The Bio-Universal Energy Series

The CUSP Way
*Climbing Up the Spiral Pathway

A New Way To Walk An Old Path

By Eric J. Katrina Rasbold
The CUSP* Way: A New Way to Walk An Old Path
(*Climbing Up the Spiral Pathway)

By Eric and Katrina Rasbold
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A Note About the “Voice” of This Book

Although Eric and Katrina wrote this book together and co-created the CUSP Way, you will find times throughout the text when the word “I” is used instead of “we.” In those instances, it’s Katrina speaking. Sometimes *I* get on a roll and start writing and telling stories and yammering and Eric is gracious enough not to try and slow me down. He is the most patient and forgiving supporter of my stream of consciousness way of writing that ever existed, bless his heart.

Anyway, *we* left those *I* parts intact, so if it says “I” it’s really “me” and that’s Katrina.

A Note About the Timing of The CUSP Process

Ideally, the CUSP system for manifestation begins in the winter to harvest in the fall. This is what will bring you the very best results. In the real world, however, you might acquire this book in June or September and not want to wait several months to begin.

We have had people successfully start their process well into the harvest cycle and have beautiful results. If you want to jump in at any time and pick up where the calendar places you in the harvest cycle, it is likely that you will still benefit (and it can’t hurt to try, right?). If you start at Summer Solstice, for instance, skip over the planning and fertilizing phase and just lay out your goals and then visualize “your crops in the field.” See what you want to manifest for your goals as reality and start from there, moving forward into your CUSP cycles.

If you start in October, you are already well into harvesting and would do well to use the time as preparatory for the coming harvest season. Start releasing the obstacles that hold you back from success and move forward into the dark of the year. August and September are a little iffy, but let’s face it, some crops grow quickly! You could visualize that you are transplanting existing crops instead of planting from seed and draw up a late harvest. Do not be afraid to adjust and adapt. CUSP is very flexible. Just tap into the energy of the holiday that is prevalent when you start reading and work from there. Trust the process.
Important Points Regarding CUSP Terminology and Theology

CUSP Honors All Paths to God

Our comfortable relation to multiple spiritual paths has put us in the line of fire for those who wish to maintain their “we are the only ones who are right” perspective. We feel no need to offer defense to that idea because as most people are aware, when you are talking to a zealot, the only way to successfully conclude the conversation is to blindly agree with their ideology. Our choice is to not engage in conflict or defense. Those who are meant to appreciate and benefit from CUSP will do so.

We do not claim exclusive rights to many of the concepts we write about in this exploration of CUSP. The doctrines that are embraced by CUSP have been used before us and will be used after us. It is the design, intent and to some degree, the application that is special. This section is to acquaint you with our basic ideals. As you begin to read about CUSP in this text, it will be helpful to keep the following premises in mind:

CUSP (Climbing Up the Spiral Pathway) is a comprehensive and complete spiritual program that is designed to stand independently as its own theology and practice or to be used in conjunction with an existing religious path. CUSP is a basic framework of practice onto which other belief systems may easily be overlaid to create a blended path. CUSP has been successfully utilized by people all over the world who of many different faiths, including several Native American paths, nature-based religions, Eastern philosophy, Christians, etc. The process of positive manifestation and life change is not contradictory to any spiritual path of which we are aware. All recognized spiritual paths work with the goal of self-betterment and personal improvement. CUSP is one of the paths that can be used to get there.

As such, CUSP does not endorse any one religious practice over another. Our belief is that everyone has a voice they use to speak to God. It is not for another to judge such a personal relationship.

Eric and I studied many different religions and we found them all to be very vital and effective ways for people to reach out to God and to bring The Divine into their lives. We honor any path that brings a person closer to God and puts them in touch with their best self. We find
it sad that these seemingly opposing paths are unable to embrace their commonalities and celebrate the differences that make each one special. One does not have to share the specific beliefs of a spiritual path to honor the effect they have on another person. Our highest ideal is to celebrate spiritual ecstasy in another person and bless their joyful connectivity to God by whatever means it is created, as it harms no one. We believe that each person has a way that is appropriate and perfect for them to connect with God and this might change for them throughout their lives.

**God/Goddess/The Universe/The Divine**

Throughout this book, you will hear different words used to refer to the omniscient, omnipotent, creator force. The CUSP premise is that God and all things considered to be God are genderless, ageless and without definition by human understanding. In CUSP theology, God is neither male nor female, but is both at the same time. CUSP believes that placing limitations on the ability of God is not for humans to do and is actually quite arrogant. By “placing limitations,” I mean the identification of God as only male, only female, only Christian, etc. When we attempt to define God, we place God in a box and therefore, limit the power of God. In the Ten Commandments of the Christian Bible, the second commandment tells us that it is forbidden to attempt to conceive of a “form” for the “formless” or to make a “graven” image of God. This is a clear indication that God intends to be something that is beyond or understanding or comprehension.

We do not believe that there are limits on how God appears to or interacts with humans. Our feeling is that God is able to take on any appearance and speak any language. If God can appear as a burning bush or a donkey or a cloud of fire, God can just as easily appear as a woman/Goddess, a Saint or in any other form. If God made us in God’s own image, as is stated in the Bible, then God is both male and female. When, in the context of this web site, the word “God,” is used, it refers to the All, the Unknowable, the power that humans view as The Divine. It does NOT specifically designate a MALE or PATRIARCHAL God. Fortunately, the ability to interact with God does not require an understanding of God, just a willingness to reach out and experience God.

To our perception, God is beyond any human’s ability to comprehend and in our attempts to do so, we assign human attributes to God. The Romans, the Greeks, the Celts, the Christians, the Hindus and most other faiths describe God as having human frailties such as jealousy and rage. We believe that God is more sacred and perfect than human beings and is
without our inherent flaws. The application of human attributes to God is an attempt by mankind to understand God when God is not comprehensible. From a CUSP perspective, we see God as spiritual perfection and not given to human frailties and struggles. We see God as The All, The Creator, God, Goddess, The Universe, Deity, The Divine and so on. As such, you will see that we use any and all of those words to refer to the power that others consider to be holy, sacred and invested in our positive life experiences.

**My God Doesn’t Need to Beat Up Your God – Really**

I have been asked countless times how I can be certain that the God I experience through CUSP is the same God as the Christian God. Honestly, anyone who has truly been in the presence of God and experienced the spiritual ecstasy that comes from knowing God will attest that it is impossible to mistake that feeling for something else or to mistake something else for that feeling. Being with God is a unique and breath-taking experience and not one that can ever be confused with anything else. Whether you encounter this feeling through Christianity or Paganism or Judaism or Hinduism or through any other path to God, when you feel it, you know it. It is completely unmistakable. Those who would ask this question have most assuredly never truly been in the presence of God or there would be no need to ask. A wise man once said of God, “Only one in a thousand will seek God. Of those who seek, only one will find God. Of those who find God, only one will know God.”

God is God. Period. The paths to God are many, by God’s own design. When Christ said, “In my Father’s house, there are many mansions,” we believe it is an allegory for the different “homes” God/Christ prepares for us to receive Divine presence.

**Satan/The Devil**

Another question we are often asked as about the influence of Satan/The Devil on the CUSP practice. Each person who comes to any spiritual path has their own preconceived ideas about the powers of evil and their presence and impact to the world. CUSP is a path to God and to the expression of God’s presence through the elements and cycles of nature. It is not about engaging Satan or any other negative entities. Within the concepts of CUSP, the only negative energies that are engaged are those within us as humans. We believe that each person has their own demons and devils inside of them and it is our own connection to God that will give us the tools needed to best those obstacles to being our best self. As such, we leave the ideology regarding negative entities to the individual’s own belief system.
Prayer/Manifestation for Personal Gain

We are also often asked if it is unethical to use the CUSP path for personal gain. Many religions do teach that we are not to aspire to wealth or creature comforts. We are taught that it is wrong to invest our energies into our own joy and satisfaction.

One of the primary premises of CUSP is that we are moving unerringly toward our own greatest good. For most people, having financial security and relaxation from money stresses is an important factor in our ability to enjoy life. Having someone in our life who loves us in a reciprocal and fundamentally rewarding way is often critical to our happiness. Having a job we love and spending our days in activities that allow us to feel good and positive about our productivity and our contribution to the world is vital to our self esteem and our ability to relate to others with confidence and joy.

The more we positive contribute to the world around us, the more we further the critical mass thought toward positivity as a whole as net creditors to the whole and to the human condition itself. If you inspire others by that which has illumined you, then you have evolved the human race forward on a spiritual level. Our overall happiness (as opposed to our greed, envy or petulance) serves exclusively as a beneficial influence to society and to the evolution of the species itself. God wants us to be happy and to celebrate in our own joy and personal success! Using the CUSP path to embrace our connectivity to the Divine and better our lives is a positive and wondrous affirmation of our faith in God and in our own abilities. The Universe will step forward and meet us on any level that we choose to engage. As long as we will put forth the effort, spiritually and mundanely, God will be there to assist, guide and empower us.

All that we do on a personal level in terms of spiritual advancement and development of our relationship with God affects the whole of humanity, just as one cell in a body can affect the body as a whole. As we advance ourselves on all levels, we simultaneously up the aggregate worth of the human population. When we harm others by devaluing how someone else approaches God, we abuse and degrade the connection to God experienced by the entire human race. Accepting and uplifting what causes another person to feel spiritually exalted, therefore, brings us all closer to God...as it harms none.

“Harm none” is a theme that permeates many parts of our life. “Primum non nocer” or “Primum nil nocer” is Latin for “First, do no harm.” The phrase is not, as is commonly believed, a
part of the Hippocratic Oath, although it does include the vow to “abstain from doing harm.” More common is the teaching of “non-malfeasance,” which is derived from the same phrase and is included in the teaching of magical ethics.

The Wiccan Rede says, “An it harms none, do what ye will.” Peppered throughout most religious doctrines is the idea that we should not harm one another. The sad part is that it is often sandwiched in between directives specifying when it is acceptable to do harm.

We tend toward the basics of simply doing no intentional harm. This sounds easy until you consider that a person can be harmed in subtle ways and on all 5 levels of existence: physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and sexually. We can inadvertently harm others and not even realize it. It is almost impossible to live in life in which we do not harm other people by accident. That being the case, does it not make sense to reject situations and attitudes that harm others intentionally, especially in the name of a God who is dedicated to love and our own greatest good? People are petty, jealous, hateful, vengeful and cruel.

In CUSP spirituality, God is above such low-brow, small-minded, hard-hearted behavior. God does not have “issues;” people have issues. To truly be in the presence of God is to know absolute love, acceptance and the understanding that we are created in God’s own image and are therefore, perfect. In all of the years we have worked with God, we have yet to see the angry, resentful God that other paths depict. We have only felt perfection, worthiness and supreme love like no other. That is not to say that The Universe is not ready, willing and able to teach us lessons we need to know, but part of tuning into the natural rhythms and flows is learning to listen to the still, small voice inside and heed the guidance that is given to us. Speaking the language gives us an advantage of staying on track with the Divine Plan for our lives and thereby learning lessons as they are presented to us rather than repeating them over and over as they become increasingly more painful.

Pain is what motivates people to change. If things are nice, we tend to hold very still because we do not want to lose the good place where we have landed. When the stove burns our hand, we quickly move it away. Pain creates action. If we tune into the voice of the Universe, we can make subtle changes when first feel the gentle nudges without waiting for the nudges to turn into a full scale beating.
CUSP (Climbing Up the Spiral Pathway) is a vibrant, productive spiritual path that incorporates practices from many religions, bringing them all together to create an easy-to-follow and sacred way to connect with God and your own best self through the foundation built on the practices of your ancestors.

Truly, all you need to enjoy a vibrant and rewarding spiritual life using the CUSP process is an open mind, a willing spirit and a belief in a Higher Power that guides us. It does not matter if you believe that the Higher Power comes from inside or outside of us. You just have to believe that one is there and is a force of love and positivity in your life. The specific way you engage this Higher Power is very personal to you and is not of issue in order to explore CUSP to the fullest.
As co-creators of CUSP, Eric and I have spent our entire adult life studying various spiritual paths and, in fact, *living them*, in an effort to learn as much as possible about all of the different ways in which people engage God and to discover the most effective ways to put those practices to work in everyday life. Since the beginning of time, humans have sought communion with God and that quest has taken on many forms as they seek to answer that oldest of all questions, “Whence do we come?” Just as there are many different languages in our modern world, all of which are vital and appropriate to their purpose, there are many “languages” God uses to speak to us. These sacred languages take the forms of the various spiritual paths.

In China, the Chinese language developed following its own etiological path. I am not bilingual and my home language is English. I do not speak the Chinese language. If I go to China and I want to integrate into Chinese society, I will be at a potential disadvantage. This is not an assignment of worth to either the English language I speak or the Chinese language they speak. It is situational to the circumstances. Neither English nor Chinese is at lacking because I could not understand what is said in Chinese.

Similarly, all over the world, people have their own historical spiritual etiology, both in the macrocosm of the immediate society in which we were raised and the microcosm of our own beliefs and spiritual needs. One affects the other and they work in tandem to create an individual spiritual language that we speak. I can explore other religious cultures and belief systems, but my own language is what will resonate more personally to me.

Sometimes, this is on a grand scale to the point that it is difficult for us to relate to or interpret what another spiritual path does (such as my own potential language barriers in China) and other times, the differences in spiritual practice are very subtle (I am from Kentucky and my speech is peppered with the accent and idioms of the area, but if I go to Oregon, I can still presumably carry on a conversation with the natives).

I can speculate on why other spiritual paths believe and worship they way they do, but until I am fluent in their “language,” it is inappropriate for me to presume to know and understand their practice. I most assuredly have no business making a determination on the worth of their spiritual path based on what someone else tells me, which is all too often the case.
Historically, there has been a tragic and destructive focus on the differences in spiritual paths. People hate others for believing and worshiping differently than they do and presume to know and belittle the connection with God another spiritual path creates. Wars have been waged and the loss of life in the name of the “I’m right, you’re wrong; convert or die” separateness is incalculable. I would wager that more people have died over money and religion than any other causes in the history of mankind.

There is no doubt that people take their religious beliefs very seriously and most certainly, those beliefs are and should be held sacred. This sacredness, however, is contaminated if we allow it to diminish the value of how another person connects to God just because it is not our way of connecting to God.

If we hold as true the idea that God is all powerful, all knowing and exists as a force beyond our human comprehension, then we also must hold true that God is well capable of speaking the different “languages” through which mankind reaches out to the Divine. We can extend that thought to presume that it, in fact, was God directly who created those individual paths as clear passageways for Holy Communion. It is no more than the ego of humans that creates the separateness of these sacred paths and fosters a dangerous and homicidal division between them; not God. If God truly loves us all, as is asserted repeatedly through the Bible, then God most assuredly does not want us killing one another in the name of God. Once one divests oneself of the ego-based need to be the only ones who are right about how to approach God, we truly open ourselves to a position of love, acceptance and tolerance, which brings us even closer to God. We also might just learn something in the process.
CUSP does not focus on the separateness of sacred paths, but instead honors the commonalities of spiritual practices the world over. Eric and I, independently and together, spent the majority of our adult lives in academic and personal study of the world’s religions with a focus on the practices people use to connect to God. As our avid and enthusiastic exploration of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Eastern religions and the associated esoteric areas of those religions such as the Jesuits, the Sufi, the Cabbalists, etc., as well as various earth-based nature religions, Native American practices and other spiritual paths unfolded, CUSP practically formed itself right before our eyes. The natural and continual evolution of CUSP beliefs and practices never fails to amaze us. It was as though all of these incredible, sacred practices came together of their own accord and formed this incredible path, right before our eyes. We are the ones who are honored to bring this path to the world in terms of writing down the words, but we cannot take credit for its development. That was an act and gift directly from God. We did not create this path, it was revealed to us.

CUSP is the result of more than two decades of working with other spiritual teachers and leaders, putting the various ideas into practice as they developed. The viability and benefits of the CUSP practice quickly became evident. Each year, the CUSP path developed and revealed itself to us on an even grander scale.

Within the first year of working with the CUSP spiral of the year and putting its ongoing themes into practice, those who incorporate the basic tenets began to see benefits on all levels, including their connectivity to God, an increased awareness of the world around them (both seen and unseen) and their place in it, as well as experiencing ongoing, overall improvement in their own day-to-day life. CUSP has enriched the lives of those who walk the path since it debuted in 1997 by encouraging evolutionary growth in its practitioners and setting benchmarks for the assessing, planning and execution of forward momentum in life.

CUSP is built upon the ancient agricultural calendar created in the European countries as agriculture became an important part of life and survival. The shift from a nomadic lifestyle to the more sedentary, community based establishment of city states has been traced to more than 10,000 – 11,000 years ago. Climate change throughout the world following the last ice age created long periods of dry spells which were conducive to the growth of annual plants. In Asia, Europe, African and the Americas, nomadic people simultaneously realized that they could encourage the growth of desired plants and discourage the growth of or even eliminate vines and vegetation that were not useful to them. There is evidence of the use of “companion planting” (the co-planting of vegetation that is complimentary to one another) and fire stick farming (controlling vegetation and wildlife attraction through selective burning of fields)
traced to that time. As early as 70,000 years ago, there is evidence of “forest gardening” in which areas of forest were trained to encourage the growth of specific vegetation that was particularly useful.

As climate shifts encouraged the growth of annual plants, people learned that they could encourage the growth of and harvest of storable grains. Dryer areas caused nomadic groups to cluster around oasis-type areas, resulting in the formation of communities and villages. These groups began to work together to cultivate and store grains such as wheat, flax, lentils, peas, chick peas and barley. They also learned that they could cultivate the growth of particular trees, such as fig trees, through the nurturing of cuttings taken from the branches of the trees. Wheat was the first grain to be cultivated and harvested on a grand scale. There are, in fact, considered to be three types of agricultural people: The People of the Wheat, The People of the Corn, and the People of the Rice.

As the beginning stages of organized agriculture took hold and populations began to grow, the nomadic groups found that they required more food and supplies than they could reasonably carry, which also contributed to the comparatively sedentary life of farming as opposed to the hunter-gatherer way of life. This transition appears to have taken place on a world-wide level. Was this a “critical mass” development or was it simply the biological drive for people to be close to areas where water is available? Perhaps, it was both.

The Sumerians were the first to commercialize agriculture. Their mastery of the growth of barley, wheat, apples, flax, dates, plums and grapes was unprecedented and they created more food than they could reasonably use. This led to the bartering and selling of a portion of their harvests. They were the first to plow fields with oxen and later, with horses.

Around 6000 BC, the European agricultural experience took off, integrating techniques developed by the Sumerians and the Romans, as well as the Islamic nations. The European climate was ideal for farming and by the 16th century, they had mastered crop rotation, selective breeding of animals and the use of hybrid technologies to create superior plants, as well as the use of greenhouses, silos and grain elevators.

All of the cultures involved with the development of an agricultural planet were tremendously religious and as their security became dependent upon the success of their harvest, both to sustain their villages and to use as barter with other villages, their religious practices began to support those goals. Agriculture is, in fact, what ultimately led to the
doctrine-based, organized religions that are practiced today. City states were established around areas particularly conducive to agricultural growth which led to social structures, routines and rituals that focused on the successful outcome of the harvest cycle. As these rituals blended with the natural cycles of the year, ongoing celebratory observations, often corresponding with specific significant astrological events, traditions began to emerge. These ongoing traditions became the foundation of established religion, including the CUSP spiritual path.

In the Germanic Europeans countries, a cycle of 8 holidays formed. These demarcations used the four astrological solstices and equinoxes as their foundation and interjected four other holidays within that structure to represent transitions significant to the agricultural harvest year. Over time, these 8 touch points became evenly distributed and were assigned specific dates; however, in actual application in ancient times, they were likely very loosely scheduled based on climate changes of that particular year and the resulting progression of crop-related work that occurred. Many different religious paths have used these 8 basic holidays to meld with their own beliefs, including the Christian path. CUSP embraces the universal appeal of these time-honored holidays and uses them as our own calibration for the celebration of the agricultural harvest year.
How CUSP Works

CUSP is an acronym for “Climbing Up the Spiral Pathway.” Many paths embrace the concept of the “Wheel of the Year” to identify the 8 agricultural holidays. The image of a wheel is appropriate to identify the cycles that return to use year after year. What it does not reflect is the progress that we make and the ascension that has built by our practice in previous years that forms the foundation for our future successes. For that reason, CUSP embraces the Spiral of the Year. We continually return to the same points in the annual progression, but on the next higher level, incorporating and building upon the foundation of our prior lessons and successes. We climb the ever ascending spiral toward greater progress and continual improvement of our life and our individual circumstances. This comes not only through the conscious manifestation of positive life changes that CUSP directly creates, but also through the lessons we learn from the changes that did not manifest or manifested in a way that we did not anticipate.

What drives CUSP is the underlying premise of “greatest good.” It is our belief that human beings are biologically driven to pursue their own greatest good and highest pleasure and satisfaction. Often, chemical changes in our bodies derail this natural drive. Alcohol, prescription medications, environmental pollutants and recreational drugs can all affect the opiate sensors that encourage us to seek out our own most positive results.

In our modern life with its emphasis on material gain and the acquisition of power, most people have lost their birthright of intuition and self-awareness. Their ability to tune into the guidance and signs around them has dimmed to the point that many no longer see it and if they do, they describe it as a “flash.” Humans are not wired up to have a “flash” of intuition or moments of clarity. They are intended to live in those moments with their “unaware” times being the exception rather than the rule.

One of the great benefits of CUSP is that the process naturally attunes you to the guidance of The Universal energies/God. You will become more aware of the gentle nudges you receive every day and as you practice more and more, they will become a valuable road map for you to navigate your way to your greatest success. How many times have you done something that made no sense to you or anyone else, simply because it felt right? Our inner guidance often defies common sense and is difficult to explain or justify. CUSP does not
typically cause you to make dangerous or unwise choices, but it may press you to step out of your established comfort zone to try new avenues to your own success.

As you begin to walk the CUSP path, you quickly start to develop two different, yet related types of growth. This is best represented by the familiar symbol of the yin-yang:

![Yin-Yang Symbol]

On an outward level that can be seen, felt and known, you will have the specific outward “harvest” of real and tangible goals. Your “harvest” will take the form of long term changes you wish to manifest in your life. The darker, more internal benefit you will achieve is that you will begin to understand why your life unfolds the way it does. You will spend a specific part of your year in meditation and evaluation of the previous harvest cycle before you begin to plan your next year’s cycle. This allows for rest, for contemplation and for greater connection to God’s plan for you. As much as this system of sacred practice is a method for positive external change, it is also an effective catalyst to internal change. It is a common belief that to change the nature of a person, one must begin either with the internal or the external, which will directly cause an effect in the other. This is not the case when endeavoring on the CUSP way. At once both the internal and the external are affected as the practice incorporates both elements in every progression throughout the year.

Beginning at Yule and ending at Samhain, the agricultural holidays will guide you through the harvest year, signifying the kick off of a new course of action on the road to achieving your goals. In the briefest of terms possible, it goes like this: You begin with the spark of an idea, come up with a solid plan, ask The Universe for input, begin your active process of manifestation, cultivate your goals, harvest your reward and then contemplate the lessons of the previous harvest year.
Our DNA is encoded with the repeated behaviors of our ancestors. We have specific psychological response to various stimuli simply because of how our ancestors lived. If we sense we are in danger, a “fight or flight” reaction is activated. Biochemically, our bodies still respond to food and water intake as though we were hunter gatherers. If our body senses we are low on food or water, it will begin to hold onto fluids and burn calories more slowly. These are just two of the many ways we are still attuned to the ancient way of living.

Because our ancestors honored the agricultural cycles of the year as sacred for so long, our instincts are innately attuned to those cycles. Although most of us are no longer literally farmers who harvest an actual crop each year, we can still use the same cycle to harvest positive and measurable results in our lives. In the next chapter, you will see how it works in detail and be shown how the tradition of the CUSP way is the way of the *Spiritual Farmer.*
The Spiral of the Year

As you can see from the diagram above, there are eight touch points throughout the year that act as keystones to the entire CUSP process. These are dates that are recognizable to
many as being important astrological and agricultural times that have prevailed in usage and celebration through history. We wish by no means to promote the idea that the discovery of these particular dates as catalysts to progressive development is our own; far from it. Our intent is to celebrate the legacy they bring to us. Many spiritual paths are drawn to these dates or times near them to share in the energy that has become indigenous to them as a result of literally thousands of years of humankind’s investment into and usage of their power.

When nomadic humans began to embrace the agricultural lifestyle and in the most literal sense, “put down roots” by cultivating crops to sustain their village, they found that these were the dates that held within them a particular significance to the process of natural growth. Just as those dates marked the important transitions through the literal agricultural cycles for those first farmers, so does it take us, the modern “spiritual farmers” through our own yearly life progression.

For more than a decade now, we have seen the ample benefits of patterning our lives around the cycles that have been worn and woven into the fabric of time by our ancestors before us. To embrace these integral patterns within us is to immerse ourselves into the symphony of nature that is ongoing and welcoming. After a short time of attuning ourselves to these cycles, we begin to feel in tune with the natural flow and process to life. Rather than feeling as though we are fighting against our destiny and our “greater good,” we find ourselves intuitively making choices that take us to a more fulfilling and successful life.

Each touch point will be discussed in detail to allow you to experience a full understanding of its place and purpose in the spiral of the year. For now, we will examine a basic overview of how the touch points work together as a system to create our progression through a CUSP year of growth and forward evolution. What is important to know is that the specific dates shown above are the celebration of the influx of a new energy into the harvest process. You will see from the previous diagram that the actual influence of this energy continues until the following holiday. When we talk about the time of Beltane in regard to CUSP practice, we are referring to the 6 weeks between Beltane and Litha.

As you look at the previous diagram of the 8 major touch points, you may be confused since it was previously explained that the CUSP system is based on a “Spiral” of the year as opposed to the “Wheel” of the year. Clearly, the diagram shown is of a wheel. The limitations of text prevent a proper spiral illustration, so imagine that you are at the top of the spiral, looking down onto the many rounds of ascension from bottom to top. As you see the years loop one
over another, each building on the last, imagine that the information you see on the diagram glows clearly on the platform from which the spiral rises.

Each time the spiral creates a rotation, it passes over the 8 touch points, weaving its way through the year with each step you take bringing you to a higher point. What you do today is the result of where you were yesterday and last year and 10 years ago. Your spiral ascends ever upward and your past becomes the foundation on which you stand. If you were to, as I suggested, stand over your spiral looking downward into it, you would see clearly the 8 touch points glowing away around the edges, but when you look at it from a side view, you can see that the path is ascending, taking you surely and confidently to your highest and best life.
About the Holidays

Pre-Christian Celtic and Germanic agriculturalists honored the equinoxes and solstices as important turning points in their harvest cycle. The “High Holidays,” as the remaining 4 events were called, completed their Wheel of the Year. The holidays we will discuss are specific to the Northern Hemisphere of the world. Although the agricultural year in the Southern Hemisphere mimics that of the North, the progression occurs at different times due to the way the earth is tilted on its axis.

You will notice that between the Northern and Southern hemispheres, the seasons are always exactly opposite of one another. When it is spring in California, it will be autumn in Brazil. As such, this phenomenon of directly opposing energies is one of the things that maintains the balance of seasonal energies. We humans exist in a world of duality. There is nothing that can be experienced without a relative experience with which to express or conceptualize. There is no knowledge of day without the knowledge of night. Therefore, the resulting energies of all things must be in balance and work in harmony, with one never truly exceeding another on a global scale.

