Fall Equinox 2012

Welcome to the time of Balance!

We are now honoring the second harvest festival. In the northern areas, we can see the beginnings of falling leaves. Here in Florida it is still in the high 80s during the day and 60s at night. I noticed the Live Oak trees are heavy with acorns. That may be a sign of a cold winter. I really hope it isn’t though. We have lost so many plants and trees already. I would worry about the new Magnolia trees we planted as part of a memorial bed. This month we are also celebrating the Celtic tree cycle of Muin (the vine). If you have any blackberries or blackberry wine, find a quiet spot and enjoy.

Enjoy the harvest season.
Blessings to you all,
Dawn

(Pho taken by Dawn Thomas on 8/14/2012)
# Contents

Welcome to the time of Balance! ................................................................................................................. 1

A Lunar Calendar to Honor Hecate by Dawn “Belladonna” Thomas ..................................................... 3

Ask Your Mama about Mothering by Mama Donna Henes ..................................................................... 4

Ask Your Mama about Occupation by Mama Donna Henes ................................................................. 6

Finding New Goddesses: Hormonia by Barbara Ardinger, PhD .............................................................. 8

Mama Donna’s Spirit Shop ......................................................................................................................... 10

Moon Schedule from Fall Equinox to Samhain by Dawn “Belladonna” Thomas ................................ 10

Pagan Every Day - Thesmophoria by Barbara Ardinger, PhD .............................................................. 12

Pagan Every Day - Vinternastblot by Barbara Ardinger, PhD .............................................................. 13

Pine Cone Bird Feeders by Dawn "Belladonna" Thomas ................................................................. 14

Review by Dawn “Belladonna” Thomas: The Tarot Game by Jude Alexander ............................... 14

Solitary Autumn Equinox Ritual by Dawn “Belladonna” Thomas ...................................................... 16

The Creative Cycles of Demeter by Mary Caelsto .............................................................................. 18

The Role of Death in the Circle of Life by Molly .............................................................................. 19
I decided to honor the crone with the lunar calendar. To me, the Crone is associated with the dark moon. She should be honored during this phase of the moon but also during the dark part of the year. Each year around this time, I find myself drawn to the Crone. Although I am peri-menopausal and still have a regular moon times. I don’t identify myself as a Crone but I see different aspects becoming more like the Crone. For me Hecate is the ultimate Crone goddess. As a triple goddess she is the three faces (phases) of the moon. She also represents the three stages in a woman’s live: maiden, mother and crone. I see her as a goddess that is present all year long. I have chosen to honor her with rituals during the year.

For the Autumnal Lunar Rites, Hecate stands between the two worlds. She has a foot in each world as we watch the falling leaves. This is the beginning of dark part of the year. For each of these months, on the night of the dark moon, I honor her with this ritual. As I stand outside in autumn air, I call to Hecate to watch over me. In front of me is an altar with a cornucopia in honor of the harvest, an acorn, small shovel, and a small dog statue. This is to honor her sacred hounds. I light my candles and say:

*Great Goddess, Hecate, you are the goddess of magic. I honor you and ask for your guidance today. I leave this gift for you. As I stand here I am surrounded by signs of changing the seasons. I see the falling leaves as a tribute to you. As the leaves die and fall from the trees they will provide nourishment to the earth so new life can begin. I plant this acorn in your name so a mighty oak will grow. Thank you for joining me today. Blessings of the season to you, Great Hecate. Blessed Be!*

During the Winter Lunar Rites, Hecate is honored as she walks the darkness with her sacred hounds. Each month on the night of the dark moon, I will honor her with a ritual. During the daylight I will dress my altar with dark blue cloth with silver candles and a sprig of holly. I sit in front of my altar and ask Her for her blessings. As I light my candles I say:

*Hecate, the Goddess of the Dark, I honor you today and give you this offering. We are in the dark part of the year but I am not afraid. I see your torch and know that you are here guiding me and keeping me safe. I find peace in the dark and know that you will be with me until the light returns. Thank you for being with me today. I am honored to call you Goddess.*

At the Spring Lunar Rites, we honor her as she guides Persephone back from the Underworld. I will spend the night of the dark moon in each of these months honoring
her with a ritual. I will spend time walking through the woods picking a blossom off a plant. At a quiet spot I will stop and clear a place to sit. As I sit looking on my blossom, I will say:

Great Hecate, the darkness is retreating. We are now seeing the increasing light. Thank you for providing the light in the darkness for me. You were there during the dark both day and night. It was a time of longing for the light and the warmth of the sun. But you were there with your torch as a beacon. No one else could provide the comfort that you gave in the dark. You wrapped me in your cloak and kept me warm. Thank you for being with me. I leave this blossom as an offering to you. Blessed Be!

