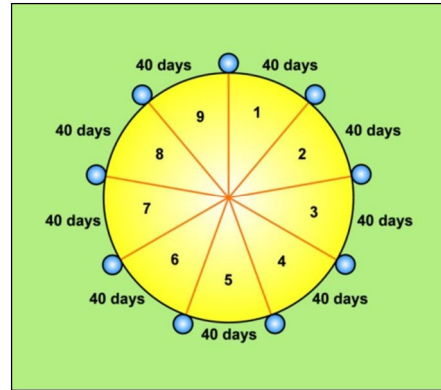




The Grail Cycle

Besides the Solar Breath Cycle of 13 'breaths' marked by 13 two-week or 28-day periods (plus a 'Day out of Time') per year, there are also what are known in tradition as the Nine Great Breaths which occur each year and which produce the biblically well-known 40-day periods. These are directly associated with inspiration from the spiritual aspect of the Sun (i.e. the divine Light) and involve the Holy Grail or Vessel of Light. This is perhaps best illustrated by the Celtic story of the great goddess Ceridwen and her magic cauldron.

Ceridwen's cauldron is kept in a revolving four-cornered castle that has three names—the Castle of Revelry, the Crystal Castle and the Castle of Riches. The castle sits on a high conical hill and has a circular moat surrounding it. Nine maidens attend the cauldron, each in turn breathing upon the fire of inspiration each year, to keep it burning beneath the cauldron. In this way, the keepers of the cauldron prepare a potion that is not only inspiring but also healing and life-preserving.



The four-cornered castle on its hill, surrounded by the ring of water, is illustrative of the Wheel of Life. The cauldron represents the cycle of the year consciously experienced; the potion is the knowledge gained as a result of that experience. The nine maidens symbolise nine spiritual impulses or 'breaths' that occur at forty-day intervals in each annual cycle. The moments of inspiration are known as the Nine Gates of Inspiration.

In North America these special moments in the year are celebrated by the Native Americans with their Ghost Dance, danced in a circle around a Peace Tree. The Peace Tree is planted at a significant place of power and represents the axis of the world.

The nine 40-day periods that occur each year sum to 360 days in total. This is not the total number of days in a year but, like the 'Day out of Time' in the Solar Breath Cycle, the five extra or intercalary days are treated as 'Jokers' or 'wild cards'.

The Ancient Egyptians recognised a 360-day year and their tradition describes the intercalary days as extra days won by Thoth from the moon-god Khonso, so that Nut (whom Thoth loved) could give birth to five children. Osiris was born on the first day, Harmachis (Horus) on the second day, Set on the third day, Isis on the fourth day, and Nephthys on the fifth day.

Likewise the Qumran Community of Essenes used a 360-day solar calendar, consisting of 12 months each of 30 days. The five intercalary days were disposed over the year so that an additional day was given to every three months and the fifth extra day to the end of the year (i.e. at the Midwinter Solstice). This is perhaps the best guide as to how the nine 40-day periods are distributed throughout the year and therefore when the Nine Gates of Inspiration are best celebrated.

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