**Autumn Equinox 2016-Celebration of Balance: Holding On and Letting Go**

**Things We Each Need To Bring and Do:**

**Debby:** (the words I want to write on my leaves to let go, pre-done)/ lighter / twinkle lights / acorns & harvest produce-pomegranates / chafing dishes / Decorations for brooms-make labels for the properties of the herbs, etc. so they know what energy they are attaching to the broom  */* autumn cloths and alter stuff / staplers /baskets for strips to be kept by tables / wood for fire & starter / trays (to put decorating items on so they can be easily transferred to the tables) / bell / paper clips / scissors and wire cutters / materials for alters for: Earth-Salt, Air-Incense, Fire-Candle and Water / ice / buckets for water by fire pit / card tables/ computer with music / sharpies for apron strips / speakers and iPad for music

**Food &** **Write:**

* **Flyer:** What do you want to keep? What do you want to release? /unique drinking vessels you will recognize / Brooms?
* “Cleansing & *Consecrating the Brooms”*: Ideas from: [**http://paganwiccan.about.com/od/wiccanandpaganrituals/ht/Consecrate\_Tool.htm**](http://paganwiccan.about.com/od/wiccanandpaganrituals/ht/Consecrate_Tool.htm) **Then,**
* **Compile**: Mix of music for computer-*Letting Go music: George Winston, “Autumn” & Sweep music: Benny Goodman, “Sing, Sing, Sing” (not the one that has “with a swing after it.*

**LeeAnn:** Tell Debby of any music for letting go or sweeping that she can add to the mix **/**The words you want to write on your leaves to “Let Go”-pre-done / Leather strips for handle / squirrels for the alter-and other alter items including harvest produce / cauldron (should we decorate it with leaves around it?/ decorations for brooms /writing tool for writing on strips and leaves / ribbons for skirts or brooms / autumn cloths and alter stuff / staplers / trays (to put decorating items on so they can be easily transferred to the tables) / scissors and wire cutters /

**Food &** **Make:**

* Song sheet for “Joining Hands in the Circle”
* Leaf wreath for our heads?

**Jen:**  The words you want to write on your leaves to “Let Go”-pre-done / paper plates / any decorations for brooms / autumn cloths and alter stuff / staplers / trays (to put decorating items on so they can be easily transferred to the tables) / scissors and wire cutters

**Food &** **Make**:

* Leaves-(using colored coffee filters)
* Sheet strips for belt and strips

**Set-up**: Belts in narrow baskets that will be put in the center of the table/ strips in containers at the ends of the tables (ready to be distributed on the table around the belt basket) / Dinner place settings in place / Chafing dishes with food in place / Decorating broom items on a table on trays / twinkle lights up and Alter set up on stage / get fire ready to light with water by it / place cauldron on alter / We 3 sit next to each other –put our cups in the right spots-(LeeAnn next to Debby, then Jen) at the table, so that others can see us modeling the tying on of the belts and blessing / Our belts should have the strips with words on them already. We can add the pre-written leaves as the others staple theirs. / 4 alters for Earth, Air, Fire & Water to be used in Broom ceremony and to face with the Directions / Put out name tags / my broom should be next to Jenny’s on the East side. /Crystal on the Alter

**The Ceremony**

6:30: (All of us) **Outside**-Women gather-We take their alter items and brooms to put in a circle in the center of the 4 direction alters, brush of broom next to cauldron (which is in the middle). Tell them to be sure to go to the bathroom because there aren’t any breaks for that. Show them the outside bathrooms.

6:45-: (Jen) “**Welcome to Autumn Equinox**-“

**Welcome to Autumn Equinox, the transition from light to dark, the time of balance, and the night of the Harvest Moon. Tonight we discover the seeds we need to gather and nurture, and the shedding leaves we no longer need. Along the way, we will blow you gently, like an autumn wind. This means we will sometimes flow into the next activity without verbal direction: we will show you where to move, and what to do once there. Please allow us to sweep you away!**

(As LeeAnn and Debby smudge them with sage in a circle…) **“Behold these maidens of autumn. They are entering the time of darkness. Bless them with the wisdom of the underworld. Give them vision and dreams. Give them Her strength, love and understanding. As the light dies, so is the light reborn. As life ends, so is it begun. As the grain is cut down, so is the new seed planted. May we all harvest well on this day of balance, so our light within shine,s as we travel through the coming days of darkness.**

Then, (**Debby stands next to Jenny**.) Jen drops Debby’s hand and leads us in, (the rest of us still holding hands). She leads us to circle around the East Alter. Drop hands, then, we call in the East. After that’s done, we reconnect holding hands and are lead to the South, etc.

