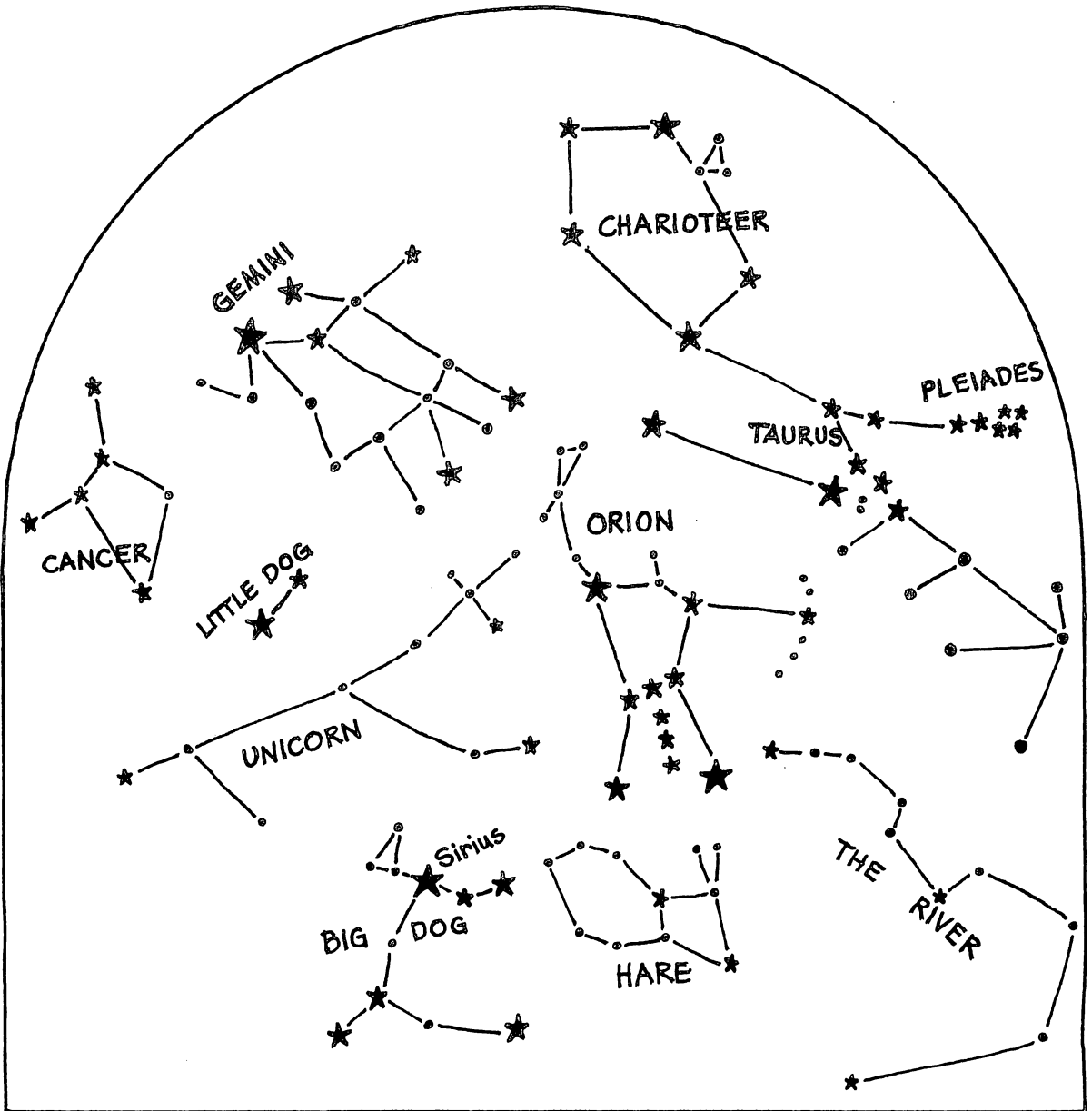


# RECLAIMING

NUMBER 13 • WINTER 1983

POLITICAL, FEMINIST, PAGAN NEWSLETTER



Major stars and constellations in the southern sky, midnight, Winter Solstice

## MESSAGES FROM THE STAR PEOPLE: A footnote to the front cover

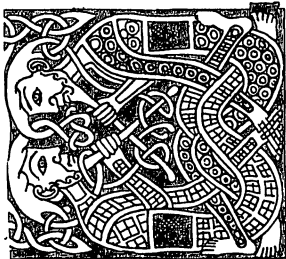
I recently uncovered a bit of our mythic heritage about the two brightest stars in the Northern Hemisphere. Sirius, the Dog Star, companion to Orion, the Hunter, is the brightest star in the winter skies. When our ancestors saw Sirius rising they knew it was time to begin the winter hunts. Likewise when Arcturus rose around Spring Equinox, they knew it was time to plant, for Arcturus is in the constellation of Boötes, the Farmer. I am amazed how the myths and names of the star people have very real applications in our lives as beacons divining the two major divisions or activities of the year.

Feather Singing .....

## ABOUT THIS ISSUE (On Darkness) AND THE NEXT (On Germination)

This issue focuses on the energy of the season - winter and darkness. We are excited to produce an issue with different articles and drawings on a theme. We want to continue this with doing a full cycle of issues on the seasonal energies. The spring issue will focus on germination, sprouts, new growth, signs of a new culture, new plans, etc. We welcome drawings, articles, poems.

Shawn Usha



## AS THE SPIRAL TURNS: A report on the Reclaiming retreats

People who are actively involved in Reclaiming met for a weekend retreat at the end of August. Some of the weekend was spent clearing up a backlog of resentments, gripes and general bitchiness, but a deeper feeling of needing some drastic shifts in our activities emerged. This feeling evolved out of discontent with the lack of power and magic in our public rituals, individuals who had been very ill and did not feel supported, fear of classes becoming rote, and ritual elements becoming dogmatized. A pattern also emerged of people not feeling enough personal and magical interaction to support the work they were doing.

