

BELTANE



CEREMONY OF
THE ORDER OF BARDS
OVATES & DRUIDS



BELTANE

1 MAY – NORTHERN

HEMISPHERE

1 NOVEMBER – SOUTHERN

HEMISPHERE

Seek then in the ancient way, between the two pillars. In the Holy Vale of Avalon the pillars are manifested as the Tor and the Well. In this, our place of worship, the Tower is the stone and the Well is the water.

Nuinn

Beltane is the third of the Spring celebrations in the Druid tradition. By May 1st, Spring is truly with us, and the invigorating energies of spring growth are flowing at their strongest through the earth, and indeed through us too.

Beltane can be spelt Beltaine, Bealteine or Bealteinne. In Scottish Gaelic Bealtuinn means May Day, and in modern Irish Gaelic Bealtaine is the name for the month of May. The original meaning is 'The Good Fire' or the 'Bel-fire' - the fire of the Celtic or proto-Celtic god known as Bel, Beli, Balar, Balor or the latinized Belenus.

Bel was 'the Bright One' - the god of light and fire, and classical writers equated him with Apollo. Bel-fires were lit on hilltops to celebrate the coming of life and fertility with the Spring, and in Ireland no-one could light a Bealteinne fire until the High King had lit the first one on Tara Hill. In 433 CE St Patrick lit a fire on Slane Hill, ten miles from Tara, before the High King had lit his. He could not have made a more dramatic symbolic gesture of his usurping of spiritual leadership over the island. St David made a similar gesture in Wales in the sixth century.

The major feature of the Bealteinne festival in many lands was jumping over the fire. Young people jumped over it to bring themselves husbands or wives; intending travellers to ensure a safe journey; pregnant women to ensure an easy delivery, young women to ensure their fertility, etc. The magical properties of the Bealteinne fire were firmly believed in, and in both Scottish and Irish Gaelic there is a saying 'caught between two Bealtaine fires' which means 'caught in a dilemma'. The tradition of jumping over the bonfire was not confined to Bealteinne - it was also carried out at the Summer Solstice, as this quote from *The Gentleman's Magazine* of February 1795, shows:

‘At the house where I was entertained, in the summer of 1782, it was told me that we should see at midnight the most singular sight in Ireland, which was the lighting of fires in honour of the sun. Accordingly, exactly at midnight, the fires began to appear; and, going up to the leads of the house, which had a widely extended view, I saw, on a radius of thirty miles all around, the fires burning on every eminence. I learned from undoubted authority that the people danced round the fires, and at the close went through these fires, and made their sons and daughters, together with their cattle, pass the fire; and the whole was conducted with religious solemnity.’

Although this traveller was in Ireland at the time of the Summer Solstice, his description would have been the same had he been there for May-Eve. The belief was that the fire ‘destroyed the powers hostile to man, purified the air, and allowed man and beast and vegetation to thrive and become fertile.’

Beltane is a time in which fertility is the main theme: May Day is the time for dancing around the May-Pole, itself a phallic symbol, and for ritual dances, games and races through mazes: ‘Spiral and labyrinthine carvings can be seen in a number of prehistoric burial chambers, and the famous triple spiral at Newgrange in County Meath may symbolize the cyclic nature of death and rebirth. Much later usages of the labyrinth idea in the form of mazes cut in the turf or built of stones may also have had a fertility significance, in that ritual dances or races through the mazes could have symbolized the rebirth of life at springtime. Documentary evidence is lacking, but May Eve games were certainly held at one turf maze, the ‘Julian’s Bower’ at Alkborough, Humberside.’ [from *Earth Rites* by Janet & Colin Bord. Paladin Books 1982].

In reference to the purpose of these various customs, Janet and Colin Bord write: ‘The customs may become clearer if we instead describe them as magical rites performed to raise energy, which is then directed to the desired goal, which is usually the fructification of crops, cattle, people, and the well-being of the land itself.’

As Samhuinn marks the beginning of Winter, Bealteinne marks the beginning of Summer. On May 1st the cattle were taken to the summer pastures until Samhuinn, having been driven through the Bealteinne fires to ensure their fertility.

The Order ceremonies are of necessity working at a different level. Fertility and the rising powers of spring are celebrated and honoured in the context of the spiritual quest - the male and female symbols are the stone and water which are revered as symbols of fatherhood and motherhood respectively.