(Debby) Calling in the Circle-Autumn Equinox 2016

*Please turn to the East*

Debby: Spirit of the **East**- land of the rising Sun; of Air, and the winds that blow across the lands; of new beginnings each day, and of open horizons; we ask for your wisdom and blessing here with us today. Please join us, Spirit of the East.

LeeAnn: Spirit of the **South**- place of passion, fire, creation and inspiration; whose warm breath reminds us of summer days- ignite our hearts with love. We ask for your wisdom and blessing here with us today. Please join us, Spirit of the South.

Jen: Spirit of the **West**- land of the setting Sun; of water and Autumn's sweet whisper. Bless us with the knowledge of peace, which follows the harvest of a fruitful life. We ask for your wisdom and blessing here today. Please join us, Spirit of the West.

Debby: Spirit of the **North**- place of quiet stillness, of cave and deep earth; place of thankfulness for the knowledge and blessings that have come to us with time; We ask for your wisdom and blessing here today. Please join us, Spirit of the North.

LeeAnn: Spirit of Mother Earth, you support us each day, welcoming our roots deep into your heart. You nurture and guide us, providing sustenance and support. We thank you for your bounty. We ask for your wisdom and blessing here today. Please join us Spirit of Mother Earth.

Jen: Spirit of Father Sky, of the angelic realms; the countless stars of the night remind us that you are vastly beautiful and majestic beyond all of our knowing or understanding. Your light shines upon the earth both day and night, guiding our steps. We ask for your wisdom and blessing here today. Please join us, Father Sky.

Debby: Spirit of Sister Moon, keeper of tides and feminine power; Your Harvest light shines down on us tonight, filling our souls with magic and healing. We ask for your protection, as we journey within. We thank you for your gifts and ask for your wisdom and blessing here today. Please join us Sister Moon.

LeeAnn: Spirit of our Souls within; place of union, love and reverence; we are grateful for this gift of life and for the love that guides our way. We open our hearts and join with all in love.

(LeeAnn) **Sing: “We are Opening Up to Sweet Surrender**” (Start singing in the circle and then move us to stand behind our chairs at the tables, still singing.)

7:00-7:45: (LeeAnn) –Model holding hands at the table, tell them the words are on their place mat- **Sing : “Joining Hands in the Circle”** (for food blessing). Then we model taking our plates to go get food.

7:15 ish: (Jen) After everyone has their food, share: **History of Autumn Equinox/Mabon**

**Two days a year, in mid-March and mid-September, the Northern and Southern hemispheres receive the same amount of sunlight as they do dark -- the earth is tilted at a right angle to the sun, and the sun is directly over the equator. In Latin, the word equinox translates to "equal night.” The days after autumn equinox will grow shorter, and the nights longer. We are right now in a time of balance, “equal night,” before this shift into darkness begins.**

**It is traditionally a time to celebrate the harvest, as people all around the world have done for millennia. In ancient Greece, Oschophoria was a festival celebrating the harvesting of grapes for wine. In the 1700s, the Bavarians started Oktoberfest which still today is a time of great feasting and merriment. China's Mid-Autumn festival, held on the night of the Harvest Moon, honors family unity. And all around us in nature this harvest is taking place, as the squirrels hurry to collect nuts, our tomatoes (hopefully) are setting one more crop, as they feel the cooling nights and shortening days. The last of the figs and blackberries have come and gone, it’s finally apple and pumpkin season, the last of the year’s fruits waiting to be picked and baked into pie.**

