

## OCTOBER

Welcome to October. October arrives in beauty. October bids farewell to the summer in a rash of autumn colours, emotional to behold. How wonderful to wander in the woodlands feasting the heart on the red and gold and feel the first breath of winter chill gathering beneath them. Summer warmth is in retreat during October. Autumn in October carries a cold burnished sword to hush the woodlands life and send all to winter's rest. Animals seek warm shelters to hide away in, birds fly after the sun. We wanderers are drawn towards the warmth of home where the cold cannot reach. Winter has a desolate feel yet can still be beautiful. Life for us becomes more focussed on inside than outside.

At home we gather closer. October is a month for remembering. Remember the spring and summer that has gone. The things we did, the places we went to, and this year too the sad memories. What could not be done, who could not be loved as we wished. So much of our ordinary living was put out of bounds and in many parts still is. But still we can remember in this October month. Remember how we coped and how we clapped and how we managed to keep in touch. The month of October ends with the traditional Halloween. Many in the world call it the festival of the dead. Sounds gruesome but it isn't. It is an ancient festival that predates Christianity. In the Christian calendar it becomes All Souls Day.

Halloween has now become a commercial event that sells dressing up clothes, so children can go trick or treating as skeletons, ghosts or little devils. It's ancient purpose to remember has been lost in the fake cobwebs of the pound stores.

For the old country dwellers, October and autumn was a time for taking stock. It was the time of the third harvest for nuts and berries. What is needed to survive the winter, what is needed for the next spring, what can be sold. Halloween was for remembering those who had died during the year. The family would gather for a special meal. An empty place was set for the ones who had died. They talked about them. The things they had done. How they had influenced the lives of the present generation, by teaching skills and passing on wisdom. Someone might bring an item which is now a treasured possession because it came from that lost person. And in talking about them they are remembered more vividly. The superstitious might feel that the spirits of the dead came near to hear the stories that were being told about them. That is the root of the commercial Halloween.

Remembering is important. Wisdom comes from remembering and taking stock of what is good and what not so good, what has worked and what hasn't worked. It comes too from remembering our ancestors, how they lived their lives, how they dealt with the hardships, the joys they shared and the love they gave.

In this month of October let remember what has been, prepare ourselves for the coming winter, plan for the spring, enjoy and take comfort from the world as it settles into winter.

I am Tony McNeile minister of the National Unitarian Fellowship. This is a spiritual community for those freely seeking meaning and purpose in life. It is a community of individual belief.

Stay spiritually strong in troubled times.