So we decided to inhale. Inhale? As Cerridwen said, some people have noticed Reclaiming is turning blue and falling over, and this is not due to Druidic wisdom. So we have decided to take a pause from our rapid growth, our state of panic about the Empire striking back, throwing our bodies in front of the war machine, and the steady amount of teaching, newsletters, etc. Ideas of following seasonal cycles of rest and work were discussed, and we decided to have a winter inhale period.

The first problem that came up with inhaling was who to inhale with. After discussing our traditional policies of all meetings and work groups being open and what has actually been happening, we realized that 1) there really is an inner core that through personal contacts knows and controls what happens, 2) that though we say we're open, people don't experience us that way and are puzzled how to join, and 3) that some of us really feel that constantly changing people dilutes our effectiveness and magic. We decided to be more realistic so we can explore what boundaries we need. Acknowledging the need for boundaries feels very alien to us, but it has happened and our current fuzzy perception has the following fence posts and barbed wire: we now have a closed collective, at least until Brigid, to explore what we are doing, why we have so much internal distress, and why we're so dedicated. It feels very arbitrary for "us" to close, but we see it as a temporary necessity. We want to figure out how genuinely to include people.

The consequences of this decision are, there will be no public classes or rituals, and meetings are closed. We encourage other people in the community to organize their own events or classes and to use the Events Line. For example, a group of people got together and organized a public Samhain ritual on Monday, October 31.

We see this inhale as a very busy time for us. We're looking forward to deepening our connections and our magic by doing rituals together, teaching each other skills and exploring new areas. We also want to look at problems we've been having such as power, leadership, money, politics (what is a political pagan), specialization. Hopefully, we'll still have time for winter dreaming to explore, for instance, the difficulty and alienation of working with an agrarian tradition in a 20th Century hostile industrial environment and how to incorporate diverse expressions of sexuality in our rituals.

We really don't know what's going to come out of this. We may decide to become a very different kind of organization or organizations. It's a difficult process to work through and painful for many of us. Some of us fought against closing the group. Some needed it closed to consider continuing. But we are all relieved to have decided to take the time to look at what we're doing. However it works out for the group, it is a very deepening experience for individuals and for Reclaiming as a whole. We felt that our public face wasn't reflecting our development. To withdraw from doing, and to look at the whole and at each other, to assess and remodel our practice, is an essential part of the development of any group. We are shedding a skin that no longer fits.

We are looking forward to renewed classes that we'll be offering in the future. We're excited about more coherent, more powerful, more magical public rituals. The collective's cycles of growth and reevaluation will continue.

Especially because this is an inhale, we want to hear from you. What have you liked and disliked, and what suggestions do you have, about Reclaiming classes, about public rituals, about our openness or closedness, about our politics and anything else relevant you are concerned about?

## LETTERS

Dear Reclaiming Newsletter Staff,

The more I think about the Newsletter cover for the Autumn issues, the more I hate it. I could handle the inept art work in the name of empowering non-artists, although when our community is rich with resources in the visual arts it seems silly not to use them. I do take issue with Gaby's dismissing our previous covers as 'beautiful but so what.' The themes of these covers has usually been magic and nature--hardly irrelevant issues to the average Witch. What bothers me the most about the cover is the 'statement;' "You can't say what you don't know--but we sure are trying." That makes it sound as if Reclaiming is hypocritical, and that is one thing our organization is not. Our traditional cover statement is about our commitments and ideals. It contains no pretense to perfection. A common assumption of mainstream 'kulture' is that everything should be instant--from soup to love to collective enlightenment. To buy into this 'instant' consciousness and trash anything which does not achieve instant immediate perfection is far from constructive.

The insides of the Autumn '83 newsletter are wonderful. I feel angry that the outsides are so--the recurring word is dumb--that I am embarrassed to share it with people outside of the collective. The Newsletter is our communications organ with the world. A Newsletter cover which conveys nothing but a vague sense of confused spitefulness does a service to no one.

My perception is that some of the people who made the decision to run the confused octopus cover had issues with Reclaiming which they were afraid to or unsure how to bring to the attention of the collective as a whole through other channels. This fear of honest and direct confrontation dismays me. Some emotional brush was cleared during Reclaiming's September retreat, and we renewed our commitment to building community. Hopefully, our decision to take the Winter season as a time to close down our public functions and nurture our collective interior will provide all of us with the chance to improve our communications.

I have always argued strongly for autonomy in the individual cells--newsletter, teaching, ritual, etc.--making up the body of Reclaiming. To be effective, autonomy must be accompanied by a sense of responsibility to the whole. I hope the newsletter collective will take their responsibility more seriously in the future.

With Sincere Exasperation,

Cerridwen Fallingstar ♄  
★

Reply to Cerridwen by Gaby

My point about the previous covers is not so much to dismiss them (they have been beautiful). "So what" to me means that the beauty of nature cannot be all we are dealing with. It becomes irrelevant if that is all we focus on. Reclaiming claims to be a political collective. And that, to me, means we have to acknowledge the other side, what we're pitted against. We don't live in a world where magic and nature are unthreatened. A majority of pagans seem to want to face into the past, into a future fantasy of a reclaimed world, but not into the present with its contradictions and terror. I don't want to foster that, especially on our cover where, as Cerridwen says, we represent ourselves.

As for the statement, I don't think we intended it to convey hypocrisy, rather that by continuing to put the statement on when we are confused about our nature, we give out an image that is misleading. By saying "we sure are trying" (not poetic, I admit), I, at least, wanted to say that we need to stop trying to say and say and say in order to look for a while at what we don't know. Not a very clear statement, true, but I fear I am uncontrite, a hardened desirer of discussion. A statement on the cover may not pretend to perfection, but it does imply that it represents the feelings of the collective. And that it did not. At least some people felt, strongly enough to want to pull out, that there was no forum for the objections and changes they wanted to make. I am not entirely clear why this was - whether it was an inability to speak up or a malfunction in our process or an inability to hear, or all of those.

The dumbness (poor old octopus) was a dumbness of unspoken disturbances, which does lead to strangulation. Also a dumbness of not fully formulated uneasiness. And a dumbness of great difficulty in communication within the collective.