Summer Lunar Rites marks the longest day. The sun is at highest peak. We honor the crone as she begins the descent with the fading light. It is a time of letting go. I will have a rite at midnight each month on the night of the dark moon to honor her. I will have my altar decorated in red with candles and runes.

Hecate, Great Goddess, you represent all women. Your magic is strong and full of mystery. It is the time of empowerment. The sun is at its peak and will begin its slow descend. I sit here bathed in the light of my candles. I feel your power and light. I ask you to join me as I cast my runes.

(At this point, I will select three runes)

Each rune represents the past, present and future. As I meditate on these runes, please stay with me.

(meditation)

I am honored to have you with me and in my life. Thank you for your presence tonight. Blessed Be!

Ask Your Mama about Mothering by Mama Donna Henes

Are you cyclically confused? In a ceremonial quandary? Completely clueless? Wonder no more.

*Ask Your Mama™
A Question of Mothering

Dear Mama Donna,
I’m enjoying reading your book, *The Queen of My Self*. I have a question, though. My own mother and both of my grandmothers were never the nurturing type of women. In truth, they weren’t the kind of people I’d care to be around if I wasn’t related to them. Both grandmothers have passed, and I try to have very little contact with my mother, as she is a negative and disruptive influence. I made a conscious decision to not have children of my own.

How do I find the “mother” in me and celebrate the part of me that I never developed in myself, and that wasn’t encouraged by the elder women in my life? I hope that doesn’t sound like a silly question, but I believe I won’t find my full power and purpose without this reconciliation with myself.
Thank you so much for your work!
- Julie, CA

Dear Queen Julie,
Of course your question isn’t silly. It is a most common one, and I thank you for sending it. I know that it will resonate with many of our sister Queens, and hopefully some of them will share their own insights and experiences with you.

The best way to find your mothering Self is to become your own mother! Now in your middle years, it is time to turn your attention to your own needs and desires. It is crucial that you nurture your body, as well as your most precious dreams, and lavish upon your Self an endless flow of emotional and spiritual sustenance and physical care.

How do you do that, you ask, without a role model? Make it up! Be your own role model! If you did not have a loving, giving, nurturing maternal influence, you now have the chance to change that karma and learn how to be your own caring mother.

And the exciting thing is that you can be the sort of parent that you always wished for — for me it was the cheerful, optimistic, fun-loving Mary Poppins that my little girl-Self needed so badly, rather than the negative, critical, demeaning mom that I had.
Whatever your childhood was like, that was then and this is now. Now, you can give your Self the unconditional love and support that you did not have as you were growing up. You can and must assume the responsibility to feed, nourish, encourage, and comfort your Self, pamper and challenge your Self, and whisper into your own ear each night as you slip off to sleep, “Good night, honey. I love you.”

Think about caring for your Self as an act of love, rather than a duty. Attitude is all. Your Self-care is, after all, strictly a gift you are giving to yourself. And you deserve it!

With blessings of mother love,

xxQMD

************************************************************

* Unofficial Commissioner of Public Spirit of NYC. - **The New Yorker**
* For 35 years Ms. Henes has been putting city folk in touch with Mother Earth. - **New York Times**
* Part performance artist, part witch, part social director for planet earth. - **The Village Voice**
* Globally significant theater-in-the-round. - **Brooklyn Bridge Magazine**
* The woman is balanced. - **Paper Magazine**
* Solstice Sister. - **TimeOut New York**
* The Original crystal-packing mama. - **NY Press**

