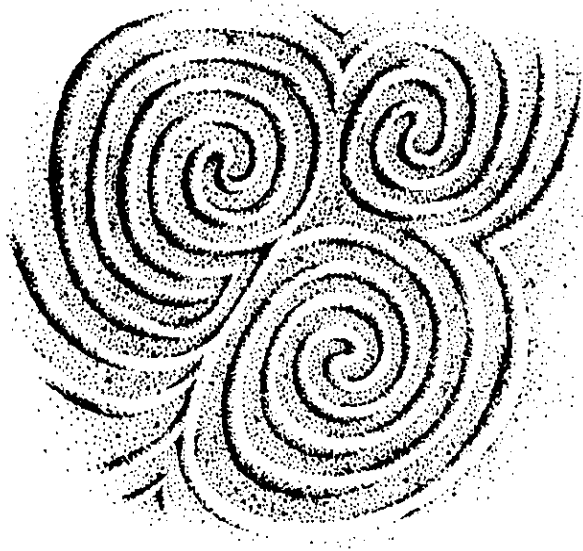
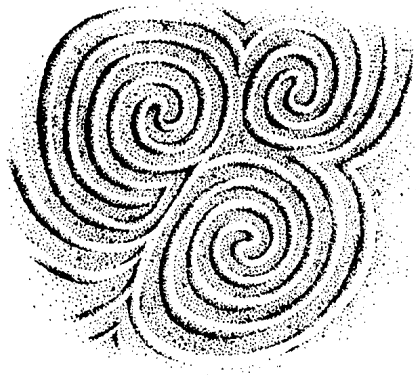


SAMHUIINN



CEREMONY OF
THE ORDER OF BARDS
OVATES & DRUIDS



SAMHUINN

1 NOVEMBER
NORTHERN HEMISPHERE

1 MAY
SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Like time its builder, the invisible wall which time alone raises between the span of the living and the realm of the dead is abolished, whilst three times, the Sun, the Eye of the World, throws his brilliant glance from East to West.

from the Order's traditional ceremony

For the festival of Samhuinn, we have drawn on one of the oldest Druid ceremonies that we have on record. The ceremony in its original form (and available from the office in the publication *Druid Festivals - The Original Order Rituals*) was given to our Order by the **Archdruid Paul Bouchet (?)000, of L'Ordre 000** in Brittany, and has been translated from the French and Breton. The ceremonies given here are developments of this original Breton ritual, in which the major participants were called *An Houc'h Kozh*, the Ancient One or Chief, *Brientin*, the archetypal Knight for Brittany, a figure akin to Lancelot, *Port-Glaive*, the Sword-bearer, *Le Druide* and *Le Mabinog*.

Samhuinn can be spelt in a number of ways, but all are pronounced 'Sow (as in Cow) -in (as in Inn)'. Samhain is Irish Gaelic for the month of November. Samhuin (or Samhuinn) is Scottish Gaelic for All Hallows.

2

According to tradition, the time of Samhuinn lasts for three days – from October 31st to November 2nd. During these three days the Veil of Time is lifted, and we may commune with the Otherworld, and those who have gone before us into 'the wider life'. After this period in which time is suspended, we return to the everyday world in a new cycle of activity that lasts until the following Samhuinn.

In the Christian tradition these three days have been re-named as All-Hallows Day on 31st October, All-Saints Day on 1st November, and All Souls Day on 2nd November.

In ancient times it was not possible to keep whole herds through the Winter, so the minimum breeding stock was kept alive, and the rest was slaughtered and salted. Samhain was the time when this killing and preserving was done. Crops too had to be gathered in by 31st October, and it is therefore not difficult to see why Samhain was considered a time of change, of transition from one way of living to another, from Summer to Winter, from a sunlit outdoor life to a period of time when more light and warmth were to be had by the hearth.

This time of transition was seen as one in which normal reality was disturbed as the earth moved through a 'joint' in time. Chaos reigned and this was marked in a number of ways, which have now become 'watered-down' and appear in the form of 'trick-or-treating' on Hallowe'en night. In Scotland, the boundary between the living and the dead was obliterated by young men impersonating spirits with masked, veiled or blackened faces. The boundary between the sexes was obliterated too, as boys wore the clothing of girls and girls disguised themselves as boys. The disorder was intensified with mischievous pranks. Ploughs, carts, gates and other belongings were borne away and thrown into ditches and ponds; horses were led away and left in other people's fields.

Samhain was also a time for divination, since the subtle realms were closer at hand to guide the seer. It was said that the time of Samhuin partakes of the nature of eternity.

Just as with Beltane, the lighting of bonfires at Samhain was an important feature of the celebration. Ireland's bonfire and firework night is still Hallowe'en on 31st October, although in England it has become transposed by five days to November 5th.

Supernatural power was seen to break through the joints between the two great seasons of the year - at Samhuinn as Winter began and at Beltane as Summer began. But Samhuinn, lasting for three days and representing the border-land between the Old Year and the New, was sensed particularly as the time when the veil between this world and the subtle realms could be drawn aside.

For this reason, a main feature of the Samhuin ceremony is an invitation to those spirits in the other world to join in the celebration, and it is a time when we can make a connection with those of our friends, teachers or relatives who have passed on - if we wish to and if we feel it appropriate. ('We greet you as brothers and sisters during your brief transit across the world of the living,' as it says in the ceremony.)

