

FIRE RITUALS

Apprenticing to Fire

In the summer of 2022, my beloved and I moved into a space whose primary heat source is a wood stove. That meant I had to get a lot more adept and comfortable with building and tending fires. I decided to apprentice to fire for a year, it being the element I had the least natural connection with.

One unexpected boon of apprenticing to physical fire was deepening the practice of tending my inner Sacred Flame. Tending this flame symbolizes living a life that is juicy and joy full, more congruent and connected with my soul's purpose. Apprenticing to fire helped awaken a part of myself who is dedicated to the path of transformation. She must build (like any light worker) a relationship with fire. She doesn't fear darkness - she sits in its presence, harnessing the potential of it, and embeds it with light.

Fire taught me that part of tending my own Sacred Flame is feeding it with passion from my own heart. And that tending the actual hearth could lead me to better tending the inner hearth. Fire asked me to cultivate and presence the magic that the hearth brings - gathering together hearts and souls, turning floor + roof + walls into a home, which I see as a woman's gift of fire. To begin teaching me, fire needed me to uncage my heart, uncage my own feral wild passion.

What is a Piece of Wood?

As an apprentice to fire, one of my starting points was to hold a piece of wood in my hands and try to sense the magic contained therein. Yup, I had to start with the basics! It's a beautiful practice, one I still do occasionally. You will, of course, come up with your own words and way of being with the piece of wood, but here is an excerpt from my journal that explains how it worked me:

I hold this piece of wood in my hands, trying to equate the living breathing trees around me with this beautiful offering. I feel the weight of it, the solid edges of it. I count the rings, remembering what I was doing on the year the tree was growing this ring. I hold my ear to it, listening. I hear the soft moss on the bark whispering to me that this is a miracle. That this solid

piece of wood being held in my hands is made of nothing but sunlight, water, carbon dioxide, some minerals from the soil AND that most important thing. The fifth sacred thing. Thou. Mother of All Beings. You who are the creative spark. You, who takes the 4 elements and with the power of spirit, the spark of life, You transform them into these living trees that surround me and this piece of wood I hold in my hands. How could I not offer you my devotion Mother? For this and so many miracles, all offering a kindness and generosity unparalleled.

The ritual fire before me is dancing. Flames curling up in beautiful curves. The orange core flickering and very much alive. The gift of heat chasing the chill of late afternoon. This fire that will transform this piece of wood in my hands. How could I ever hope, other than with my death, to transform so utterly and completely?

I offer this wood to this fire, I offer it with devotion and a sense of awe of the spirit, the magic spark that turns two cells into a full human baby. The same spirit that turns sunlight, water, air and minerals into this wood. The power of fire that transforms this wood into heat, light, smoke that carries prayers and the force that calls, gathers and builds community. The magic that turns a house into a home and a group into a community.

Lighting the First Hearth Fire

This is an evolving ritual, one I have been doing by myself for a few years, but this year plan to turn it into a community ritual. Obviously, this only works if you have a hearth or a wood stove in your house.

Preparation: before you need to light the first fire in the hearth (because it's getting cold outside) make sure to ritually clean the hearth or wood stove. Do a good thorough job, with a lot of intention and love. Lay a beautiful fire in the bed. Use your cleanest, most lovely pieces of wood. Your fanciest kindling. Add some color and beauty with clean burning natural materials, like dried rose petals and sweet smelling herbs.

The first fire: Gather the humans and other than humans who will enjoy the hearth. Do any ritual set up that calls to you. As you light the fire, say something like:

I honor the hearth which is, in winter especially, the center of the household.

I honor the Great Mother with the lighting of this first fire. I build this fire that will attract and draw in all the human people who are within sight of it. In

this gathering, the people will feed each other, and this will feed the spirit of Her. Cheered by the warmth and light of this fire, we the people will share many meals and connecting moments. This will also feed Her.

Just as She is the creative glue that holds the universe together, so we people are the loving glue that holds this community together.

The fire of the hearth has long been an ally and a partner, gathering us in the cooking of food, bringing us the gift of story. Thank you blessed hearth fire! I look forward to sharing many cozy evenings with you this winter.

As fire transforms wood, a gift from the earth, into heat and light, may this fire transform a structure into a home. May it help transform individual humans into a collective web of kindness, love, interdependence and shared experience. May this fire build community and make this space a place of belonging.

In whatever ritual way seems right, light the fire and let the love flow...

Yearly Tending the Bones - around Samhain

I have a lot of bones. A few have been gifted to me, but most I have found while out backpacking deep in the wilderness of Cascadia. I always ask permission, both of the bones and the spirits of land I find them on, before removing them. Sometimes I get a clear NO, which I respect. But most often I get a feeling of yes, it would be fine. If I can manage some extra weight in my pack, I take home a bone.

I don't know where this ritual came from, I don't think I have ever heard of anyone else doing it. It started small, with me passing a few bones over a candle flame. It has grown over the years and has turned into a major event. Some time after Samhain (I have it on my sacred calendar in early November) I cart all the bones down to the big ritual fire pit in our meadow and lay a ritual fire.

I light the fire, calling in my ancestors and the ancestors of this land I live on. Then I set all bones around the fire, on the ground and on chairs. Then, I tend to the bones. This is an offering for them, as well as my ancestors. I sing to them, tell them stories, make sure they get warm.

I talk story with them about how I am readying myself for the darkness of winter that is coming. I ask them for help in making peace with what lives in my shadow, my disappointments, sadness, losses.

I honor the dissolving that each body went through to reach the state they are in now.

Even when the flesh is stripped away, the bones remain. And so it will be with me.

Tending the bones I am anchored in my solid frame, not fearing the dissolution that will come.

Neither the actual dissolution of my physical body, nor the spiritual dissolution that often happens during the long nights of winter.

This time of year, we are entering into the void space on the way to the Death House.

I am readying myself for surrender to the void space, the place where "what was" lives, and where "what is yet to be" is forming.

I call on the bones of my ancestors, on these bones around the fire, on my deep wisdom and inner knowing.

I get lost in the flames tending the bones.

I dissolve and the framework is still there.

How much a miracle is that??