Of all of the things that exist and can be perceived in our world, the Sun is the only thing that is outside of the closed system. Early peoples recognized this as the first honored deity was the Sun. It gives energy, heat and light yet takes nothing in return from us. It could be said from this observation that the sun is not part of the duality of the human experience, but it really is. The light of the Sun is obviously balanced by day and night and, less obviously, by the change of the seasons in perfect balance around the globe. The Sun has always played a central role in all religious and spiritual paths, even to this day. Of all physical objects, it is the only one truly worthy of worship.

Of course, the concept of time keeping is manmade in origin and the tracking of the movements of the Sun and earth are our way of observing and attempting to understand the idea of time. The Spiral of the Year through these holidays is an underlying common thread that draws together many paths to God and brings us together to celebrate. The agricultural holidays and the religious counterparts that spin off from them are a sacred medium through which God gives and sustains life. In each organic item that the agricultural harvest creates, there still exists a breath of God within.
In ancient times, the changes of the season were vital for survival in terms of the effect on both hunting and the harvest cycle. Our lives are still bound by these cycles, even though we do not usually practice them actively. You do not have to work hard to attune yourself to these natural cycles. You are already attuned by virtue of being human due to the actions and beliefs of your ancestors. All you have to do is to honor the connection that is already within you and strengthen your existing bond to the natural flow.
In the darkest moment of the longest night of the year comes the spark of light to the sky. Incrementally, the days will now begin to lengthen as the Sun returns to the sky. Many spiritual paths interpret the strong, sustained energy of the Sun to be masculine in nature and the Moon with its monthly cycles and gentle light to reflect the feminine qualities.

If we follow this theory, then this time of year is the most female time and therefore, the most nurturing and intuitive. When the spark of light returns to the sky, it begins to very subtly push away the darkness. We start our cycle of the year with the “spark” of intuition and desire that will create the goal that we will nurture and grow in the coming months. Like the spark of life that springs forth from the seed, the spark of idea that comes to us now begins the process of harvest that will culminate in the fall. The process of manifestation has now begun.
Imbolc – Plan – Approximately February 1st

Six weeks ago, the spark of an idea formed in our minds of what we would like to bring into our lives when Harvest comes. By Imbolc, we should already have in our minds a solid plan for what we will plant for the coming year. Now it is time to commit to that plan and put it out into the Universe as a solid and substantial determination. Once we do so, we will be shown over the coming 6 weeks whether or not this plan is indeed in our best interest. Our task during this time is to pay attention, watch for signs, and trust that we will be given clear confirmations or redirections regarding our plan. Vigilance and objectivity are vital at this point in the agricultural year. Sometimes, what we think we want in our lives is not what our inner selves know is actually for the best and The Universe will clearly show us if this is the case. This is a time to be very alert and aware of subtle (or profoundly direct) nudges and any guidance that presents. It is part of the human condition to ignore what we do not wish to hear, but it is to our greatest advantage to be very honest with ourselves and accept the wisdom we are shown during this time. At this time of the year, the return of the Sun is evident, the creeks and rivers are beginning to flow. The winter loosens it grip as the ground begins to thaw. The farmer realizes the time of the planting is near, and the prudent one is he who through experience, knowledge and the contemplation of those is able to determine what shall be planted and what shall not. For us, as the Spiritual Farmers, we must open ourselves to be able to successfully determine not what we want to plant, but what we should plant. This is wisdom.


**Spring Equinox/Ostara – Plant – Approximately March 21st**

Spring comes to us as a time of new life and new beginnings. The earth has softened and awaits the seed that it will nurture and sustain in the coming months. The world sings with possibilities and potential. We have now invested 6 weeks in determining whether our plan is a good one or should be adjusted according to the redirections we receive. It is now time to plant our goals and begin the active part of the year which will last for exactly six months.

As ones who follow the natural flow of the year, we rest, reflect, plan and contemplate during the cold months and emerge ready for action when the first warmth of the Sun touches the earth In Spring. By “planting” our goals, we begin the process of welcoming the outcome into our lives and we signal the start of the physical actions we will invest into making them a reality. Planting represents the end of the time of “planning” and our transition into the time of “doing.”
Beltane – Faith – Approximately May 1st

In many ways, this is the hardest time of the year because we have invested effort into the conception of our goals and now they feel tiny and vulnerable. After the planting is done, we may begin to see the first tiny signs of life emerging from our goals...or we may not just yet.

An old saying tells us, “Do not dig up in doubt what you planted in faith.” It is tempting to want to poke down into the planting area to see if our goals are manifesting; however, this is a time to step back, provide essential maintenance and allow the process of growth to be established. Fertilization occurs at this time and the seeds have been given a good start in life during the planting. Now, we fertilize the ground around it, gently protect it from encroaching weeds or other dangers, water it just enough and wait.
Summer Solstice/Litha/Midsummer – Promise – Approximately September 21st

The time of promise is the direct opposite of the time of the spark. The Sun is now at its zenith and masculine energy is in full force: Do, Make, Create, Fix, Protect. The longest day of the year was a blessing for farmers as it gave them more time to work in the fields.

At this time, the crops are very visible above the ground and although still young and vulnerable, they are seen to be green, strong and full of the promise of a successful harvest. In our own lives, we begin to see the results of our efforts and know that with continued effort, we will achieve in the fall what we planned in the winter.
**Lammas – Harvest – Approximately August 1st**

Although this is a joyful time in the cycle of the agricultural year, the Harvest is also a time of tremendous, back-breaking, sweaty, muscle-wrenching hard work. It is a labor of love, there is no doubt, but it is certainly a challenging time. It is often easier to invest tremendous energy into a situation when we can see the results of our efforts right away, much like the burst of energy marathon runners get when they see the finish line.

Many people who follow the CUSP flow of the year (and many who do not) find that this time of the year is extremely busy and productive as the fruits of their efforts begin to manifest and they are rewarded for the energy they have invested. The first harvest is the direct result of our own actions and our own efforts. What we have planted in faith is now manifesting in our lives and we experience the exhilarating rush of its fruition.
Autumn Equinox – Boon – Approximately September 21st

Historically, the time of the second harvest was seen as an incredible blessing to the ancient farmers. While they were still putting away crops from the fields for Winter storage, nature yielded up another bounty that would grow with or without their efforts. As they made their way into the untended forests, they found fruits of the trees, bushes and vines. Nuts, roots and other forms of food that were seen as gifts from God to supplement their harvest.

In our modern day lives, we often find that during this time, blessings rain down upon us in addition to the fulfillment of the goals we planted in our own life’s “fields.” These extra blessings are The Universe’s way of telling us that we have done well with our year’s planning and planting. “You did a great job and yielded wonderful results. Here, have some more.”
Samhain – Surrender – Approximately November 1st

In some European traditions, any crops remaining in the field on November 1st were said to be “poisoned” and had to be sacrificed when the fields were burned to cleanse them for the planting of the following year. Although we certainly know in this day and time that the crops would be no more poisoned on November 1st than they were on October 31st, there is a valuable lesson to us in this ancient wisdom. “Know when you are done.” “Understand when to let go; when to release.” Take that which you need and no more. This eliminates the human tendency to seek after greed.

Even in today’s demanding society, there are ways that we are able to take our hands off of the constant need to control and allow for a time of relaxation through the winter months. The advent of November tells us it is time to do just that and in following the CUSP progression, this is when we celebrate the successes of our harvest and release our expectations for the things that, for whatever reason, did not come to us this year. Fields are burned away, cleansing us of the old and outmoded and encouraging us to release the parts of our lives that do not serve us and to fall softly into the embrace of Winter when we will reflect on the previous year and wipe clean our slates to receive the new spark for the coming year that will present to us in December as the cycle begins again.
Now that you have a basic overview of how each touch point fits into the CUSP structure of the agricultural year, we will take time to discuss each holiday in detail to give you a full understanding of its individual energy and how we can best honor its very special time in our cycle of manifestation.
Yule
Winter Solstice
Yule/Winter Solstice – Approximately December 21st

Where Does It Come From?

The word “solstice” derives from the Latin word “sol,” meaning “sun” and “stare,” meaning “to stand still.” At the time of the winter and spring solstices, the sun appears to stand still as it transitions from its energy waning or waxing, respectively. So monumental were these solstice demarcations in the ancient societies that huge structures were built to commemorate them. Both the Newgrange burial mound in Ireland and England’s famous Stonehenge all have architectural aspects and spiritual properties to them that can only be perceived at the true moment of the solstices. Many other impressive structures use the specific of the lighting at different times of the solstices as part of their design. The standing stones of Kindtraw in Argyll, Scotland, for instance, as well as the Long Meg and Her Daughter structure in Cumberland are specifically oriented toward sunset on Winter Solstice. The Coricancha (Sun Temple) in the ancient Inca capital of Cuzco focuses on sunrise of the Winter Solstice. The structures of the Aztecs and Mayans also show that the solstices were very important as well. At the site of Chichen Itza, the geometry of the main temple building will cause an illusion of the sunlight “running” up and down the building during the course of the day on each solstice. Almost all cultures of the world have placed a similar significance around these particular times.

In the 4th century Gothic language, the word “giuli” was the name of the month during which the Winter solstice occurred and is thought to be the etymological source of the word “Yule.” The name is referenced in the writing of the 8th century historian Bede as being part of the Anglo Saxon calendar. In his 1st book of Heimstringla, Ynglinga Saga mentions a Yule feast (AD 840). King Haacon I of Norway is credited as being the one to align the Christian celebration of Christmas to coincide with the Winter solstice ceremonies that were already celebrated. This occurred around AD 950. The first recorded use of the word “yuletide” is in 1475.

The Romans started the Yule traditions that are now most familiar to us and many of those translated out into Christian practice. The Sun, of course, was tremendously important to these agriculture mavens and to that end, they lit candles, lamps and bonfires to welcome the return of the Sun after the longest night of the year and to banish evil spirits. They believed that the lighting of bonfires encouraged the Sun’s return to the sky. The Romans adopted the Babylonian practice of gift giving as an expression of love at this time and also decorated their homes with laurel boughs.
Shortly afterward, the emerging Christian church adopted this time period to honor the birth of Christ, melding the “Birth of the Sun” with the “Birth of the Son.” This merged celebration created the foundation of what we now call “Christmas.” Historians agree that due to fact that the birth of Christ is biblically documented as occurring during the time of the census, it is unlikely that this would have been more likely to have taken place during winter months and would more be more aptly placed in spring with the birth of new livestock for sacrifice)or fall after the time of harvest.
The Persian god Mithra was honored at the Winter Solstice in pre-Christian times and it is said that his birth was attended by shepherds who came to honor the newborn leader. The religion called “Mithraism” spread into the Roman Empire and eventually became its official religion. The Empire converted to Christianity by the 4th century under the rule of Constantine.

For the Norse and Teutonic people, Yule was a major holiday. Their celebration of this time, in fact, spanned 12 days, providing the source of the “Twelfth Night” observance, as well as inspiring the classic Christmas song, “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” They attribute the word “Yule” to “iul,” meaning “wheel.” The Norse celebrated the holiday of Yule as their new year, which is why it starts our own CUSP cycle of the harvest year. The focus of their celebration was the Yule log, a log that was brought into the house and kept burning through the night to honor Thor and Freyr. The ashes would then be scattered throughout the fields to bless the coming harvest. Some of the ashes were kept inside for blessing and protection of the home. A tiny piece of the Yule log would be saved to use in the lighting of the next year’s Yule log and create continuity between the cycles. Yule was also the time of the Wild Hunt when the hunters would go into the woods to kill game to sustain the village and supplement the previous harvest with fresh meat.

Druids would gather Mistletoe at Yule and people would hang it in their doorways to protect their homes from lightning strikes and fire. It was believed that if a woman could get a man to kiss her under the mistletoe, they would marry.

The first written record of a fir tree being used to celebrate the holiday comes from Latvia in the year 1510 and is described as a tree adorned with paper flowers. A dance was performed around it and it was then set on fire. In 1841, Queen Victoria had an evergreen tree decorated at Winsor Castle for Christmas, which launched the practice into common households.

The practice of hanging wreaths during this holiday dates back more than 4000 years and originates in Scandinavia. The wreath itself represents the Wheel of the Year, a circle with no beginning or end.

Although most cultures see the veil between the worlds as thinnest during the honoring of the ancestors at Samhain, Yule also brings with it a closeness to those who have passed on as we share memories of winter holidays passed and those with whom we shared those times.
The classic Charles Dickens story, *A Christmas Carol*, also brings an element of spirits into this darkest night of the year.

Some of the traditional practices of Yule have bled over into our modern day New Year’s celebrations. January is named for the Roman god Janus, who was a two-faced god who looked both forward and backward. It is from this source that we derive our traditional time of self-evaluation as we look upon our past with contemplation and create resolutions for the coming year to manifest changes in our lives. This blends beautifully with our CUSP process of creating our list of goals now to which we will commit at Imbolc and await confirmation or redirection from The Universe.

**Don’t Be Afraid of the Dark**

Everyone knows that we go through phases as we mature. As children, provided we have a somewhat normal upbringing, most of us are given to positivity and joy that is on a hair trigger. Because the whole world is a magical experience for us, we are constantly delighted and because we have so much to achieve and a number of older folks around us to teach and encourage us, we get to feel an ongoing rush of pride in what we learn. Anyone who spends time with babies and children knows that they laugh and giggle a lot more than do adults. With any luck, kids don’t know much about dark places and if they do run into a few, they have adults there to smooth over the bad feelings. For babies and young children, it takes a long time before they lose the egocentric life model that processes experiences only through the filter of how it affects them.

At some point in our adolescence, we usually hit a dark phase. I tend to think of it as that loss of innocence that occurs when we realize that our parents can’t fix everything and there are some tough experiences out there in life that we have to navigate on our own. For some of us who had, well, *challenged* parents, that realization comes earlier and hits harder. I believe we all go through a grieving process for the safe world we had that we come to think of as an illusion. We have experiences that make us feel alone and unsure, convinced that we are incapable of managing life on our own. At this point, young people still have not fully escaped that egocentric perspective and because of the peer relationships they go through socially, everything feels personal and intense, especially the loss of safety and stability. They are on the verge of having to create their own life away from the protection of parents and rarely will we ever again encounter anything so simultaneously exciting and terrifying. (Childbirth, perhaps? Love? Reality TV?)
Some of us go into drugs and alcohol to create a new world of illusion. Some succumb to depression. Most emerge on the other side a little wiser and a little more balanced. From there, we go through our recurring personal crises as life progresses and we either learn from those experiences or we continue to repeat the same cycle over and over again.

The desired outcome is that we will marry up our darkness and our light into perfect balance. We are taught to fear and reject the dark, but we can never understand the dark unless we spend time there. The bad guys in movies always have black hats and the good guys have white. In Christianity, God is portrayed as light and white and the Devil is represented by darkness. All of this conditions us to be afraid to confront our own shadows and find out what is in the darkness.

The sad thing is that our dark areas contain the answers to the mysteries in our lives. What is the kingpin to our addictions? What makes us afraid to love? What makes us afraid of our own success? Our limitations and realities hide in the shadows and if we are too afraid to go in there and talk to them and discover truths about ourselves, we will forever be enslaved to our handicaps and obstacles and will be unable to live a sacred and fully actualized life.

Encoded into our DNA from centuries of living as agricultural people, we have a natural relationship to the changing of seasons and the cycles of the year. On all levels (mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually and sexually), we have needs that work in tandem with the natural cycles. Even though many of us have not worked as farmers in our lifetime or in the lifetime of our parents or grandparents, the imprint remains and will for some time to come, woven into the fabric of time by the constant repetition of our ancestors.

In our modern daily life, we are required to remain on full output, total production, all year round. Most of us do not have the luxury of stopping what we do in the winter to go inside and close the door to the world. Some careers are more in tune with that schedule, such as those that depend on hospitable weather conditions for productivity (logging, construction, farming when it still happens, gardening, landscaping, etc).

It’s not that there is nothing to do during the dark of the year, but more than we do things differently. If we work in a cubicle or a retail store, we probably work as hard in the winter as we do in the summer. Because of our society’s demands that we be productive, active people all year long, we have incongruence with what our spirits tell us we need to do. This
manifests in the form of greater illness and depression in the dark of the year, as well as disorder such as SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder).

Each year after Samhain, Nature tells us that it is time to stop harvesting and go inside. The outside weather normally turns more inhospitable and harsh in the winter. We have holidays built around being together and celebrating our connectedness. Our desires turn more toward quiet nights by the fire with hot cocoa than being out in the world.

When using the CUSP spiritual path, we incorporate this natural rhythm into the progression of the year by closing down the active part of the year, starting with Samhain, and opening up the introspective time of the year. We call this “the dark of the year.” At Yule, we begin to explore what we want to change in our lives and what we think should be different by the time next year’s harvest finalizes.

After Samhain, the tremendous work of harvesting is done. The last ear of corn is stored and the barn door is closed. It is time to rest. The six weeks until Yule is a time of tremendous
stillness as everything stops for a time and we quiet our world for the coming winter months. I have found that because of our conditioning, very few people are comfortable with true stillness. They need to be active and doing and surrounded by sound and people and stimulation. How many people do you know who keep a TV on for background noise or “company” when they are home alone? How many do you know who need noise to sleep and have a fan running or a TV or radio playing as they sleep? How many people do you know who are uncomfortable going to a movie or out to dinner alone? How about driving in the car with no music playing? It is rare that people enjoy their own company and their own thoughts sufficiently to allow total stillness to enfold them or to enjoy time without the input of others in some form.

Often, people become so wrapped up in the thoughts of others that they no longer have their own original thoughts or form their own judgments exclusive of approval or criticism from the people in their orbit. This time of year, this stillness, is about connecting with our own thoughts, opinions and judgments as we reflect on the lessons of the Harvest and process all that has happened to us in the year we just closed down.

At Yule, it will be time to look forward once again as we begin the process of planning the next year’s harvest. Our goal is to find the quiet, stillness inside and go into it. We are to get to know ourselves exclusive of the people around us and to find our individual place in collective spirit. The dark of the year is a time of introspection and reflection.

Since it is nearly impossible for most of us in modern society to take a break from life for six weeks while we explore or inner, shadowy spirit sanctum, we have to honor the dark of the year in an adaptive way. This means changing our non-work related activities so that we have time, even a few minutes a day, to sit in the stillness and reflect on our past year, our inner thoughts and the obstacles that hold us back on a regular basis. This is when we clear away the doubts and shames from the past and replace them with positive, affirmative responses instead. We must first love ourselves enough to forgive ourselves and then proceed to work on the problems in our interpersonal relationships from that place of healing rather than a position of accusation and blame.
At Yule, light will subtly prevail and the days will gradually become longer until the light part of the year begins at Spring Equinox. Until then, we use this time for introspection, for healing, for internal processing and for courting the shadowy places inside us. Engage the stillness whenever possible between now and spring. Write your thoughts in a personal journal that no one sees. Reflect on goals from the past that were put aside, possibly against your will. Yule brings the spark of light back into the sky after the longest night of the year has held court. That spark ignites our spark of inspiration and helps us to see what we should manifest in the coming year.

Consider where you are now and how you got here. Consider your progress thus far and how it matches or is different from what you intended. Limit your stimuli as much as you can and learn to enjoy the quiet, even if you find yourself resisting at first. Take a few minutes and lie down in the darkness, supported by pillows, and see what images come to you. Whatever shows up, chase it and see where it goes. Pay close attention to your dreams and write them down when you wake for later reflection. Take note of interesting coincidences and hunches that come to you. All of this is part of the message system The Universe uses to get you to know what you need in your life and how to best feed your hungers.
When we make friends with the dark of the year instead of treating it the same as we treat the light of the year, our spirits flourish. When we confidently engage the darkness inside ourselves and accept the messages and challenges that come from the shadows, we will live a more plugged in and balanced life.

Starting Your List

By the time we reach Imbolc, your quite introspection should yield for you an idea of what you want to change in your life in the coming harvest year. At this time, all that is needed is a preliminary list or set of ideas. Project your mind ahead to November 1st of the coming year. That is almost an entire year away from Yule and it demarcates the end of the next harvest season. How do you want your life to be different at that time?

It is very, very natural when you first begin to work with the CUSP process to feel your flow of ideas catch on filters that exist in your thoughts. You will likely find yourself thinking, “But THAT could never happen.” “There just isn’t enough time.” “What will people think?” “That is selfish of me.” “How will I ever afford that?” Doubt and negative thinking are the greatest road blocks you will find on the spiral pathway as you begin your trek upwards.

When you begin to hear this kind of thinking in response to your ideas, it is important that you stop yourself, consciously back up and start moving forward mentally again. Reject the doubt and do not allow it to enter into your mind. Replace it with a positive idea such as, “I have the perfect amount of time to make this happen.” “There is always enough time.” “I deserve to be happy and enjoy my life.” “The money and means will be provided. At this point in your journey through the agricultural year, you are creating a destination. You do not need to concern yourself with the route you will take to get there.

One of the other difficulties people face at this point is the very sad fact that many people have forgotten how to want. We often get so caught up in the wants and needs of others around us (coworkers, family members and friends) that we no longer are in tune with what we want for ourselves. How often do you hear people respond with, “Oh really, I don’t need anything” when they are asked what they want for their birthday or other event. We are trained to believe that it is rude to ask for what we want. Since the person is likely asking because they intend to get us something regardless of our assistance, we usually end up with a gift that is not useful to us or what we really do not want at all.
When you considering with a friend or partner the restaurant at which you should eat your meal, do you decline to offer a suggestion and instead say, “What are you in the mood to eat?” Do you continue to evade the issue until the other person finally names a place where they would like to go? If either of these situations describes you, then you have very likely been trained out of wanting things. It is important that you train back into it!

Take out a paper and pen and begin writing. Even if the ideas for what you would like to change sound ludicrous to you, keep writing. Remember to backtrack and re-think any time you find yourself engaging in negative thinking. Do not refuse to put something on your list because you think it cannot happen. Doubt has no place here. Do not try to imagine how you will get from point A to point Z. You have not even started your first steps yet! This is not a process to be rushed.

Once you have your list in place, now we start the refining process. First, assign to each item on your list a feeling that you want to feel when the goal does manifest. For instance, most people who work to manifest a new job have a particular feeling that they want to associate with that new job. For some, it is the feeling of being prosperous if they have created a higher paying job. For others, it is working with people who are motivated, cooperative, kind and helpful. Still others might want a job that is closer to home and their feeling is one of sleeping later, traveling less and greater convenience. Others want to manifest a job they love doing that is within their zone of genius. Imagine the feelings you will have when each of those goals are made manifest. If you have more than one goal that ties into the same feeling, group those goals together and instead of the specific item or circumstances, list the feeling as your goal. This way, the goals are immediately tied together. It is the feeling you want as much as you want the specific goal.

Now, take at least a 10-15 minute break from your list. You need to come back to the list later with fresh eyes. Once you have had your break, look at your list again. Is there anything on your list that you have added because you feel you should as opposed to adding it because you really want it? Are you listing something because you believe it would make someone else happy, even though it is not a goal you would normally choose? If so, cross it off. This is about you. You should only have your heart’s desire on the list. Weed out your list until you have line items that you really, really want.

Next, do you have any items on your list that require other items on your list to happen first before they can manifest? If so, cross out the second chronologically occurring item and
leave it for another year. For example, if you write on your list that you would like to get a BA in English Literature and you also list, “Enroll in college,” you are experiencing some cart and horse issues. If you want to fit into your wedding dress but you need to lose 100 pounds to do so, then your goal is to lose weight, so if you wrote both of those on your list, you can cross out one of them because they are mutually inclusive.

If you write that you want a healthy, mutual and sizzling romantic relationship on the same list as “I want a divorce,” you should first work on “I would like a positive and respectful end to my current marriage.” The cart goes after the horse. On the other hand, if you list that you want a healthy, mutual and sizzling romantic relationship and leave it at that, you could manifest that kind of relationship with your current partner. Most importantly, be clear on your list about what you really want to manifest. Honesty is essential because your energy to do this will be colored by the true intent you carry in your heart, not just the words on your paper. Your own free will can greatly affect the harvest process. If you write “I want to get a job with great pay” simply because other people around you feel you should be working, it’s possible that your goal would not manifest unless YOU are certain you want to get a job. The power of your own desires is part of what fuels the harvest process. God knows what you do and do not want to happen and is perfectly willing to give it to you. You just have to know what to request.

Remember before when I said, “This is about you?” The other side of that idea is that your list should not involve someone else doing something. For instance, you would not list, “I want my husband to update his wardrobe” or “I want my child to stop taking drugs.” Your goals should involve YOU and changes to YOUR life rather than depending on others to change.

Once you have carefully examined your list and distilled it down to some solid goals for the coming year, fold the paper and set it aside. Some people put it under a column candle and burn the candle a little bit every day for the next 6 weeks. Pull out your paper from time to time and review your list, making any changes you think are appropriate. Your list should be finalized by Imbolc, when we will send it up the chain of command for approval or reconsideration.

Susan, a CUSP student from Florida writes: “I want to thank the two of you for providing your wonderful CUSP website and for babysitting me through my last CUSP year. I was not confident that I could layer my Christian beliefs onto this system, but I should not have worried because it worked beautifully. I guess the first year of trying something new is rocky for everyone. Even though it felt right, I found that I questioned
everything, thinking it could not possible be as easy as you made it sound. It was! After the success of last year, I was eager to get started on this year’s planting and had to keep pulling myself back into the stillness and quiet of the Samhain season. I wanted to jump ahead, but knew I would have a better harvest year if I used the quiet time to let go and release.

When Yule finally came, I arranged for quiet time when I would not be disturbed. I found myself craving darkness for this process, so I waited until late at night and closed myself up in a room with no light except for the candle I would light later. I settled in and did some deep breathing. After spending some time with the dark and the stillness, knowing that I was on the brink of a new adventure and a new life, I reached my spirit out to God and began to pray.

“Lord, what is Your will for me in the coming year? What should I plant to change my life in the most positive way? How can I best serve You and walk the sacred path that has been put before me?”

I waited and although I could feel the presence of God in the room with me, I began to get frustrated when I got no answers. I took another breath, let go of my frustration and reminded myself that all was exactly as it should be.

I said the prayer again and waited and what came into my head was “The Spark of Light.” I thought about the return of light to the sky and lit the white column candle I’d brought into the room with me. The glow from the candle was almost startling in the complete darkness.

I prayed, “Heavenly Father, You are the source of all light on earth, You who said, ‘Let there be light.’ Let there now be light in my life to illuminate the path before me.”

In that moment, the words began to pour into my head. I started writing my list, modifying when I felt my own will overriding God’s will. When I was finished, I found that most of what I’d written satisfied both my will and God’s will. There were a couple of things I was not excited to
see on the list, mostly because they were things I needed to change, but did not want to put the effort into changing. I will find my comfort with the list over the coming weeks and be ready to offer it up for confirmation and redirect at Imbolc.

Thank you so much for the wonderful, intimate and holy experience I had writing this year’s list. Without the foundation the two of you created, which I really do believe flowed to you from God, I would not have the solid foundation on which to change my life on a regular basis by working directly with God. I used to always just pray for God to give me the things I want. Now I know that I can use this system to help determine what God wants ME to do instead of just waiting for HIM to do all of the work.
Imbolc – Approximately February 1\textsuperscript{st}

Where Did It Come From?

Imbolc or Imbolg is a Gaelic festival that celebrated the beginning of spring. The onset of spring occurring at the vernal equinox is a fairly new tradition, this shift did not occur until the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The celebration originated in the Scottish Highlands, Ireland and the Isle of Man during the Middle Ages. The Christians adopted this holiday to celebrate St. Brighid’s Day or in some areas, Candlemas, with great feasting.

Many people, even those who celebrate Imbolc regularly, do not know that it is actually the precursor to the Groundhog Day tradition. Our ancestors would watch to see if serpents or badgers would come out of their winter dens on Imbolc. A Scottish Gaelic poem about the day goes as follows:

"The serpent will come from the hole  
On the brown Day of Bride,  
Though there should be three feet of snow  
On the flat surface of the ground."

