

2021 SAMHAIN RITUAL FLOW:

This is a relatively long and complex ritual including container building, ancestor feast, spellwork/crafting, rites of remembrance, and shadow journey. You could cut out pieces if you don't have 5 hours or keep a tight rein and time all shares and activities. We only had 13 people at this one in 2021 (pandemic and all), it took time to do all that community sharing and witnessing, so we planned for the ritual to go 5 hours.

Pre-planning and set up:

In the ritual invitation, it's good to let people know what will happen, so they can put some thought into things before they arrive. Ask them to put some thought into a dish they could bring that would bring honor to their ancestors, or a special recipe from their grandmother. If you don't have enough plates for everyone, ask them each to bring their most beautiful plate to use at the feast. Let them know the prompts for the ancestor feast sharing, let them know about the rites of remembrance so they could bring photos or other props to show what they have lost. Some of these rites of remembrance have been amazing – a requiem for all the species put on the extinction or endangered list that year, a beautiful musical presentation about a cherished musician who had died. If you invite your community to pour their hearts into this, it can be a work of art.

If you are doing some kind of crafting or spell work, you will want to have everything prepared and laid out – we prepared all the materials for the crafting of the Rites of Remembrance Bundles and had them laid out for people. If you can, have that area set up before you begin so you don't have to spend ritual time preparing the space. We let the dishes sit on the table until after the ritual and clean up later.

It's lovely to have a beautiful table set for the feast – candles, rich table décor etc. We make a beautiful setting for the ancestor plate, usually decorating the chair at the head of the table, making it into almost a throne.

Some years we incorporate the Ancestor Plate into the ritual – bringing it outside and doing a formal offering of the plate to the spirits of the land. Some years, I take care of that the following day, having it be a solo ritual. Whatever you decide, make sure you do something with that sacred plate of food!

Gathering Song: gather in a circle, XXX will teach the song and sing it

This is a good zipper song. We only do the words below, not the lovely verses that are sung over the top in the video below. The leader explains while teaching the song that they will yell out the zipper word at the beginning of the line and we all use that word. You can invite ritualists to contribute their own zipper words.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5jTCEKkg_0

Honoring the ones who came before us
Honoring the ones who came before us
Honoring the ones who came before us
Honor them with **song**

(to do this as a zipper song, the leader will shout out the substitution for the word **song** at the beginning of the line – all will sing the line with that new word) examples – honor them with prayer, flame, blessings, food, love, remembrance)

Welcoming: Sandra

(these are my notes from planning the ritual – what actually came out of my mouth in the ritual was probably something like this)

Samhain, as the halfway point between fall equinox and winter solstice, has many associations. For the druids, this was the final harvest time, the beginning of a new year. In many traditions, this is recognized as the time when the veils between the worlds are the thinnest. The question I would pose tonight is this: what does this much used phrase “the veils are thin” mean to you? Do you feel something in your body? Do you sense something happening, either describable with words or perhaps not? Do you act differently at this time? During this ritual, or maybe in the coming days, perhaps we could all devote some energy to feeling into this “time of thinning veils”?

What we do know is this has become a time to honor our ancestors, remember what has died and celebrate the possibility of rebirth.

Tonight, we will create the container for our ritual and invite the ancestors. We hold an ancestor feast, giving them a place of honor at our table, feed them with foods they remember from their human lives, and honor their memories with our stories.

Then in a Rite of Remembrance, we will honor and remember what has been lost this year, supporting each other in our grief and sadness. Then we will journey on the land, welcoming the darkness as the wheel of the year turns towards winter solstice. Each person knowing in their heart the work they are called to do in the Shadow.

I don't often cast a formal wiccan circle in our community rituals, but tonight, for Samhain, we will. Remember this is a space we create together. I may be the one holding the knife, but I invite you all to lend your energy and intention to the casting. As I draw the circle, you envision what a safe and protected space looks like for you - whether a circle of blue flame on the ground, a golden sphere encasing us, or a wall of bright light all around us. This circle casting is where you set your healthy boundaries - know that you get to choose which ancestors you invite in- you get to set your boundaries about how much grief or sadness you feel at any given moment, how deep you choose to go in your shadow journey. Please know that I will not be formally taking down this circle at the end of the ritual. Instead, we are creating a sacred space that will be permeable but will remain in place as a safe place to grieve, do shadow work, do descent work into the darkness...until winter solstice.