**Many cultures see Fall Equinox as a time of giving thanks. It's when you figure out how well your crops did, how fat your animals have gotten, and whether or not your family will be able to eat during the coming winter. While we celebrate the gifts of the earth, we also accept that the soil is dying. We have food to eat, but the crops are brown and going dormant. Warmth is behind us, cold lies ahead. It is a time to burrow in, to reap what we have sown, and nurture those last seeds we wish to see come to fruition before the wheel of the year turns.**

**Mabon is a modern naming of this celebration: there is no clear history linking this name to any ancient celebrations or Goddesses. Mabon was first used in 1970 by Aidan Kelly, in his book Crafting the Art of Magic. He wanted to assign traditional names to the 8 Sabbats. Autumn Equinox was only referred to as the second harvest, or mid-autumn festival, so he coined the name Mabon, perhaps drawing a name from the Legends of King Arthur, or the Welsh saint, Mabyn. We as your facilitators are not sure how we feel about a women’s celebration named by a man, although we do acknowledge that other ritual groups do include men.**

7:40: (LeeAnn) After most are done eating: Read: **History of Brooms -(**While LeeAnn talks, Jen and Debby bus tables. Then LeeAnn joins us in cleaning.)

**History of Brooms**

**I believe brooms have been around as long as cave dwellers.  We like our comfort. Sweeping is even mentioned in the Bible in both old and new testament.  Early traditional brooms were called besom brooms and made of birch twigs tied to a handle of hazelwood.   It represents the air element and spiritual as well as both male (the handle) and female (the brush).  It physically cleans as well as drives away negative energy. Brooms are placed inside the house with the bristles up to ward off negative energy and to protect the home and all who live within.  It can also be found hanging over the door with the bristles facing in the direction of opening of the door.**

**Jumping the broom is an Afro-American tradition brought from Africa.  The Metis people of Canada have a broom dancing tradition of fast footwork and jumping.  Janism monks and nuns carry a small broom to gently push aside ants and small animals.  In 1797 a Mass. Farmer made a sorgum broom for his wife.  They became very popular. Flat brooms of broom corn were invented by the Shakers in the 19th century.**

**Rich witches rode horses while the poorer ones rode their brooms.  The first “official” record that documents the claim of flying on a broom stick was recorded in 1453.  The claim was made in a confession by a male witch named Guillaume Elelin. During the Burning Times there were hiding places in the broom handle to hide wands and oils and feathers used in ritual. That added to the energy of the intent that the broom was used for. Early accounts tell of decorating our brooms with flowers of the season tied on with some type of decorative string or later using colored ribbon.  A practice that is continued today.**

7:50-8:10: (Debby) **Introduce the Brooms & Consecrating the Brooms**: (While Debby talks, LeeAnn finish cleaning up with Jen and setting out Broom decorating items on the tables. They will be on trays on a side table.)

**The act of creating any ritual object is an act of magic and should be treated like any other sacred ritual activity. Behind the intent to make a ritual object is to focus all parts of your mind (intellect, creativity, imagination and spiritual self) into one purpose-to manifest an object that will be a receptacle for higher forces. The form of the object is not what is important. It is the intent behind your actions that matter.**

**Our intention today is to consecrate a ritual broom to assist us in a cleansing activity. A broom is a tool we use in our homes to gather together the bits of debris and clutter that collect in corners and generally don’t enhance our environment. Well, our bodies and minds are environments that occasionally need a good sweeping out as well. By opening ourselves to the magic within this room and within ourselves, we will imbue into the brooms that we brought with us, the properties that can assist us in sacred work. When working with brooms, when releasing energy in the broom, it’s important to make sure the point faces downward with the flow of water, so negative energy always flows out and away.**

**Before adding energy into the brooms, we first need to cleanse them and make them our own. Many hands and energies have touched your broom. Some of the energy, you may want to retain; other energy you may want to release. What you *do* want to do, is to make any ritual object your own, so that when you connect to it, the energy flows freely between you freely.**

**So, if you would stand by your brooms. Jenny leads us around the East Alter, like before…**

**Cleansing &Consecrating the Brooms**-(On each of the four directions place the following: East- incense, South-candle, West-water, North-Salt

Circle the East Alter, holding the brooms over the incense…

**“At the end of each blessing, we’ll swing our brooms downward, tap the floor, and allow the Guardian energy to flow through the top, and out the staff to be cleansed by Mother Earth. As we do this we’ll say: “Ho!”**

