TRILITHON

THE JOURNAL OF THE ANCIENT ORDER OF DRUIDS IN AMERICA

VOLUME IV
SUMMER SOLSTICE 2017

Trilithon: The Journal of the Ancient Order of Druids in America

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Volume IV
Summer Solstice, 2017

ISBN-13: 978-1547213993

ISBN-10: 154721399X

Colophon

Cover art by Dana O'Driscoll

Designed by Paul Angelini using Adobe® InDesign.®

THE RENEWED TREE.

The Book of Trees: Descriptive of the Principle Timber Trees and the Larger Species of Palms
1837

"The Three memorials of the Bards of the Island
of Britain.
Memorial of Tradition:
Memorial of Song: and
Memorial of Letters."

Triad from "*The Bardic Musuem, of Primitve British Literature,; And Other Admirable Rarities: Forming the Second Volume The Music, Poetical, and Historical Relicks of The Welsh Bards and Druids*"

Contents

Editor's Letter

Welcome to the fourth volume of the AODA's official journal, *Trilithon*. Given many of the articles in this year's issue, I've been recently thinking about how we in the AODA are working to rebuild human-nature connections. I'm reminded of an experience with a good friend of mine a few months ago. The two of us had traveled to a bushcraft school in the region for a weekend course in various natural crafts: spoon carving, basketry, and cordage. We had a delightful time and worked with materials right on the land. The next day, my friend, who is new to the Druid path, found herself cutting back wisteria vines on her property. She shared with me, "Before, I would have seen these vines as just a nuisance. But now, I'm seeing lots of things differently. I am reconnecting." And this, I believe, is the power that the Druid path offers us: moments of reconnection. Every part of nature offers us teachings, lessons, connections, necessities. There is no part of nature that we can't connect with on some level—even if it is to offer us a warning or powerful lesson (like poison ivy) or the lesson of vigilance (from the predators). And it is with this in mind that I'm delighted to offer you a glimpse into our fourth volume of *Trilithon*, which focuses on connections.

Our issue begins with an article from our Grand Archdruid Emeritus, John Michael Greer. In this article, Greer explores a potential Jungian connection for AODA's core ritual, the Sphere of Protection (SOP). We follow this article with a second piece on how to localize the SOP from Ron Slabaugh. Moving into other connections, Kimberly Kirner presents her ethnoecological study of modern Druids and their knowledge of plants and earth healing.

Moine and Patrick Ford both offer us the connections that come through direct contact with nature, which sits at the core of our practices as Druids. Moine describes a wide series of techniques for walking meditation and Patrick presents information on how to go on Druid pilgrimages to sacred sites.

We continue our connections theme with a pair of articles on permaculture, a design system and set of practices and ethics modeled on the natural world, connections between humans and nature. Two articles, from Adam Robersmith and myself, offer us a view of the connection between Druidry and permaculture (which is rich indeed!). Adam explores permaculture's ethical system of earth care, people care, and fair share, and I tackle the permaculture design principles through the lens of the five elements (air, fire, water, earth, and spirit).

We round out this issue with interviews with Adam Robersmith and myself (to complete our interview series from last year) and a delightful article on human-divine and mythological connections from Christian Brunner.

I want to recognize the good work of the *Trilithon* team: Karen Fisher, who has copy-edited our journal for the last four years (no small task!), Moine, who has joined us as a content editor this year, and Paul Angelini, who has once again designed a beautiful-looking journal and has worked to shepherd the issue to press. Thank you also to all of the authors who have worked tirelessly on revisions and shared their wisdom and to the Grand Grove in continuing to support this endeavor. And finally, thank you for reading our journal!

I hope that you enjoy the articles and information presented in this issue. And please consider submitting something yourself to our 2018 issue—we'd love to hear more from you. May this time of the summer solstice (for many of you) bring you deep connections with the living earth.

With the blessings of the blooming elderflowers,
Dana O'Driscoll
Chief Editor, *Trilithon*
Druid Adept and Archdruid of Water, AODA

The Book of Trees: Descriptive of the Principle Timber Trees and the Larger Species of Palms
1837

Trilithon Credits

Dana O'Driscoll, *Chief Editor*
Dana O'Driscoll is the Chief Editor of Trilithon: The Journal of the Ancient Order of America, a Druid Adept in the AODA, and serves as the Archdruid of Water. She also is Druid grade graduate in the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids, a member of the Druidical Order of Golden Dawn, and a traditional western herbalist. Her AODA Druid Adept project explored the connection between druidry and sustainability and how to use permaculture design principles and community building to engage in druidic practice. By day, she is a writing professor and learning researcher; by night, an organic gardener, natural builder, mushroom forager, and whimsical artist. Dana is typically covered with paint, dirt, or both, and loves to sneak into the forest to play her panflute when other people aren't looking. Dana's writings can be found on the web at druidgarden.wordpress.com.

Karen Fisher, *Copy Editor*
Karen M. Fisher is an Druid Apprentice in the Ancient Order of Druids in America and has been a pagan for over 30 years, most of which were spent on a Wiccan path. She is a professional freelance copyeditor for several academic publishers. She enjoys hiking and foraging and lives in a big old house in Pennsylvania.

Moine, *Content Editor*
Moine is a contemplative Druid (AODA Candidate), writer-poet, and Scottish Gaelic learner who lives outside of DC. In her day job, she teaches writers to love every stage of the writing process and studies the conditions that support the effective teaching of writing. In her free time, she can be found talking to rivers, trees, stones, and mountains.

Paul Angelini, *Layout and Design*
Paul Angelini, native-Michigander and Druid Apprentice in the AODA, has been an assitant on the Trilithon staff for the past two years, and a member of the AODA since 2013. His passions include cyder making, permaculture design, used book stores, foraging for wild food and herbs, and the study and practice of the Western Esoteric Tradition. As Grand Pendragon of the AODA, Paul is commited to preserving the order's unique history and tradition for the benefit of generations present and future.

About The AODA

Founded in 1912 as the American branch of the Ancient and Archaeological Order of Druids, AODA is a traditional Druid order rooted in the Druid Revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, offering an opportunity for modern people to experience the teachings and practices of Druidry in today's world. We don't claim direct descent from the original Druids—the priestly caste of ancient Britain, Ireland, and Gaul, which went extinct around 1,200 years ago—and to be honest, we're skeptical of any group that does make that claim. Instead, like other modern Druid groups, the AODA evolved out of a 300-year-old movement, the Druid Revival, that found the fragmentary legacy of the ancient Druids a powerful source of inspiration and insight, and drew on a wide range of sources in shaping a nature spirituality to meet the challenges of today.

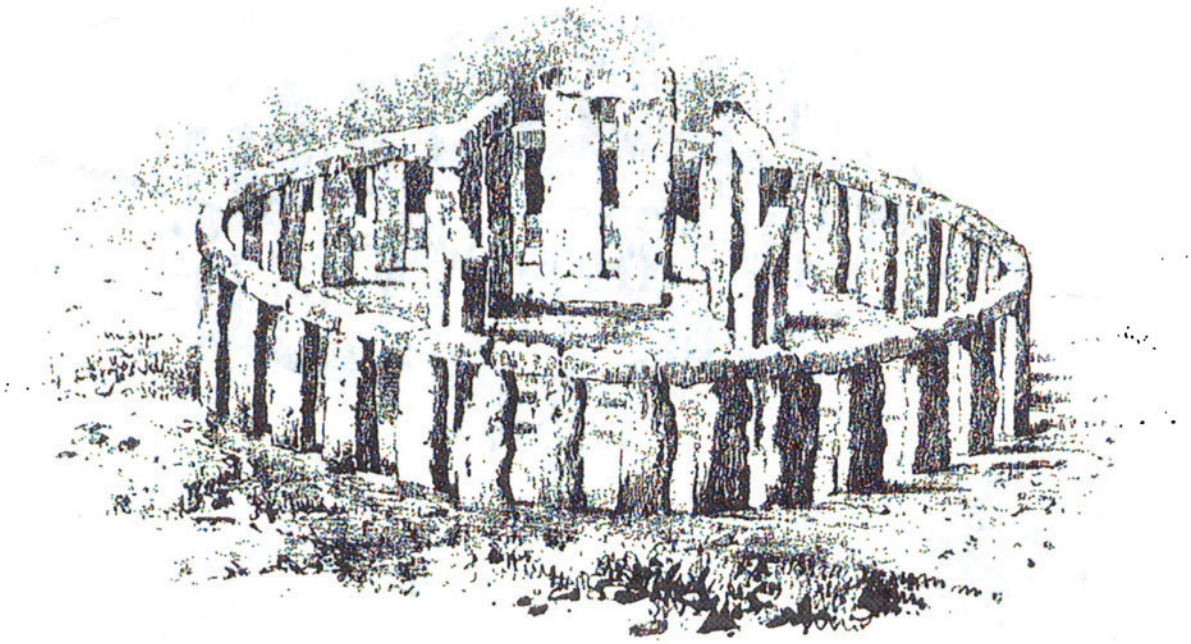
AODA understands Druidry as a path of nature spirituality and inner transformation founded on personal experience rather than dogmatic belief. It welcomes men and women of all national origins, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and affiliations with other Druidic and spiritual traditions. Ecological awareness and commitment to an Earth-honoring lifestyle, celebration of the cycles of nature through seasonal ritual, and personal development through meditation and other spiritual exercises form the core of its work, and involvement in the arts, healing practices, and traditional esoteric studies are among its applications and expressions.

Its roots in the Druid Revival give the AODA certain features in common with esoteric societies such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. It offers an initial ceremony of reception into the order, followed by three degrees of initiation—Druid Apprentice, Druid Companion, and Druid Adept—which are conferred upon completion of a graded study program. Its members have the opportunity to meet in local groups of two kinds, study groups and groves, and a Grand Grove oversees the order, charters study groups and groves, and manages the study program.

In keeping with the traditions of Revival Druidry, the AODA encourages its members to pursue their own spiritual directions within a broad common framework, and its approach to spirituality is personal and experiential rather than dogmatic. The initiation rituals and study program are prescribed, and AODA members are expected to keep four traditional Druid holy days, the solstices and equinoxes. Creativity and the quest for personal Awen—the inner light of inspiration—are among the AODA's central values.

The Gnostic Celtic Church (GCC) is an independent sacramental church of nature spirituality affiliated with the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA), a contemporary Druid order. Like many other alternative spiritual groups in American society, AODA—which was originally founded in 1912—developed connections with a variety of other compatible traditions over the course of its history. One of these connections was with the Universal Gnostic Church (UGC).

For more information about the AODA's study program, please visit:
http://aoda.org/curric.html



The Celtic Druids
by Godfrey Higgins, Esq., 1829

How to Join the AODA

The Ancient Order of Druids in America welcomes applications for membership from men and women of all spiritual, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, age eighteen or older, who wish to create and follow a personal path of nature spirituality in the traditions of the Druid Revival.

By Mail: Send a letter of application to AODA, P.O. Box 1002, Indiana, PA 15701, USA. The letter should include your legal name, Druid name (if you have one), postal and email addresses, date of birth, an outline of your previous Druid studies if any, and anything you may want to say about why you wish to join AODA and what you hope to get out of it. Include a check or money order for US$50, payable to AODA.

Electronically: Please send a letter of application via email to info@aoda.org. The email should include your legal name, Druid name (if you have one), postal and email addresses, date of birth, an outline of your previous Druid studies if any, and anything you may want to say about why you wish to join AODA and what you hope to get out of it. Your membership fee of US$50 may be paid via PayPal; please have payment made to payment@aoda.org.

