

Samhain: Trick or Treat Oct 15, 2023

The season of jack o'lanterns, spooky scenes, and trick-or-treaters is upon us once more. Do we ever outgrow the desire to hide ourselves behind costumes and makeup and masks?

Intro:

Halloween is near, always one of my favorite seasons. Trick-or-treating, haunted houses, scary movies, costumes and masks, I've always loved it all. Halloween is even my anniversary. When I started studying Paganism, I learned that it's a big holiday on that path - Halloween and New Year's all rolled into one. Instead of Halloween, it gets an older name, a Gaelic one for it's Celtic roots. This is the season of Samhain, of summer's end.

- Samhain: the ancient Celtic festival
 - midpoint between the autumn equinox and the winter solstice,
 - marks the transition from the warmth of summer to the cold embrace of winter
 - end of the harvest season
 - crossroads between light and darkness, life and death
- Ancestral Connection
 - Soul Matters theme is "Heritage"
 - Samhain is a time to honor ancestors
 - reminds us of our heritage
 - interconnectedness of all beings across time and space.
- The Thin Veil
 - Samhain season: thinning veil between realms of life and death.
 - Allowing for communication with those who had passed.
 - Cross cultural, e.g. Mexico's Day of the Dead
 - While our beliefs about the afterlife may differ, we can at least contemplate the mysteries of existence and what lies beyond our mortal understanding.
 - approach the unknown with humility and curiosity.

- Regardless of our religious background, we can appreciate the value of connecting with our roots, seeking wisdom from those who came before us.
- In addition to honoring ancestors, Samhain is a time to acknowledge death as a natural part of the life cycle.
- It's a time to remember loved ones who have passed away and to contemplate the mysteries of life, death, and rebirth.
- Masks and Disguises
 - a playful aspect of the holiday that has carried over into modern Halloween celebrations
 - Ancestral heritage: wearing masks and costumes during Samhain originated from the belief that disguising oneself would confuse or ward off wandering spirits, i.e. keep them at bay
 - Protection and Warding
 - Samhain is also associated with protection and warding off malevolent spirits.
 - Other traditional customs
 - lighting bonfires
 - carving protective symbols or faces (such as jack o'lanterns) to keep harmful energies at bay
- The Masks We Wear
 - At Samhain, consider the masks we wear and the selves we present to the world.
 - Oscar Wilde "A mask tells us more than a face."
 - The mask you choose tells the world what you want to project
 - In our daily lives, we often wear masks — not physical ones, but emotional and social masks that hide our true selves.
 - The reasons for wearing a mask can be both positive and negative
 - We wear masks to fit in, to protect ourselves, or to meet societal expectations, to keep us from getting too hurt.
 - i.e. we wear masks to keep harmful energies at bay!
 - recognize that beneath these masks lies our authentic selves, worthy of love and acceptance

- Story: The Masquerade Ball

In a distant kingdom, there was an annual masquerade ball that brought people from all walks of life together. The event was known for its extravagant masks, where attendees could hide their true identities and be whoever they wanted to be.

Among the attendees was a young woman named Maya. Maya was known for her kindness and compassion, but she believed she needed to wear different masks to fit in and be accepted.

Maya spent days searching for the perfect mask. She wanted to be perceived as confident, successful, and beautiful. Finally, she found a stunning mask adorned with vibrant feathers and sparkling jewels.

At the ball, Maya donned her mask, instantly transforming into a captivating and enigmatic figure. She danced with grace, engaged in light banter, and attracted attention from all around. People were drawn to her captivating persona.

Deep down, Maya felt disconnected and empty. She was exhausted quickly! She took a seat in the shadows at the edge of the dance and, to ensure no one approached her while she was feeling down, took off the mask that had given her confidence such a boost. After all, no one would ever approach plain old Maya without her magical mask.

Except...one man did. Holding his own mask in his hands, he took a seat near her. "You have a lovely mask," he said. "But you look so much more comfortable without it."

She smiled sadly. "As the night went on, it kept getting heavier. It weighs a ton now!"

He nodded. "Masks are like that. They let us hide, but hiding ourselves means not truly connecting. True beauty lies not in our masks, but in our hearts."