The ceremony is the most solemn and most 'inner' of the eight seasonal rituals, and for this reason is traditionally not performed in public, but is only open to members of the Order and invited friends.

If you wish, imagine you have been invited to the traditional ceremony: two candles burn on each of the small tables at the three quarters of West, North and South. At the Eastern altar burn three candles. The Companions of the Order are seated in a circle - Druids robed in white, Ovates in green and Bards in blue. The Chief in the East stands, and so - in the West - does the Mabinog, who is the youngest member of the Order, or a young aspirant who has not yet joined. The Young One asks the Chief about the time of year, and the Chief tells him of the mysterious quality and power that reigns at this time. He then explains that we show our love to those in the other realms at this time by making ritual gifts.

These ritual gifts are then presented to the Chief who consecrates them. These are a branch of Yew, the Sword, the Hammer, Bread and Salt, Honey and Wine.

All then face the West - the traditional direction of the Blessed Isles of the Departed - the lights are dimmed, the windows are opened, garlic is spread upon the window-sill, and the Spirits of the departed are invited in. The Order's Roll-Call of the Departed is read, in which the names of previous Chosen Chiefs, and of other leading figures in the Druid tradition are inscribed. The Spirits

are invited to 'come to the help of those who are striving strenuously upon the path that your lives have marked out,' and a little of the bread and salt, wine and honey is thrown into the brazier in the centre of the circle, which crackles and releases puffs of smoke as this is done.

All those participating are invited to take this symbolic feast before beginning a directed meditation. After the meditation, in which often an important connection is made for many participants between the two planes of this world and the next, the New Year is proclaimed, sprigs of yew are distributed to everyone, the circle is unwound, and the celebration continues informally with food and drink.

Nuinn writes of this ceremony:

'The idea of offering foods to the dead was originally a matter of propitiating forces on the other side: you offered sacrifices to avert evil, it was a cult of fear. A long history of sacrifices including human exists.

'Yet, whilst adopting much of the setting and ideas of the old observances, the whole spirit has in this Breton rite been reversed. We no longer wish to drive away harmful forces: the foods of the dead are offered as a gesture of love, and those whom we wish to contact are invited in.

'Samhuinn is the first of the three ceremonies of the winter months, the others being Alban Arthan and Imbolc. They all have many lights, eight or nine candles, and liquid, either water or wine. By earlier reckonings, most of the winter, say three months of it, was called Samhuinn, a whole season given over to the darkness and the domination of the spirits of another world. This changed until it became three weeks, then as it is given in the ceremony, it became three days. And for ritual purposes Samhuinn is treated as though it occurs within the limits of the evening, for at the close the Ancient says: "A year is finished, a year begins".

'A colloquy between the Ancient and the Mabinog leads to a lowering of lights and an invitation to good spirits to enter across the garlick barrier. Those specially honoured and known are mentioned from the Order Scroll. The traditional Four Foods are given to the spirits on the brazier. By all ancient tradition the smoke of sacrifices ascends to and feeds the gods.

4

'Those this side of the 'invisible wall' however consume in ordinary fashion, joining with those passed on in a sacramental link. Towards the end, the three grades of the Order are identified with three trees - the Oak is the Druid, the Yew is the Ovate, and the Silver Birch is the Bard: trees of eternal strength, unperishing life and graceful resilience respectively.'

*We die with the dying
See they depart and we go with them
We are born with the dead
See they return and bring us with them*

*The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew tree
Are of equal duration.*

T.S.Eliot

SUMMER'S END

In the 7th century, this festival, whose name comes from two old Celtic words for 'summer's end,' was Christianized as All Saints Day, also known as Hallowmas – 'the Feast of the Holy Ones' – on which the blessed saints were remembered. The night before, which was the most important time for the festival, came to be known as All Hallows Eve, or Hallowe'en, as it is called today. It was such an important festival in early times that some scholars believe it marked the original Celtic New Year. In the ancient worldview, darkness always precedes light: Caesar said of the Celts that 'they called themselves sons of the god of night and defined the division of every season, not by the number of days, but of nights; their birthdays and the beginning of months and years they observe in such order that day follows night.' If this seems strange to us, we might contemplate how new life takes place in the darkness of the womb, and seeds sprout underground.

In early Ireland, a great assembly was held at this time called 'The Feast of Tara,' whose main purpose seems to have been the renewal of kingship and the kingdom itself. A sacred fire was lit, at Tlachtga, a dozen miles northwest of Tara, the seat of the High King. This was the burial-place of Tlachtga, who was the daughter of Mogh Ruith, one of the greatest druids of Ireland. She was said to have been a woman skilled in magical powers, and may originally have been one of those mysterious Celtic goddesses who symbolized the sacred land itself. The king's druids presided over the fires, into which were cast offerings to the gods in thanksgiving for the year's harvest, together with prayers for the new cycle to come.

Lighting fires at this season has continued right up to the present in Ireland and the British Isles, although often under the more modern guise of 'Guy Fawkes Night' on November 5th. In the 1860s, the Halloween bonfires were still so popular in Scotland that one traveller reported seeing thirty fires lighting up the hillsides all on one night, each surrounded by rings of dancing figures, a practice which continued until the first World War. Young people and servants lit brands from the fire and ran around the fields and hedges of house and farm, while others surrounded parish boundaries with a magic circle of light. Afterwards, ashes from the fires were sprinkled over the fields to protect them during the winter months – and of course, they also improved the soil.