**Powers of the East,Guardians of the Air,We consecrate these broomsand charge them with your energies.We purify them this night, and make these brooms sacred.** “Ho!” (Leave it on the floor for a second so the energy flows through)

Circle the South Alter and passing the brooms over the flame of the candle

**Powers of the South,Guardians of Fire,We consecrate these broomsand charge them with your energies.We purify them this night, and make these brooms sacred. Ho!** (tap to the ground)

Circling the West Alter and passing the brooms over the water. Say:

**Powers of the West,Guardians of Water,We consecrate these brooms and charge them with your energies.We purify them this night, and make these brooms sacred.**

**“Ho!”** (tap on the ground)

Circle the North Alter, with brooms pointed over the salt, say:

**Powers of the North,Guardians of the Earth,We consecrate these brooms and charge them with your energies.We purify them this night, and make these brooms sacred.**

**“Ho!”** (tap on the ground)

Circling in the center and holding the brooms in the air, touching each others, say:

**We charge these brooms in the name of Old Ones,the Ancients, the Sun and the Moon and the Stars.By the powers of the Earth, of Air, of Fire and of Water,We banish the energies of any previous owners,and make them new and fresh.We consecrate these brooms,**

Broom down and 2 hands on it and say 3 times: “It is mine!”--- It is mine!”--- “It is mine, HO!”

“We have different items on the tables to “decorate” your brooms. As you work, stay focused on the energy you wish to bring in. Your broom is now open, clean and waiting to connect with you. We’ll have 20 minutes for this process.”

8:10-8:35: (20 min to decorate) **Decorate Brooms/then bless them** –( Ring bell at 8:30 for 5 minute warning.)

8:35: (Deb) **Ask the women to return with brooms to the circle; holding their brooms (handle up):**

*“Repeat after me…”*

**Besom, besom, broom so bright,**

**I charge you with intent this night,**

**Sweeping power, flow with me**

**As I will, so mote it be.**

Lay brooms down in the circle around the cauldron- handles in; brooms out.

Then, ask for help cleaning up tables, then, put strips down the center of the tables nestled around the baskets, that have belts in them.)

8:45-8:55: (Jen) (10 min total) **Reading: Fall Equinox**, by Miriam Dyak (Mother Tongue Ink, 2015)

**The Goddess weaves her magic through the seasons, endlessly aging and growing young. She gives birth to the wild force of Nature, unleashing her mighty child to grow, and decay - sacrificing her progeny time and again into the vast Dark, feeding the Power of Life. Aaah - time to look at what we have birthed into being this year. What did we bring forth that totally awakened our desire? What of our own creations did we so fall in love with, that we married it down in the marrow of our bones? What now are we getting ready to take with us into the dark?**

**Fall is a time of decision, of gathering in, of choosing what to keep and what to let go. Fall now into our heart of hearts. Dive now into the deep end of the pool of ourselves. Let go now of the above ground. Burrow now into our dream cave taking with us the final harvest, the essential piece that will nourish the root of our being and bring us into our next life.**

**Visualization**- **“What Do We Want to Keep and Nurture?”**

Visualization:

**Close your eyes, and settle into your chair. Take a deep breath in, and out… Breathe in… and out again, releasing anything you are carrying from the day.**

**PAUSE**

**You are walking along a path through the woods. On one side, the trees of the forest reach out with tender branches, brushing their leaves against your skin, as you pass. On the other side, a steep hillside rises up from the forest floor. It is dusk; the time between day and night is upon you.**

**Up ahead, you can just make out the opening of a cave, in the side of the hill. You hesitate at the entrance, but are drawn in by a gently glowing light. You slowly enter.**

**The cave is softly cool, like an autumn evening. As you move in deeper, you see images and words on the cave walls: representations of places, people, and events you have dreamed about. You are in your Dream Cave!**

**You walk further in, and notice a table with a flickering candle, next to a large, comfortable chair. You sit down, sinking into the soft cushions. You breathe deeply, allowing your body to fully…let…go.**

