

Trick or Treat

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Halloween is an annual holiday observed on October 31, primarily in Canada, Ireland, the United States and the United Kingdom. It has roots in the Celtic festival of Samhain and the Christian holiday All Saints' Day, but is today largely a secular celebration.

Common Halloween activities include trick-or-treating, wearing costumes and attending costume parties, carving jack-o'-lanterns, ghost tours, bonfires, apple bobbing, visiting haunted attractions, committing pranks, telling ghost stories or other frightening tales, and watching horror films.

Historian Nicholas Rogers, exploring the origins of Halloween, notes that while "some folklorists have detected its origins in the Roman feast of Pomona, the goddess of fruits and seeds, or in the festival of the dead called Parentalia, it is more typically

linked to the Celtic festival of Samhain, whose original spelling was Samuin (pronounced sow-an or sow-in)".^[1] The name is derived from Old Irish and means roughly "summer's end".^[1] A similar festival was held by the ancient Britons and is known as Calan Gaeaf (pronounced Kálan Gái av).

The festival of Samhain celebrates the end of the "lighter half" of the year and beginning of the "darker half", and is sometimes regarded as the "Celtic New Year".

The ancient Celts believed that the border between this world and the Otherworld became thin on Samhain, allowing spirits (both harmless and harmful) to pass through. The family's ancestors were honored and invited home while harmful spirits were warded off. It is believed that the need to ward off harmful spirits led to the wearing of costumes and masks.

The practice of dressing up in costumes and begging door to door for treats on holidays dates back to the Middle Ages and includes Christmas wassailing. Trick-or-treating resembles the late medieval practice of souling, when poor folk would go door to door on Hallowmas (November 1), receiving food in return for prayers for the dead on All Souls Day (November 2).

The Halloween festival has considerable psychological significance for each one of us. It symbolizes a bridge between the past and the present, between the light and the dark aspects of our personality and reality. Each one of us is a bundle of the opposites; thinking or feeling type, intuitive or sensate type, introverted or extroverted attitude, optimistic or pessimistic nature, Type A or Type B personality, religious or atheist, active or passive, masculine or feminine, active or reflective, light or shadow. What is close to our consciousness or acceptable to our culture is considered good, what is repressed or unacceptable to our particular milieu is considered bad or evil.

The task of our life time is to integrate these opposites in our nature into a seamless whole. In Hindu tradition, this is called Moksha or freedom from these opposites. In the Buddhist tradition, the goal is Nirvana or the synthesis of the opposites. The synthesis of the opposites in our nature is a more viable goal for most of us. The freedom from the opposites is a commendable goal which may take many lives or reincarnations to achieve. The Jungian school of psychoanalysis considers this attempt at the synthesis of the opposites as the highest achievement of our soul work – the Magnum Opus of our Individuation process.

In psychotherapy, the task is to integrate these opposites in a meaningful and purposeful way. This is the union of the

opposites when we find the “Third position”, the middle way. The process of bringing such a union about is called the Heros Gamos or the sacred marriage of the divergent aspects of our personality. This was the subject matter of Carl Jung’s last masterpiece, “The Mysterium Coniunctionis”. This text is the basis of the alchemic process of bringing about our personality in balance.

Those aspects of our personality that are repressed by our conscious attitude are repressed in our unconscious alongside our un-lived and unrealized potentials. These un-lived potentials call for embodiment. If we keep neglecting these, they manifest in our dreams and fantasies, our complexes or hang-ups, our accidents or synchronicities, our relationships tangles or medical and psychiatric symptoms, in our creative process or products, in our symbols or personal myths. If we engage these consciously with respect, reverence and wisdom, they enrich our personality and fulfill our spiritual purpose or Dharma. If we ignore them, they become our problems or symptoms.

There are many paths to attend to these un-lived potentials. These include a reflective attitude, yoga, mindfulness, meditation, contemplative life or psychotherapy. The most important element in all these paths is openness to our own mystery. Nothing is redundant in our personality. All we have is a gift of

nature. Our task is to understand how to assemble the jigsaw puzzle of our personality into a purposeful narrative. Our soul guides us onto this path, if we stay tuned into the whispers of our soul by attending to them. In some of my books, especially *Path to the Soul* (Samuel Weiser Inc. 2000), I have outlined some of the methods to decode these whispers.

All the great traditions of the world, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity offer a path. The conflict arises when the path is confused with the destination. When we use our traditions as a roadmap rather than the destination, as guides rather than dogma, as symbolic rather than literal, we are handsomely rewarded. In such a framework, all traditions complement each other in a cross cultural matrix that weaves the magic carpet of human civilization to help us reach our higher nature and secure world peace and dignity for every religion, culture and race. This is the state of *Unus Mundus* or Unity of the human nature.

The rituals of Halloween symbolize the union of these opposites in our nature and culture. They offer a bridge between the light and the dark, between the ego and the shadow, between honoring the ancestral wisdom and claiming our emergence, between the pagan and the modern aspects of our spirituality, between the so called demonic and numinous aspects of our personality and civilization.

Life is a dance between the tricks or treats that universe offers us on the stage of life. Every trick has the potential for a treat, and every treat comes with its burdens. In our contemporary society, it feels like we have been offered a trick: recession, unemployment, religious wars, territorial conflicts, terrorism, and poverty among many. Our present predicament also offers hope and possibilities. We must realign our priorities as a human race, the life/work balance, capitalism tempered by compassion, national priorities with global considerations. How we transform these tricks into treats is our challenge and opportunity.

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Trained in India, Great Britain and the US, he is interested in the emerging frontiers of Spirituality and Healing and the synapses of the Mind, Body, Soul and Spirit. He is author of the book, Path to the Soul, Weiser Books, 2000, Awaken the Slumbering Goddess: The Latent Code of the Hindu Goddess Archetypes, Booksurge Publishers, 2007 and the coauthor of Retire Your Family Karma, Nicholas-Hays, Inc. 2003, These and his other upcoming presentations can be previewed at his website

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Ashok Bedi has been in practice in Milwaukee for over thirty years and specializes in Adult Psychotherapy and Jungian Psychoanalysis. He regularly presents lectures and seminars in India, Great Britain, Ireland and USA on the topic of the Spiritual and analytic dimensions of treatment, healing and personal growth. Over the last several years, he has been the International Association of Analytical Psychologists liaison person for developing Jungian training programs in India and travels annually to India to teach, train the consult with the Jungian Developing groups at several centers in India including Ahmedabad &, Bangalore. He leads the annual "In the Footsteps of Carl Jung in India" study group to several centers in India under the auspices of the New York Jung Foundation.

