

## Soul Matters Theme: Nurturing Gratitude

Pagan Holiday: Samhain

November 9, 2025

Gratitude Amid Darkness

- Gratitude
  - spiritual practice that deepens our awareness of interconnectedness
  - thread that keeps the interdependent web of all existence vibrant
  - connects the past with the future, the living with the dead
  - Just good for us! Helps us to
    - feel more positive emotions
    - relish good experiences
    - improve health
    - deal with adversity
    - build strong relationships
- Two-Word Theme: “Nurturing Gratitude”
  - Past years: single-word themes — like gratitude, hope, or justice
  - Single word like gratitude can sound complete
    - Something you either have or don’t
  - Shift from single-word “Gratitude” to two-word “Nurturing Gratitude” offers opportunity for reflection
    - both linguistically and spiritually
    - The verb matters
      - nurturing turns gratitude into an action
      - shows growth
        - moving from a concept to a practice
        - from a feeling to a way of being
    - second word makes all the difference
  - *Nurturing* gratitude reminds us it’s alive, something that grows with care, patience, and intention
    - How do I feed thankfulness?
    - How do I protect it through the winter of the soul?
  - Goes beyond saying “thank you”
    - more than just feeling thankful now and then
    - about living thankfully
    - means turning gratitude into a living, growing practice
      - cultivating mindfulness, generosity, and reverence
  - In times of darkness or loss, gratitude helps us hold on

- both grief and grace
- Seasonal Parallels
  - season of reflection
  - connects the seasonal rhythm into a cohesive spiritual arc
    - Samhain
      - The harvest is in, the days grow shorter, and gratitude is in the air
      - In this sacred liminal time, we can deepen our practice of gratitude—not as denial of loss, but as a way of nurturing life, memory, and renewal
    - Birthday - Personal Reflection
      - turning point: where am I going now?
    - Thanksgiving
      - remove revisionist history
      - literal gratitude holiday
  - Samhain → birthday → Thanksgiving
    - ancestral → personal → communal gratitude
  - Samhain
    - fields lie empty, but beneath the surface, life still being nurtured
      - roots deepening, seeds resting
    - gratitude works the same way
      - doesn't vanish in dark times
        - just moves underground, gathering strength for the next season of growth
      - keeps the inner flame burning even as days grow shorter
      - soil from which compassion and justice grow
        - transforms remembrance into action
    - To nurture gratitude in this season means thanking:
      - ancestors for their stories and strength
      - the land for its abundance
      - the winter for the rest and renewal it will bring
    - gratitude for the web of connection
      - countless lives have made my own possible
        - family, friends, mentors, pets, ancestors never met
        - thank them, keep their stories alive
      - Gratitude becomes a kind of lineage we pass on
    - Healing Through Gratitude
      - Nurturing gratitude is not ignoring pain

- means holding sorrow and thankfulness together, allowing both to teach us
  - Samhain reminds us that death is not an ending, but a transformation
  - When we honor loss, endings, and ancestors, gratitude can be way to transform grief into blessing
    - Yes, this hurts
    - Yes, I am grateful that it mattered
  - Gratitude becomes act of healing and resilience
- We nurture gratitude every time we say “thank you”
  - not just for what we receive, but for what we have learned, lost, and become
- To nurture gratitude is to make thankfulness a spiritual discipline
  - intentional way of seeing, remembering, and responding
    - keeps the heart open even in dark times
- Birthday
  - Samhain as threshold between light and dark, endings and beginnings
  - Eve of my birthday: standing at my own threshold moment
    - One year closing, another opening
    - time to look back with gratitude and ahead with intention
    - Samhain is spiritual “New Year” in Pagan tradition
      - Birthday is my personal new year
    - Both are invitations to pause, reflect, and give thanks.
  - From the edge of a new year, I'm aware that my attitude of gratitude has changed
    - Younger years: gratitude felt when things went well
    - Now I know it's something I must nurture
      - especially in times of loss, uncertainty, or change
    - Gratitude grows best when tended deliberately
      - by noticing beauty, honoring memory
      - giving back to people, the Earth, and traditions that have given so much to me
      - i.e. by tending the relationships that sustain life
  - Gratitude as life practice
    - Gratitude doesn't just appear on its own — it *needs* tending
      - Sometimes it comes easily

- Other times, need to seek it thru times of loss or change
  - But every year, gratitude keeps me rooted in joy
  - Nurturing gratitude is tangible
    - something lived, not just preached
  - Gratitude and renewal
    - Gratitude is not just about what has been good, but about what still can come to fruition
      - like the bulb planted in the dark earth of autumn, trusting it will bloom
- Thanksgiving
  - Not just about a single meal
    - Stronger sense of community
    - Broader season of gratitude
  - Gratitude is more than a feeling to visit once a year
    - It's a relationship to nurture every day
  - To nurture gratitude is to keep the sacred flame alive, even in the dark.
- The Intersection: Gratitude Amid Darkness
  - Gratitude as a counterbalance to fear
    - When we acknowledge blessings, we loosen the grip of scarcity and open ourselves to abundance
  - Gratitude doesn't always come naturally
    - especially in times of grief, stress, or darkness
  - To nurture it means to *choose* to notice what is good, sustaining, or sacred
    - even when the world feels uncertain
      - last year: horrendous election
      - this year: signs of hope
      - Was this year possible without last year?
      - Finding gratitude even in darkest days helped carry me through
  - Shadow Side of Gratitude
    - Un-nurtured gratitude can become shallow:
      - If gratitude stays only at the table, it can become performative
        - a polite thank-you without transformation

