

# Seasonal Rhythms: The Melancholic Autumn

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Autumn has always been my favorite time of year. During the months of Autumn I feel more easily grounded, balanced and at peace than I do all year. I never really thought about why that was until I learned about the temperaments. Now it makes a lot of sense. Autumn is the time when the melancholic temperament comes to the surface and this temperament is a perfect balance to my sanguine tendencies.

Whereas the sanguine lives in the whisper of the wind, the melancholic lives in the solidness of the soil with both feet firmly planted on the earth. Whereas the sanguine is easily distracted by each next bright and alluring sensual experience, the melancholic focuses on the task at hand and follows a straight course. It is ideal, then that Autumn is the time when the school year starts. It is not the cold, introspective New Year's Day that is ideal for resolutions – the first day of Autumn, September 22nd, is the perfect time to start something new, make resolutions and plan a course for the year.

In the Autumn the leaves fall and cover the ground. In the same way we also fall to the earth and find ourselves more connected with the solidness of the ground. The harvest of the earth brings us even closer to this natural “centering and earthing” process. Autumn is not about the energy and fun of the summer, the new growth of the spring or the sleepy introspection of the winter. Autumn wants us all to get organized and prepared for the coming year. We must all fall to the ground as the leaves do, focus at the mulching tasks at hand and stop seeking new growth and waving in the hot summer sun.

In Autumn the temperature drops and becomes cooler. In the same way we must all drop our temperature and slow down as the weather does. Autumn is not about the scurrying eagerness of the spring, the joyous celebration of the summer or the overly cold and introverted energy of the winter. Autumn is about the balancing of the temperature nature and our own natures so we are “not too hot” and “not too cold” – just like baby bear's porridge in *“Goldilocks and the Three Bears”*. It is only with this balanced temperature that we can really focus on organizing, preparing and making plans for the coming year.

In Autumn we harvest our corn, apples and other produce. In the same way we must also harvest the fruits of our labors of the year, reflect on what those were and store them for the coming year. Some things we may need to can or freeze and yet others we need to store in such a way that they can be easily used the next year. We want to make sure we share what we will not be able to consume and store enough that we will be well fed over the winter. Similarly, when we plan lessons or activities for the coming year, our minds use the same process. We ask ourselves – what did I plant last year that did well? What ideas, tasks and lessons do I need to plant more of in the coming year? Thanksgiving, which takes place in November, is a time to revel in this harvest, give thanks for the year and help us to focus on the process of gathering in general – gathering harvest as well as gathering family. Around the world people celebrate the harvest in some way. In China, there is a Autumn moon festival, in Germany there is an Oktoberfest and in Africa they celebrate the “Festival of the Yams”.

In Ireland they celebrate Lammastide, also known as the “Celebration of Bread”. The preparation of bread during this festival is a way to honor the ritual of careful preparation and recognize the importance of a staple food such as bread in the diet. In the same way, the planning we do for the coming year is the cornerstone staple in our “life diet”. If we take time in the Autumn to carefully prepare our “bread of lessons and goals” for the year and we honor the careful and important ritual and importance of this cornerstone in our lives, our next year will be more relaxing, joyful, harmonious and nourishing. In modern times you can see people doing this at the beginning of the school year as they descend upon the shops and purchase school supplies, new clothes and

planners for the year. In the homeschooling arena you can see this happen as parents consider which curriculum they will purchase and prepare their lesson plan calendars for the year.

It is interesting to note that in the Waldorf homeschooling tradition the Autumn is the time for the three main celebrations involving Saints. In September we celebrate Michaelmas, in October, Saint Francis and in November, Martinmas. If you belong to a religious tradition that celebrates other saints, you may also celebrate additional ones during the rest of the year. However, in the Waldorf tradition you may experience only these three – and all in the Autumn (note that some, but not all, schools may also celebrate St. John's Day in June). This is not a coincidence. In telling stories of the saints and reflecting on their lives, we are led to focusing on what beauty, strength and power can emerge when a person focuses on the path they have planned. St. Michael is so determined to save the people of the village that he finds the strength and courage to slay a dragon – a feat which could not be matched by many. His careful planning, preparation and focus on the task at hand is what give him the power to do this. St. Francis was so inspired, determined and blessed that he was able to talk to the animals, and St. Martin was so dedicated to helping others that he became known in some circles as the “patron saint of beggars”. Saint Martin taught people that if they give of themselves, they can make a big difference in the world. In each of these cases it was their dedication to a goal (the goal of praising God and/or dedication to one physical goal) that enabled them to accomplish so much.

However, although the season of Autumn is the ideal season for planning and centering, we do not need to despair the rest of the year, for during the rest of the year we have those people of the melancholic temperament to help us all stay centered and balanced on a daily basis. As I state in my book [\*The Temperaments and the Adult-Child Relationship\*](#), “The melancholic person is ruled by the physical body and thus has a deep connection with the earth. Like the earth the melancholic can be solid and obstinate but can also be dependable and comforting. Like the earth the melancholic functions within an intricate order that follows certain intrinsic rules and links resulting in a harmonious structured system.”

It is the melancholic child that will insist you prepare meals at the same time each day, it is the melancholic spouse that will expect the house to run on a predictable schedule and it is the melancholic manager at work that will organize regular meetings where you set goals for the week. The melancholic person will often reflect on the past or be planning for the future, but will not often dwell in the present moment. The melancholic will often make plans and seek for the world and people around them to adapt to those plans rather than being adaptable themselves, or “going with the flow” of the river of life. The melancholic is always seeking to harvest the perfect form just as the seed creates the most perfect apple or cob of corn. And just as the small seed grows into a complex and valuable natural food, the melancholic is always looking for ways to distill the pure from the primitive.

To the sanguine these melancholic “requirements” may seem an annoying interruption to the natural flow of the seasons, to the choleric the melancholic may seem “too strict” and to the phlegmatic the melancholic may seem “too demanding”. However, it is the people of the melancholic temperament that keep daily life in order and hold the gifts of the other temperaments together. Just as a harvest fest brings together harvest and family, so does the melancholic bring together systems and people.

Just as Autumn helps everyone slow down their pace and center their lives, so does the melancholic help those around them feel safe and directed and just as the leaves fall from the trees in a predictable manner every September, so does the melancholic provide a cornerstone in our own lives that we can depend on every day we are with them.