How to Contact the AODA

Trilithon Journal

Contact the editor, Dana O'Driscoll, at trilithon@aoda.org

Contact the AODA

Contact the AODA Grand Grove at info@aoda.org

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The Fourth Quaternio: Jungian Symbolism in the Sphere of Protection

John Michael Greer

Born in the gritty Navy town of Bremerton, Washington and raised in the south Seattle suburbs, John began writing about as soon as he could hold a pencil. SF editor George Scithers' dictum that all would-be writers have a million words of so of bad prose in them, and have to write it out, pretty much sums up the couple of decades between his first serious attempt to write a book and his first published book, "Paths of Wisdom", which appeared in 1996. He served for twelve years as Grand Archdruid of AODA and has received initiation in an assortment of Druidical, Hermetic, and Masonic lineages. These days John lives in Cumberland, Maryland with his spouse Sara, and writes in half a dozen nonfiction fields, nearly all of them focused on the revival of forgotten ideas, insights, and traditions of practice from the rubbish heap of history.

Alternative spiritual traditions tend to leave faint tracks in the sands of history. Plenty of organizations that once counted members in the thousands or tens of thousands have vanished with next to no trace, taking their histories and teachings with them. Had the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA) not managed an improbable revival in the first decade of the present century, that same fate would almost certainly have happened to its history and teachings—and as it is, an enormous amount has been lost despite that last-minute reprieve.

When I became the order's seventh Grand Archdruid in 2003, very little AODA material survived outside the memories of a handful of elderly initiates. Archdruid Emeritus Betty Jean McCloud Reeves's history of the order (Reeves & Greer, 2003), written not long before her passing, was one of the few sources of historical data we had, and many of the details have proved difficult or impossible to confirm. It took me ten years of research, for example, to find solid documentary evidence that Dr. Juliet Ashley, the third Grand Archdruid of AODA and the creator of most of its current rituals and teachings, actually existed.[1] Again, this sort of

1 The evidence finally surfaced in a book of New Age philosophy written by a friend of hers (Keyes, 1968, p. 89).

thing is far from unusual in the history of alternative spirituality, but it makes life interesting for those of us who are interested in chasing down the facts about our order's past.

Where direct evidence is unavailable, though, indirect evidence can sometimes fill in a gap here and there. It so happens that one claim about Ashley told me by several of AODA's elderly members in the early days of my involvement has a certain amount of indirect evidence to back it up—and investigaing that claim led straight to a source that casts unexpected light on one of the basic practices of the AODA tradition.

A Jungian Connection?

According to two of the order's past Archdruids, the late Betty Reeves ("Mother Betty" to all her associates in the order) and John Gilbert, Dr. Juliet Ashley made her living as a hypnotist, lay psychotherapist, and teacher of alternative spirituality, and in the years following the Second World War served as the presiding officer of a series of interlinked initiatory orders, including AODA. Some years before, in the late 1930s, she traveled to Europe, where among other things she is supposed to have studied with the famous psychologist Dr. Carl Jung.

I have not yet been able to determine whether this actually happened, for the inquiries I've made so far have not turned up any record of Ashley among Jung's known American students. It's entirely possible, of course, that Ashley studied in a less formal manner; she could, for example, have visited Zurich, where Jung taught and practiced, and taken in a lecture or two by Jung himself or one of his students, but it's also possible that the entire story was an invention of hers, or of some of her students. It would not be the first time, or the hundred and first, that a teacher of alternative spirituality cooked up a colorful story to give his or her students more faith in the teachings they were receiving.

That Ashley had at least some knowledge of Jungian psychology, though, seemed likely even before I began serious research into that possibility. In their original form, the AODA initiation rituals were closely modeled on those of Freemasonry, with three main officers—in a Masonic lodge, these are the Master, the Senior Warden, and the Junior Warden, who sit in the east, west, and south of the lodge respectively—and three degrees of initiation. Jungian theory, however, considers most threefold patterns to be unbalanced, and considers fourfold symmetry to be a sign of psychological wholeness. Jung's essay on mandala symbolism is thus full of circles divided into four equal parts, or with four equidistant points marked around the circumference. Ashley's revision of the AODA rituals thus transformed the druidical grove into a Jungian mandala, with four officers equally spaced around a circle and four elemental symbols placed on the central altar, and added a preliminary candidate initiation to bring the number of rituals up to four (see Diagram 1). It's hard to dismiss the possibility that this revision could have been influenced by a study of Jung's work.

Possibility is not proof, however, and there were other sources from which Ashley might have gotten the idea of a fourfold circle as the basic template for AODA grove work. To make a stronger case for a direct connection between the AODA tradition and Jung's psychology, something

far more distinctively Jungian would have to be located in the teachings of the order. As it happens, though, exactly such a telltale clue can be found in one of the core AODA practices—the Sphere of Protection.

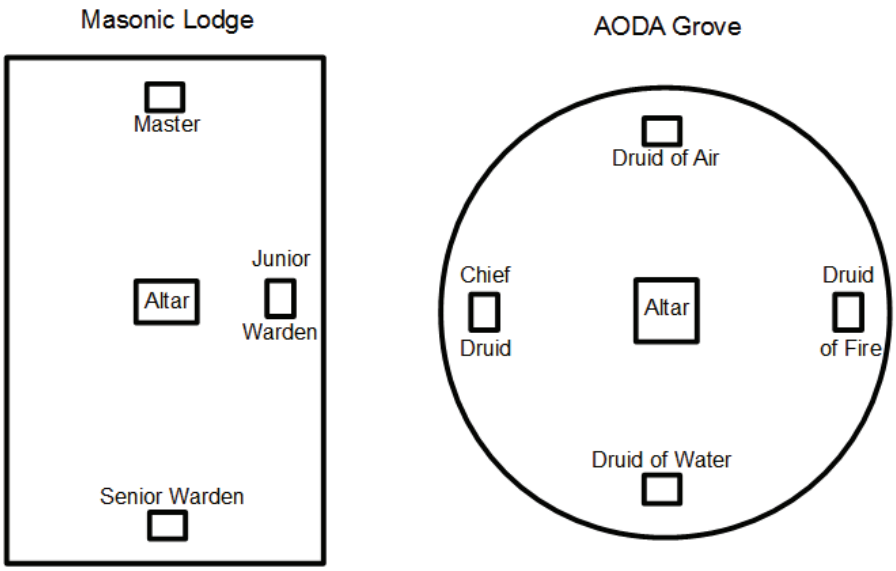

Diagram 1
Left, layout of Masonic lodge ritual; right, layout of an AODA grove.

The version of the Sphere of Protection practiced by AODA members at present was created by past Archdruid John Gilbert in the early 1970s, as part of his doctor of divinity studies with Universal Seminary, a divinity school then connected with AODA by way of the Universal Gnostic Church. The original version created by Juliet Ashley, however, survives in the AODA initiation rituals, especially the candidate ceremony and the grove opening and closing ceremonies. A comparison with these shows that Gilbert's revisions did not change the basic spatial structure of the Sphere of Protection, which is the detail relevant to this essay.

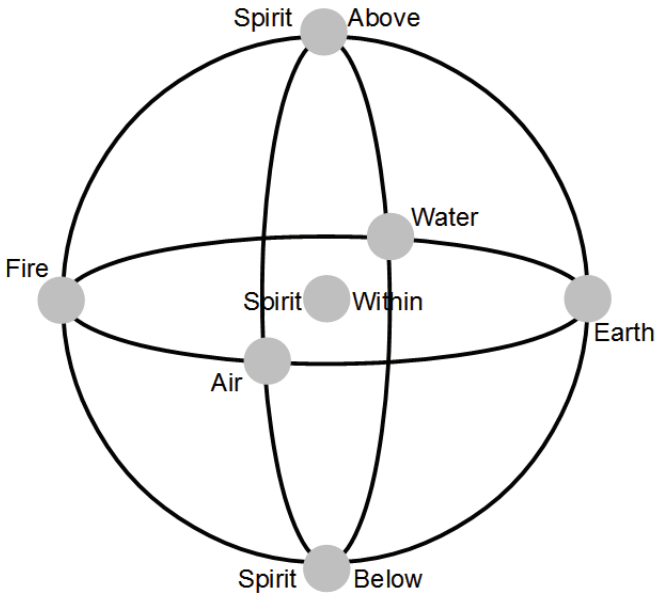

Diagram 2
The Sphere of Protection.

The Sphere of Protection differs from more commonly used protective rituals such as the Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram in that it includes the third dimension.[2] When casting the Sphere, the practitioner invokes the powers of

2 For a detailed account of the Sphere of Protection as currently used by AODA, see Greer (2007).

air to the east, fire to the south, water to the west, and earth to the north, as in most rituals of the same kind. Once this is done, though, the practitioner also invokes Spirit Above, Spirit Below, and Spirit Within to provide a vertical axis. The result is as shown in Diagram 2.

The Sphere of Protection is not unique to AODA; it is (or was until recently) practiced as a significant part of the training program of all the magical traditions that were headed by Juliet Ashley in the 1950s and 1960s. This is all the more striking in that its spatial structure closely duplicates that of an important theme in Carl Jung's later work—the system of quaternios in his late work *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*.

The Four Quaternios

Some grasp of the basic concepts of Jungian psychology will be necessary to make sense of what follows. To summarize an intricate theory all too briefly, Jung proposed that the conscious personality—in his terminology, the ego—is only one portion of the whole psyche, and far from the most important part at that. In addition to the ego, the psyche contains the shadow, which consists of everything in the psyche that the ego refuses to accept; the anima (in a man's psyche) or animus (in a woman's psyche), which sums up the psychological potentials of the opposite gender; and the self, which is the latent center of the entire psyche, equivalent to the higher self of many schools of mysticism. Surrounding all these are many other archetypes, basic structures of consciousness in the psyche, which are the inner reflections of human instincts and thus form a psychological framework shared by all human beings irrespective of culture or race.

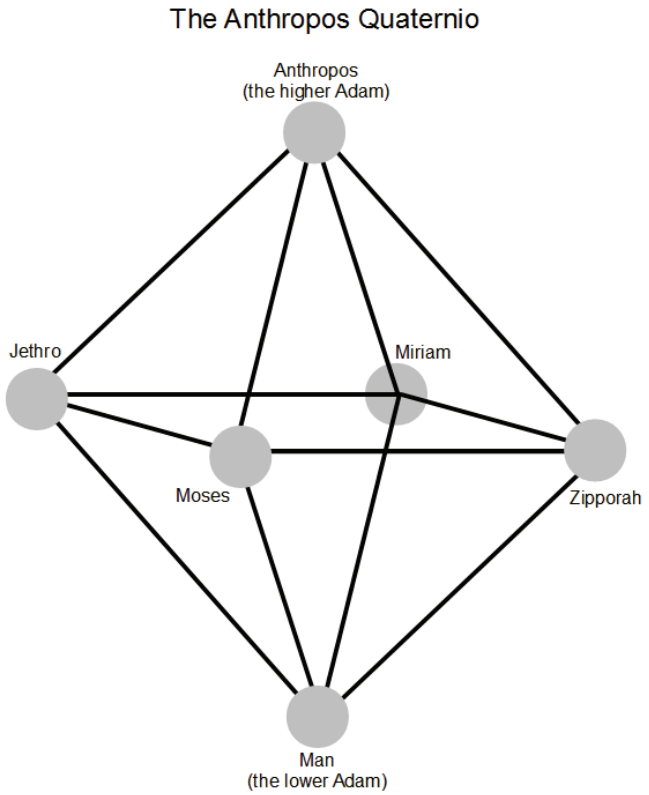

Diagram 3
The Anthropos quaternio.

