Persephone  
(Autumn Equinox)

*...* And She dances and spins toward darkness all dressed in autumn fire\  
To descend to the time of shadow, and rest from the world’s desire*...*

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The Year Goddess approaches her Crone time now, as the nights begin to lengthen and the days to shorten once more. We feel her bite, the crispness of the air, the brightness of the moon. Pomegranates and nuts ripen. Storehouses are stocked with the harvest. Demeter yields Her daughter to the underworld. Kore descends to Hades and becomes Persephone, to confront the inevitability of death, change, and separation. This is a time of both mourning and joy, as we face the darkness and look back over the year we have just lived. For many witches, this begins the most powerful of the year—the dark time when the sun’s light recedes to give more focus to the moon and the deep self of the female principle. As Kore must separate from the world, and her Mother for a time, so must each of us undergo this mystery in our lives. Rituals of grieving are appropriate now, as well as acknowledging the rebirth and joy which follows.

The separation between mother and daughter, and that between lovers, are the dominant theme of this time. We are in deep need of rituals that help us through transitions. Many daughters never achieve a full sense of self, remaining dependent and frustrated all of their lives. Many mothers never fully let go of their children. Both are caught and cannot grow to their reunion as equal adults. Most lovers need to undergo a closing ceremony when their passions end. Often splits continue to anger and hurt for many years because of the fear of death and endings, frequently suppressed, and so continues to drain and sicken us indefinitely. The way out is the way through.” We cannot reach rebirth if we cannot allow for death. We know neither life nor death, but a kind of stasis that is void of movement. We fear the deep emotions that arise at such times, following the dictates social propriety, and burying our grief with shame. (There are many cultures that provide mourners at death, or support the open expression of grief.)

Hold the ritual indoors. If you do not have an indoor sacred space, consecrate a living space make an altar. Clear the center of the floor for the circle. Decorate the altar with autumnal plants: seeds, grains, nuts, pomegranates, etc. Drape with a dark color, dark blue or grey, and place an image of the Crone, a skull or bones, dried autumn leaves, autumn-colored candles. Wear autumn colors: rusts, browns, greys and dark blues. Make crowns of autumn leaves for all to wear. Prepare a sumptuous feast, for this is a harvest time. Place the ball of yarn used last Spring Equinox, and beside it a cutting tool, such as an athame or scissors. Prepare some separated pomegranate seeds in a dish.

Cast the circle, breathe, chant Persephone, raise the cone. One by one the lights are all extinguished, and the circle sits in dark and silence while a priestess chants:

The old year wanes.

The moon swells to power.

The sun shrinks, to be reborn.

Maiden and Mother fly apart.

The Crone comes in to Her own.

We celebrate the darkening of the year

With songs of death.

Come moon, give us your kiss

Come Old One,

Give us your wisdom...

Another priestess begins a group relay chant:

We can see in the dark.

All: We can see in the dark.

Priestess: We can feel in the dark.

All: We can feel in the dark.

Priestess: We can live in the dark.

All: We can live in the dark.

Priestess! We can touch in the dark.

All: We can touch in the dark.

Priestess: We can change in the dark.

We can know in the dark, dream, love, make love, be born, die, etc.

All cry and wail and moan, calling out the names of beloved ones who have died, or from whom they have been separated: mothers, children, lovers, friends, etc. Let the wailing build to a crescendo and wane naturally to its conclusion.

The Priestess now lights the altar candles saying:

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.

She takes up the dish of pomegranate seeds and feeds one seed to the first woman, saying:

That which has died shall be reborn.

That which was separated shall be reunited.

Eat my sister of the seeds of death and renewal.

The first woman eats the seed, then takes the dish and does the same for the next woman, and so on around the circle. The last one replaces the dish upon the altar.

Ceremony of bonding and separation: A priestess takes up the ball of yarn asks for the goddess’ five-fold blessing:

Maidens, Mothers and Crones

We call for your blessings and support.

Give us strength for the time of separation,

Wholeness within ourselves,

Deep love for ourselves,

And wisdom from the underworld.

Bless this yarn, symbol of our eternal connection.

Bless it with your holy spirit

Give us vision and dreams

(She holds the yarn up and all place their visions within for the coming winter.)

All: So be it!

Bless it with your holy air

And give us understanding

And Naming power

(She passes it through incense smoke;)

All: So be it!

Bless it with your holy fire,

And give us the power

Of Will and Action

(She passes it over candle flame.)

All: So be it!

Bless it with your holy water

Give us Love

And infinite Compassion

(She sprinkles it with consecrated water.)

All: So be it!

Bless it with your holy earth

And give us harmony within our bodies

And with all nature

(She touches it to the earth.)

All: So be it!

Next, she unwinds the yarn, which is still tied at the ends from last spring, and twines it around all members of the circle. Then she takes her athame or scissors and makes the first cut, saying:

Great is the wisdom of the goddess

For she gives us our time of rest

And separation from the world’s desires

That we may be refreshed and renewed once more

For all forms must die to be reborn.

Now let the cutting crone fulfill her purpose.

She hands the knife on, and all take turns cutting the yarn where it connects between each woman. Priestess turns to the first woman again and takes the severed end, winding it gently around her wrist and tying it with a loose bow. All chant:

May the circle never be broken

May the earth always be whole

May the rattle ever be shaken

May the goddess live in our souls.

All continue the chant as each woman winds the strands of yarn around her neighbor's wrist. All wear their yarn until they get home that night, and then save it upon their altars until the following spring.

The rattle is passed and women share their grief at death or separation, their strengths and recoveries. Members affirm, support, and bless each sharing.

All join hands and close their eyes, visualizing a safe and cozy winter for all

present, for the end of violence, war, rape, etc. upon the planet.

Closing chant:

Maaaaaaaaaa...

Open the circle, share food and good will.