

Samhain

Ritual written and led by Jenni
(Friday 27/4/07)*

Background Information...

Samhain

Samhain (Pronounced Sow-en or sometimes S'aun) means the month of November in the Old Irish. It marks Summer's End in the Celtic Calendar, and is the last harvest. It is the first of the 8 Sabbats - or Holy Days - marking the onset of winter. It is the time of year when we notice that the days are getting colder and shorter. Samhain is also the start of the Celtic New Year.

In ancient times, the crops had already been harvested and the farm animals were brought inside to survive the coming Winter. This is also the time of year when the Otherworldly portal - or the Veil - is at its thinnest. Cheeky and mischievous spirits come through the Veil to wreak havoc on the unsuspecting and unwary, and apparently this is how the tradition of "Trick or treat" came about.

As well as the malevolent spirits, so, too, do our ancestors access their way through the Veil, in that we may remember and honour them. It is this reason also that the celebration is known as the "Festival of the Dead". Altars are decorated like shrines in memory of our ancestors, and offerings of food and the like are placed there for their enjoyment.

The four major Sabbats - including Samhain - traditionally coincide around the time of the full Moon. This year in the Southern Hemisphere, this will take place on 2nd May at 8:09PM AEST.

The Morrigan

Sometimes known as the "Washer at the ford" The Morrigan is a Goddess of War who converges on the battlefield to choose those that should be slain, much like the Valkyries of Norse legends. She is a shape-shifter, normally taking the form of a crow - sometimes also a cow. In some images, she is seen washing clothes in a river of blood at the impending battle as a means of choosing the fallen. She is also represented as a triple Goddess - carrying the aspects of Maiden, Mother and Crone. She had the ability to foretell fortune or doom, and she is also depicted as a fertility Goddess.

The Daghdha

Called the "Good God", the Daghdha was the chief God of the Tuatha De Danaan - Children of the Goddess Dana. Apparently there wasn't anything the Daghdha couldn't do. Described as being very tall and stocky, he had a huge appetite to match. Amongst his personal treasures was a club that could kill as well as heal, a magical harp that could change the seasons, and a cauldron that was always full of food - no one ever went hungry.

On Samhain night, before the Daghdha went into the second battle of Mag Tuireadh with the Formorians, he encountered a beautiful woman by a river, and wasted no time in seducing her. This woman was the Morrigan, she predicted victory for the Tuatha and promised her aid. Every year on Samhain night, the Daghdha mated with the Morrigan, to ensure the fertility and prosperity of Ireland. This was done because the Morrigan was also the Sovereignty of Ireland.

Casting the circle

By the power of the Sidhe (Shee), may this circle be blessed, cleansed and sanctified.
Keep repeating this incantation until 3 anti-clockwise revolutions have been done.

Guardians of the Directions

The four guardians chosen for this ritual are from the Tir Na Nog, or the "Land of Youth" which was the home of the Tuatha De Danaan before they inhabited Ireland.

East

From the city of Gorias, I call upon Esra - creator of Lugh's spear - to come forward this night so you may protect and charge this circle.
Hail and welcome!

North

From the city of Finias, I call upon Uiscias - creator of Nuada's sword - to come forward this night so you may protect and charge this circle.
Hail and welcome!

West

From the city of Murias, I call upon Semias - creator of the Daghdha's cauldron - to come forward this night so you may protect and charge this circle.
Hail and welcome!

South

From the city of Falias, I call upon Morfesa - creator of the Stone of Destiny for the High Seat of Tara - to come forward this night so you may protect and charge this circle.
Hail and welcome!

Invocation to the Morrigan

To the Morrigan - Sovereign of Ireland, War and Fertility Goddess - I call upon you to come forward this night so you may impart your all-knowing wisdom and your warrior spirit onto us.
Hail and welcome!

Invocation to the Daghdha

To the Daghdha - the Good God and all-father of the Tuatha - I call upon you to come forward this night so you may nourish and sustain us from your cauldron of plenty and impart your fatherly wisdom.
Hail and welcome!

The Ritual

The circle has been cast, the four directions, the God and Goddess have been invoked. We are now walking between this world and the other. The ritual may now begin.

The altar has already been prepared with the tools representing each element. Cake and ale is also given to our ancestors as a means of honouring them, as well as shared with the group. In an anticlockwise motion, the host calls for each person to approach the altar with a picture of their ancestor.

Placing the picture on the altar, he/she will say: *"To my ancestor (say name, if there is more than one say all their names at the one time), I honour you this night with food and drink. Thank you for joining us."* While still standing, grab a cake and eat half of it, placing the other half in a spare bowl reserved for the ancestors. Take a drink and reserve the rest to leave on the ancestral table.

Returning at last to the host, she takes her turn. Upon lighting a fire in the cauldron, the host will ask everyone to throw their pictures in the fire. There may be a moment for everyone to share memories of their ancestors, or why they were called upon.

Trick or Treat

No one can really say how this came to be part of the Hallow'een celebrations as we see it today, except that it originated from the U.S.A. I'm adopting the modern Scottish variation, more for the fun of it. People can put on a silly mask if they wish to, and participate in "Trick or Treat". Once again in a circle, the host will ask the person to the right to perform a trick before getting their treat. The trick must be stipulated to that person so he/she may perform it. Do this around the circle until it is completed.

Closing

Farewell the Daghdha

To the Daghdha - the Good God and all-father of the Tuatha - I thank you for sharing with us your cauldron of plenty and your fatherly wisdom on this night.

Hail and Farewell!

Farewell the Morrigan

To the Morrigan - Sovereign of Ireland, War and Fertility Goddess - I thank you for sharing with us your all-knowing wisdom and warrior spirit on this night.

Hail and farewell!

South

From the city of Falias, I thank Morfesa - creator of the Stone of Destiny for the High Seat of Tara - for protecting and charging our circle this night.

Hail and farewell!

West

From the city of Murias, I thank Semias - creator of the Daghdha's cauldron - for protecting and charging our circle this night.

Hail and farewell!

North

From the city of Finias, I thank Uiscias - creator of Nuada's sword - for protecting and charging our circle this night.
Hail and farewell!

East

From the city of Gorias, I thank Esra - creator of Lugh's spear - for protecting and charging our circle this night.
Hail and farewell!

May this circle be open but unbroken
May the peace of the Goddess be ever in our hearts.
Merry Meet and Merry Part
and Merry Meet again.



** This ritual is a combination of the author's original ideas and information obtained from various books and/or internet sources.*