

Midsummer to Lunasa: The Season of Hope

by Judy Harrow

At Midsummer, after half a year's increase, the light peaks and begins to recede. Now, on the down side of the Wheel, we begin to encounter limits. Our joy is tinged with wistfulness: this is as bright as it gets. The solar year has begun its long descent. At Midsummer, the winter begins to return.

Although we may not like them, limits are life-sustaining. Unlimited growth kills both individuals and ecosystems. Any system without limits is a system in runaway. By defining our boundaries, limits give us both identity and wholesome balance, and keep us from crashing out of control.

The need to do useful work is one such limit on humankind. We cannot play, rest, or meditate forever. Most of us draw a large part of our identity from the useful work that we do.

In the agricultural cycle, this is the time when farmers work without any immediate reward. Spring's bright promise is faded. Most of the blossoms have fallen now, but the fruits are not yet ripe. The potentiality is yet unmanifest, and its manifestation depends upon our ability to sustain hope in the face of uncertainty, to keep on keeping on. We can't just wait for the harvest. We must work for it, in the burning sun and the drenching rain, and despite the terrifying knowledge that drought, hail, disease or fire may snatch the harvest away. Hope sustains our work until the harvest comes.

The two great concerns of human life are said to be love and work. After Beltane, in the time of flowers and promises, love filled our thoughts. Now, in the season of hope is a good time to focus on some of the issues around work.

Work may seem like a four-letter word sometimes, and yet it fulfills two very different needs for us: self- support and the sense of accomplishment. Although these needs are not contradictory, their fulfillments are definitely independent of one another. They can coincide, but most often they do not. Here are some things to think about under both headings:

1. Right Livelihood

In our time and place, all healthy adults are expected to support themselves. As a result, a large part of our sense of dignity and autonomy comes from not being dependent on or beholden to other people. When we meet new people, we often introduce ourselves by what we do for a living or what we hope to do after completing school. For Witches, who are committed not to take pay for our religious activities, the need to earn a secular living becomes even more obvious. And yet, not all means of livelihood are "right."

- Is your job congruent with your basic values? If your job demands that you do something you consider to be wrong, look for another job. In extreme cases, you might even need to leave this job before you have found another. Also consider that you may be doing

something morally neutral, like operating a switchboard, in an organization whose overall purpose is contrary to your values. Do you know what the values of your organization really are? Find out.

- Do your employers respect you as a human being and as a worker? Are you being treated fairly at work? If not, there are a variety of ways to respond:
 - If you feel a basic underlying sense of trust and respect with your supervisor, you can try open discussion of specific concerns. Proceed with caution -- today many managers and supervisors are trained to actively listen without any intention of doing anything about what they hear. This is a manipulative technique intended to de-fuse your legitimate anger, or even to identify, and later eliminate, "trouble makers."
 - You can discuss your concerns with trusted co-workers, perhaps even organize a union (better yet, call in an already-established one), and, by working together, deal with management from a position of much greater strength.
 - Always remember that your rights as a citizen extend into the workplace. If your hours and wages are not in accord with legal standards, if your workplace is hazardous or working conditions are bad for your health, if you are being subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, religion, age, gender (or, in the more enlightened jurisdictions, sexual preference), do not hesitate to call in the relevant government agency.
 - If you are really unhappy with your job, and your efforts at improvement are not producing satisfactory results, you can look for another job. Update your resume, get an interview outfit together, and start watching the ads. Also, discreetly ask around. Most job openings are not advertised.
 - Remember, you have a job. The bills are being paid. There's no need to grab the first thing that comes along. Be clear about exactly why you want to leave your present job, exactly what you want to be different about the next one. Be patient and careful. Don't make a change until you have good reason to believe it will bring the improvement you want.
- If your job is OK, but you're still not happy, you may want to think about a change of *occupation*. This is a lot more drastic change, and may take years to accomplish. You should start exploring the possibilities while you are employed by working through the exercises in a book like *What Color is Your Parachute?* or even consulting a vocational counselor. Exercises like these can also make interesting coven activities.

Many occupational changes require that you go back to school. Taking some of the introductory courses at night is another way to both explore and get a head start on the change if you decide you really want to do it. Some new careers can also be explored through volunteer work.