The goal of Jungian therapy is the process of individuation, by which the ego comes to terms with the existence of these other forces in the psyche and enters into healthy relationships with them, so that the ego (the part of the psyche that deals with the outside world) can draw on the resources of the whole psyche, and conversely the whole psyche can seek the fulfillment of its needs through the ego. Broadly speaking, the process of individuation Jung outlines in

the pages of *Aion* proceeds in the order just sketched out: first the ego grapples with the shadow, then it interacts with the anima or animus, then it enters into relationship with the self and the whole world of archetypes reflected in the self.[3]

Each step along this route shares a common archetypal structure, which Jung diagrams geometrically as a quaternio—that is, a set of four archetypal images that unfold together from a common origin and then coalesce again into a common result. The first of these, which Jung called the Anthropos quaternio, is typical of the ego before it begins the process of individuation. Jung's discussion of this and the next stage in *Aion* relies extensively on symbolism borrowed by the ancient Gnostics from the Old Testament, which isn't especially relevant to the present theme. The point that deserves attention here is that the Anthropos quaternio shows how the unseen self (here the Anthropos, or Higher Adam) expresses itself in consciousness as a set of archetypes: the wise old man (Jethro the Midianite priest), the virgin priestess (Miriam, sister of Moses), the lover and wife (Zipporah, daughter of Jethro) and the ego itself (Diagram 3), seen through the rose-colored lenses usual among those who have not yet encountered the shadow.[4]

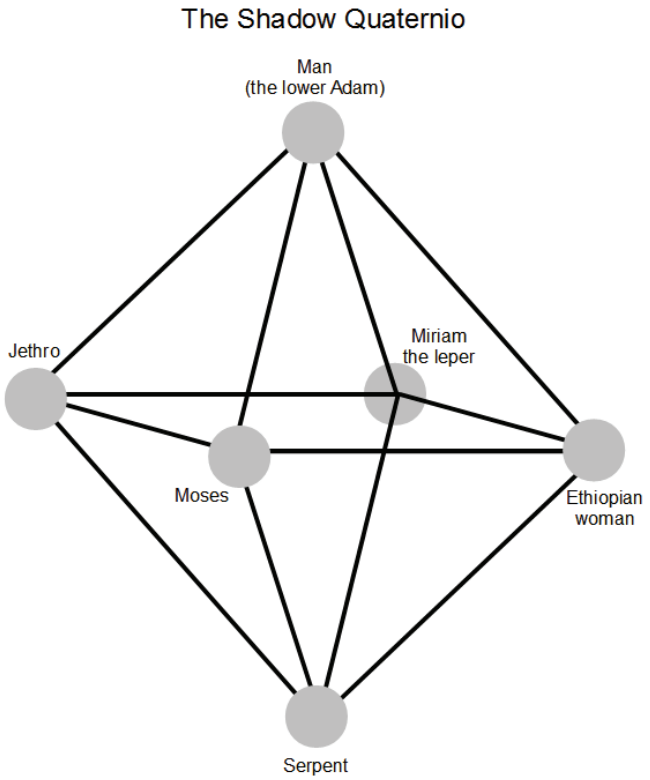

Diagram 4
The Shadow quaternio.

All of these archetypes are projected onto people in the outside world: the individual's father, or some other older male role model, may be identified with the wise old man, the lover and wife with some actual woman the individual desires, and so on. At this stage the ego has not yet realized that its value judgments and interpretations are subjective, and insists on seeing them as objective qualities of the world around it. Thus the apparent fourfold pattern draws together into a unity, whom Jung identified with the mythic figure of Adam.

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3 See Jung (1969a, pp. 222–265). I have also drawn extensively on Stein (2012) in the discussion that follows.

4 Though Jung doesn't actually discuss this point, his model is specifically relevant to the heterosexual male psyche; a corresponding model of the heterosexual female psyche would reverse the gender signs, with a wise old woman and so forth. Other gender polarities would have their own archetypal patterns.

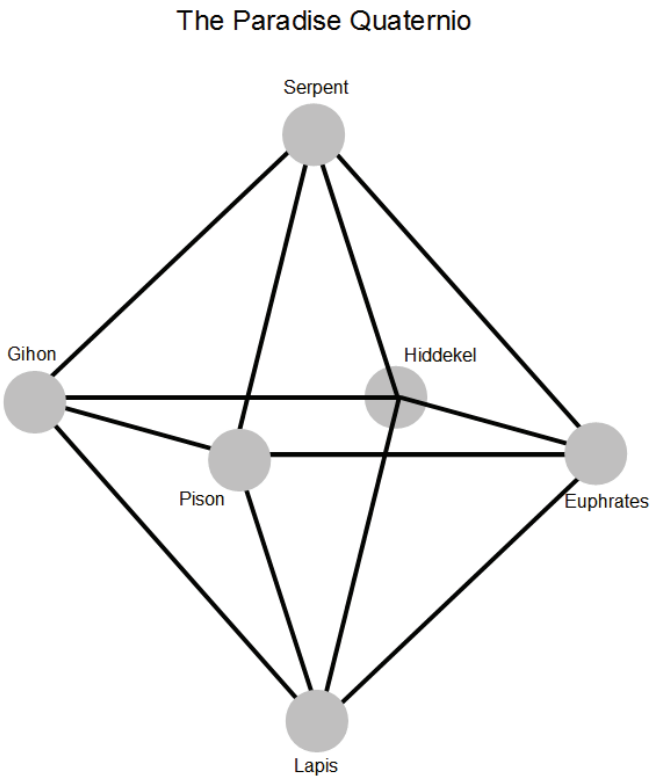

Diagram 5
The Paradise quaternio.

The next stage, the Shadow quaternio, takes the same archetypes and transforms them into their hostile and negative equivalents (Diagram 4). Here again, the symbolism Jung used comes from ancient Gnostic sources commenting on stories from the Old Testament, and can be passed over for the present. What happens in this phase is that each of the archetypal characters displays its unpleasant side: the wise old man suddenly becomes a tyrannical and superstitious old fool, say, the lover and wife becomes the unfaithful femme fatale or the nagging harridan, and so on. The person who has this experience can run away from it by abandoning existing relationships and projecting the positive side of the archetypes on someone else; some people spend their entire lives this way, running from one failed relationship to the next, because it never occurs to them that both the desirable and unwanted qualities they see in the other person are projections out of their own psychological structure.

The alternative is to recognize that these archetypal qualities don't actually belong to the people onto whom they're projected. The elderly friend, for example, was neither as wise or as foolish as he appeared when seen through the distorting glasses of a projected archetype, and so on. Once this realization occurs, the quaternio draws together once again into a unity: the serpent of the myth of Genesis, the emblem of projection and deceit.

The third quaternio, the Paradise quaternio, then unfolds (Diagram 5). The four archetypal forces are recognized at this stage as processes rather than persons, a transformation which makes it much easier to keep from projecting them on other people. At this stage a relationship with an actual person, uncontaminated with archetypal projections, for the first time becomes a possibility. The symbolism of Paradise, with its implied reference to Adam and Eve, is obviously relevant here, and the four archetypes of the quaternio thus take their names from the four rivers of Paradise in Jewish legend.

This is the stage in which the anima or animus, the contrasexual archetype, has to be encountered and brought into a balanced relationship with the ego. Jung suggested that the traditional idea of the poet as inspired by a use, a feminine spiritual power who embodied

the poet's creativity, is a precise reflection of the experience of interacting with the anima, and proposed that an equivalent process accounts for the idea, just as common in religious traditions, of a spiritual marriage between a female mystic and a male deity. More broadly, this stage marks the point in the process of individuation when the ego can begin to relate to the archetypes as inner realities rather than outward projections. As this process unfolds, the quaternio draws together yet again into a unity: the Lapis, the alchemical stone, which is an emblem of the self.

The fourth quaternio, the Lapis quaternio, then unfolds from the Lapis (Diagram 6). Jung identified its four powers as the traditional elements of alchemy: fire, air, water, and earth, the ingredients of the alchemical stone. At this stage of the individuation process, the ego finds its proper place as an element of the psyche, and the four elements then draw together a final time to become the Rotundum, the fully individuated self. The Lapis quaternio, though, has another significance for those who know their way around the traditions of the AODA or its sister orders: it is mirrored almost precisely in the spatial structure of the Sphere of Protection, as may be seen readily by comparing Diagram 2 to Diagram 6.

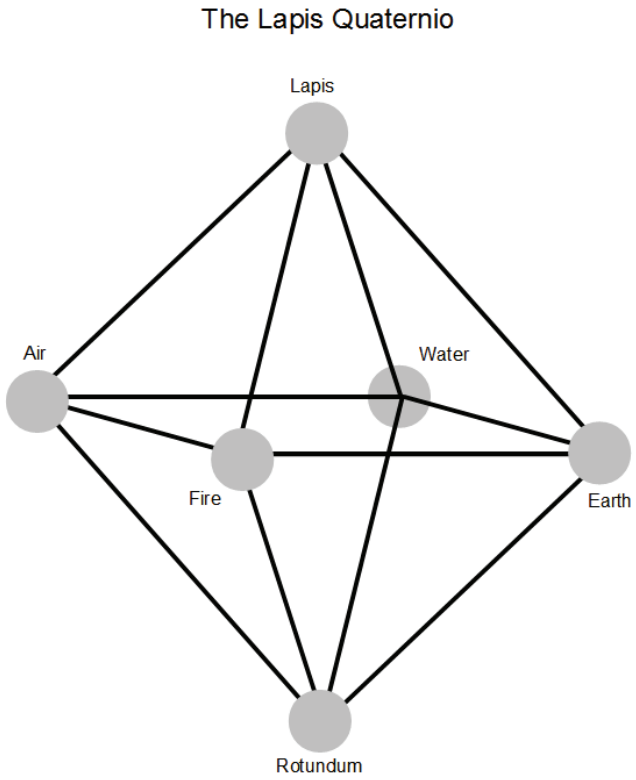

Diagram 6
The Lapis quaternio.

The Sphere of Protection

What this implies, in turn, is that Juliet Ashley may have intended the original form of the Sphere of Protection as a way of helping to catalyze the process of individuation in initiates of the orders she led. That suggestion makes sense in terms of Jungian psychology; Jung's patients, after all, were encouraged to use painting and other arts to give concrete form to the contents of their inner lives. Jung (1969b) himself insisted that such exercises only had the desired effect when they happened spontaneously, but magical traditions emphatically contradict his claim. What, after all, is a talisman, if not a mandala symbol deliberately created for the purpose of bringing about specific changes in someone's inner or outer life?

In exactly the same way, the deliberate and regularly repeated enactment of the Lapis quaternio using the performing art of magical ritual could quite conceivably have been intended

to help constellate, as Jung liked to say, the desired end point of the individuation process. Whether this was an appropriate activity in terms of orthodox Jungian therapy is of course beside the question, for no one to my knowledge has ever claimed that Juliet Ashley was an orthodox Jungian or, for that matter, orthodox in any other sense. She had her own distinctive approach to spirituality and the quest for psychological wholeness, and within that approach, a borrowing from Jung's theory of individuation makes perfect sense.

At least two consequences follow from the likelihood that the Sphere of Protection was at least partly influenced by the fourth, or Lapis, quaternio that Jung described in *Aion*. The first, obviously enough, is that it might well be worth exploring other aspects of AODA tradition with an eye for other borrowings from Jung, or from important writers of the first generation or so of Jungian theorists such as Marie-Louise von Franz. Exactly what such an exploration might turn up is anyone's guess, but if other connections can be identified, the result would be a clearer sense of AODA's descent from the psychological and spiritual traditions of the twentieth century, and thus a clarification of its history.

