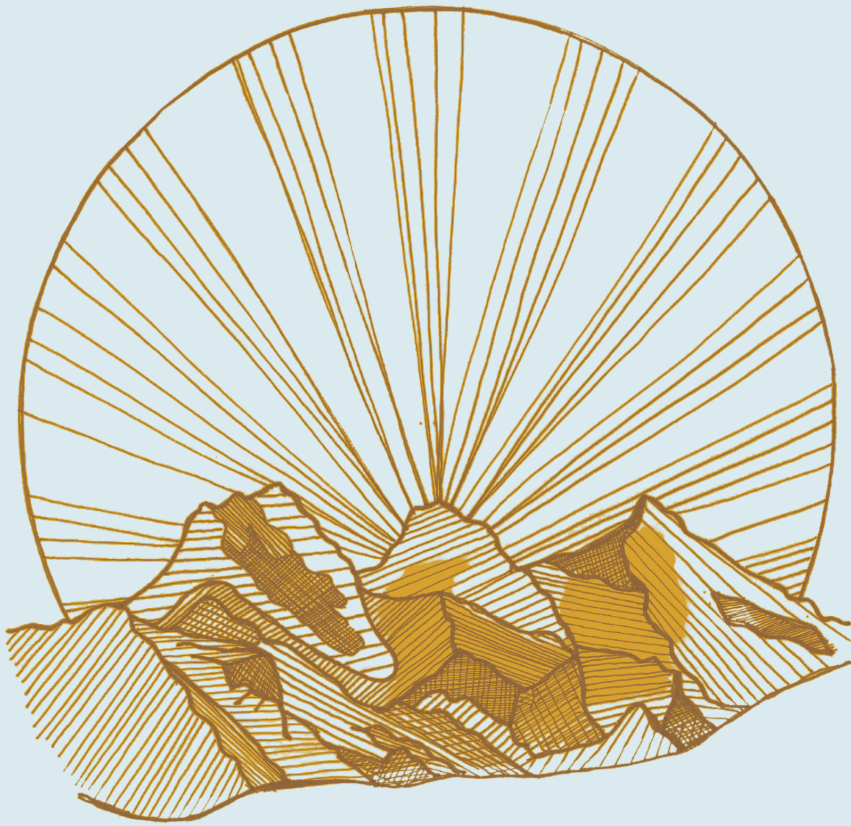




winter
solstice
reflection



The winter solstice is the day of the year with the fewest hours of daylight, and it marks the start of astronomical winter. After the winter solstice, days start becoming longer and nights shorter as spring approaches.

- The word solstice is derived from the Latin sol ("sun") and sistere ("to stand still"), because at the solstices, the Sun's declination appears to "stand still." The seasonal movement of the Sun's daily path (as seen from Earth) pauses at a northern or southern limit before reversing direction.
- The Winter Solstice is caused by the earth's tilt on its axis and its orbit around the sun.
- Humans may have observed the winter solstice as early as the Neolithic period—the last part of the Stone Age, beginning about 10,200 BC.
- Solstice has historically been viewed as a time of death and rebirth.
- Rituals in Germanic, Scandinavian, Druid and many other cultures held celebrations and rituals to herald the return of the sun and the hope of new life.





Ways to Honour Solstice

- **Build a Yule altar to honor the return of the sun.**
 - An altar is a structure that can be made with natural found items. It can be made to remember or commemorate an event. The purpose of the Yule altar is to honor the return of the sun, so one of the most important items is a candle that symbolizes the sun. Fill the altar with symbols of winter like pinecones, evergreen boughs of fir and cedar.
- **Give Back to Nature.**
 - The winter solstice is a time to celebrate the natural world. Take some time during the day to scatter seeds for local birds and wildlife to give back to your home's original community.
- **Light candles.**
 - Being the shortest day means the solstice is also the longest night of the year, and one of the original traditions was rooted in candlelight—both for the needed light, and to celebrate the return of the sun in the coming months. Using a tabletop or a bucket to place candles in, places unlit candles either in a circle or a varied pattern, depending on your preference. In the centre place a candle that symbolizes the sun (ideally in yellow or gold) in the center. Light the sun candle first, and then the rest of your candles, and you can recite a ritual (like the following one) while doing it, too.