The bonfire provided an island of light within the oncoming tide of winter darkness, keeping away cold, discomfort, and evil spirits long before electricity illumined our nights, for on Samhain Eve, the veil between the human realm and the Otherworld was thin: ghosts and demons were abroad and mortals had to protect themselves from the powers of darkness on this, the third and greatest Spirit Night of the year (the other two being Beltaine and the Summer Solstice). In Ireland it was said that the prehistoric burial mounds opened and the Sidhe or Faery Host rode out to roam the countryside. At the Feast of Tara, the four provincial kings and their people sat foursquare around the High King who sat in state at the centre, symbolically asserting the order and stability of the people of Erin. This was very important to establish in the face of the growing forces of darkness and chaos that threatened outside where the dark was rising. Less than a hundred years ago, country-people heard sounds of revelry as they passed ring forts and barrows. They fashioned special protective crosses called 'parshells' and hung them up over their doors. Late wayfarers made certain to carry a black-handled knife or have a steel needle stuck in coat or sleeve so they would not be 'taken' by the faeries.

In Scotland and Wales, the great cavalcade of the dead known as the Wild Hunt swept through the skies at this season. At its helm rode an illustrious huntsman, who in northern areas might be Woden; in Wales Gwynn ap Nudd, the King of the Faeries; in England, Herne the Hunter or King Arthur himself. In Scotland, the riders appeared as ghostly hunters with hawks on their hands followed by their pack of hounds known as Gabriel's Ratchets, riding westward on the wind as they hunted down the souls of the newly dead to take them to their new home in the Land-under-wave.

Not all of the spirit wanderers on this night were to be feared, however: some were the friendly ghosts of one's ancestors, come to pay a visit to their old homes on this night when the doors between the worlds swung open. The Celts have always believed it was the duty of the living to show their returned ancestors proper respect and hospitality. Until quite recently, in the Irish *Gaeltacht*, families set aside a special 'room to the west' – just an alcove or a nook in poorer homes – where they kept a shrine full of mementoes of their loved ones who had passed over into the Summerlands. On Samhain Eve, the family would light candles on the shrine and turn to the direction of the setting sun and the vast ocean over which their kin had made the spirit journey. Afterwards they sat down to a communal feast in their honour, and before going to bed, they left out some food and drink and left doors and windows unlocked so their dead could enter in. If they awoke in the night, they might hear the scraping of stools and clatter of plates and forks as the spirits enjoyed their meal. Nor did they forget the spirits who had no families to visit, sadly roaming about the countryside with nowhere to go. Food and drink were set out on doorstep and windowsill so that they too might have a share.

The invasion of the spirit world into our own at Samhain suspended everyday normality, ushering in a brief period of anarchy and misrule which gave the community a chance to rebel against the boundaries of the social order in a sanctioned way. In some areas it became known as 'Mischief Night,' as people gleefully gave full rein to their shadow side. They blackened their faces and trooped through country lanes bearing turnips or mangelwurzels that were carved into deaths' heads, glowing eerily when a candle was placed inside. (The pumpkin is a modern importation from America). Masks and costumes transformed village regulars into cross-dressers and cavorting hobbyhorses. Hallowe'en pranks wedded to the custom of going door-to-door begging for goodies gave rise to the modern custom of trick-or-treat, although originally, children filled their pockets with apples and nuts, not candy. In County Cork, a band of young men blowing horns and making a general hullabaloo marched through the countryside led by a man wearing white sheets and a horse's head. He represented the White Mare (*Láir Bhán*)- an aspect of the goddess. On hearing the horns approaching her house, a housewife would rush to the door with offerings of cakes or coins, while the leader sang the traditional verses. Underlying the mischief and merrymaking was a more serious ritual. The masked figures represented the spirits of the dead. To refuse them food was to invite their vengeance on the household – hence the trick if there were no treats.

6

In some parts of Wales the celebrations known as Harvest Home were sometimes delayed until Hallowtide, and the harvest supper was called 'the Hag's feast,' referring to the Crone or Hag Goddess who rules from Samhain to Imbolc. In Carmarthenshire, the rooms of the farmhouse were decked with evergreens at Hallowe'en, as if it were Christmas. A huge fire was lit in the hearth and the whole household sat around the fire drinking hot sweet ale from the Wassail bowl, telling ghost stories and playing divination games with roasted apples and nuts to see what the future held in store – a faint echo, perhaps, of what the Druids themselves did long ago at this festival, when the open door between the worlds invited them to peer beyond into the unknown.



LIVING THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

The essential features of Samhuinn are greeting and connecting with ancestors and loved ones who have passed on; divination; and a time for saying goodbye to the Old and preparing for the New.

If you're not planning a ceremony as such, or in addition to your celebration, here are some suggestions for things you can do to acknowledge and attune to the energy of the time

ASSOCIATIONS TO SAMHAIN THE OTHERWORLD, THE ANCESTORS, THE DEPARTED, FEAST FOR THE DEAD, LETTING GO, DIVINATION, BLACK, YEW, GARLIC, ANGELICA

Go through the house and throw out everything that 'you do not know to be useful and feel to be beautiful,' as William Morris said.