The theme of Imbolc is that the earth is beginning to thaw from the grip of winter, as the Sun is now six weeks into its return to prominence which gives the idea that spring has arrived. Naturally, if it is sufficiently warm below ground where the serpents and badgers sleep, they will be more active than if the ground is still frozen.

Imbolc means “in the belly” and is traditionally associated with the beginning of lactation in the pregnant ewes that will give birth in the warmth of spring a few weeks from the celebration. The Blackthorn (a small tree/shrub used as a cattle hedge) is said to bloom at Imbolc and celebrations centered on hearth and home. It was tradition for our ancestors to watch for signs and omens during this time to tell them how the year would progress. Candles and fires would be lit during Imbolc to celebrate the return of warmth and daylight that comes with the increased power of the Sun in the coming months. Although the light technically began to grow at Yule, by Imbolc, the ancient ancestors could see a discernible difference in the length of days and they took this day to celebrate that softening of the frozen earth. This represented the first promise of the coming spring. It is hard for us modern babies to imagine how difficult
the winter months were for our ancestors, particularly those in the Northern European areas where freezing cold was typical for months on end. Without electrical assistance for heat and cooking, winter life was a tremendous and dangerous struggle. The return of warmth to any degree was certainly cause for celebration.

The Norse people celebrated *Disting-tid*, which is the “Charming of the Plow.” They honored the first breaking of soil by a metal tool and the advantage this brought over wooden plows. If they could more quickly cultivate the land for planting, they could increase their productivity significantly, which greatly increased the chance of survival for the villages. It is of interest that the Christian interpretation of this holiday involves St. Brighid because the goddess Brigid is the Celtic goddess of smiths, who made the plows. It was She who was called upon to bless the plows during Disting-tid and the two are considered by many scholars to be one and the same, although there are writings of St. Brigid as an incarnate human living in the 5th century. Tremendous similarities between the goddess and the saint abound. Still, many people still use the time of Imbolc to cleanse and consecrate their sacred belongings just as the ancient Norse people blessed their plows.

The Christians celebrated Imbolc as “Candlemas.” During this time, the entrance of the boy Jesus into the temple as the “Light of the World” was celebrated. Candles were blessed and lit and a feast took place. The lit candles were carried in procession around the church after the Mass service, then burned before a statue of Mary or taken home for protection during times of illness or danger.
A Call to Patience and Adaptation

By Imbolc, newcomers to the CUSP way begin to recognize that this is going to be a slow process. It is important to remember that working the agricultural year takes time and is not for emergency change. If you think in terms or planting, if you are starving, you would not remedy your situation by cultivating soil, planting seeds, nurturing them to fruition and bringing in the harvest. The CUSP progression of the solar year is specifically for the manifestation of long term goals.

As humans, we need time to adjust to long term, major changes; even good ones! The vast majority of the people in our society at this time have been raised in an instant gratification lifestyle, at least comparatively. Our ancestors did not purchase their meat at a grocery store on a fancy Styrofoam tray with plastic wrap covering it nice and neatly. If they wanted meat, someone had to go out and kill it, dress it and prepare it for cooking or storage. Vegetables had to be planted, nurtured and grown, then harvested and stored. People in that time were accustomed to patience and waiting for what they wanted. Their bodies learned to adapt to times of famine and drought.

In modern society, we want what we want right now and are often not content to wait for things to follow their natural course. One thought I share with my clients and students on a
regular basis is, “Just take a breath and let the world turn a time or two before you decide anything.” Sometimes, things just have to unfold on their own without our influence in order for us to better understand what is happening and what should happen. Patience is now a virtue because so few people use it. There was a time when there was no choice except patience.

Think about this modern parable in terms of patience:

A guy is relaxing in front of the TV watching the big game when he hears a loud knocking at his front door. He opens it to find no one there. Irritated, he settles back down to continue watching the game and is frustrated to again hear the insistent knocking. He opens the door and is about to slam it closed when he looks down and sees a snail on his welcome mat, looking up at him expectantly. The snail starts to say something, but the guy is angry at being interrupted from watching his game not once, but twice, so picks up the snail and hurls him across the street into the field beyond. He settles in to watch TV undisturbed.

Three years later, he's again in front of the TV enjoying a show and he hears a loud beating at the door. He opens it to find the snail there who says, "What the hell was that all about?"

The ability to maintain focus over a long period of time and center energy on a goal that does not have immediate reward is a challenge for many people. Long term change takes careful planning and preparation. Patience is a valuable quality that CUSP teaches as we strategically approach our long term changes over a year’s time or sometimes even several years’ time. Through CUSP, we learn how the value of careful planning, of listening to our inner hunches and of tuning into the Universe and of patience creates a superior outcome.

By Imbolc, our list we generated at Yule should be perfected from our own perspective and now we enter the magical time of confirmation and redirect. This is a time of commitment, when we “seal the deal.” We settle on our list once and for all and then ask that we be shown whether or not our plan is actually in our best interest. This is one way that we honor the existence of a higher plan in our lives. We may think we know what is best for us, but we will acquiesce when presented feelings or events that lead us to realize that what we want is not in the spirit of the Greatest Good – that the microcosm, which is our world, must reflect the macrocosm, which the Universe. God has a different perspective on our circumstances and our future than we do. Think of your life as an intricate tapestry. We are within the tapestry. We
know, intellectually at least, what is behind us. We experienced our history and so even though it is colored by our own filters of perception, we only “see” it through our memory. What we can see is what happens directly around us at this time. Since we, according to the properties of manmade linear time, cannot usually “see” what happens in our future, it is a mystery. Again, we can see what is directly in front of us, happening at this time. God, however, can see the entire tapestry. God knows what is unfolding in front of us that could be impacted adversely or positively by the plan we have created. God also knows our hearts and our true intent and can see through any goals we may have created for the wrong reasons. We work cooperatively with God to create our harvest plan because God can see what we cannot.

After you offer up your final list to the Universe, it is time to relax into the coming 6 weeks and pay close attention to your dreams, to your inner hunches and to the omens and guideposts that manifest around you. Sometimes, the answer is very direct. Other times, it is more subtle. As Freud said, “Sometimes, a cigar is just a cigar,” so don’t over-think everything and go seeing “demons behind clothesbaskets” as my mother used to say. Not everything that comes to you during this time has significant meaning, but most everything is worthy of a once over just to see if you are missing a signal.

You may immediately begin to received and understand your confirmations and redirects as soon as your list is committed to print. On the other hand, you might not hear a thing from the Universe about your intentions until a few weeks after planting. As humans, we like things tidy and predictable, but the Universe does not see fit to run on our schedule. This is another way that the Universe demonstrates to us that patience is a productive and necessary virtue.

One year, I planted 3 things and since that was around 10 years ago, I can't remember exactly what they were, but 3 things did I plant. What we often do during our planting time is to plant actual, physical seeds, usually in the form of dried beans. We will instill our goals into the beans (1 per bean) and plant them into little peat pots full of potting soil like this:
We then cultivate our little bean plants over the coming weeks with the care we give to the plants symbolizing the care and attention we give to our goals. Often, how the plant grows tells us how the harvest will go. This particular year, I planted my physical little beans to represent the goals and they were tucked into their peat pot and growing nicely.

I placed the peat pots up on a high shelf where they would get sunlight, watered them every other day or so and gave them plenty of love and encouragement. They grew into sweet little bean plants, fragile and new. One day in mid-April when they were around 6-7 inches above the ground, I came in one day to find my two-year-old eating my bean plants. Potting soil was strewn all over the carpet and he was happily munching away on the leaves of my precious magical beans.

My son was a very, very "busy" child, as some on the child care industry would say. Pulling up my plants by the roots, throwing the dirt around the room and eating the tops was not so much an unexpected occurrence and was more of an hourly event. Anytime I left the room for something as frivolous as say, a bathroom break, he would immediately get busy doing something he ought not be doing, whether it was peeing in the dishwasher or throwing things into the turtle’s tank or let’s say, pulling up plants by the roots. He was fast and he was determined and he was creative. He is exactly the type of child for whom those baby leashes
were created. Parents who sanctimoniously sniff and hold their heads high and attest that such behavior is merely the result of lazy parenting have never had a child like this, I can guarantee you. I have raised six children and trust me, they come in all shapes, sizes and temperaments no matter how pious your intent might be. It’s all in where you take it from there.

As you can tell from the date, we were well past the time of confirmation and redirect and past the actual planting stage. It quickly became clear that the beans were a lost cause. We were only about 3 years into working with the CUSP process at that point and we still had so much to learn about it. Now, I would take such an event in stride and think, “Hmm... That’s interesting. Must be a delayed redirect. Something in my life has shifted so that what was appropriate for me to manifest a month ago is no longer what should happen.”

Then, however, I sat down in the middle of the dirt and cried. I had some stems left and a leaf or three that had not yet been digested. I blubbered while I tried to scoop dirt back into the peat pot and he sat on the couch and looked self-satisfied. As I type this, it is easy to remember how frayed I was at that time in my life. I had a 4-year-old and a 2-year-old. I was almost 40-years-old. Our financial life was a disaster. Our relationship was having issues. I was at the end of my rope and emotions were considerably more fragile than they are now. It felt like all of my hopes and dreams for the future were tied up in the progress of those broken bean plants.

I tossed the whole thing in the trash and decided to take some time that night to think on it. Later that night, I meditated about the plants and realized that I needed to rethink my goals for the year and redefine what and who I wanted to be at harvest.

*I’d had a spiritual miscarriage.*

An important thing to note (and you will hear me use this word quite a bit) is that Harvest is a process and sometimes, you have to back up and start all over again. This is perfectly normal and the timing and outcome of the Harvest will only be affected positively if you dutifully tune into what The Universe is telling you in your time of confirmations and redirects. Do not question or filter. Just follow through.

In my situation of looking at my poor, destroyed little beans, I took a breath and went back in my mind to the time of the Spark. I retooled it a bit, coming up with a set of goals that while similar, were more in keeping with the direction my life seemed to be heading of its own
accord. I replanted the beans, moved them to the kitchen window sill and they grew faster than any beans I have ever seen. Quickly, they caught up to the level of growth Eric’s plants showed, even though they were planted weeks later. I felt as though I was back on task again and sure enough, by the end of the Harvest season, my goals manifested beautifully and worked out far better than had the original goals come to fruition.

This is one example of a redirection that took physical form. Sometimes, you will begin to see other forms of redirection. Let’s say you are unhappy with your job because your boss does not respect what you do and you are not adequately compensated for the tasks you are expected to perform, many of which are outside of your job description. You decide you want to plant a seed for a new job that creates an atmosphere of support and reward for your hard work. You put that on your list and offer it up at Imbolc. Two weeks later, your boss is fired and
a new supervisor comes on board. The new supervisor immediately realizes your worth and offers you a higher position and provides encouragement and support to you on an ongoing basis. This is a redirect that tells you that you do not need to change your job. Your job was ready to change on its own and your situation was already about to improve. You should plant something different.

What if the opposite happened? Let’s go back to the starting point where you commit to your goal of planting a new job for yourself at Imbolc. Two weeks later, you receive notice that the company you work for has been sold and your job will be ending as of August 31st. This is a confirmation that what you planted is exactly correct.

Another example:

You are struggling through a difficult relationship and you decide to plant an end to your marriage. You have worked hard to repair the damage, but your spouse denies there is a problem and wants things to continue as they are. You are unhappy and want a different kind of relationship and life. At Imbolc, you commit to planting an amicable end to your marriage.

Two weeks later, your spouse comes to you and says, “You know, I’ve been thinking. We don’t have the quality of relationship either of us wants to have and frankly, I want to make that happen. With your permission, I would like to make an appointment with this counselor and work together to make our marriage better. I love you. I care about how you feel and what you want your life to be. Let’s try and create that life you envision and when we do, I know we will both be happier.”

This is a redirect telling you that ending your marriage at this time when your partner is now willing and open to receiving help and changing your lives would be premature. You should reframe your planting to ask for the “best possible outcome” for your marriage or that you and your spouse rekindle the flame and become close again.

Again, the opposite could happen:

You commit at Imbolc to planting an amicable end to your marriage. Two weeks later, your spouse comes up to you and says, “You know, I’ve been thinking. We don’t have the quality of relationship either of us wants to have and frankly, I do not believe that is something
that is going to happen. I would like to talk to a divorce attorney and start the process of separating our lives, but I want to do it in such a way that as little damage as possible is done.”

That is a confirmation telling you that you are planting the right thing. When a situation or piece of information presents itself that could possibly be viewed as a confirmation, pay special attention to the time around which it would be fulfilled. In the case of the job ending on the 31st of August, notice that the fulfillment of that new information takes place during the time of the harvest. When a possible confirmation is brought to one’s attention that plays out during the harvest period, there is a very good chance that it is a true sign of confirmation.

Follow what your spirit is telling you to do rather than what your ego and your head are telling you to do. When you experience what you feel is a confirmation or redirect, relax, breathe, meditate and carefully consider what is happening. Make sure you are objectively evaluating the guidance you are receiving and that you are not molding what you are seeing to fit your idea of what should happen. Once you offer up your commitment of what you will plant to The Universe, do your best to remain neutral and open to the messages you receive. They will come, but as I have said, they do not always come immediately. Sometimes, a delay means that you have not yet received all of the confirmations or redirects or even slight retooling nudges you needed before time to plant.

If you get to the point of planting and do not feel confident that you have received or interpreted your confirmations and redirects, do not feel as though you have to plant yet. You can be certain that if a farmer plans out his agricultural year to perfection, but goes out to plant on March 21st and finds that his field is under 3 feet of snow, he is not going to plant. We plant when the time is right. If you are confident that you have received adequate confirmation in regard to your commitment or you have received redirects and have adjusted your plan accordingly, then and only then should you plant. There have been years where Eric and I have changed our final plan 3-4 times in a season, sometimes even after we planted (as in the “child destroys beans” story), and still yielded exactly the harvest we needed. Redirects are not a sign of being an amateur farmer. The ability to recognize the redirect and make adjustments is the sign of being in tune with the Greater Good. It is simply part of the process. This very year, both Eric and I received redirects while we were in the process of planting! We did not end up planting the same goals we thought we would when we began our planting session. One of the last minute redirects I received was the notice that I was to plant the writing of this very book!
During the time between Imbolc and Ostara, your job is to pay close attention to the underlying messages of things you see and events that take place in your life. There will be omens and portents everywhere and it is crucial that we keep our third eye open and alert for the guidance of the Universe in relation to the goals we have set for ourselves to manifest at Harvest.

One of the biggest favors we can do for ourselves, although it seems counterproductive when you look at the big picture of what we do, is to disengage ourselves from the outcome of the goal(s) we have set. This is part of “remaining neutral;” to be unattached to a specific outcome of the harvest. Often, if we are eagerly invested in the manifestation of the goals at this point in the process, we can intentionally overlook redirects that we very much need to see.

To use another analogy, remember that "Imbolc," is the ancient Gaelic word that literally translates to "in the belly." Imagine that the spark of light that came at Yule was the idea that you might be pregnant. Imbolc is the time when you learn that yes indeed, you are pregnant, but you are not very far along. You are hesitant to tell anyone or make solid plans until you are sure the baby is viable. Metaphorically speaking, you would not rush out and furnish your nursery and set up a college fund as soon as you get a positive test result. You would wait until later in the year to start buying onesies and stock up on tiny Pampers. For now, your “pregnancy” is your secret, your plan and it is still very fragile and subject to change. Love, hope and want, but do not fully invest your complete desire just yet.

**Offering Your Commitment**

The way you offer up your commitment once your list is complete depends completely on your preference for engaging God/The Divine. You can embellish the commitment to celebrate whatever your own spiritual path might be. Here is a suggestion:

At a time when you know you will not be disturbed, take out your list and read it as though you are seeing it for the first time. Spend a few minutes with each item on your list, imagining how it will feel when that goal is realized. Engage as many of your senses as possible and you create this vision. Think of how you will feel inside and out. Hear the words you will say as you realize that your goal is actually about to manifest.
Once you have spent time with each goal, fold up your list and slip it under a column candle of a color of your choosing. Light the candle and sit quietly with it for a few minutes. Open your mind and travel through your spiritual channels to connect with The Universe/God. Feel the loving guidance and warm light surround you when you make that contact. Ask that your desires be considered and that you be given the wisdom and guidance you need to know what exactly to plant in the coming harvest year. Ask that you be able to clearly understand the messages you receive. Ask that you always trust your instinct and that you reject the negative influence of your filters and your doubt. Spend time with the loving presence that is God and when you leave the commitment, know that you have done your part of the process for now. Let it go. Over the next 6 weeks, follow your instincts, connect with your higher self as often as possible and trust where you are led. The most important part of this practice at Imbolc is to be able to “let go.” Understand that we are still in the dark half of the year; this is still the time of rest, repose and thoughtful meditation. Do not begin to rile the mind and the spirit by getting wrapped up in a desired outcome. The ability to remain objective and still while attempting to manifest desire is a skill that takes great discipline. Attachment to outcome is one of the great downfalls of any type of manifestation, whether physical, mental or magical.

James, a non-denominational Pagan from Oregon writes, “I want to share with you the experience I had with this year’s Imbolc. I have been using CUSP for five years now ever since I came across your website. I am a believer and CUSP has always worked for me, but nothing like this time. The ag year is just beginning and if the rest of it is as magical as Imbolc was for me, then I am sure you will here [sic] from me again.

I set up my to-do list at Winter Solstice and only made a couple of changes in the time before Imbolc. To send up my list, I went out to my outside circle area, read the list one final time and then lit it on fire and tossed it into the fire pit. It went up really fast.

As I was walking back into the house, I heard my phone ringing. It was a friend of mine from a town on the other side of the state telling me that his company was expanding and asking me if I would be available to take a management position there. The start date? AUGUST 2ND! The day after Lammas? Do I need to even mention that the main item on my list was a new job in a new town?
What’s funny is that I argued with myself about even putting that goal on my list because I could not imagine how in the world I would pull that off. You were absolutely right when you said not to question how it will happen, just do it. I’m excited and eager to find out what else this harvest year brings. Thanks again for putting this system out there.
Ostara
Spring Equinox
Ostara/Spring Equinox – Approximately March 21st

Where Did It Come From?

The word “equinox” finds its roots in Latin and means “equal night.” The equinox refers to the balance between light and dark in the cycle of the year. At Winter Solstice we had the longest night and at Summer Solstice, we have the longest day. At the mid-point of each of those points, we have an equinox that is the perfect balance between the two. Around March 21st, the sun crosses the equator separating the two hemispheres, providing us with a perfect 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of night. These are the two points in the year when the Northern and Southern hemispheres share the same experience of having a perfect balance between light and dark. At all other times, they provide the yin to the other half’s yang, balancing out the light above with the dark below or vice versa.

Like the solstices, the equinoxes have impressive structures devoted to their orientations. The Great Sphinx and pyramids of Giza in Egypt, as well as their surrounding temples, are all constructed to use the equinox sunrise as specific lighting. King Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem is similarly oriented toward the equinox sunrise. The Temple Mayor in the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan functioned as an observatory for the autumnal and spring/vernal equinoxes. Two structures, the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan and the Mayan temp group at Uaxactun mark both the solstices and the equinoxes. A natural amphitheater called “Calendar One” in Vermont and Mystery Hill in New Hampshire (called “America’s Stonehenge”) also mark the equinoxes.

In the Temporum Ratione or The Reckoning of Time by the Northumbrian monk and scholar the Venerable Bede (673-735), the scholar and historian attributes the origin of the word “Ostara” to “Eostre,” a Germanic goddess of spring called “The Radiant Dawn.” The word Easter is also thought to derive from the word “Eostre.”

In Deutsche Mythologie (Teutonic Mythology), a seminal treatise on Germanic mythology (1835), Jacob Grimm also proposes that the Anglo-Saxon name of “Eostre” derives from the Old High German adverb “ostar,” which relates to expressing movement toward the rising sun. He says:
“Ostara, Eostre seems therefore to have been a divinity of the radiant dawn, of upspringing light, a spectacle that brings joy and blessing, whose meaning could be easily adapted to the resurrection-day of the Christian's God.”

The Germanic cultures celebrated the feast of Ostara on the Full Moon following the Spring Equinox, which is almost identical to the celebration of the Christian holiday of Easter. During this time, the earliest agricultural societies would celebrate their planting season and bless the new crop. The association of the Vernal Equinox with fertility goddess leads to the traditional folk name of “Lady Day” for Ostara.

Ancient Romans held sacred the story of Mithras, who was born at the Winter Solstice, died and was resurrected as the Spring Equinox. Mithras would reward his loyal followers by helping them to ascend to the realm of light after they died.

In another story from ancient Rome, Cybele was a goddess whose consort, Attis, was born of a virgin birth. He also died and was resurrected at Spring Equinox.

The Christian Bible shares the story of Jesus Christ whose birth is celebrated on December 25th, 4 days after the Winter Equinox, and who rose from the dead in the spring on Easter.

The Iroquois in America used the equinox to perform fertility rites to bless the coming harvest, including a corn dance that was considered essential for a successful harvest. Ceremonial corn would be mixed with the seeds for planting, which was considered to be a blessing on its growth.
Reap What You Sow...Or Not

By now, we used the Spark of Light that came to the skies at Winter Solstice to inspire us in planning our initial list of goals to harvest in the fall. Afterwards, we took 6 weeks to tune into the whispers (or screams) of the Universe and find confirmations and redirects regarding our intended planting. Now, it is time to plant those goals, original or refined, and begin the process of nurturing and tending them. We should be certain about what we choose to plant and go into the planting process confident of our intention.

No matter how assured we are or how closely we have heard God’s voice in our ear, guiding us toward the “correct” goals, please know that it is not at all unusual to get a last minute redirect seconds before your seed goes into the soil. You should remain tuned in for the next few weeks just in case new information comes to light. As I mentioned in the Imbolc section, I have received redirects after my seed was planted and sprouting!

The fact of the matter is that the butterfly effect is real. A seemingly insignificant choice that we make today can affect our interests and our needs a day, a week or a month in the
future. We constantly adjust the direction our life will take, often unconsciously. That is the impact of free will. I could plant that I want to move into a small apartment that is closer to town so that my money stretches farther. A friend invites me to go to church with her at her new church home and I accept. I feel comfortable there, attend a few more times and learn that a woman with whom I struck up a tentative friendship wants to allow her son and his family to move into her larger home and is looking for a house she can share with a compatible roommate. I suggest that she share my current house with me and split the mortgage bill. I now have a more relaxed financial situation; however, my original goal for the year of wanting to move into an apartment is now no longer appropriate. Because I chose to go to church with my friend and just happened to meet a woman who goes to the same church who has similar goals to mine and because I made the free will choice to invite her to be my roommate, my whole future changed.

One can argue that this was “pre-destiny” and certainly, there is ample room for such a suggestion. I am of a firm mind that we are all headed in the same direction and that our seemingly “free will” choices are just destiny in disguise. Still, it is interesting the way that our choices propel us toward our own greatest good.

In this case, we could say that the goal was actually manifested, but in a different form than what was expected. That is why it is tremendously important that when we plant, we are very clear on exactly what we want to feel at the time of the harvest. In this case, the person who planted did not necessarily want to move to a small apartment. The apartment was a means to an end, which was to afford a more generous financial flow.

In fact, if pressed, given the way the goal manifested, it is likely that the person had reservations about moving at all. They may have had a nostalgic attachment to the house and feel reluctant to leave, but feel it would be the only way to pay less for living expenses. Perhaps they were hesitant to pare down their belongings and streamline into a smaller environment.

Often, God will take over and provide you with what you want even when you have not adequately expressed exactly what that is. When teaching people, I equate this to planting corn and finding that you are harvesting green beans. Both are delicious and nourishing and will fill your belly, but it’s quite a surprise when something grows up from the ground that you did not expect.
The important thing is to always greet your harvest with tremendous enthusiasm and gratitude. What you need most will come to you and it will take the form that is most appropriate. As the song says, “We’ll understand it all bye and bye.” It is often in retrospect that our harvest makes perfect sense, so at the time, just go with it and trust that what is growing is exactly what you need.

If you get a redirect right as you are planting, it can be quite startling and you may need a few minutes to adjust. Just take a breath, trust your instinct and go for it. It’s one thing to have planned and considered what you will plant for 12 weeks and quite another to have to hit the ground running on a goal you had no idea about or (actually) interest in pursuing until a few minutes or hours before the planting exercise.

As I mentioned previously, if I get a last minute redirect or even a redirect after the plant begins to grow, I just plant my new goal on the spot. It’s not like it won’t come up or manifest just because it gets planted a little bit later. The Universe is nothing if not flexible and forgiving. Like Nature that is God’s own expression, all things adapt and so must we. It can be tremendously exciting to find that your goals will be met in a way you did not envision. Although the natural tendency may lean toward doubt and panic, do your best to dismiss these negative influences and instead embrace the excitement and anticipation of the redirect. The greatest theory of evolution is that it is not the strong that survive, but they who best adapt.

A word of caution: Beware about planting lofty and egocentric goals like “self-mastery” or “self-actualization.” The Universe loves to hear us thinking that highly of ourselves. Humans are not designed to correct all of their flaws in one grand swoop and planting something so grandiose is an open invitation for an onslaught of life lessons. Concepts like “self mastery” will only manifest during one’s lifetime if that person has spent their entire life devoted to “enlightenment” and “self realization” and sometimes, not even then. The true wisdom lies in being in tune with the Greater Good and pursuing that, not pursuing the exaltation of oneself.

Although sudden redirects such as these can and do occur enough to not be considered unusual, you will often find yourself right on course, planting exactly what you have envisioned for the past 12 weeks. Sometimes, the vision is clearer and more refined after working on it for so long. By the time you are planting, it is likely engraved on your mind and ready to go provided you have followed the process and done the described work for your lead-in time.
In the 15 years we have been following this path, we have planted our seeds in more ways than I can remember. Most of the time, we do a literal planting using flower seeds or the dried beans mentioned before. We hold the seed in our closed hands and focus on it intently, thanking the bean plant dormant in the seed for its life force and for housing the intent of our goal. We connect with God/The Universe and ask for blessings upon the process of harvest on which we have embarked and that our outcome be for our own greatest good.

When we feel that the seeds have been adequately blessed and instilled with our goal, we plant them into our little peat pots and give them a touch of water. Sometimes, we fold up our original list and place it under the peat pot. Sure, it will absorb some of the water and get dirty, but to us, that is part of the process of assimilation as our goals meld into the natural world.
The ways you can plant are limited only by the boundaries of your imagination. In addition to planting physical seeds, we have done meditative plantings and we have used imagery of grafting goals from the goals of previous years. We have written our goals in black marker onto the shell of a raw egg and buried it in the ground or in the bottom of pot of soil in which we set a plant. We have written our goals onto paper and burned them. There really is no set rule for planting. You will find a way that is right for you.

One of the hardest things about planting, both literally and figuratively, is the ability to walk away and let things manifest of their own momentum. We will talk about this more in the next section, which is focused strongly on the power of faith. We are a society built upon instant gratification and patience is required for this path. We plant our seed, nourish it, nurture it, tend it and let it unfold on its own. Once we have planted, we can provide care and support, but the real power comes from inside the seed itself. When God gives life to our prayers and ignites the spirit inside the seed to begin its life cycle, the real magic takes hold.

In our mundane life, this is the time when we begin taking baby steps toward achieving our goal. We have now entered the active part of the year. Just as we are planting a seed in our observance of Ostara, we should plant seeds toward our goals in “real life” and patiently wait as they take root. If, for instance, you are planting a new job, this would be the time when you would retool and update your resume so that it is in its best form. You could do an analysis of the market of the career you wish to follow and find out who is hiring and what qualities they are seeking. This is the time for those initial, preparatory moves that will take you ultimately toward your goal. Just as we said that the tiniest movements can change your life in profound ways on an unconscious level, consider that they can move mountains when created deliberately.