- From "Ways to Honour Solstice" Nena Farrell

<https://www.sunset.com/lifestyle/wellness/winter-solstice-rituals-nature>





Questions for Reflection

- What associations do you have with darkness?
- What are the gifts of darkness biologically and in the natural world? What would happen if we did not experience darkness?
- How does darkness teach you about your own edges, gifts, beliefs, fears?
- How do we define & explain darkness culturally? What words get used? How do these words shape your understanding or experience of darkness?
- What connections do you see between darkness, slowness, and hibernation?
- What is darkness inviting you into in this season? Where is it speaking to you? Where do you feel it in your body or emotional experience?
- How can you practice honouring the dark?
- How does your body feel when the glow of natural light from the sun or a fire touches it? How does your body feel when it is in darkness? What does darkness feel like? When does it feel cool? Cozy? Inviting? Or intimidating? Why?
- What associations do you have with light?
- What are the gifts of light biologically and in the natural world? What would happen if we did not experience light? What if we experience too much of it?
- What is seeking your attention right now?
- How can you practice welcoming the light back?
- What can I learn from the winter solstice about light and darkness? What might solstice teach me about this year





Solstice Candle Ritual

Darkness, you have been our guide this season. In a year where we have been rushed into a return to pre-pandemic productivity, you have reminded us that as earth creatures we are bound to seasonal rhythms of slowness, deep rest and a stilling of our movements.

You've invited us into the dissonance between current capitalistic values and the deeper values you impart. You nudge out of comfortable ways of existence prompting us to recall that to move in the darkness is to decentre predominant ways of experiencing the world through sight. You caress us; inviting explorations of sensory and intuitive ways of knowing and being.

Thank you for luring us into deeper embodiment, by helping us to accept uncertainty as our daily reality, but also as a doorway into mystery.

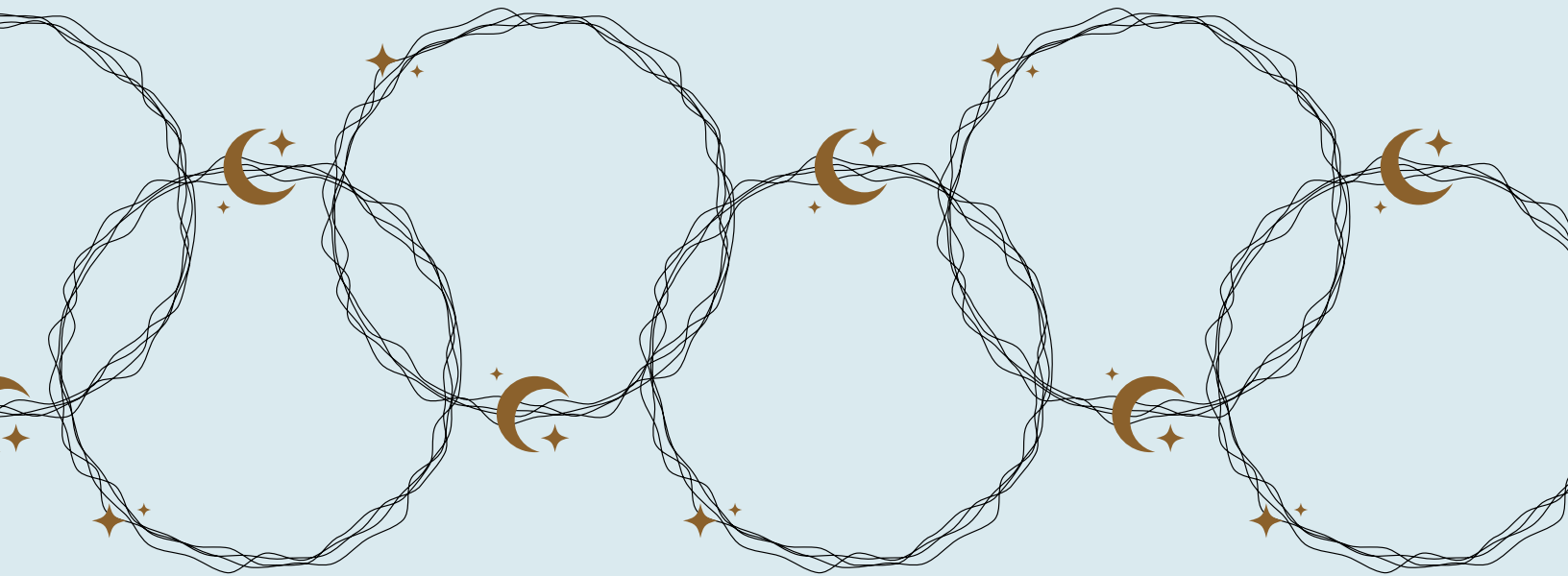
Your guidance has taught us that while life is uncertain, some entities like fire, starlight, and crickets hold more beauty, resonance and meaning in darkness, and that, to enter you is to move into deeper channels of experiencing the world.