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When the ceremony was performed at Glastonbury, during Nuinn’s time, each participant laid their hand on the Tower at the summit of the Tor, saying: ‘In this Tor and Tower we honour the symbol of supernal fatherhood.’ Water from Chalice Well is then brought by the water-bearers to each Companion, who says in turn: ‘In the water from this eternal well of health we taste the sweetness of motherhood.’ The Glastonbury ceremony then includes the following dialogue between the Herald and Scribe after Excalibur has been held aloft by the Sword-bearer:

Scribe: Here are not only the Tor and the Well. There is the third wherein they become one.

Herald: What mean you by this?

Scribe: The Cave contains all, both the dragon and the treasure. The two pillars are the entrance thereto.

Herald: When Arthur descended to Annwn few there were that returned with him.

Sword-bearer: Excalibur is the symbol of the way of the few.

Of the three spring festas, Bealteinne is the third, and only in the traditional Glastonbury celebration of it does a full pentagram form itself naturally in the landscape, out of the unusual nature of the site: Excalibur the symbol of Spirit, Aether and Will is drawn from the three elements of earth, as represented in the cave under the Tor, fire as represented by the dragon within it, and water, as represented by Chalice Well, while the Tower on the Tor represents air. The raising of Excalibur from the sterile fixity of earth, represents the triumph of Spirit over hard structured intellect; when raised out of fire, it represents the triumph of Spirit over the strife of passion, and when raised out of the water, it represents Spirit separated from emotionalism. But it is also important to note that in order for the sword to be raised it must first have experienced the strengthening power of earth, the annealing power of fire, and the calming power of the waters of 'still meditation'. In Glastonbury, the transformed and generalised nature of the fertility aspects of the Bealteinne ceremony are there for us to see in the masculine symbol of the Tor and Tower, and the feminine symbols of the rounded Chalice Hill and Chalice Well itself. The landscape portrays the mystery of creation as does the human body, and in this ceremony, whether performed actually in the Vale of Avalon, or at another place, we connect to the power of that mystery to celebrate the height of Spring.

At this time of the union of the Feminine and Masculine powers, May your celebration of Bealteinne open you fully to the creativity and abundance of Life.

THE GATEWAY TO SUMMER

Beltaine, on the 1st of May, is one of the two great gateways into the Celtic and Druid year, ushering in the cycle of summer, which lasts until Samhain, (November 1st). The sun now pours its light and warmth onto the Earth, and all her creatures bask in the joyous tide of burgeoning life, sensuality, fertility and abundance. The bright procession of summer days last longer than the nights, and the seemingly endless winter nights of being cooped up inside are but a faint memory of long ago.

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The name stems from the Irish Gaelic "Bealtaine" (Scottish Gaelic "Bealltainn"). In his glossary, the 9th century monk Cormac of Cashel says that it was named after an 'idol god,' but he may have been mixing up the native tradition with Baal, the Middle Eastern god mentioned in the Bible. Some scholars believe the festival might have been named for a Celtic god of the sun, Bel, Beli or Belinus, whose mythology has been obscured by time. But 'bel' is also a common Celtic prefix meaning 'bright, fortunate.'

In ancient times, Beltaine was celebrated with huge gatherings on top of the sacred hills of the land, that were often topped by standing stones or cairns. Here the tribes would spend Beltaine Eve, staying up to watch the triumphant sun rise at dawn. All fires throughout the land were extinguished and rekindled at the sacred flame of the hilltop fire, which originally was presided over by druid priests. Lighting the fires was a ritual act that ensured the sun's light would bless the earth.

We can get some idea of the special rites of this time through listening to accounts from later centuries. In 17th century Scotland, for example, the wood for Beltaine fires had to be chosen from nine sacred trees. Nine men, or a multiple of nine – sometimes as many as eighty-one – were specially chosen to kindle the first sparks of the fire by taking turns at spinning a piece of wood through a hole in a plank. They had to be good and honourable souls, or the flame, which was a gift of the gods, would not spring forth. As soon as any sparks were seen, they applied a species of the fungus, agaric, which grows on old birch trees and is very combustible. Now the fire would appear suddenly as if by divine magic. From this newborn flame, the main bonfires were lit: these were often two in number, and people drove their cattle and other livestock between them in a ritual of purification.