Celeste, a long-time CUSP student from Colorado writes, “You are going to LOVE how I planted this year! I instilled my goals into JELLY BEANS and sat in a quiet place and ate each of the jelly beans that represented one of my goals. As I chewed the jelly bean, I focused on the goal intently and visualized that I was internalizing my goal, adding it to my physical self (probably my hips). I also focused on the SWEETNESS of the fulfilled goal. The imagery was very rewarding, intense and tasty too! I planted my seeds in the fertile fields of MY BELLY!”
Beltane – Approximately May 1st

Where Did It Come From?

Beltane comes from the Irish Gaelic word “Bealtaine” and in the Common Celtic language means “bright fire.” “Bel,” the root word, comes from “bale” which means “white” or “shining.” “Tene” means “fire.”

Festivals celebrating this optimistic and joyful event took place all over Europe. The actual astrological date for Beltane is the midpoint of the Sun’s movement between Ostara/Spring Equinox and Litha/Summer Solstice. This normally occurs approximately May 5th – May 7th; however, the common celebration time is May 1st.

In Celtic mythology, Beltane marked the beginning of summer (which is why the Summer Solstice is referred to as “Midsummer”) and the start of the light half of the year. Great bonfires (balefires) were lit to mark a time of purification and transition, which heralded in a time of hope and anticipation for the coming harvest season. Cattle were driven between the fires to purify them for the year and thus ensure their safety and fertility. Ashes from the balefires, which honored the return of the Sun, joined the ashes of the Yule log in the fields to bless the coming harvest. In Wales, it was customary to place a bit of the balefire ashes in one’s shoe for good luck. Beltane is also the time of the year when the hearth fire, which has burned through the winter, is extinguished, officially welcoming summer.

In Europe, the original Maypole consisted of newly budding branches suspended from a tall pole. Young people would hold the branches and dance around the pole to celebrate new life. The Maypole would later consist of brightly colored ribbons attached to a strong pole. The pole represented the fertility of Nature and the ribbons were a powerful talisman in the Roman culture and served as protection for the crops of the coming harvest. Preferably, men and women alternate positions in the Maypole dance, braiding and weaving the ribbons around the pole as they move in a spiral fashion in opposite directions. This theme of the blending of opposites is common to Beltane.

In Italy, the Maypole was greased and topped with a wreath bearing a crown. Competitors try to climb the pole to get the crown. In Southern Europe, Beltane was celebrated by tying brightly colored ribbons around flowering tree branches. The Romans celebrated Flora,
the Goddess of Spring, at this time and would decorate themselves and their animals with flower garlands to garner her blessings.

Beltane was a celebration of fertility and it was common in European celebrations for there to be fertility rites to energize the coming harvest. Children born of these pairings were considered to be particularly sacred.

Beltane is the counterpart to Samhain and together they mark the beginning of summer and winter respectively according to the old Celtic calendar. Since the ancient Europeans were involved with animal husbandry as well as agriculture, Beltane was important as the official herald of the pastoral growing season.

In the Christian faith, May Day is dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus. School children, adorned with flowers, would form a processional through the streets singing hymns. A teenage girl, chosen as May Queen, wore a bridal gown and would end the procession by placing a wreath of flowers onto the head of a statue of Mary. Young girls would hang small bags or baskets with flowers, treats or other gifts on the doorknobs of homes, then knock and run away.
Beltane represents the joining of opposites toward a common goal; the union of male and female. What is more opposite than that, truly? Beltane is the celebration of the perfect fitting together of that yin and yang, dark and light, earth and sky, toward the fulfillment of a new life. At Beltane, the days are warm; the nights are cold. The seeds are sprouting within the fertile body of the earth, but we may not yet be able to see our little plants. Likewise, we will not usually see results from our mundane efforts toward our goals just yet. That comes further into the year.

New life is what is promised to us every year with CUSP and every time we use bio-universal energies (our own and God’s) to enact our intent. Through the introspection of winter’s darkness, we contemplate how we want our life to change. We plant our desires after putting the idea in place to the Universe for confirmation and redirect, and then we watch as those seeds of change take hold. We work in accord, doing the busy work that goes along with the divine manifestation, patterning our energy investment to the cycles of the year as well: as above, so below. Ultimately, hand-in-hand, our own efforts are met at least halfway by The Universe to create the changes we sought to manifest during the harvest time.
Just as Beltane celebrates the fertility of man and woman, it also honors the union of Heaven and Earth, of humans and God. It is about the magical combustion that happens when a person works in accord with the Universe to create their own greatest good. Working in harmony with the natural flow of one’s life and following the guidance of Divinity is one of the most delightful and productive experiences a human can have. It isn’t always pretty, but when you can collapse yourself into Divine intent and build your life around the flow of universal energy, fantastic things happen.

The Sacred Marriage of our actions and complete faith with the blessings of God is cause for celebration and when the weather is warming and we can feel the promise of gentler days, there is no better time.

Beltane is a time of tremendous faith because we have to trust that our efforts are taking hold and producing results even though we can see very little progress from the outside. As was mentioned in our brief overview of how the holidays work together, “Do not dig up in doubt what you planted in faith.” Humans want quick results and that is just a fact of modern life. CUSP takes time, just like bringing a seed to fruit takes time. We want to dig down into the ground and see the tiny sprouts and watch the seed change form, but doing so will kill the process. It is vital that we trust the process and have faith that all is going well beneath the surface. Our Beltane celebration is an external manifestation of that faith and the strong belief that we will have an abundant harvest.
In ancient observances, the theme of fertilization was vital. The crops in the fields were fertilized during this time and our ancestors drew the correlation between fertilizing the land and the fertility of the women in the village. All forms of fertility were considered to be fortuitous. Women were viewed as sacred for their ability to produce life from within. Because the life of vegetation springs forth from the earth, the earth was also seen as female and was venerated as well. From the feminine form, all life springs forth.

Men were seen as the opposite. They took life in most of what they did to contribute to the cycles of the year. One way was in the form of ritual sacrifice. Although there is much maligning and finger pointing between faiths regarding animal and human sacrifice, the fact is that all faiths practiced sacrifice in ancient times. The Aztecs would sacrifice thousands of humans a year and countless animals. Christians sacrificed animals and humans on a regular basis. Pagan faiths also practiced animal and human sacrifice. Although it is a reality we do not like to face or consider, it is still a reality and fortunately, one that is no longer commonly practiced. In those times, however, it was primarily the males of the village who performed the sacrifices.
Men were also the ones who hunted and took life in that way as well. All though whole families were involved with the harvest, men typically carried the bulk of labor, which was yet another form of taking life, this time in the form of vegetation. Men took life in battle when they were called to be warriors. Life for both men and women was very different in ancient times and a great deal of the work done by men involved death of some kind. As the “destroyers” in the male archetypal triad of “Creator, Protector, Destroyer,” men looked with awe upon the females who created life. There is little wondering why the men enjoyed involvement in rituals that celebrated life, fertility and abundance when so much of their time involved the ending of life.

Coupling that occurred during the time of Beltane was often exclusive of marriage or commitment and was instead a blessing onto the fertility of the crops. In fact, in many traditions, it was considered to be unlucky to marry at Beltane because it was a time of non-commitment. Children conceived during Beltane acts were considered to be particularly blessed and were often given names that were of a divine nature.
Fertilize Your Fields

The time of Beltane is a time of personal gratification and celebration and should be treated as such. This is in its purest sense a “count your blessings” time. In most geographical areas of the Northern Hemisphere, by Beltane, the weather is becoming markedly milder. Take advantage of this change to step out into the sun and feel its warmth against your skin. Close your eyes and bond with the heat of the sun and feel its blessings caress you. Feel the soft May breezes play against your skin and dance in your hair. Remember that Nature is a concert that has gone on long before us and will continue long after we are gone from the earth. We do not command Nature. We do not destroy Nature. Nature is always stronger than we are. Nature allows us to live here because we are an integral part of Nature. When we actively engage the Natural energies to feel that connection with God, we are stepping into a concert that is already
well underway. Our gift to the process is to pick up our instrument and begin playing in harmony with the rest of the orchestra all around us.

Dance like no one is watching. Feel the spirit of God/Goddess/The Universe descend into you and then express that ecstasy with your physical body. Beltane is all about physical expressions of all kinds. Where the winter is introspective, dark and emotional, the summer is exuberant, light and expressive. Fill yourself with energy and dance until you are completely spent. Breathe in joy and breathe out satisfaction. Trust completely the process in which you are involved. It is as old as time itself and is woven tightly into the fabric of history. You are a continuing a song that the first humans wrote. It binds us together with our ancestors and just as the Spiral of the Year, so do we walk in their footsteps, move into their shadows, and build on the foundation they created. All of our technological advancements are simply part of the process of moving up the spiral to better ourselves.

Be sure and give your CUSP plant extra love during this time. Transplant if it is growing out of its smaller containment. Give it a little fertilizer and lightly aerate the soil around it with a fork, being careful not to disturb the tiny seeds and sprouts. Make certain it gets enough water without becoming soggy.

Fertilize your mundane efforts toward your goals as well. If your goal is to lose weight, now is the time to kick up your output. Add more weights to your strength training. Walk or run that extra half mile. Demand a little more from yourself to really get things moving. If your goal is to get a job, this is when you submit your resumes to prospective employers and provide follow up calls as needed. Work on your presentation. Learn how to interview successfully. Again, demand more from yourself and step up your game at this time. Remember that this is a time of tremendous faith, so have faith in yourself and feel confident about the package you present to your future bosses. When you find the job that feels perfect, believe it is yours and claim it. If extra steps are needed to prove yourself right for the job, take those steps! This is about actively creating the life you want. The old biblical adage is true: God helps those who help themselves. It is a time to fully believe that if you just begin walking, the Universe will rush to meet you. Sometimes, the Universe will rush to meet you, then effortlessly pick you up and start running toward your goal, so be ready!

Joni, a Canadian CUSP student who is an elementary school teacher, writes, “I wanted to share with the two of you my wonderful maypole experience. In my 3rd grade social studies class, the subject of
maypoles came up. I explained the practice to them and they asked if they could try it. After obtaining permission from our principal, I had the children paint a PVC pipe as an art project. I then gave them each a long length of ribbon and told them to write a wish on the ribbon. We tied the ribbons to the top of the pole and added a wreath, then up it went! I told them to think about their wish as we did the maypole dance and to imagine it coming true. I alternated boys and girls as well as I could (we are a bit off balance in our male:female ratios) and told the boys to face one way and the girls to face the other way. As the music played, they dipped over and under the oncoming ribbons and you know, they did a fine job! They were laughing and dancing and making merry the whole time and had great fun. It was especially funny when they got close to the pole and were knocking into one another. They were stalwart and held onto their ribbons by their thumbs and forefingers until there was literally no more to wind.

When they were finished, I brought out some milk and cookies for them to share and one of the little lads said, “My wish was that there would be cookies! It worked!” Thank you for being the inspiration for such a fun event for my kids. They have decided that this should be something the 3rd grade class does each year.

Note from Katrina: I would have happily included the photos Joni sent of this event, but since I do not have permission from the parents of the children to publicize the photos, I will instead share with you a picture of my pigs dancing the maypole:
Litha
Summer Solstice
Litha/Summer Solstice/Midsummer – Approximately June 21st

Where Did It Come From?

Of all of the holidays, it can be argued that there is no culture on earth that has not at some time or another celebrated Midsummer. The Sun reigns at its full power and dominates the sky for the longest day of the year on Litha. It is commonly believed that the Faeries are most active during this time and that idea was perpetuated by William Shakespeare’s famous play, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The power of herbs and plants is said to be strongest at this time, so many of the summer herbs are harvested on this day.

According the Celtic calendar, this was literally the middle of summer, which began at Beltane and will end with Lammas. By the time reach Midsummer, the freezing cold of winter has completely loosened its grip and we are celebrating the long, warm days. The crops are planted and are now fully visible in the fields, so a collective sigh of relief goes up. Provided proper care is given and no calamity befalls, the harvest is assured.

Summer Solstice is the mirror image of Winter Solstice, the longest night. While the Moon is the dominant force for Winter Solstice and the energy is overwhelmingly feminine, at Summer Solstice, the Sun is king and masculine energy permeates all existence. This day typically falls around June 21st. Summer Solstice marks the zenith of the Sun and from this point on, the days will gradually shorten toward the call of winter yet again. The truest definition of astrological Summer Solstice is when the Sun is at its most Northern position touching the Tropic of Cancer. Just as it did at Winter Solstice, the Sun appears to stand still at the Summer Solstice, reminding us that “Sol” means “Sun” and “stice” means “to stand still.” Because of the balance it represents, it is thought to be considered extremely good luck if a Full Moon falls directly on the date of the Summer Solstice.

The Native American peoples of the Plains Tribes celebrated Midsummer with their Sun Dance, which lasted up to four days. They would ritualistically connect Heaven and earth with a “Sun Pole.” Male puberty rites took place at this time. The purpose of the ritual was for purification and renewal of themselves and of the earth.

For the desert people of Nabta Playa of southern Egypt, determining the time of the Summer Solstice was of critical importance since it brought with it the monsoon season. In
Karnak, Summer Solstice told residents that the Nile would soon flood. Some tribes assigned “sun watchers” whose sacred duty it was to keep track of the position of the Sun and chart the solstices and equinoxes. The sun watchers knew it was the time of the solstice when the Sun remained in the same place for 4 consecutive days.

Following the idea of the immediate, but gradual, waning of the Sun’s power at Midsummer, Chinese Taoists recognize the Summer Solstice as the birth of the divine female principle: the yin. Winter Solstice heralds the birth of the yang, the divine male principle.

Purging is a main theme of Litha and you have likely sensed a theme in how those ancient Europeans liked to celebrate during these festivals. They lit stuff on fire. Truly, there is not a single holiday where the Europeans did not set giant piles of things on fire into huge conflagrations, so expect to see that during each of our holiday discussions. Bonfires burned all across Europe as the Midsummer was celebrated. The fires were placed so that the fields were downwind and the smoke would be carried over the crops to bless them. Torches were lit from the fires and taken into homes to and around the cattle areas to bless and protect them. This was of tremendous significance because now that the harvest was visible in the fields, growing strong and proud, there was an urgency to protect it from blight, weather disasters, or blight/disease.

Remember that after the ice age was over, the nomadic groups who created the villages of which we speak gathered around places where there was still plenty of water. The Sun is hot in the sky, the days are long and the water supply that is their salvation shrinks and stagnates, becoming a breeding ground for disease carrying bugs. The smoke from the fires helped to keep down the bug population and prevent disease.

Since the power of summer herbs was considered to be heightened at this time, St. John’s wort, vervain, lavender, calendula, mugwort and mistletoe were harvested during this time and brought into the home for protection. An interesting point about mistletoe is that at Winter Solstice, the plant has berries and promotes fertility. Mistletoe is also believed to have the power to open locks. Lavender is a potent herb for brining love into one’s life. At Summer Solstice, there are no berries and the properties shift to protection. Amulets of mistletoe were woven for protection and boughs of rowan were affixed over stables and barns to keep livestock safe. A fun piece of lore says that fern seed collected at Midsummer has the ability to render a person invisible. The trick is that ferns are not flowering plants and therefore, do not have seeds. They propagate by means of spores, which are nearly invisible to the naked eye and
are present on the underside of the leaf of some species. Although it is doubtful that true invisibility can be accomplished, it is said that if the full leaf is harvested at Midsummer and wore in a person’s shoe, they will be able to slip by unnoticed.

Because of the belief of increased faerie activity at this time, many people follow the tradition of leaving out food, bowls of sweetened milk, bread and honey, wine, trinkets or other treats for the wee folks.

Pets and familiars were blessed during the Summer Solstice. For those who practiced animal husbandry, a representative animal from the herd would often be taken to receive the official blessing, which was then conveyed to the entire herd. The Beltane tradition of driving herds of cattle between the bonfires often extended to the Summer Solstice fires as well.
Two Christian festivals occur at this time. One is called St. John’s Day which is a time of great feasting to commemorate the birth of John the Baptist. The venerated St. John’s wort is, of course, named for John the Baptist. St. John’s Day is traditionally celebrated on June 25th and is seen as the counterbalance to Christmas. In the 14th century, it was tradition for the women of Cologne in Germany to rinse their hands and arms in the Rhine River to ward off “threatening calamities of the coming year.”

The second festival is Whitsuntide; the 50th day after Easter. Although bonfires were once used to celebrate this harvest, it has now been replaced by candle services throughout Europe.

Although the historical European monument, Stonehenge, is roped off from public access due to the eroding of the stones, four times a year, at the two solstices and the two equinoxes, English Heritage Society allows open access to the beautiful stones. The “Heel Stone” is located just outside the main entrance to Stonehenge and when one stands inside the monument and faces the Heel Stone on Summer Solstice, they will see the Sun rise directly over the stone.
They Don’t Mind If You Don’t Believe In Them, But Don’t Piss Them Off

One of my favorite things about Midsummer is the communion with the Faeries. I never thought much about Faeries until we moved to Grizzly Flats. Up here in the mountains, however, they will not be denied. They were here before us and will be here after us. They play all around our earth labyrinth and especially love to be on the balcony outside of our bedroom, which is Eric’s Man Cave.
The first summer we were here was in 2004 and as soon as we arrived in March, I knew that the Faeries would come at Midsummer. There was no rational thought invested behind this knowledge. In my past, I’d known people who claimed to work with faerie energy and while I did not directly scoff, I also did not take their claims very seriously. This is another one of those times when we should not cast aspersions on another person’s spiritual path if we are not intimately familiar with it.

Feeling as though we were going through the motions and not quite knowing why, for part of our Summer Solstice celebration, we made a faerie ring. I called upon one of the most whimsical people I know, our friend and long time spiritual partner, Jennifer King, to help us create the area. We put an assortment of shiny items, pretty buttons, tiny mirrors, glass marbles and the tiniest little plastic wine glasses filled with sweetened milk in the faerie ring, along with some crumbled cookies. As part of our observances, we called them in and welcomed them to be with us until they chose to go, wishing them well and asking for their
protection and kindness in return. I'd always heard that Faeries were a mischievous lot, so I had no idea what to expect.

The day after we called in and welcomed the Faeries for the first time in 2004, we went back out to the circle and saw that all of the little glasses were emptied and knocked over, some of the items we'd left were gone and there was a tiny pair of bright pink shoes in the ring. I picked them up and put them on our indoor altar until the next Midsummer. (Below is a photo of one of the faerie shoes)
As I was putting them on the altar, my son, who was 6 at the time, said, "Mom, did you see the Faeries?" I said, "Faeries, where?" He said, "They're outside! They look like dragonflies unless you see them out of the sides of your eyes and then you can see that they are really Faeries!"

Sure enough, from the day after Solstice that year on, we had lots and lots of dragonflies throughout the summer. Each year after that, regardless of whether our Midsummer celebration is early, late or right on time, the very day after we celebrate, the dragonflies come in.

At Winter Solstice, the summer Faeries leave and the winter Faeries come in. They have a very different feel. They are more work-oriented and less playful; very serious little guys who don't intermingle much. The summer Faeries, however, are frivolous and joyful and love to party and play.
The next Midsummer, we again set up the Faerie circle for their welcoming and this time, I placed the pink shoes in the circle. The next morning, they were gone. I hated giving them up, but they were not mine to keep. Each year now, I try to find a tiny pair of doll shoes of some kind to leave for the Faeries.

We also have several areas in our home that are set up to entertain and honor the Faerie Folk.

Our earth labyrinth has a special Faerie area with a lot of playthings and little Faerie statues. This year, we will welcome them again and the following day, there will be dragonflies. Oh yes, there will be dragonflies.
Jennifer remains our Liaison to the Fae and one year, she brought them a very special present. A stepping stone:

**See Your Crops in the Field**

In CUSP tradition, at this time of the year, you can see your crops in the field and have a pretty good idea of how the harvest is going to go, barring catastrophic disasters. Midsummer is a time of patience and putting your back into the pursuit of your project you and the beginning of a lot of hard work. Our goal at this time is to do exactly what Goddess is doing through our earthly fields from below and through sunshine and rain from above: nourish, protect and take care of the baby harvest.

Any time we grow these crops in our life or manifest a different way of being, we are growing a new life: *our own* new life. We change ourselves with every act of manifestation and with every step on the Spiral of the Year. Our progress through the agricultural year can easily be equated to a pregnancy. At Yule, we begin to suspect we might be pregnant and form our thoughts around that possibility. At Imbolc, we have our “confirmation” that we are pregnant or our “redirect” that we are not. Ostara is when we get excited and start telling people.
Beltane is when we begin to feel the baby move actively inside us. Litha/Midsummer is when we start to “show” and the pregnancy is obvious to everyone. Lammas and Mabon are our birthing times. Samhain is the time when we adjust to parenthood and a little bit of us grieves the feeling of the baby moving inside us.

Although the outcome seems very real to us in June when we start to see the results of our efforts, we are still far away from the time of actual harvest. Your goals are not quite ready and just like those tiny little corns you find on the salad bars, if you try to pick them early and eat them, you are not going to get much of a reward.

At Winter Solstice, we envision ourselves as we are and as we wish to be by the end of the next harvest season. Over the coming weeks and months, we put that vision into proactive creation. One of our CUSP people once called the process we follow, “proactive prayer,” and that is a very apt assessment. While we engage the sacred forces in the world, God, the Universe, etc, we also take up our own part and work in accord with what we have asked to receive. Too many people pray for something and then sit back and wait for it to happen. We do not work that way. We believe in a person’s own responsibility and accountability for their life circumstances and feel we should each and every one actively work to create a life that is
based around our own greatest good. We pray for blessings, miracles and assistance with our efforts. We pray for guidance. We do not ask God to do it all for us. There is no room for laziness in CUSP. Jokes are now our modern parables and here is one that outlines the necessity of working in accord with the Divine when we ask for an important life change.

Joe and the Lottery

Joe worked for his company for twenty-seven years and was three years from a nice pension package. He was something of the Old Grey Dog at his job and prided himself with having weathered any number of layoffs with his seniority protecting him while others came and went. Joe was the one constant as a changing economy shifted and realigned the corporate structure around him. When anyone wanted to know the real deal about gossip around the workplace or where to find this part or that Operating Instruction, they came to Joe. He knew inside and out the job of everyone in the company and had worked most of them on his way up the chain to the position of foreman. He was well respected and instantly, newcomers knew that he was the backbone of the crew. It seemed as though Joe had the inside track on everything in the company and not much escaped his eagle eye and ear to the ground.

What did get past him was that the company was declaring bankruptcy. Joe was let go very suddenly, very unexpectedly. He was assured that with his skills and the exemplary letter of recommendation he would receive, he would be hired on elsewhere in no time.

He wasn’t. His paltry severance package was depleted within weeks. The mortgage on his small house was overdue. He and his wife ate rice and beans and made endless calls to the utility companies to try and arrange to keep the house heated.

Each night, Joe prayed. If he could only win the lottery, all would be well. He could retire and finally rest after his years of service. He could stay home with his wife and lead a life of leisure after so many years of trading in his hours for a handful of dimes. He saw it happen all the time. Ordinary people just like him won the lottery and were millionaires in a split moment. He prayed and prayed, enflaming himself with passionate prayer. Winning the lottery would solve all of his problems and surely God could see this and would have mercy on him.

One night, as he knelt to pray, the light from his little oil lamp began to grow until was engulfed in spectacular brilliance. He squinted against it and quaked with fear when he heard the voice of The Lord all around him.
“Joe!” The Lord said, “What are you doing, Joe?”

“Lord,” Joe said, falling to his knees. “I have asked you for months now to help me win the lottery. You see my despair and need. You know what I’ve gone through in my life. Please, Lord. I have to win that lottery!”

“Joe,” the Lord said patiently, “I’ve heard your pleas for all of these months. I have seen your despair. Your plight has touched me deeply.”

“Then Lord,” Joe pleaded. “You have to help me. You have to let me win that lottery.”

“Joe,” the Lord said, softly. “You have to buy a ticket, Joe.”

There are a couple of CUSP related points in this modern parable. The obvious is that we must act in accord. We have to do our part to make change happen in our lives. Although there is scattered documentation of incidents of virgin births, if we pray for a baby, it helps things move along faster if we have sex or see a fertility specialist. We can pray for a job, but unless we submit applications and make our own attempts at finding one, we are not likely to be successful in our search. We always have to do our own part and it has been our experience through CUSP that the more you do, the greater your blessings. “The Lord helps those who help themselves.”

The female energy that is strongest at Yule through the Moon energy gives a dreamy, introspective, internal trajectory to our CUSP process. This is when we vision and imagine and plan. The solar opposite of that time is Litha, when the male aspect, the Sun, is at it zenith of power. This is a time for outward expression; for physical doing. It is a time for cause and effect on outside basis rather than inside.

Several groups with whom I have celebrated Litha in the past maximize this expression by hosting competitions among the men, young and old, to choose a Sun King for the year. Their trials would be physical as they competed for the Warrior King title, throwing spears into haystacks, hurling large weights and running races. They would be insightful and wisdom-based as they competed for the title of Sage King. Next, their level of cool with ladies would be tested as they vied for the title of Courting King.
All of the guys who were competing were required to endure each of the three trials, amassing points in each one. The minor three titles went to the fellow who got the most points in their individual category, but the manly man who collected the most points total in all three competitions won the coveted title of Sun King. If there was tie, the finalists would battle it out with the battle sticks until one man lost or broke his stick or was down to the ground.

It was all fun and games, but the men took this test of their prowess on all three levels very seriously. The women would coo and cheer and give favors to the men who they wanted to win. It was an exciting and fun way to honor the Sun and reflect the physical aspects of the harvest.

In your CUSP celebration of Litha, always incorporate lots of experiences with light, the Sun and physical activity. Just like your harvest in the field, this is a time when you should feel excited to be alive and full of new life. Your CUSP plants should be in full bloom or even
producing tiny fruit by now. All physical expressions such as dancing, leaping over the bonfire, and physical competitions are appropriate at this time.

In your mundane efforts, you should put out your strongest efforts between now and the end of harvest. If you are looking for a job, you would set up interviews, aggressively pursue all leads to the jobs you seek and make sure your physical presentation is in keeping with the career you want to pursue. Upgrade your wardrobe if necessary, stand up straight, get a good haircut and conduct yourself as though you already have the job.

If weight loss is your goal, you would begin to see the rewards of your efforts now, even if you are not yet at your goal weight. Your blood pressure and blood sugar levels have likely improved. You have greater stamina and lung capacity. You are starting to see changes in how your clothes fit and possibly need to replace your old clothes. Just like with the agricultural harvest, your goal is not yet complete, but you see results. Like the marathon runner, lean into your progress and give everything you’ve got to your goal. The end is in sight!
Bill from Ohio writes: I AM THE SUN KING!! HUZZAH!!

We went the distance this year and had the Summer Games! Our group planned this back in the winter and some of us actually took it seriously enough to train for the events. Some of us, who shall remain nameless, did not train and LOST! Bwahaha.

The physical challenges involved a foot race called the “Maiden Run” where we chose our favorite maiden to hop on our back while we ran a quarter mile. Those gals get heavy after a while! The next physical event was wood splitting. We later used the wood for the bonfire. The object was to cut up your pile of wood faster than the other competitors. The last physical event was the archery contest with targets set up for a long bow accuracy competition.

The Sage contest involved three questions that must be answered correctly and for the Courting contest, we had to write a love poem. We were given points in each level of competition AND I WON!

My poem is below:

“Your eyes how they twinkle, your dimples, how merry.