A second consequence relates to the present and future of AODA rather than its past. If the Sphere of Protection was in fact modeled on Jung's Lapis quaternio, as part of a general revision of the order's work inspired by Jung, the entire body of Jungian psychology becomes a resource for further expansions and developments of the still somewhat fragmentary body of theory and practice AODA offers its initiates. In order to reach a destination, it helps a great deal to know where one is going; if the goal (or at least one potential goal) of initiation and spiritual practice in the AODA tradition is understood as individuation, in something like the sense Jung gave the word, a very broad field for the development of rituals, practices, and instructional materials would be opened up by that understanding.

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Localizing the Sphere of Protection for Travel

Ron Slabaugh

Ron Slabaugh is a Druid Apprentice in AODA and lives in Middlebury, Vermont, where he has been active in sustainability and localization efforts in the community. His early education culminated in a PhD in biochemistry, and his learning since then has been dedicated to recovery from this reductionist approach to nature. He earned an MSSW (master of science in social work) degree and practiced psychotherapy and family therapy while working as an educational specialist in medical school family practice departments and in private practice. He has since trained in BodyTalk, a proprietary form of energy medicine. He is a YUGE *composter with a large garden and chickens, even though he recently changed his diet to near vegan.*

In the winters of 2015 and 2016 my wife and I were gifted with travel opportunities, first to Hawaii and then India.[1] In each case, the gift was airfare and a week's lodging and in both cases we managed a low-budget extension to be able to stay for five weeks. In both cases I felt cultural dissonance between the local ecology and culture and my regular daily practice of the Sphere of Protection (SOP) ritual.

Since 2009 I have practiced the form of the SOP given in the *Druid Magic Handbook* (*DMH*, Greer, 2007, pp. 65 ff.), using the structure and the animals and deities given there. In the beginning of my practice I did not accept the invitation to personalize the SOP with different animals, gods, and goddesses. In both Hawaii and India I felt a resonance with the indigenous spirituality and dissonance with the Celtic deities and animals in my normal practice. This led me to experiment with substituting local deities and animals in the SOP while there and for a time after my return to the northeastern United States (Vermont).[2]

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1 I realize that a major Earth Path step in reducing one's carbon footprint is to avoid air travel. I have my own rationalizations for the travel described here (both were gifts) but did so with some regret and apologies to Mother Earth.

2 On returning from Hawaii to Vermont, somehow the Hawaiian deities didn't feel right and I went back to the Celtic. Returning from India, I persisted with the Hindu deities and animals while writing this article.

While I have always been aware of the SOP instructions to insert personally relevant "expressions of spiritual power" into the different positions of the ritual, it was only when I felt out of sync with my environment in Hawaii and India that I felt a need to change what I was used to, the Celtic gods and goddesses given in the *DMH*. I found further encouragement for this experimentation in a post by John Michael Greer on the AODA forum in response to someone's question about the different versions of instructions for doing the SOP:

> "Yes, the versions of the Sphere of Protection in the various books that were issued during my time in the Big Chair were all different, and deliberately so. The SOP, as I was taught it, is a template to be filled in by each student as he or she wishes, not something to be done letter perfect according to the rule book. The temptation to do the latter is strong enough in many pagan and occult scenes these days that I decided to make sure nobody would be able to point to one approved version and claim that that was Holy Writ. JMG, Grand Has-Been.[3]"

Therefore, this essay outlines my methodology, process, and experience adapting my SOP practice to Hawaiian (winter 2015) and Hindu (winter 2016) deities and local animals.

Method

There are ten places in the SOP where one may substitute a deity saint or avatar and four places (the four directions or elements) where one might, in addition, substitute a local animal for the ones given in the *DMH*. There is an eleventh position, Spirit Within, where a word from the local tradition might be substituted for Awen (see Table 1).

My process in arriving at substitutions was to retain the structure from my standard practice of what might be called the Celtic version, that is, the deities and animals given in the *DMH*. One is gender balance of the deities. I have greatly appreciated this aspect of Druidry, so I searched for substitutions that would follow the gender placements in the Celtic version (see Gender column in Table 1). In addition, I wanted to retain the age versus youth that pertains in the Celtic version for up and down and right and left. Finally, I looked for correspondence with characteristics of the various positions, for example, a celestial association for above, earth energy for below, and some kind of association of the deity to the elemental gateway: for example, for air, the Hindu monkey god, Hanuman, whose father is the wind god Vayu; or Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of fire and volcanoes for the south.

For the animal substitutions I looked for a bird for the east, a hoofed animal for the south, a fish or sea animal for the west, and a mammal for the north to match the Celtic version: hawk, stag, salmon, bear.

The first four positions for substitution occur in the second performance of the body motions of the Elemental Cross, where I had been using Hu above, Esus below, Ceridwen

3 https://beta.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/AODA_Public/info

	CELTIC			HINDU			HAWAIIAN		
	Deity	Gender	Animal	Deity	Gender	Animal	Deity	Gender	Animal
Up	Hu	M	—	Bramha	M	—	Io	M	—
Down	Hesus	M	—	Vishnu	M	—	Kane	M	—
Right	Cerridwen	F	—	Saras-wati	F	—	Na'wahi-ne	F	—
Left	Niwalen	F	—	Lakshmi	F	—	Hina	F	—
East	Hu	M	Hawk	Hanu-man	M	Brahminy kite	Lono	M	Hawaiian hawk
South	Sol	F	Stag	Kali	F	Cow	Pele	F	Wild pig
West	Hesus	M	Salmon	Ganesh	M	Albino dolphin	Kanaloa	M	Humuhumunuku-nukuapua'a[4]
North	Elana	F	Bear	Parvarti	F	Indian elephant	Ku	M	Humpbacked whale
Below	Ced	F	[2]	Shakti/ Amma	F	—	Haumea	F	—
Above	Celi	M	[3]	Indra	M	—	Wakea	M	—
Within[1]	Awyn	—	—	Om	—	—	Aloha	—	—

Table 1. Deities and Animals Named in the SOP in Celtic, Hindu, and Hawaiian Contexts

1 Word, not a name.

2 The bright heart of the Earth Mother.

3 The sun in its glory and the Father of Light.

4 Picasso triggerfish (Hawaiian state fish).

to the right, and Niwalen to the left as given in the *DMH*. Hu might be considered more senior ("Hu the Mighty," Greer, 2007, p. 239) and Esus "sitting in the first fork of the sacred oak" (p. 238) more junior. Ceridwen represents the archetype of the older, wise woman, with her cauldron of herbal potion, while Niwalen is "the young goddess of dawn and springtime. . . . Imagine her as a maiden with golden hair, clad in a short white tunic, her arms and legs bare, dancing in the forest" (p. 238).

The second four positions which may be substituted (directions and elements) also show elder and younger gods in the east and west and elder and younger goddesses to the south and north. The next two places for substitutions are Spirit Below and Spirit Above, which in the Celtic version suggest Mother Earth and Father Sky, another principle I wished to honor.

Most of my research into aspects and characteristics of potential substitutions was done online, supplemented by books from local libraries or bookstores. For the Hawaiian, I used the website Ancient Huna (http://ancienthuna.com/). For the Hindu, I consulted various websites plus the book *Hindu Gods and Goddesses* by Stephen Knapp (2012). In both cases the research was supplemented by reading novels set in the two cultures. Particularly helpful for Hawaii was *Shark Dialogues* by Kiana Davenport (1995). This epic novel spans several generations of one family very connected to the ancient culture. Two novels were helpful for Hindu culture in India, both utilizing stories and characters from the Indian classic *The Mahabharata*: *Vishwamitra* by Dr. Vineet Aggarwal (2014), and *The Mahabharata Quest*, by Christopher C. Doyle (2014).

Results

Table 1 (page 11) gives the results of my substitutions for both the Hawaiian experiment and the Indian or Hindu along with the Celtic version.

Discussion

I will address my experiences with the Hindu deities and animals first, as I began writing this article immediately on my return from India and the experience is fresher. I have also found it easier to do the SOP in New England with Hindu deities than with Hawaiian. I have a hypothesis for why this happened: New England is a long way from Hawaii, not just in distance but in climate, vegetation, and feeling—but then so is India. But my spiritual history includes some Hindu guru experience, which may have made the deities more familiar. One of our home-stay hosts in Jaipur, a practicing Hindu, said to us that Hinduism in India was much more than a religion, it was a culture. As a culture, and as a religious-spiritual tradition, the Vedic influences go back as far as 1500 BCE. In India, one sees these influences in the temples and other religious institutions as well as everyday culture. I'm not sure how old Polynesian religion is, but it would be extant in Hawaii from the second century CE at the earliest, although the eleventh is more likely.

I had powerful experiences with all the animals. We spent a week at Amritapuri, the ashram for the modern Indian saint, Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma). Our room was on the

eleventh floor overlooking the waterway between the island on which the ashram is located and the mainland. The red-brown sea eagle known as the brahminy kite frequently soared below our windows. Cows were seen on the streets of Mumbai, New Delhi, and other cities and along country roads. At the ashram, I would do my SOP out on the end of a rock jetty extending a hundred yards or so into the Indian Ocean. The local fishermen used kayaks to fish with lines and with nets. One morning, one of the men deployed a hanging net some hundred yards long attached to floats. An albino dolphin appeared and cruised along the net several times, enjoying the fruits of the fisherman's labor.

I had been to Hawaii several times before and in 2003 spent four months living on a wilderness beach on the west side of Hawaii, the Big Island, looking across to Maui. Humpback and spinner dolphins were regular visitors and the humuhumunukunukuapua'a (Hawaii state fish) is commonly seen while snorkeling.

In both cases, I felt more in touch with the indigenous culture with these substitutions.

The invocations for the various directions follow the structure of the SOP given in the *DMH*. The Elemental Cross is done three times and the first and third are the same as the *DMH*, without substitution. My script, using the Hindu example, would be something like (thumbs against forehead), "Brahma, the creator" (thumbs below navel), "Vishnu, the sustainer" (right hand to the right, elbow against body, palm up), "Sarasvati, who encourages learning and education" (left hand similarly to left), "Lakshmi, youth and spiritual wealth." I take a deep breath after each of the three Elemental Crosses.

My script for the directions and elements, using east as an example, might be (facing east and drawing the symbol in yellow, circle with vertical line pointing up), "By the brahminy kite soaring in the morning sky of spring and in the great name Hanuman and his father Vayu, god of the wind, I invoke air, its gods, spirits and powers. May the gifts of air be mine today." This would be followed by the script for banishing by air.

I found this kind of creative substitution to be in the spirit of Druid practice and fun for me. Somehow it seemed to honor and respect both the ecology and culture of where I was. Should others want to apply these methods in travel settings, I would suggest pretravel research into both the natural setting of your destination and the religious and cultural aspects of the area for substitutions which might be made, with the chart in Table 1 as a guideline.

Given the situation in the world right now with respect to Islam, it would be interesting to modify one's practice of the SOP while in Middle Eastern or other Islamic nations with saints and prophets from the Islamic tradition. The Sufi poets Rumi and Hafez speak to me spiritually and would have a place!

Conclusion

Continuity of my practice of the SOP has been important to my Druidry, and I have found, in two instances when I was in vastly different environments than North America, that by modifying the ritual by substituting deities and animals from the respective local ecology,

culture, and spirituality, I have reduced the cognitive dissonance I have felt using the Celtic version of the SOP that is my standard practice.

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Seeking Nature Wisdom as a Sacred Act: Holistic Plant Knowledge and Earth Healing Among Modern Druids[1]

Kimberly Kirner

Kimberly Kirner, PhD, is a cultural anthropologist, nature mystic, and animist Druid. Kim is an Ovate in the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids and a member of the Ancient Order of Druids in America. Her spiritual path also includes a current Faery Seership apprenticeship under Orion Foxwood and two years of spiritual direction from T. Thorn Coyle. A professor of anthropology at California State University, Northridge, her professional work centers on the relationships between cognition, emotion, and action and how these are shaped by place, community, and identity. Her research primarily focuses on environmental issues (particularly sustainability and environmental justice) and the intersection of religion and everyday action. As a Druid, she seeks to deepen her embodiment of ecocentric values in everyday life and her exploration of what it means to connect to the divine through service to nature spirits. She pursues crafting secular actions for justice and sustainability alongside meaningful religious practices that can assist in developing the human capacity for liberation, peace, mindfulness, and love. When not working, she can be found in the horse stable, garden, or art studio—and occasionally in the solitude of the mountains.

