



## The Twelve Days of Yule

*This series is courtesy of the AFA Germanic religious community. Its content does not match those of their AFA's booklet, "The Twelve Days of Yule in Word and Deed." which available for purchase on their website [www.runestone.org](http://www.runestone.org)*

### The First Day of Yuletide - Dec 21st

The holy season begins. The big challenge is to stop the commercial feeding frenzy, and to feed our souls instead. Try to break the cultural (anti-cultural?) trance today. Remember who you are: a person connected to the ancestors...to kin...to descendants...to the Holy Powers...to the natural world. Light a candle tonight, for the practice of Industriousness. But you've been industrious. Right now, it is time to do something else, to reap the rewards of your industriousness. Stop the action. Take a break. Go look at the stars or listen to the rain fall or feel the warmth of the fire or touch someone. Thus begins this Yuletide, Happy Mother's Night!

### The Second Day of Yuletide – Dec 22nd

Yule is a time of recapitulation, of summary, in which the whole year is represented in twelve days - one month per day. What else can you do in the remaining eleven days that has this same spirit of recapitulation? Read the Voluspa, perhaps the most beautiful and complete poem in the Elder Edda. In it we find the story of this present cycle of cosmic time, in its arising...its becoming...its falling away...to rise again. Don't read it all tonight, however. Spin it out slowly over the days. Finish at Twelfth Night. Read it aloud. Sense it in your body. Light a candle tonight, for Justice and be as just as the driving destiny that shapes the Wyrd of the World. Or, failing that, be as just as you can.

## Twelve Traits to Nourish

*There is nothing complicated about these twelve traits, yet they provide material for a lifetime of growth. To the extent you develop them in yourself, you will stand high above the crowd!*

### **Industriousness**

Be productively engaged in life. Avoid laziness. Strive to accomplish good things.

### **Justice**

Let equity and fairness be your hallmark. Treat others in accordance with what they deserve, and give each person a chance to show his or her best.

### **Courage**

Fear is natural, but it can be overcome. Train yourself to do the things you fear, both physically and morally.

### **Generosity**

An open hand and an open heart bring happiness to you and to others. The miserly are never happy.

### **Hospitality**

In ancient times, travelers were greeted with food, drink, and a warm place by the fire. See that your guests never want.

### **Moderation**

Enjoy all good things, but do not overindulge. No one admires a glutton or a person who cannot control his or her appetites.

### **Community**

Cooperate with kin and friends, do your fair share, and remember your responsibilities to others.

### **individuality**

Although we belong to a community, we are also individuals with distinct personalities and clearly-defined rights. Respect the individuality of others, and insist on the same in return.

### **Truth**

Be honest and straightforward in all your dealings. Avoid deceit and deception.

### **Steadfastness**

Learn to persist, to endure in the face of adversity without discouragement. Do not be blown about by every changing wind.

### **Loyalty**

Be steadfast in your commitment to others and to yourself. Have a true heart.

### **Wisdom**

Learn from your experiences. Grow in the understanding of the world, and of the human heart. Comprehend as much of the universe as you can in the years available to you.

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## The Third Day of Yuletide – Dec 23rd

The ancestors are always with us, but in some sense their presence is more immediate during Yule. We feel them in the moments of quiet, walking under the stars or through the wintry woods. They linger near the fireplace, too, as the crackling flames cast moving shadows across the dimmed room. And sometimes, when making grandma's favorite Yule recipe or just remembering what this season was like for us as children, the past seems to rub up against the present like a friendly cat that has stealthily, unnoticed, padded into the room. When we set a place for the ancestors at the Yuletide table, we know that in some way we cannot fully fathom, they delight in the attention. We think on those who have gone before us - their gift of life to us, and our obligation to burnish the family name with love and leave it shining all the more brightly for our having been here. This third day of Yuletide, light a candle for Courage and let it shine bravely across the years.

## The Fourth Day of Yuletide - Dec 24th

By whatever name one celebrates the winter holiday in the West, the giving of gifts is a central part of the season. Sometimes this descends into rank commercialism, but the idea of gift-giving itself is a thoroughly spiritual one. The giver and the one given to are united through the medium of that which is given. We give, and in a spiritual law as true as Newton's physics, we must then receive - even if the reward is not a material one. "The generous and bold have the best lives," the Havamal tells us - and note that the two traits are listed together. And is not the power of generosity the whole point of Dickens' marvelous tale, A Christmas Carol? Look closer at the story, and you will see a lesson how open-handedness gives a better life...not to mention an exact parallel between the three Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and To Come and the Norns that move behind the action in our own sagas and Eddas. Generosity is one of the tools we use to forge a good orlog, or "fate" for ourselves. Light then, a candle for Generosity. Give the brightness of the flame to the world around you, and watch it reflect back on you as well.

