

Soul Matters Theme: Building Belonging

Pagan Holiday: Mabon

September 14, 2025

Building Belonging at Mabon

- Mabon
 - Mabon marks the Autumn Equinox
 - Balanced day and night, a turning point toward the darker half of the year.
 - Time of gathering the harvest
 - not just food, but relationships, community ties, and shared meaning
 - our spiritual harvest is building belonging
- Spiritual Meaning of Mabon
 - Balance – Light and darkness in equal measure mirrors the need for balance in community
 - honoring the old and the new
 - Harvest - as we gather crops, we gather people's stories, contributions, and care
 - Preparation for Winter – In ancient agricultural societies, survival through the dark months depended on community cooperation
 - Belonging was not optional; it was life-saving
- Call to build belonging
 - Belonging vs. Fitting In
 - Fitting in is about changing yourself to be accepted
 - Belonging is about being seen and valued as you are
 - Why we need belonging
 - In modern life, many are “over-connected” digitally but under-connected in the heart
 - Isolation is rising; community can heal this
 - Mabon - In the same way farmers prepare and store the harvest, we must intentionally cultivate and store up the bonds of trust, care, and shared joy that sustain us
- Practical Ways to Build Belonging
 - Welcoming the stranger
 - our community has room for many identities and paths

- Sharing the work
 - invite everyone into community tasks celebrations, acts of care
- Creating Traditions
 - follow some old trads but adopt new ones also
- How does building belonging differ from radical hospitality?
 - Radical Hospitality
 - Focus: The welcome at the threshold
 - Meaning: opening the door, setting the table, and making sure no one feels like an outsider when they first arrive
 - Energy: Outward-facing. “You are invited, you are wanted, you are seen.”
 - Challenge: Hospitality can sometimes stay at the surface if it’s only about the initial invitation without deeper integration
 - Building Belonging
 - Focus: The life inside the community.
 - Meaning: It’s about what happens after the welcome — weaving people into the fabric of the group so they are not just guests, but family
 - Energy: Inward and ongoing. It says, “You are part of us. Your gifts, your presence, your voice matter here.”
 - Challenge: Belonging takes work, vulnerability, and time. It’s a mutual relationship, not just one-sided welcome.
 - How They Relate
 - Hospitality is the doorway; building belonging is the home.
 - Hospitality offers a seat at the table; belonging ensures your dish is valued as part of the feast.
 - Hospitality is the invitation to enter; belonging is the commitment to stay and grow together.
- Longing for community
 - so powerful it can drive us to join groups, relationships, or even systems of belief that provide false impression of belonging
 - conditional membership requires us to cut parts of ourselves off in order to fit in
 - is that acceptable? is it worth fitting in?
 - sacred inner discomfort tries to push, pull and prod us back to wholeness

- marginalized among us are especially pressured to twist and shape-shift into smaller beings in order to be "acceptable"
 - bigotry in society
- Social media pressures
 - shave off rough and imperfect edges
 - present ourselves as polished people who've got it all together
- Carl Jung: "Loneliness does not come from having no people around, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself."
 - Is anyone allowed to live without burying at least one part of themselves?
 - Under what circumstances is that okay?
 - Caretaking part of us tries to tell us "This is not the way to live!"
- Specific example Part 1: NET and the Outsiders
 - Pagans often look to gods/spirits for life lessons/guidelines
 - knowledge comes via myth
 - "Acceptable" entities
 - Thor, Frigg
 - Questionable entities
 - Loki, Angrboda, Jormundgandr, Hel
 - Fenrir, the wolf
 - Ragnarok
 - destruction, chaos, the end of the gods
 - assists in setting the world aflame, resulting in the collapse of humanity and society, and killing Odin
 - The other side of the story
 - prophecy
 - kidnapping
 - deception
 - binding
 - The underlying problem
 - Side 1: Fenrir as destructive beings, adversary of the gods, should never be honored
 - allowing worship invites strife and destruction
 - Side 2: Fenrir embodies breaking chains, overcoming deception, finding strength. Deserves veneration