I am both a Druid and an ethnoecologist, which means that in my professional life, I study the ways in which people develop, transmit, and refine knowledge about their environment and how to interact with the various beings in it. As a Druid, I believe nature is sacred and the earth is full of sentient beings. I live in a world that is experientially relational—in which I

1 This is an abridged version of an article first published in the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*: Kirner, Kimberly. (2016). Pursuing the salmon of wisdom: The sacred in folk botanical knowledge revival among modern Druids. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 9(4), 448–482.

have relationships with beings, not management of objects. It is an animist worldview. Cultures (including subcultures in the United States) diverge in how they relate to the natural world. This study investigates how contemporary Druids of various orders relate to plants, and how this differs from mainstream Western (and particularly U.S.) ways of doing so. It also poses questions about how these differences could lead toward greater conservation of plant biodiversity, the advancement of local knowledge about the environment, and greater sustainability. My hope is that from this essay, Druids learn about trends occurring across the United States, the United Kingdom, and other places that Druidry and Druidism have flourished, and that Druids are inspired to further build knowledge of and engagement with local plants.

Ethnoecology is a field that touches the natural sciences of biology, botany, and ecology; cultural anthropology; and cognitive science. Ethnoecology studies traditional ecological knowledge (TEK, the knowledge of nature from indigenous cultures) and local ecological knowledge (LEK, the knowledge of nature that nonprofessionals produce in localized contexts). While Western science generates formalized knowledge using empirical ways of knowing, and institutions such as government agencies use this knowledge to craft environmental policy and programs, the positive and negative impacts of humans on nature are mediated through the informal (folk) knowledge and actions produced by people on the ground in local contexts. These studies are critically important for understanding how humans all over the world conceptualize nature, how they interact with it, and the on-the-ground factors that lead to sustainability or collapse.

This study was, like many in ethnoecology (and more broadly cultural anthropology), conducted through ethnographic and mixed methods. Ethnography includes both participant observation (the researcher personally engaging with people within a particular culture in activities as they are doing them) and interviewing people (in this case, unstructured interviews, which is when a researcher asks questions as they come up during participant observation). The study also mixed this qualitative (ethnographic and interview) data with quantitative data (survey data that produces statistical results) in order to understand how broadly Druids engage in certain practices across different geographic areas. This data was used in combination to characterize how Druids relate to plants, the ways in which they generate and share knowledge about plants, and, when these findings were analyzed in comparison to other more long-standing nature-centric religious systems, how Druidic engagement with plants might lead toward conservation of biodiversity and greater sustainability.

As both Druid and environmental anthropologist, I am particularly interested in how we can forge a more sustainable future—one in which humans are connected with nature, respect nonhuman beings, and seek to be humane and sustainable in the ways in which we use natural resources. There is a large literature on how animism in indigenous societies is part of a wider cultural framework that supports long-term sustainability. As an animist, and as an environmental anthropologist working on issues of sustainability in the United States, I wondered if contemporary animism (frequently found in Druidic and wider Pagan

communities) would lead to the types of rich folk ecological knowledge and sustainable actions that it does in many indigenous societies. A number of small but organized international Druid orders provide for the revival, construction, and transmission of folk ecological knowledge as a central part of their spiritual movements through correspondence courses, books, and workshops.[2] It was this facet of the movement that piqued my interest as an ethnoecologist. Situating contemporary animism in a new religious movement with global borders could contribute to the literature on the potential relationship between animism and sustainability, and illuminate how such new religious movements in the Western world might be understood in light of the considerable literature on indigenous religions' roles in conservation (Berkes, 1999; Byers, Cunliffe, Robert, & Hudak, 2001; Ramakrishnan, Saxena, & Chandrashekara, 1998; Sponsel et al., 1998).

Druidry has much in common with traditional ecological knowledge, and self-consciously so. Rather than endorsing the mainstream contemporary Western view that humans are separate from and in control of natural resources, Druids maintain a spiritual orientation to the natural world, viewing their community as inclusive of nature spirits—the spirits of plants, stones, animals, places, and natural forces. As in the case of TEK, Druidic knowledge is constructed on the idea that plants and animals are individuals in their own right and Druids maintain two basic concepts found throughout TEK systems: first, that all things are connected, and second, that all things are related (Pierotti & Wildcat, 2000). However, Druidry also arises in a Western context, and so is informed by Western scientific ways of knowing and data and by Western capitalist economic and legal structures. In the past, little formal study has been done on the impact contemporary animism in new religious movements has on conservation or sustainability in the Western world. My study bridges the gap between the literature on TEK and indigenous animism, and the literature (largely from religious studies) on contemporary nature-centric religious movements, which has insufficiently addressed folk ecological knowledge and conservation-related behavior. My contribution in this work is to discuss, using ethnographic and survey data, how Druidry unites Western scientific and animist epistemologies in its re/construction and transmission of folk botanical knowledge and the challenges of translating animist belief and practice into conservation action in a Western context.

Methodology

In this section, I briefly outline the details of how I conducted my study, which explains not only how I acquired the data I did, but how I am situated in the study as both Druid

2 Within the Druid community, there is often a distinction between Druidic polytheist religion (most frequently called Druidism) and Druidic spirituality compatible with a wide range of theological views (most frequently called Druidry). In the literature, use of these terms varies by author. I will use the same convention as was used in Hutton's (2009) comprehensive historical analysis to describe the entire contemporary Druid movement (Druidry), to be inclusive of both religious and spiritual strands

and professional anthropologist. These details frame how widely applicable the study is to Druids globally, where ethnographic details came from (in terms of specific groups and gatherings), and help other social scientists understand how my findings should be assessed vis-à-vis their own studies. This particular study was based on collecting and analyzing a combination of qualitative and quantitative data in order to better address the need for both deep, experience-based understanding and capturing representatives from a wide range of Druid orders and geographic locations. Druids are scattered across a large region globally. Most are concentrated in the United Kingdom and the United States, but there are also significant populations in Europe (particularly western and northern Europe), Australia, and New Zealand. It is difficult to estimate the number of Druids globally; the largest worldwide order, the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD), claims over 10,000 members. Yet many Druids do not belong to any order at all, studying and practicing on their own. For this reason, I used participant observation in Druid gatherings in diverse locations and review of published materials from three of the largest Druid orders (Ár nDraíocht Féin [ADF]; the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids [OBOD]; and the Ancient Order of Druids in America [AODA], for depth) combined with a survey (for breadth and inclusion of solitary practitioners).

I myself am situated in the Druid community as an insider, which is a common positionality in Pagan studies that brings with it both a depth of experience and also potential bias (Blain, Ezzy, & Harvey, 2004). Mixed-methods research, that is, research that collects multiple kinds of data, assists in not only capturing a broader population of Druids, with the local variation inherent in the population's distribution, but also provides quantitative and survey-based qualitative data that can contradict the ethnographer's (and insider's) biases and assumptions. In total, I have spent fourteen years as a Druid, eleven of which I have been in training under OBOD, and the last eight of which I have been an active member of a local Druid grove. For this particular study, I selected four large-scale gatherings of Druids in different geographic regions (the West Coast Gathering 2012 in California; the East Coast Gathering 2012 in Pennsylvania; the Samhain Druid Camp 2012 in southwest England; and the Pan-Druid Gathering 2013 in Virginia) and conducted participant observation there, taking detailed notes on workshops, conversations, and rituals.[3]

In addition, I distributed an online survey on religious beliefs and practices, as well as ecological footprint measures, to a broadly Pagan audience through a popular Pagan news site, The Wild Hunt, as well as through posts to social media and word of mouth (the survey can be found with this article). The survey generated a total of 799 responses, 164 of whom

3 The camps that were attended in the United States and England, with the exception of the Pan Druid Beltane, were associated with OBOD to varying degrees, but not officially hosted by OBOD as an organization. Participants included Druids from AODA and ADF, and Druids who were not affiliated with any of the major orders. It is not uncommon for American Druids to simultaneously belong to OBOD, AODA, and/or ADF as none of the orders demand exclusive affiliation.

self-identified as Druid. Of these respondents, 84 percent were from the United States, and most were European/white/Caucasian persons evenly distributed between the ages of twenty-five and sixty-five. The average Druid had self-identified as Pagan for eighteen years. Analysis for this research included reflecting on my own experience (my thoughts, feelings, etc.) as I participated in Druidic practice and community and analyzing survey data and ethnographic notes by categorizing them both inductively (that is, finding patterns that arise in the data using grounded theory) and deductively (that is, evaluating the data for patterns related specifically to animist belief and practice and folk knowledge, using content analysis). The combination provided interesting insights into how folk ecological knowledge is being constructed and transmitted, and the challenges of translating animist belief and practice into conservation action in a Western, mostly sub/urban context.

Knowledge and the Sacred

The remainder of this piece discusses the findings from the study and my reflections, as a Druid, on those findings. I begin by describing the ways in which Druids interweave sacredness with knowledge about nature. I then describe how Druids gain wisdom about and from plants in a relational manner, learning both practical and spiritual-magical knowledge about trees, herbs, and other plants. I conclude my findings with an exploration of sacred groves, both those that Druids are planting and how they could be situated in an ongoing broader global pattern of sacred forests that conserve biodiversity. Finally, I problematize the relationship between Druidic knowledge and sustainability, explaining how the confines of contemporary life in Western capitalist nations can make the implementation of widely held Druidic values for sustainable action difficult.

Druidry as a spiritual movement is rooted in an exploration of what humans can know, either through experience or reason. It is a different type of religious inquiry than is common among the major Western religions, beginning with the individual's quest for knowledge rather than a collective faith. For many Druids, deity is understood in ways that are inclusive, experiential, and frequently immanent. In the survey, 51 percent of Druids perceived deity as animist, 49 percent as polytheist, 38 percent as pantheist, and 34 percent as panentheist. In general, these conceptualizations of deity can overlap in a single Druid's cosmology, and most Druids are focused on forging personal experiences and understandings of deity, rather than agreement between Druids on the nature of deity. More common than a focus on deity is the pursuit of spiritual experience through "nature spirits," of which plants are a subset: 95 percent of Druids reported faith, experience, or hypothetical agreement with the existence of tree and other plant spirits (with the majority, 51 percent, perceiving plant spirits through experience of them). In qualitative responses, the frequency of Druids reporting a responsibility to nature (including "nature spirits," "land," "place," "earth," and "trees") was far greater than mentions of obligation to deity and was only superseded by a sense of responsibility to one's ancestors.

Anthropologists have frequently wrestled with how to understand animism. Some have proposed animism as a "responsive relatedness," a way of generating knowledge that develops the relationship skills of humans to other nonhuman beings and deepens one's awareness of oneself and the environment (Bird-David, 1999). In such a framework, humans "talk with" and relate to nonhuman beings within one system, rather than categorically separating humans (the knower) from nonhumans (the known) and reducing nonhumans to bits of data to acquire. This spiritual worldview of the natural world is often closely aligned with the production of traditional ecological knowledge (Basso, 1996; Hunn, 1990; Thornton, 2008). Other ways of understanding animism have pointed out its practical dimensions (as a code of ethics; see Nelson, 1983) and its spiritual dimensions (arguing it is more an ontology than an epistemology; see, for example, De Castro, 1999).