Look at old family photo albums, draw your family tree, get elderly relatives or friends to tell stories about their lives and if you can, tape or video them.

Do a budget.

Do a divination.

Drink Beaujolais Nouveau.

Have a family gathering.

Go to a Remembrance day gathering.

Read the biography of someone you admire.

Since Samhuinn is a time of passing from one phase to the next, it is an ideal time for releasing worries or unwanted aspects of your life. Write these on separate pieces of paper and symbolically burn them in the 'Samhuinn fire' - which at this time might simply be a candle flame.

A dance or movement meditation: begin small, moving just a finger or toe. Feel its bones as you go. Touch and explore other bones in your body. Visualize yourself as a string of white stones. Dance.



SAMHUINN

SOLO CEREMONY

Prepare a Gateway in the North West, with enough space on the other side for you to sit. You may place your altar at the farthest NW point, and have Samhain-associated things on it, such as garlic, angelica, a yew-branch and berries, or a small yew in a pot; stone or crystal, ancient artefacts such as arrowheads, etc., photos or memorabilia of your own ancestors... Have a fire, or candle and fire-bowl at the centre, as well as your spiritual journal or a notebook and pen. Have some bread, wine, salt and honey, and a rattle, drum or similar sound-making thing – some beans in a jar will do! – by the central fire/candle.

THE OPENING

Enter your circle from the West. On entering, pause for several breaths, consciously leaving your daily concerns aside, allowing yourself to relax. Feel the earth beneath you and the sky above you, feel yourself grounded and centred. Sitting if necessary, perform the Light Body exercise. If you wish, you can now visualise your Sacred Grove. This is a good time to chant a few AWENS to 'warm up' your voice. It also helps you to feel connected, centred and relaxed.

Move sunwise to the East, pause and make a salutation, such as

○ Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es) (choose a term you feel comfortable with) , I ask for your blessings on this my ceremony of Samhuinn. (pause, then turn to face inward) ○ Spirit of this circle, Spirit of this place, I ask for your blessings, guidance and inspiration on this my ceremony.

Then complete the circuit and stand again in the West, facing inwards. Take a few moments to meditate on peace, and to feel peace within you. It may help to find an image that you associate with peace, which you can then use to help you awaken the feeling within yourself. Some examples are a quiet lake; a sphere of soft light; or a particular colour. If you are not very visual, you could try imagining a piece of music, or a musical note or chord, or simply the sound of the word 'peace' as you say it to yourself. Notice also how your body feels: let yourself breathe peace. If you like, you could say the Druid Prayer for Peace

8

*Deep within the still centre of my being, may I find peace.
Silently within the quiet of the grove, may I share peace.
Gently within the greater circle of humankind,
May I radiate peace.*

*Then walk to the North, face outward, and say
May there be peace in the North.*

As you do, imagine peace flowing out to the North – picture it as it flows through your neighbours' homes and gardens, out across roads and forests, across towns and cities, all the way across the Earth.

Then turn and cross the circle to the South (skirting round the central fire or candle if you have one) and repeat. Then to the West, then across again to the East. Then step toward the centre and turn around in a full circle, saying

May there be peace throughout the whole world.

Now return to the West, facing centre, and, if you choose, say the Druid's Prayer:

Grant, O Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es), thy protection,
and in protection, strength,
and in strength, understanding,
and in understanding, knowledge,
and in knowledge, the knowledge of justice,
and in the knowledge of justice, the love of it,
and in the love of it, the love of all existences,
and in the love of all existences,
the love of Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es) and all goodness.

Chant more AWENS.

Then, moving around to start at the East, cast your circle as taught in Gwers Seven, trying to visualise it clearly as you do so. Perhaps you can hear it, or feel it, as well as see it. Notice that the circle creates a container: feel yourself to be contained. When you have completed the circle and are again standing in the East, face in to the centre and say:

This is sacred time. This is sacred space. I am fully present, here and now.

Now, if you have learnt how to do this, bless and consecrate your circle with Water and Fire, then stand at the East. (Leave out this stage if you have not yet learned how to do this). Then turn to face outwards, and raise one or both hands in salutation and say:

With the blessing of the hawk of dawn soaring in the clear pure air, I call upon the powers of the East.

See the clear blue sky above and ahead of you and feel the blessing of the dawn and of the hawk, and sense power flowing into your circle from this direction. Then turn and walk sunwise to the South, and facing outwards say

With the blessing of the great stag in the heat of the chase, and the inner fire of the sun, I call upon the powers of the South.

See warm southern lands before you in the noon-day sun – sense the blessing of the stag and feel power flowing into your circle from this direction. Then walk sunwise to the West, and facing outwards say

With the blessing of the salmon of wisdom who dwells within the sacred waters of the pool, I call upon the powers of the West.

See the sun setting over the sea or a lake – sense the blessing of the salmon, and feel power flowing into your circle from this direction. Then walk sunwise to the North, and facing outwards say

With the blessing of the great bear of the starry heavens and the deep and fruitful earth, I call upon the powers of the North.

Gaze into a clear night sky – see the stars shining in the darkness, sense the blessings of the bear, and the Great Bear, and feel power flowing into your circle from this direction.

Then turn to face into the circle, and move your attention to the earth beneath you. Sense the energy of the earth flowing up into you, and the energy of the sky flowing down into you – meeting in the centre of your Being. Feeling connected to both Earth and Sky, say

May the harmony of my life and of this circle be complete.

THE RITE

Sit facing the central fire/candle, with your back to the Samhuinn gate in the Northwest. Meditate on what you consider as ‘ancestral’ to you – where have you come from? What is your history, your lineage? What is your personal past, and the past of your people? See if you can sense a line stretching out behind you, of figures who are immanent within you even as you are implicit in them. They are your inheritance; you are their legacy. Notice that this line contains people from whom you have received a genetic inheritance, as well as many whose gifts have been ideas or passions, knowledge or skills. When you’re ready, stand, turn around and face the Northwest Gateway across the central fire/candle.

10 O Ancestors, known and unknown, ancestors of my body, ancestors of my spirit, all those who have given form to my life, who have made me what and who I am, body and soul. Mothers of mine! Fathers of mine! Teachers! Guides! Healers! Nourishers! Showers of the way to go...and of the way not to go! All you whose Fire is in me, whose Water is in me, whose Air is in me....whose Earth is in me....all you whose Spirit is in me! On this night of Samhuinn I feel you near. At this time of no time I call to you. *(repeat as you wish, using your own words)*

When you’re ready, shake your rattle/play your drum, etc. and visualise the gateway slowly opening. Sit again before the central fire/fire-bowl/candle and make sure it’s going well, then prepare your offerings.

Cast a bit of bread on the fire (or place by the central candle) saying

For the gift of my body.

Cast a bit of wine on the fire, saying For the gift of my heart.

Cast a bit of salt on the fire, saying For the gift of my mind.

Cast a bit of honey on the fire, saying For the gift of my will.

Now pause and allow yourself to sense if there is a response to your call and offering.

You may sense a contact with an actual ancestor of yours, or with a spiritual ancestor in the form of an inner teacher or guide. Or you may simply feel a sense of connection with something you can't picture or put into words. You may wish to ask a question, or simply be open to receiving any communication or gift. (As always, you will use your own judgement to evaluate any advice or messages you may receive. Just because someone doesn't have a physical body doesn't make them any wiser or smarter than you.)

When you have concluded your exchange, and if it feels appropriate, ask whether you may pass through the Samhain Gate yourself. The Cailleach (Goddess) waits on the other side. To her you may release your deepest wounds, your sorrows, your regrets and your fears; to her you may pour out the blackest waters of your soul.

If the response is positive, move around to the Gateway and step through, then kneel or sit facing the North West. The Cailleach waits by a gently steaming cauldron. She is ancient beyond all reckoning, she has seen countless generations live and die. She has seen you in life after life, and though she does not speak you sense her complete acceptance of you.

Place your wound/sorrow/fear/regret in your open hands and offer them to her. She reaches out to you, and for a moment you feel her ancient hands brush yours as she accepts your offering, which she holds for a moment before adding to the cauldron. She thanks you, and you have the strange feeling that you have somehow brought a necessary ingredient, that only you could have provided.

When you are ready, give your thanks and say your farewells, and return to the centre of your circle and sit once again. Have a bit of bread, wine, salt and honey (if the ancestors have left you any), saying

*With this bread, may my actions be blessed.
With this wine, may my feelings be blessed.
With this salt, may my thoughts be blessed.
With this honey, may my desires be blessed.*

When you are ready, prepare to close the North Western Gateway. Stand, facing the Gateway, and say

Ancestors of mine, friends, loved ones, companions this night, I thank you for your presence here at my fire, here in my circle and in my life. I thank you for the gifts you have given me, of body and mind, of will and heart. By your presence is my spirit blessed. Guide me as I live this life, as I face the responsibilities and the choices of my present circumstances.

*Sense that any presences withdraw through the Gateway. Close the Gateway, saying
I bid you farewell, and I close this Samhain Gateway.*

Sit and record your experiences of the ritual in your journal or notebook then enact

THE CLOSING

Stand at the East facing the centre, and say

It is the hour of recall. As the fire/light dies down, may it be relit in my heart. May my memory hold what the eye and ear have gained. *Now extinguish the central candle. Alternatively you can say:* As the radiance of this ceremony fades let it remain as a light in my heart. May my memory hold what the eye and ear have gained.

Chant CASCADING AWENS. Then say

May the spirits of the Four Directions be thanked for their blessings.

Walk sunwise to the North, face outwards and with raised hand/s in salutation say

In the name of the great bear of the starry heavens and of the element of earth, I thank the powers of the North.

Then Walk counter-sunwise to the West, face outwards and with raised hand/s in salutation say

In the name of the salmon of wisdom and the element of water I thank the powers of the West.

Then Walk counter-sunwise to the South, face outwards and with raised hand/s in salutation say

In the name of the great stag and of the element of fire, I thank the powers of the South.

Then Walk counter-sunwise to the East, face outwards and with raised hand/s in salutation say

In the name of the hawk of dawn and of the element air, I thank the powers of the East.

12 *Turn to face the centre again, and pause to feel that the energies of each direction have ceased to flow into the circle. Then say*

May the harmony of the land be complete.

Then uncast the circle counter-sunwise, return to the East and say

May the blessings of the Goddess/God/Spirit/Great Spirit be always with me. I declare this ceremony of Samhuinn is closed in the apparent world. May its inspiration continue within my being.

Then make whatever closing salutations you wish to the East, and exit sunwise.



SAMHUINN GROUP CEREMONY

A meditation on what is passing, what needs to be shed and what, in ourselves and our lives, we need to let go of at this time, is ideal preparation for this ceremony. Prior to the ceremony all participants should have prepared a piece of paper on which they have written down those things that they wish to release.

The ceremony is based on the original Breton, but if wished, the references to the Breton gods and the Breton affirmation may be omitted.

ADDITIONAL ROLES: Cailleach, Mabinog, Ancient

PREPARE: At the centre of the circle have a fire, fire-bowl or candle. You will need a branch of yew, sufficient to provide sprigs for all participants; a sword and hammer. For the sword, you could use instead a knife. In addition, you need enough bread, salt, honey and wine. The Ancient should carry a bowl of water - used for consecrating the ritual objects. Whoever is taking on the role of Cailleach should prepare separately beforehand (black clothing, a veil, a cauldron to carry). Someone may be designated to help him/her into and out of the role. She/he should wait outside the circle until the participants in the NW have opened a gateway. Time and care should be taken to divest oneself of the role of Cailleach after the ceremony, by returning fully to one's everyday self.

Traditionally, bags of angelica for protection were distributed to all participants, but this requires considerable preparation and can be dispensed with. Garlic can be used as indicated or dispensed with. If used, it should be discarded after the ceremony.

13

PROLOGUE

(Before the ceremony proper begins, one of the youngest present - The Mabinog – and one of the oldest/most experienced in Druidry present – the Ancient – step forward, and sit opposite each other, ideally beside a fire, with participants and guests seated around them.)

MABINOG: I come to your hearth, wise Ancient, for comfort - for on this night I can feel that the Otherworld draws closer.

ANCIENT: The hearth fire burns brightly on this night, Young One, and you are welcome to share in its warmth. Now is the time of Samhuinn – the old year is dying away and the dark months approach. The Otherworld does indeed feel closer at this hour, for during Samhuinn, time ceases to exist.

MABINOG: If time is abolished during the celebration of Samhuinn, what becomes of that invisible wall which time alone raises between the span of the living and the realm of the dead?

ANCIENT: Like time its builder, it is abolished whilst three times the Sun, the Eye of the World, throws his brilliant glance from East to West, whilst three times darkness comes again over our lands. Then and then alone, time will be reborn, the invisible wall will be raised anew, and then alone will begin the New Time.

MABINOG: Is it then possible, during the celebration of Samhuinn, to pass without risk or fear from one world to another: the living to the realm of the dead, the dead to the span of the living?

ANCIENT: It was during the celebration of Samhuinn that Cuchulainn penetrated the realm of the dead, and it is during these three nights and days, each time a year dies and the dark hours begin, that the veil between the worlds is thinned, and the dead may walk with us once more, and the living may cross to the Otherworld.

MABINOG: Your words, wise Ancient, and the thought of encountering those who have already died, fill me with fear.

14 **ANCIENT:** Do not try then, Little One, to penetrate to the kingdom of Ankou, the father of Anken and Ankoun (*Breton gods of the Otherworld*), for this test will be greater than your powers. Dwell then in yourself and your own house. But know that each one of us is on a journey – a journey of the Soul that passes many times through life and through death. We are each at a different stage on this journey, and there is no need to fear those who have forged the paths before us – even if they stand now in the Otherworld.

MABINOG: My fear is not yet lessened, Wise Ancient, since the departed are given the freedom to mingle with us.

ANCIENT: Know, O Little One, that the Spirits are amiable and favourable to those who respect, venerate and love them.

MABINOG: But how can I prove to them that I love, venerate and respect them?

ANCIENT: By making them ritual gifts.

MABINOG: What are these gifts and what are the rites whereby the offerings should be made to them?

ANCIENT: Hear and see, Little One, and be wise - guard carefully in the most secret places of your heart this ceremony of the Ancestors in which we authorise you to be the learner.

Ancient and Mabinog return to their places (East and North East respectively). The ceremony can then begin in situ, or participants can then proceed to another place, where a circle is formed by each person entering from the West and circling sunwise to salute the East before taking their place in the circle.

Candles and incense are lit. Bags of angelica can be given to all. The ceremony then begins with

THE OPENING

HERALD : By the power of star and stone,
By the power of the land within and without,
By all that is Fair and Free,
We welcome you to this rite of Samhuinn,
In the grove/seed group/family/etc. of...

WEST: We have come from East and West, North and South to be here together today. *(All join hands)*

DRUID 2: Let us take three breaths
Together with the Earth beneath us....
Together with the Sky above us....
Together with the Sea around us...

NORTH: With the blessings of Earth, Sea and Sky may our ceremony begin! *(All release hands)*

DRUID 1: *(Saluting East and facing outwards)* O Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es) *(Choose a term you feel comfortable with)* we greet you and honour you, and ask for your blessings! *(face inwards)* O Spirit of this place, O Spirit of this circle, we ask for your blessings, your guidance, and your inspiration on this our ceremony.

DRUID 2: Let us begin by giving peace to the quarters, for without peace can no work be.

(Moving to salute each direction in turn, crossing the centre of the circle, then returning to place in the West)

May there be Peace in the North.

May there be Peace in the South.

May there be Peace in the West.

May there be Peace in the East.

ALL: May there be peace throughout the whole world.

DRUID 1: Let us join in this prayer that unites all Druids:

ALL: Grant, O Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es), thy protection,
and in protection, strength,
and in strength, understanding,
and in understanding, knowledge,
and in knowledge, the knowledge of justice,
and in the knowledge of justice, the love of it,
and in the love of it, the love of all existences,
and in the love of all existences,
the love of Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es) and all goodness.

ALL: 3 AWENS

DRUID 1: Let all disturbing thoughts be laid aside.

(Casts circle sunwise, while Druid 2 says)

DRUID 2: The circle of our horizon – of our lives and lands, of time and of the year, of seasons and of goodness, of birth and of growing, of dying and of rebirth....

16

DRUID 2: As this circle is cast, the enchantment of the apparent world subsides. We stand together in the eye of the sun/by the light of the stars, here and now, between past and future. The earth below us, the heavens above us, and the circle/stones/trees/sea around us. This is sacred time. This is sacred space.

DRUID 1: Now let us consecrate this circle with Water and with Fire.

WEST or WATER BEARER: May our circle be purified and blessed with the Element of Water. *(moves sunwise with water)*

SOUTH or FIRE BEARER: May our circle be purified and blessed with the Element of Fire. *(moves sunwise with candle/incense)*

DRUID 1: We gather as equals, in our physical form here upon the earth. Each presence is a blessing, and with every breath we take, we breathe light and life into this circle.

DRUID 2: Let the four directions be honoured, and let the gateways of the Quarters be opened, that power and radiance might enter our circle for the good of all beings.

EAST (*turning and facing outwards*): With the blessing of the hawk of dawn soaring in the clear pure air, we call upon the powers of the East.

SOUTH (*turning and facing outwards*): With the blessing of the great stag in the heat of the chase, and the inner fire of the sun, we call upon the powers of the South.

WEST (*turning and facing outwards*): With the blessing of the salmon of wisdom who dwells within the sacred waters of the pool, we call upon the powers of the West.

NORTH (*turning and facing outwards*): With the blessing of the great bear of the starry heavens and the deep and fruitful earth, we call upon the powers of the North.

All four then turn to face into the circle.

ALL: May the harmony of our circle be complete.

THE RITE

The Yew is presented by the North to the Ancient who consecrates it (with water) and places it near the fire/fire-bowl in the centre of the circle, saying:

ANCIENT: The ritual of Samhuinn being set in the sign of the Yew, the Tree of the Dead, whose eternal green symbolises the eternity of the spiritual life, we lay here a branch of Yew.

WEST: If the Yew is the Tree of the Dead, it is equally that of the Ovates. In this rite of Samhuinn it is then the Ovates particular offering to the wise departed.

In the next section of the ritual, The Knight (South) presents the Sword to the Ancient who consecrates it. The Knight then lays it in the North-East. The Hammer, after consecration, is placed in the South-East, and the Bread and Salt to the North, the Wine to the West and Honey to the South: so that there is thence formed a star with five points at the centre of which is the yew and fire/fire-bowl. The ritual objects can be placed close to the centre, forming a small central pentagram shape, or towards the circumference of the circle.

SOUTH: The sword is the symbolic weapon of the warriors. We offer this therefore to the heroes who are departed.

South (The Knight) presents the Sword to the Ancient who consecrates it. South then lays the sword in the North-East.

WEST: The Hammer is the symbolic tool of the builders and producers. We offer it therefore to the departed labourers.

West presents hammer to Ancient who consecrates it. West then places it in the South-East.

NORTH: Whatever was their work on earth, the departed ate honey, bread and salt, and drank wine; we shall therefore offer to them bread, salt, honey and wine that they may refresh themselves in spirit even as in the time of their earthly feasts.

North brings bread and salt, South brings honey, West brings wine to the Ancient who consecrates them. After consecration, Bread and Salt is placed to the North, Wine to the West and Honey to the South.

If indoors, candles and lights are extinguished, the windows opened, and garlic can be placed on the window-sill. All face the open window. If outdoors, garlic can be placed at the Western gateway, any lights are extinguished, and all face West. A bell or other instrument may be sounded if it feels right at this time.

ANCIENT: O Ancestors, known and unknown, ancestors of our bodies, ancestors of our spirits, all those who have given form to our lives, who have made us what and who we are, body and soul. Mothers of ours! Fathers of ours! Teachers! Guides! Healers! Nourishers! Showers of the way to go...and of the way not to go! All you whose Fire is in us, whose Water is in us, whose Air is in us....whose Earth is in us.... all you whose Spirit is in us! On this night of Samhuinn we feel you near. At this time of no time we call to you.

18 Come dear Spirits! We welcome all of you who come in love and friendship, who share our quest for the Truth, and even as you move amongst us we shall remember those of the departed who are most dear to us.

Long Pause to allow individual communion with the Departed, or say:

Let any who so choose, now step forward and speak the names of those they wish to remember, that they be honoured in our circle tonight.

DRUID 2: O dear Spirits, you who were our predecessors, our friends, our guides, come to the help of those who are striving strenuously upon the path; guide them upon their quest for the light, support them in their times of difficulty. Ask for them the support of the Higher Powers and gain for them, if it be possible, the all-powerful blessing of the Unknowable Ones. We greet you as brothers and sisters during your brief transit across our world.

