

The Festival of Lughnasadh

Ritual

Altar: paper figures; oat cakes, fire, bowl of water

Introductions

Grounding

Invocation

Circle Cast

Chant: Earth My Body

History

Paper figures distributed; each person identifies a fear and chants it

Chant: She changes everything she touches; everything she touches changes

Dancer leads chanters in a clockwise snake dance; dancers cast figures into fire

Dosing with water: Be refreshed and energized.

Leader distributes oat cakes, asking each person to identify hope

Song: This Little Light of Mine

Oat cake eaten

Meditation

Chant: Hale and Farewell

Circle opened

Invocation

This is the wake of Lugh, the Sun King who dies with the waning year, the Corn King who dies when the grain is reaped. We stand now between hope and fear, in the time of waiting. In the fields, the grain is ripe but not yet harvested. We have worked hard to bring many things to fruition, but the rewards are not yet certain. Now the Mother becomes the Reaper, the Implacable One who feeds on life that new life may grow. Light diminishes, the days shorten, summer passes. We gather to turn the Wheel, knowing that to harvest we must sacrifice, and warmth and light must pass into winter.

History

The third great festival of the Celtic year takes place on August 1, known in Ireland as Lughnasadh, “the assembly of Lugh,” one of the chief gods of the Tuatha De Danann. It marks the midpoint of the summer half of the year between May and November and is the first of the three autumn months. In early Ireland it marked the beginning of the harvest season, which continued till the last sheep and cattle were brought down from the highland pastures in time for Samhain. Farmers reaped the first ears of wheat, oats, and barley and, in later centuries, dug up the first new potatoes. Lambs were weaned so that their mothers would mate and conceive new offspring to be born the following year in time for Imbolc. Soft fruits swelled and ripened - gooseberries in the garden, bilberries on the moors. The gods had kept their covenant with the people, and it was time to celebrate earth’s bounty.

In Celtic tradition a plentiful harvest could not be won without the cooperation of the earth goddess, of whom Tailtiu is a local manifestation. Before a new king could be inaugurated, he had to undergo a ritual marriage with the goddess of the land in her role as Sovereignty, for only she could confer upon him the authority to rule. Lugh and Tailtiu may once have been related as king and consort, but if so the original myth has been lost. In a medieval tale, Lugh appears as the husband of the Sovereignty goddess as she initiates a future king.

Meditation

Climb a hill, picking berries as you go.

At top of hill, look out over fields shimmering in the August heat.

Look to the east: newly cleared fields, new beginnings in your life

Look to the south: fields thick with corn, ready for harvest

Look to the west: grain strangled with weeds, needing attention

Look to the north: field ready to be plowed under

Look toward the center of the hill: Lord and Lady of the harvest offer you its fruits; leave berries as offering.