

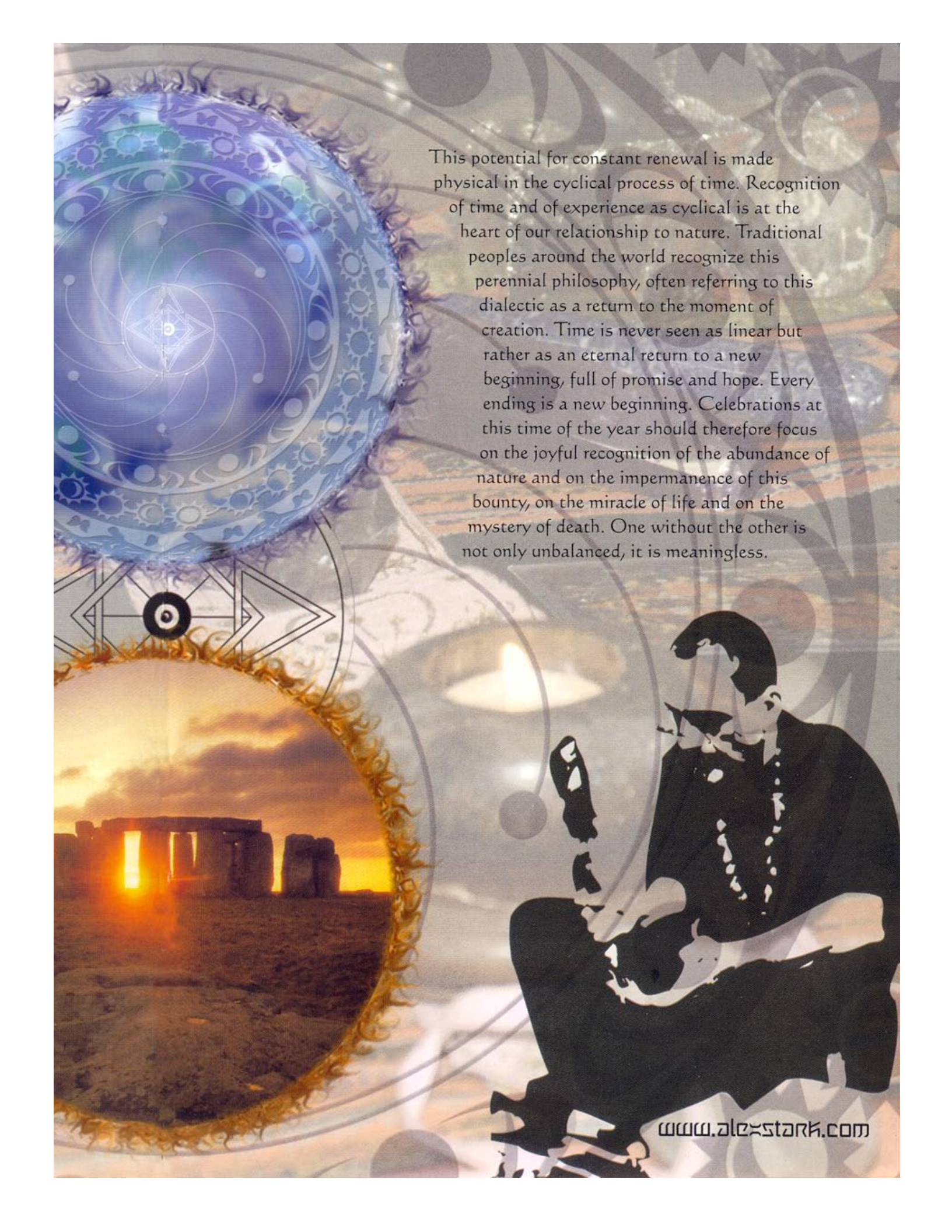
In the End is the Beginning - The Summer Solstice and the Marking of Time

by **ALEX STARK**

The summer solstice on June 21st is one of the key dates in the solar calendar. The sun has reached its highest point in the sky, thereby creating the longest day in the year. It is a traditional time for celebration and rejoicing, and cultures around the world have dedicated considerable resources and effort to mark its passing. In cosmic terms, the solar god is at the pinnacle of his power. Similarly, the Earth goddess is also ripe with the fruit of abundance and fertility. The crops, which provide sustenance to the human participants of this cosmic drama, are ready for the taking. The midsummer moon, in the meantime, has grown to its own fullness, and is considered by many cultures to be a harbinger of strength and success; among the Celts, it was associated with the oak, the hardest of trees. This is a time of great power, in which the archetypal forces find themselves in perfect balance. The Chinese, like many other peoples, have associated this time with the element of fire and its attributes in clarity, enlightenment, charisma, passion, and achievement. Suitably, it was celebrated with great bonfires and round-the-clock rituals.

There is, however, a darker side to this moment because it presages the impending decline of Autumn and the forthcoming winter solstice six months later. At that time the sun, weakened by the force of the approaching winter, will travel low across the sky in the shortest and darkest day of the year. Whereas the summer solstice represents the apogee of light and an opening to consciousness in the vitality of life, the winter solstice, its twin brother, represents a descent to the world of shadow and a return to the unconscious and, ultimately, to death in the colds of winter. Just as the summer solstice cannot be understood without reference to the winter solstice, it is important also to remember that moments of happiness and revelation will necessarily be followed by their twin experiences of sadness and despair. The passing of time reflects and instructs us as to the importance of both: in order to grow and to create, it is essential to suffer a metaphorical death, which then leads to rebirth into a new consciousness.





This potential for constant renewal is made physical in the cyclical process of time. Recognition of time and of experience as cyclical is at the heart of our relationship to nature. Traditional peoples around the world recognize this perennial philosophy, often referring to this dialectic as a return to the moment of creation. Time is never seen as linear but rather as an eternal return to a new beginning, full of promise and hope. Every ending is a new beginning. Celebrations at this time of the year should therefore focus on the joyful recognition of the abundance of nature and on the impermanence of this bounty, on the miracle of life and on the mystery of death. One without the other is not only unbalanced, it is meaningless.