In investigating how Druidic animism is enacted, it becomes apparent that it is simultaneously ontology (ways of organizing the nature of being), epistemology (ways of knowing), and ethics (ways of organizing the "right" or best way to act). Like most animist systems, Druidry purports a distinctly relational and ecocentric ontology. Nonhumans and humans are part of one interdependent system, and nonhumans are different from humans more in form than in substance (hence the description of these as "kindreds" in ADF liturgy). Nonhumans are often experienced as "persons" who communicate, have power, and have agendas of their own—they are "people with whom to work," not "objects to know and use." However, this spiritually infused view of the natural world is not oppositional to a Western scientific epistemology, but rather unites such ways of knowing with intuitive, emotional, and spiritual forms of acquiring knowledge—which is consistently linked to ethical action:

> "An important step in this [Druidic path] is to learn as much as you can about the ecosystem you live in, what should and should not be there, what changes occur with the seasons, and what can be done to protect it. Spend time out in the woods and green areas near you. Learn what trees, plants, and animals live around there. Spend time with individual trees and plants and listen to what they have to tell you. (Ellison, 2005, p. 82)"

It has been widely recognized that folk science systems frequently have spiritual and magical dimensions, often to pragmatic ends in terms of conservation, and that such systems are not inherently incompatible with Western science, even though they are differently oriented (Anderson, 1996, 2010; Gadgil, Berkes, & Folke, 1993; Gagnon & Berteaux, 2009; Kimmerer, 2002; Moller et al., 2004). In Druidry, these two epistemologies—Western scientific and animist/relational—are viewed as not only compatible, but mutually necessary, in order to use all potential ways to know the natural world and to appropriately respond to it.

As knowledge in general (in the Druidic worldview) is thought to be both spiritual and scientific, rational and intuitive, this integrated way of inquiring into the world of flora

and fauna permeates the Druidic subculture, uniting Druids not only in a quest for full understanding of other beings, but also in the ways they communicate such knowledge to each other. The body of lore that is constructed and transmitted in Druidry is largely done so through a method more akin to a university than to a religious organization. The largest Druid groups—OBOD, ADF, and AODA—though performing public ritual and other activities similar to a church, provide detailed training programs for members (including reading material, activities, and mentorship). Members work through degrees, deepening their knowledge and experience over time, and in all three orders, written examinations or reviews are evaluated by senior Druids in order to progress to the next level.

Druidic knowledge about plants is woven into the training programs, and such study incorporates diverse information, including mythology and associations in the spirit realm, ritual and meditative practices, uses, and scientific data, including scientific and folk names, habitat and ecology, biology and behavior, and, when applicable, appropriate actions in cultivation, restoration, and conservation. In addition to training materials, there are websites, podcasts, topically specific discussion groups, published books, and workshops at large public gatherings. Druids are expected to draw from all of these sources, as well as literature from the natural sciences on their local environment, in order to fulfill an appropriate complete course of study. Because Druidic training emphasizes multiple ways of learning material, and particularly encourages (or even demands) experiential learning, each Druid is recognized as a practitioner who may hold specific expert knowledge on some ecological topic. At the same time, those who hold either Western scientific degrees (botany, biology) or alternative recognized accomplishments (work as an herbalist professionally, master gardener certification, successfully published on Pagan work with plants) are recognized as folk experts and are often asked to provide workshops at public gatherings. Workshops may be led, therefore, by persons formally trained in a relevant Western science, or informally or formally trained in a spirituality or folk science, or self-taught but recognized for their contributions.

Because of how Druids are positioned within Western Euro-American culture and the scattered nature of their community (often sharing information online or through written material, such as letters between tutors/mentors and students, rather than in person), it is problematic to call Druidic folk ecological knowledge local or traditional. While Druids are inspired by tradition and, to a greater or lesser extent (both individually and in groups) attempt to reconstruct pre-Christian Celtic ecological knowledge, they are sharply limited by the almost total lack of information on ancient Druids, a nonliterate society that was more or less wholly absorbed and transformed by Roman invasion and Christian religion. Therefore, Druidic knowledge is not traditional or indigenous in a conventional sense, though it attempts to reconstruct and reinvent a traditional-like knowledge and spiritual system in contrast to mainstream Western science and Judeo-Christian-centric religion.

In summary, while contemporary Druidic knowledge is, unlike indigenous knowledge, not local nor traditional, it does situate knowledge in a relational system in which nonhuman beings

are "persons with whom to have relationship" rather than "objects to manage." At the same time, Druids widely hold building knowledge of the natural world to be a sacred or spiritual act, an integral part to the practice of Druidry itself. This knowledge is ideally presented as a union of various streams: folklore and Western science, local and nonlocal, pragmatic and magical, learned at a distance and experientially. This way of situating knowledge as a sacred endeavor motivates Druids to learn about plants, but also from plants as persons in their own right.

Plant Wisdom

Most Druids (76 percent), as the survey data established, "firmly" believe that plants have spirits. Knowledge about plants, therefore, is seen not only as "knowing about" (objectivist stance) but also "gaining wisdom from" (relational stance). Plant wisdom includes both Western scientific knowledge (Latin and common names and relationship in the Linnean system, companion plants for gardening, native versus nonnative species by ecosystem) and spiritual and magical knowledge (messages from plant spirits, magical and divinatory uses, mythological associations). Druids use the Linnean system to describe biological relationship (in either Latin or common names), mapping this onto a series of spiritual classification systems that organize plants according to meaning and relationships on the spiritual plane. Such knowledge organizational systems, often presenting species with their Latin, Gaelic, and English names, include ogam (an Irish mnemonic device and contemporary divinatory system), oracle sets (used for divination), and correspondence tables (associating plants to meanings, magical uses, and seasons/festivals). Ogam is most commonly focused on trees, other oracles on power plants and animals, and correspondence tables on associating plants and animals with such aspects as the four elements and cardinal directions, often used to inform ritual.

Plant wisdom is generated and transmitted through a number of different mechanisms: direct contact with plants, workshops, and books and training materials. OBOD, for example, introduces much of the plant lore and activities working with plants in the second degree training materials, and includes in one of its first lessons a suggested bibliography, inclusive of both spiritual and botanical works, on United Kingdom plants. Immediately after my own initiation into the second degree (called the Ovate work in OBOD), I was offered a gift from the host group of the initiation of six dried herbs that are intensively studied, so that I could begin to forge a relationship with them (and not only through reading about them).[4] The survey data indicated that 60 percent of Druids have or are currently participating in a formal course of study (such as the one that I have participated in through OBOD), with 29 percent participating in regular local group (usually called groves or seed groups) meetings,

4 Both my initiations (into the first degree, or Bardic, level and to the second, or Ovate) involved interactions with plants experientially. However, because of the tenets of initiatory tradition, I am limited in what I can say about my initiations and the specifics of the training. I speak generally when necessary to preserve the ethics of conducting research within initiatory tradition and specifically (providing the common and Latin names of specific plants) when able.

21 percent participating a few times per year in local meetings, and 20 percent participating in annual large gatherings (where people from multiple groves convene). Of those who go to local group meetings, 57 percent reported that such meetings featured environmental education at least once per year, according to survey data. Of those attending large annual gatherings, 76 percent consistently attended at least one workshop at annual gatherings on environmental knowledge. The degree of interest among Druids in environmental knowledge is quite high: 86 percent of respondents reported that their conversations with other Druids and Pagans included sharing such knowledge at least a third of the time (with 17 percent saying that such conversations always included the exchange of environmental knowledge). Ethnographic research indicated that these conversations and workshops revolve around two interwoven ways of interacting with plants—pragmatic uses (planting, tending, harvesting, wildcrafting, healing) and spiritual uses (communication with plants, magic, divination).

Druids encourage one another—through orders' training materials, order-specific and pan-Druid online groups, and through informal local groups and conversations—to interact directly with plants through nature walks and hiking (to learn how to identify wild plants), gardening, herbalism, and wildcrafting. The survey data indicated that the overwhelming majority of Druids engage with plants directly on a monthly (or more frequent) basis: 73 percent garden; 86 percent hike or walk; and 81 percent cultivate and/or use herbs. At least once per year, 74 percent of Druids go camping or backpacking; large gatherings are generally held at rural camps (children's summer camps in the off-season, nature spirituality centers, national forest campsites). Nature walks to teach plant identification and use is a common feature in large gatherings, and frequently featured in local groups' meetings, including the use of excursions to botanical gardens and public talks by botanists and, in the United States, national park and forest rangers.

Workshops on gardening and herbalism follow similar patterns of integrating Western scientific knowledge with an animist worldview and folklore. Druids are encouraged to plant and tend a tree or other plant, even if they have limited space, being urged by training materials to try even just potted plants or window boxes. This direct interaction with planting, tending, and harvesting is the experiential companion to learning about plants through written materials. Gardeners often simultaneously join permaculture and gardening groups locally to learn practical skills, read books on gardening, and forge relationships with the plants they tend, asking the plants directly for feedback to improve the garden. For example, Dana O'Driscoll, a Druid who completed the third degree in AODA based on her permaculture project, ran a permaculture group, a Druid grove, and a blog on both topics, using her three-acre farm to provide a study area for both groups.[5] She explained to me that there is

5 AODA's third degree roughly equates to doing a master's thesis, and students are expected to create a proposed project and provide a committee with a culminating body of work. Permaculture design is founded on the idea of regenerative and self-sustaining agricultural and other systems that are based on natural ecosystems, and that integrate multiple goals, including benefits for wildlife, other ecosystem services, and natural resources for humans.

substantial back-and-forth movement between the two groups; that is, Druids who join the grove often eventually join the permaculture group, and vice versa.

Those using herbs for healing or magical purposes are encouraged to pursue formal study of herbalism and also to "talk" directly with the herbs themselves, who will provide instruction intuitively on their use. Herbalism courses for healing purposes are widely available in the wider culture through Western or Eastern herbalism certification avenues, but using herbs for magical purposes is often a more solitary activity, given the limited availability of workshops and courses. Some use published books, such as *A Druid's Herbal for the Sacred Earth Year* (Hopman, 1995). While providing plant-by-plant discussion, the book is organized according to the eight Druid seasonal festivals, grouping plants by the appropriate time of year (that is, their association with the time of year their characteristics would be most applicable to human spiritual life). Additionally, the author provides appropriate herbal lists for rites of passage such as funerals and handfastings (marriages). Each plant is identified by its common English and Latin names, and has entries for the parts used, herbal uses for healing, homeopathic uses, and magical uses. Magical uses are ways in which to use the plant to assist in making one's will manifest in the physical realm; for example, one might wear rowan wood for protection or use the leaf and berry as incense to increase psychic powers (Hopman, 1995, p. 62). Again, the construction and transmission of folk knowledge blends Western scientific data, practical use, spiritual orientation, and magical use.

In ethnographic observation, there are two broad ways in which plants are considered to communicate spiritually important messages to humans: first, through symbolic associations that are formally recorded through the oracular systems and correspondence tables and second, through mystical experiences with plants in which individual plants are thought to relay messages to the individual human directly. Oracular systems include modern interpretations of the ancient ogam, an alphabet that first shows up in the fourth century CE in Ireland, carved into stone, and contemporary oracles that assemble information from a wide range of folkloric resources. Contemporary Druids largely use the ogam as a system to understand symbolic associations with different plants, mostly trees, that are found in the historical literature. While the ogam is generally marketed in the popular press as a divinatory system, it is used by some folk experts as a complex set of lists to construct poetry, work magic, and use for guidance through divinatory methods, associating the symbols' sounds with trees/plants, birds, animals, and colors (Laurie, 2007). One well-known Druid author used the tree ogam as a means of compiling an herbal that integrates practical and spiritual knowledge (Hopman, 2008). Even with these types of formalized associative symbolic systems, the use of the system is thought to necessitate personal interaction with the plants themselves, rather than being merely a form of mechanical divination. At the U.S. East Coast Druid Gathering in 2012, a workshop on the ogam focused as much on the process of developing relationships with the trees as the divinatory procedure itself. The workshop teacher had traveled all over the United Kingdom to communicate with specific individuals

of each of the ogam plants and collect material (after communicating with the plant, asking its permission, and providing offerings to its spirit) to create his set of small wooden staves (a common way of organizing the ogam for divination; one tosses the staves and reads the patterns between them). Students were encouraged to interact with living individual plants of each of the *fid* (symbols that correspond to a plant), even if they purchased an already-made ogam set, so that they could gain a deeper sense of the plants' wisdom and guidance through personal relationship.

