by the Gods and Goddesses who expressed their anger and blessings through good or ill signs in the natural world. The Gods of Thunder and Volcanoes were angry, while the goddesses of growth and nurture were happier as long as people offered up blessings on their altars. Today we live in a scientific age in which the ancient Gods and Goddesses of the earth have been replaced with scientific explanations of why things happen. The cost to influence scientific outcomes seems much higher than offering a sheep or a bushel of grain. Today it will take much more time, effort, and money to fix the things that are threatening humanity and it may be beyond what we will be able to do!

Unless we succeed in blowing the earth up from its core, it will likely keep spinning and orbiting the Sun as long as the Sun survives, perhaps another 5 Billion years, but it may become a wasteland that will take a billion years to recover from the damage that we humans are inflicting upon it.

For Billions of years, earth went through its seasons, sunsets and sunrises, Solstices and Equinoxes, before sentient life developed. This experiment with humans is at most a few million years old, and homo sapiens far younger than that. The cockroaches might survive and even rise to sentience at some point, and kudzu vines might still be around, but humans and the larger animals are not likely to survive unless quite a few changes are made to repair the damage that humans have been doing to the earth during the last 3 centuries.

As Spring arrived this week, the evidence is mounting that Monsanto has succeeded in damaging far more than the pests it was targeting with Roundup. It now appears that this decades old widely used poison causes cancers in humans as well as killing off weeds and pests. And it is looking more and more like Boeing could have prevented two plane crashes with better software, better training, and making a high-priced optional warning light standard. With only a few years under obligations to emphasize safety, corporations have been allowed to answer only to their own bottom lines with no obligation to provide safe or ecologically neutral products. Most of the limited safeguards on corporate practices and environmental responsibility are being thrown out by the current administration. It also appears that the Mueller investigation will not be the way that this administration will leave office.

And so I again pose the question, what can and shall we do to make the world a better place, to prevent humans from destroying this planet that has always been our home? In this Spring of the year we call 2019, what are we going to do to protect our world, not just for our own generation, but for our children's children and future generations? I don't know about the rest of you, but I am tired and I don't know how much strength I have left to fix this world. And yet, I know that we each must do our part. We each must take responsibility for the damage we have done or have allowed and work to mitigate that damage.

It seems to me that corporations need to carry a big share of that responsibility as well. This bottom line only behavior is a big part of what caused the problems of pollution and deforestation. If plastic makers had been forced to take back and recycle what they make, that would have helped a lot. If factories had been forced to clean up their waste water and their exhaust before it got out of the factory, that would have helped a tremendous amount. If producers of engines had been forced to clean up their exhaust and run more efficiently sooner, it would have made a big difference.

This Spring is not that much different from previous Springs except Nebraska is flooded, the storms of the last several months have been stronger than most on record, the fires of the last few years have grown to almost unimaginable

size, and even with the deep snowpack in the Sierra, the Spring melt may bring flooding then leave us dry by late summer. The damage done to the environment over the last 3 centuries is really showing this Spring.

When humanity replaced the old gods, when humans became the most powerful gods, the world started to go to hell. No, I am not advocating bringing back any of the old gods, though we really could use some Marvel Superheroes! I am challenging us to find ways to make a difference. To call out the corporations and their wholly owned subsidiaries in government to fix as many of the problems as they have caused and push the balance point back to where it will support human survival and preservation of as many plants and animals as possible. There will be many more extinctions, that is now unavoidable, but changes made soon will keep it from being even worse.

This Spring, I call for a rebirth of responsibility, a resurrection of human integrity and honesty, a return to the belief that we carry a responsibility for the Earth we will leave to future generations. I call us away from the short term bottom line, away from hedge fund supported destruction of otherwise good companies, away from individualism and back to being part of the one species of humanity. This Spring I call us to unity with all people, all religions, and all the animal and plant inhabitants of the earth. So may it be!

Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen!