

Samhain - Gateway to Initiation

With the ancient pagan festival of Samhain approaching, sound priestess Heloise Pilkington shares five ways to honour the darkness and replenish the soul during the winter months ahead

When we attune to the ancient Wheel of the Year and the cycles of nature - Samhain, the old pagan festival we now celebrate as Halloween on 31 October - is the point of the year when we begin to descend into the darkness of winter. It's a time associated with death, dying and letting go.

All of nature moves in cycles, and as part of nature, human beings are also subject to these natural cadences. We have circadian rhythms and experience physical, mental and behavioural changes throughout each day, primarily in response to shifting cycles of light and darkness in our environment. When we allow ourselves to flow with nature's cycles we tend to feel more connected, creative and energised.

Nature's seasons are also cycles of life and death. In the light time of the year, energy from the sun fuels new growth, then as the light recedes in winter less energy is available and things begin to die back. Samhain marks the beginning of the drawing in part of the cycle as we settle into shorter days heralding the onset of winter, the dark time of the year. It's the time when many animals go into hibernation and trees shed their leaves. We see many things in nature decaying, dying and returning to the earth. This becomes compost ready to fertilise the next growing part of the cycle which begins at Imbolc, the ancient fire festival celebrating the first signs of spring. When we become aware of life's natural cycles and can surrender to them we can allow our own life and death cycles.

In preparation for Samhain, 'All Hallows Eve', on 31 October - the traditional time for honouring the dead and the ancestors - I'd like to offer the following five suggested ways we can all honour the darkness that lies ahead on this inward cycle of the Wheel of the Year.

- 1. Nourish your inner world:** At this time of year we can come into alignment with nature by slowing down and listening to the body's natural desire to rest and sleep more. This is a good time to honour our instinct to turn inwards and listen to what is happening internally. Whilst in summer months our energy moves into outward activity, the winter months can be a time to nourish our inner world. When we quieten external activity, we create space to hear the inner voice and to nourish our creative and imaginative world. This is the dreaming time, when we can receive creative inspirations which are seeds we can sow at the beginning of the next growth cycle, starting at Imbolc.
- 2. Take time for reflection:** It is also a time to reflect on what we have harvested from the last growth cycle. Are we happy with what we have created over the last nine months? What are the lessons we can learn? What might we wish to change? These are all poignant questions to ask ourselves at this natural time of reflection.
- 3. Letting go:** As we enter this time of year, we can begin to contemplate what we may be ready to let go of in our lives. What is no longer serving us? From Samhain to Imbolc, the shedding of dead wood is what takes place in nature, leaving space for new growth. This is the perfect time to clear the dead wood in our own lives, creating space for new seeds to take root.
- 4. Grieving:** Traditionally this is a time for remembering the dead and honouring the ancestors. This can include a revisiting of the grief of their passing together with a reflection of our own mortality and the stark reality that as living beings our lives will also come to an end. This is a reminder of the preciousness of being alive in every moment and the choice is there to live life fully.

5. **Transformation:** We have an ancient relationship with fire. Our ancient ancestors learnt to keep warm in the winter cold by burning the dead wood of the year as they told stories of times gone by and dreamed of what was to come. As we enter the dark part of the cycle it is helpful for us to light a fire, even if it is simply a candle. By doing this we can ritually let go of the old dead wood of the year and envision the new cycle to come when the light starts to return after the solstice.

It is important not to treat winter as an inconvenience you'd rather not have but to honour it as an essential part of the cycle of life. In our culture we've come to fear the darkness because our culture only values and honours the growth part of the cycle, but in doing so it's become massively out of balance. We are encouraged to be continuously outward focused, busy and productive, overlooking our need for downtime and inner nourishment so essential for avoiding burn out and fatigue, and for enjoying a balanced, vital and happy life.

Heloise Pilkington's new album Initiatrix is released on Tuesday 31 October. To pre-order, or order a copy of the album after this date, visit Heloise's website: www.heloisepilkington.com. The album will also be available on iTunes and Amazon.

For a sneak preview of Heloise performing Live tracks from Initiatrix, check out this new YouTube video clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fHIGwmC5bA>