If you were really a maiden, I’d honor your...legendary... beauty.”

OK, so I’m no bard, but did I mention I WON??! The winner got a gold crown (not real gold) and a sash and was carried around by the group while they cheered. They dropped me. I’m just sayin’.

Thanks for a great time. I hope others will try this fun celebration of summer energy.
Lammas - Approximately August 1st

Where Did It Come From?

The excitement of the harvest season has permeated the fabric of history since the agriculturally based societies were first established. Having weathered the delicate beginning of the planting stage and found mercy from the myriad of catastrophes that could befall the crops, Lammas heralded the onset of the time of tremendous work and tremendous reward. Wheat is thought to have been the first grain to translate out into deliberate agricultural production and the festival of the wheat harvest was of tremendous significance.

The Anglo-Saxon word “hlaf-mass” or “loaf-mas” is thought to be the origin of the word “Lammas.” Lammas is also called “The Festival of the Wheat.” The date of August 1st is significant in that it marks the midpoint of the warm time of the year, which would begin at Beltane and end at Samhain.

On Lammas Day in England, it was customary for the villagers to bring a loaf of bread made from the first wheat of the new harvest. The loaf was blessed and was then the sacred bread would be broken into four pieces. Each piece was placed in the corner of the grain storage barn or silo to protect the rest of the garnered harvest.

English tenants were obligated to present freshly harvested wheat to their landlords on Lammas Day, which was also called “The Feast of the First Fruits.” Churches in both the East and the West routinely blessed the first fruits of the harvest between Lammas and August 6th, which was the feast to celebrate the Transfiguration of Christ. Lammas itself corresponds to the feast of St. Peter in Chains, which celebrates the miracle of St. Peter’s release from prison.

John Brady’s 1812 annotated calendar compendium, Clavis Calendaris, suggests that the rather than from “loaf-mas,” the word “Lammas” originates from “Lamb-mass,” derived from the practice at the Cathedral of York of villages being required to bring a live lamb to the church. This was significant because lambs were not in season at that time, routinely being born in the spring.
Lammas marked the end of the hay harvest which started at Midsummer. At that time, it was customary for a sheep to be turned loose among the mowers in the meadows and the one who could catch it got to keep it.

In Ireland, the Gaelic festival of Lughnasadh (LOO-nah-sah) was the celebration of the first harvest. Lughnasadh honored the god Lugh (modern spelling: Lú) as a funeral feast and sporting competition to commemorate of his foster-mother, Tailtiu, who died of exhaustion after clearing the plains of Ireland for agriculture.

In her 1962 book The Festival of Lughnasa, a study of Lughnasadh, folklorist Máire MacNeill compiled her exhaustive studies of medieval writings, surveys and studies throughout Ireland and Britain. She provides the following account of an ancient Celtic festival held on August 1st:

“[A] solemn cutting of the first of the corn of which an offering would be made to the deity by bringing it up to a high place and burying it; a meal of the new food and of bilberries of which everyone must partake; a sacrifice of a sacred bull, a feast of its flesh, with some ceremony involving its hide, and its replacement by a young bull; a ritual dance-play perhaps telling of a struggle for a goddess and a ritual fight; an installation of a head on top of the hill and a triumphant over it by an actor impersonating Lugh; another play representing the confinement by Lugh of the monster blight or famine; a three-day celebration presided over by the brilliant young god or his human representative. Finally, a ceremony indicating that the interregnum was over, and the chief god in his right place again.”

Lughnasadh would also be celebrated by what? Can you imagine?
They burned stuff. Huge bonfires were lit across the countryside to bless the fields, the cattle and the people of the village. In Ireland, the Catholic Church still has the custom of ritually blessing the fields on this day. Games were played believing that the energy invested into the field games would increase the power of the Sun.

Also traditional were pilgrimages to holy wells where people would pray for health while walking clockwise around the well itself. Offerings would be left in the form of coins or “clooties” which are strips of cloth that have been dipped in the sacred water of the holy well.

In Gaelic Ireland, Lughnasadh was the preferred time for handfastings — trial marriages that would generally last a year and a day, with the option of ending the contract before the new year, or formalizing it as a lasting marriage once the trial period ended. If the couple came back the following Lughnasadh and felt that their marriage was not working, they could “handpart” without any form of social disapproval. They would dissolve their union by standing back to back and symbolically walking away from one another.
It was also customary for other types of contracts to be negotiated at this time for business such as purchases or employment. Throughout the Middle Ages in England, Lammas was a time for holding great fairs, playing certain rents and electing government officials. As recently as 1940, farmers in Southern England still presented the first sheaf of grain to the church for blessing.

The Creek, Cherokee, Seminole, Yuchi, and Iroquois Indians, as well as other Native American tribes, all celebrate the “Green Corn Festival.” The date of the ceremony in some manner is usually determined by to the corn. It is traditionally held on the Full Moon after the first corn crop is ready to harvest, although the Santa Ana Pueblo Native Americans in New Mexico celebrate slightly before Lammas on July 26th. It is considered to be a time of giving thanks and for forgiveness. The ceremony lasts for several days. A sacred fire is tended by a tribal holy man as a symbol of health, life and spiritual power.

The first few days of this ceremony are known as “Busk.” During that time, people fast and cleanse both themselves and their homes. An herbal concoction called “Black Drink” induces vomiting to assist with the internal cleansing process. This clears the system so that the first taste of food that enters into the body after the cleansing is that of the first corn harvest. The foods prepared are all related to the corn from the first harvest, such as roasted corn, corn tortillas, corn soup and cornbread. Creek women adorn themselves with colorful ribbons, shells, rattles and other decorations and then perform a ceremonial dance that lasts up to three hours.

**Bringing In the Sheaves**

One of my favorite Lammas ceremonies was one we hosted at Gibson Ranch in Antelope, California.
Gibson Ranch is a park of rolling green hills, a beautiful lake, horse stables, geese and llamas.
Did I mention the llamas?

We were all right about here:

...by the lake and to honor Lammas, we told the story of Lugh at the Gate.

*Lugh (pronounced "Loo") had been wandering the country for many years and finally decided it was time to put down roots, marry, raise a family and put his days of wanderlust behind him. He came to a mysterious city surrounded by a huge wall and wondered what kind of wondrous place would require such protection.*

*As he approached the wall, he saw a gate and a sign that said, "Ring bell to attempt entry." He pulled on the thick rope and a giant bell clanged overhead. Almost instantly, a window opened in the gate and a stern face looked out on the weary traveler.*

"*We aren't accepting any more citizens,*" the voice said.

"*What do you mean, you aren't accepting any more citizens?*" Lugh asked.
"I'm telling you that we have enough people in our fair city and we have no use for anyone else who isn't born here. When we accept new citizens, they must have something to offer our wonderful community. We have everything now and you couldn't possibly have anything to offer that would benefit us enough to let you in."

Lugh thought about this for a moment, then said, "But you haven't even let me try!"

The man behind the gate sighed heavily, "Fine. Impress me."

Lugh said, "I'm a talented blacksmith."

The gatekeeper yawned, "Got one."

"I can bake wondrous sweets and breads!"

"Got a baker."

"I can build beautiful structures: homes, barns, shops."

"Got builders."

"I can tell riveting stories about my travels."

"Got a talespinner."

"I can sing and play a lute!"

"Got a bard."

"I can do magic."
“Got a wizard.” And so it went on and on, with every skill Lugh could name already having representation in the city. Finally, the gatekeeper said, "As you can see, we are well stocked with everything we need. Before you take up more of my time, I must bid you good day, sir."

As he was closing the peephole window, Lugh stopped him and said, "Then I ask you consider this, sir. Do you have anything within these fine walls who can do ALL of those things?"

The gatekeeper thought for a moment...then he let him in...and then the village made him their king.

The moral of this story is, of course, to be discriminating about whom you allow into your life and to know your worth and be confident in your abilities and what you bring to the table in any situation. Plus, it was fun to say that we had “Lammas by the llamas.”

Harvest is about willfully and intentionally upping your own value. When we increase the quality of our own lives, we provide a more positive contribution to the world. We naturally feel more confident and assured when our goals are accomplished and we move forward in our lives. When we sit stagnant with no change or forward progress, our contribution to the power center of humanity dies out, just as stagnant water in a pond or swamp becomes dead and fetid. When living water flows freely, it remains fresh and vibrant. It encounters rough areas and smooth areas, but it continues to forcefully flow, blowing past the obstacles of stones, vegetation and other barriers, until it reaches its ultimate goal.
Keep your living waters flowing briskly and ever moving toward the ultimate harvest goal.

**Considering the Harvest**

The crops are tall and strong in the field, heavy with the fruit of the first harvest. Far from being a rest at the end of the cycle, harvest is the time when we work harder than we have at any other time of the year. The next 12 weeks of harvest between now and the time it ends on October 31st will be challenging to say the least. We harvest until we feel as though our backs will break and our legs will give out on us...then we harvest some more. In our "real" lives, we are now seeing the results of months of preparation and activity. Significant change begins in our life and we are swept along in the process of reaching our goals.
That is not to say that a big truck will drive up to your doorstep full of harvest on August 2nd and pile it in front of your house. You still have to go out into the “fields” to get it and the harvest and gathering effort is another part of the manifestation process. I have had plenty of years where the third week or so of October rolled around and I was sitting in the field wondering, "Where the heck is my harvest??"

When you are contemplating your harvest, always go back to the exact words you used at your planting in March and the ideas that were in your head at that time. Write them out and look at them. If you have your original list, go over it as well. Meditate on what you planted and consider all of the inflections and ways this goal could come about.

Sometimes, harvest just takes a little bit longer than we think it should. When we set a plan for manifestation in place, we create a matrix that must allow for an unthinkable number of connections to take place between March and November. All of the cogs have to line up just so, all of the players have to move into position and all of the lights on the console have to light up in just the right pattern. We should definitely see some results and encouragement by the week of Lammas, but do not be discouraged if your harvest has not yet manifested. It is not uncommon for more time to be required for a perfect result and often, that can continue well into Mabon.

Remember that typically, Lammas is the harvest we receive from our own efforts. If your particular goal required a little extra Divine assistance, it would be appropriate for manifestation to occur further into the second harvest when the influence of the Universe is more strongly felt. As with all parts of the harvest year, patience and absolutely faith are the keys to success. If you begin to doubt, fear or discount, the energy you have put into your harvest will be compromised. It is essential at this point and all others that you simply trust the process and believe that things are going exactly as they should for your own greatest good.

Beth from California writes: I made such a rookie move! I've been CUSPing for years now, but when mid-August hit and I did not yet have my harvest, I had such a pout as you would not believe. Through the Summer Solstice, my crops had been so visible in the fields that I was sure the fulfillment of my goal was imminent. I got all jazzed for the payoff at Lammas, but Lammas came and went and I was still “on hold.” Argh! Finally, in the third week of Lammas, I sat with my bean plant for a little while and talked to it, asking what it needed to be successful. What I got in
my head was “time and patience, time and patience.” I committed to give the process just that, let go of my expectations and within a week, I had my harvest! Thanks for helping me remember that I can’t push the cycles. They unfold in their own time and in their own way.
Mabon
Autumn Equinox
Autumn Equinox/Mabon - Approximately September 21st

Where Did It Come From?

There are several theories about the assignment of the name “Mabon” to the Autumn Equinox and many historians and researchers theorize that the name was not even used until the 20th century. Since all of the theories for how the name was derived are fairly weak, for the purposes of this particular text I will simply say that it is historically called Mabon and that balances out our dual names for the holidays nicely. While the other harvest holiday names are rooted in generally agreed upon extraction from other languages, the history of the name “Mabon” amounts to a conversation that goes like this. “This is where it comes from.” “No it’s not.” “Yes it is.” “I don’t believe you.” “I don’t care.” The etymology of the name is a train wreck and one with which we are better off not making eye contact.

Otherwise back in Factual Land, there are two days out of the year when the Northern and Southern hemisphere receive the exact same amount of sunlight due to the tilting of the earth at a right angle to the Sun. At the two equinoxes, spring and autumn, the sun is directly over the equator, which gives us what is in the Latin language called “equinox” or “equal night.” From the point of the Autumnal Equinox forward, if you're in the Northern hemisphere, the days will get shorter after the Autumn Equinox and in the Southern hemisphere, the days will get longer.

An interesting consideration about the two equinoxes is that since the Moon is seen as the feminine astrological energy and the Sun is seen as the male astrological energy, at the time of the equinoxes, their energy is also in balance, symbolizing male and female equality. This is reflected specifically in the time of Mabon since the work of the second harvest involved the men harvesting in the fields while the women canned and otherwise preserved the newly harvested foods for the coming winter.

The idea of the forces of light and dark changing power was an important transition for the ancient agricultural people. They used this transitional time to begin the process of closing down the year in preparation of the descent into darkness and cold. The harvested fruits and vegetables would be canned and stored. Wood was chopped for the winter. Animals began to hibernate. The sale of excess harvest foods allowed for the purchase of or bartering for new clothes to keep people warm in the coming cold months. There was a rush to complete the harvest process before November 1st, after which anything remaining in the fields or woods
was considered to be poison and must be left to nature. As the days become markedly shorter before the time of electric lights, there was a rush to harvest as much as possible in the shortened daylight hours. The brilliant Harvest Moon, which occurs during the Full Moon closest to the Autumn Equinox, provided additional light through the night for harvesting efforts to continue after dark.

The last sheaf of grain to be harvested in the season was given special treatment. The removal of the last sheaf signals that the harvest was over. Water was said to be sprinkled on both the sheaf and the bearer as a blessing on the coming year. The final sheaf was then fashioned into the form of a woman, called a “corn dolly,” and within her skirts, the kernels would dry to provide the initial, blessed seed for the crop of the next year. She would be decorated with ribbons and other adornments and placed in a position of honor near the hearth of the home of the farmer who owned the land.

Young, unmarried girls were the ones who were invited to bring in the last sheaf in Ireland. Whichever one of them managed to cut it down with one swing would marry within the year. In Ireland, England and Scotland, farmers would wear a “harvest knot” on their clothing like a corsage or a boutonniere to show that their own harvest was completed.
In that time, “corn” was not used as a word specifically meaning the corn “maize” as we know it now, but as a generalized term for the primary cereal crop of the area. Therefore, wheat, barley, oats or other grains may be referred to as “corn.”

In earlier times, the harvesting of the last sheaf was celebrated with a huge feast provided by the landowner for the workers. There would be toasts, drinking games, singing and great celebration that the major work of the harvest season was ended. During the 19th century, tensions were high between the classes and this resulted in a decline of the celebratory parties as most landlords preferred to pay their workers in cash rather than provide a huge feast. The introduction of technology to farming in the mid-nineteenth century had a significant impact on the number of workers a typical farmer needed to harvest his fields. The reaper and the baler alone reduced the average harvest work force to a quarter of its previous numbers and this amount was down to approximately 2 percent by the mid-twentieth century.

The Christian version of Mabon became Michaelmas to honor the archangel Michael. Michael is said to be the angel to whom it was tasked to evict Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden after their fall from grace. For this reason, Michael is often seen with a flaming sword as a great protector and defender. His official feast day falls on September 29th.

**Blessings and Boons**

This is definitely the time of the year for changes to happen. As humans, we still tend to internalize and act on the patterns and paths that were woven into time by our ancestors. As agricultural people, humans farmed according to the Sun and Moon cycles. Mabon was celebrated as the time of the second harvest, particularly in European countries. The first harvest began August 1st and continues on until the fields are barren in late October/early November and is the result of the efforts of our own hands that have planted and cultivated the crops in the fields. The first wave of grains and legumes would be ready for harvest around that time and would continue for weeks to come as the plants produced their own cycles of growth until the annual yield was reached.

The second harvest begins on September 21st and is not related to the efforts our ancestors invested in their agricultural endeavors. The second harvest is taken from the fruit trees, nuts and berries that grow wild in the wooded areas and are available for harvest without any form of pre-cultivating on the part of the harvester. In times of a lean first harvest, this second harvest and the hunt could be what saved entire villages from starvation. Because of
the value of these untended but ample food sources, the second harvest was seen as a “boon” and a blessing from God.

The first harvest filled the larders and in many ways, was a good indicator of how the winter would go. Sure, they would supplement with meat from the hunts, but that was an unknown in terms of availability. The hunts could be wildly successful or sparse and undependable. As long as the harvest was bountiful, there would be an assurance of food for the coming winter.

The second harvest was supplemental. The first harvest was the result of hard work invested by many people, each devoted to the cause of feeding the village or large farm on which the crops grew. What they pulled from the gardens and fields was the result of work from their own hands and the sweat of their brow.

Apples and nuts and berries grew without the assistance of humans and as such, were considered to be sacred. They were a blessed addition to the man made harvest and provided what was needed without being asked or encouraged to do so. People could go into the woods and pick baskets of blackberries and apples and walnuts and other delicious foods to supplement the results of their own efforts.

I often have people ask me if it’s true that the effects of CUSP result in benefits and rewards that specifically collect around the times of the two harvests. Would it not stand to reason that results would have just as much of a chance to manifest in January or April than in August or September? One would think so; however, I have seen the flow of the CUSP year result in significant positive life changes occurring during the harvest months at an unbelievably disproportional rate. I genuinely do see blessings and surprises coming in late September and through October more than any other time of the year. It’s a fascinating study and a real motivator to attune our lives to the old agricultural cycle. When we step into the concert of nature that is already underway with our without our participation, you can feel the flow of life much stronger than when we fight against it.
The coming months reflect a point where humans, especially Americans, tend to fly off the “natural” path and suffer as a result. By the agricultural calendar, farming and harvesting was typically finished by the first week of November. At that point, the chill was definitely in the air and the job was to put the fields to sleep for the year. The herds of livestock were culled to remove the animals that were old or infirm and not likely to survive the winter. The plant beds were burned to cleanse them for the coming planting season. When I was growing up in Kentucky, during the late fall, you could, at night, see spots of plant beds burning all over the hillside. For us, it was the definitive symbol of autumn.

**Time to Go Back Inside**

After the rush of culminating activity that occurred at the time of harvest, in ancient times, the weather itself urged people indoors for the months of winter. As the second harvest winded down, families began to ease into the embrace of the dark of the year. Days were shorter and the hours of light during which any work or hunting could occur were limited. Time
was spent around fireplace hearth, sharing stories and connecting as a family. Plans were made for the new planting season that would begin in the spring. It was a time of quiet introspection, evaluation and forward thinking, but physical activity out of the home was greatly minimized. It was, above all, a time of tremendous celebration and joy to honor a successful harvest.

In our modern lifestyle, humans are expected to produce at the same level of productivity all year around. We do not tailor our output or type of work to the season unless our job itself is tied into the seasonal activity. For most of us, there is no wind down or retreat. I believe that is why we have such widespread depression in the winter months. We have denied our heritage and what our spirits cry out to experience.

As humans, are nature is cyclic and our energy levels are based on that imprint. To continue at full steam through the cold months, doing all that we were during in the height of spring or summer, puts our internal clocks and regulators out of whack. Through “Daylight Savings Time,” we even change our clocks to be sure we get an even greater level of productivity out of our days. We work against the natural flow and often suffer as a result. Any measures you take to decrease your outward activity during this time will result in a greater attunement to your natural rhythms and a better connectivity to the cycles of the year.
If you can, even in the smallest ways, gear down in the winter/colder months, I can assure you that it brings us greater peace and a feeling of rightness. I have been doing this for many, many years and can personally attest to the benefits of attuning to the natural flow of life cycles. Most of us do not have the luxury of changing what our jobs demand of us, but at home, we can make subtle changes that will bring us more in tune with the energy of winter.

Make time each night to sit by the fire or curl up with a blanket and a warm drink and consider where your life is now and where you want it to be. Think about what parts of your life no longer serve you and need to be released to the dark time of the year when the night holds dominion over the sun. Reflect back on other winters and remember the lessons life has shown you over the years. If you are comfortable doing so, keep a journal during the cold months and write out your hopes and plans and memories, even if you only write a line or two a night. Study the blessing and challenges you have in your life right now. Make an effort to really connect with your loved ones on a meaningful level.
Allowing even a half hour for this practice until the time after our big thaw in the spring will quickly put you on track with nature’s cycles even if you are having to be unseasonably busy during the daylight hours. Embrace the darkness and use it to your benefit!

In CUSP life, the things that are to be manifested by our own involvement and energy tends to show up between Lammas and Mabon, with some of it continuing through the fall until Samhain. Mabon through Samhain is a very special period of time when blessings come to us from unexpected sources through the sheer grace and love of God. Those goals and surprises that need a little divine assistance are the ones that tend to manifest during this time.

That makes this a particularly special and exciting time. For me, it's like waking up to Christmas day every day, wondering what I'll find under the tree. Sometimes, it's something small and sweet and other times, it's a huge blessing that cannot be denied. I love them all.
Mabon marks the halfway point of the harvest period and takes us into the blessings and boon. Open yourself to the miracles all around you. There is a story behind those calla lilies you see. During one of our hardest times in the middle of winter, I was at my altar, filled with fear and apprehension over some serious financially issues we were experiencing. I was at the end of my rope and felt as though we would never again see the light in the darkness. As I prayed about this dilemma, cried a bit and then just gave it all up to the Goddess. In my hour of need, I find that I relate better to a mother figure than a father figure. I took all of my worry and fear and rolled it up in a ball and put it in the palm of Her hand. I felt a peace come over me.

The next day (remember, this was in winter), I went outside my door and found sever callas blooming from that cluster. They had never bloomed before and I honestly had no idea what kind of plant it was. By that time, we’d lived in the house for two years and I’d actually planted moon flowers and morning glories in that particular location. That very week, we had money come in from sever different unexpected sources; enough to sustain us for a little while. The entire time I lived in that house after that time, those calla lilies were my predictors of miracles. As you can see from the photo, I had a lot a miracles and I am blessed to say that even without the callas, the miracles continue as long as I open to them. The calla lily to this day remains a sacred flower to me for that reason.

During the Mabon season, open your heart and your life to the miracles that are all around you, waiting for an invitation to come in. Like the Faeries in Peter Pan, all they need is for you to believe in them to be given life.

Jack from Texas writes: I run a CUSP-based group that has followed the agricultural year for three years running now. For our Mabon celebration, we host a huge Thanksgiving feast to give thanks for the harvest blessings we have received and are about to receive. Since it is in the time of the Boon, we feel richly blessed and happy to be together to honor this sacred time. We typically have three main dishes and everyone works together to supply many side dishes and desserts. Before we and our families eat together, often up to 50 people or so once children, spouses and friends are involved, we each tell something for which we are grateful, then we toast with sparkling apple cider. It is a lovely time of togetherness and gratitude.
Samhain - Approximately November 1st

Where Did It Come From?

Samhain was originally the Gaelic harvest festival, celebrated as the Celtic New Year, which was held on October 31st – November 1st. Around the 8th century, the date came to be associated with All Saint’s Day/All Soul’s Day from the Catholic faith after a declaration from Pope Gregory affixing the date onto the historical Samhain celebration. In 835, Louis the Pious officially dedicated November 1st to the celebration.

Samhain is loosely translated to mean “Summer’s end” and officially closes the lighter half of the year and starts the dark of the year and yes, there were bonfires. In Scotland, these bonfires were called samhnagan. [Note from Katrina: Whenever I read the Scottish word for those bonfires, it looks like “Samhain-nanagans” to me and I giggle maniacally.]
Once again, those people, cows, pigs, goats and other livestock were ushered between the bonfires to be cleansed and purified. The herds spent the warm months grazing in the fields and this was a time when they were returned to their local pens. Cattle that were too old or poor of health to survive the coming brutal winter were culled at this time. With the summer grazing soon to end and the cold weather available to freeze the meat, such measures were necessary to allow for the best use of resources. The bones of the animals that were slaughtered were tossed into the flames. At that time, cattle were the main form of currency and a primary element of the pastoral and agricultural lifestyle.

All other fires were extinguished for the time of Samhain with only the bonfires burning. Each family would then take a torch from this common source to light their hearth fire for the year. In addition to heralding in the dark of the year, Samhain was the first day of winter according to the old Celtic calendar.

The custom of wearing costumes and masks at this time is Gaelic in origin and was an attempt to ward off evil spirits. It was believed that on Samhain night, the dead revisit their homes to bless or curse those within. Families would leave out offerings to the dead in the form of wine, food and gifts. In Scotland, young men would impersonate the dead with veiled, blackened or masked faces while dressed all in white. The traditional jack-o-lantern was not carved from a pumpkin, but a turnip, which was hollowed out, carved with faces and placed in windows to ward off evil spirits.

In Celtic tradition, the period of time called “a year and a day” was considered to be sacred and was assigned to many legal contracts, including handfasting, the temporary marriages that occur. Samhain was the “day” of a “year and a day” and was seen as a “time outside of time.” This furthers the idea of Samhain being a time that is between the worlds.
Releasing Expectations

On November 1st, it was traditionally believed that whatever remained in the fields could no longer be used as it was "poisoned." Although this might seem rather arbitrary and nonsensical when there are perfectly good cucumbers, pumpkins, beans and such out there waiting to be picked, it's actually a fairly sophisticated psychological tactic. It teaches us to "make hay while the sun shines" and be invested in the time of the harvest in a sweaty, back-breaking fashion. It places a delineating cap on our efforts. It places a finish line and says, “Time’s up, you’re done.”

To everything, there is a season and when the season of harvest has gone, it's time to let go. It teaches us the discipline to release our expectations and to know when we are done. As the Christian premise says, "God always answers prayer, but sometimes, the answer is ‘no.’” I would go on to add that the answer could also simply be, “It’s a good idea, but it is not yet time.” Samhain tells us that whether we feel it or not, we are now ready to stop the process of
expectation and receiving and begin the process of settling and adjusting to our newly manifested life.

What if what you planted in the spring has not manifested by the time November 1st rolls around? That is the question we have encountered since this path first revealed itself to us back in 1997. Most of the time, our harvest manifests in a way we have predicted or better. In fact, in the planting of our goals, we should always include a codicil of “I ask for this or better.” We should never presume that we know exactly what we need since our perspective of our life is the here and how and the past, both of which are affected by our own filters and intentions. God is able to see our life in panoramic view and override our own plans based on the factors we cannot perceive. By asking for the equal of our intention or better, we allow more room for miracles to come through and for a life that is greater than even we can imagine to imagine.

There have been a few times, however, when we have had a CUSP student standing in a barren field on November 1st with no sign of a harvest anywhere. This is when a harvest year autopsy is in order. We have found that in this particular situation, one of these issues is usually the reason:

The person may have ignored or misread confirmations or redirects that occurred during the Imbolc period. Sometimes, especially if the guidance we receive goes against our own desires, we simply do not see the redirects when they present. Normally when this happens, a harvest of some kind relevant to what was planted occurs, but it is often in a different form than what the person is seeking.

The person may have actually received their harvest, but in a different form than what they expected. It is natural to narrow our focus to what we expect to see and fail to realize that the issue we identified on our list at planting has been resolved in a different way.

The harvest is late. This may sound simplistic and it absolutely flies in the face of not harvesting after November 1st, but there are times when what we need simply takes longer to come into fruition than the harvest cycle allows. For every rule, there has to be an exception. The premise of Samhain is “release” and if what you planted did not happen, it is your responsibility to release your attachment to that plan and to believe with absolute assurance that this is for your own greatest good.
More than once I have seen the old adage of “you have to let something go to get it” take over. I have watched people tearfully release a precious desire, trusting completely that something better is coming along, only to have it manifest to perfection within the next week or so. In this case, a late harvest is considered to be “Divine Intervention” and you should take it, smile big and say ‘thank you,’ even if it is after November 1st.

