"We are all fools together, every last one of us, when we forget the ghosts and the planets and the galaxies and ourselves." -The Halloween Tree, Ray Bradbury

As the leaves turn rich and vibrant colors, and change is brought in on the wind, we take the time to celebrate the life and death cycle. Though, if you look at today's celebrations, you might be confused. How did such an enigmatic and existential concept come to be remembered through silly costumes and candy? Just as languages and dialects transform throughout the generations, our traditions undergo a similar process. To truly recognize the mystical and ancient aspects of [Halloween](#), we must seek out our roots; the very beginnings of such traditions.

The beginning of our Halloween traditions stems from the Ancient Celts. October 31st marked the end of their year and harvests. It was the perfect time to think about the death and rebirth of the earth. The Celts held the festival of Samhain (sow-in) to honor the dead. They were connected to the spirit of the earth, and so the wintry death of the crops and trees became synonymous with their own dead. It was believed that on this night of Samhain, the veil between the living world and the dead was thin enough for spirits to come across.

Some records state that costumes were worn to blend in with the spirits who roamed the earth during Samhain. Others say that they were worn to protect from malevolent spirits trying to possess a body. Either way, costumes were used for the living to participate in Samhain alongside their departed loved ones. Pranks and tricks were played with the convenient excuse that they were the cause of a spirit. Bonfires were lit, and the people burnt offerings to their gods and to the spirits. When the festival ended, the people took a torch from the bonfire to light their hearths as a way of preparing for the winter and remaining connected with the spirits and with each other.

When Christianity arrived in Celtic lands, Samhain began to be combined with the Catholic church's All Saints' Day celebration. The honoring of the saints and martyrs became honoring all the dead, and the bonfires remained to offer up gifts to the souls. All Saints' Day was sometimes called All Hallows, and so the night before was All Hallows' Eve.

As a predominantly European holiday for centuries, All Hallows' Eve did not take root in America until much later. The Puritans felt that the holiday was too Pagan, too Catholic, or both; and refused to take part in those traditions. It wasn't until the potato famine and the mass immigration of the Irish people that All Hallows' Eve really began in America. And, the holiday was celebrated by pranks played on neighbors. But, through the years, the pranks became more along the lines of actual crimes. What was eagerly awaited by

teens and kids was dreaded and feared by adults. The damage became so bad that Americans had enough. They began implementing Halloween parties and trick-or-treating, calling back to the offerings made to spirits of old, to appease the malevolent, youthful tricksters.

It might seem odd when you look at today's celebrations, but if you dig deep enough, you will see the bones of our rituals within the ancient harvest festivals. Candy given to children to prevent them from playing tricks was once offerings made to spirits and deities for the same purpose. Dressing up in costumes was once a ritual to blend in with the spirits of the dead.

So, this year, as you celebrate, think back to the ancient days of this holiday. Connect with the past and reflect on how you might honor the dead. That is one way of making this holiday more than just a commercialism nightmare. Connect to the spirits of your ancestors and the spirit of the earth. Feel the life and death cycle in the falling leaves and the cooling breeze that speaks of winter on its way. And embrace the mystical, spiritual essence that has always made up the holiday known as Halloween.