As the fires blazed merrily through the night, there was singing and dancing around and through the flames. Young men leapt through the fires to bring good luck and protection to their livestock, while old folk slowly walked around the fire, muttering prayers. A man about to embark on a long journey, or get married, leapt backwards and forwards three times through the flames for luck. As the fire sunk low, the girls jumped across it to make sure they would obtain good husbands; pregnant women stepped through it in hopes of an easy birth; and mothers carried their children across the smouldering ashes for their health and protection. When the fire died down, the embers were scattered throughout the fields for good luck, while each household carried some back to kindle the new fire in their hearth. When the sun rose, those who had stayed up to watch it might see it dance for joy three times upon the horizon before leaping up in all its summer glory.

Another central tradition of Beltaine celebrations was to ‘bring back the summer.’ In later times, when in many areas Beltaine became more commonly known as May Day, this was called going a-Maying. Some members of the village went off into the woods the night before to gather boughs of white-blossoming hawthorn (the May tree) and other flowers of late spring. At dawn, they brought back their colourful, fragrant burdens to the village and processed in a dance around the houses, leaving bouquets and sprays on doorstep and windowsill, and often arousing the still-sleeping householders with songs of summer. In return, they expected to be given gifts of food or money, but if anyone failed to reward these messengers of summer, they were warned that their crops might fail and their animals not thrive. Stinginess was dangerous to the wellbeing of all: food had to be circulated generously within the community so that the circuit of life could be kept flowing. What was more, the Mayers were performing an important ceremony and deserved to be rewarded for their service, for through their song, dance and ritual, they actively hastened the return of summer to the community.

This festival also celebrates the natural feelings of love, courtship and the joyful expression of sexuality that arises in the human and animal realm at the onset of warm weather and the rising tide of the life force. Going a-Maying afforded a wonderful opportunity for young men and women to make love all night on soft grassy beds in the greenwood, far away from their parents’ watchful eyes. Nine months later, any resulting offspring were given the delightful name of ‘merrybegots’! In many areas of the British Isles, a tree was brought home from the woods and erected as a supreme symbol of life’s creative force in the centre of the village. Musicians played beneath it, while dancers, dressed in gaily-coloured clothes, bedecked with flowers, circled around it. A Victorian observer in a country village might have seen a procession of up to forty yoked oxen, all decorated with posies of flowers on the tips of their horns, drawing home a maypole covered with extravagant bunches of flowers, greenery, and ribbons from top to bottom, all painted in bright colours, while two hundred men and women followed behind. In Ireland, a May bush was more customary, made from whitethorn or holly,

and decorated with flowers, garlands, eggshells, and ribbons. Sometimes, candles were lit upon it, or a small, golden ball hung down, as a symbol of the sun. It was borne around the neighbourhood on a short pole and people danced beneath it.

In some parts of Wales, the men and young boys of the village formed two teams. One represented Winter and was led by a captain dressed in a long coat and hat, trimmed with fur. He carried a stout blackthorn stick and a shield studded with tufts of wool to represent snow, while his companions wore waistcoats of fur decorated with balls of white wool. The other was Summer, and its captain wore a white smock decorated with garlands of flowers and ribbons, and a broad-brimmed hat trimmed with flowers and ribbons. He bore a willow-wand wreathed with spring flowers and tied with ribbons. The mock battle commenced with the Winter team flinging straw and wood at their opponents, who used birch branches, willow-wands and young ferns to beat them off. After a lot of horseplay, Summer finally won the day. The victorious captain chose a man to be the May King and the people nominated a May Queen, who was crowned and led back in triumph to the village. So every Beltaine the Bride of the Earth weds her lover, the Green Man of the blossoming year.



LIVING THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

Since Bealteinne is a time of becoming aware of the creative, fecundative power of Spring, you may want to take some time in meditating on the male and female aspects within you. How well do they interact? How well do they communicate with each other? Having done this, you may wish to extend these thoughts to include any relationship you may be having. Your meditation could then widen to include your relationship with the world, and how you manifest your creativity in the world. Finally, you might like to align yourself to the rising energies of the Natural world around you, so that your creativity and vitality is enhanced.