This takes us to the concept of time itself, including our sacred and holy touch points. As you know by now, CUSP works from the energy that is stored into the collective consciousness of humans from repeated ceremony, celebration and practice over thousands of years by humankind. That collective belief has saturated the touch point days we celebrate with a particular energy that we are attuned to because it is embedded in our DNA structure to react to those energies.

All of that, however, is a man-made concept. Time itself is a man-made concept. The Universe and "The Process" know no time constraints and are not man-made. While you may have put a goal out there at Spring Equinox, right on schedule, and dutifully followed the cycles of the year toward the nurturing of that goal, you are still following a man-made premise while dealing with a divine influence. That's the wild card and once in a while, the Universe chooses to show us who is boss by thumbing its nose at our little calendars.

The process of manifestation always takes the path of least resistance because it is a form of energy and following the path of least resistance is a primary function of energy. Most of the time, the path of least resistance is along the natural course of human existence. Every now and then, however, The Universe pulls rank and refuses to play along the constructs we put into by using man-made time frames.

When this happens, the first thing you do is have a good sit in your mud puddle of sorrow and pout it out. If you are plugged into God and remain in tune with the flow of the process, you will soon recognize the inherent power in the moment. When the Universe takes hold and begins controlling things, all bets are off and it's anyone's ballgame.

If you find this happens to you, meditate, pray or connect to the Holy and Divine in the way that you choose. Know that you are in the supremely sacred moment of being held in the hands of God. You have been singled out for special care and you can bet that your goal is going to manifest in a profound way, likely when you least expect it.
In all questions about our harvest, we draw back to the basic truths of agriculture.

If we plant a seed, nurture it and see it through to fruition, there is never a guarantee that it will actually yield fruit or that it will come up at all. We all take that chance when we plant something, figuratively or literally. We have an expectation that the seed will grow because that is what typically happens. There are, however, exceptions.

The same can be said with CUSP. The most common reason why a harvest does not yield its produce is because the practitioner insisted on enacting their own desires instead of heeding the redirects and messages to the contrary they received from the Universe. Often, what we think we want and choose to work our will to manifest is not in our best interest for reasons that we cannot see and do not yet understand. That being the case, we have a “failsafe clause” with God that prevents manifestation of situations that are genuinely not in our best interest.
A similar situation is when we plant a goal and it ultimately manifests in a way we did not expect. In those cases, it is always best that we go back to the exact wording of our goal at the time of planting and see how the unexpected result applies.

While we may in good faith plant what we feel is the best circumstance to better our lives, we may be prevented from the manifestation of that reality because of factors unseen to us. As long as we are acting in good spirit and are genuinely focused on our own personal and positive development, we can be absolutely assured that the outcome of our actions, whatever it might be, will be a very good thing. It has been our experience over many, many collective years of practice that “the Lord helps those who help themselves.” God appreciates when we move forward positively and confidently and is more than happy to assist us in our evolution on all levels, even if sometimes, that assistance takes the form of saying, “No” or “Not yet.”

Or, as I said, you might have just jacked up the re-directs between Imbolc and Ostara.

One important tenet to remember that sounds naive, but has proven true over and over is, “Nothing that happens at harvest is a ‘bad’ thing.” “Bad” is something that is subjective and as always, the results of our planting should always be brought back to what we actually planted. Often, what looks or feels to us to be “bad” is actually for our greatest good, but is temporarily in disguise until we see the complete unfolding of the harvest.

For instance, let’s say that a woman plants “true love” in hopes of finding happiness in her marriage. As a result, she loses an unfaithful wretch of a husband who she actually does love in order to clear the way for her true sweetheart to find his way to her. Mind you, she will be devastated to see her marriage end, especially if she has invested a great deal of work into the relationship by pulling more than her share of the emotional weight.

To her, this is a very negative result and NOT what she envisioned when she planted. Once, however, the debris is cleaned and Mr. Wonderful comes into her life, she can ultimately look back and see that she harvested exactly what she envisioned, even though the path to get to it was not easy and seemed like a bad thing.

Sometimes, we have to go through pain and loss to actually get to where we need to be. In that respect, events that we label as “bad” are truly blessings in disguise.
Part of the energy of CUSP is in fully trusting that we are moving unerringly toward our greatest good, whether the road is smooth or rocky. When times are hard, we hold our head high, take care of troubles one or two or a hundred at a time and just keep on walking, confident that at the end, it will all be worth it. There is no room for doubt; only complete and total faith. This is why in CUSP, we call Samhain the time of surrender. It is when we give over our expectations, fears and control to a higher power and graciously accept our harvest, always with the complete faith that what we experience is for our total greatest good.

There may be times when we don't even realize that the harvest actually has arrived until we look back on it in retrospect. We tend to create a firm idea of how harvest will look that it can manifest directly at our feet in some different form and we don't even notice. It may be even harder if we do not have an image in our mind of what form our harvest will take. Consider the lesson of another modern parable:

Bob and the Flood

Bob was quite a devout follower of his spiritual path and people frequently remarked on the incredible degree of faith he always had that everything would turn out just fine and that God would take care of him. He always believed that things would work out and they always did. People looked to Bob in a crisis and he was right there, assuring them that God would provide. God always came through and as a result, Bob became something of a spiritual icon in the community.

Then came the flood, and it was a doozie. It rained in torrents and the water rose for days. Families grabbed their prized possessions and went for higher ground with only the die-hards remaining. The Red Cross was called in to ensure the safe evacuation of the town. As they went door to door with their high profile vehicles to escort people out of town, they came across Bob.

“No,” he smiled. “You go ahead. God will save me.”

They tried to persuade him to go with them, but he was steadfast, even as the water was soaking his carpets. He assured him he’d be fine. Everyone again admired Bob’s stalwart faith. As the flood waters rose, Bob happily climbed to the top floor of his home and watched out the window as a few of his neighbors floated by in canoes and on hastily fashioned rafts, clinging to the few prized possessions they could salvage.

“C’mon, Bob!” they called. “There is room for one more. The waters are rising.”
“No worries!” Bob smiled and waved. “God will save me. Best of luck to you!” The waters continued to rise and Bob made his way to the roof. “Closer even to Heaven!” he thought, smiling. A newsman in a helicopter could not believe that someone was actually on top of his house in the flood! He had the pilot move in closer and drop the ladder.

“Grab the ladder!” he called. “We’ll hoist you up!”

“It’s OK!” Bob called. “I’ll be fine. God will save me. Get great footage!”

The newsman tried to convince Bob that the water was rising rapidly, but Bob was steadfast in his faith. The newsman got great footage of Bob as the water consumed him and his life was lost.

When Bob got to Heaven, he was utterly confused and downtrodden. “How could You DO this?” he asked God. “How could You let this happen? I had absolute faith in You and You let me die!”

“Bob,” God said gently. “I sent you the Red Cross. I sent you a canoe. I even sent you a helicopter. What more did you want?”

The moral of this parable is that miracles and manifestation do not always take the form we expect, so be alert for all of the ways that your harvest could present. Do not disqualify any options that may provide the success you seek. This person had tremendous faith, which is a vital part of the CUSP process. The failure was that he did not recognize the miracles when they manifested right in front of him.
Where I live in the mountains of Central California, a distinct bite in the air as the sun goes down is what tells us that fall is underway, even though the days remain pleasant and warm. At night, the smell of wood smoke drifts from chimneys and in the day, we see fewer bees, dragonflies and hummingbirds. Most of our trees are evergreen, but they still have a distinct browning that occurs and the few deciduous trees begin to lose their leaves.

After Samhain, the descent into darkness happens quickly and we can use that experience to our advantage. Just as the theme of Samhain is death and rebirth, so do we go through our own death and rebirth as our harvest finalizes. Whenever we manifest major life changes, even positive ones, we undergo a death of sorts. The way we were in the world before dies away and a new life begins with the evolution we have created.
The glow of success surrounds us at this time and we get a rush of "Holy Moly, this WORKS!!" It is easy to get caught up in the excited flurry and not truly process all of the levels on which we are affected by the harvest. Once November rolls around, we feel reality setting in and the afterglow of harvest begins to wane.

The Mourning Moon that occurs in November provides a therapeutic release of the expectations we attached to the harvest and a recognition of the grief we feel over what we had to release in order to receive our harvest blessings. You cannot add to a cup that is already full, even if what is inside is old and stale. We have to pour out of our cup to make room for the new blessings to come in.

It is wise to get a jump on the adjustment process. We can do so if we embrace the full meaning of Samhain and welcome the harvest into our lives. We should take an objective inventory of what we still need to release in order to enter into the new harvest year unencumbered.

It is in our nature to cling to the familiar, even if it is something we know is not good for us. When the plant beds are burned away and the harvest is released from the fields for the year, it is the perfect time to enact our own releases and let go of the things in our lives that are obsolete and no longer serve our greatest good.
Those ancient agricultural ancestors had it right with all of those bonfires. The key is to be clean and clear and shake out all of your dark, dusty corners. Those places are where the fears hide. Those places are where the bad habits hide. Those places are where insecurities hide. Those places are where doubts hide. The fires of the plant beds purify the land for the next year’s planting. Even the earth must release what it holds from the harvest.

As I said early in this book, many (and I would dare say most) people fear the quiet and the dark of the year. They keep their environment steeped with stimulation, sounds and people. The soundtrack comes from outside of them rather than inside. Being alone with your thoughts in silence is a supreme act of bravery. If you have cleaned your mental closets to the point that you can comfortably sit with your own thoughts, then you have mastered a beautiful project that few even attempt. It is this state that will allow you to enter into the dark of the year with joyful anticipation of the introspection, reflection and insight it will bring.
On the waning moon, go out into the cool night pick up an autumn leaf that has naturally fallen; one for each of the situations you plan to release. Using a Sharpie pen, write on each leaf what you plan to release and what that leaf represents. When you have written on a leaf each thing you want to release to the dark of the year, hold all of the leaves in your hands close to your heart and solar plexus.

Close your eyes and take several deep breaths in and out. Smell the leaves and the natural smells of fall around you.

In your mind's eye, visualize for each thing you wish to release a mental image that represents the situation. Next, clearly envision your life as it would be without what you are releasing. Take your time in doing this exercise. Spend time with each of the things you are releasing. Thank it for what it has given to you while it has been with you. Each circumstance brings lessons and rewards on some level. Once you have worked your way through each release, toss all of the leaves backwards over your head as you walk forward, letting all of the leaves fall behind your body. Do not look back. Keep walking forward and away from the leaves that have fallen.

In this time that is not a time and place that is not a place, there is no planning next year. There is no activity required. You are entering into 6 weeks of stillness and rest. Do good things for yourself. Treat yourself to experiences of relaxation, comfort and luxury that you would not normally choose. When you find your mind drifting to the next year, stop yourself and give yourself the mental message that there will be plenty of time for planning later. Now, we are still and quiet. Read books. Spend time with your loved ones. Start no new projects for the Samhain time. Do absolutely the bare minimum of what you must do. This is a break you need on every level. Just as Samhain represents death and rebirth, this is like the quiet and peace of the grave. Let the peace surround you completely and find your comfort with it.

Your release has begun and you are now ready to wrap yourself in the darkness of the year to rest, plan, meditate and contemplate. Walk away from a harvest year well done and slip into the silence and stillness of the Samhain season. At Yule, you will take your first step up to the next level of the Spiral of the Year.

Laura from Idaho writes: Each year at Samhain, I have a “Give it up to the Goddess” ceremony. I go to a cemetery, preferably a new one if I can find it, and spend time focusing on endings. I pick 3-4 graves to which I feel...
drawn and commune with each one, thinking about their own personal stories of love and loss, of victory and defeat. Once I’ve done that, I have my own harvest review right there in the cemetery. I reflect back on that year’s harvest all the way to Yule and visualize how it all came together the way it did. I think about any new concerns or insecurities that have come up since the harvest manifested. I give thanks for what I have received and then let it all go, giving it up to the Goddess to manage. When I walk out of the cemetery, I always feel completely clear, unencumbered and ready to move into the dark of the year to rest until Yule.
Moon Cycles
As the previous chapters have illustrated, the CUSP Spiral of the Year is used to bring about long-term, progressive changes throughout the harvest cycle with each successive year building on the foundation laid by the previous years. While this is appropriate for major life changes, there may be times when you need a change to happen on a smaller scale and over a shorter period of time. Fortunately, nature has provided for this as well.

The Sun has long been honored as the strong, bright and masculine symbol in the sky, but the feminine mysteries are the domain of the cool, silvery Moon. Psychology tells us that masculine energy is projective, aggressive and slow to change. Feminine energy is adaptive, reflective and cycles rapidly.
The solar energy is that of the passion fire, full of action and motion. The Moon is the calm reflection that allows us to understand why we do those actions and what the motions mean. It is no wonder our ancestors took note of those innate gender qualities and equated them with these individual Heavenly bodies as they did.

Life is complicated and can sometimes come at us pretty quickly. We do not always have time to wait until the harvest to manifest an immediate need. Our yearly harvests are for major life change goals, not just quick and simple changes in our lives. In CUSP, we also work with the cycles of the Moon, which allow for manifestation within a month’s time, following the ever present cycles of the Moon.

From the first moment that humans looked up into the sky, they felt an intense draw to the ever-changing Moon. While the Sun offers us assurance and reliability, easing up into the sky each day and dipping behind the horizon every evening, lengthening and shortening the days as the earth moves around it in orbit, the Moon reminds us on a more immediate level that all things are transient.

The Moon rides its month long cycle, showing its bright, full face and then gradually turning away again to leave us in the darkness. All faiths have been fascinated by the Moon and most have included it in the fiber of their belief system in some form, either in parables, direct worship or even in placing the dates of their major holidays.

Our biological function is very much related to the Moon. Many women find that their menstrual cycles are attuned to the cycles of the Moon. Gravity is stronger at the time of the Full Moon because of its relative position to the observer and this slightly increased pull can cause a woman who is poised on the brink of childbirth to go into labor as the baby weighs heavier against her ripened cervix. Farmers have, for centuries, worked the fields on the Full Moon because of its bright, generous light during the harvest time of the year.

In CUSP, the Moon cycles are the microcosm of what we are doing on a bigger level within the Spiral of the Year. It begins in the darkness, just as December takes us into the first spark of light, and progresses to full zenith, just as June brings us to the strongest point of the Sun. It then begins to slip away, little by little, just as a few minutes of light are shaved off of each day from June through December until we find ourselves in the darkness again.
Just like the Sun, however, the Moon shows us that all things work in cycles and that out of the darkness will come light and out of the light will again come darkness. It is a comforting reminder that we are never “stuck” and that movement, even unseen, is always in play, taking us ever forward.

The Sun is very prominent and bright in our lives and we are directly dependent upon it for our survival. It boldly provides us with heat and energy, assists our crops in the field to grow and gives our bodies a necessary dose of Vitamin D. Lack of exposure to the Sun can even cause illness.

The Sun can pleasantly warm us with its rays or just as easily burn us. Modern medicine demonstrates that exposure to ultraviolet light changes the DNA molecules in the body. Over generations, those changes are passed down to offspring. This recent discovery is irrefutable proof that the environment can and does change what we are.

The Moon, however, is more gentle and subtle, quietly slipping through its phases. Changes in the character and appearance of the Sun occur almost without detection by the naked eyes, whereas the Moon cycles faster and each night we can note the changes in the Moon’s progress.

Lore tells us that each full Moon has a particular nature that comes with it and for us, that ties into where we also are in the solar calendar. Each Moon is a celebration of the point of the year where it occurs, gently encouraging us toward the macrocosm of our overall yearly goal while also allow us to put energy toward more immediate goals.

Honoring the Moon as it moves through its cycles is yet another way of celebrating ourselves and our place in the natural world, as well as honoring the cycles that move through our own bodies and human lifestyle. We can also use the shorter cycles of the Moon’s phases to achieve positive manifestation in a shorter amount of time.
Making the Moon’s Cycles Work for You

Human beings react to what they see. Eyesight is and has always been the most heavily used and relied upon of all the senses. Since the dawn of time, mankind has watched as the Moon moved through its many phases, month after month. This cycle, like the agricultural year, is embedded into our collective consciousness. We respond to the cycles automatically. Because of that, the imagery provided by the Moon’s cycles lends itself to our goals of manifestation.

While each Moon is similar to the others in its overall progression of New Moon, Waxing Moon, Full Moon, Waning Moon, the astrological placement of that particular Moon enhances the process of our Spiral of the Year and is specific to the month and touch point influence in which it occurs.
If we are farming or gardening in the traditional sense, we would use the Moon in the following ways: On the New Moon waxing to Full, we plant seeds, graft fruit trees and focus on crops that grow above the ground. From the Full Moon waning to the New Moon, we plant bulbs and root crops that will develop unseen below the ground. How easy is it to apply these principles to our thought and meditative processes as the farmers and gardeners of the Spirit and follow yet another natural cycle? It is the active time of the year and the quiet time of the year brought into smaller time period. From New Moon waxing to Full Moon, we work on our external life and perform physical actions to better ourselves. From Full Moon waning to New Moon, we work on the quiet, internal projects, cleaning out the mental cobwebs; healing old hurts and damage that create unhealthy responses.

We can also follow the Moon’s progression through the waxing stage to make goals grow, like prosperity, love, patience, the solution to a problem, etc. We start new things on the New Moon. Our goal can culminate with the Full Moon which is only a fourteen day progression.

The Full Moon illuminates, so it is good for creating awareness. The Full Moon is the ultimate symbol of fruition and completion, but quickly, it begins to go away. It is important to capture the energy of the moon as it occurs because of its transient nature. Do not delay. Both the fullness and the darkness of the Moon will only last a couple of hours, all other times in the cycle, it is either waning or waxing. Through the waning phase, we can focus on banishing conditions in our life that are undesirable, such as fear, guilt, gossip, impatience, poverty, etc, to culminate on the New Moon when everything is purged and dark yet again. By the time the New Moon comes, what we were working to eliminate is gone, just like the Moon. Once the Moon is fully dark, a new cycle begins again.

Our attunement to the Moon’s cycles is so automatic that this process quickly becomes natural to us. The beauty of it is that almost any situation can be adjusted to work with either the Waxing Moon or the Waning Moon. You can manifest money or you can banish poverty. You can manifest patience or you can dissolve impatience. You can manifest health or you can banish illness. Alchemically, the Moon is related to silver. Silver is the most perfectly reflective material on Earth and is still used in the highest quality optical mirrors. The Moon is like a silver mirror as the Moon’s radiance is a reflection of the light of the Sun. It does not give off any light of its own. It is part of the Human condition to see what one wants in the mirror. This is not a delusion, but is part of the magical properties of a mirror and the magical properties of the Moon. We see what we want in the mirror in order to make it so. The power of the Moon is not
rigidly defined, it’s uses and forms are mutable, like the mirror, and should also be used to *make it so.*

If you go a step further and tune into the energy of the individual Full Moons when you are manifesting short term, positive results, the connection to your natural rhythms is even stronger.

**The CUSP Moons Defined**

The names of the individual Full Moons vary from culture to culture. The names we use in CUSP are gleaned from the (many) traditional names for Full Moons that have been used over time.

**Cold Moon:** This Full Moon occurs between December and January in the sign of Capricorn. The theme for this Moon is “Joy.” Winter is at its strongest point and is about to loosen its hold on the world, allowing us to return to a warmer, kinder time. Throughout winter, the question became who would survive and who would not. At a time when there was no central heat and when animals often became desperate in their search for food, danger ran high. Those not attuned to the cycles could suffer from “cabin fever” as they react to the limitations on movement created by cold, ice and snow. Livestock were vulnerable to the elements and hungry predators. A sense of urgency for survival would develop around this time if the stockpiles from the earlier harvest began to dwindle. Reaching this Full Moon was a turning point that brought with it an assurance that warmer times were on the way. December provided a heartwarming time to spend with friends and loved ones, reminding us of their value in our lives as we shared gifts as tokens of our affection. Fresh from the blush of that familial closeness, our spirits are quickened and we feel our own inherent strength move within us, preparing us for the physical work that is to come. The joy of the Cold Moon takes through the dark of the year and our time of “The Spark” which awakens within us the dreams of a new life that will manifest in the fall with Harvest and shapes our goals for the coming year.

**Quickening Moon:** This Full Moon occurs between January and February in the sign of Aquarius. The theme for this Moon is “Awakening.” It heralds in the first signs of warmth returning to the land as the sign of Aquarius ignites creativity, originality and stirs within us including new ideas and new approaches to life. As the Earth quickens and comes back to life, we do as well. Our ideas begin to flourish around the new spark that will become our goals for the harvest year. We begin to dream, plan, and want a new way of being in the world. The
coming Spring can be sensed even though we cannot always see proof of this in the weather. This encourages us to have faith in the unseen and believe and trust in what is not immediately apparent. We start to build our hopes around the ideas and inspirations that have come into our head about how we can change our lives in the coming year. We feel the stirring of excitement and a slightly premature eagerness to get moving. The “Awakening” energy allows a clear generous knowledge that our hopes and dreams can take form and manifest positively in our “real” lives rather than just in our heads. As they say, “Thought manifests form.”

Storm Moon: This Full Moon occurs between February and March in the sign of Pisces. The theme for this Moon is “Desire” as we solidify the goals that were born at Winter Solstice when the Spark brought the new harvest ideas onto the radar of our minds. Because Pisces is very mutable and adaptable as a sign, the energy around this Moon allows us to weather the storms that come into play as we receive the confirmations and redirects of Imbolc from Deity as to what to plant in spring. It also encourages us to use the brewing storm of our desire and passion for what we are harvesting in creative and inventive ways while still remaining attuned to the natural flow and progression of the year.

Wind Moon: This Full Moon occurs between March and April in the sign of Aries. The theme is “Change” as the winds of change blow into our lives to prepare us for the planting that is taking place. As soon we are certain of what to plant, The Universe begins to clear the way and prepare our lives for the acceptance of this harvest as a reality. The Wind Moon sweeps clean the debris in our lives that would pose as obstacles to the manifestation of our harvest. It prepares our hearts and spirits for the change that is to come. Aries is a sign of fierce self-protection and determination which helps cement our intent on the harvest that is to come and help us fully commit to the process of manifestation of those desires. The Wind Moon is the fire that burns through our planting area to sterilize the ground for our waiting seeds.

Tower Moon: This Full Moon occurs between April and May in the sign of Taurus. The theme for this Moon is “Perspective.” It is a Moon of complexity and contradiction, yet it works effectively toward the purpose of helping us to adapt to the new way of being in the world that the Wind Moon ushered in. Taurus is a sign that relishes in creature comforts and physical luxuries. After the Wind Moon initiated widespread changes to ready the “fields” of our life for the harvest that is to come, the Tower Moon gives us the ability to find comfort in that change. It guides us to the understanding that what appears to be destruction and devastation is actually working in our favor to ready the playing field for the incoming harvest energy. The Tower Moon gives us strength and fortitude right when we need it most. We often interpret change as “bad,” but the energy of the Tower Moon allows us to settle into the change and
prepare for the exciting ride that is to come over the busiest months of the year that are now upon us.

**Strong Sun Moon:** This Full Moon occurs between the months of May and June in the sign of Gemini. The theme for this Moon is “Strength” as the most physically demanding time of the harvest year is broached. This Moon bellies up to the longest day of the year and heralds in the waning of the Sun’s strength as the days now become shorter. The crops are in the field and the harvest is nearly assured. The sign of Gemini gives us adaptability and quick thinking to problem-solve on the fly and bring swift resolution to problems. The strength of the Sun, the most powerful astrological male aspect, is at its height and so the emphasis is on all things associated with male processes: strength, action, logical/practical approaches in thought processes and fierce determination.

**Blessing Moon:** This Full Moon occurs between June and July in the sign of Cancer. The theme of the Moon is “Awe and Anticipation.” We now see the “crops in the field” and get a glimmer of how our harvest will manifest. The first visible signs of the impending harvest reward our faith with strong assurance. Certainly, any manner of destruction could still affect the crops in the field, but we can see results and know that what we are doing is real and generates true results. Inevitably, whether this is your first CUSP harvest or your twenty-first, there is always a startled feeling of awe when you see those initial results of your crops in the field and know that the process is definitely underway. It is a time to celebrate our blessings and invest faith into the outcome of our planting. It is at this time that the fruits of the crops are becoming evident: The ears of corn are formed, but not yet full just as the goals that were planted spiritually are showing signs of bearing immature fruit. The sign of Cancer is very mother-oriented and this is a wonderful time to connect to Mother Earth and give thanks for all that Nature provides to us. With this Full Moon, the blessings are bountiful and assured.

**Corn Moon:** This Full Moon occurs between July and August in the sign of Leo. The theme is “Gratification.” The harvest now starts to deliver its very first results, which are those that come of our own hands and our own effort. Corn is often the first plant to yield fruit and it is celebrated in many cultures as the symbol of First Harvest. The ancient peoples throughout the Americas all have a principle deity of the Corn. During this time, manifestation is particularly potent and can happen in the blink of an eye. In reality, during Harvest time, if you want a tomato, you go out into the garden, pick it and eat it. It is a time of instant gratification with little or no wait or process required for reward. It is essential, therefore, that we be especially careful in mind and deed during this time. The sign of Leo gives us great expression and joy in the face of the work required by Harvest.
**Harvest Moon:** This Full Moon occurs between August and September in the sign of Virgo. The theme is appropriately “Harvest.” As the first harvest is gathered, we learn how to put the early results of our harvest to best use. The sign of Virgo gives us organizational skills and discernment of how to use the harvest to the greatest advantage. The skill of discipline is strongly at play here. We must know how much to store for the coming winter, how much to share with our fellow man and how much to return to the Earth. The Harvest Moon was sacred to the ancient agricultural societies. It would sit full and golden on the horizon and provide illumination for continued work in the fields even after darkness fell. It is a time of celebration and anticipation as the time of the First Harvest approaches a close and the Second Harvest of Mabon broaches. Harvest Moon can be exhausting and demanding as often the actions required of us seem to exceed the time and energy we have to invest. As the heavy Harvest Moon hangs in the sky, we are reminded that we are not alone and that our efforts invested into the Harvest are proportional to the bounty we will receive. If we do not go out into the fields and work hard at this time, our harvest can rot in the field. Harvest is not going to walk its way up to our door and crawl into the larders on its own. Tremendous work and time are required to create a successful and lasting harvest.

**Blood Moon:** This Full Moon occurs between September and October in the sign of Libra. The theme is “Balance.” As the harvest time slows down for the upcoming dark of the year, we seek inner adjustment changes we have manifested. The Zodiac sign of Libra, which is represented by the scales, gives us balance and emotional detachment for objectivity and discernment. As the Second Harvest dawns near the time of this Moon, the energy of The Boon begins to balance with the overlapping results of our own efforts. This is a glorious time of blessings and bounty and we can almost see the end of our hard work and sacrifice coming into view. The balance is now coming into play and we will be able to rest as well as work as we begin the descent into the dark of the year. The Blood Moon got its name from the ancient practice of culling the herds of cattle during this time, sacrificing the animals who would not likely survive the harsh winter. We ourselves sacrificed our own blood, sweat and tears to create a new life that has now manifested and our efforts are to be honored.

**Mourning Moon:** This Full Moon occurs between October and November in the sign of Scorpio. The theme is “Mourning.” As the harvest ends, we mourn the things that did not manifest and the things we released at Samhain. Even though our goals are realized, we sometimes do not react well to change, even positive change. If we had to sacrifice something in order to gain our harvest, it is during this time that we mourn that loss. One of the basic laws of existentialism says that “Every choice is bittersweet.” If we choose vanilla ice cream, we may briefly mourn not having the strawberry ice cream. When we choose one thing, we inevitably
un-choose something else. That is part of the balance that came to us through the Blood Moon. The Mourning Moon is efficient enough to recognize that as humans, we need to acknowledge and grieve the parts of our life that were changed in order for us to receive the bounty of our harvest, as well as the chance to work through the parts of our Harvest that may not have manifested for our own greatest good. The sign of Scorpio gives us both the passion to grieve and the resilience to recover.

