

Samhain Ritual to Honor the Forgotten Dead

Take a moment at Samhain to remember those who have been forgotten.



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By
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As Samhain rolls around and the veil grows thin each year, many people in the Pagan community take the opportunity to hold rituals honoring the dead. This may take the form of setting up an altar to honor the ancestors, or to hold a vigil for those who have crossed over in the past year. In general, we're pretty good about remembering those who have touched us, whether they were family of the blood or of the spirit.

However, there's one group that is typically overlooked at this time of year. It's the people who passed through the veil with no one to mourn them, no one to remember their names, no loved ones left behind to sing their names with honor.

Think of the people out there, not just in your community, but around the country who are buried with no headstone, because there was no one to pay for a marker. Consider the old woman in

a nursing home or care center, who died with no children or nieces and nephews to bid her farewell in the final moments. What about the homeless veteran who used to panhandle on your city's streets, who one day just stopped showing up at the corner, and is now buried in an unmarked plot with dozens of others just like him? How about the children who are lost, for whatever reasons, in our world, and die alone, whether by violence or neglect or illness? What about those who were once remembered, but now their gravestones lie untended and ignored?

These are the people that this ritual honors. These are the ones whose spirits we honor, even when we do not know their names. This ritual can be performed by a solitary practitioner or a group. Keep in mind that while you can perform this rite as a stand-alone ritual, it also works well being incorporated in at the end of your other Samhain rituals.

You will need a collection of candles in colors and sizes of your choice – each will represent a group of forgotten people. If there's someone specific you know of, who died alone, choose a candle to represent that person as well. For this sample ritual, we'll use a candle for men, one for women, and another for children, but you can group people in any way that works for you.

If your tradition requires you to cast a circle, do so now. Even if your tradition doesn't require it, it's a good idea to have designated sacred space of some sort for this ritual, because you're going to be inviting the dead to stand outside and watch you. You can do a simple delineation of the circle with string, birdseed, salt, or other markers. Another alternative is to simply create sacred space around the participants. Or, you can do a full-on circle casting.

Decorate your altar as you normally would for Samhain, and include the collection of unlit candles in a prominent

position. *Safety tip: put the smaller ones at the front, and the taller ones behind them, so there's less chance of you setting your own sleeve on fire as you light them.*

Particularly if you're doing this during the Samhain season, there's a lot of activity crossing back and forth over the veil, so it's a good idea to take a moment to meditate and get grounded before you begin. When you're ready to start, say:

- *Now is the season of Samhain. It is the season of our ancestors, of our glorious dead, of those who have fallen and crossed over the veil from this world to the next. This is a time for us to honor them and pay tribute.*
- *Tonight, in the darkness, under this starry sky, we remember those who were forgotten. Tonight we memorialize you, the unknown, the unloved, the unwanted of our world. Whoever you may have been in life, tonight, now, in death, you are ours as you watch from the other side, at least for a little while.*

Light the first candle, representing the group of your choice. Again, for purposes of this ritual, we'll assign this candle to the women:

- *Women who were lost to us, how did you pass? Were you old and alone, crossing over with no one but your own ghosts to keep you company? Were you young and healthy, taken from us unexpectedly, your crossing as much a surprise to you as to anyone else? Does your body lie in a cold office somewhere, waiting to be claimed? Or do you lie under the stars tonight, in a field or a forest where you'll never be seen? Forgotten women, your spirits are with us tonight, watching us from outside the circle. We remember you and want you to know you are honored. You are remembered.*

Light the second candle, for the second group you are honoring:

- *Men who were lost to us, how did you pass? Did you die in a strange place, far from your family and friends, lost to everyone but your own demons? Were you in the prime of your life, or creeping along against the ravages of old age, watching as disease and neglect took their toll on you? Are you buried in an unmarked plot in a potter's field somewhere, or do you lie under these glorious stars tonight? Forgotten men, your spirits are with us tonight, watching us from outside the circle. We remember you and want you to know you are honored. You are remembered.*

Light the next candle, for additional groups you may be honoring:

- *Sweet children, crossed over from this world to the next. Your lives were far too short, for whatever reason, and you left us before you grew. On the other side, perhaps there is a mother to hold you when you need to feel loved, a father to comfort you when you are afraid, a big brother or sister to guide you on your journey. Wherever you may lie, and whether you were big or very, very small, your spirits are with us tonight, watching us from outside the circle. We remember you and want you to know you are honored. You are remembered.*
- *All of you, women, men, children... you may have crossed over unnoticed when you left this world, but for now, you are remembered. You are unforgotten. You are honored by us this night of Samhain, and if it helps you along your journey, then so may it be. Know that this night, you are with us in memory and spirit. Know that you are no longer the lost and unreachable dead.*

Take a moment to meditate on what you have just said. See if you can feel the presence of the lost ones as you stand at your altar. You may notice a distinct shift in the energy you're feeling, and

that's normal. It's also why this next part of the ritual is very important: you've invited them to watch you, and now you need to send them on their way.

- *Spirits, guests from the place beyond, it is time. We have honored you and celebrated your names, though we may not have known you in life. Now is the time for you to move on. Go back to the places from which you came, to the places to which you belong as one of our beloved dead. Go back, knowing that this night, you were honored and remembered. Go back across the veil, and remain in that world. You will not be forgotten again, and we will honor you with our memories. Farewell, rest easy, and may the coming parts of your journey be worthy of you.*

Take a few minutes to get yourself centered. End the ritual in whichever way you normally do, breaking down the sacred space. Extinguish the candles, and offer a quick final blessing of farewell to each group as the smoke drifts away into the night.

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