

# The Promise of Harvest

*August 1, 2011*

It's a humid and stormy Lammas this year in Queens. Like so many other Witches, I look for symbolism in nature to help better connect with my own path and the wheel of the year as it turns. Stormy and uncomfortably sticky seems to be quite apt for harvest this year. Lammas (or Lughnasadh as was called by the Gaels) was an ancient harvest festival celebrated in the British Isles. Modern day neo-pagans have reclaimed the holiday as one of their eight holy days. Celebrated each year on August 1st, Lammas is the first of the harvest holidays and generally represents the hard work and sacrifice that it takes to reap what we have sown.

In my experience, Lammas is always a challenging holiday. The changes I plant for my life come fully into fruition in late July as my world shifts and stretches to accommodate the new shape of things to come. Those last few weeks of effort, whether they be psychological or physical, are always exhausting. This year hasn't been any different.

As I sit here, soaking in the thunder on a humid August day, I am thinking about harvest expectations. Harvest is about receiving the rewards, the end result of our sacrifices and efforts. We have put in the long hours, planting our seeds and tending our fields. We have been patient and mindful. The promise of the harvest says that she who puts in the effort will be blessed when those plans come to fruition. But what happens when your harvest isn't what you expected? And what happens when there is no harvest at all?

The downturn of our economy and the high unemployment rates mean that many of us are not getting the harvest we expected. Students are graduating from college and facing a job market with few, if any, opportunities. Folks are being laid off after dedicating years of effort and sacrifice. Even for those of us who have been able to keep our jobs, the long hours and patience that were supposed to lead to promotions and raises feel wasted in the light of budget cuts and layoffs. While no one wants to feel ungrateful, still

having a job isn't exactly the reward that those folks were probably hoping for. In my own life, I am letting go of a long held dream. Facing the reality of the economic and political situation, this year's harvest has brought me an awareness that I cannot continue to work towards a career within academia. After many years of schooling, I am leaving my graduate program and my chosen discipline. It is a bittersweet harvest and one that I will freely admit I am struggling with.

The promise of the harvest, that the work I have put into this life course will eventually lead me to a career that I love, has been feeling a bit hollow today. So I have been asking myself exactly what promise does Lammas actually give us. I have learned over the years that the seeds I plant rarely grow as I anticipate they will. The promise of the harvest has never been that we will get what we expect. Sometimes the harvest is far from what we anticipate and the price can be very high, but it is always for the best even if that is only seen in retrospect. Perhaps the promise of the harvest isn't that we will, in fact, harvest anything at all. Certainly, there are always seeds that I plant, plans that I lay and work towards that never come to fruition. But if this is the case, then why bother planting anything at all?

Years ago I was taught that there is a vast difference between the things we believe we need in our lives and the raw emotional core behind those needs. The desire to be in a stable relationship is often less about being bonded closely to another human being (with all of their flaws, habits, and idiosyncrasies) and more about gaining a sense of security, the feeling of being loved, and the freedom from being lonely. The more we understand the emotional core behind the things we want in the world, the easier it is for us to see how many ways our needs can be met. This is a hard lesson to hold onto and one I have had to relearn again and again.

So I asked the Goddess today about the promise of harvest and this is what came through:

The real promise of harvest is simply this: If you listen to your heart, choose a direction, and work hard, you will gain. You may gain skills, knowledge, wisdom, opportunities,

self-awareness, or even more tangible things. But the work will produce some change in you and thus, in your life. We pick a direction, pour ourselves into the work, and find out where it takes us. The expectations, though necessary for making sense of the earthly aspects of our lives, are not the only harvests we have.

We are shapeable beings and often the things that shape us the best are the trials we set for ourselves. I may never be a college professor, and that grieves me. But the work I have done has shaped me. I have developed analytical skills as a scientist and a scholar that enrich my life and my sense of self. I have traveled across the country alone, in my pursuits of this educational dream. I return home, assured that I have the confidence and strength to take risks and survive on my own. I know that I am a gifted educator and I can take those skills into any career that comes to me.

The future is never what we expect it to be. Thankfully, it is often far more amazing than what we would have planned for ourselves. This year, be thankful for the harvest you are bringing in. Do your best to consider how your hard work this year has shaped you into the talented and unique individual that you are today.

May the blessings of the harvest touch your heart and help you to see a bigger and brighter future,  
Kai