- not allowing worship of them means checking too much spirituality at the door...so NOT building belonging!
- What's the solution to a spiritual...or any similar dichotomy?
 - Honor Difference Without Erasure
 - Belonging we're trying to build doesn't mean sameness.
 - Authentic belonging flourishes when we *can* be different and still be valued
 - Analogy: harvest basket
 - apples, squash, corn, and beans don't look alike
 - together they make the abundance of Mabon
 - Practice Radical Curiosity
 - Instead of rushing to resolve differences, communities can cultivate listening
 - "Tell me what this practice means to you" rather than "Convince me you're right"
 - Curiosity is a bridge-builder
 - It shifts focus from "winning" to "understanding"
 - Lean Into Seasonal Wisdom
 - Mabon teaches balance
 - opposites held in harmony
 - Message to community
 - If earth can hold balance between sun and shadow, can we learn to hold balance between our differing truths?
 - Move from "agreement" to "commitment"
 - Agreement says: "We believe the same things."
 - Commitment says: "Even though we *don't* believe the same things, we choose to walk together, share food together, care for one another."
 - Belonging is sustained not by uniform belief but by mutual commitment.
 - We do not have to collapse difference into sameness
 - Build a table wide enough to hold many dishes — even the ones we've never tasted before
 - Balance mirrors the Equinox

- Just as Mabon balances dark and light, community can hold opposing concepts like reverence and caution side by side, without collapsing one into the other
- Practical paths to building belonging
 - Belonging is not agreement
 - A community can hold people who hold different viewpoints in the same circle.
 - Differences reveal values
 - Individuals, at heart, are seeking to honor what they see as sacred
 - Emphasize mutual commitment over consensus
 - We may not all honor the same gods, but we can all honor each other's dignity
 - Invite storytelling rather than debate
 - Let each side share what truth they find in the myth, rather than who is "right"
 - Some see Fenrir—or any of Loki's children—as worthy of reverence, others see them as adversaries
 - They are held in the story, part of the mythic tapestry
 - Mabon reminds us: light and dark stand equal
 - we need both to understand the whole
 - Fields at harvest time hold both ripe fruit and withered stalks.
 - Both belong in the cycle of life
 - In the same way, whether we see Fenrir as teacher or threat, his presence in the myths reminds us that even opposing truths have a place in the larger story
 - If the Norse cosmos could hold such vast tension, surely our community can, too.
- Specific example part 2
 - Begin with story, not argument
 - Instead of opening with: "You're wrong, Fenrir is actually good," say: "When I hear the story of Fenrir, I see... strength, breaking chains, a reminder that even what's feared has power. It helps me when I feel trapped or voiceless."
 - Framing it as personal meaning lowers defensiveness
 - not trying to *win*, trying to *share*

- Acknowledge the other's fears
 - "I understand why you'd see Fenrir as dangerous. He's fierce, destructive in the myths. I can see how that would be frightening or even dishonoring to the gods."
 - Acknowledgment isn't agreement, but it shows respect.
- Name the shared ground
 - Both people ultimately care about the integrity of the tradition and the sacredness of the stories
 - A possible bridge: "Even though we see Fenrir differently, we both honor the myths enough to wrestle with them."
- Offer a Both/And frame, not an Either/Or
 - The wolf is BOTH terrifying AND empowering
 - Mabon: harvest is BOTH abundance AND decay
 - balance always includes opposites
 - "Maybe Fenrir carries both truths — destructive power and liberating strength. Maybe the story holds room for both of us."
- End with relationship, not resolution
 - The goal isn't consensus, it's connection
 - "I may always honor Fenrir differently than you, but I value walking this path beside you. Our community is big enough to hold both our truths."
 - Belonging is not agreement!
 - A community can hold people who see Fenrir as beloved, and people who cannot stomach that, in the same circle.
 - Frame ritual space as a mosaic
 - Not every altar needs to hold every deity
 - Can the community create room for diverse practices without demanding uniformity?
 - this is what we're trying to do today
- Two people stand before a fire. One feels warmth and safety. The other feels danger and threat. Both are right—because fire is both.
 - So too with Fenrir. What matters is not forcing the same experience, but learning to sit around the same fire without burning one another.
- Closing Reflection
 - Aspire to listen beyond echo chambers

- leave behind silos of comfort
 - explore the possibility of expanding a sense of belonging while holding the tension of difference and disagreement.
- We're living in difficult times
 - in the face of whatever fell apart yesterday, last week and last month
 - begin building belonging together again today
- Takes courage, wisdom and inspiration to work together
- Return to the Season
 - As days shorten, let us be each other's warmth and light.
 - May the harvest of our hearts be abundant, may the bonds we weave be strong, and may we walk into the dark season together, never alone.

Closing Meditation – "The Harvest of Our Hearts" (unknown)

Day and night stand in balance,
the wheel pauses — just for a breath.

We gather what has grown in us this year:
acts of kindness,
laughter we've shared,
hands we've held in times of need

As the barns of the earth are filled with grain,
may the barns of our hearts be filled with one another.

When winter's wind comes,
let our shared warmth be a hearth that never fades.

Here, you are not a guest.
Here, you are home.
Here, you belong.