

An Invitation to Open Our Hearts

Creating the Festivals for Our Time

Somer Serpe

As Waldorf Early Childhood teachers we have accepted the important task of providing an atmosphere of love, warmth and gratitude in which the young child feels recognized and accepted as a newly journeyed being from the spiritual world. We carefully weave reverence, beauty and intention into our environment and activities to acknowledge this journey while gently guiding the young child into the earthly world with joy and wonder. In the eyes of the child we can see our own souls' purpose as we begin the sacred task of renewing the relationship between the spiritual world, mother earth and the wisdom of the stars. The festivals are the celebration of this sacred task and therefore need to honor what each child has come to earth already knowing.

The festivals bring us together in a social and spiritual deed. They are physical manifestations of the soul quality of the seasons. They unite our souls' rhythm with that of the earth, the sun, the moon and the stars. We know these rhythms deeply and yet we also know that many of the physical forms of our beloved festivals do not speak to the universal human. In our attempt to remedy that, we have made well-intended changes to our festivals over the years in many ways. We have kept old traditions but given them new names so that we won't offend. We have incorporated as many cultural festivals as we can into one season so as not to exclude. We have celebrated the purely physical aspect of nature to eschew any spiritual ties. In some cases, we have even considered giving up the festivals altogether. Sometimes we have created these new forms because of or in spite of our own inner life. Often our "new" festivals can feel contrived, truncated and unenlivened. In the end, are we not left less united than when we began and are we truthfully meeting the children before us?

If we remember that each human is a spiritual being, then we can be unapologetically spiritual in our festivals. Moreover, our festivals can serve as a healing balm for our world at a time when society places the importance of science over spirituality and the individual over humanity. To imagine a festival life that honors every human spirit, we need to honor the spiritual essence of the cosmic year which has informed the beautiful festivals that we have come to cherish and will inform the new festivals we wish to create. To always be aware of and truly know the other, we can look to the festivals to inform each other, weave into each other and echo in one another.

This is a process of renewal like any other. It doesn't happen all at once; it is a living, breathing picture. This process doesn't discard that which came before, but it happens precisely because of the wisdom from which it was born. The transformation happens within us, not outside of us. There is a certain amount of individual work and self-reflection needed before connecting to the other. It is the being of love within us all that makes this possible. It goes into us, creates forces within us, weaves through us and then out of us. When the spirit informs us and we are open to receiving it, a certain alchemy must take place in order for us to bring it out into the social sphere in a way that truly unites us all.

How do we do this in a conscious way? We look to the spiritual world and we look to the wisdom of the earth. We look to the elemental world and the mood of the seasons. We look to the indigenous people who celebrated the land on which we stand, and we look to the threads that are universal in all cultures. This is an invitation to consider the universal threads:

*Light and Dark, Warm and Cold, Movement and Stillness, Balance and Breathing
Breathing Out and Breathing In, Nature Consciousness and Self Consciousness,*