Maya left her mask sitting on the chair and accepted the man's invitation to dance. As the night went on, the two of them shared stories, laughter, and genuine emotions. Beneath the masks of the others who joined them on the dance floor, Maya was sure she saw, more than once, a flash of envy in their eyes.

- **Types of Masks**

- The Japanese say that you have three faces:
 - The first face, you show to the world.
 - The second face, you show to your close friends and your family.
 - The third face, you never show anyone. It is the truest reflection of who you are.
- First Face Examples:
 - The Cool One
 - Unrattled by chaos. Looks like Zen Master.
 - bottled-up emotions.
 - The Humorist
 - comedy serves as a protective shield.
 - doesn't allow anyone in, and is lonely.
 - The Overachiever
 - stubbornness, obsessiveness, and lack of trust build a barrier between her and her loved ones.
 - The Martyr
 - exaggeration of sacrifices drives loved ones away
 - The Bully
 - Self-doubt drives hostile behavior
 - The Control Freak
 - assumes responsibility for around, even when they don't want to be cared for.
 - The Self-Basher

- Self-deprecation becomes a defense mechanism to avoid any risk of intimacy.
 - The People-Pleaser
 - Easily influenced by others, decisions are especially difficult
 - The Introvert
 - would much rather feel the pangs of loneliness than risk not being liked.
 - The Social Butterfly
 - Although the life of the party, the social butterfly is innately lonely.
- Purpose
 - Masks serve a purpose.
 - We can recognize when to wear them.
 - Many times they *are* necessary
 - But at the end of the day, like the end of trick-or-treating, it's time to take them off.
 - Oscar Wilde "Be yourself Everyone else is taken."
 - Keeping the mask on can be exhausting!
 - Masks close us off from authentic relationships
 - What are we hiding?
 - We fear that should our vulnerabilities be seen by others, the game would be up and we would be exposed.
 - But our vulnerability is what connects us all!
- The Season of Change
 - Samhain is a season of change, a time when nature sheds its vibrant colors and embraces the quiet of winter.
 - Samhain teaches us that change is an undeniable part of life.
 - Embrace the ebb and flow of life, recognizing that transformation can be a beautiful and necessary process.
 - Use this season as an opportunity to shed our metaphorical masks and embrace our true natures.
 - Just as the trees release their leaves, we can release the need for pretense and allow our authentic selves to shine.

- By identifying our protective shields, we can begin to heal from past hurts and enjoy deeper intimacy with our loved ones.
- worth and dignity of all includes the ever-changing nature of ourselves
- Embracing Authenticity
 - We want to seek truth and meaning in our lives.
 - Authenticity is a vital aspect of that search
 - As we think about the masks we wear, also consider what it means to be authentic
 - Embracing our true selves, flaws and all, can lead to a deeper sense of connection with ourselves and with others.
- Mask Conclusions
 - On the threshold of Samhain, reflect on the masks we wear and the authenticity we seek.
 - I hope that this season inspires you to unmask your true selves and embrace the beauty of your imperfections
 - Let's offer support and acceptance to one another as we journey toward greater authenticity
 - sometimes it's not people who change, it's the mask that falls off
 - May we find strength in vulnerability, connection in authenticity, and unity in diversity
- Heritage and Ancestors
 - Recognize that our ancestors also wore masks
 - In some cases, cut them a little slack. They too were hiding their true selves
 - Talking about masks is one way to find wisdom in the ancient traditions that have shaped us.
 - Look for more!
 - May we carry the wisdom of our heritage with us as we journey through life, honoring the past while forging a path toward a more compassionate and just future.
 - Blessed Samhain to you all, and may the wisdom of our ancestors guide us through the winter ahead.

Concluding Words:

- Blessed Samhain to you all
 - Just as Samhain marks the transition from one season to the next, may it also mark a transition in our lives, where we shed those masks that no longer serve us and step into the light of our true selves
 - May Samhain be a time of deeper connection with our heritage, a season of gratitude for the gifts of our ancestors, and an opportunity to strengthen our bonds with one another.
 - May this season bring you insight and transformation as you unmask the beautiful soul within.