

Harvest to Samhain: Nesting

by Judy Harrow

In October, the agricultural cycle comes to its annual closure. So, it makes sense that Samhain is our New Year. Traditionally, whatever was not gathered by Samhain no longer belonged to humankind, but remained for the fair folk, and for the animals and birds.

Think about leaving something over. In ritual, we pour libations, returning some of the plenty to the Gods. In daily life, acting in accordance, we give some back to the land. Over-harvesting destroys. Greed destroys. Hedgerows help preserve biodiversity. Cunningfolk gathering herbs leave a part of each tuft to regenerate. Fisherfolk throw the smaller ones back in to keep breeding. If you have a garden, be sure to compost the inedible parts of your harvest, along with the bright leaves that soon will fall. Sustainability depends on completing the cycle in this way.

Look at the wild things, the Goddess' natural children. Some of them are migrating to nests farther south. Only a lucky few of us can emulate those. Those birds and animals that will be remaining here are preparing their nests, stocking in food and making the area snug and comfortable. This is exactly what our Pagan predecessors did, and what we can be doing right now.

Think also about putting something by. This is the season when, in the old days, the summer's richness would be preserved, canned, dried, frozen to provide for the winter's needs. Although we have supermarkets now, stocked year round, a storm or a bad case of flu might still confine us to our homes for a few days. Even the tiniest apartment kitchen can hold a week's worth of dried, canned or frozen foods. There are blustery, raw, nasty evenings ahead. You could be coming home to a hearty warming soup that you prepared yourself, just the way you like it, and froze in single servings.

Don't forget the non-edibles: candles, incense and charcoal for your rituals. Toilet paper, flashlight batteries, cleaning supplies (do you really want to have to bring them in when it's stormy and icy?) Some bottled water, in case a storm freezes the pipes. Bath oils or salts for warming yourself when you come in from the cold. Supplies to work with when the nasty weather keeps you home: crayons if you draw, fabric if you sew, a couple of reams of paper if you write. Books to learn from. Music to dream by.

You be spending a lot more time inside during the next third of the year. How can you make your home more comfortable and appealing? Tidying, and general cleaning and organization always help. In addition, would some more cushions or a cozy warm throw make a difference? Would half a day spent painting walls, or some other small decorating touch, brighten up a room?

It's time to pack away the summer clothes and bring the warm stuff out of storage. If you have things you never wore all summer, perhaps someone else would be happy to have them for next year. Is your winter clothing clean and in good repair? Do the zippers zip and the buttons button?

Have you renewed the waterproofing on your boots? Do they need to be re-soled? Does anything need replacement? Would you like to add anything?

If you own your own home, how is the insulation? Do the doors and windows close snugly? Are any air conditioners covered? Do you need to install storm windows? Are there warm drapes to stop any remaining drafts? Is the fuel tank full? Should you have your chimney swept before using your furnace or fireplace?

If you have a car, make sure antifreeze and windshield cleaners are ready for winter. Find and install your snow tires. Put your chains and snow shovel in the trunk. Most important, pack a "blizzard box" into your car, in case you are stranded on the road in a storm. This should include a sleeping bag, candles, chocolate bars (perhaps granola bars), matches, warm gloves and an ice scraper. Of course, you should always have flares, a basic first aid kit, and (if you can get it) one of those fluorescent orange vests in the car.

Oncoming winter, by sending us indoors, gives us the opportunity for introspection -- and reminds us of its importance. In harvest time as the evenings lengthen, ponder your achievements and your strengths. How can you further develop your natural endowments? How can you build on your achievements? What are your resources, both internal and material?

Harvest is the time to reap the rewards of our work. Is there something you've been wanting? If you can afford it, buy yourself a nice present. Better yet, buy two. Let one be something to grow on: a tool or piece of equipment that will help you do the things you like to do even better, or, perhaps, tuition to a workshop or class that you've been wanting. Balance that with something entirely frivolous: a night at the theater, a silk garment, a professional massage. At the end of a year's good work, you deserve some pampering.

We still live from the fruits of land and sea and by the Lady's grace. Remember, as the harvest time winds down, to give thanks. This needn't - in fact it shouldn't - be anything time-consuming, elaborate or formal. Words are okay, but not at all necessary. The simpler and quicker our practice is, the more likely we are to actually keep doing it.

Pause before meals to enjoy the sight and smell of the good food on your plate, and think of the complicated natural and social activity that feeds you. Acknowledge the Moon when you first see Her each evening. Salute the Sun when you see Him rise or set. Pause for five seconds or less. Notice. Appreciate. The clouds glow. The flowers grow through cracks in the pavement. The baking bread sends out fragrance. Give thanks.

Do it regularly, and it will bring a great reward. Stopping briefly to notice and appreciate is taking a moment for pleasure. Pleasure is self-reinforcing, so the habit will become stronger and more delightful. The more you deliberately savor it, the more pleasure you take in it, the more you will notice all the beauty of this life. By noticing and giving thanks, you develop your awareness of the Immanence within which we all live, and this connection will always be there to sustain you through the hard, wintry times of your life.

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