**Long Night’s Moon:** This Full Moon occurs between November and December in the sign of Sagittarius. The theme is the “Descent.” It is time to welcome the quiet repose of winter and the introspection that is to come. Sagittarius gives us the spirituality and insight to explore or inner selves and to reflect on what has occurred and later, to plan what is to come. As the Strong Sun Moon celebrates the most powerful male astrological symbol in our Heavens, the Long Night’s Moon heralds the energies of the Moon, the female archetype. Rapidly changing and mutable in comparison to the Sun, the Moon hides her face and goes into seclusion for part of the month and beams down upon us in full glory at other times. The weather is cooler now, leading us inside both physically and emotionally. During the dark of the year, we get to know ourselves better through spiritual exploration and understanding. Where the Strong Sun Moon represented the greatest physical energy of the year, the Long Night’s Moon is all about emotional and internal strength. We descend down into ourselves and explore all of the hidden passages and dark, recessed corners of our psyche to emerge in the spring clean, clear and ready again for action.

**Blue Moon:** This Full Moon occurs between the worlds. The Blue Moon is the second Full Moon in a month (since there are 12 months and 13 Moons in the lunar year, this can happen at any time and usually happens once a year) and is magical time when we slip away from the beaten path to celebrate, dance, drum and manifest “one of a kind” moments. This is the time to make a special, ethereal wish and slip between the worlds into the time of the unseen and unimagined. It’s a great time for asking for a special boon or blessing because the theme of this Moon is “Extra” since it is an “extra” Moon. Treat it as the joyful, magical gift it is and expect the unexpected!
How to Use the CUSP Moons

By using an almanac or calendar, you can easily determine the sign in which the Moon will be full or new and the Sun sign is for that time period. The attributes of those signs will influence the energies of that time and feed into the strength of your purpose for that Moon phase.

For instance, let’s say that the Blood Moon which occurs in the Sun sign of Libra has a Full Moon in the sign of Pisces. The theme of the Blood Moon is “balance.” We are heading into a transitional time as First Harvest evolves into The Boon and the Libra Sun sign helps us to embrace that balance as the seasons change and the inherent energy of that time shifts. Pisces, being a water sign, is very mutable and flexible with change, so that allows us to bend in the wind and remain standing during this time of transition. We are also adjusting to the Harvest we have received and the new life it has generated. We could base our approach to the Full Moon around these themes of adaptability and balance. Just as water (from the influence of Pisces) always conforms to its container, we can work on conforming to our own environment and releasing our own expectations in favor of trusting the process.
That embraces the Harvest aspect of the Full Moon and is the set up for how you would use this particular Moon in practical application. Let’s say you are troubled because you have an electric bill you cannot pay. First, it is important that you detach yourself from focusing on a specific way in which the situation be resolved. It is normal for us to jump to the very reasonable conclusion that to rectify the problem with the electric bill, you need money; however, that is not necessarily true. While yes, that would be one way to solve the problem, what you actually need is for the electric company to be happy with you. The concept of detachment is one that is taught in many esoterically oriented spiritual paths. The human mind is logical, practical and seeks the shortest route and the easiest means to correct a perceived error or a “bad” situation. This is fine, but the balancing side of the intellectual faculties of the mind involves opening up to the possibility that you are not yet aware of the correct way to solve a problem and that “giving it up to God” may be the correct approach.

Your Moon work focuses on the theme of that particular Full Moon, which is a message of balance, mutability and adaptation. You could envision that your account is balanced and that you and the electric company are able to achieve balance in what you have and what they need. This non-specific approach opens doors for unexpected money to show up to pay the bill, for adjustments to be made on the part of the electric company to bring your account current or for assistance of other types to come into play.

After you do your Moon work, call the electric company and find out what kind of hardship plan or payment plan you can enter into with them. Once you have the definitive outline of your options with them, going up the chain of command if necessary, you will know the many ways manifestation could occur. After you set the wheels in motion and follow through to the best of your ability, relax and know that the situation is rectified, even if you cannot yet see the results. The absolute faith that a goal will be accomplished is your most powerful tool and it creates tremendous energy around your manifestation process. We have all seen and ready about how acts of tremendous faith have created miracles. The biggest sure-fire way to cause the energy you invest into a situation to drop is to allow even a moment of doubt to contaminate your process. Anytime doubt comes into play, you have lost ground. Remember, the Moon is like the mirror and has the energies of it. We can see what we want to see until that becomes the reality.
One of the most rewarding experiences we have had through CUSP is working through the cycle of the year with a dedicated group of people who are bringing their own goals into manifestation. The shared group experience seems to lend greater energy to the CUSP process of everyone who participates. We are also able to network and help one another with the practical aspects of goal manifestation.

Although Eric and I aggressively work on our own CUSP goals and follow the agricultural year, we also provide group celebrations to further the CUSP experience for others. We receive countless emails from CUSP practitioners from all over the world who are working
independently, with a group or both. The CUSP process is one that can be effectively followed as an individual or while working with others.

Most of the exercises provided in the holiday exploration of this book are geared toward individual work. Here, you will find samples of group work that can be used to express the individual holidays and welcome and activate the incoming energy as a shared experience. There is no particular talent or technique required to create a CUSP celebration for individuals or a group. All you need is a willing spirit and a little imagination. Consider the theme of the particular holiday and think of ways you could honor that energy:

Yule – The Spark – The return of light to the sky

Imbolc – Commitment – Confirmation and redirect

Ostara – Planting – New beginnings

Beltane – Faith – Fertilizing the crop that may be unseen at this point

Litha – The Promise – Seeing your crops in the field

Lammas – The First Harvest – Results of our own efforts

Mabon – The Boon – Blessings from The Universe

Samhain – The Surrender – The release of expectations and descent into the dark of the year

**The CUSP Ceremony Components**

The human spirit reacts well to symbolism, so surround yourself and your group with colors, scents and representations of the holiday.
Each time you celebrate the CUSP holidays together, your ceremony should have a few very distinct components:

The Opening – This should state the time of the year, the purpose of the holiday and the intent of the ceremony. This is typically stated by a designated leader of the group or that particular ceremony.

The Joining – This joins the energy of the participant together for the time of the ceremony. Since the energy connects the participants and is flexible, the “circle” moves with the people. This flexibility allows participants to shift position within the ceremony area and maintain the energy flow. If someone has to leave the energy circle, all the need to do is join the hands of the person to their left and right and leave the circle. When and if they return, they should touch the hands of those same people and re-enter the same place where they were when they left. Since there is a slight disruption in the circle’s energy when this happens, it should only be done if necessary.

The Invitation – This is when you invite what you consider to be Holy and Divine to join you for your ceremony, to guide your intent and to bless your actions. You should use the names and images of God that you hold dear and sacred, as applicable to your own spiritual path.

The Activity – This is some type of energy building activity that amplifies the energy of the ceremony.

The Release – This is a moment when the energy of the ceremony builds through the activity and is then released to fuel your goal(s). The Release is directed either “out into the Universe” into a token object for storage. In the case of directing the energy into an object, it is typically done in conjunction with the activity and not as a separate component.

The Communion – This is a time when the group shares a type of cake, bread or other food together and some form of drink. This helps to further ground the energy by activating our internal physical bodies as well as our spiritual selves. We usually try to tailor the “cake” and “ale” to the theme of the ceremony (such as cornbread at Lammas). We do not always use “cake” for “cake” and never use actual “ale” for the drink since not everyone consumes alcohol. “Cakes and ale” is a traditional term used for communion.
The **Graciousness** – This is when you thank the Divine for being with you for your ceremony and for your life path and thank the participants for joining you for this special time.

The **Untwining** – This is when the energies of the participants separate once again.

How those components are expressed is totally up to you. If you follow the course of the specific components, you will see that they correspond to the energy of the 8 holidays:

The Opening is the spark of Yule.

The Joining is the commitment of Imbolc

The Invitation is when we plant at Ostara and open the door to our goals becoming reality

The Activity is the fertilization and faith of Beltane

The Release is the relief of seeing the crops in the field at Litha.

The Communion is the celebration of the first harvest at Lammas.

The Graciousness is saying “Thank you” at Mabon for our blessings.

The Untwining is the preparation for the descent into darkness at Samhain.
A practice specific to the movement of personal energy in a CUSP ceremonial circle is that it flows *counter-clockwise*. Many spiritual paths work in a *clockwise* direction and fly into a panic at the idea of moving the energy in a *counter-clockwise* direction. We have been taken to task many times by those “you must do it THIS WAY” people and anytime you are dealing with zealots, the most important knowledge you can possess is that you will never, ever make a point or win the argument. Therefore, we do not argue this point with anyone except to say that it simply works and we have had absolutely zero ill effects after working this way for more than fifteen years. Of all of those people who came to us bug-eyed and horror-stricken over the idea that our energy moves counter-clockwise, we have never had one, even the most educated and experienced practitioners of their own faith, who could tell us *exactly what they believed was going to happen*. They only knew it would be something *very bad*.

Our reason for the counter-clockwise movement is quite simple: we follow the flow of energy in the universe. The practice of working clockwise comes from the observation of the sundial. The sundial, however, is a *reflection* of the position of the Sun as opposed to the actual positioning.

The earth moves *counter-clockwise* around the Sun. In the Northern Hemisphere, the earth turns *counter-clockwise* on its axis relative to the observer, as North is universally
accepted as the “up” position. Electrons move \textit{counter-clockwise} around an atom. To get really scientific about it, as electricity flows in one direction, the magnetic lines of flux will travel counter-clockwise around the conductor. This is referred to as the Right Hand Rule. The \textit{right} side of the brain is considered to be female in nature and is therefore \textit{receptive}. The \textit{left} side of the brain is considered to be male in nature and is therefore \textit{PROjective}. The right side of the brain controls the \textit{left} side of the body, meaning the \textit{left} hand is \textit{receptive}. The left side of the brain controls the \textit{right} side of the body meaning the \textit{right} hand is \textit{projective}. When we touch hands, the left hand receives what the right hand of the person sitting next to them projects; therefore, the current moves \textit{counter-clockwise}. 
Eric and I explored, together and separately, many, many different religions and interviewed literally hundreds of people about their connection to God/Goddess/The Universe/Creator. It is our passion to explore how others walk their own sacred path and what about their particular spiritual process appeals to them. In doing so, we incorporated many different beliefs into our practice and it works for us. What we consider to be sad is that the greatest thing about each of these spiritual paths – its individuality – is what causes such separatism and elitism. Each of the people we met who were passionate about their path shared a common element: they all had a personal and intimate relationship with the Divine. As my son once put it, “Different taps on the same keg of beer.” Unfortunately, many of these people insisted that their way was the only way to engage God and that anyone who did it otherwise was simply wrong.
When a person is not aligned with God, they know it. There is no mistaking the power of God when you have experienced it even once and likewise, there is no mistaking the feeling of being out of step with The Universe. There is also no mistaking the feeling that you are in the process of doing something inherently wrong.

Eric and I have never had doubt that when we are experiencing the CUSP process, we are working with the power of God. Even when there are events and situations that we do not understand, it is still easy to feel the hand of God at work in our lives. We do not have to understand; we only have to keep walking the path and soon, the meaning will come very clear.

In our own practice, we incorporate elements from many of the religions we have experienced in our lives. The old adage, “If it works, steal it” is a big factor in our spiritual lives. When we have an experience that is spiritually meaningful for us, regardless of the spiritual path of its origin, we will likely use it again and probably incorporate it into our practice.

To give you an idea of the diversity of our ceremonies, we have a Native American sweat lodge in our back yard, a spiral shaped earth labyrinth on another part of our property, representations of Buddha and Kwan Yin throughout our house, gospel music on our MP3 players, pentacles to represent Earth, Air, Fire, Water and Spirit here and there, I use Catholic saint candles for my moon goals and there is a Book of Mormon on our bookshelf next to the Quran.

We are whole-heartedly equal opportunity students of spirit. I have included some of the group rituals we have used over the years, one for each of the holidays. As you read through them, you will find our eclectic style expressed in many ways. It is what works for us. I am confident that you will find the CUSP style that works for you. These ceremonies were used for anywhere between 5-6 people to 50-60. CUSP is nothing if not adaptable.
A Native American practice that we have incorporated into both our ceremonies and our everyday life is that of “smudging.” This is the movement of smoke from burning herbs over an area, item or person for the purpose of cleansing the energy.

We typically use sagebrush, white sage, cedar, sweet grass or a mixture of any of those. We let the smoke waft over the target and the smoke clears it from negativity, tension or other non-productive qualities. Before each ceremony, the area and items that will be used, as well as each participant, are thoroughly smudged. This is not indicated in the scripts below because it is done every single time prior to the beginning of the ceremony.
Some of Our Own CUSP Ceremonies

You will notice in the ceremonies below that some are more verbal and some are more about doing. “Actions” and “conditions” are denoted by brackets. [Like this]. Words spoken are without brackets. Also, there are some components of the ceremony that remain the same at some times and are changed at others to fit the purpose of the season.

Yule

Setting: [Inside the sweat lodge, 5 people, 10 hot rocks in a fire pit in the center, 2 5 gallon buckets of water ready to pour with a hollowed gourd, one candle waits to be lit as the spark. Each person is given a small taper to hold during the ceremony and take with them as they leave. The candles are unlit and the only light is from the sparkling heat of the white hot river rocks. It is snowy and cold outside, but inside the sweat lodge, the rocks give off incredible heat and we all start to sweat before the water even hits the rocks. We spend a few moments in meditative silence before the ceremony begins. Fragrant white sage and eucalyptus oil is scattered over the hot rocks. The sage cleans the air and the eucalyptus oil opens our lungs to
full reception. Narrow “prayer cloths” hang from the willow boughs that make up the structure of the sweat lodge and brush against us when we move.]

**The Opening:** We welcome you to the celebration of the Winter Solstice, the time when the Sun stands still and holds its breath in anticipation of the spark of inspiration that will set off our harvest cycle for the coming year. From this night forward, the Sun grows stronger every day and the masculine half of the year comes forward to culminate in the Summer Solstice. For this time, we dwell within the warm and nourishing womb of the great Earth Mother and hear her words and she whispers to us in the darkness.

**The Joining:** Reach your hands out to one another to join together for the time of this ritual. [The group touches hands, palm to palm, fingers up.]

Pull your energy up from Mother Earth and down from Father Sky and blend with it with your own personal energy at the solar plexus. Move that energy from your solar plexus out your right hand, projecting into the left hand of the person next to you. Receive the energy through your left hand from the right hand of the person on the other side. Feel the energy as it courses hand-to-hand, person-to-person, heart-to-heart, and spirit-to-spirit, joining us together for the duration of this ceremony. See the strands of energy wrapping around one another, blending the energy of the Divine with our own personal energies into an impenetrable bond that connects us. As you lower your hands, continue to feel that we are joined together by our combined energies, even though we are no longer touching. Those who are within the circle become the circle. Those who manifest the will, become the means. The circle is cast.

**The Invitation:** We ask for the blessings of Earth, Air, Fire and Water on this ceremony. The Earth surrounds us. The Fire heats our rocks. The Air carries the heat. The Water creates our steam. We ask for the blessings of God and Goddess to be with us now and bless the ceremony and our harvest year.

**The Activity:** Breathe deeply of the steam around you. Feel the sweat as it pours out of your body, taking with it the toxins that have built up in your body systems. Feel the sweat as it goes from sticky and toxic to clear and clean. Feel your lungs welcome the steam. Feel them expand and feel the impurities clear. As you breathe in and out, feeling the heat around you here in the darkness, connect with the spark of light. [The candle is lit.]
See how one spark of light illuminates the darkness. See the glow from the flame and notice the layers of color within its light. See it dance and shift, just as we will shift and adjust our goals in the coming 6 weeks. Connect with the light and feel it move within you and connect with your spirit. Feel the spark of light ignite your spirit and wake it for the harvest year. Feel the spark bring your spirit forward out of the stillness; out of the dark of Samhain. See the ideas begin to dance in your mind.

Bring your mind into focus of your life and how it is right now. Visualize the important people in your life. See the things you do in a day. Objectively see yourself and your place in the world. Bless the parts of your life that you love and say thank you for them. Now see the parts of your life that you would change. Imagine how you would like to have your life be different in the fall. Start off with an idea and then flesh out the vision into full texture. Imagine how you would feel with those changes accomplished. If you find an idea that does not feel right in the image of fruition, discard it and possibly come back to it later. Entertain a number of ideas, visualize them as accomplished and decide whether or not they fit. [Allow several minutes for individual visualization.]

**The Release:** Now bring your mind back to the present; to this reality. Focus again on the light of the candle and thank it for the spark it created in your mind. Take those images with you as you create your list this week. To take some of the first spark of the year, light your own candle from the group flame. When everyone has lit their candle, take a moment and feel the earth beneath your body and the hot air all around you. Know that when you emerge from the sweat lodge into the cold air, it will be like a birth of sorts. It will be the first time that you emerge into a life where your new ideas have been created. Take your candle with you and extinguish it in the night air to use later as you compose your list.

**The Communion:** [Pieces of bread, cake or cookies are provided, as well as a drink. No one consumes until we do so together. Everyone holds up their cake.]

We share this cake in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by the four elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a piece of the cake back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone crumbles a bit of the cake on the ground.]

We share this drink in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by God and Goddess. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a bit
As above; so below.

*The Graciousness:* We give thanks to the earthly elements of which all things are formed and forged for blessing our ceremony and for the bounty they provide to us. We give thanks to God and Goddess for blessing our ceremony and speaking to us through the Spark of light of how we can best change our lives. May there be peace between us now and forever. So be it.

*The Untwining:* Reach your hands out to one another and feel the energy that still pulses between us, joining us together. Begin to gently unwind your energy strands away from those of the others in the group and pull it back into yourself. You will find that there is additional energy created by the synergistic effect of the circle. Feel the energy slow as it passes through your hands from person to person. See the strands unwinding one from another and moving back into the person from which they came. When your energy has returned to you, move your hand away from the persons next to you and touch the ground to release any residual energy. The circle is open, but unbroken.

[At this time, the Spark candle is extinguished, the door to the sweat lodge is moved and the ceremony is ended.]
Imbolc

*Setting:* [The setting is in a living room, decorated with many lit candles. Electric lights are off, so the room is illuminated only by candlelight. Soft music plays in the background. Everyone is seated on couches around our large coffee table.]

*The Opening:* We come here on this night to celebrate the quickening of warmth and new life within the earth. At this, the time of Imbolc, we light candles just as the ancient ones did to symbolize the flame of warmth that quickens within the Mother Earth. This also represents the quickening of new life that now exists in our minds after 6 weeks of planning since Yule.

This is a time of commitment and we will offer up our goals for the year to The Universe to bless and confirm or alter and redirect. The coming weeks will tell us what to plant in the spring for our own greatest good and positive growth. We will now join together for the time of the ceremony.
**The Joining:** Reach your hands out to one another to join together for the time of this ritual. [The group touches hands, palm to palm, fingers up.]

Pull your energy up from Mother Earth and down from Father Sky and blend with it with your own personal energy at the solar plexus. Move that energy from your solar plexus out your right hand, projecting into the left hand of the person next to you. Receive the energy through your left hand from the right hand of the person on the other side. Feel the energy as it courses hand-to-hand, person-to-person, heart-to-heart, and spirit-to-spirit, joining us together for the duration of this ceremony. See the strands of energy wrapping around one another, blending the energy of the Divine with our own personal energies into an impenetrable bond that connects us. As you lower your hands, continue to feel that we are joined together by our combined energies, even though we are no longer touching. Those who are within the circle become the circle. Those who manifest the will, become the means. The circle is cast.

**The Invitation:** [We all continue to hold hands, now in the normal fashion rather than fingers up, and sing the following as candles of the appropriate color for each of the elements.]

Earth, Air, Fire and Water are lit in turn as they are called:]  

We call the Earth to us, come by here.  

We call the Air to us, come by here.  

We call the Fire to us, come by here.  

We call the Water to us, come by here.  

God and Goddess, come by here.  

[We pause for a moment to honor the energies that have come to us.]  

**The Activity:** [A bowl of dry black beans is provided for the group. Everyone takes a bean from the bowl for each of their goals. We go around the group one by one and as we]
come to an individual, they choose one of their goals. They tell us what it is, why they want it and what it will accomplish for them. When they finish, we tell them in unity...

“We offer the energy of the group to bless your goal.”

[We then pass on to the next person and the process repeats. We go around the circle as many times as is needed for every single goal to be explored and blessed. We then hold the beans in our hands and ask that the bean receive our goals and represent our goals with its life process. The beans are then kept to be planted at Ostara. If we receive redirects over the next 6 weeks, the individual will re-consecrate the bean. Placing the goal into the bean and then offering it for the group blessing represents our commitment to the goal.]

**The Release:** [Since the energy is instilled into the beans, we do not need to release it for this ceremony. It will remain active.]

**The Communion:** [The bread used should be a fairly stale sourdough and the drink should be a very sweet grape juice or apple juice.]

Take the bread and eat it. This bread will nourish you. It will stave off hunger, but it is sour and dry. It is will sustain you, but it is not pleasant or delicious. It would be slightly better with butter, jelly or other toppings, but as it is now, it is no way to live. This bread is the old life that you give up with your new goals. This bread is the part of your life that is old and outmoded. Your old way of being in the world is life and it will sustain you, but it lacks richness, perfection and joy. Once, the bread you were eating was moist and full of flavor, just as the choices that brought you to your old life were appropriate and vibrant for what they needed to provide to you. Now, they are ready to be cast away in favor of a new life. They are to be thanked and released with love. Release a part of your old life into the cauldron to be returned to the earth. [A few crumbs of the dry bread are put into a small cauldron by each person to be returned to the earth after the ceremony.]

Now, see the drink in your glass. Its color is bold and strong. It carries within it the sweetness of new life. Taste your new life over your old, but leave a few drops to return to the earth. [Everyone (gratefully) drinks their juice and dribbles a little into the cauldron. Together they say...]
As above, so below.

The Graciousness: We give thanks to the earthly elements of which all things are formed and forged for blessing our ceremony and for the bounty they provide to us. We give thanks to God and Goddess for hearing our words and providing us with clear confirmations and redirects over the next 6 weeks. May there be peace between us now and forever. So be it.

The Untwining: Reach your hands out to one another and feel the energy that still pulses between us, joining us together. Begin to gently unwind your energy strands away from those of the others in the group and pull it back into yourself. You will find that there is additional energy created by the synergistic effect of the circle. Feel the energy slow as it passes through your hands from person to person. See the strands unwinding one from another and moving back into the person from which they came. When your energy has returned to you, move your hand away from the persons next to you and touch the ground to release any residual energy. The circle is open, but unbroken.

[The participants are provided with a plastic bag to carry their beans, which they take home with them to protect until Ostara, paying careful attention for confirmations and redirects in the interim.]
**Setting:** [We are outside, weather permitting, and have been drumming and chanting to raise energy before the ceremony. The area is decorated with spring flowers. A small fire is burning in the cauldron or fire pit. Enough small peat pots and potting soil is available for each person present.]

**The Opening:** We are gathered here to celebrate Spring Equinox, to honor the new life that is to come, to begin the active part of our agricultural year and plant our goals to harvest in the fall. Raise your hands to one another to cast the circle through us.

**The Joining:** Reach your hands out to one another to join together for the time of this ritual. [The group touches hands, palm to palm, fingers up.]

Pull your energy up from Mother Earth and down from Father Sky and blend with it with your own personal energy at the solar plexus. Move that energy from your solar plexus out
your right hand, projecting into the left hand of the person next to you. Receive the energy through your left hand from the right hand of the person on the other side. Feel the energy as it courses hand-to-hand, person-to-person, heart-to-heart, and spirit-to-spirit, joining us together for the duration of this ceremony. See the strands of energy wrapping around one another, blending the energy of the Divine with our own personal energies into an impenetrable bond that connects us. As you lower your hands, continue to feel that we are joined together by our combined energies, even though we are no longer touching. Those who are within the circle become the circle. Those who manifest the will, become the means. The circle is cast.

**The Invitation:** [The group welcomes and honors the elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water by chanting. Suggested chants to use are “Earth My Body, Water My Blood, Air I Breathe, Fire is My Spirit” or “The Earth, The Air, The Fire, The Water” or a similar elemental chant. If you have access to youtube.com, you will be able to hear these chants. They are also available on our CUSP website at [www.thecuspway.com](http://www.thecuspway.com).]

**The Activity:** [Everyone brings out their beans from Imbolc and we go around the group, talking about any confirmations or redirects they received. The bowl of black beans is available for anyone who needs to bless a new goal and put it into the bean. Any beans representing goals that were redirected are placed into the fire of the cauldron or the fire pit. New beans are instilled with their new goals as appropriate. Each person receives their peat pot full of potting soil and we ceremonially plant our goals/beans into the soil.]

We ask for the blessings of the elements onto these goals.

May the earth hold our goals as they grow. [We pick up a bit of the soil and feel it]

May the rains bless our goals as they grow. [We pass around a glass of water and everyone gives their soil a drink.]

May the winds of change blow over us. [We pass around a small censor and everyone waves incense smoke over their pots.]

May the Sun shine brightly and bless our goals. [Everyone walks past the fire and dips their pot into it.]
[Everyone holds up their pots to the sky.] May the blessings of God and Goddess be upon our goals.

**The Release:** [No release is needed for this ritual since the energy goes into the planting of the goals.]

**The Communion:** [Pieces of bread, cake or cookies are provided, as well as a drink. No one consumes until we do so together. Everyone holds up their cake.]

We share this cake in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by the four elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a piece of the cake back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone crumbles a bit of the cake on the ground.]

We share this drink in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by God and Goddess. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a bit of the drink back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone lets a bit of the drink drip onto the ground and then everyone together says...]

As above; so below.

**The Graciousness:** We give thanks to the earthly elements of which all things are formed and forged for blessing our ceremony and for the bounty they provide to us. We give thanks to God and Goddess for blessing our ceremony and blessing our goals. May there be peace between us now and forever. So be it.

**The Untwining:** Reach your hands out to one another and feel the energy that still pulses between us, joining us together. Begin to gently unwind your energy strands away from those of the others in the group and pull it back into yourself. You will find that there is additional energy created by the synergistic effect of the circle. Feel the energy slow as it passes through your hands from person to person. See the strands unwinding one from another and moving back into the person from which they came. When your energy has returned to you, move your hand away from the persons next to you and touch the ground to release any residual energy. The circle is open, but unbroken.
Setting: [Outside. The fire pit is prepped for a huge fire, but it not lit until just prior to entry. Charcoal briquettes are pre-lit in the iron cauldron and are red by the time the ceremony starts. The maypole has been set with enough ribbons for each participant.]

The Opening: [Before the ceremony, participants are chosen to play the role of Spirit, Earth, Air, Fire and Water. They recite the following...]

S: Why do we come here on this day?

ALL: To celebrate the rites of May

E: It is the time of the great fertilization
A: To feed the seeds of our creation
F: At Yule we saw the spark of light
W: Imbolc showed us our choices were right
S: With spring’s new life we plant the seed
E: With Beltane’s fire our goals gain speed
A: At Summer the crops show in the field
F: At Lammas first harvest gives forth its yield
W: At Mabon our boon from above comes in
S: At Samhain we burn and begin again
E: The wheel now turns and the spiral ascends
A: The efforts of man and God now blends
F: Our goals are made manifest; new life is known
W: As we now fertilize seeds we’ve sown.
S: By light of day and dark of night
E: We ask for blessings upon this rite.
ALL: In the company of our friends and kin, let the rites of Beltane now begin!
[Big cheers from everyone. The group leader then says...]