- But if we nurture it—tend it like a seed—it grows into generosity, reconciliation, and right relationship
  - True gratitude isn't about *having* more. It's about *giving* more
  - It's a practice, not a personality trait
    - "Gratitude turns what we have into enough." — Aesop
- Attentiveness and Presence
  - When we nurture gratitude, we slow enough to see what's already here:
    - The warmth of a mug in your hands
    - The memory of a loved one's laughter
    - The way the trees shed their leaves without fear
  - This attentiveness transforms ordinary moments into sacred ones.
    - Gratitude is the fruit of paying attention
- Reciprocity and Relationship
  - In many worldviews, gratitude is not just an emotion
    - it's a relationship
  - To nurture gratitude means tending that relationship
    - feeding it with appreciation, humility, and care
  - When we are grateful, we are in reciprocity with the world
    - giving thanks, giving back, participating in the ongoing flow of life
  - Heathen gifting cycle
    - sacred pattern of giving, receiving, and returning
    - Hávamál 42
      - Be a friend to your friend,  
and repay each gift with a gift.  
Repay laughter with laughter,  
repay treachery with treachery
    - Reciprocity not about obligation
      - about ongoing exchange that sustains life and community
      - Each gift, whether food, kindness, time, or blessing, creates a bond between giver and receiver
    - Doesn't mean we owe something in a cold or contractual sense
      - means gratitude naturally flows back into the world through acts of generosity, reverence, and care
    - To nurture gratitude, then, is to keep that flow alive
      - to make sure the energy of giving doesn't stagnate or die out
    - Sacred ecology of giving
      - When gratitude becomes practice of reciprocity, it transforms spirituality into an ecology rather than an economy

- In this sacred ecology
  - Our ancestors give us stories; we give them remembrance
  - Earth gives us food; we give the Earth care and respect
  - Community gives us belonging; we give our service and presence
- This mirrors the Heathen gifting cycle, in which right relationship is maintained through mutual exchange
  - not just between humans, but with spirits, gods, ancestors, and the land itself
  - Nurturing gratitude means actively participating in this ongoing web of mutual giving
- Gratitude Beyond Possession
  - In modern culture, gratitude too often stops at thank you
  - But in the gifting cycle, gratitude demands response, not just emotion
    - How can I give back in a way that keeps this goodness moving?
  - That could mean
    - offering care for the environment
    - honoring elders
    - mentoring someone
    - simply living with intention
  - nurturing gratitude is a spiritual act of reciprocity
    - not *passive* thankfulness, but *living* thankfulness
- Samhain reciprocity
  - life and death are part of one cycle of giving:
    - ancestors gave us life, wisdom, and story
      - We return remembrance, song, and gratitude
    - Earth takes what has died and gives rise to new life
  - offerings at Samhain — food, candles, spoken names — we are participating in this ancient gifting cycle
    - We are saying, “What I have received, I now return in love.”
- Thanksgiving reciprocity
  - Thanksgiving table echoes the gifting cycle
    - We come together to share food — the harvest’s gift
    - Give thanks for the abundance of the Earth

- Nurturing gratitude calls us to take the next step
  - To ask, what will we give back?
    - to the land, communities, those whose stories were silenced or forgotten
- Thanksgiving invites moral and spiritual reciprocity
  - returning respect, equity, and care to the world that sustains us
- Bringing It All Together
  - This year, as we enter the dark season, as I begin another personal year, as we move toward Thanksgiving, may we all remember that gratitude is a living thing
    - It needs light, attention, and care
    - it gives life back to us in return
  - To nurture gratitude is to enter the dance of giving and receiving
    - to understand that every blessing carries a responsibility
  - Gratitude is not the end of a gift, but the beginning of another one
  - Each thank-you is an invitation to keep the circle turning.
- Action Rooted in Gratitude
  - When nurtured deeply, gratitude moves us to action
  - We care for the Earth because we are grateful for her
  - We work for justice because we are grateful for the gift of life shared by all
  - **It is gratitude that sustains compassion when outrage alone would burn us out**
  - “Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.”  
— Cicero
  - The Circle of Giving
    - “At Samhain, we give thanks backward — to our ancestors, to what has passed, to the harvest now complete
    - At Thanksgiving, we give thanks outward — to one another, to the bounty we share, to the present moment
    - And through both, we are invited to give thanks forward — nurturing the future with our care and our gifts

## Closing Reflections

- As the wheel of the year turns, gratitude calls us into deeper relationship
  - with our ancestors, with the living world, and with each other
- As Samhain gives way to Thanksgiving, remember that gratitude isn't a single moment but a movement
  - sacred cycle of giving, receiving, and returning love
- To nurture gratitude is to keep that cycle alive, in every season of our lives
- Personal
  - On the eve of my birthday, standing between Samhain and Thanksgiving, I find myself asking: how can I give back for all that I've been given?
    - That question is where gratitude truly begins
  - As I cross this threshold of another year, I give thanks
    - for what's been harvested, what's been lost, and what's yet to come
  - I invite you to do the same
    - to nurture gratitude as we step together into this new season
    - holding our memories with love, and our hopes with faith
- Gratitude transforms endings into beginnings
- In gratitude, we find not only peace—but purpose
- May we go forth with grateful hearts—honoring the ancestors, cherishing the present in ourselves and our community, and trusting the seeds of the unseen future