**Donna Henes** is an internationally renowned urban shaman, ritual expert, award-winning author, popular speaker and workshop leader whose joyful celebrations of celestial events have introduced ancient traditional rituals and contemporary ceremonies to millions of people in more than 100 cities since 1972. She has published four books, a CD, an acclaimed Ezine and writes for The Huffington Post, Beliefnet and UPI Religion and Spirituality Forum. She has created and officiated public ceremonies for two mayors and a governor and serves as the ritual consultant on Hollywood films. Mama Donna, as she is affectionately called, maintains a ceremonial center, spirit shop, ritual practice and consultancy in Exotic Brooklyn, NY where she works with individuals, groups, institutions, municipalities and corporations to create meaningful ceremonies for every imaginable occasion.

www.DonnaHenes.net

**Ask Your Mama about Occupation by Mama Donna Henes**

Are you cyclically confused? In a ceremonial quandary? Completely clueless? Wonder no more.
Dear Mama Donna,
I can’t turn on the TV anymore; because I get so upset listening to the news and the manipulative commercials. Is the world going to explode or implode or just shrivel up and die? It is so depressing out there. What can I do to feel better?
So Upset in Chicago

Dear One,
You are not alone. We are all upset. But for once, the News is good news! The media is teeming with stories and images that are full of promise and hope, broadcasting shocking! new notions and values based on the need for us all taking mutual responsibility for the safety and well-being of each other and of our planet home.

I am referring, of course to the Occupy Movement that is sweeping the nation, articulating the cares and concerns of us all. These populist movements here, in Europe, in Canada, started with the Arab Spring, which excited people everywhere about the real possibility of being able to truly make change in the world. Egypt, especially, inspired a global response to the peaceful occupation of Tahrir Square by huge, diverse crowds. Wherever we live, we all know how it feels to be exploited, manipulated, and robbed blind by the devious and greedy powers that be. And people everywhere have had just about enough, thank you very much.

Even though many of us might feel “mad as hell and not going to take it anymore,” the tenor of this movement is not angry or violent. Occupy Wall Street is not a rally, not a temporary gathering, but a town hall, public forum, a community meeting place where the previously silent voices can at last be heard.

So pitch a tent and occupy your own center, your own deepest, most authentic, most ethical, most articulate self, and speak your truth out loud and often. There are signs in the NYC subway that exhort us, “If you see something, say something.” Well, we have seen what we have seen, and now it is time to say something about it.

I guarantee you this will make you feel much better. And you will be encouraging others to speak up, as well. Through your good example.
With blessings of peace and abundance for all,
xxMama Donna
********************************************
* Unofficial Commissioner of Public Spirit of NYC. - The New Yorker
* For 35 years Ms. Henes has been putting city folk in touch with
Mother Earth. - New York Times
* Part performance artist, part witch, part social director for planet earth.
 - The Village Voice
* Globally significant theater-in-the-round. - Brooklyn Bridge Magazine
* The woman is balanced. - Paper Magazine
* Solstice Sister. - TimeOut New York
* The Original crystal-packing mama. - NY Press

Donna Henes is an internationally renowned urban shaman, ritual expert, award-winning author, popular speaker and workshop leader whose joyful celebrations of celestial events have introduced ancient traditional rituals and contemporary ceremonies to millions of people in more than 100 cities since 1972. She has published four books, a CD, an acclaimed Ezine and writes for The Huffington Post, Beliefnet and UPI Religion and Spirituality Forum. She has created and officiated public ceremonies for two mayors and a governor and serves as the ritual consultant on Hollywood films. Mama Donna, as she is affectionately called, maintains a ceremonial center, spirit shop, ritual practice and consultancy in Exotic Brooklyn, NY where she works with individuals, groups, institutions, municipalities and corporations to create meaningful ceremonies for every imaginable occasion.

www.DonnaHenes.net

Finding New Goddesses: Hormonia by Barbara Ardinger, PhD

Hormonia
(Hoar-MOAN-ee-a)

Goddess of Menopause (A Laughing Goddess)

She’s only recently let us in on the joke, you know. Although we’re born through blood, for the first decade and a bit of our lives, we’re bloodfree and boyish. Then we start bleeding every month. We experiment with the moon mysteries and dance with lunacy and after a while we get really good at it. And then, after forty-odd years of practice, we come to a stop. Like an albatross making a landing, we start and stop and stumble and
sputter and flap and fall over until by the fourteenth month we find ourselves back where we started. Bloodless.