Most Druids believe that plants are capable of directly communicating with humans, if the human is sufficiently focused and open to receiving intuitive knowledge. Plant spirits, and particularly trees, are sought out for wisdom and spiritual guidance; trees are often viewed as spiritual teachers. In the survey, 83 percent of Druids reported communicating with nature spirits, of which plant spirits are one kind, on a monthly or more frequent basis. At the 2009 California Gorsedd (Druid gathering), the Bardic (first-degree) initiation rite included a discussion on how to communicate with trees and then sending Bards out into the surrounding redwood grove to find a tree to which they were drawn, connect with it, and receive its message. The purpose of such a rite was not only to publicly initiate Bards into their spiritual work but also to provide training in a key ability—communicating with nonhuman beings in order to receive their wisdom. Bards shared these messages as a group after some time of individual meditation. For some, messages came as emotions, as a mystical sense of wider community. Others received some of the tree's personal history and a feeling of seasonal change. And for others, the trees imparted wisdom specifically about their spiritual path, acting as teachers or guides.

Plant spirits and their associated properties are thought to imbue not only live individual plants but also the wood harvested from them. It is quite common for Druids to craft wands and/or large staves, and holding a wand or staff is widely considered to be, in itself, a magical act, as the quality of certain woods is energetically related to their meanings in ogam and other oracles, and therefore they have the capacity to imbue the Druid who holds it with some of its essence. In one local Southern California workshop on wand making, various woods were placed on a table and Druids were instructed to hold or touch each in turn, to reflect on how this changed how they felt in their bodies, and to try to associate the tree with this intuitive feeling. Harvesting practices generally include asking plants for permission and thanking them with offerings. These are commonly presented in published training materials and workshops, as well as discussed in informal conversations about using plants:

> "The spirits of the plants used in this process are also asked for their help. In an animist sense, we give these spirits thanks and recognition. . . . The spirits of plants are living beings that can be appealed to through our words and actions. Through these acts, we build our connections with the spirits and relate more easily to them, growing ever-deepening roots in the earth. (Laurie, 2007, p. 43)"

Particularly with trees, people are encouraged to always leave some small offering for the tree—often water—in exchange for its gift of wood, leaf, nut, or berry. In my survey, 77 percent of Druids reported providing offerings for nature spirits on a monthly or more frequent basis (with 20 percent on a daily basis). In one ritual at the Pan-Druid Beltane gathering, a small altar was constructed at the site of two trees considered, with the spirits of place, to be particularly powerful. People left small pieces of jewelry and honey on the altar for the nature spirits there, in order to begin to forge a connection to them. Informal conversations at several gatherings featured discussions of suitable offerings; such discussions usually framed suitability in an ecological orientation rather than a spiritual one, again linking Western scientific knowledge with a spiritual orientation. That is, it was imperative to leave an offering for spiritual reasons, but what was left as an offering should reflect ecological knowledge—it should be biodegradable or of natural material, should not endanger wildlife, and should not alter the plant community.

The union of Western scientific knowledge and an animist worldview is perhaps most easily seen when the Druidic movement is geographically situated in environments very different from the United Kingdom. In these cases, Druids interact with training materials that are often grounded in the ecology and folklore of the United Kingdom, but are instructed to do sufficient local ecological research and direct interaction to forge their own spiritual and magical knowledge of local plants based on Druidic principles. At the West Coast Druid Gathering in 2012, one Druid offered his insights into redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) tree magic. He explained that offerings to the tree should be approximately fifteen feet from its trunk in order to ensure water offerings reach the roots. Messages from redwoods were explained to "bring ancient earth memory and energy to healing rituals," as their roots have a large span and often interweave with other trees. Contemporary trees are often clones of a parent tree, and therefore were perceived to be ancient beings, having the wisdom of thousands of years, rather than the hundreds of years that individual redwoods may have lived. The trees' height was taught to be useful for "sentinel magic," essentially asking the tree to psychically climb to its canopy to view the landscape if one were lost while hiking. In the absence of magical associations with an obviously imposing and salient species, Druids in California were creating folk ecological knowledge that wove together Western scientific knowledge with personal spiritual and magical experience. The union of these two is widely thought in the Druid community to be essential for becoming more sustainable as a species and for biodiversity conservation.

Druids across orders frequently describe the goal of sustainability as one with both spiritual-magical and practical dimensions, and their ways of learning about (and directly from) plants affirms this dual orientation. Druid orders encourage individuals to learn through both reading and experiential study, focusing on practical and ecological as well as spiritual and magical dimensions of knowledge. Through this process, Druids are meant to forge not only knowledge about plants' spiritual and magical associations, but also their role in local ecology

and gardening. In having this dual focus, Druids unite animist spirituality (which treats plants as persons with whom to communicate and relate) with practical, Western science-infused ecology (which encourages direct actions to conserve plant biodiversity).

Sacred Groves

Druidry encourages individuals to select activities based on their existing lifestyles and locations that will reduce their negative impact on the planet and promote conservation and sustainability. As a religion, however, Druidry lacks the central organization and congregational reach of many older, more established faiths to have a far-reaching impact as a cohesive whole. The most visible collective action taken by Druid organizations for conservation is the planting, tending, and registering of sacred groves, particularly in the largest Druid order, OBOD. The OBOD planting program offers small grants to Druid groups that cannot afford the materials to plant sacred groves, and produces a small instructional booklet including a list of sacred trees and their optimal planting sites, materials to have on hand, and instructions for successful tree planting and tree tending, as well as sample rituals for planting individual trees or entire groves (Saunders et al., 2001, p. 26). According to the survey data, the majority of Druids (56 percent) participate in tree planting, cutting, and blessing ceremonies at least once each year. OBOD maintains a registry of the sacred groves that have been planted around the world as part of the Druid movement, viewing the planting of trees as desirable not only for religious purposes (some use groves as sacred sites for conducting ritual) but also as an action that assists in both conserving biodiversity and reducing carbon footprint.

Sacred groves have been widely studied and are a common feature in many religious traditions and in diverse geographic regions. Sacred groves are commonly subject to restrictions on resource extraction and encourage conservation practices, grounded in religious justification (Gokhale et al., 2011; Hakkenberge, 2008; Xu et al., 2005). While they vary considerably in duration and size, and are therefore problematic for botanists and ecologists to generalize as to their impact for conservation and sustainability, the literature on them reports an array of ecosystem services that they provide (Ramakrishnan et al., 1998). Sacred groves often have higher rates of biodiversity than surrounding nonsacred forests (Gao et al., 2013; Hakkenberg, 2008; Salick et al., 2007); act as reserve forests and seed banks (Gokhale et al., 2011; Hakkenberg, 2008; Khan, Khumbongmayum, & Tripathi, 2008); protect old-growth trees and forest structure (Salick et al., 2007); and ensure habitat preservation (Khan et al., 2008). Yet at the same time, sacred groves can be fragile, subject to shifts in land tenure, national forest policy, economic change, and the erosion of traditional ecological knowledge systems—including competing cultural ideals between conservation and preservation, and between hegemonic Western scientific epistemology and environmentalism and local persons' access and control (Wadley & Colfer, 2004; Xu et al., 2005).

The study of the modern Druid movement and its groves may, over time, offer a way of understanding the process of creating and maintaining sacred groves in the Western

world, including how Druids navigate the integration of local management and national and regional forest policy. While too recent to effectively project the potential environmental impact of such groves in the United States and the United Kingdom, where they have been most commonly planted, there are early indicators that at least some of the ecosystem services afforded by traditional sacred groves elsewhere will be shared with Druid sacred groves, most notably the protection of old-growth trees and forest structure and the preservation of habitat. What is noticeably different in how Druid sacred groves are constructed and maintained is the collaboration of Druid groups with nonprofit organizations and federal land management agencies from their inception. For example, in honor of its fiftieth anniversary as an organization, OBOD collaborated with a Scottish conservation charity, Trees for Life, to plant a grove dedicated to the organization's founder, Ross Nichols (also known by his spiritual name Nuinn, or ash) in the Caledonian Forest. In the United States, Druids have participated in reforestation efforts in national forests, tree care in the AIDS memorial grove of Golden Gate Park (San Francisco, California), and donations for tree planting through Sacramento Tree Foundation (Sacramento Grove of the Oak, California) and American Forests (ADF). This structure, which utilizes existing national or nonprofit mechanisms for supporting protected forests, differs significantly in terms of ownership, access, and control from traditional sacred groves. In addition, Druids plant sacred groves on private property (for example, AODA requires that each member plant a tree during their candidate year), but this too differs from the usual collective tenure and maintenance common in traditional sacred groves. While a significant thread of contemporary Druids' collective action toward conservation, and strongly linked to the spiritual value of not only all nonhuman life, but specifically trees in Druidic spirituality, it may take hundreds of years to be able to quantitatively assess the success and environmental impact of Druid sacred groves. Druids are uniting spirituality and sustainability, but in new ways uniquely suited for life in the contemporary Western world, and therefore the impact for the environment in the future is both unclear and likely to be shaped by limitations of this sociocultural context.

Druidic Spirituality and Sustainability

Druids are one of a number of new religious movements that have constructed a new spirituality modeled after animist indigenous traditions, and alongside this spirituality, worked toward constructing and transmitting a folk ecological knowledge system. Folk ecological knowledge systems infused with religion are recognized as significant for motivating humans to more sustainable behavior, shifting decision-making horizons from individual, short-term purviews to collective, long-term ones (Anderson, 1996, 2010). While humans may indeed have an innate love of nature and intrinsic drive toward conservation (Kellert & Wilson, 1995), humans also need cultural conditioning and social support to be willing to put significant effort into conservation (Milton, 2002). Druidry fosters positive, personal, emotionally invested

experiences in nature and provides a sense of community (even if only online and in print for many Druids) that provides an alternative ontology to the androcentric and theocentric Western religions as well as an alternative ecological knowledge system to Western science. Having established the significant extent of constructing and transmitting such ecological knowledge and spiritual experience within Druidry, how does this translate to action?

Often quite self-consciously, Druids recognize the scientific perversity of the modern consumer culture: "Fantasies about infinite material power and wealth are dysfunctional enough by themselves. On a finite, fragile planet, they become forces that push Earth's human and natural systems alike against unyielding planetary limits" (Greer, 2006, p. 140). Animism is acknowledged as a logical rebuttal to a dominant cultural paradigm of overconsumption and materialism:

> "If we believe that plants and animals, mountains and rivers are alive it shifts the ways we view our responsibilities to the earth and each other. It doesn't mean we never use them to our own ends, but it does mean that such use is more often approached with deep respect and examined for its necessity. (Laurie, 2007, p. 29)"

Many Druids espouse practical ecological action to promote conservation and sustainability as imperative in practicing their religion. Spiritual and practical engagement with the environment are often perceived as two halves of one whole:

> "Spirit must express itself in the world of matter or it accomplishes nothing. Insights from meditation and ceremony gain their full power and meaning when reflected in the details of everyday life. A spirituality based on reverence for nature thus finds its full expression in a life in harmony with the living Earth itself. . . . The Druid vision reaches beyond these issues, however, into an intense awareness of humanity's connection with the living Earth. It's important to move away from modern habits of mindless consumption, but it's equally important to challenge the ways of thinking that underlie those habits. The most important of these misunderstandings is the notion that human beings are somehow outside nature, free of its laws and without any need of its gifts. (Greer, 2006, pp. 138–139)"

Magical and spiritual activism are believed to work in the human consciousness, helping to manifest a new way of relating to the natural world and attempting to heal the spiritual wounds of the earth that humans have caused. Practical activism is the outward, physical manifestation of this inward desire to realize a different culture and economy, involving reducing one's negative impact on the earth. The two meet through the construction and use of a folk ecological knowledge system that combines Western scientific epistemology and data, an animist worldview, and experiential learning.

