

A Perennial Course in Living Druidry

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LEAF DANCE MOON (October - November)

Moon : Leaf Dance

Leaf Dance is the name I give to this moon, and in the beauty of my valley it is not hard to see why, for the winds come and draw the leaves from the deciduous trees, and they dance, a thousand colours of russet and brown, gold and copper, spinning and twirling, lifting up and dipping down. Then in the piles of leaves, with celebration of the season, we dance!

Find what other names are used for this moon, and by its end, choose your own name for it.

Festival : Samhain

Samhain, Samhuinn or Calan Gaeaf are names for this festival, known in Christian and now secular culture as Hallowe'en. What do the old names mean and where do they come from?

Usually celebrated on or around October 31, for me it is a festival that arrives with the first thick frost that is still upon the ground at dawn. With this frost comes a force of decay that prunes back the annuals, declaring the end of cycle. The festival is an opportunity to find that release within ourselves, ending a cycle, letting go of what is no longer needed. This then, for many in Druidry, is the end of the year.

In secular culture, that is now celebrated on December 31, when a second passes taking us from the end of one year into the beginning of the next. However, in the old nature traditions, life isn't that precise. For many, Samhain is the end of a cycle, but the new one does not begin until the birth of the new sun at the Winter Solstice.

Between now and then, there is the empty space of growing darkness, of quiet and decay, a time of death, as the world is prepared for the new light.

How does that feel?

How can you celebrate it?

Season : Winter Waxing

Samhain is the festival that welcomes winter. The nights are suddenly longer, the stretching days of summer now a memory. It is important at this time to

prepare for the winter's cold and darkness, adjusting our homes so we are welcoming the change instead of simply dealing with it.

In the valley of my home, it is through the last week of October and the first of November that the leaves usually fall, leaving the forest and hedgerows suddenly bare. When do they fall in your home environment? How long does it take? Which is the last tree or plant to let go?

Perception : Listening

Listening at this time of year is important. We listen to the wind, to the dance of the falling leaves, and then we listen to the stillness of the forest with its canopy now bare.

Brought in from the dark cold, we gather with family and friends around the hearths of our community, and we listen to each other in a different way - different stories are told than those of summer's parties.

Through this moon, wake yourself to the sounds of life, of your home, of nature, listening to the stories of those around you.

How much do we hear with our ears and how much do we hear through the rest of our being? How much do you truly hear? How can you improve both your listening and your hearing?

Element : Stone

As the season changes, so does the element, taking us at Samhain into studying Earth. Through this moon, let the focus be earth not as mud, but as rock and stone.

Explore the biggest stones you can find, feeling the power of their stability and history; if you can, lie down on a great stone, or lean against it, and let your soul dissolve into it, listening to its story of millions of years.

Play with gems and crystals, and - equally - with pebbles and gravel. What about bones, shells and fossils? You may like to study the geology, but also simply be with a sample each day; keep one in your pocket. Open your soul to wonder at its journey through time and space, and all that has formed it.

Humanity : Ancestors

The relationship to work with through this moon is with the ancestors. In Druidry we look at three strands of ancestry: those of our own bloodline; those of the land on which we live; and those of our spiritual heritage, our teachers.

If you don't already have one, create an altar to the ancestors. What would you make it of, where would you put it, what would you place upon it? As in all of this tradition, this is not an act of worship, but one of respect and wakefulness.

It is easy to let the dead slide into becoming an abstract, no more than a photograph and a limited box of memories. To remember the dead as individuals, each leading their own lives of love and laughter, struggle and discovery, guides us to be aware of the continuity of life and learning. It helps us to behave with patience and compassion when slowed by weakness and, recalling ancestral achievements made in hard times, it encourages us to celebrate our strength, and the source of that strength: the generations who have lived before.

How can you better honour your ancestors? Offer time to learning about who they were, what they did, how they behaved and why.

Make sure that you are giving thanks with sincerity, awake to their struggle and all that they have given you.

Environment : Mushrooms

With the trees losing their leaves, the annuals of our gardens and of the wild places being cut back by the frost, this moontide is one of great change.

Although some point to ivy as the focus of this moon, what is the tree or plant you would choose to represent this tide, if you could choose just one?

Mushrooms are a wonderful expression of the time of year. Find a place where you can seek out mushrooms, in the woods, gardens, parks, under the trees and in dark corners. How can they teach us of this moontide?

Self : Release

Although some speak of their fear of death, for many it is the process of dying that is harder. Caring for someone who is dying, watching strength and energy slip away, can be devastating.

Yet it is not just the death of another person that is hard to bear. As a culture, we are not fluent with the emotions of any process of release. Relationships die, love affairs wear out, creative projects come to an end. Our offspring leave home, their childhoods ending. We cling on. Grief is about holding on to something that we must release; when we do let go, that grief is able to transform into relief. We may journey through numbness, through rage and resentment, but in tenderness we may also find the freedom beyond.

Through this moon, consider what it is that you are clinging on to. What can you release? What, if you were to let go, would allow you the freedom to live more fully? Now is a good time.

Creativity : Empathy

Spending a moon's cycle heightening our ability to hear allows us also to find a story that touches us, a story with which we empathize deeply.

Listening to stories told by the people around us, by the stones, by the wind and the trees as they lose their leaves, wakes us to both the diversity of individual experience and also to the continuity of life - for our 70 or 80-odd years of life in this realm are a tiny blink in the flow of nature.

As you listen to nature, also spend time listening to the old stories of your ancestors and of this land, to the mythologies of your heritage. Wakeful to that feeling of empathy within your being, find one that you can truly hear, one that touches the fibres of your soul. Keep listening to it. Ideally find a storyteller who tells the tale, in person or on CD. Listen as you read it, hearing the voices of all the Bards who have told the tale through centuries. Keep listening.

Ethics : Honesty

Humanity is flawed. Within the lines of our ancestry, whether of our own immediate blood or of our culture, our people, our heritage, there are heroes and there are bastards. There are abusers and the abused. There are slaves and slave traders.

Indeed, all humanity is within each one of us, seen through the many facets of each individual soul, with its weaknesses and its strengths.

Accepting both the beautiful and the barbaric within our ancestry allows us to accept it within ourselves; and through that acceptance we are better able to address the weakness and make any appropriate change.

As the darkness creeps in, let the focus of this moon be on personal honesty. For the first step to honesty is accepting the fullness of a reality.

How honest are you with yourself, let alone others? How honestly do you express who you are, who you wish to be, who you have been? What difference would it make to your wellbeing, your creativity, your sense of freedom, if you were more honest?

Honesty has an impact. It requires an acute sense of responsibility; there are times when telling the truth will be hurtful, times when this is necessary and when it is not. The Druid will avoid unnecessary harm, aware of all the

threads which weave together a situation. Honesty also requires respect, for others can be more perceptive and more adaptable than we may have anticipated.

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?