Is that a good joke, or what?

Behold Hormonia the Great and Powerful, the Laughing Lady behind the curtain, speaking in conundrums, making unreasonable demands on everybody, pulling levers, running the whole show. Bow down before Hormonia, She and Her Sisters Auntie Gravity and Naustalgica are the Triple Queens of Getting Older. They rule the transition of present to future, They rule memory. They’re tricky old ladies, aren’t they? They’re grannies full of tales and full of mischief. The Goddess Gotcha is Their good friend. (This is a surprise?)

“Listen up, girls,” says Hormonia. “It’s not a hot flash, it’s a power surge. Listen up, girls. It’s not a sickness, it’s only a little change of direction, and how many changes of life have you already been through?

“Listen up,” She says. “You girls gotta do what you gotta do. Play with your estrogens and all those endocrinal effluviums. Sip your herbal teas. Glow. Perspire. Sweat. Let Me give you a new wardrobe concept. Layering. Or did you already know that one? “Just remember,” She says, shaking a grandmotherly finger, “just remember that no matter what all those boy doctors have been telling you, you’re not sick. The change isn’t a disease. It’s just a change, that’s all. Such a big deal,” She says, “it isn’t.” “You girls just go out and play. I’ll take care of all the hard parts.”

And Hormonia the Great and Powerful closes the curtain again. We would do well to understand what She’s doing in there.

Hormonia’s consort is Rex Macho, the God of the Mid-Life Crisis. A fine, upstanding, fellow, Macho goes about in disguise for half the year as a Horny Forest God. During this season. He chases girls, plays rhythm guitar in a band, runs a microbrewery, and presides at formal and informal fertility festivals. During the other half of the year, He lives with Hormonia. During this season, he drives red sports cards with the top down. (She buys Him a new one every year), works out, and spends as much time as possible watching professional sports on TV. Macho is mart and ambitious. He is well loved and perfectly pampered by Hormonia.

Behold Hormonia the Great and Powerful. She’s got a life. She knows it goes on after that “certain age.” She knows how to get it on after that certain age.
Barbara Ardinger, Ph.D. (www.barbaraardinger.com), is the author of Pagan Every Day: Finding the Extraordinary in Our Ordinary Lives (RedWheel/Weiser, 2006), a unique daybook of daily meditations, stories, and activities. Her new book, Secret Lives is a novel of magical realism about elderly women, younger women, good men, and mythological characters including the Green Man and the Norns gone mad in a modern world. Her earlier books are Finding New Goddesses, Quicksilver Moon, Goddess Meditations, and Practicing the Presence of the Goddess. Her day job is freelance editing for people who don’t want to embarrass themselves in print. Barbara lives in southern California. To purchase a signed copy of Finding New Goddesses, just send Barbara an email at bawriting@earthlink.net

Mama Donna’s Spirit Shop

Moon Schedule from Fall Equinox to Samhain by Dawn “Belladonna” Thomas

(Times are Eastern Time)

2nd Quarter – September 22nd: 3:41 p.m.

Full “Harvest” Moon – September 29th: 11:19 p.m.

4th Quarter – October 8th: 3:33 a.m.

New Moon – October 15th: 8:02 a.m.

2nd Quarter – October 21st: 11:32 p.m.