- As you work through these decisions and changes, remember that you are a Witch. Do not ignore or disconnect your magic while approaching such apparently secular areas of your life. Divination and pathworking can help you extrapolate the possible outcomes of various choices. Spellwork can help awaken and strengthen the energies you need in order make any desired changes, or simply to keep your secular career going in a direction you like. There are Deities Who guide and empower the working world. All this is your heritage and a very useful resource.

2. Meaningful contributions

Self-actualized adults need to know that what they do matters in this world. We need a sense of accomplishment. To really focus in on this issue, two clear distinctions are required:

- Meaningful contribution has nothing to do with whether or not we are paid for this work. Our modern habit of evaluating activities by their earning power often distracts us from their real worth. Remember, reading with a young child is an equally profound contribution to that child's development whether it is being done by a salaried schoolteacher or an unpaid parent. On the other hand, the kind of endless paper- pushing that many of us do all day may bring in the bacon, but it leaves us at quitting time with no real sense of accomplishment at all. What do you do as a priest/ess that brings you that sense of accomplishment?
- Meaningful contribution is equally independent of creative self-expression. You can have a valid art practice without sharing your work with anyone else. On the other hand, most of the ordinary chores of home care - dusting, washing the dishes, laundry - are real contributions to a family's well-being that involve little or no creativity. And you can feel good looking at a clean kitchen. What are the ordinary chores that sustain the life of a coven, a community, the Earth?

Priest/esses get a great deal of satisfaction from our religious work. For those of us who follow the Old Ways, that's *all* we get -- no extrinsic rewards follow. It's helpful, then, to remember that a sense of real accomplishment is an equally important need, and one that many day-jobs leave unfulfilled.

Since our religion is not at all organized -- and most of us prefer it that way -- there's no central authority to assess our talents and strengths and assign us to places where our work is most needed. The tasks of knowing oneself and developing one's own religious career devolves on each individual Witch.

Another way of saying this: we're not getting paid for this, nor are we being bossed. That leaves us free. We can do the things that we enjoy doing, and that we believe are really needed. We can do the things through which we continue to learn and grow. We can -- and we should -- be self-directed as priest/esses.

Here are some questions to ask ourselves as we reflect on our work during this season of hope.

- What are your talents? What subjects did you like best (and least) in school? What are your hobbies (or what were your hobbies when you had them)? What were the results of any aptitude tests you took?
- How might those relate to any needs that you perceive among the Wicca or within the more general Pagan community? How might they address the needs of the Earth?
- What are your temperaments? What kinds of work do you most (and least) enjoy? Would you rather work alone or as part of a team? Do you prefer to work with information, people or things? Are you more drawn to building Pagan community or creating Pagan culture?

- In the past year, did you do any Craft-related project that you feel particularly good about? What about it feels best to you? Would you like to do more of the same? How might you build on what you learned doing that project?
- Through doing that project, did you identify any subject you would like to learn more about, or any skills or talents that you would like to develop (or develop further) in yourself?
- As you figure out what you want to do for the community, where will you offer these gifts? Is there an existing organization or institution through which you can work, or will you need to devise your own venue?

[**note:** a lot of the information you will glean from answering these questions will also be useful as you make decisions concerning your secular career]

The work we do as priest/esses grows out of our spirituality and our magic. Without those roots, it cannot flourish, cannot bring forth sweet fruit. That would not be religion. At best it's religious bureaucracy. But those who think priesthood consists of meditating in a cave, ignoring the community and the world, are also missing a point. Religion means connection -- the connection of the Sacred with the world of form.

In Buddhist tradition, there are a series of pictures called the "ox-herding" pictures. Like our Tarot trumps, they have been presented many times in many different artistic styles, but the basic ideas stay the same. The ox-herding pictures depict the process of spiritual growth. One of them represents total merger of the self with the Sacred. It's not the last picture. There's one more to go. The final picture is called "returning to the village with helping hands." There, and here, and always, the circle is completed by service, by good work.

In July, we work and hope for the harvest that grows from Mother Earth's sweet body under our watchful care.

written by Judy Harrow

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