Grounding:

We begin by grounding. Close your eyes if that feels good for you. Take a couple deep cleansing breaths, letting go of the thoughts and cares of the mundane world. Feel your feet connecting with the earth, solid and strong beneath you. Find your own connection with the Mother, the point of entry for your grounding cord. Ask her to create an opening which allows that cord to sink deep into the earth. Through the soil, the mycelium and the fungi people, the rock people, through the waterways. From this point of deep rootedness, feel her dependable strength and solidity begin to flow upward, through your feet, into your

calves, your knees, your thighs. Feel the earth energy raising up into your body, enlivening your gut and all your organs, spreading through your chest and your heart, raising like sap into your face and your head. Now allow the connection to blossom upward and outward, sending your cord or antenna up into the realm of the sky people, through the atmosphere, up into the place of the moon and the stars. Knowing that all the earth, and all life on earth, was formed from the dust of the star beings, gather that primordial energy from the sky and bring it down to meet with the earth energy coursing through your body. Take a few deep breaths, savoring this connection with earth and sky, energized and grounded in this place, in this now. I invite you to open your eyes if you have had them closed.

Circle Casting:

From this place of union with Earth and sky we draw the power to cast the circle (with athame, walk to the North draw invoking pentagram) By the earth that is her body we cast this circle. (walk to east) By the air that is her sweet breath we create the boundaries that offer us safety and security. (walk to south) By the fire of her bright spirit we allow in the invited ones, keeping out any who mean us harm. (walk to west) By the living waters that are her blood, we give our feelings permission to be seen and felt in this space By all that is above, may the unseen ones protect us. By all that is below may our connection to earth keep us rooted. By all that is within we allow ourselves to be fully present. By all that is without, may these boundaries be strong

Sacred circle, we call you forth. Be thou a meeting place for all you see here before you, between the world of the humans and the realms of the mighty ones. Be thou a vessel to contain the energies raised within thee. Be thou a guardian and a protection against any and who would do us harm.

And so the circle is cast
we are between the worlds
and what happens between the worlds
changes all the world
So Mote It Be

Calling the Ancestors:

XXX opens the door and invites in the ancestors. She physically opens the doors to the outside. Using drums and rattles, we make some noise to let the ancestors know we are here, and this is where the party is. Using our voices, we call out to them and invite them in. She tells them what we are doing, how we are wanting to honor them, pointing out to them where their place of honor is at the feast, and the wonderful foods we have prepared in their memory. There will probably be an ancestor welcome song here as well?

Introducing the Ancestor Feast:

XXX explains the feast: We begin this Samhain ritual, the night when the veils are the thinnest and contact with our ancestors is easiest, by inviting them to a dinner party. We feed them both literally, with portions of food we have brought to honor them, and figuratively, by telling our stories about them and keeping them alive. Parts of this, especially the beginning where we are getting our food, are fun and lively because our ancestors love a good party...and parts of it are quiet and contemplative. In a moment, you

will go get your potluck dish and put in on the buffet tables. Then I will guide you in filling the ancestor plate - as honored guests and elders, they get served first. As you put a small portion of the dish you brought on the ancestor plate, give us a VERY brief description of the dish - you'll have more time to share the story with us later. When the plate is full, we will serve ourselves and sit down. Once we are all seated, we will have a rousing rendition of the Sacred Groves food blessing songs because the ancestors love a good song! Then we begin the meal with 3 minutes of silence. This is your time to invite your personal ancestors to the table, and to say what you would like to say to them. Then we move into the sharing of stories about our people and lineage.

Now we will take a 5 minute bio break and put out your potluck dishes

Filling the Ancestor Plate:

XXX pick up the ancestor plate from head of table and say something brief like: As our honored guests at this dinner, we serve you first, Ancestors. Please know that we offer you all the hospitality of an honored guest. **XXX** models by

1)describing the dish she brought very briefly - even remind people they will have more time later to share more about their dish if they want but right now, the food is getting cold so please keep it brief!