**As you take one more deep breath, you begin to observe the words and images on the cave walls. Some of these images are recent, and they represent things you have been working on: relationships…………projects…….…creations………. self-healing………… Which of these things have totally awakened your desire? Which of these do you want to continue to nurture? What are you choosing to take with you into the dark?**

**LONG PAUSE**

**You stand now, reaching out with your hand. As you do so, one of these images that you have chosen to keep slides off the cave wall and into your open palm. Hold onto it; bring it close where you can observe it. Take note of what is there, then, slip the word or image into your apron pocket for safe keeping.**

**PAUSE**

**Reach up again and again, gathering these images and words one at a time, taking note of each one, then slipping them in your pocket.**

**LONG PAUSE**

**When you have gathered all of the images and words that you want to keep, you are ready to leave your Dream Cave. Take one last look around, then walk back out to the entrance of the cave… slowly open your eyes, and join your sisters in the circle.**

8:55-9:05 (Jen) **Apron Strings Project-Tying the Strips on the Belt:**

**We will be moving to the tables in a moment, and creating our own string aprons.**

**In the center of each table is a basket that contains your apron sash. There are also smaller strips of cloth down the center of the table. We will only use these strips right now, (not the sashes in the basket), to write a word or draw a symbol for the things you gathered in your Dream Cave. Continue writing, using a new strip for each idea, until the bell rings - we will have only 5 minutes to write, so let your mind open and flow as words or images fly forth. These apron strings are reminders: What are you choosing to nurture and work on as you move into the dark time ahead? If you write your words at the bottom of each strip, you will have the option of cutting off that word when you complete the task, making space for new tasks that rise up.**

Ring bell in 5 minutes

**We’re going to tie the strips onto the sashes now. There are also colored ribbons, if you’d like to add some of these to make your apron more festive! When you finish, you can help others add strips and ribbons to their aprons. Leave space on each end to allow for tying your apron on. You’ll have about 5 minutes to do this. Please don’t wear it until we tell you!**

Ring bell again: 5 minutes

**Leave your apron at the table and return to the circle. (If you moved your chair, bring it with you) After 5 minutes ring the bell**

(Jen): ***“Please leave your belts at the table and return to the circle.”***

9:05-9:10: (Debby) (5 min) **Visualization –Letting Go**-

**As you settle back into your chair, close your eyes; drop a grounding cord and let it sink deep into the Mother. Let Her energy rise through the cord and feel the power of Her presence. Through Her, you can understand how change; birth, growth, death, & renewal, is right, and good. You feel how you are a part of this cosmic cycle.**

**She takes your hand and leads you deep into Her forest. The leaves have changed to gold, oranges, & reds. The ground is carpeted with the beautiful colors of fall. She tells you everything needs a time to let go to complete its cycle. She asks you, “What is in your life whose time has come? What are you ready to let go of?”**

**As you walk on, thinking, you see leaves fluttering down and settling to the ground. You look up. There is one falling right toward you. It lands on your shoulder and sticks to it. As you take it off your shoulder and look at it, a word appears on the leaf. You turn to her and read it. The minute you say it, images of the purpose it served for you flit through your mind. All the energy this word carried is held within the leaf. / You look at it thoughtfully; she smiles as you put it in your apron pocket. / Continue walking with Her. Every time a leaf sticks to you, read the word, and learn why it’s time for it to be let go of. Gather as many as you need to.**

**PAUSE-1 min?**

**You take the last leaf and after reading it, you put it in your pocket… / She hugs you and says you’ve done well. As she kisses your forehead, you feel her blessing fill your inner core. She turns and walks away back down the path. As you breathe in the essence of fall you feel so grateful for all the gifts you have received. / You pat your pocket and feel the bulge of leaves that are ready to be released. / Say goodbye to the forest and give thanks. / Slowly pull your grounding cord back up and re-enter this world with your sisters.**

**PAUSE**

**Your pocket is full of things you want to let go of. We’re going to take our chairs and move to the tables where there are leaves and pens. As we did before, allow words to flow out through your hand onto the leaves. Use as many leaves as you wish. What do you want to release from your life? You’ll have 5 minutes to write on as many leaves as you need, so just allow the words to flow. After we write, we’ll have a few minutes to attach them to our belts.**