Beltane is the time of the year when we fertilize the efforts we planned in the winter and planted in the spring. Beltane is a time of great faith, for we cannot yet see the results of our efforts, but if we disturb the work in progress, it could die and yield us nothing. We should not dig up in doubt what we have planted in good faith.

*The Joining:* Reach your hands out to one another to join together for the time of this ritual. [The group touches hands, palm to palm, fingers up.]

Pull your energy up from Mother Earth and down from Father Sky and blend with it with your own personal energy at the solar plexus. Move that energy from your solar plexus out
your right hand, projecting into the left hand of the person next to you. Receive the energy through your left hand from the right hand of the person on the other side. Feel the energy as it courses hand-to-hand, person-to-person, heart-to-heart, and spirit-to-spirit, joining us together for the duration of this ceremony. See the strands of energy wrapping around one another, blending the energy of the Divine with our own personal energies into an impenetrable bond that connects us. As you lower your hands, continue to feel that we are joined together by our combined energies, even though we are no longer touching. Those who are within the circle become the circle. Those who manifest the will, become the means. The circle is cast.

**The Invitation:** [The person representing each of the elements invites that element to bless the ceremony using words similar to this...]

We ask for the blessings of ______ upon this ceremony. Be with us now.

[God and Goddess are NOT invoked at this time.]

**The Activity:** [Selected women from the group go to the cauldron and drop fragrant herbs to represent various attributes onto the smoldering coals and say...]

In the name of Goddess, I bless the fields with... [she names the attribute the herb conveys, such as “love,” “prosperity,” “health,” etc. When the last blessing is given, the women say in unison...]

So be it.

[Beltane is the only celebration in our particular group practice where the Great Rite is performed. At this time, Eric and I, as circle leaders, use carefully selected music to invoke the God into Eric, the Goddess into me, and then enact the seduction of the Maiden by the Creator and culminate in the symbolic joining of a wand into a chalice.]

[Ribbons of two different colors are used on the maypole. Participants choose a ribbon and stand so that the ribbon colors are alternated in the circle. Everyone faces the same direction initially, then the leader instructs those who are holding a particular color to turn around 180 degrees and face the opposite direction. As peppy music plays, the dancers weave over and under one another. In theory, a person holding a ribbon will go under the first ribbon]
that comes toward them and then over the next ribbon that comes toward them. They continue winding until the maypole is completely wound or no one can get close enough to the pole to continue. When it is completed, it should look like this:

Another cheer goes up from the crowd at a job well done.

**The Release:** [The leader lights the bonfire and it blazes up. The fire pit should be of a size that an average person can jump over it. If there are participant who are uncomfortable jumping the fire, it is acceptable to walk closely around the fire pit — it worked for those cattle, remember). Energetic music plays.]

This is the time when we jump the fire and burn away the last of the obstacles to a successful harvest!
[Participants clap as everyone takes turns jumping over the fire as they are moved to do so, focusing on the fire removing their obstacles to success. When the music ends, there are big cheers again.]

**The Communion:** [Pieces of bread, cake or cookies are provided, as well as a drink. No one consumes until we do so together. Everyone holds up their cake.]

We share this cake in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by the four elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a piece of the cake back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone crumbles a bit of the cake on the ground.]

We share this drink in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by God and Goddess. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a bit of the drink back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone lets a bit of the drink drip onto the ground and then everyone together says...]

As above; so below.

**The Graciousness:** We give thanks to the earthly elements of which all things are formed and forged for blessing our ceremony and for the bounty they provide to us. We give thanks to God and Goddess for blessing our ceremony and speaking to us through the Spark of light of how we can best change our lives. May there be peace between us now and forever. So be it.

**The Untwining:** Reach your hands out to one another and feel the energy that still pulses between us, joining us together. Begin to gently unwind your energy strands away from those of the others in the group and pull it back into yourself. You will find that there is additional energy created by the synergistic effect of the circle. Feel the energy slow as it passes through your hands from person to person. See the strands unwinding one from another and moving back into the person from which they came. When your energy has returned to you, move your hand away from the persons next to you and touch the ground to release any residual energy. The circle is open, but unbroken.
Setting: Flowers are a CUSP theme of Midsummer. Summer flowers are in abundance at this time and they are seen as the "promise" of the God and Goddess of the coming harvest. Their sweetness and beauty reflect the rewards of the coming new life we will have when our goals are accomplished in the fall. Although Faeries are active all through the year, they are particularly busy during the very magical time of summer. We use the Midsummer ritual to honor the Faeries and other benevolent little critters indigenous to the area. Each Midsummer, we create a place for them, either a circle of stones or an altar with tiny "toys," like shiny objects, pretty stones, pennies, flowers and other things the Faeries like.

The Opening: At Midsummer, the crops stand tall, proud and strong in the field and the sense is that the harvest is assured. The crop, however, is still immature and now is not the time to rush the process. Care is still needed to bring about a successful harvest and although
we may, in our own lives, see direct evidence of how the harvest will manifest, it's not usually here yet and patience is still advised. We are gathered here to celebrate the height of the Sun's power in the sky and herald in the coming dark of the year. Male energy is strong and we welcome the Faeries join us in our sacred place to celebrate and bless the growing, healthy crops in the field. We see the promise of the wonderful bounty that is to come both in the healthy plants and the beautiful flowers that God and Goddess send to us at this time.

**The Joining:** Reach your hands out to one another to join together for the time of this ritual. [The group touches hands, palm to palm, fingers up.]

Pull your energy up from Mother Earth and down from Father Sky and blend with it with your own personal energy at the solar plexus. Move that energy from your solar plexus out your right hand, projecting into the left hand of the person next to you. Receive the energy through your left hand from the right hand of the person on the other side. Feel the energy as it courses hand-to-hand, person-to-person, heart-to-heart, and spirit-to-spirit, joining us together for the duration of this ceremony. See the strands of energy wrapping around one another, blending the energy of the Divine with our own personal energies into an impenetrable bond that connects us. As you lower your hands, continue to feel that we are joined together by our combined energies, even though we are no longer touching. Those who are within the circle become the circle. Those who manifest the will, become the means. The circle is cast.

**The Invitation:** [The person representing each of the elements invites that element to bless the ceremony using words similar to this...]

We ask for the blessings of ______ upon this ceremony. Be with us now.

[The person representing spirit issues the same invitation to God and Goddess]

**The Activity:** [Yellow or gold flat marbles, enough for each participant to take one, are left out in the sunlight for a couple of hours before the ceremony to absorb the heat. They are distributed to each person.]

Feel the warmth of the Sun that has been instilled into these stones. Feel the life the Sun has given these pieces. They are The Sun's token to you; the promise that the harvest will come and you will be protected always. Feel the strength that burgeons within the stone. Take
this stone home and put it on your altar or carry it with you in a mojo bag or pocket to bless the harvest until its completion at Samhain.

A designated participant welcomes the Faeries and dedicates the new area to their enjoyment as an offering of friendship.

**The Release:** [The group is led in a cone of power toward the goal of protecting the nearly ready harvest. The chant for the cone of power is...]

High and strong, strong and high, harvest time is drawing nigh!

[Start the chant off slow and soft, faster and louder until a roaring climax as the energy releases.

The Cone of Power is a practice frequently used in our CUSP group to discharge the raised energy of our circle. It is very important to remember that when you raise energy in a ceremony, it needs to be discharged to a particular goal or embedded into an object such as the seeds we plant. The cone of power can be performed in a number of ways. The basic premise is that an energy building exercise is done in the joined circle of energy, built to a climax, and then released upward and outward toward the goal of the ceremony.

The energy may be raised in any number of ways. A simple chant may be repeated over and over. We have found it best to keep the number of words chanted for a cone of power to a minimum to condense the energy. The words should flow rhythmically and be spoken clearly and intently. The cadence should build and quicken and when the energy is at its highest, the group leader gives the signal (usually a shout or a particular movement or even a "Three, two, one" countdown.) that tells everyone to release the energy and fall into silence. This practice is extremely profound.

Rather than chanting (or in addition to), the energy may also be built with musical instruments or with rhythmic humming that builds to a climax. Hand movements (such as squeezing the left hand and then the right of the persons beside you to create a pulse around the circle) or dancing may also be used to build the energy.
Once the energy releases, any additional energy should be grounded by touching the earth or a stone.]

**The Communion:** [Pieces of bread, cake or cookies are provided, as well as a drink. Our customary drink for Litha is sweet, fresh lemonade. No one consumes until we do so together. Everyone holds up their cake.]

We share this cake in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by the four elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a piece of the cake back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone crumbles a bit of the cake on the ground.]

We share this drink in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by God and Goddess. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a bit of the drink back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone lets a bit of the drink drip onto the ground and then everyone together says...]

As above; so below.

**The Graciousness:** We give thanks to the earthly elements of which all things are formed and forged for blessing our ceremony and for the bounty they provide to us. We give thanks to God and Goddess for blessing our ceremony and speaking to us through the Spark of light of how we can best change our lives. May there be peace between us now and forever. So be it.

**The Untwining:** Reach your hands out to one another and feel the energy that still pulses between us, joining us together. Begin to gently unwind your energy strands away from those of the others in the group and pull it back into yourself. You will find that there is additional energy created by the synergistic effect of the circle. Feel the energy slow as it passes through your hands from person to person. See the strands unwinding one from another and moving back into the person from which they came. When your energy has returned to you, move your hand away from the persons next to you and touch the ground to release any residual energy. The circle is open, but unbroken.
Lammas

**Setting:** The Lammas ritual area is decorated with sheaves of wheat, corn still on the husks, fresh vegetables of all sort and brooms. The participants make corn dollies ahead of time. Corn dollies are actually, in our limited artistic ability, more often "corn joints" than "corn dollies." We use corn husks, purchased in the Hispanic section of the grocery store for tamale making, as the wrapper for our corn dollies. We combine aromatic herbs that are affiliated with each of the five elements (earth, air, fire, water and spirit) into five different potpourri blends. You can use books like *The Master Book of Herbalism* by Paul Bereyl and *The Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs* by Scott Cunningham to determine the elemental affiliation of different herbs and determine which are actually "aromatics" and which are actually "stinkies." Choose the "aromatics." Sympathetic essential oils may also be added for increased scent.

Layer two corn husks one on top of another lengthwise to make a slightly longer, doubled husk. Cup it in your hand lengthwise and fill it with the potpourri that is best in keeping with the goals you are harvesting this year. (Water - emotions/intuition, Fire - creativity/passion, Air - education/intellect/change and Earth - healing, prosperity) If more than one goal is being harvested, the herbs may either be combined into one corn dolly or more than one corn dolly can be made. After the dolly is stuffed with the potpourri, the ends are tied off with raffia or hemp twine. Participants bring their corn dolly into ritual with them.
The ceremony area should also include a number of decorative brooms. This is for the Broom Dance to "turn the spiral" to the next holiday on the cycle. Instructions for the dance are included with the “Release” section for this ceremony. We purchased a number of straw brooms from an arts and crafts store (about $2 each). A fire is lit in the cauldron.

**The Opening:** We gather today to celebrate the coming of the First Harvest and to give thanks for the bounty we have received! This is the time when the fruits of our own labors come forth and we see the results of our hard work through the harvest year. The work is not over and in some ways, this is the most demanding time of all, but it is a labor of love and one of instant reward as we see all that we have accomplished.

**The Joining:** Reach your hands out to one another to join together for the time of this ritual. [The group touches hands, palm to palm, fingers up.]

Pull your energy up from Mother Earth and down from Father Sky and blend with it with your own personal energy at the solar plexus. Move that energy from your solar plexus out your right hand, projecting into the left hand of the person next to you. Receive the energy through your left hand from the right hand of the person on the other side. Feel the energy as it courses hand-to-hand, person-to-person, heart-to-heart, and spirit-to-spirit, joining us together for the duration of this ceremony. See the strands of energy wrapping around one another, blending the energy of the Divine with our own personal energies into an impenetrable bond that connects us. As you lower your hands, continue to feel that we are joined together by our combined energies, even though we are no longer touching. Those who are within the circle become the circle. Those who manifest the will, become the means. The circle is cast.

**The Invitation:** [One of the elemental chants from “Suggested CUSP Chants” on www.thecuspway.com may be used to invite the elements.]

**The Activity:** [Each person files past the burning cauldron and drops their corn dolly into the flames. We turn the whole circle at once so everyone is walking in a circle toward the cauldron, which is in the southern quarter. When the last person drops their corn dolly into the cauldron to burn, everyone is where they started again. As it burns, the energy of the herbs is released, blessing the circle and the harvest. In this ritual, as the dollies burn and the circle turns, the song "John Barleycorn Must Die" by Traffic plays. This song is on our CUSP website under “Suggested CUSP Chants” www.thecuspway.com.] This practice honors the sacrifice made by the plant for our own sustenance.
**The Release:** [Brooms are distributed to the group, either to each person, every other person or every 3rd - 4th person depending on how large the group happens to be. Each person faces to the right with their left hand holding the broom extended into the center of the circle like wheel spokes. The group begins to chant rhythmically (you can choose one of the “Suggested CUSP Chants” from www.thecuspway.com or you can write or find one of your own that is appropriate) and walks around the circle with the brooms still extended to the middle of the circle.

Every third or fourth step, the brooms are lifted upwards and the group says "Ho!" or some other expressive expression. However long you broom dance depends on how long you wish or how soon the left arms of your group begins to ache. At the end of the dance, two things should happen. 1) Everyone should end up 1/8 further around the circle than they were when they started. This signifies being another step further along the spiral and 2) A Cone of Power (see “The Release” section of the previous ceremony for instructions) is led, culminating with the brooms all being hoisted powerfully into the air as the energy releases. The focus of the cone of power is giving blessings to the harvest.

**The Communion:** [Cornbread is the traditional Lammas bread, as well as a drink such as apple cider. No one consumes until we do so together. Everyone holds up their cornbread.]

We share this bread in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by the four elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a piece of the cake back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone crumbles a bit of the cornbread on the ground.]

We share this drink in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by God and Goddess. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a bit of the drink back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone lets a bit of the drink drip onto the ground and then everyone together says...]

As above; so below.

**The Graciousness:** We give thanks to the earthly elements of which all things are formed and forged for blessing our ceremony and for the bounty they provide to us. We give thanks to God and Goddess for blessing our ceremony and speaking to us through the Spark of
light of how we can best change our lives. May there be peace between us now and forever. So be it.

_The Untwining:_ Reach your hands out to one another and feel the energy that still pulses between us, joining us together. Begin to gently unwind your energy strands away from those of the others in the group and pull it back into yourself. You will find that there is additional energy created by the synergistic effect of the circle. Feel the energy slow as it passes through your hands from person to person. See the strands unwinding one from another and moving back into the person from which they came. When your energy has returned to you, move your hand away from the persons next to you and touch the ground to release any residual energy. The circle is open, but unbroken.
Mabon

*Setting:* [The ritual area is decorated with haystacks (if outside), corn stalks, grapes, apples and fruits and vegetables of the time. A bowl or basket of walnuts in their shells and a small candle for each participant is on the altar. Also provide a container of sand, large enough to hold all of the candles standing.]

*The Opening:* We are gathered here to celebrate Mabon, to give thanks for the first harvest and welcome in the boon of the God and Goddess. Today, we spend time with our circle friends and family, grateful for all we have received and all that we are to receive. Raise your hands to one another to cast the circle through us.

*The Joining:* Reach your hands out to one another to join together for the time of this ritual. [The group touches hands, palm to palm, fingers up.]

Pull your energy up from Mother Earth and down from Father Sky and blend with it with your own personal energy at the solar plexus. Move that energy from your solar plexus out
your right hand, projecting into the left hand of the person next to you. Receive the energy through your left hand from the right hand of the person on the other side. Feel the energy as it courses hand-to-hand, person-to-person, heart-to-heart, and spirit-to-spirit, joining us together for the duration of this ceremony. See the strands of energy wrapping around one another, blending the energy of the Divine with our own personal energies into an impenetrable bond that connects us. As you lower your hands, continue to feel that we are joined together by our combined energies, even though we are no longer touching. Those who are within the circle become the circle. Those who manifest the will, become the means. The circle is cast.

**The Invitation:** The elements are welcomed with one of the element chants listed on “Suggested CUSP Chants” from www.thecuspw.com

[Leader says...] We welcome to our ceremony the Goddess of the Field and Grain, She who has birthed the harvest into our lives. We welcome the Goddess of the Wood, Vine and Tree who nurtured the nuts, fruits and berries that grow wild. Be with us now.

[Group says...] Be with us now.

[Leader says...] We welcome the Lord of the Hunt and Protector of the Harvest, He who has kept our crops safe and brought the beasts of the forest to us. We welcome the God of the Green who runs with the mighty stag and brings the Sun to our sky each morning. Be with us now.

[Group says...] Be with us now.

**The Activity:** [The “boon nuts“]: Each participant is given a few of the walnuts from the altar and a sharpie pen. They write their wishes for the others in the group onto the walnuts and then push the walnuts, one by one, into one of the bales of hay.

Circle leader takes the group through a short guided meditation, showing them the fields that are now emptying as the harvest is finalized. Show them the apple trees, the blackberry bushes, the nut trees that are heavy with gifts from the God and Goddess. Show them the blessings we have been given and are to receive. Bring them out of the meditation gently and have each person file past the hay bale and pull a nut from the bale. This will be one
of their blessings or the theme for their boon for the Mabon season. As they take the boon nut, they light one of the small candles and place it in the sand to burn down to solidify their boon.]

**The Release:** [No release is needed for this ceremony because the energy is stored in the boon nut.]

**The Communion:** [Pieces of bread, cake or cookies are provided, as well as a drink. No one consumes until we do so together. Everyone holds up their cake.]

We share this cake in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by the four elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a piece of the cake back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone crumbles a bit of the cake on the ground.]

We share this drink in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by God and Goddess. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a bit of the drink back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone lets a bit of the drink drip onto the ground and then everyone together says...]

As above; so below.

**The Graciousness:** We give thanks to the earthly elements of which all things are formed and forged for blessing our ceremony and for the bounty they provide to us. We give thanks to God and Goddess for blessing our ceremony and speaking to us through the Spark of light of how we can best change our lives. May there be peace between us now and forever. So be it.

**The Untwining:** Reach your hands out to one another and feel the energy that still pulses between us, joining us together. Begin to gently unwind your energy strands away from those of the others in the group and pull it back into yourself. You will find that there is additional energy created by the synergistic effect of the circle. Feel the energy slow as it passes through your hands from person to person. See the strands unwinding one from another and moving back into the person from which they came. When your energy has returned to you, move your hand away from the persons next to you and touch the ground to release any residual energy. The circle is open, but unbroken.
Samhain

Setting: Each participant is asked to bring to the ritual a small, old piece of luggage of some kind that they do not mind discarding, as well as a token or photo that represents a loved one who has passed. The ceremony area is decorated with hay bales, corn shucks and stalks, jack-o-lanterns and other appropriate items. A bonfire is prepped to be lit. Somewhat away from the ceremony area, preferably in a dark area in the West lit by candles or luminaries, a table is set up with a large mirror placed across it. The participant should have the feeling of walking away from the ceremony area as they go to the table. On the mirror is placed a burning candle and a Tarot deck fanned face-down across. There should be room on the table for tokens and photos from their loved ones who have died. As the participants file into the circle, the song "Breaths" by Sweet Honey in the Rock plays. Their sacrificial luggage is carried into the circle with them. ]

The Opening: We are gathered here to celebrate the closure of the harvest time and to enter into the dark of the year. Tonight, we release the harvest and honor the dead who have passed on before us.
**The Joining:** Reach your hands out to one another to join together for the time of this ritual. [The group touches hands, palm to palm, fingers up.]

Pull your energy up from Mother Earth and down from Father Sky and blend with it with your own personal energy at the solar plexus. Move that energy from your solar plexus out your right hand, projecting into the left hand of the person next to you. Receive the energy through your left hand from the right hand of the person on the other side. Feel the energy as it courses hand-to-hand, person-to-person, heart-to-heart, and spirit-to-spirit, joining us together for the duration of this ceremony. See the strands of energy wrapping around one another, blending the energy of the Divine with our own personal energies into an impenetrable bond that connects us. As you lower your hands, continue to feel that we are joined together by our combined energies, even though we are no longer touching. Those who are within the circle become the circle. Those who manifest the will, become the means. The circle is cast.

**The Invitation:** The elements are welcomed with one of the element chants listed on “Suggested CUSP Chants” from www.thecuspway.com

[Leader says...] We welcome to our ceremony the God and Goddess of the Harvest who will lead us into the darkness of Samhain. We will heed their wisdom in the coming months and welcome the Spark of Light from them at Yule God and Goddess, be with us now.

[Group says...] Be with us now.

**The Activity:** [The group is led through a meditation that opens the chakras and channels to commune with the dead.

The leader brings out a broom (one of the ones from the Lammas Broom Dance) and shows it to the group as the last of the harvest. It is then lit at the large end to symbolically set the fields ablaze to purify them for next year’s planting. The burning broom is then thrown into the prepared bonfire to light it.]

**The Release:** [The group is instructed to study their luggage they have brought and imagine what parts of themselves or their lives they do not want to bring with them into the dark of the year. What do they want to burn away? They visualize this going into the baggage and one by one, they go to the bonfire and throw in their "baggage" that they do not want to
take with them into the coming New Year. Participants watch the burning and focus on their release.

In the West, a "door" is opened to the other world and an invitation is given for spirits who are well wishing and "of the light" to join us in our celebration. Participants walk to the table with the mirror and may place a photo or token that reminds them of a loved one who has passed on with whom they wish to have communion. After the invitation is issued, they focus on the photo or token and on the person they wish to visit. If no person is designated, the participant remains open to whoever contacts them during this time. After 10 minutes or so, the spirits are thanked, wished well and asked to return to their usual state.

They also pick up one of the Tarot cards and this is their message for the dark of the year. If there is a Tarot reader in the group, that person may interpret the card or the participant can determine what the card means to them personally. Another idea is to have a basic Tarot book available so that interpretations can be researched if desired.

**The Communion:** [Hot mulled cider and ginger snaps are provided. No one consumes until we do so together. Everyone holds up their cookie.]

We share this cookie in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by the four elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a piece of the cookie back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone crumbles a bit of the cookie on the ground.]

We share this drink in joyful celebration of the bounty provided to us by God and Goddess. We take it within us to allow their blessings to dwell in our bodies and we return a bit of the drink back to the earth to return it to the elements from which it came. [Everyone lets a bit of the drink drip onto the ground and then everyone together says...]

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light of how we can best change our lives. May there be peace between us now and forever. So be it.

**The Untwining:** Reach your hands out to one another and feel the energy that still pulses between us, joining us together. Begin to gently unwind your energy strands away from those of the others in the group and pull it back into yourself. You will find that there is additional energy created by the synergistic effect of the circle. Feel the energy slow as it passes through your hands from person to person. See the strands unwinding one from another and moving back into the person from which they came. When your energy has returned to you, move your hand away from the persons next to you and touch the ground to release any residual energy. The circle is open, but unbroken.
The Graciousness and the Untwining

Thank you so much for your interest in the CUSP Way and for taking the time to share our path with us for the duration of this book. *The CUSP Way* is a labor of love that is many years in the making and over that time, we have never ceased to feel blessed that we were the ones chosen to birth this lovely and rewarding spiritual path into the world.

We are very well aware that it is not for everyone. But then, no spiritual path really is, is it? This is what works for us and literally thousands of other people around the world. We are delighted to now share it with you.

Please feel free to visit us at our website at [www.thecuspway.com](http://www.thecuspway.com). We look forward to hearing about your own CUSP experiences.

~Eric & Katrina Rasbold, 2012
About the Creators of CUSP

Eric and Katrina Rasbold are the co-founders of CUSP and have been developing the path and teaching its principles to students since 1997. They are happily married and live in the remote mountain community of Grizzly Flats, California where they enjoy a rural, blessed lifestyle. They have six children, some of whom are adults and some who are younger.

Both Eric and Katrina are avid students of human spirituality and have devoted their entire adult lives to the exploration of the many ways human beings connect to God and vice versa.

Eric is a veteran's representative in El Dorado County, California and a full time college student. He is also a professional gold miner. Katrina is an author, instructor, public speaker, and life coach. She holds a Ph.D. in religion and is working toward her M.A. in psychology.

Katrina’s books, lectures and classes are available through [www.katrinarasbold.com](http://www.katrinarasbold.com).
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Other Books by the Authors

**Energy Magic** - This is the book that started it all! Now in its 2nd edition, *Energy Magic* gives the basic overview of how to use bio-universal energy (from yourself and from God) to manifest positive life changes. While the books listed below that are a part of the Bio-Universal Energy Series go into in depth explorations of the ideas mentioned in this book, *Energy Magic* shows you the whole system and how it works. Read *Energy Magic* to lay the foundation for future study, then use the Bio-Universal Energy Series to build on that established structure. – *Part of the Bio-Universal Energy Series*

**Properties of Magical Energy** - What speeds up magical energy? What slows it down? This book will take a detailed look at the specific properties of magical energy and apply current principles of physics to this sacred subject. Give your magic more impact by eliminating obstacles and using particular procedures and tools to increase its flow. – *Part of the Bio-Universal Energy Series*

**Reuniting the Two Selves** - We each have two “selves” within us that work to create not only our personality, but also our life experience. They are the Higher Self and the Conscious Self. While at one time in our history, those selves were in close communication, a de-emphasis on the spiritual aspect of life in our society has caused those selves to become divorce from one another so that it is difficult for them to interact. This book discusses in depth how to reunite your two selves and use them effectively to create a magical life that you love to live. – *Part of the Bio-Universal Energy Series*

**Magical Ethics and Protection** - Although each person must establish and follow their own moral code of magical practice, there are certain basic premises that always seem to apply. This book takes a look at how a person can achieve their goals without sustaining karmic backlash. The book also has a section on how to magically cleanse, empower, bless, and protect yourself and your home. – *Part of the Bio-Universal Energy Series*

**The Art of Ritual Crafting** - This book goes into detail about the optimal process for creating an effective and sacred ritual for reaching up to the Divine and working to manifest our positive life goals. – *Part of the Bio-Universal Energy Series*
The Magic and Making of Candles and Soaps - This book gives detailed instructions on the making of soy and paraffin candles, as well as poured goats milk base soap. The process of storing energy into soaps and candles is explored in depth. – *Part of the Bio-Universal Energy Series*

Days and Times of Power - On what days and at what times should you perform energy work to maximize particular energies you want to emphasize? This book gives helpful hints on solar and lunar aspects, as well as holidays, weather conditions, and times when the veil between the worlds is at its thinnest. A technique is also included for how to store the energy of particular days and times to be used in later work.

Crossing The Third Threshold - Too often Pagan leaders feel that they are alone and that no one understands the stresses involved with leading a group of people while you are trying to go through your own life lessons at the same time. This book is not specifically a “how to” manual, but more of an “I get it. I hear you.” hug. In addition to a number of musings about the joys and sorrows of passing beyond third level/degree, this book also includes excerpts from the author’s own book of shadows.

How to Create a Magical Working Group - This booklet gives thoughtful consideration for those who wish to form a magical group. In addition to helpful guidelines, an extensive set of sample by-laws is included.

An Insider’s Guide to the General Hospital Fan Club Weekend - This book is a fun and informative guide to the premier General Hospital fan event of the year! With over 260 photographs from the author’s personal collection and countless helpful tips for successfully navigating the weekend, you will have full guidance for this fabulous event! An extensive section is also included on other activities recommended for additional fun in the area.

Leaving Kentucky in the Broad Daylight details Katrina’s life growing up in rural Kentucky in the 1960-1970s. Her lively and eccentric family adventures will make you laugh and cry in the same moment. Not always fun, but never boring, growing up in the Chapman family was always an adventure.