Darkness, much like sorrow, anger or pain, you often deter us. Life feels easier if we avoid you, but like sorrow, anger and pain, you invite our attention. You remind us that every moment of this life is gift.

In this year, as we journey even more deeply into collective sorrow, upheaval, and chaos, you have given us the gift of heightened awareness. In the midst of our personal and collective upheavals, we are continually reminded that our health and the world's health cannot be separated.

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Solstice Candle Ritual cont.1

Thank you for reminding us that we as humans, and kin to all other life on earth, are interdependent beings. Thank you for blankets, dens, deep rest, dreaming, and the collective re-remembering that we belong to each other.

(Take a moment of silence to think about what the darkness has meant for you this year.)

In a year where the rush to return to a time before pandemic continues to destabilize us; exposing the brokenness of our health care systems, the continuing rise of fascism, ableism, and racism and multi-layered physical and emotional impacts of living on a warming planet; the slowness, hibernation and deep listening that darkness invites might feel hard to enter. But we are mindful that to be both kin with other earth creatures and in relationship with our bodies rhythms, is to slow down and to embrace the teachings of darkness. So we thank you, darkness, for inviting us in once again..

(Reflect on or journal about something you see as beautiful about darkness, write a letter to darkness or..if you are doing this with others, share aloud..)





Solstice Candle Ritual cont.2

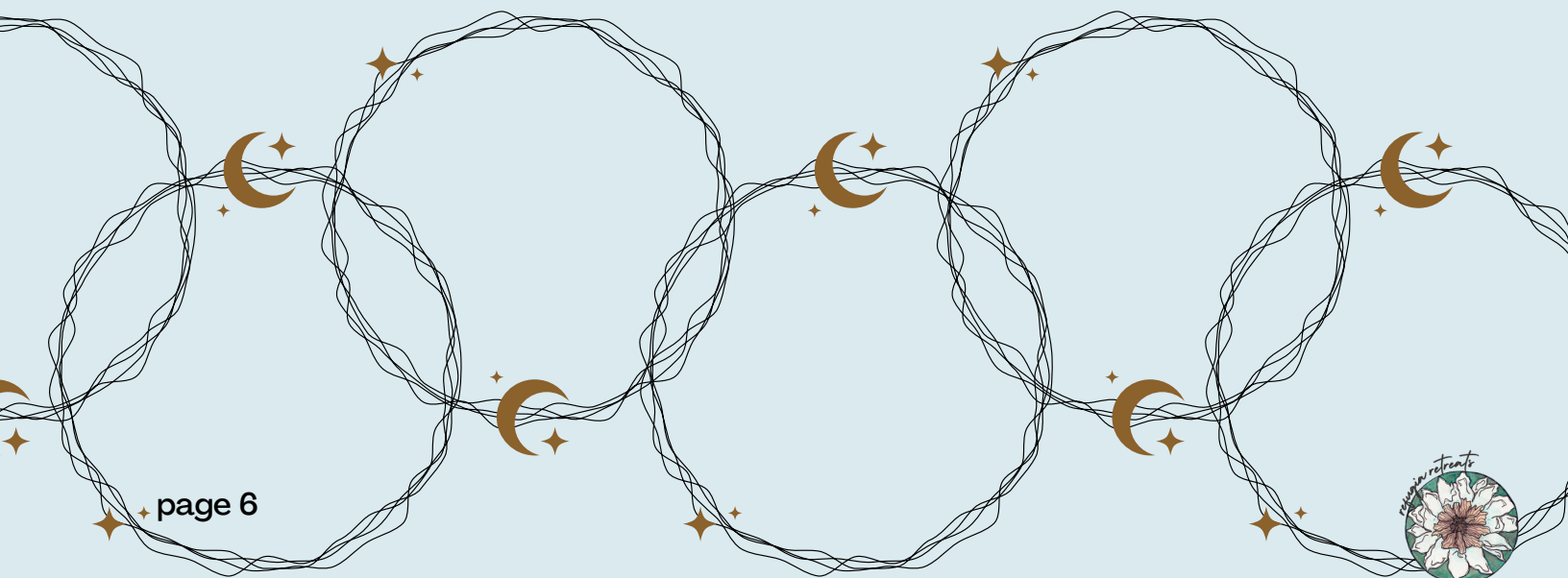
In this year, our lives have been pushed further into precarity. We think of humans, plants, animals and ecosystems around the world that feel this uncertainty on a daily basis. And we think of where we have been blind in darkness.

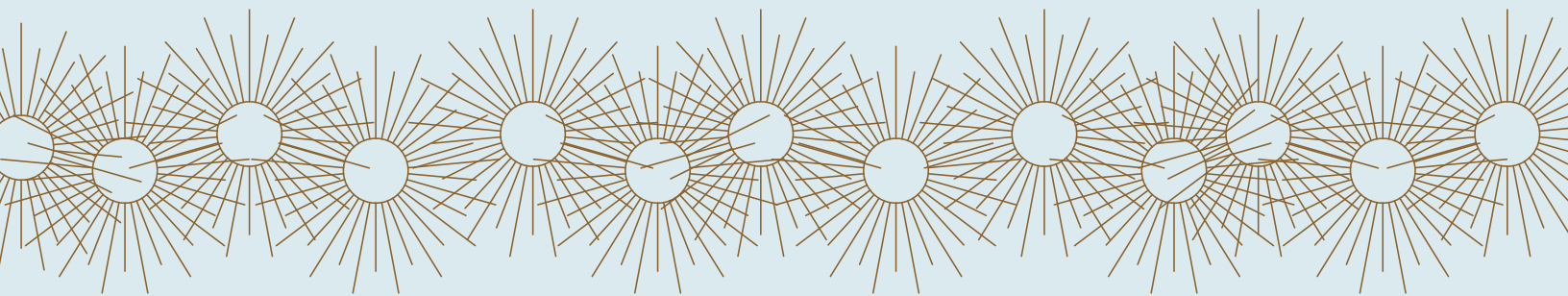
Thank you for bringing our attention, darkness, to where you have revealed injustice, sorrow and despair. You also remind us that all new things waiting to be birthed must gestate in darkness.

Darkness, we release our sorrows into your keeping. We ask our heartbreaks and the places we have seen or experienced injustice, heartbreak or sorrow be composted and reconstituted into medicine for the healing of ourselves and the world..