If you're not planning a ceremony as such, or in addition to your celebration, here are some suggestions for things you can do to acknowledge and attune to the energy of the time

ASSOCIATIONS TO BELTANE FERTILITY, BLOSSOMING, CREATIVITY, UNION, MAY FLOWERS (HAWTHORN), THE GREEN MAN, FIRE, ORANGE

Find a flower garden in bloom and spend some time watching the bees working the flowers.

Kick off your shoes and go barefoot in a park or in your yard.

Write a love poem or song.

Celebrate your sexuality in a new or special way.

Do something creative that you don't usually do, whether it's making a piece of art or taking a creative approach to a problem.

If you're a woman, spend a day trying to see things from men's points of view. If you're a man, spend a day trying to see things from women's points of view.

Just before sunset on the evening of the full moon nearest to Beltane, go out to a field, park, rooftop or hilltop where you can see to both the West and the East. Wait and watch as the moon rises on one side of you and the sun sets on the other (a good time to make love!)

Pair all your odd socks. Go to an agricultural show. Join a club. Make a new work team or party.

Enter a competition.

Dance or movement meditation: Dance around a candle. Make small vibrations with your heels, knees, or hips. Let them grow filling your whole body. Dance to the 'Fire Bird Suite' or similar 'fiery' music. Leap and cry out.

BELTANE SOLO CEREMONY



Prepare but don't light two fires or candles to the Southeast of the centre of your circle. They should be about a meter apart. Have matches or a lighter to hand. By the one on your right (as you face out from the centre) place objects associated with the Sun – gold or yellow colours or flowers, etc. and with masculinity. By the one to your left, place objects associated with the Moon – silver, grey and white, etc. and with the feminine. If you have a wand and a chalice, put them to the right and left. If you are left-handed, reverse these placements and the corresponding directions and words given in the ritual. If you like, you may have candles lit in each Quarter as well. You may place your altar at the farthest SE point of your circle. On it, or just on the ground, have some flowers – ideally a flowering plant, and even more ideally, the same sort of plant as the seed you planted at Alban Eilir. Have your spiritual journal or a notebook and pen ready at the centre.

THE OPENING

Enter your circle from the West. On entering, pause for several breaths, consciously leaving your daily concerns aside, allowing yourself to relax. Feel the earth beneath you and the sky above you, feel yourself grounded and centred. Sitting if necessary, perform the Light Body exercise. If you wish, you can now visualise your Sacred Grove. This is a good time to chant a few AWENS to 'warm up' your voice. It also helps you to feel connected, centred and relaxed.

Move sunwise to the East, pause and make a salutation, such as

O Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es) (choose a term you feel comfortable with), I ask for your blessings on this my ceremony of Beltane (pause, then turn to face inward) O Spirit of this circle, Spirit of this place, I ask for your blessings, guidance and inspiration on this my ceremony.

8 *Then complete the circuit and stand again in the West, facing inwards. Take a few moments to meditate on peace, and to feel peace within you. It may help to find an image that you associate with peace, which you can then use to help you awaken the feeling within yourself. Some examples are a quiet lake; a sphere of soft light; or a particular colour. If you are not very visual, you could try imagining a piece of music, or a musical note or chord, or simply the sound of the word 'peace' as you say it to yourself. Notice also how your body feels: let yourself breathe peace. If you like, you could say the Druid Prayer for Peace*

Deep within the still centre of my being, may I find peace.

Silently within the quiet of the grove, may I share peace.

Gently within the greater circle of humankind,

May I radiate peace.

Then walk to the North, face outward, and say

May there be peace in the North.

As you do, imagine peace flowing out to the North – picture it as it flows through your neighbours' homes and gardens, out across roads and forests, across towns and cities, all the way across the Earth.

Then turn and cross the circle to the South (skirting round the central fire or candle if you have one) and repeat. Then to the West, then across again to the East. Then step toward the centre and turn around in a full circle, saying

May there be peace throughout the whole world.

Now return to the West, facing centre, and, if you choose, say the Druid's Prayer:

Grant, O Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es), thy protection,
and in protection, strength,
and in strength, understanding,
and in understanding, knowledge,
and in knowledge, the knowledge of justice,
and in the knowledge of justice, the love of it,
and in the love of it, the love of all existences,
and in the love of all existences,
the love of Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es) and all goodness.