Full “Blood” Moon – October 29th: 3:49 p.m.
### Moon Void of Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Starts</th>
<th>Ends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 24th</td>
<td>5:19 p.m.</td>
<td>7:32 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 26th</td>
<td>11:33 p.m.</td>
<td>September 27th 1:23 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 28th</td>
<td>10:35 p.m.</td>
<td>September 29th 9:14 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1st</td>
<td>6:32 p.m.</td>
<td>7:26 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 4th</td>
<td>3:44 a.m.</td>
<td>7:47 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 5th</td>
<td>5:08 p.m.</td>
<td>October 6th 8:45 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 8th</td>
<td>3:33 a.m.</td>
<td>October 9th 7:55 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 10th</td>
<td>5:40 p.m.</td>
<td>October 11th 3:23 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 12th</td>
<td>7:48 p.m.</td>
<td>October 13th 7:02 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 15th</td>
<td>8:02 a.m.</td>
<td>8:06 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 16th</td>
<td>10:23 p.m.</td>
<td>October 17th 8:26 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 19th</td>
<td>4:27 p.m.</td>
<td>9:41 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 21st</td>
<td>11:32 p.m.</td>
<td>October 22nd 1:02 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 23rd</td>
<td>9:27 p.m.</td>
<td>October 24th 7:00 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 26th</td>
<td>11:04 a.m.</td>
<td>3:31 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 27th</td>
<td>9:32 p.m.</td>
<td>October 29th 2:15 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 29th</td>
<td>5:01 p.m.</td>
<td>October 31st 2:40 p.m.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Planting Days**
- September: 27th, 28th
- October: 2nd, 3rd, 7th, 8th, 16th, 17th, 24th, 25th, 26th, 29th, 30th, 31st

**Harvesting Days**
- September: 30th
- October: 1st, 4th, 5th, 6th, 9th, 10th, 11th
The Thesmophoria, a three-day celebration of sporetos (“seed time”), the autumn sowing season, was a women’s festival dedicated to Demeter Thesmophoros (“law giver”), she who oversees the order of the seasons. The women camped in little huts near Demeter’s hillside sanctuary, the Thesmophorion.

On the first day, the priestesses performed the kathodos (“going down and coming up”) ritual in which they descended into Demeter’s cave carrying piglets. The pig was sacred because it loves the earth, eats grain, and returning food to the goddess, source of all food. They left the piglets at the underground altar, cleaned the altar and the sacred images, and brought up the remains of last year’s piglets.

On the second day, in remembrance of Demeter’s refusal to eat while she was in mourning for her daughter, the women fasted. When their hunger made them cranky, they engaged in aiskbrologia, or abusive language, which recalled the taunting back and forth of Demeter and lambe. Because Demeter was the law giver, the city’s courts were closed on this day and prisoners were pardoned. Z. Budapest writes that the women also told the men that they would nurture them only to a certain point in their lives; eventually, men had to take care of themselves.

On the third day, which began with a torchlight procession at dusk of the second day, the thesmoi, or sacred items, and the putrefied remains of last year’s piglets were displayed in buckets on the altars. After this compost was removed, it was mixed with grain to be sown in November. What had been under the earth had been brought up into the light. What was dead and buried would be revived in new life, new grain, and food for the people.
They say winter is nearly upon us. I have friends in northern states who e-mail cheery notes about frost and early snow while I’m sitting here trying to breathe while the hot Santa Ana winds are blowing.

In earlier times, preparation for winter started when the birds flew south. Most travel, especially long-distance sailing, stopped, and armies put away their weapons until spring. Herds were brought down from mountain pastures, and crops were harvested. People turned to indoor tasks. One thing they did was ask the blessings of the goddesses and gods for survival through winter. The word blot means “blood sacrifice” and is cognate with “blood” and “blessing.”

Because we pagans know that the dark side of the year is when we do our inner work, we feel uncomfortable with the coming holiday season; with its emphasis on secularized commercialism or an overly pious “churchianity” that denies pagan antecedents to celebrations of the rebirth of the light.

Reader, it’s time to start thinking about your inner winter work for this year. If you have a Book of Shadows, is it up to date? Add your newest spells to it. Do you want to write a book? Buy a three-ring binder. Print each page a title and a date. When the pages are an inch thick, see if you can organize them into a coherent order. That’s the beginning of your rough draft. Every time you write anything you think might go into your book, put it in the binder. The essential tasks of writing are prewriting and rewriting.

Sports writer Red Smith said, “There’s nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein.” Let your writing be your “blood sacrifice” this winter.

