

While you may not be able to tell, based on the temperature outside, spring has sprung and our clocks have sprung forward by one hour. What a joy it is to have daylight last longer into the evening. I trust we've all acclimated to having lost one hour of our lives.

Whether we calculate spring based on the weather, the equinox, or the budding of trees or plants, Spring brings a sense of uplift, hope, excitement and renewal. This is especially true for those living in a northern climate.

We've endured bone chilling cold, snow storm after snow storm, sleet and freezing rain. We've endured the daily hassle of putting on boots, bulky coats, gloves and hats in order to venture outside, even if just to put out the trash. We've either been forced to or have chosen to stay in doors. Many of us have come to recognize the characteristics of cabin fever.

In ancient times, spring brought a sense of hope and potential. By the end of winter, people were often at the end of their stored foodstuffs. Rationing was not an uncommon requirement. Springtime brought hope for another harvest, it brought relief from the cold and dark. The spring brought the earth back to life again. It brought new life, both literally and figuratively. It easily became a time of celebration.

Even though they may have morphed, many of the celebrations of old, remain with us today. Like the changing of the seasons, these celebrations have become ritualized. The Hindu have Holi, the Sikh have Hola Mohalla, often simply called Hola (not to be confused with the Hindu Holi), Jews celebrate Purim and Passover, Christians celebrate Easter.

In the Northern Hemisphere, the spring equinox marks the time when the sun passes over the celestial equator, when the day is shared equally by darkness and light. It also marks the beginning of more daylight than darkness. It's long been a day of celebration.

Wiccans and other neopagans celebrate the spring equinox with the festival of Ostara. (There will be such a celebration after service this morning in the Baldwin room.) The festival includes symbols of the abundant fertility of spring; eggs, rabbits, seeds and flowers, along with altars, rituals, and feasts.

The Anglo-Saxon goddess, Ostara, a spring goddess, who represents the dawn, oversees budding plants and the renewed recognition of the earth's fertility. The Horned God, often perceived as the god Pan, is also included in the festival, representing the festive enjoyment of nature, hunting and dancing.

These festivals were so prominent in the ancient world that as Christianity spread, it pulled them into the celebration of Easter; that prominent celebration of a new life of salvation. While they jettisoned the Festival of Ostara, they kept the bunnies, eggs and flowers.

Wikipedia tells us:

*The Festival of Isis was held in ancient Egypt as a celebration of spring and rebirth. Isis features prominently in the story of the resurrection of her lover, Osiris. Sir James Frazer says in *The Golden Bough* that "We are told that the Egyptians held a festival of Isis at the time when the Nile began to rise... the goddess was then mourning for the lost Osiris, and the tears which dropped from her eyes swelled the impetuous tide of the river."*

***In Iran**, the festival of No Ruz begins shortly before the vernal equinox. The phrase "No Ruz" actually means "new day," and this is a time of hope and rebirth. Typically, a lot of cleaning is done, old broken items are repaired, homes are repainted, and fresh flowers are gathered and displayed indoors. (Sound familiar?) The Iranian new year begins on the day of the equinox, and typically people celebrate by getting outside for a picnic or other activity with their loved ones. No Ruz is deeply rooted in the beliefs of Zoroastrianism, which was the predominant religion in ancient Persia before Islam came along.*

***In Ireland**, St. Patrick's Day is celebrated each year on March 17. St. Patrick is known as a symbol of Ireland, particularly around March. One of the reasons he's so famous is because he drove the snakes out of Ireland. What many people don't realize is that the serpent was actually a metaphor for the early Pagan faiths of Ireland. St. Patrick brought Christianity to the Emerald Isle, and did such a good job of it that he practically eliminated Paganism in that country.*

In ancient times, when planting was required to sustain a community, clearing away debris and weeds was an important step before spring planting could occur. Remnants of those rituals remain as well. I've always associated spring with spring cleaning. It was a ritual of sorts in my mother's house.

