

## **LUGHNASSAD**

*by Merlyn*

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Lughnassad, it can be said, celebrates full bellies! Mid-summer was the time in northern Europe when the first grains ripened and were harvested. No longer did the ancient Celtic villagers, who lived off subsistence agriculture and sporadic successful hunts, need to survive on a few of last year's crumbs and a few green spring herbs. Freshly harvested grain was now available to make bread, and a bountiful nature promised a continuing season of crop harvests and fattening livestock until Samhain.

Today Lughnassad gets slighted as one of the four major cross-quarter sabbats, because it brings us nothing new. We already have a bountiful year-round food supply in our supermarkets. Whether our bread was baked with last year's Kansas wheat or from early harvests of North Texas and Oklahoma wheat makes no difference, because we assume the grain will always be there. Still, if our modern agricultural and food distribution system breaks down briefly for any reason, the supermarket shelves quickly become empty.

At Lughnassad, the sun god Lugh married the Celtic goddess Eire or Earth and transferred his solar energy to her body in an act of sacrifice. In non-Celtic cultures, Lammas was celebrated as the Feast of Bread in honor of the great goddesses of the grain--the Greek Demeter, the pre-Roman Ops, the Roman Ceres and Juno, and many similar goddesses. Over time Lammas and Lughnassad merged into one celebration of the season's first harvest.

The sun god Lugh's self-sacrifice of his body's light and warmth to bring Mother Earth's crops to maturity is visibly evident following Lughnassad, because this sabbat represents the other dramatic turning point in the year's cycle that is matched only by the opposite day length changes after Brigid. By Mabon in another six weeks, we will have lost two hours of daylight and the temperatures will have cooled off enough for the first frosts to threaten some gardens at high elevations. The warmth and sunlight of the long summer days cannot be stored in grain elevators like Kansas wheat. Instead we need to enjoy them now before they disappear until next spring.

Some Wiccan covens celebrate Lughnassad by baking a grain or corn god, who is sacrificed either by tossing him in the fire or by consuming him during the ritual. The Lughnassad ritual can also be used to clear away negative thoughts or other obstacles that have accumulated since the last harvest by writing them down on pieces of paper that are burned in the ritual fire. It is interesting to note the many negative influences we absorb in our busy modern lives which need to be periodically removed from our psyches.

Yellow, of course, is this sabbat's color as it symbolizes both the sun and the harvested grain. Corn and sheaves of grain make the best altar decorations. Other sabbat activities include blessing your garden, completing long-standing projects by Mabon, and feasting on corn (the British term for all grains) and wine.