Barbara Ardinger, Ph.D. ([www.barbaraardinger.com](http://www.barbaraardinger.com)), is the author of Pagan Every Day: Finding the Extraordinary in Our Ordinary Lives (RedWheel/Weiser, 2006), a unique daybook of daily meditations, stories, and activities. Her new book, Secret Lives is a novel of magical realism about elderly women, younger women, good men, and mythological characters including the Green Man and the Norns gone mad in a modern world. Her earlier books are Finding New Goddesses, Quicksilver Moon, Goddess Meditations, and Practicing the Presence of the Goddess. Her day job is freelance editing for people who don’t want to embarrass themselves in print. Barbara lives in southern California. To purchase a signed copy of Finding New Goddesses, just send Barbara an email at bawriting@earthlink.net
Pine Cone Bird Feeders by Dawn "Belladonna" Thomas

We made these with our granddaughters. They had a ball and we loved watching them smear the peanut butter around with their hands! Of course, I had to help so I had peanut butter all over me too. We are still vacuuming up tiny seeds but it was worth it!

What you’ll need:

- Pine cones
- Paper plate
- Loaf type pan (to hold seed)
- Big spoon
- Creamy or smooth peanut butter
- Birdseed
- Waxed string
- Scissors
- Plastic gloves (if you don’t like getting messy)

How to make it:

1. Cut a long length of string to hang the bird feeder.
2. Tie the string around the pine cone near the top.
3. Use the spoon to scoop some peanut butter onto the paper plate.
4. Use your hands to cover the pine cone. Make sure you get into the small areas and around the edges.
5. Roll the pine cone in the birdseed.
6. Hang the pine cone outside

Review by Dawn “Belladonna” Thomas:
The Tarot Game by Jude Alexander

I bought this game as an activity for my local women’s group. I opened
the box and was surprised by the vivid colors of the board. There are rectangles to set the tarot cards along with spots for Spiral, Star, or Question Mark cards. Also included in the box are small polished stones to use as player tokens, Blessings coins, dice and a keyword tarot set. We used the tarot cards that came with the game as placeholders on the board. The tarot cards included in the game only have keywords on them. There are no pictures and it is suggested that the players use their favorite decks. In our group, each woman used her own deck to view the imagery on specific cards. What we found that when someone landed on a specific card, the other women pulled out that card out of their decks and gave it to the woman to look at. Since we all had different decks, it gave us different perspectives.

The game is played by a player rolling a die to move her token around the board. The path of the game is a coiled snake and follows the major arcana and starts with the Fool and ends in the center at the Universe. There are fun spots marked with Infinity. On these spots, the player does something creative and spontaneous. The first time we played, a woman landed on this spot. She jumped out of her chair yelling Woo Woo! She danced into the other room, grabbed a brownie and ran back in. We all got a big laugh out of it. Then we all wanted to land on an Infinity spot.

There are three levels to play this game: Novice, Enthusiast, and Adept. The Novice has a three-card reading, the Enthusiast has a four-card reading, and the Adept has six-card reading. We have found that even the three-card reading were extremely accurate. The first three-card drawing I asked a question about needing to find balance in my life. My three cards were the 3 of Pentacles, the Emperor, and Lovers. What I took away from this reading was that my returning to college was the right path and as long as I shared my feelings with my husband, we and our relationship would be secure.

There are examples of the other cards:

- **Spiral**: Select the 6 of Pentacles. Take a moment to look at the imagery. Now tell a story of a time you gave generously that which was required at the time it was needed. Can you recall receiving in kind? Record this card on reading sheet.

- **Star**: Use Full Deck, Shuffle and Draw a card. Take a moment to look at the imagery. Let it call to mind an event or influence in your life. Describe it for us. Record this card on reading sheet.

- **Question Mark**: Ask the Tarot about your physical world or body. Form the question, then shuffle and draw a card from the Pentacles pile. To answer, take a
moment to look at the imagery and reveal what comes to mind. Record this card on reading sheet.

- Blessing Coin: these coins have “gift” to bestow on the other players. Mindfulness, Serenity, Love, Friendship, etc.

The group enjoys playing this game so much; it has been put on our activities rotation schedule. For those of you that think of it as simply a game, you will be pleasantly pleased. It will only take playing it one time for it to make an impact on you that you will look forward to playing it again.

**Solitary Autumn Equinox Ritual by Dawn “Belladonna” Thomas**

For the altar:
1 yellow candle
1 orange candle
An apple
A cup of wine or juice
A small cluster of grapes
Fall flowers or fall leaves

*Set up your ritual area. Light the candles and arrange the grapes, the vine and flowers or leaves on the altar.*

**Casting the Circle**

*Take the apple and hold it in both hands. Feel the wisdom and love of the Goddess. She is generous.*

“The apple is an ancient symbol of the Goddess with her great knowledge and power of healing. It holds Her wisdom and provides a gateway into other realms. Sacred is this space filled with the riches of the Great Mother.”