Chant more AWENS.

Then, moving around to start at the East, cast your circle as taught in Gwers Seven, trying to visualise it clearly as you do so. Perhaps you can hear it, or feel it, as well as see it. Notice that the circle creates a container: feel yourself to be contained. When you have completed the circle and are again standing in the East, face in to the centre and say:

This is sacred time. This is sacred space. I am fully present, here and now.

Now, if you have learnt how to do this, bless and consecrate your circle with Water and Fire, then stand at the East. (Leave out this stage if you have not yet learned how to do this). Then turn to face outwards, and raise one or both hands in salutation and say:

With the blessing of the hawk of dawn soaring in the clear pure air, I call upon the powers of the East. 9

See the clear blue sky above and ahead of you and feel the blessing of the dawn and of the hawk, and sense power flowing into your circle from this direction. Then turn and walk sunwise to the South, and facing outwards say

With the blessing of the great stag in the heat of the chase, and the inner fire of the sun, I call upon the powers of the South.

See warm southern lands before you in the noon-day sun – sense the blessing of the stag and feel power flowing into your circle from this direction. Then walk sunwise to the West, and facing outwards say

With the blessing of the salmon of wisdom who dwells within the sacred waters of the pool, I call upon the powers of the West.

See the sun setting over the sea or a lake – sense the blessing of the salmon, and feel power flowing into your circle from this direction. Then walk sunwise to the North, and facing outwards say

With the blessing of the great bear of the starry heavens and the deep and fruitful earth, I call upon the powers of the North.

Gaze into a clear night sky – see the stars shining in the darkness, sense the blessings of the bear, and the Great Bear, and feel power flowing into your circle from this direction.

Then turn to face into the circle, and move your attention to the earth beneath you. Sense the energy of the earth flowing up into you, and the energy of the sky flowing down into you – meeting in the centre of your Being. Feeling connected to both Earth and Sky, say

May the harmony of my life and of this circle be complete.

THE RITE

Sit at the centre facing the SE and meditate on creativity in all its forms, from the creation of the Universe to the procreation of humans and animals and the pollination of plants. Consider the creative process of artists and inventors – how it moves in stages from dreaming and imagining to planning, building and making. Consider the nature of creativity generally, and look at creativity in your own life. Notice in what aspects of your life you are creative, and in what areas you're not. Consider the ways you'd like to develop and enhance your creativity.

When you're ready, move to the fire/candle on your left and light it. As you do so, be aware that you're also lighting and activating the feminine aspect of your own being. Meditate on what this means to you, what thoughts and images arise, what emotions and sensations. Make a conscious choice to open to this side of your nature. Say

10 I turn to my left, I bend toward the Moon,
I open myself to the Goddess in me.

When you're ready, move to the fire/candle on your right and light it. As you do so, be aware that you're also lighting and activating the masculine aspect of your own being. Meditate on what this means to you, what thoughts and images arise, what emotions and sensations. Make a conscious choice to open to this side of your nature. Say

I turn to my right, I tend toward the Sun,
I open myself to the God within me.

Now sit, stand or kneel exactly between the two and feel the two energies flowing into you, stimulating and awakening their corresponding qualities within your body, your mind and your heart. You may visualise a masculine figure on your right, a feminine one on your left, or you may sense or hear their presence. You may become aware of an animal presence on either side of you. You may visualise the two energies as flows of different colours entering you. Just notice what's there for you.

Become aware that the energy from the left is activating the right side of your brain, the non-linear, intuitive, imaging side, while the energy from the right is activating the left side of your brain, the linear and logical, verbal side.

When you are feeling the presence of both polarities, pick up your wand with your right hand and your chalice with your left. If you don't have these items, just make a pointing gesture with your right hand (one or two fingers extended, the rest folded away), and cup your left hand so that it forms a bowl shape. Lowering your wand or right hand point down into your chalice/ left hand, and say

I unite the powers of the Sun and Moon within me. With my wand/right hand I father the Child, with my chalice/left hand I mother it. Within me lives the alchemy of this union of opposites. Let the magical child of my creative nature blossom and thrive in the inner and the outer worlds.