## The Fifth Day of Yuletide - Dec 25th

Yesterday I mentioned Charles Dickens' classic, A Christmas Carol. I recently watched an adaptation of this story, in the form of the movie Scrooge, starring Albert Finney in the role of the monumental miser himself. I was struck by the richness, the plenty, associated with the Spirit of Christmas Present. He was a giant figure, masculine, bedecked in holly and wearing a luxurious green robe that barely covered his otherwise bared chest. Indeed, the Spirit was the very figure of wealth. When he informed Scrooge that "I love life...and life loves me," it became plain that - whatever Dickens' intention - we were seeing none other than the God of the Vanir, Frey himself! The old Gods and Goddesses of our people are alive and well, lurking in the pages of literature produced a thousand years after the official demise of our native faith. They bring a timeless message of life, love, lust, and liberty. With the Yule season upon us, we can do no better than to heed this admonition to happiness and plenty! Let us light a candle for Hospitality, sharing our prosperity with kin and friends everywhere!

## The Sixth Day of Yuletide - Dec 26th

A few days ago, I stood on the scales down at the gym and discovered that I had gained four pounds over a period of perhaps a week and a half. Part of the increase resulted from fewer workouts over the period in question, but most of the extra weight came from too much eating and drinking - and worst of all, indulging in eating and drinking just before bedtime! Clearly, I had not been moderate. My response was to get on the treadmill and burn off 640 calories, being sure to get in some intense running to keep my metabolism elevated over the next few hours. Come to think of it, that wasn't very moderate of me, either. The truth is, it's not what we do SOME of the time that makes a difference - whether it's eating or running - but rather what we do MOST of the time. Perhaps we have to be moderate even in our moderation, punctuating our lives with variety in the form of occasional excess. Moderation in food and drink is particularly hard this time of year, but it is, after all, a time for celebration. Exercise some control as a matter of principle, but have fun, too. Light a candle for Moderation, and resolve to keep your sense of humor!

## Yule Lore

The date varies from December 20 to December 23 depending on the year in the Gregorian calendar. Yule is also known as the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere.

Yule, (pronounced EWE-elle) is when the dark half of the year relinquishes to the light half. Starting the next morning at sunrise, the sun climbs just a little higher and stays a little longer in the sky each day. Known as Solstice Night, or the longest night of the year, the sun's "rebirth" was celebrated with much joy. On this night, our ancestors celebrated the rebirth of the Oak King, the Sun King, the Giver of Life that warmed the frozen Earth. From this day forward, the days would become longer.

Bonfires were lit in the fields, and crops and trees were "wassailed" with toasts of spiced cider. Children were escorted from house to house with gifts of clove spiked apples and oranges which were laid in baskets of evergreen boughs and wheat stalks dusted with flour. The apples and oranges represented the sun. The boughs were symbolic of immortality (evergreens were sacred to the Celts because they did not "die" thereby representing the eternal aspect of the Divine). The wheat stalks portrayed the harvest, and the flour was accomplishment of triumph, light, and life. Holly and ivy decorated the outside, and inside of homes, in hopes Nature Sprites would come and join the celebration. Mistletoe was also hung as decoration. It represented the seed of the Divine, the Druids would travel deep into the forest to harvest it.

The ceremonial Yule log was the highlight of the Solstice festival. In accordance to tradition, the log must either have been harvested from the householder's land, or given as a gift... it must never have been bought. It was decorated in seasonal greenery, doused with cider or ale, and dusted with flour before set ablaze by a piece of last year's log. The log would burn throughout the night, then smolder for 12 days after before being ceremonially put out.

Many customs created around Yule are identified with Christmas today. If you decorate your home with a Yule tree, holly or candles, you are following some of these old traditions. The Yule log, (usually made from a piece of wood saved from the previous year) is burned in the fire to symbolize the Newborn Sun/Son.

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## The Seventh Day of Yuletide - Dec 27th

I sometimes think that the Yule season's time-transcending quality derives from nothing more than its regularity, and that almost any other yearly date, if we had strong and pleasant memories to mark it, would serve the same function. I can remember my early childhood - how the tree looked, what my brother and sister were doing, the paper candy cane I gave to the repairman who came to fix our (now) old-fashioned, cabinetstyle radio. I know that those things happened at just about this point on the Wheel of the Year, and somehow that gives me comfort. That moment half a century ago is now not so long ago, or far away; I could turn a corner any moment and find myself there again. Somehow, it all... touches. The Wheel is, of course, central to our understanding of Yule. When Nietzsche conceived the Eternal Return, was he intuitively tapping into a substratum of ancient lore? Only, we might say that instead of a wheel returning to the same point, it is actually a spiral, deviating from its unchanging course by the power of our Will. The spiral nevertheless connects all times, all events, and gives us a glimpse of eternity. Tonight we light a candle for Community, and think on the cohort of kith and kin that give us love and merriment through the years, as we journey on our endless gyre.