(Reflect on or share something that you would like to release back into the previous year...)

As we invite back the light, darkness, we release you back into the earth's embrace. We thank you for your service to earth and us in this season.





Solstice Candle Ritual

cont.3

Longer Days. Shorter nights. The flickering warmth of candlelight. The spark that kindles into the intensity of a blazing fire. The pale, pure light of a winter morning. Sunlight, heating our skin on a hot summer day. Light, we are grateful for you, and we welcome your return.

Thank you for your presence. We often take you for granted in the long, roasting days of summer, and we dream of your presence in the depths of a cold, harsh winter.

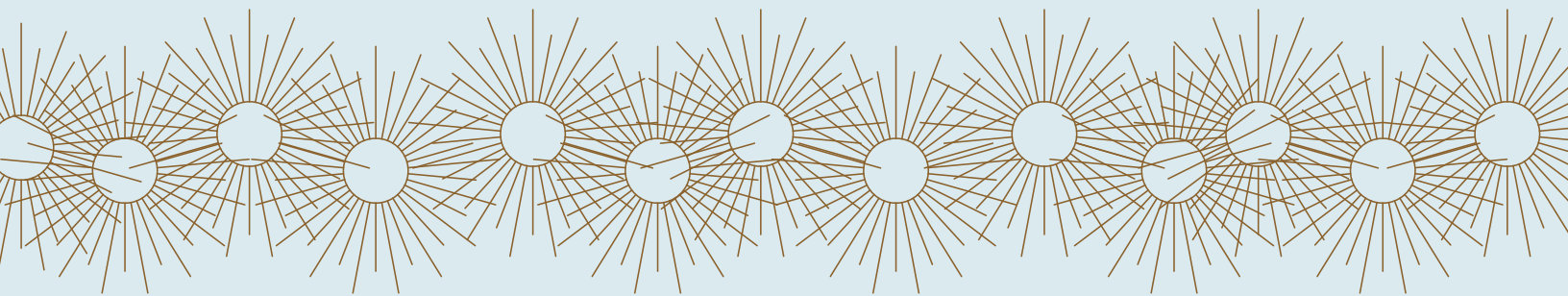
In a year such as this, every glimmer of your sunlight is welcome. We are grateful for the way you warm our bodies and hearts, reminding us of the trickle of sweat we feel when sitting in the noonday heat, the pungent smell of earth when it's been toasted in the autumnal sun, and the translucent quality of light on a winter's day...

We are grateful for the ways that you animate joy and activity into our lives, reminding us of, if not easier times, at least moments of connection, growth, and fertility.

We thank you for warmth and illumination. As light comes back into our hemisphere and we welcome longer days, we call into our world

(Take a moment of silence to reflect on or share something about the light that you are longing for or a hope for your human or more than human community that you are calling into the world...)





Solstice Candle Ritual

cont.4

Light, as you re-animate our lives illuminating another year's journey around the sun, We call into our lives...

(Write a letter to light and/or share something that you would like to call into your life this year..)

We welcome you, light. We bear witness to your return in gratitude as we call you back into our lives and the world. So may it be.



The winter I hibernated,
the aspens on the road to our
old house fascinated me
When others tried to help
Their words turned to ash in my
mouth.
But, the aspens stood tall and
resolute,
Mangled branches, barren in the
cold.
They looked as though they had
been buried,
Roots to the sky.
I understood. I was in darkness
too.

poetry

Winter Solstice

The shortest day.
The longest night.
What blooms in darkness?
What whispers, longing for
Stillness, and attention?
What fertile seeds need darkness to grow?
What weary heart can darkness heal?

Darkness

Is

Disorienting
And, paradoxically
Re-orienting.

The deep dark, an invitation into seemingly endless
descent.

Enter. Linger. Be transformed.

This finely knit cocoon awaits your annihilation
As it sings your rebirth.

Do not fear,

It is but a season.

The light will come again.