**Call the Quarters**

“Hail to the Spirits of the East, Element of Air, knowledge, and wisdom. Bless me with your gifts during the season of fall. Please join me tonight.”

“Hail to the Spirits of the South, Element of Fire, bring the warmth of sunlight to my day. Bring illumination and passion in many ways. Please join me tonight.”
“Hail to the Spirits of the West, Element of Water, come to this circle of mine. Add love, peace, and intuition in this place and time. Please join me tonight.”
“Hail to the Spirits of the North, Element of Earth, give me strength and success. Please join me tonight.”

“The circle is cast as above and so below.”

Call the Goddess
“The Autumn Equinox is the harvest of fruits and late grains. I ask the Goddess of Grain, Demeter, the Lady of the Harvest and bountiful earth. Bless me during this autumn season. I also ask Pomona, the Goddess of Apples to join me. Please share your sacred orchard with me.

At the autumn equinox a time of equal light and dark hours occurs. Help me to find balance and harmony within. Guide me with Your wisdom and remind me to be thankful for all of the blessings that I have in my life.

It is now time to pass from summer into the dark of the year. On this day of the equinox, this day of balance, it is the threshold where light begins to fade. As the nights grow longer, it is a time to cultivate inner wisdom.”

Meditation and Giving Thanks
“I raise my chalice in thanksgiving for what the Mother Earth has given me this year.”

Think of these questions and answer honestly. What is my personal harvest? What have I brought into manifestation this year? What can I do to honor the generosity of the Earth that sustains me? How might I thank my loved ones and acquaintances who have supported my creativity this year? How can I best acknowledge and celebrate myself for hard work completed this year?

Releasing the Elements
“Spirit of the North, Element of the Earth, thank you for lending your strength and stability this night. Hail and Farewell. Blessed Be.”

“Spirit of the West, Element of Water, thank you for blessing me with loving emotions so right. Hail and Farewell. Blessed Be.”

“Spirit of the South, Element of Fire, thank you for your passion and illuminating light. Hail and Farewell. Blessed Be.”
“Spirit of the East, Element of Air, thank you for the winds of change that swirl within my life. Hail and Farewell. Blessed Be.”

**Releasing the Goddess**
“I thank you Demeter and Pomona for joining me this night. Hail and Farewell. Blessed Be.”

**Open the Circle**
“The circle is open but remains unbroken.
Blessed be!
Merry meet, merry part, and merry meet again.”

**The Creative Cycles of Demeter by Mary Caelsto**

The cycle of Demeter and Persephone’s relationship and their impact on the weather and crops are widely known within the pagan community. We find Demeter, the mother goddess, in the lush fields full of crops and the bountiful harvest which will see Her people through the winter. In very real terms, Demeter’s domain involves life and death, for without her bounty, Her people will not survive. That is why the pain she feels when her daughter is not with her, along with the winter it brings contrasts so sharply to the rich and warm bounty of summer.

This cycle plays itself out within the creative individual as well. There are times when the words or music or painting seem to flow from the fingers. The inspiration cannot be harnessed fast enough. Like corn stalks reaching for the sky, the creative juices go from a small seedling to a towering plant in the span of a very short time. And then, as it usually happens, when the creative work is finished, or sometimes in the middle as our doubts and fears assail us, there is a lull. Inspiration fades away and the bleak expanse of our psyches can produce no more. In time, the block leaves and the creative individual can create again. But the barren time can be as long as winter with no end in sight. Looking to the myths surrounding Demeter can be a huge help to writers or other creative individuals in this situation. Her stories teach us several very important lessons.

First, the barren period will not last forever. Eventually Persephone returns, winter thaws, and the world becomes lush again. It may seem as if the current state of blocked energies will never end. But eventually, it will. And we will be all the more grateful for the renewal when it comes.
Secondly, sometimes we need to find our inspiration. There’s always something that drives a creative individual. Perhaps it’s societal, like Dickens’ focus on the poor in his native Britain. Maybe it’s spiritual, or perhaps emotional. Whatever this driving force is, we need to find it if we’re to step out from the dark of winter and return to a much more fruitful time.