I am strong in feeling that the newsletter collective has shown a deep sense of responsibility - lack of perfect clarity notwithstanding - in opening up difficult issues and provoking thoughtful responses such as Cerridwen's.

Dear Reclaiming Newsletter,

Maypoles: Freedom and Constraint.

A maypole is a gadget, a structural device for a particular dance, like a long narrow hall, or a dancing circle, or a floor maze, a way to constrain dance into a particular interesting form.

Yes, a maypole is a phallus and the ribbons are a vagina, but why stop there or even begin there. One of the big problems with people who are afraid of eros is that they freeze whenever they see erotic content in a new place. If they find out that something is "really" a phallus or a vagina they stop there, sure that they have been introduced to the deep and forbidden truth. It's roughly the equivalent of having a vision of one of the aspects: maiden, mother, crone; and freezing onto that perception to the point of being unable to perceive or honor the other aspects.

Piet Hein rhymed: Everything's either  
Concave or convex,  
So whatever you dream  
Will be something with sex.

The maypole is a phallus, a clitoris, a nipple, a tongue, or any other positive projecting entity; a tree, a mountain, a horn, a lightning bolt, a thyrus .... What is more important is that it speaks of all these things at once, that its meanings and relationships change with the needs of the dancers.

Likewise the ribbons are the emergence from the void or from disorder of a loving enfolding pattern, a vagina, a hand, a mouth, an anus, a cauldron, a treasure chest, a whirlpool, a boa constrictor, or whatever else is needed by the dancers as they dance.

All of the above, the bitter and the sweet, the terrifying and the exalting, the compulsory and the forbidden, the relationship is celebrated in all its multiform nature and aspects. 100% nonpartisan enthusiasm.

Now, about too much order in a maypole dance: yes, a maypole works best if you follow the traditional forms and stick to an ordered pattern. But when the ribbons are woven to the end, the dancers are free. Freedom is often best experienced and appreciated by contrast with order, especially the voluntary cooperation with rigidly structured traditional acts. Anything can be lowered to serve small life-denying goals, or raised to serve and praise the goddess, the task is to find the way.

Then, how to get more people to help keep things moving? It's hard to learn how to help without seizing control or how to control without trying to make it permanent. People need a sense of power and of self-worth, and the first steps are often to push other people around, to teach them too much too fast, or just to tell them how to have fun or how to worship. Giving responsibility is good, giving trust is better, discovering that each element has tolerance for error makes room to learn new skills.

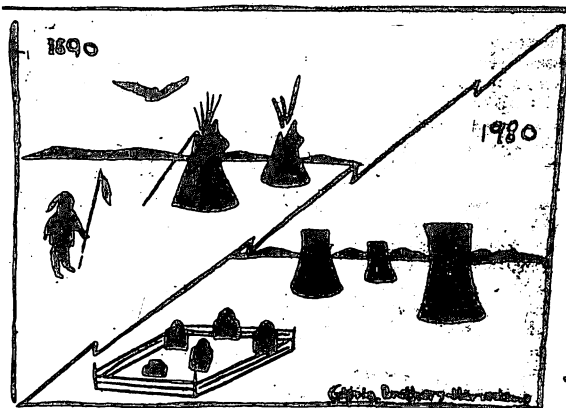
The great conservative sickness of magicians is to believe that everything that worked once must be kept. You end up with great overgrown stifling accretions of superstition and ritual with some tiny grain of energizing truth under the burden. If you are working towards the right rite, the goddess will slap you down if you goof, the problem is what to try, not what to keep.

The virtue of a symbolic act, as distinct from simple celebratory fucking, is that it can include the entire spectrum - up to and including the celibate who is willing to recognize that choosing not to make love does not stop love from being expressed.

The old ways are good ways, but if and only if they are carried forward to now with complete awareness of the inherent possibilities and complete dedication to getting it right.

Inventing new ritual is exciting and challenging, but the cycle asks for some stability, some comforting reassurance that there are repetitive elements. Fixation on repetition can lead to high art, but also to complete estrangement of most of the participants. Insistence on innovation, improvisation, new ways, can lead rapidly to a chaotic and boring homogenized rite. Some music forms leave room for the solo player to improvise and then return to the ordered composition. Something like this ordered freedom is a way to work for preservation of the best. And facing the problem is eternally necessary. If there is no effort to solve it, the religion dies. If the effort is delegated to a few specialists, the religion becomes a slave factory. If responsibility is not shared, it stops being responsibility.

BB  
George Hersh



5



Dear Reclaiming Newsletter,

By a stroke of luck, I stayed in one of your houses upon first arriving in the city of dreams. The strength of the characters who worked on your plane impressed and attracted me while the false externalization of that character, in ancient coded references to previous persons' meanings shut me out, tripped my "I'm no professional" trap, and left me silent.

The quest for an open community leaves no other possibility than an open ritual as its form. The tone and daily felt intuitions of the participants have to become the subject of the event and the clues to power.

The direction you are taking away from a set format and from set leaders has great merit. I want to offer this opening for new characters to join the dance.

I would just as soon call my car in the parking lot as the spirit of the south; the nearby hill, the Radio tower, and the turbulent history of Haight Ashbury, as the directions and real guardians of our current ceremony. The myth is in the spirit and the spirit is in our creation - not the other way around.

Clinging to images of the pre-industrial past will only alienate us from our daily life though calling these images as reference to the history of our spiritual life can deepen us. There is something about entering another world which can not be accomplished by putting on the style of another way of life. What is needed instead is a total transformation of our economic and social relations. Magic has something to offer to this transformation and that is personalizing commodities. One of the most fundamental spiritual tasks of our time is that we generally recognize the impoverishment of our society - that our way of life calls for another way of life.

Of course, a sub-cult of paganism is not it. Of course, the spirit in each of us that hears this call is in conflict with all of the practices and institutions of present daily life. Unleashing and discovering this spirit is more like being spontaneous than pretending to be from another world.

