

A Year of Living Shamanically

Part 5: The Summer Solstice – celebration and action

The Summer Solstice, on or around June 21st in the northern hemisphere, is the longest day (and shortest night). Also known as midsummer, it is the time when the solar energy is at it's high. In terms of the Medicine Wheel, it corresponds with

Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
East	South	West	North
spring	summer	autumn	winter
6am	12 am	6pm	12pm
air	fire	water	earth
future	present	past	timeless
ideas	actions	persevering	endings
thinking	deciding	feeling	being
mind	willpower	feelings	body
buds	flowers	fruit	seed
child	youth	middle age	elder
breath	warmth	fluids	food

Exploring these more will help us get to the heart of meaning of this time on the wheel. Let's start with the cycle of a flowering plant. If winter there is the seed, in spring the bud, summer is the flowering, before giving way to the fruit of the autumn. If you have been following the earlier articles, and practicing the idea of working with the Medicine Wheel to follow plans through a yearly cycle, then ideally by now your plans are in full swing. The planning was done at the beginning of the year, the ground prepared, the seeds planted, and now things are in action. If so, then this can be a time to take a break and enjoy life, before the busy harvest period in the autumn (hence the idea of the summer holiday). If not, then in terms of plans (unlike actual gardening), it's not too late! In fact, as well as helping us live more in harmony with the seasons, the Medicine Wheel is also a model we can use to help us with issues irrespective of the actual time of year. In this sense, this particular point on the wheel is a reminder to get going. It shows us we need to stop procrastinating and endlessly planning, and instead we need to make a decision and act on it; to get busy; to harness our willpower. So, do a review. How are your plans going? Have you been dithering, or letting things slip? Do you need to move from air and get fiery?

Like Beltane, Midsummer is a fire element time. Fire is an element many people have an issue with. These are some themes that relate to, and come from, the fire element...



Directions. Goals. Purpose. Action. Vitality. Lack of vitality. Anger. Will. Assertiveness. Power. Powerlessness. Power-over. Extroverted. Self-centered. Restless. Impatience. Impetuous. Dramatic. Reactive. Excessive. Proud. Arrogant. Selfish. Humility. Zest. Passion. Confidence. Vision. Clarity. Courage. Motivation. Energy. Inspiration. Honesty. Self-awareness. Optimism. Empowerment. Disempowerment. Genuineness. Shame. Warmth. Humiliation. Forgiveness.

For most people, there are several themes in there that are challenging. It is if fire has a light and a dark side. Of all the elements, fire is the only one we have to learn to use (we just live on the earth, drink water,

breath air, but we had to learn to work with fire). Fire is a tool which we can use well, but used badly it can get out of control and burn. If we are not taught to use fire well, we may have issues with it. We can overuse fire and become arrogant, selfish, bossy, domineering, even aggressive and violent. Conversely we may sit on our fire and become unassertive, put-upon, dominated, feel powerless, unassertive, lacking in confidence, and eventually depressed. Depression is always an issue with the fire element (the fire is what is being 'de-pressed'), in the sense of depression being either anger turned inwards, and/or a sense of powerlessness. If one looks at the healthy, positive qualities of fire, they are the antithesis of feeling depressed.

As human beings, we usually think we can turn off, or chose to ignore, just one aspect of an element. But, in fact, we can't. If we were brought up seeing anger modeled badly, say by our parents arguing and being aggressive, we may make the (unconscious) decision to not be angry. However, to turn off our (natural feelings of) anger, we have to turn off the whole fire element, and all the other things that go with it. This includes a whole list of positive things, including things like spontaneity, happiness, motivation, focus, ability to be healthily assertive and draw good boundaries, joy and optimism.



Of course, the opposite may happen. In growing up with fire being modeled badly, we may learn to misuse and overuse fire. Or, if we don't know how to be healthily assertive, sitting on our fire until we erupt and blow our top, and then feel ashamed. Whatever way we have gone, the fact is that we have to 'grasp the nettle' and learn to use fire well. Fire used well allows us to harness our willpower and consciously chose the life we live.

So, if you go through the list of fire themes, just how *is* your relationship with the fire element? How do you let it operate in your life? What messages did you get about it? Where does your conditioning about it go back to? Are there things about it you want to (need to) change? The summer solstice is an ideal time to work with these issues.

Shamanically, if you have issues with fire, you journey. Take your power animal(s) with you, and any other trusted guides, and journey to meet to meet your fire 'adversary' – something that represents your problems with the fire element. Really, of course, the adversary is usually an ally in disguise. Ask your guides for help to work with and resolve the issue. Maybe you need to do a soul retrieval to get back your lost fire. Or maybe some cord-cutting to let go of other peoples' messages about fire that have been unhealthy influencing you, or that no longer serve you. If you need more fire maybe you could deliberately journey to meet a fiery animal helper. This could be one of the hunters, such as Tiger, Wolf or Lion. The birds of prey belong to the air element as birds, but to fire as hunters; the clarity and decisiveness of birds such as Hawk and Falcon can help cut through indecision and procrastination. Or work with fiery stones such as sunstone, fire agate or fire opal. Conversely, animals such as Rabbit, Mouse or Deer may be able to teach you about gentleness. Your guides will help you with what you need if you ask them.

Healthily fire brings joy and optimism. The summer solstice is a time to celebrate being alive. However in talking to people who love the summertime, I've been struck by how many of them expressed feeling a sense of sadness at the summer solstice, as it signals a turning point where the days start to become shorter and the nights start to draw in. With this, the medicine wheel can really teach us about impermanence, and accepting that nothing lasts and everything must make way. That being said, at the moment though, it *is* mid summer! Fire, more than any other element can teach us about enjoying the moment and living joyously *in the here and now*. This is why it is this few weeks that is the time for festivals and gatherings all over the world. So celebrate! It is time to dance, drum, barbecue, picnic, laugh, have a bonfire, get outside, and remember how to simply enjoy being alive.



Wishing you a joyful solstice!

If you missed the previous articles in this series, they are available to download from [here](#).
[Paul Francis](#) teaches [shamanism](#) and [therapeutic-shamanism](#) in the UK, where he also works as a homeopath, polarity therapist and psychotherapist. He is the creator of the Power Animal Essences (www.animal-essences.co.uk) and the Harmonic Resonances (www.harmonic-resonances.co.uk).