Indoor cleaning began long before yard and garden cleanup. I grew up in Schenectady and often spring weather lagged significantly past the official beginning of spring. Mom would generally pick a Saturday, or two and engage all us kids in spring cleaning. Not only were we involved in thorough cleaning of rugs and corners, we combed through our closets and washed windows.

I suspect those days are mostly gone for most of us. I don't have a sense that our culture places a priority on spring cleaning as in the days of yore. Non-the-less, spring remains a time of renewal, of new beginnings, a time of potential and dreams.

There is nothing like the dreams that get stirred by spring training in baseball camps or opening day in the big leagues. Many a dream come crashing to the floor in the run-up to the sweet sixteen and the final four in the NCAA basketball tournaments. In men's college hockey, nothing beats the end of the season trek through the Frozen Four to a national championship crown.

But for me, I become excited when I see the trees begin to come alive. The tips of branches show life first, as they begin to change color. My breath is often taken away when I'm captivated by that tawny yellow of a graceful Weeping Willow tree. As spring settles in and the leaves on trees begin to come out, there is a lime green color I adore, a color I don't think exists in nature at any other time of the year.

What truly renews my spirit is seeing the tip of plants begin to poke up through the dark, wet soil. Truth be told, as soon as there is bare ground, I begin to walk around the yard to see what's coming up. By the time the snow is completely gone, it becomes almost a daily mantra for me. It truly is a meditation on renewal, hope and possibility.

Spring brings a sense of uplift, hope, excitement, renewal, rebirth. When the warm weather birds return, it's almost as if a piece of life itself has been reborn. We can hear them sing in the morning and watch as they tug at twigs or pieces of string as they begin to build their nests. When I feel the heat of the sun on my face, I'm almost forced to stop and just take it in.

Psychology Today tells us, when we think of renewal we often think of rebirth; something old dies and something new is born. They ask, "why not use this season of renewal as a reminder to get rid of things that are weighing you down and sapping your energy?" They offer a list of seven rituals for spring:

- 1) declutter: get rid of anything you no longer need. If you haven't worn it in two years, toss it or give it to charity.
- 2) Clear out mental and emotional clutter; allow ourselves to let go of the past in order to make room for new things to come into our lives. They tell us to challenge limiting beliefs about ourselves and about how things should be. From personal experience, I know that limiting beliefs are more powerful than we might imagine and we often don't even recognize they exist. We only see them by slowing down. Sometimes the universe simply doesn't accept our view of how things should be, and we expend a lot of energy fighting a losing battle.
- 3) Start a Practice: A new discipline will ensure that you invite mindfulness into your life. A daily practice affords you a "time-out" from your every day routine. It's a gift to your self; a promise to honor who you are. You can start a spiritual practice such as yoga, meditation, or chi gong or begin to read sacred texts of cultures or traditions. They say look for the universal themes that connect us all. They also suggest walking as a practice and encourage us to change our routes often in order to change our perspective.

- 4) Focus on spring as a time of new beginnings and resolve to begin something brand new. Explore your creativity. Learn a new language, take piano lessons, volunteer your time. I've started to paint with acrylics and I'm having a great time. Still have a hard time mixing colors but I'm making progress.
- 5) Spend time outdoors, plant a herb or flower garden. Plant a tree with your child or make a bird house; these things provide a connection to the earth and continuity to life.
- 6) Take a trip, maybe a personal retreat all by yourself for time and space to contemplate, refresh and renew. Or plan a family trip. Get away for a change of pace.
- 7) Simplify your life; slow down, find a way to quiet your mind, make quality time for yourself. Downshift, streamline your life to enhance the overall quality of your life. My addition would be, this may mean you cut back on some of your children's commitments to which you must commit your time and energy. Focus on creating the life you want to have.

Good tips all, from Psychology Today.

Spring is a time of rebirth and revival. Each year it comes to us full of new possibilities. As it's famously been said, "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both. And be one traveler, long I stood. And looked down one as far as I could, To where it bent in the undergrowth; Then took the other, as just as fair...."

May spring put a spring in your step.