Neil Marshall



Dear Reclaiming Newsletter,

October 23, 1983

To continue the comments on "heterosexist Beltane" one view I'd been taught is that the May-pole symbolizes the God (ithyphallically) enmeshed in the nets of Isis/Dictynna/Maya, which is the Veil of Illusion, the play of life, the Goddess. Not that we Pagans are seeking to escape the Veil, as the Buddhists aim to do ...

In Celebration of Diversity,

Anna Perenna

MOTHER/NATURE: A high place of darkness

"I came to a high place of darkness and light  
The dividing line ran through the center of town."

--Bob Dylan

I have a lot of ideas about darkness. So many I have been fantasizing writing a column, tentatively called MOTHER/NATURE. About Mother Nature and the Nature of Mothers. About being pregnant with a child, about being pregnant with a new culture. About giving birth and about being born, about snakes shedding skins, the naturalness and the holy terror of transformation. About endarkenment, which is the necessary complement of enlightenment. About the soft black underbelly of the New Age. About cherishing the gifts of darkness, its potential for healing old wounds and opening new doors.

So, in between diapers and dirty dishes, I keep thinking about this column. I keep visualizing assignments for myself. Little existential questions like, "The Meaning of Darkness and Light." Feel off about posing as an authority. Acting like I know all about darkness and light. Hell, I don't know shit about darkness and light. I do know that both sides have their share of shit, and shit has its share of miracles to perform.

No, I don't even know that. It sounds good. I like the look of the pattern. How do I know if a thought pattern is worthwhile? I hold it up to the light and see how much it looks like a spider web, if it casts the right kind of shadow. If it hangs with murderous grace. Sometimes it looks like a spider web done by one of those hapless arachnids zapped by scientists with enormous doses of LSD or THC. Distorted, scrunched filaments, tremendously elongated spokes, tight woven bars like a cage, dead lines without grace, without even the grace of utility.

When I feel judgmental or cripplingly critical of my work and think it lacking in grace I try to remind myself of all the different types of grace which exist in this world. Hyena. Rhinoceros. The Monterey Pine twisting in the salt wind. Learning to sense patterns I cannot see in the dark. That's the thing about the dark, you can't see in it. You don't know what's out there. It calls for another sense. Sixth sense. The sixth chakra is the brow chakra, indigo space between the eyes. Between the lies. The sixth sense is the third eye.

As a novice Witch seven years ago, I stumbled across a sex magic working which opened my third eye. That eye was the os, the opening to my cervix. It is very dark in the vagina. The uterus is darker still. When that eye opens, when women bleed, the crack between the worlds opens for us. We stuff our vaginas with sponges and tampons and take hygienic measures to bottle up and block all the other openings that happen then. The typing pool is not a menstrual hut. We have been taught well; there is no safety in opening. Don Juan says that while the crack between the worlds opens automatically for women, men must create such an opening. It can be done, but it is very difficult. "Know that every wound is an opening," the Priestess said as she sliced into my palm with her athame. But who will give themselves willingly to the wounding? Do you think I would have consented to be torn apart in childbirth if I had been offered another option?

"Break the ground not once alone,  
Once for Maiden. Once for Crone.  
Once for Mother. Even stone  
Will yield when the thrice-broke field is sown."





The charm chanted over the stony fields of Scotland before planting. There is no fertility, of mind, or body, or earth, until the ground has been broken. Let me bring you this valentine from the dark. Every wounding is an opening. If this time of darkness is rich with despair, depression, confusion, uncertainty, all the dark and bloody shades of pain, do not despair of your despair. You are not doing it wrong. It is not because you do not know how to handle darkness. It is the way of darkness to be dark. Consent to it if you can, fight it nobly if you must. Why do you think they call it the cross-roads? It's natural to feel cross when you're being crucified. The old woman is sans merci, and not particularly belle.

"She conquers our defenses  
She deafens to our pleas  
She brings us to our senses  
As She brings us to our knees."

The spirit of Holy Terror walks. She is dangerous, lunatic. She is forge, sword, and plow. And this time of year, the dark time, She is the only game in town.

Dark Blessings,

Cerridwen Fallingstar ☾  
★

#### WALKING THE DARK

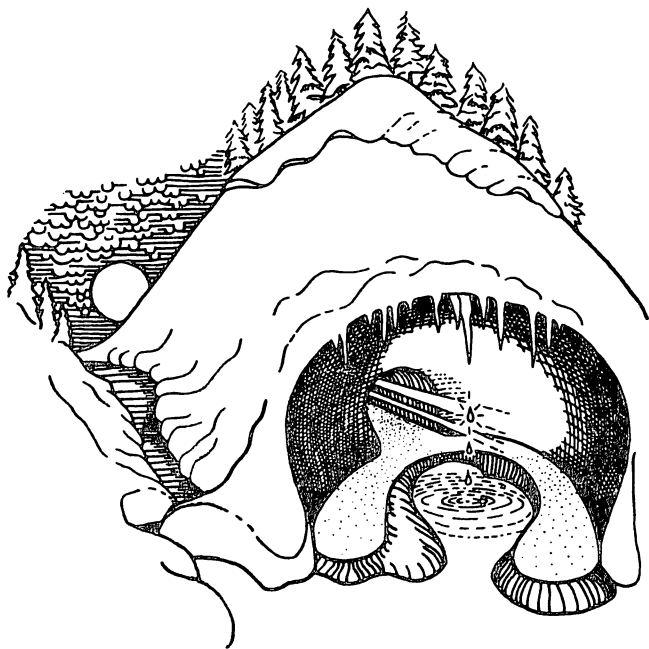
Like Kore, we go through hell again and again. We lose jobs, we lose lovers, we find ourselves jailed or hospitalized, we become unbalanced, we become addicted to drugs and alcohol, the people we love break our hearts or die, and there we are: in the dark again for a few days, a few months, a few years. We cannot choose not to meet pain.

We can choose how to meet it. When Kore returns to hell, she does not sit huddled on the sofa, staring at the walls and drinking Tequila. No, she is the Queen of Darkness, and she walks out on the roads of hell, and the travelers she meets are her lovers.