2) put a small helping on the ancestor plate

3) pass the plate to each person and have them do the same with the dish they brought

4) put the plate at the ancestor seat

5) invite everyone to serve themselves and sit down - we create the tone that it's ok for this to be joyous and lively

6) once everyone is seated, bless the food with lively food blessing songs

7) **XXX** reminds us to begin dinner with an invitation for 3-5 min of silence, allowing all of us for to greet and invite in their own ancestors for the evening

8) **XXX**, at 3-5 minutes in, asks for all to begin the community sharing - to deepen community connections and to honor our beloved dead by sharing their stories. Here are some possible prompts, but remind people to speak that which needs to be spoken, from the heart. We will each have 3 minutes for share, the chime will go off at 2:30 to let you know to begin to wrap up. Review the prompts, call on someone to model.

1. Share a short story about a known-to-you ancestor, or your lineage as a whole, that has shaped you.
2. Share a gift or a challenge you have received from your lineage
3. Share more about the dish you brought and why

XXX will keep time for the shares

When dinner is complete:

XXX brings out the herbal elixir she crafted for the ritual, shares what it is, why we are drinking it, how it might help us in connecting with our ancestors, with sharing and witnessing the losses of this year, and journeying into the Shadows.

XXX brings out traditional soul cakes he made and shares what it is and a little about the tradition behind it.

XXX will end the feast and do transition to Rites of Remembrance

While still at the table, **XXX** says “the time has come to adjourn from the table of our ancestor feast. In a moment, we will be transitioning to the circle in the living room. Leave your plates on the table, if anyone wants to pitch in to help clean up after the ritual is done, you would be welcome to do that. This will be a good time for a bio break if anyone needs one.

In a few minutes, they begin the song:

Song to transition:

Return Again (Betsy Rose version, Adapted from Traditional/Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mpbm-T-D7Y>

Return again, return again
Return to the land of your soul
Return again, return again
Return to the land of your soul
Return to who you are
Return to what you are
Return to where you are
Born and reborn again

Pre-ritual, we had set up a circle of back jacks, one for each person, with:

- *pre-cut 4-5 foot lengths of 3 cords (black, white and red) placed on each back jack.*
- *a sprig or two of 4 different herbs on each backjack (I think we used rosemary, mugwort, sage and lavender)*
- *Extra herbs and the extra spools of cord and scissors in the middle.*
- *Simple altar at the middle has some ferns as a base, a place to put the bundles after the sharing has concluded*

Introduction to Rites of Remembrance: XXX

- One of our traditions of Samhain is the Rite of Remembrance. This is a space where we remember what has been lost to us – specifically in the past year, but any loss that still feels alive for you is welcome. *(Maybe add something in here about witnessing and supporting people in their sadness, and how/why we have invited in the ancestors for their support)*
- During this time, we will be crafting a Remembrance Bundle, more about that in a minute, and as we work, we will be sharing out loud that which has been lost to us this year.
- This loss could be a person you knew, or a person or people you did not know. Could be a person who inspired you. A beloved animal friend. A tree you loved. It could be an intangible or a concept. The loss of youth or physical vitality. The loss of kindness in our wider culture, etc.
- It is the time for us to remember the losses we experienced, ask for support or prayers if you need them. Speak what you need to say to what has been lost. Let your community share in your sadness
- The suggestion is, after someone shares something or someone they have lost, we can all respond out loud with “what is remembered lives”

- We will suggest about 3 minutes for the first round of sharing, though we will not time this. It takes the time it takes. There will be space for a second round if anyone feels incomplete.

Here are the instructions for constructing the Bundle:

- o you each have 3 cords pre-cut and a bit of each of the herbs. More herbs and more cord in the middle of the circle if you find you need extra. You choose what you use. You can use just one herb, only 2 colors of cord...totally up to you
- o **XXX** explains the herbs and significance of the color cords – white life/black death/red rebirth, the cycle continues
- o OR AND – you decide the significance of everything!!
- o using these materials and your prayers, create a bundle to take home - put it on your altar, hang it over your bed, burn it in a ritual fire - whatever speaks to you.
- o This bundle can take any form you choose. You can wrap the herbs, hang them from the cord, braid the cord around the herbs, tie the herbs together and leave long tails to do knot work, whatever calls to you.
- o As you work, have an intention or prayer you infuse into your creation. Maybe the spell you weave into your bundle is to allow yourself to grieve for what has been lost this year. Maybe you do a knot work spell of remembrance, with every share spoken here in the circle, you tie a knot. Maybe you make this bundle to put on your altar as a reminder for you to call on your ancestors for support when you need it.
- o Are there any questions?