Pause to allow yourself to be open to the depth and beauty of this moment. Then move beyond the fires and approach the Beltane altar and the flowering plant. Hold the plant and feel the energies of the Moon entering it from your left hand, the energies of the Sun through your right. Look at the flower and imagine how it has emerged from a bud, and the bud from the stem; how it was within the plant all along, even when the branches were bare, even when it was just a seed newly fallen from its mother. Imagine how it has absorbed nutrients from the soil and water, and how it has drawn into itself the heat of the sun. Now picture the plant growing rapidly before your eyes, new stems reaching out, new buds forming and flowers opening in profusion. Know that new forms of creativity can flower in your life too, though they may have been hidden or latent until now. Say,

From the divine union of Sun and Moon, of the masculine and the feminine, is born the Mabon, the third force, the energy of creation. I welcome the flowering of the Mabon within me and I pledge myself to cherish and nurture this bright child of creative energy, whatever form it may take in my life.

Replace the plant on the altar or ground, and when you're ready return between the fires/candles to the centre of the circle. Say

I thank you for my life on this earth and I ask, O Spirit/God/Goddess, for blessings on myself and my loved ones. Illuminate me from within. Fill me with the light of creation. Help me to radiate light upon the world by granting me the wisdom to use and direct the light always for good. I ask this in the name of the Sun Father, the Moon Mother, One Being of Light.

Sit and record your experiences of the ritual in your journal or notebook then enact

THE CLOSING

Stand at the East facing the centre, and say

It is the hour of recall. As the fire/light dies down, may it be relit in my heart. May my memory hold what the eye and ear have gained. *Now extinguish the central candle. Alternatively you can say:* As the radiance of this ceremony fades let it remain as a light in my heart. May my memory hold what the eye and ear have gained.

Chant CASCADING AWENS. Then say

May the spirits of the Four Directions be thanked for their blessings.

Walk sunwise to the North, face outwards and with raised hand/s in salutation say

In the name of the great bear of the starry heavens and of the element of earth, I thank the powers of the North.

Then Walk counter-sunwise to the West, face outwards and with raised hand/s in salutation say

In the name of the salmon of wisdom and the element of water I thank the powers of the West.

Then Walk counter-sunwise to the South, face outwards and with raised hand/s in salutation say

In the name of the great stag and of the element of fire, I thank the powers of the South.

Then Walk counter-sunwise to the East, face outwards and with raised hand/s in salutation say

In the name of the hawk of dawn and of the element air, I thank the powers of the East.

Turn to face the centre again, and pause to feel that the energies of each direction have ceased to flow into the circle. Then say

12 May the harmony of the land be complete.

Then uncast the circle counter-sunwise, return to the East and say

May the blessings of the Goddess/God/Spirit/Great Spirit be always with me. I declare this ceremony of Beltane is closed in the apparent world. May its inspiration continue within my being.

Then make whatever closing salutations you wish to the East, and exit sunwise.



BELTANE

GROUP CEREMONY

A meditation on creativity in one's own life, and the creative nature of duality is ideal preparation for this ceremony.

ADDITIONAL ROLES: Green King and Flower Queen (May King & Queen/Lord & Lady)

PREPARE: For this ceremony the men should decorate the circle with greenery. They should decorate the King in a similar fashion. The women should carry garlands/bunches of seasonal flowers to decorate the circle on arrival. The Queen should be similarly decorated. Druid 2 should have sufficient sprigs of hawthorn (or whatever flowering tree is available) to give to each participant.

The circle should be prepared with two fires or candles, in the centre of the circle. A container of small stones (pebbles or crystals) should be placed at the SE in advance.

When the circle is prepared, the men take their places within the circle first and await the women, led by Druid 2. When the women have entered and bedecked the circle with their flowers....

THE OPENING

HERALD : By the power of star and stone,
By the power of the land within and without,
By all that is Fair and Free,
We welcome you to this rite of Beltane,
In the grove/seed group/family/etc. of...

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WEST: We have come from East and West, North and South to be here together today. *(All join hands)*

DRUID 2: Let us take three breaths

Together with the Earth beneath us....
Together with the Sky above us....
Together with the Sea around us...

