



Harvest Mother Activity

Handfasting

For over a decade during Vinotok at the Harvest Feast we celebrate our All-Community Handfasting and Re-Commitment Ceremony. This is an ancient Norse and European tradition in which a couple who choose each other may make a loving commitment, to be loyal, caring, compassionate and co-creative, to support our community and the Earth.

Handfasting is a contract, which in the Old Norse fashion meant giving one's word to another and promising to keep it truly and completely. The bond was made through the firm clasping of the forearms or hands of the two parties. We celebrate this at one of the seasonal cycles and celebrations of the year, Mabon or the Autumn Equinox. This is the time at which the Sun pauses and day equals night—or Equinox. It is a time of balance, equality and harmony. It is a time of commitment for the long winter and the next seasonal changes.

In later times in Britain, handfasting with a red ribbon or cord was the way that country couples would formally designate their “engagement” or marriage. The handmade cord or sash represents the fire of Life in each partner, the blood of the ancestors flowing through the couple and bonds and binds or “fasts” both of their hands in love and loyalty. This is a joyous, conscious and realistic way to approach the ongoing recommitment of relationships, recreating, recommitting and renewing the vows—if both parties wish—every year and a day. In our community Handfasting has been practiced between couples, families and individuals’ statements of their Re-Commitment to the Self.

Creating the Ceremony

Regalia. Headwreaths, of course for everyone! Show your love and create a natural Handfasting head wreath for your sweetheart. And, you can dry and save your wreaths hang on your front door, or to add to and wear again in your next Vinotok celebration and Handfasting Re-Commitment ceremony.

Traditionally, men wore white “peasant” or “poet” shirts and women wore their most wondrous clothing. However, at Vinotok Handfastings folks wear their most wild and wonderful regalia, much of it handmade, hand-me-down and vintage creations. Have fun!

You will want to find, or better still create your own red Handfasting cord, ribbon, sash. It should be at least three feet long. It is a sweet ritual to sew or string onto the sash special objects, talismans, gifts from the forest or from friends to remind you of your unique story and how you came across the world to find each other.

You do not need a pastor, priestess, minister or judge for this ceremony. You two are all that is necessary. It is the country way of those who prize freedom and self-created celebrations.

Creating Sacred Space If at all possible, choose a place in Nature that is meaningful to both of you, or all of you if this is a group-family re-commitment ceremony. Create your sacred circle by identifying the Four Cardinal Directions. Decorate the Handfasting Circle with little altars in the Directions, and you may wish to place offerings on the altars to honor the Earth and to feed the spirits, animals and the Land. Cornmeal, breadcrumbs, flower seeds and a vessel of water make fine and worthy offerings.

Enter the Circle from opposite directions. One of the partners wears the Handfasting scarf around their shoulders. As you face each other clasp the opposite forearm of your intended placing yours over theirs. The pulse point on the wrist of both partners will be connected, signifying the love and Life Blood which flow through each to the other. Each pledges their promises, vows, loyalty to the other.

Vows

Each speaks to the other:

“I (state your name) have come through my life to meet and choose you. I am here to plight my troth, and make my promise to love you, commit to you and have joy with you for the coming Year-And-A-Day.”

You may wish to speak personal promises and commitments to each other. However, this is not necessary. At this point the old ceremonial way asks the partner who is wearing the Handfasting cord to take it off, and begin to weave the cord around both clasped arms, leaving a foot on each end of the cord free. Each partner takes the end of one cord, and together “tie the knot”(hence the old wedding phrase).

Each speaks to the other:

“You are my nourishment. Your love is food for me.” *The second partner repeats this vow.*

“I am your nourishment. My love is food for you.” *The second partner repeats this vow.*

“I honor that we are fed and nourished by the Earth.” *The second partner repeats this vow.*

Lifting your joined handfasted arms up in the air, joyously announce together:

“WE ARE THE FEAST!”

Kisses of course!! And.... BLESSED BE! (until this time next year) It is so!

You can hang your decorated Handfasting cord in a special place in your home, ready to use the next time you may choose to Handfast, perhaps for life!