Begin Work on the Bundles:

everyone begin to work on your bundle, in relative silence. You will have about 10 minutes of quiet time to work. Use this time to deepen and ground your connection with the earth, the ancestors, yourself, the community of beloveds in this circle with you. Set your intention for the bundle, do your spell work or silently speak your prayer as you work. Make yourself ready for the deep work of sharing and witnessing our collective losses. You will be able to continue working on your bundle as people begin to share, or you can complete it after the ritual, so take your time, take it slow. It's a spell meant to be crafted over the next hour or so of our time together.

(Probably set a timer for 10 minutes. Give a one-minute warning)

Begin Community Share and Witness

Now we can begin to share. Remember, we will do 2 rounds if needed, the first one being around 3 minutes, but we are not timing these, so take the time you need!

(here it might make sense to invite one specific person to share, to model the concept)

(When first round shares are done, offer a second round, maybe shorter this time, if there was anything forgotten.)

(sometimes, people bring amazing shares that take 10 minutes instead of 3 – be prepared for that)

When all shares are done:

Would everyone put their Remembrance Bundle in the middle of the circle please and stand up.

All are standing in circle around the bundles... join hands...say something like:

“all these bundles together in the center of the circle are a symbol of how we as a community come together, both in good times and when we have sadness and loss. It’s a symbol of the support of community, to show up as our authentic selves and share what is in our hearts. On Samhain, we remember our losses...in community, we share what’s in our heart and are supported. We will be transitioning to our Shadow Journey in a moment – feel free to leave your bundle here and pick it up later...or take it and carry it with you on your walk”

XXX begins the song to transition:

Oh Grandmothers, with the words changed to what is below

This was the closest version I could find online, but it should be slower and with feeling

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZBkPCfwFdo>

Oh ancestors, hear us calling

We your children seek healing

Oh ancestors, hear us calling

We your children are healing

Power, power, our love is our power

Power, power, your love is our power

All sing that song until it does not want to be sung any more, then **XXX** announces it’s time for the Shadow journey, please take a bio break and prepare yourselves to go outside, get your candle and your bundle if you want to carry it with you

Shadow Journey will be outside on the land, either ending at a fire in the Meadow or around the hearth/altar in the roundhouse – weather and group energy dependent.

Shadow Journey – Stewarded by XXX

Gather at the starting spot, either outside or in, leader will decide

XXX tells the story and gives instructions for the journey

The narrative arc is we set a place at the table for our ancestors to join us on Samhain. We feed them, tell their stories, offer gratitude for how our lineage shaped us. With that connection established, we invite them to move with us into the realm of remembering what we have lost in the past year. Our ancestors and our living community witness our loss and support us. Then we take all that with us as we journey...seeking guidance from the unseen, turning inward, listening deeply and speaking what needs to be said to that which is beyond the veil

What is your focus for the Shadow Journey – are you seeking guidance or connection with an ancestor? Guidance from spirit about a choice you need to make? Trying to access some part of yourself that is hidden in Shadow? Looking for a message about what work you need to do during the darkest time of year?

Teach the song for the Shadow Journey – find a good song for this that expresses the tone you want to set and the work we are encouraging. It should be slow (it will tend to speed up) and really really easy. As people spread out in the walking line, it’s a long way from the first

to the last person – make sure you plant people in the middle who really know the song and will sing it – or it will just fade away. Or, decide you want to journey in silence.

Decide if you want to walk with a candle (which can make it harder to see the ground), or if you need to put some tiny string lights along sections that don't have good footing. Decide if you want to walk on road or forest paths. Will you do it if the weather is really bad, pouring down rain? Could you shift this portion to a guided (or not) journey indoors? I have seen ritualists mutiny when confronted with walking outdoors in 40 degree driving rain – have a plan B, or people who can let spirit guide them in spur of the moment decisions.

We normally don't plan the end of this ritual very closely. We have a few ideas, but we are largely guided by the energy of the group and the whispers of spirit. We have done short walks and an hour long sharing circle indoors. We have done long walks that ended with people heading off solo into the woods. We have ended by lighting an outdoor bonfire and having storytelling and song sharing. We have met back in the house and done a more formal devoking of the container when that felt needful. Sometimes people feel very inward and quiet and just want to slowly make their way home to sit in sacred darkness.