This is what I attempt when I walk my dark: to accept gratefully the pain that is given me; not to hold it in greedily and let it fester; not to shrink from it and hide -- to let it in like a lover, to let it pass through me and go, to let it pass through, remembering that each ghost I meet in the darkness is one of the reflections of my eternal heart.

Pandora Minerva O'Mallory



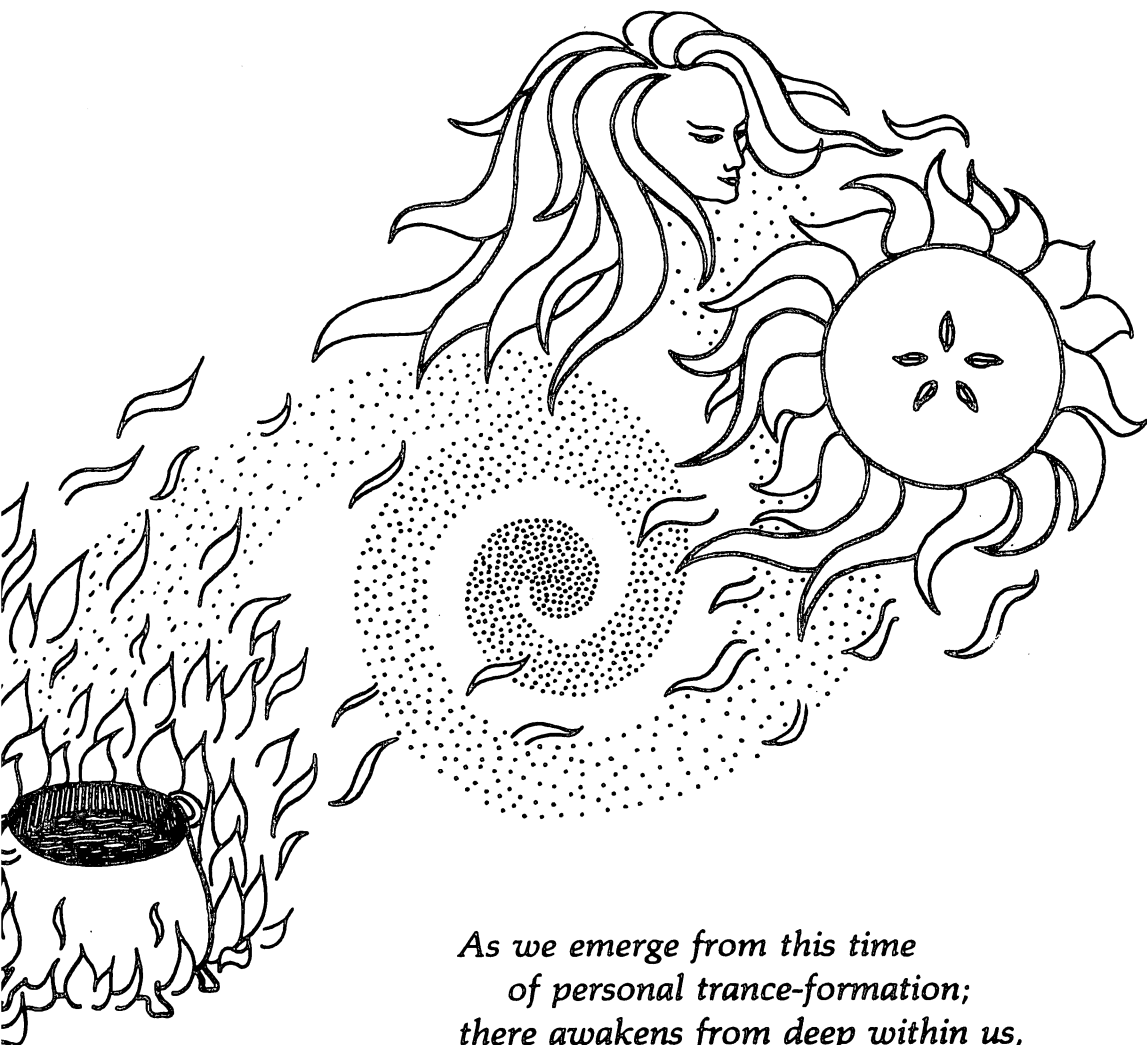


*My seeds lie  
within the earth's womb,  
and will not move again -  
until the sun returns  
from the darkest part  
of his journey.*



© 1980 feather

*midwinter solstice and yule  
the dark of the year*



*As we emerge from this time  
of personal trance-formation;  
there awakens from deep within us,  
a slumbering seed of knowledge  
of our oneness with mother earth.*

## SOME MUSINGS ON THE DARK

Slipping and sliding into the dark, each day ignoring a few more things that were important, growing numb, listless, strength waning, draining, sliding into sickness, consciousness eroding, and I find myself in a slough. I eventually notice that I'm in the pits. Then to get out, there must be dark-dealing. Dramatic. Rewarding as I order chaos, name my enemies, and fight them within myself, eventually finding this dark fertile for growth. The hard way.

It is easier when I know I am moving in cycles. That it will get light and dark and light and dark. Easier when I know what to expect.

Dark. I get confused sometimes by the language. I know there is great value to the dark, but we still attach negative meaning to it in the language spoken and heard all around us. We see places where energy is not moving in chakras, auras, and we call them dark spots. Are they dark because they are bad, or sick? Or are they just places that we cannot/will not see, and so are scary, unknown?

Pandora talks about "walking the dark" as a strong action. For me it can mean dealing with the hard stuff, the income taxes, the addictions, the marital breakups, the frozen resentments. Walking the dark can be putting yourself in a potential arrest situation, not getting excited when a cop tells you to move along. I can walk right into the dark, I don't have to slip and slide and fall into it.