NORTH: With the blessings of Earth, Sea and Sky may our ceremony begin! (*All release hands*)

DRUID 1: (*Saluting East and facing outwards*) O Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es) (*Choose a term you feel comfortable with*) we greet you and honour you, and ask for your blessings! (*face inwards*) O Spirit of this place, O Spirit of this circle, we ask for your blessings, your guidance, and your inspiration on this our ceremony.

DRUID 2: Let us begin by giving peace to the quarters, for without peace can no work be.

(*Moving to salute each direction in turn, crossing the centre of the circle, then returning to place in the West*)

May there be Peace in the North.

May there be Peace in the South.

May there be Peace in the West.

May there be Peace in the East.

ALL: May there be peace throughout the whole world.

DRUID 1: Let us join in this prayer that unites all Druids:

ALL: Grant, O Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es), thy protection,
and in protection, strength,
and in strength, understanding,
and in understanding, knowledge,
and in knowledge, the knowledge of justice,
and in the knowledge of justice, the love of it,
and in the love of it, the love of all existences,
and in the love of all existences,
the love of Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es) and all goodness.

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ALL: 3 AWENS

DRUID 1: Let all disturbing thoughts be laid aside. (*Casts circle sunwise, while Druid 2 says*)

DRUID 2: The circle of our horizon – of our lives and lands, of time and of the year, of seasons and of goodness, of birth and of growing, of dying and of rebirth....

The circle can either be cast with a wand, staff, sword or forefinger, or in the following way - particularly if children are present - SOUTH: Let us mark out this circle with symbols of the season. (*Children/adults sprinkle confetti or seeds, flowers, petals or leaves in circle sunwise around participants while Druid 2 speaks as above*).

DRUID 2: As this circle is cast, the enchantment of the apparent world subsides. We stand together in the eye of the sun/by the light of the stars, here and now, between past and future. The earth below us, the heavens above us, and the circle/stones/trees/sea around us. This is sacred time. This is sacred space.

DRUID 1: Now let us consecrate this circle with Water and with Fire.

WEST or WATER BEARER: May our circle be purified and blessed with the Element of Water. (*moves sunwise with water*)

SOUTH or FIRE BEARER: May our circle be purified and blessed with the Element of Fire. (*moves sunwise with candle/incense*)

DRUID 1: We gather as equals, in our physical form here upon the earth. Each presence is a blessing, and with every breath we take, we breathe light and life into this circle.

DRUID 2: Let the four directions be honoured, and let the gateways of the Quarters be opened, that power and radiance might enter our circle for the good of all beings.

EAST (*turning and facing outwards*): With the blessing of the hawk of dawn soaring in the clear pure air, we call upon the powers of the East.

SOUTH (*turning and facing outwards*): With the blessing of the great stag in the heat of the chase, and the inner fire of the sun, we call upon the powers of the South.

WEST (*turning and facing outwards*): With the blessing of the salmon of wisdom who dwells within the sacred waters of the pool, we call upon the powers of the West.

NORTH (*turning and facing outwards*): With the blessing of the great bear of the starry heavens and the deep and fruitful earth, we call upon the powers of the North.

All four then turn to face into the circle.

ALL: May the harmony of our circle be complete.

THE RITE

DRUID 1: Let the Sun and Moon, the Bright Ones, shine above our centre.

DRUID 2: Let the Earth, our Mother bear witness.

DRUID 1: At Samhain we witnessed the death and decay that is part of the natural cycle of our lives. Now at Beltane we celebrate the fertility of Spring and the sacred gift of life.

DRUID 2: The Lady has appeared. In green she has dressed the land, flowers spring up in her footsteps and the breeze is scented with her blossom. The hawk, the stag, the salmon and the fox (*or other animals native to your region*) obey her call. The Lord answers the tides of Her power; in which is our beginning.

NORTH: In the name of the Lady, Sovereign of the Land.

SOUTH: In the name of the Lord, Guardian of the Wild.

WEST: By wind and water, by earth and fire.

EAST: By the ecstasy that is their gift.

DRUID 1: In the centre burn the twin fires of Bealteinne. Man and Woman; Goddess and God; Stars and Earth; each in each one of us. Let us now in perfect love and perfect trust centre ourselves in peace and in power.

