



*Sage's* CIRCLE  
with Candice Marie Sage, PhD

# Beltane - May Day as an Act of Resistance

**C**elebrated May 1, Beltane (pronounced BELL-tayn) is the Gaelic May Day Festival, the second of the four greater pagan fire Sabats of the Wheel of the Year and the apex point between the spring equinox and the summer solstice. Beltane is “high spring” when the increased warmth of the sun leads to the blooming of flowers and the earth’s readying for the planting of crops. It is a time for connecting with life-affirming energies. A prominent deity is Flora, the Roman goddess of flowers, who has the power to create new life and birthed the Tree of Life.

Beltane has many symbols. In Celtic mythology, the “Green Man” is a tree-like figure who acts as the guardian of all living things. The Maypole, a tall structure with ribbons tied from its height, symbolizes fertility. The divine masculine energy of the sun as provider and protector is anchored within the divine feminine energy, the land itself. The ribbons are symbols of energy, gifts to encourage connection to the spirit world. Festival colours are white for the pure light of the feminine, green for the lushness of new growth, and red for fiery energy and passion. Crowns for women were created from the Hawthorn flower, associated with wisdom, and interwoven with Lily of the Valley (joy and the return of spring), primrose, (youth and growth), roses (love, beauty and the divine feminine), and elder to ward away negative energy.

Beltane is a festival of life, and - in ancient times - a giant bonfire lit the night while people gathered to feast and celebrate nature’s beauty and rhythm, dancing barefoot on the warm earth. In Celtic lore, the “Aos Si” or faeries, oversee the blooming of flowers, and are invited to come and dance with the revelers and bestow blessings as they dangle from the ribbons of the Maypole. Beltane was about “connecting” with the passion of spring. Dancing and reveling led to new love and lovers. The pagan tradition of ‘hand-fasting’ - the union of a couple for a year and a day - was a precursor to marriage the following spring (and why



May and June are still such popular times for weddings).

Interestingly, it was maidens who proposed hand-fasting to their partners, and if they weren’t satisfied with the union, they could dissolve it the following Beltane.

With the coming of Christianity, the raw earthiness of Beltane became frowned upon, and

went underground during the Reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries. Beltane was reinvented in private celebrations, while its essence was disguised through the play of children around the Maypoles of May Day celebrations. Its survival was through the resistance of people who kept the old ways alive in secret.

“**Today, May Day still reflects resistance, as organized Labour and environmental groups promote social and environmental justice on that date.**

Another important deity of Beltane is Áine (Anya or Anu), the Irish Faery Queen and goddess of wealth and sovereignty. She was the goddess wife of the King of the ancient Irish Province of Munster in the South. She embodies the fertility of the land with the sun’s vitalizing power. Áine embodies the Celtic values of integrity, authenticity, creativity and reverence for Mother Nature. She reminds us that sovereignty means more than one’s personal power and happiness, that we live in a web of life, tied to our natural environment, and to each other. We need community to survive. This spring, it seems difficult to ignore how the world we know is being challenged by a variety of social, economic and environmental shocks. Hyper-capitalism and its mass consumption is leading to increased economic and social injustice. Meanwhile climate change is creating further insecurity. Being sovereign at the individual level is not a virtue when injustice prevails around one. Beltane can be a way of bringing together our communities to celebrate the beauty and renewal of spring, and that together, connected to nature and each other, we will survive, perhaps even thrive in difficult times. Make Beltane a celebration or resistance against the forces that would see us divided and conquered. It’s time to light the fires.