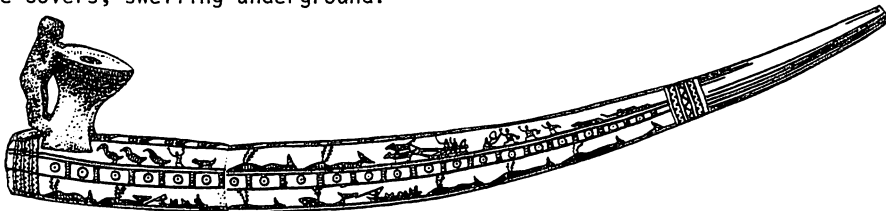
When the Tower Card comes up for me in tarot spread, or some other card of possible disaster, I say, well, here it comes, I can either face it, discharge explosive energy in a deliberate, healing way, or I can let it take me by surprise. And I do well if I can follow this plan. If not, BOOM!

Engaging the dark means dealing with difficult and scary situations as soon as they rear their ugly little heads (or I can bind the problem, promise to come back to it ASAP, and make sure that I do so). Engaging the dark. Slowly, deliberately, like the waning moon, moving into darkness.

An advantage of engaging the dark, instead of letting it sneak up on me, is that I can go around looking for trouble. If my life is pretty clean, if no unpaid bills or unsaid words of anger are lurking to catch me up in darkness, when it is time for darkness, I can make my own. Out on the streets, in front of the death-corporations and weapons factories.

This year, the light had almost burnt me to a crisp, and so I welcomed the dark with rituals -- getting rained on as I talked to the spirits, painting a death's head on my face and walking through the Mission smiling at children, children watching me carve a jack-o-lantern on the front porch. I saw my living room filled with candles, bones, skulls, skins, drumming, food for the dead, and beautiful people, in black clothes. I visited La Galeria de la Raza's El Dia de los Muertos, and walked home in the dusk with a skeleton puppet I got there, his name is Mort and he is my special friend for the season. I bathe by jack-o-lantern light on the darkest moon of all, and I'm liking the dark, staying up in the night, plumbing my depths, piling on the covers, swelling underground.

Rose



## DEATH TO BIRTH - THE DARK SIDE OF THE CYCLE

Summer solstice, the beginning of the cycle of darkness, the ritual sacrifice of the sun god, Matrix ritually blockaded Livermore Labs. I'd been visiting my childhood home in rural North Carolina for a month and reluctantly returned to San Francisco June 10 - not wanting to be here, nor to blockade, not relating to the ritual Matrix had planned for the blockade ...

I feel very out of balance, but never mind - onward pagan warriors!

In jail we have a solstice ritual; each man in the circle says what he's sacrificing. I don't know what to say. Next day I get severe abdominal pain. Two days of hell later I'm in a hospital bed, close enough to death to touch, smell, accept. All events outside my poisoned body receded nearly to infinity.

I'm cut open, my appendix removed, I survive, recover slowly, get wonderful support and healing work from Matrix, Reclaiming and greater community.

Gradually we begin to put it together on a mythic level. My name - Roy King, a leo; my sexual union since Beltane (when I ritually played the god role) with our high priestess (unacknowledged as such due to our non-hierarchy ideal/myth), my feeling at Llammas like an empty husk, at Equinox like an angry ghost, at Samhain my living will returning through the veil of darkness. Against all reason I'm caught in the role of the sacrificed sun king. I was our sacrifice.

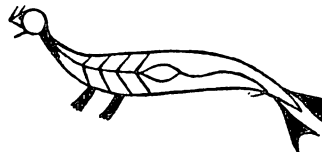
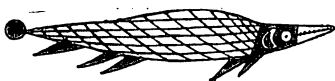
Why? For what purpose, if any? Doubts and questions in a dark time. Are we so scattered and frantic from our constant personal, community and political struggle that our magic is inept? Sloppy? Haywire? We face a foe of awesome destructive power and we invoke (sometimes successfully) high voltage power in opposition, but are we disciplined and clear and pure enough to direct such power, as we pretend to do? What of our outreach policy of simple, mass magical empowerment? Questions and doubts.

Conclusions: a deep inward evaluation; a personal initiation; a lesson - quality, not quantity.

for Matrix - a group challenge; a new sense of seriousness and commitment; a sense of coven.

Be careful what you pretend you are .... You might be called upon to back it up.

Roy



### NEWSLETTER REVIEW

#### Wiggansnatch

Laughing Otter sent us a copy of Wiggansnatch in September (in time for the retreat). I am very impressed and excited by what he is putting out. Being myself, I liked especially the extract from the Heretic's Journal "What's right - and wrong with the New Age." He includes letters from many parts of the country, articles original and reprinted, some very thought-provoking quotes, interesting graphics, poetry and personal revelations. If you are interested in seeing a copy of the newsletter, send \$1 for one copy to Laughing Otter, 701 31st Ave. S., Seattle WA 98144. Make out checks to Laughing Otter.

## CLASSES & WORKSHOPS

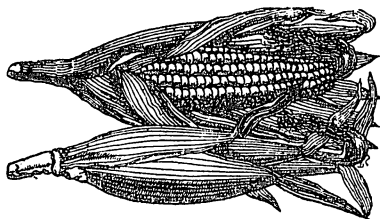
Announcements for our spring classes will appear on the Events Line (547-4830) rather than here in our newsletter. As you know, we are catching our breath. So we took a break from planning the next cycle of classes, and will probably get around to it in January. In the meantime, this gives you all an opportunity to tell us what kinds of classes you want. Here's a synopsis of what we've offered in the past. Give us new ideas too. We won't have space on the events recording to describe every class in detail, so refer to these descriptions.

Reclaiming initially created a series of three basic classes: the "Elements of Magic," the "Pentacle," and the "Rites of Passage." In the past two years, we have followed our interests and developed a wide range of more in-depth classes, some of which concentrate on one of the four elements. "Herb Magic" for earth, "Dream, trance and fairy tale" for water, "Spiralling Vortex" for energy chakras, sound-fire/air, "Journeys through Reincarnation," "Evoking (and transforming) the God," "Afro-Caribbean Traditions," "The Moon for women," etc.

**ELEMENTS:** Basics of changing consciousness at will: visualization, sensing and projecting energy, releasing blocked feelings, trance, empowering ourselves to act. Creating rituals collectively.