Expansion and Contraction, Birth, Death, Rebirth, Transformation

Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter

Sun, Moon, Earth, Stars

Air, Fire, Earth, Water

Sylphs, Salamanders, Gnomes, Undines

Movement, Ballance, Touch, Life

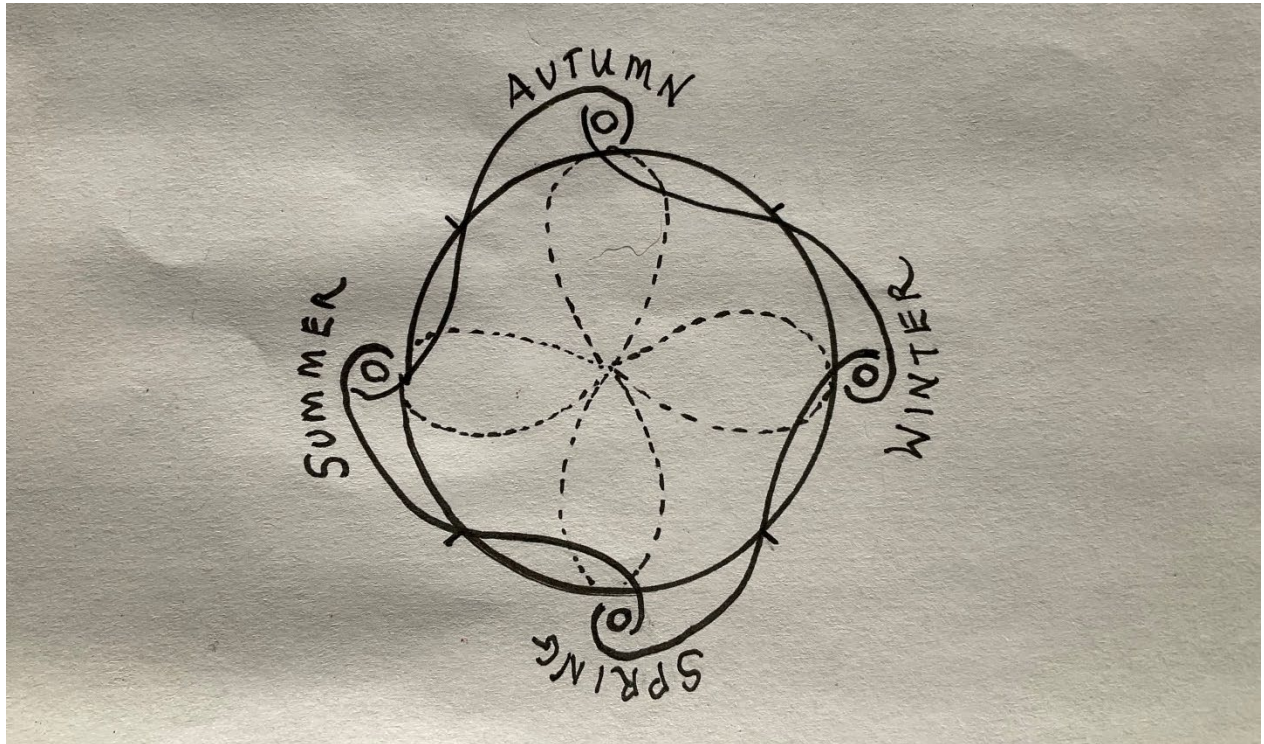
Astral, I, Physical, Etheric

Thinking, Feeling, Willing

Roots, Leaves, Flowers, Seeds

Food, Song, Art,

Gratitude, Harmony, Love, Courage



We will begin to know these essential imaginations intimately if we consciously begin to feel the shifts in nature and the cosmos in our souls just as the young child feels them unconsciously. Then we can bring this essence into a physical form of celebration to the children, their families and our communities with love, authenticity and joy.

Once we have worked through the inner meaning of the season and the festival, we can ask the following questions of ourselves and with our colleagues:

- How can I bring this festival in a picture that captures the essence of this festival and is appropriate for the children in my class?
- How will I engage their four senses?
- What part can the parents or families play?
- What is the giving and receiving in which we will all participate?

We can allow our heart wisdom to inform our deeds so that the festivals we create tend the garden of our souls and honor every young child's unfolding. As we honor our connection to the living, breathing earth and our spiritual foundation, let us not forget that we are on this sacred heart path together, and we have all we need within us to create a true festival life for the children, for each other and for all humanity.

***Somer Serpe** trained as an artist and as a teacher, earning her BFA degree at Parsons School of Design and her Master's Degree in Waldorf Early Childhood Education at Sunbridge College. After teaching Nursery and Kindergarten at the Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School for 15 years, Somer now leads Forest Parent Child Programs in Massachusetts and New York. Somer is a Northeast Regional Representative for WECAN and serves as a mentor for teachers and schools as well as an inspirational coach for parents. She is the Assistant EC Director at Sound Circle Center for Arts and Anthroposophy and leads workshops and parent education opportunities around the country. Somer enjoys gardening, puppetry, singing, purposeful work and creating healing stories for children and parents.*