And third, we need to understand that there are cycles to life, the seasons, and our own creativity. If we do not honor them, then we will find ourselves even more frustrated and caught up in our own lack of creativity than ever before.

Demeter’s myths can help us to understand these things. Not just with her daughter, but also as an agrarian deity, she deals intimately with cycles: understanding them, dealing with them, honoring them. She can lead the wayward author back to inspiration, and she can teach us that even in our barren times, things are happening which we cannot see. Most of all, she can teach us about trust. Because she had to trust Persephone would come home, and we need to trust in our own abilities, even when we cannot see them.

Mary Caelsto lives in the Midwest with a menagerie of animals, including an opinionated horse, a vocal parrot, and the not-so-itty-bitty-kitty crew who fill her days with laughter and joy. As a writer, she pens fiction and nonfiction. Additionally, her love of the muse has led her to become The Muse Charmer, helping writers charm their muses for passion, productivity, and profit. You can learn more about all of Mary’s work at http://www.musecharmer.com

The Role of Death in the Circle of Life by Molly

As I sit here
death is all around me
canopying the ground
with a blanket of brown
and yet still buzzing, teeming, throbbing with life.

My womb sheds its lining
another egg that didn’t make it.
and baby chicks in the nest hatch
and then fail to take a first breath

Sometimes things die
because they didn’t get something they needed
And, sometimes they die
because their time has come
Sometimes they die
to make room for something else
and sometimes they die
and nourish and nurture the new growth

It is all part of the same whole
this tapestry that Life is weaving
day in and day out
New bursting forth from old
giving birth
over and over and over again
letting go
over and over and over again
Shedding, bleeding, giving, dying, flowing, knowing
Saying goodbye and hello

This pulse, this rhythm too
this ebb, this flow
is part of the greater whole
each thread
some picked up,
some let go
becomes a part of the tapestry

Nature has a higher loss tolerance rate than we do
I know that from sad, personal experience
and a multitude of observations

What matters
is that the overall pulse keeps beating
that the overall heart keeps singing
and that mother hens continue trying to hatch new chicks.

–Molly, 2012

When I go down to the woods alone, sit on a rock and open my mouth, sometimes poetry comes out. This summer, I was very sad when one of our mother hens hatched
two new babies who died immediately. It is depressing to have them come so far and then not make it. For one of my ecology lessons at OSC, I wrote the following:

“... baby chicks are one of the things that make me believe in “the Goddess.” Maybe that sounds silly, but when I sit before a nest and see the bright black eyes and soft down of a new baby chick, where before there was just an egg, I feel like I am truly in the presence of divinity. This, this is Goddess, I think whenever I see one. There is just something about the magic of a new chick that brings the miracle of the sustaining force of life to my attention in a profound way. (New babies of all kinds do it for me, but there is something extra special about chicks!) Of course, when several died, I couldn’t help but feel sad about all of that work and that wasted potential and how that little baby had come so far only to die shortly after hatching, but that, to me, is part of Goddess/Nature/Life Force too. I do not believe in a controlling/power-over deity who can give life or take it away at will or at random. I know that things just happen, that the wheel keeps turning, and that while that force that I name Goddess is ever-present and able to be sensed and felt in the world and in daily life, it/she does not have any kind of ultimate “control” over outcomes.”

Anyway, I was feeling sort of like, WHY, why did they get this far and then die so quickly? When I sat in the woods and opened my mouth, the answer that I’ve transcribed above is what came out...

And, the following week I went out to the broody coop and in it was a brand new chick—the mother kept sitting and she got a fresh, bright, breathing baby for her efforts.

Molly is a certified birth educator, writer, and activist who lives with her husband and children in central Missouri. She is a breastfeeding counselor, a professor of human services, and doctoral student in women’s spirituality at Ocean Seminary College. She was recently ordained as a Priestess with Global Goddess. Molly blogs about birth, motherhood, and women’s issues at http://talkbirth.me and about thealogy and the Goddess at http://goddesspriestess.com