**PENTACLE:** Exploration of inner pentacle: sex, self, passion, pride, power. Deepen skills with moving and shaping energy, trance-forming, magical group dynamics, group bonding.

**RITE OF PASSAGE:** Ritualizing personal transitions, using power of group bonding to provide the support to let go of outgrown habits and freely steer the course of our lives, guided by dreams and visions.



## NEW COVEN COORDINATION

We're not making any promises.

Without benefit of computer or videotape, Reclaiming is once again attempting to serve as a clearinghouse for witches seeking like-minded others to work with. To work with. This is the key phrase, for being in a coven is work. Magic and excitement and ecstasy and despair and wonder and frustration, but also work.

If you're thinking that you'd like to be a part of a group that forms a new coven (and joining an existing coven is almost impossible), here are some questions for serious thought.

What is your motivation? What do you hope the circle will provide for you? An intense emotional support group? A loosely woven group that meets primarily for study? A family? How much of a commitment of time and energy are you prepared to make? Once a week? Full or new moon only? Sabbats only?

Are you prepared to travel, and if so, how far? Can you provide transportation for others? Can you offer your home as an occasional meeting place?

What is your background in the craft? Have you taken classes? Who were your teachers? What tradition(s) have you studied or do you want to study? Do you wish everyone in your circle to have the same background or would you prefer a more mixed group?

Would you want your coven to be men/women/mixed? Gay/straight/mixed? Do you have preferences as to class background? Political orientation? All Jews who grew up in New York? Are these just preferences or are they prerequisites?

You might think of other issues or requirements to add to the list. After your serious thought, write out your answers, put them in an envelope with a dollar to cover postage and phone calls, and mail the whole thing to Ariadne, 484 Lake Park Avenue, Box T, Oakland CA 94610. Be patient. You can see how many variables are involved.

We're not making any promises.

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#### PUBLIC RITUAL

Making public ritual is a difficult but rewarding task. People who make public ritual often hear all the criticisms and little of the praise, and when they stop making public ritual they get COMPLAINTS! Nevertheless, Reclaiming is taking a rest from public ritual from the period Samhain to Brigid this year. (Although I hear there was a great ritual by "Not Reclaiming" in the Headlands on Samhain.) This rest we are taking is part of our "inhale" period, and we intend to use our energy to develop new ideas and practices.

Reclaiming and associated groups have been giving public rituals for some time. We have sometimes wished that our rituals could be more spontaneous, and at other times, we've wished they could be more well planned.

A small intimate group, which shares vision and common symbols, is capable of "hot" spontaneous ritual, when the energy is flowing well. A big group is capable of "hot" ritual when there is good but not too much planning, care given to "warm up" the crowd, and plenty of enthusiastic priestesses and priests can help keep the energy moving. It also helps to have "dragons" to minimize outside disruptive forces, and "graces" to mingle with people before the event and make them feel at home. "Crows" and "snakes" are needed to look over last minute details, and remember what the planners forgot, as well as to suggest changes in plans when called for. We need people who are willing to help plan public rituals, and we need more people in the community to come forward, take their power, and move energy at rituals. Also, when one comes to a public ritual, it's handy to bring lots of warm clothes, blankets, food, instruments, and small cash donations.

Anyone interested in beginning to plan Brigid and Beltane, especially people who have taken Reclaiming classes, please call the Events Line. And be patient.

Love,

Rose

## SEASONS IN THE BAY AREA?

People who move to the Bay Area from other parts of North America usually say that there aren't any seasons in northern California. There are indeed, but the pattern is more subtle than the dramatic four seasons most of us are familiar with, and the signs of the turning points go unnoticed for the most part. We actually have a multi-layered set of seasonal cycles here. There is a solar cycle of lengthening and shortening days, a climatic cycle of rainy and dry seasons, and a cultural cycle of holidays, which for the most part, is based on European pagan festivals. The confusion arises from the fact that these different rhythms do not intermesh as they do back East. Nature's season of death and rest is in the dry summer, when our emotional rhythm is set on gregarious, outward activity, being out in the sun, travelling and visiting friends. We celebrate May Day in the traditional European way as the celebration of the coming of green and the rising of sap, at a time when the California hills are turning brown, and the seeds are being cast into the wind, completing Nature's life cycle. I question how appropriate it is to transplant our inherited rituals without adapting them to this environment. It reminds me of the British in Australia continuing to celebrate Christmas on December 25, the middle of summer in the southern hemisphere, completely ignoring that Christmas is basically a winter solstice festival.

In the Bay Area we have a Mediterranean climate: a dry season and a monsoon, with a slight fluctuation in temperature. Winter is not the barren time it is in the rest of North America. The hills are re-greening, coming back to life. Autumn is not recognizable in the usual way. Most of the trees are broadleaf evergreens. They drop their leaves at various times of the year, immediately replaced by the new leaves pushing outward. Unless we are aware of the change in color from grey to brighter green, we completely miss the season of "Fall." The plum trees blossom here in early February along with the acacias, but they are not the same kind of signal of warm days that they provide in the Midwest. But the plums are sacred to Brigid back in Ireland, so their blooming does intermesh with our mythic year cycle.

Tuning into the seasonal cycles wherever we live is at least a four-fold process. We need to combine our personal rhythms and hereditary festivals with Nature's cycles and the indigenous festivals that put the natives in harmony with this environment. Sometimes this is an easy marriage, sometimes it requires some ingenuity and flexible adaptation. We have at least five seasons in the Bay Area. There is a rainy growing season, a spring or non-rainy growing season, a dry season when the hills turn brown and the seeds rest in the ground for the November rains. There is a period when summer fog comes rolling in through the Golden Gate, followed by hotter sunny dry days that linger into Indian summer or Autumn. The first rains, rather than frost or barren trees, are the first harbinger of winter. The Ohlone Indians celebrated first rains, the salmon and herring runs, the whale migration, the birth of fawns, the return of the chimney swifts, the acorn harvest, etc. I think it would help us a lot in becoming native to this place to incorporate elements of indigenous festivals into our seasonal rituals.

