

Samhain, 2013, Spirit and Nature Celebration

Honoring the cycle of the seasons and the journey of the soul.

Sunday, November 3

Ah, the night was perfect for our Samhain Celebration! Clear, cold, and still. It was new moon and the time had just fallen back, so it was very dark. There were a million stars, and the Milky Way, in some cultures the pathway for the dead, shone above. We were here to honor the recent losses in our community and to be with our beloveds in the transformative in-between time, the transition between life, death, and rebirth.

As people arrived they were smudged with white sage and given white prayer ribbons to hang on the bare tree branches above the altars to honor loved ones who have passed. A great horned owl hooted once as the ceremony was about to begin. We called the Spirits of the Directions and the Elements to open the circle, singing the Thunder Beings song, *I call to the power of the thunder beings, I call to the power of the earth. I call to the power of the east and west, I call to the power of the north and south. Behold the time has come, the time has come to unite as one. Behold, the time has come, to encircle the earth with our love.*

As is our Samhain tradition, we had cut the woven ribbons down from the Beltane Maypole that had been raised to celebrate the light half of the year. The snake of ribbons lay around the fire circle, slit open, looking for all the world like the shed skin of a snake, perfect symbol of transformation and rebirth.

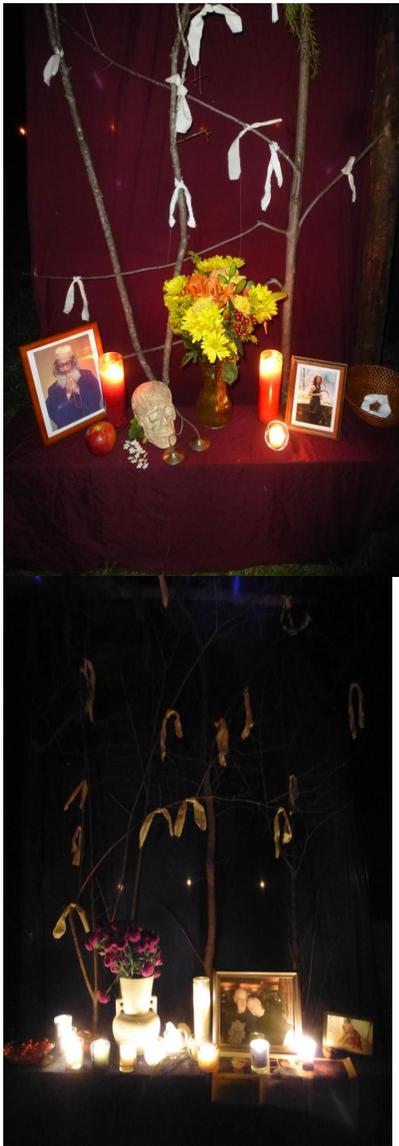


Together we raised the ribbon snake and draped it over the teepee of wood. Invoking the vision of the lighting of the great Samhain fire on the Hill of Tara in Ireland, where the people gave thanks for the last harvest and made offerings of objects into the fire with their prayers, we would now offer to the fire our ribbons with the prayers written onto them at Beltane. Together we watched as the space inside the cone of wood began to glow. Watching that glow slowly grow brighter was almost like watching the gradual lightening of the sky before sunrise. The first small tongues of fire began to lick up the outside of the wood and then became big flames crackling the woven ribbons, consuming them, turning them to ashes before our eyes. We were transfixed, time standing still, as the smoke rose up carrying the prayers of our community. Finally the yellow flames reached the top of the cone and leaped up into the night.



Circling the fire, we began honoring our departed ones by name, lighting a candle on the altar and ringing a bell for each, sending up our prayers for their safe journey. Our community has had so many losses lately, Larry Taylor the father of the dances here and such an inspired musician, Eileen Schlosnagle

whose boundless enthusiasm for the dances had graced our circle for so long, Layne Redmond, our beloved drum teacher, who had just died on Monday. Samhain couldn't have come at a better time!



We each took a river stone from a basket that was passed and raised it, calling to an Ancestor or spirit guide to be with us and help us both celebrate and grieve our beloveds. We sang "Ancestors, Sky People" several times with simple movements, blessing and being blessed around the fire.

Singing, Hoof and horn, hoof and horn, all that dies shall be reborn. Corn and grain, corn and grain all that falls shall rise again, we began to process through the gateway between the altars. As we passed through the

black veil that draped the Threshold we received pomegranate seeds, like Persephone, symbolizing our willingness to descend into the initiatory crucible where transformation takes place.



Continuing up to the dark dancing ground, we circled the cauldron of rebirth in the center. In the darkness we took a brief drumming journey into the underworld. Placing our ancestor-stones on the white cloth around the cauldron, we invited the Ancestors to be with us during the Dances that were to follow. Then the cauldron flames were lit.

We looked north for the polestar. The polestar is the last star at the tail end of Ursa Minor. Shamanically, this series of stars was seen as the axis of the world, the Axis Mundi, to be climbed to help the natural world and spirit world reunite. In the northern hemisphere, the polestar stays still as the Little Bear and the great wheel of the constellations circle counterclockwise around it. Since this was the first night of Diwali, the Hindu New Year, as Samhain is first night of the Celtic New Year, we honored this Festival of Lights, by lighting the torches around the dance circle. Then, circling counterclockwise, we danced the Polestar Dance. *I have made thee Polestar of my life... a chant by Paramahansa Yogananda derived from a poem by the great 20th c. Bengali poet, Rabindrinath Tagore. ...Though my sea is dark and my stars are gone, still I see the path through thy mercy.*

Around the burning cauldron, we honored the dark goddess of transformation, Kali, as we danced, *In the fire, in the fire, gonna burn my burden in the fire...give it up to Kali, give it up to Kali, give it up to Kali, give it up...purify me in your holy flame.*



As it was getting quite cold, we returned to the bonfire circle to dance the celebratory African American spiritual, "Death Come A Knockin'." Oh that we each can sing when the time comes, *Halleluja, done done my duty, got on my traveling shoes!* Then, basking in the dark moon, we danced the New Moon Zikr. We visualized returning through the Threshold as we sang to each other, *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.* Then we sang it once more to our loved ones.

In closing we thanked the Ancestors and the Spirits of the Directions for their presence and released them, opening the circle, singing *May the circle be open...* and sent out our prayers for the wellbeing of all with the Buddhist Blessing. Of course we then feasted around the blazing fire on goodies brought by the community!

With Gratitude to All,
Hakima Betty Lou Chaika

Sponsored by the Ziraat Circle of the Rose Heart Sufi Community and members of the Pittsboro Dances. Special thanks to Roger for the spectacular altars and threshold, Christine for the drumming journey, Hamid, Raymond, and Nur Rahmana for their music, and Nur for leading us in the Dark Moon Zikr.