*(Circle Reading. Each participant reads a line from the following, starting with **South**, reading it twice or more if there are many participants...Or one participant reads it all)*

16

Light of the sun warms the earth,
Quickening the pulse of the land.
The sleeping giant rises,
To answer the call of the king.
And I saw the May
with its myriad lights
And myriad plants.
I saw leaves
as they are wont to sprout
I saw branches
equally laden with flowers:
I saw the attributes of a most generous king...

And I saw the Lady smile as she passed by.
Mine are the riches of the lands of Albion
Mine their bounty,
Mine their kindness,
Mine their cloth,
And mine their victals,
Mine their mead from horns.
And the hand of the best of kings,
Lies in mine
And the hand of the sovereign Lord,
Lies in mine.

Adapted from two Taliesin poems

DRUID 1: Let us now witness in our sacred circle, and in the secret places of our hearts, the union of these powers, the Lord and Father of Life, and the Lady and Mother of the Land.

FLOWER QUEEN: (*Stepping forward from her place in the North East, looking directly at King*) I call to the Sower of Seed, free Lord of the Wild. I call to the father of the quickening life of my womb. To the woman be man, to the Queen, be King.

GREEN KING: (*Stepping forward from his place in the South East, looking directly at Queen*) I am the sower of the Seed. I am the Power of the Wild. With you I will father the child. With you I will husband the Land. I am King to the Queen and hold fast to your hand.

Druid 2: The Power of Love attends us in the union of god and goddess.

King walks round to take the Queen's hand in the North West. Together they walk between the sacred fires (The Beltane Gate), and cross over to the South East of the circle. They pick up the bowl of small stones (pebbles/crystals) and turn to face each other, holding the container together.

Druid 1 (*addressing all*): In the deep Earth grow Stars; light in the dark. Between the two fires of god and goddess, of woman and man, is born the Bright One, the Child of Light. Step forward now and pass through the Beltane Gate. Pass through the sacred fires and be renewed!

Beginning in the East, each participant goes sunwise around the circle to the North West, then steps between the sacred fires and approaches the Queen and King in the SE. Each woman receives a stone from the King, each man receives one from the Queen.

King or Queen (*quietly to each participant as they hand them the stone*): Of this the stone/crystal is a true token. Fill each with your prayer and, when the time is right, release this to the Universe by returning the stone/crystal to Earth or Sea.

Each participant then returns to their place.

When all have come through, the King & Queen hand each other a stone/crystal, then turn to face into circle.

If May flowers available:

Druid 1: The Goddess enfolds us in Her three natures. In the Elder; in the silver Birch; but today we honour Her and bless ourselves with Her May flowers.

Druid 2 now gives each participant in the circle a sprig of May.

Druid 1: From the divine union is born the Mabon, the energy of creation. Let us welcome the flowering of the Mabon within us, and pledge ourselves to cherish and nurture this bright child.

Brief Meditation

Druid 2: We thank you for our lives on this earth and we ask, O Spirit/God/Goddess, for blessings on ourselves and our loved ones. Illuminate us from within. Fill us with the light of creation. Help us to radiate light upon the world by granting us the wisdom to use and direct the light always for good. We ask this in the name of the Sky Father, the Earth Mother, One Being of Light.

THE CLOSING

DRUID 2: It is the hour of recall. As the fire/light dies down let it be relit in our hearts. May our memories hold what the eye and ear have gained.

All hold hands.

ALL: (3 times, pausing between each)
We swear, by peace and love to stand,
Heart to heart and hand in hand.
Mark, O spirit, and hear us now,
Confirming this, our sacred vow.

All Chant CASCADING AWENS.

DRUID 1: May the spirits of the Four Directions be thanked for their blessings.

NORTH: In the name of the great bear of the starry heavens and of the element of earth, we thank the powers of the North.

WEST: In the name of the salmon of wisdom and the element of water we thank the powers of the West.

SOUTH: In the name of the great stag and of the element of fire, we thank the powers of the South.

EAST: In the name of the hawk of dawn and of the element air, we thank the powers of the East.

All Turn to face the centre again.

ALL: May the harmony of the land be complete.

Circle is uncast counter-sunwise.

DRUID 1: May the blessings of the God & Goddess/Goddess/God/Spirit/Great Spirit be always with us. I declare this ceremony of Beltane is closed in the apparent world. May its inspiration continue within our beings.



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