So today we have a mixture of cycles affecting our bodies and psyches. We are caught between a five-season, Mediterranean climate, Nature's cycles and native festivals, a cultural heritage of more temperate climate holidays, and the legal holidays like Labor Day, July 4, and Thanksgiving. Our bodies react to the sun cycle of lengthening and shortening days with increasing or decreasing activity. The long summer days when we are more gregarious, come however at the dry season, which is Nature's resting time. The shortened winter days trigger us to rest, dream and do less, during what is the natural growing season. The rains fortify our impulse to stay inside our homes and inside ourselves. Maybe that's why northern California is such a major hearth of personal and internal growth.

At any rate, I feel we need to develop a new mythic ritual year cycle to weave together the various natural rhythms within us and within this place where we live. I plant a seed in our collective womb, to be nourished by the winter rains throughout the fertile, inwardly creative dream time.

Feather Singing





## THE NEWSLETTER

The newsletter is a forum for Reclaiming feelings, opinions, facts and controversy. The publication reflects the spirit of the people involved in it and the content of the submissions. If you want it to meet your needs - PARTICIPATE! There is no official membership - the magazine is open to anyone who identifies (or disagrees) with the struggle to unify spirit and politics.

Our production group is currently coordinated by an open group that rotates responsibility. Decisions are made by the entire work group. We always need more members to report, do graphics, typing, layout, bulk mailing, etc. Feel free to come and join us or send in your contribution.

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## SUBMISSIONS

Anyone who submits work is responsible for getting it to the work group in time for layout. The closer to layout you come, the more camera ready the work must be (typed with a carbon ribbon in an 8" column). We will not take responsibility for chasing down late material.

The Spring deadline is Friday, February 4. Call Events Line for editorial meeting and layout dates. Send material to Reclaiming P.O. Box 14404, San Francisco CA 94114 marked "Newsletter."

## LETTERS AND GRAPHICS

The number of letters we are receiving is still increasing. We really appreciate your responses. Don't be discouraged if we don't have room to print what you write straight away or if we have to edit to make space. If you feel we have misrepresented you, please say so.

We are short on interesting graphics. If you draw or have photographs or illustrations you'd like to see included, send them to us.

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## PARTICIPANTS

This issue was prepared by Iris May, Shawn and Gaby. Come out of hiding the rest of you.

## CONTRIBUTORS

Feather, Rose, Cerridwen, Pandora, Ariadne and letter writers.

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## EVENTS LINE

The Events Line is a phone recording to announce events which happen too late to be included in the newsletter. Some are sponsored by Reclaiming, while others come via the grapevine. The number is 547-4830. To put something on the events line, leave a message on our machine. Be sure to include your number.

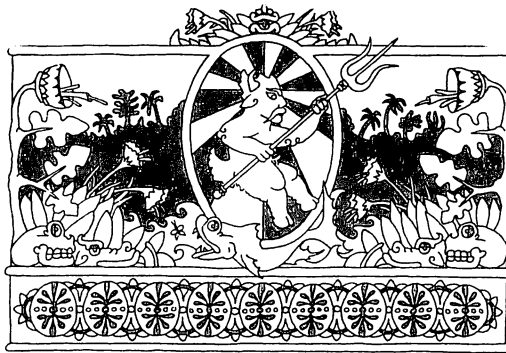
## BLOOD BANK

Reclaiming has opened an account (#1913) at Irwin Memorial Blood Bank, 270 Masonic Avenue, S.F. 567-6400. The account is always in need of more blood. One need not be a member of Reclaiming to participate in this program - either by donating or availing themselves of credits. If the Lady blesses you with good health, please share and give the gift of life.

## FOR THE SPRING:

**THE RESOURCE POOL:** Reclaiming teachers will be available to teach or to advise ongoing or newly formed groups. Your group can make a contract with one or several of our teachers for a class series or for specific sessions that meet your particular needs. Contact Rose at 641-5836. We will travel.

**CLASS COSTS:** We ask anyone who takes Reclaiming classes to put some work into our collective (i.e., helping cleanup at rituals, helping to do bulk mailings, gardening, blood bank donations etc.). We have revised our sliding scale: the 6-week series classes, unless otherwise noted, will be from \$35 to \$90.



## SUBSCRIPTIONS

To receive issues of the Newsletter at home, send your \$\$ subscriptions to Reclaiming, P.O. Box 14404, San Francisco CA 94114.  \$3-\$10 one year;  \$6-\$20 for two years;  minimal income, cannot donate.

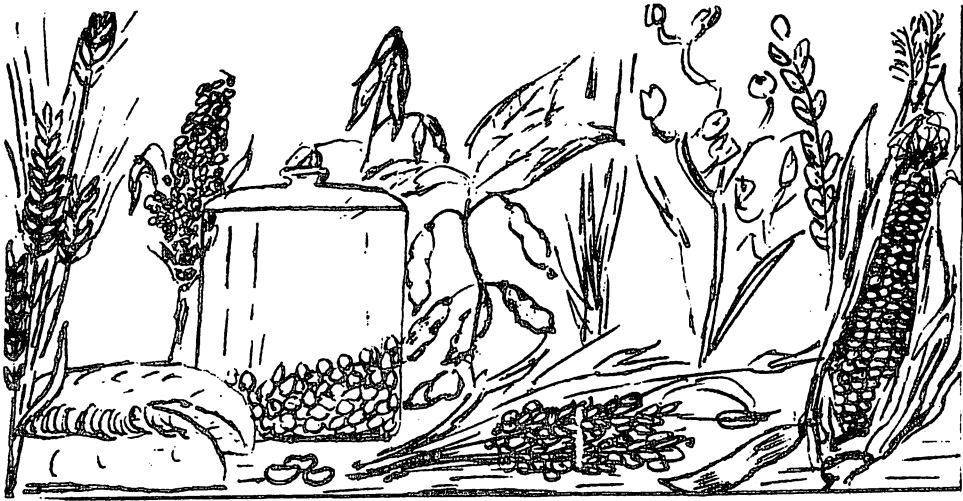
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