

# Samhain to Yule: The Death Season

by Judy Harrow

At Samhain, the bright autumn colors are fading or gone. Nature strips down to essentials: seeds, buds, bare branches. In the old world, after Samhain, the harvest was over for humans. Whatever still remained in the fields was forfeit to the fair folk. What had been gathered could then be measured against the cold, dark months to come. Cattle that could not be sustained through the winter were slaughtered and preserved. Farm folk now hunted for meat, of necessity transforming from nurturers to slayers. Their fresh kill would help the stored foods last the winter.

The dark time comes. The crops are gathered in.  
We know how much we have, how much we lack.  
And, as we take the measure of each bin,  
We know, too, what we need, for folk and flock

The harsh and howling wind tears leaf from bough.  
We hear in it the Wild Hunt raging near.  
No more till August than what we have now.  
We watch the storm. We count the stores. We fear.

The end of summer brings a fearful choice:  
Which of the flock to shelter, which to slay.  
And now we need the strong and ancient voice.  
Those gone before us, counsel us we pray!

Now, in the killing time, come blessed dead,  
Lend us your courage. Guide the path we tread.

We call this the Death Season: these bleak, cold weeks of November and early December, as the days shorten and the darkness grows around us. Although our homes are warm and well-lit, and our supermarkets full of food, still the Death Season reminds us to simplify and to conserve.

In the Celtic Cross Tarot spread, there is a position called the "crossing card." It represents not the most important or most central issue, but the most immediate, that which obstructs the path ahead, that which keeps us from the real work. It shows us the blockage, the clutter. Similarly, the Death Season is the time for taking stock, mending what is broken and clearing away whatever is outgrown, outworn, useless or unsustainable. We go back to the basics, just as the trees do, preparing for the seasons of growth to come.

One good way to start is to literally clean out your space, at home and where you work. Spring cleaning is to make things fresh and pretty. The housecleaning we do in the Death Season prepares for Spring by making space and order. Pay attention now to what is inside, underneath and behind -- your files, your closets. What is broken? Repair it or discard it. What are you not using? Give it to a friend or a good cause. Are there foods you no longer trust in your pantry or your freezer? If you have a garden, compost them. If not, discard them. As you simplify the physical spaces around you, hold the conscious, magical intent of making space in your life.

- Next, take care of your personal business. Pay all possible debts. For long-term loans or mortgages, get up-to-date with your payments. Do you have any legal matters that need attention? Are you due a medical or dental checkup?
- How about projects, promises made to yourself, last year's overambitious New Years' resolutions? At Harvest, you celebrated your accomplishments. Now it's time to look hard at the other side, the disappointments all of us have.

Of the things that you'd hoped to achieve this year, which have not come about? Do you know why not? List the unmet goals. Are things happening more slowly than you thought, happening wrong, not happening at all?

On reflection, some may be things you now understand that you never really wanted. Are there activities you no longer wish to pursue? Let go of those. Feel the relief.

Others you still would like, but having honestly tried, they seem to be beyond your present capacity to achieve. Let yourself feel the disappointment and frustration, even bitterness. Then let go. If you find that letting go opens some space, leave that space empty for now, as the winter fields lie fallow.

Some of the things you still want can still happen, but they need more time and more work than you originally thought. Based on what you learned from this year's efforts, make a more realistic plan. It may take longer than you thought. You may need some help. Or you may need to turn this project over to someone better able to do it than you are.

- Relationships next, all kinds: friends, family members, lovers, coven mates, work mates. We develop our humanity through interactions of many kinds with other humans. Do you notice, in any relationship that is important to you, any really disturbing pervasive problem or ongoing bad pattern of interactions? As much as you can, make peace. Where you cannot make peace, let go, either of the gripe or of the relationship. You choose.

Do you want to air a grievance with the other person? Find a time when you are both relatively calm, comfortable, unrushed and in private, and discuss your problem. Be sure to describe specific (and hopefully recent) instances and how the behavior actually impinges on you. Be prepared to listen openly to any response -- there may well be a counter grievance -- and to work together for a fair and comfortable solution.

On the other hand, when you realize you have hurt another person, acknowledge it directly to them, express regret, do what you can to repair the damage. Although apology is embarrassing and risky, you will feel much lighter and freer afterwards.

If you've made promises, keep them. If you can't or won't be keeping a promise, explain this to the people concerned. Don't leave them waiting for something that will not come.

Sadly, not all troubled relationships can be repaired. If you've tried and it just has not worked, or if you find yourself without the interest or energy to try, find a way to draw closure, as gently and respectfully as possible. *If you're being abused, get out of it any way you can.* If you really can't discuss the problems with the other person, you might want to write them a letter, then, rather than mailing it, give it to the fire, thus providing yourself with some catharsis.

You won't face a parting every year. Give yourself space to grieve and heal whenever you do.

- And finally, while the Wild Hunt howls through leafless forests, confront your own mortality. There are logistics to death. Seeing to those logistics in advance in no way hastens your passing, but it will make things easier for all concerned when the time comes. For some of us, the time will come without warning.

So, do you have a Final Directive, Living Will, Health Care Proxy, or Durable Power of Attorney (titles vary from state to state)? Does the person who holds your Proxy know your values and wishes? Does your primary care physician know them? If you believe in organ donations, do you have a Donor Card?

Have you arranged for the care of children, pets, anyone else for whom you are responsible? How about long-term projects and responsibilities: are you training a successor? Have you left instructions regarding your magical tools or other cherished objects? Have you a Will? If you do, is your executor still available and willing to act for you? Do your significant others know your preferences regarding burial or cremation? regarding funeral or memorial ceremonies?

Some of these processes are difficult and disturbing. When they are completed, you may feel empty and naked. You may feel unfettered. Either way, the metaphoric and literal space you've created is a kind of freedom. Eventually, you will make some new choices. You may want to expand some of what you kept. You may want to bring in something new. You may want to live more simply. Most probably, you will work out some combination of the three. But not now, not yet -- this is the time to rest and heal, a pause before dreaming new dreams.

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