9:10-9:20: (Debby)-They go to the tables and write on the leaves

9:15: (Deb) **Ring bell after 5 minutes**

***It’s time to attach them to the belts.***

***G*ive the bell to LeeAnn**. (Note: We add our leaves to our belts, too.)

*9:20-9:30: (LeeAnn):* **Putting each other’s aprons on:** *-****Ring bell t****o signal the end of attaching the strips.*

The 3 of us are sitting next to each other. **LeeAnn and Debby stand and model, saying:** ***“Remember you are supported by me, by our group, and by the universe in reaching your goals.” (***You might want to use hand motions to help them remember what to say.)

Then, tie Debby’s belt on her. **Debby turns to all the women and says:**

***“Please find the partner next to you and support them with this blessing and by tying on their apron for them.”***

**Jen:** Stand up and model turning to the partner next to you. (Debby meanwhile continues on blessing LeeAnn.) All others proceed to bless each other and tie on belts. (We are trying to have it all happening at once instead of everyone watching each woman.)

9:30-9:40: (Debby): Leave the table and **turn on the music low**… (George Winston’s, “Autumn Woods”

(Jen): Take the extra leaves and throw them around the room.

( **LeeAnn)**: “**As we dance, we’re going to tear the leaves off our aprons and let them fall to the ground. Each time you let one fall, fill your lungs and your body with breath, knowing you’ve created space which will allow the work you’ve planned for winter, to flourish. Each time you let go, feel your body lighten and expand. Anything you may not have had time to write down, is here, already released! Join us in the “Dancing of the Leaves” and release that which no longer serves you. “**

The 3 of us start dancing and model tearing a leaf from our belt and throwing it in the air.

*(Debby):* **Turn up music as women join us.**

9:30-9:35- (Debby)-**Change the music** **to the Sweeping Song, Benny Goodman, “Sing, Sing, Sing”**

(Jen): (When music changes) **Tell women to “Grab their broom and sweep the leaves into the center toward the cauldron!”**

**All of us:** During the sweeping song start saying…”**Let it Go, (over and over)-maybe add “Sweep it up”**

**(Debby): Go out and start the fire**.

9:35-9:40: End up circled around the cauldron-LeeAnn and Jen model **putting the leaves in the cauldron.**

9:40-9:55: (LeeAnn): After the leaves are in the cauldron…**Ask them to lay their** **brooms on the floor in a circle** –**handles toward the center –**

LeeAnn: Pick up the cauldron and start a conga line saying **“Follow me!”**

(LeeAnn) Begin singing the chant below, with Jen echoing (and hopefully others are following). Jen is the last person to hold the cauldron so she can throw the leaves in the fire.

***Singing:***

**Let it go… let it go,**

**Sweep it up…sweep it up**

**Put it in the cauldron...Put it in the cauldron**

**Take it to the fire…take it to the fire,**

**Burn it all away…burn it all away…Hey!**

(Jen) Put leaves into the fire pit and as you throw **each handful** we all model calling out things that are being released.

(Debby): **1 Thing to Nurture, 1 to Release-Explain that we’ll move into triads w/ 5 min. each**

**“There is probably something that has come to your attention that is the most important item you wanted to release and the most important area that you want to nurture as you move into the darker, reflective days ahead of us. When we go inside we are asking you to form triads in order to share. We’ll have about 5 minutes each to share. We’ll ring the bell when it’s time to switch.”**

(LeeAnn): Sing to return, **“The Earth the Air the Fire the Water…”** as we move back into the building.

9:55-10:10: **Triad Sharing-**After sharing ask them to bring chairs to the circle

10:10-10:30: (Jen) Ring bell: Ask them to “**Return to the full circle**- **Share what came to you in your triad, or you may choose to read from your skirt”**-Give time check-We just have about 1 min. each.

Close: “Stand up with your brooms”-

**We thank the Powers that formed our circle this evening. Thank you for the gifts of protection, magic, wisdom and knowledge that deepened our understanding of the Mystery and of ourselves- as we move into the darkening days ahead. With one sweep, we open our circle.**

Sing: Our closing songs