All turn to face inwards.

WEST: The Sun of all our lives sets in the West; but the Stars of The Seven Sisters have risen. Beloved spirits, we welcome you to share the wine of love.
(Casts a little wine into fire)

NORTH: The veil of midnight discloses the stars. O ancestors, in wisdom share the salt of Earth. *(Casts a little salt into fire)*

SOUTH: In the light of day lies understanding; shadows are small. True spirits, share your clear vision as we share the sweetness of honey on the tongue of truth. *(Casts a little honey into fire)*

ANCIENT: The Sun is reborn in the setting stars of dawn; may the souls of our loved ones share again the bread and breath of life. *(Casts a little bread into fire)*
May the fire release the spiritual essence of these offerings, that you, beloved Ancestors, may partake of this feast in the company of those on this plane.

Candles are lit if needed. Symbolic feast of bread and salt, honey and wine is offered to all. NORTH takes salt, EAST takes bread, SOUTH takes honey and WEST takes wine around to each member of the circle. Ensure that a little of each offering remains. After all have eaten, the remains are consumed in the fire. As the Ancient pours these onto the fire/fire-bowl, S/he can say:

PEZH A ZO RET BEZON A VO! *(Breton – pron. Pej-ah-zo-ret-bee-zon-a-voh)*
MAY THE DESIGN OF GOOD BE BROUGHT INTO BEING!
(Say either or both. The English is the literal translation of the Breton, meaning ‘May the very best be manifested - what will be will be - all is well’)

Two participants then form a gateway in the North West and the Cailleach appears through it, carrying a cauldron. She is dressed in black and is veiled. As she first emerges into the circle from the gateway, North says:

NORTH: The Cailleach approaches! Do not be afraid, Companions. One of the faces of the Great Goddess is the Cailleach, the Hag. Her work is veiled and little understood, but without her process of destruction and decay, the Earth would be barren of all life. It is She who brings the Winter snows to cleanse the Autumn debris, allowing the soil to be fertilised with the remains of last year’s harvest. It is She who hardens the ground with the frost and ice which quickens the dormant seeds in the earth’s womb. As the North wind, She scours the earth, stripping the branches bare. Without the work of the Cailleach, new life could not be nurtured during its long winter sleep in the depths of the Earth.

ANCIENT: The Cailleach calls to us. She sweeps through the cave of our souls. She clears away all that is finished or no longer of worth. Nothing unworthy escapes her challenge. At this time of Samhuinn she moves among us, offering us the gift of purification, of clearing away all thoughts and feelings and habits that no longer serve us. Now, if you wish, you may in the company of your Ancestors, offer to the transforming cauldron of the Cailleach all that you wish to let go of, to release.

Now, as the Cailleach moves silently anti-sunwise around the circle, each participant hands her the piece of paper on which they have written down whatever they would like to shed from themselves or their lives.

The Cailleach then moves to the central fire, as the Ancient says:

ANCIENT: O Great Spirit, O Cailleach, O Ancestors, we ask that we might be freed of all that hinders us. (*Cailleach casts papers into fire*) PEZH A ZO RET BEZON A VO - May the design of good be brought into being - What will be will be - all is well.

Cailleach leaves the circle via the NW gateway. (If you have no central fire, and there is no way you can burn them at a candle, let the Cailleach take the papers in the cauldron out of the circle, disposing of them by burning immediately after the ceremony.)

ANCIENT: O Ancestors, O Spirits, we have met this Samhuinn Eve and remembered one another. With respect and love, may you now depart in peace. (*Turns to face West if outdoors, or open window if indoors, in gesture of farewell. All do likewise*)

ANCIENT (*turning back into circle after a pause. All do likewise*):

20 Let us rejoice – a new Time begins, may it bring us whatever things are needful, support our bodies, nourish our souls and give radiance to our spirits. May it show to each one their true Path, by the light of the Oak, the Yew and the Silver Birch!

Sprigs of Yew are distributed to all.

THE CLOSING

DRUID 2: It is the hour of recall. As the fire/light dies down let it be relit in our hearts. May our memories hold what the eye and ear have gained.

All hold hands.

ALL: (*3 times, pausing between each*)
We swear, by peace and love to stand,
Heart to heart and hand in hand.
Mark, O spirit, and hear us now,
Confirming this, our sacred vow.

All Chant CASCADING AWENS.

DRUID 1: May the spirits of the Four Directions be thanked for their blessings.

NORTH: In the name of the great bear of the starry heavens and of the element of earth, we thank the powers of the North.

WEST: In the name of the salmon of wisdom and the element of water we thank the powers of the West.

SOUTH: In the name of the great stag and of the element of fire, we thank the powers of the South.

EAST: In the name of the hawk of dawn and of the element air, we thank the powers of the East.

All Turn to face the centre again.

ALL: May the harmony of the land be complete.

Circle is uncast counter-sunwise.

DRUID 1: May the blessings of the Goddess/God/Spirit/Great Spirit be always with us. I declare this ceremony of Samhuinn is closed in the apparent world. May its inspiration continue within our beings.



NOTES



THE ORDER OF BARDS OVATES AND DRUIDS
PO BOX 1333 LEWES E.SUSSEX BN7 1DX ENGLAND

Email: office@druidry.org

© OBOD or individual authors 2001
All Rights Reserved