## The Eighth Day of Yuletide - Dec 28th

On the Seventh Day of Yuletide we lit a candle to Community. Today we light a candle to its apparent opposite, Individuality. Contradictory? Paradoxical? No, just another fundamental trait of the Northern European psyche, one illustrating the need for a consciously-maintained, dynamic balance rather than the will-less absorption of the self into a featureless consistency. Historically, the peoples of Europe are comfortable with cooperation and hierarchy - hence the value of Community. We are also the most ego-driven, selfassertive, and individualistic primates on the planet. Both these traits are perfectly capable of existing in the same human heart at the same moment. So light that candle for Individuality, hold it high, and defy any attempt by the group to blow it out!

## The Ninth Day of Yuletide - Dec 29th

It is significant that truth is so often compared to light. The analogy is a powerful one. Perhaps it springs from the fact that light reveals thing as they are, showing that which is hidden, while darkness obscures. In the light, we see what is, not what may be. This is not to deny the importance of the darkness. Darkness contains all potential. It is not merely the absence of light, but something that is, in its own way, just as vital. The long nights and short days of winter are pregnant with potential. A creative chaos, the womb of all that is unmanifest, lurks in the shadow. But in the fullness of time it must be replaced by rebirth, by manifestation, by light, by truth rather than ambiguity - and thus we have the return of Sunna, the Sun. Light a candle to Truth, and define the world. Notwithstanding, there is another dimension to our actions, and it may best be summarized as "participation." The logical process described in the paragraph above applies to the normal world of human experience, but beyond cause and effect there is a level on which we participate in, or become one with, the act of the sun's return. We do not cause the return but we do more than merely observe and celebrate; we become a part of it. It is in this spirit that we burn sunwheels, pour libations, and make invocations - that we may transcend who and what we normally are, and partake of eternity. So light your candle, and think on Loyalty - including, but not limited to, our loyalty to ourselves and to the highest, God-like potential that is within us.

## The Twelfth Day of Yuletide - Jan 1st

By now, hopefully, you have taken stock of the year past and thought about what you want to accomplish in the one to come...and that brings up the question of oaths, or at least resolutions, for the new year. I list the two separately because they are very different things. In ancient times, our people swore oaths on the Yule boar as he was led around the hall. Today, we may use only a loaf of bread baked in the shape of a boar, but the oath is no less binding than if a live, snorting, squealing boar had been brought into your dining room! And oaths, as you know, must be taken very seriously. I have noted that in modern times, many swear oaths when they would gain better reputation by staying silent... Resolutions are the common fare in American culture, and they are much less binding than oaths. This does NOT mean that they are to be taken casually or halfheartedly, but there is relatively little loss of spiritual might if one fails to attain them. They can be a useful tool for developing the will and making progress toward the high level of attainment that should be the long-term goal of all of us. When you make your choice, you don't want to be lacking in wisdom! Light a candle for Wisdom as you wrap up this Yule season, and turn your face toward the new year!

**Happy New Year, everyone!**

# Aspects of Yule Winter Solstice

## Deities of Yule

All Newborn Gods, Sun Gods, Mother Goddesses, and Triple Goddesses. The best known would be the Dagda, and Brighid, the daughter of the Dagda. Brighid taught the smiths the arts of fire tending and the secrets of metal work. Brighid's flame, like the flame of the new light, pierces the darkness of the spirit and mind, while the Dagda's cauldron assures that Nature will always provide for all the children. Other deities are Isis, Demeter, Gaea, Diana, The Great Mother. Gods-Apollo, Ra, Odin, Lugh, The Oak King, The Horned One, The Green Man, The Divine Child, Mabon.

## Symbolism of Yule

Rebirth of the Sun, The longest night of the year, The Winter Solstice, Introspect, Planning for the Future.

## Symbols of Yule

Yule log, or small Yule log with 3 candles, evergreen boughs or wreaths, holly, mistletoe hung in doorways, gold pillar candles, baskets of clove studded fruit, a simmering pot of wassail, poinsettias, christmas cactus.

## Herbs of Yule

Bayberry, blessed thistle, evergreen, frankincense holly, laurel, mistletoe, oak, pine, sage, yellow cedar.

## Foods of Yule

Cookies and caraway cakes soaked in cider, fruits, nuts, pork dishes, turkey, eggnog, ginger tea, spiced cider, wassail, or lamb's wool (ale, sugar, nutmeg, roasted apples).

## Incense of Yule

Pine, cedar, bayberry, cinnamon.

## Colors of Yule

Red, green, gold, white, silver, yellow, orange.

## Stones of Yule

Rubies, bloodstones, garnets, emeralds, diamonds.

## Activities of Yule

Caroling, wassailing the trees, burning the Yule log, decorating the Yule tree, exchanging of presents, kissing under the mistletoe, honoring Kriss Kringle the Germanic Pagan God of Yule.

## Spellworkings of Yule

Peace, harmony, love, and increased happiness.

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