Druidic spiritual practice fosters experiential and emotional connections to one's environment, while simultaneously encouraging the amateur study of ecology as a Western science. Practices frequently center on emotional and practical challenges of critically analyzing one's relationship to the environment in the capitalist Western world in order to confront barriers to translating folk ecological knowledge into action. In the 2010 California Gorsedd, collective ritual called on the Celtic god Lugh to assist in bringing the Druidic community together and strengthening individual commitments to offer one's gifts, time, and efforts toward healing the earth. A workshop on sustainability used a meditative practice that brought one face to face with some being (popular choices included mosquitoes) that one disliked or disrespected, learning to view it with greater understanding and love, and then solidifying the change in perception through committing to self-directed practical actions that would express this newfound realization. These spiritual practices demonstrate a recognition within the movement of challenges in living animist values in the Western world.

While there are clearly links in the Druid movement between spiritual belief and practice ideals of sustainability, it can be quite difficult for individuals and groups to enact choices they recognize as optimal. Sacredness alone is not sufficient to ensure conservation; there must be a comprehensive, integrated, and holistic approach (Pungetti, Oviedo, & Hooke, 2012). The Druid movement has integrated a number of the features of such comprehensive approaches that are hallmarks of traditional ecological knowledge systems, including knowledge of ecological principles, a nature-centric spirituality, and interactive philosophies (Turner, Ignace, & Ignace, 2000). However, it is still building the details of folk ecological knowledge, and due to the scattered and relatively noncentrically organized nature of the movement, it may never have comprehensive folk knowledge systems for certain locations. Folk knowledge systems (including consistent, youth-inclusive ways of transmitting knowledge), as well as public collective enactment of Druidic values with regard to environmental issues, seem to be more developed in the UK than in the United States, which is not surprising given its much longer Druidic history and smaller landmass combined with more vacation time for the average worker, which affords greater ability for Druids to regularly gather across diverse regions (and in Europe, nations). Even so, originating in the Western world, in nations that have very strong national land management agencies and regulations, it is unlikely that the Druid movement will develop management plans for large spaces, though it is in the process of developing folk knowledge for smaller spaces such as home gardens, small farms, and small-acreage forests.

Just as it is for all Western peoples, living sustainably is also tremendously difficult to enact. The average U.S. citizen, simply by virtue of the ordinary lifeway (wage labor with a commute, a home that has electricity and running hot water, etc.), leads an extraordinarily unsustainable life. Unfortunately, Druids are not an exception to the general rule. While my year of attending ritual gatherings in a number of different nations and geographic regions introduced me to individuals living in small urban places without cars, cohousing, Buddhist

sanghas, as gypsies, on small permaculture farms, and in small self-crafted roundhouses on the edges of farms, the vast majority lived as I myself do—attempting to balance the demands of a middle-class professional life in an urban center with a spiritual worldview and ecological knowledge that recognizes this as unsustainable. While the reasons for this are still unclear, it is likely that major factors include career demands, disagreement between marriage partners over lifestyle (many Druids are in interfaith marriages), and the needs of children or other family members. The survey, which asked questions for ecological footprint analysis, such as house size, transportation, and foodways, demonstrated that Druids did not significantly statistically differ from the average American. European Druids had lower ecological footprints than those of U.S. Druids, but this too follows national differences in ecological footprint trends.

In many informal conversations I observed, Druids discussed small ways of becoming more sustainable. These included such actions as turning lawns into native plant gardens, recycling, eating more vegetarian or vegan meals, and so on. Very few spoke of radical alterations to their lifestyle in any immediate terms, though conversations in many places over the last five years have turned to creating sustainable Druid communities similar to Buddhist sanghas and cooperative farms. Barriers to radical lifestyle changes are not only cultural but also economic and regulatory. Even minor changes, such as replacing a lawn with a native wildlife garden, is a radical action in some neighborhoods of the United States that fine people whose yards are not kept to certain aesthetic standards. The desire to take public transit may be limited by the economics of housing and work. Druid gatherings themselves are not always organized for sustainability (for example, food may be offered that is factory farmed in some locations); it is certain that traveling the long distances that Druids do to reach one of the few regional gatherings has a substantial carbon footprint (though many attempt to carpool when possible). This keeps Druids in a state of persistent cognitive dissonance.

Druids' informal conversations include common elements of discussing barriers to enacting their religious values, including attentiveness both to pragmatic actions and to handling the emotional strain of being unable to relate to the earth sustainably. One Druid who had expertise in permaculture shared how to register urban wildlife gardens with national registries in the United States in order to get around neighborhood regulations. One person who had found cohousing in Canada described how it worked to another Druid who wanted to try to organize something similar in the United States. British Druids suggested to me to forge relationships with small farmers who might be willing to let Druids host a gathering on their pastures when they are in rest from grazing and provide the food, so as to limit farm-to-table transit and support family farms. In one opening workshop at the U.S. East Coast Gathering in 2012, Druids offered that they felt "overwhelmed in their attempt to raise consciousness" and that "so many things in our lives don't serve us anymore—they're toxic." The Chosen Chief of OBOD, Philip Carr-Gomm, offered, "Society tells us the problem is lack; our [Western] social problem is abundance."

While the Druid movement struggles with enacting sustainability in the Western world, it is hopeful that the movement (and others like it) is occurring. While such movements

may be sharply limited by cultural, economic, and regulatory limitations in their impact, they are also still in their infancy as religious traditions and are alternative options in consumption-oriented, androcentric Western nations. They represent diverse ways that Western peoples are attempting to construct alternative worldviews and lifestyles that have nature at their center (Taylor, 2010). As folk knowledge of plants and the native languages associated with them have increasingly disappeared since the beginning of the twentieth century (Cox, 2000), movements that value folk ecological knowledge are significant voices in the Western world to argue for the maintenance of traditional knowledge systems and landscapes globally. Movements such as Druidry, which seek to construct folk ecological knowledge and animist worldviews from European pre-Christian folklore and contemporary experience, combat the tendency of Western peoples to appropriate indigenous culture, to juxtapose humans and nature in a preservationist ideology, and to pit folk knowledge against Western science (Barnhill & Gottlieb, 2001). Though small, the Druids are quite vocal in local and national environmental political and educational forums: 48 percent of Druids engage in national environmental protection actions at least several times per year or more; 33 percent engage in local environmental restoration efforts; and 38 percent engage in national environmental education. The alternative worldview and folk knowledge system generated within the Druid community touches those outside it, and the geographically scattered nature of the movement therefore inserts such voices into diverse local and national contexts.

Perhaps most significantly, such movements represent the evolution of conservation knowledge in the Western world, arising from both acknowledgment of the imminent depletion crisis and deepening ecological understanding, which has the potential to increase resilience (Berkes, 2006). The Druidic union of spiritual and Western scientific epistemologies in the quest for personal connection to nature, collective understanding of it, and a transformation of lifeway to a sustainable future is an example of a modern quest to holistically approach the most pressing problems of our time—the outstripping of our resource base and accompanying biodiversity reduction and environmental injustice. Though a small community, the Druidic movement has many social and natural scientists within its ranks, and features regular virtual and face-to-face conversations between laypersons and scientists on how to unite an animist worldview and folk knowledge with Western science. In doing so, it inserts nature-centric ethics and intuitive, emotional, and personal experiences within science and the utility of Western scientific epistemology in the generation of a modern folk ecological knowledge system—something acknowledged as significantly useful for resource management (Berkes, 1999). Through attempting to reenchant the world, Druids seek to heal a fragmented materialist world, both within the self and within society as a whole (Greenwood, 2000). While it is too new a movement to adequately assess its potential to instantiate greater sustainability in the Western world, it represents a significant attempt to construct a spirituality and folk ecological knowledge system designed to heal the chasm between many Western people and the natural world—starting with the cornerstone of sacralizing emotional connection and knowledge.

Final Reflections

Conducting this research was deeply meaningful and challenging for me as a Druid. Reflecting on my own experience brought to the fore the conflicts I face in attempting both to live a relatively ordinary academic life and also to be true to my animist beliefs. I had to admit that while I make many choices toward conservation and sustainability, my life is not sustainable because it is embedded in an economic and cultural system that makes it very difficult to enact my ideals. Furthermore, these systems are ingrained in my consciousness, so that sometimes, I could make choices that are more aligned with my Druidic animism, but these choices may feel like sacrifices that on a selfish level, I do not want to make. I imagine that many Druids wrestle with this dissonance in their lives, and I keep returning to a question that reaches beyond my academic research into Druidic community: how can we help one another live out ecocentrism in a world that does not reward it? I offer, as my closing reflections, some suggestions for our community and how we might build toward a more sustainable future. These suggestions arise out of my union of ethnoecological knowledge, Druidic practice, and my personal path of working with nature spirits. These are not meant as academic insights, but rather, intuitive responses to my experiences through this project and passionate pleas for what I believe will enable us to live more lightly on our earth and with greater service to the nonhuman beings who share this planet with us.

As I hope my research illuminated, sharing knowledge is critical to advancing our ability to live a new and different kind of life. While scientific knowledge is useful, it has been my experience (and also observation among others) that many of us struggle to wade through the immense volume of information now available through the Internet. Sharing between people with whom we have similar priorities and values, and whose personal experiences we trust, can be extremely valuable to helping us overcome barriers that initially feel insurmountable. My colleagues' personal experiences and recommendations they shared with me about putting in solar panels and buying an electric hybrid car, for example, helped me overcome my initial trepidation at making these changes. This knowledge can be effectively organized and shared online; pan-Druid "data portals" that would allow people to access a wide range of blog posts, links, and other useful information and that provided wisdom from those who had spent the time researching and assessing resources on various topics related to environmental knowledge, conservation, and sustainability would go a long way toward helping us overcome the immobility that often occurs simply because we face too much information and not enough guidance.

In both online and face-to-face community, one observation that I made during my two years of ethnographic research was that the U.S. Druid gatherings and groups seem to provide few, if any, opportunities for children and adolescents to meaningfully participate. While many Druids I know have children (and I am admittedly limited in my sample size), I rarely see children included at Druid rituals and gatherings, and even more rarely have seen children-friendly or child-focused workshops and rituals. That is, Druidry (as I have experienced it) is often practiced by parents who leave their children at home or under the care of

a spouse in another area, removed from the action. This is problematic for the production and transmission of folk knowledge over time. It produces a pattern in which adults must reinvent the wheel, and in which children are strangely divorced from a tradition that is inspired by a pre-Christian era in which family was the fundamental unit of spiritual life. There are other Pagan models, such as the Fairy and Human Relations Congress (a gathering that I also attended during this research), in which I observed many more children (and more diverse ages, ranging from infants to elders in scooters) and child-focused or child-friendly rituals and workshops ("doing" oriented, simple language, etc.). I would encourage our communities to think carefully about how we will pass on our knowledge and values to our children, and plan more inclusive spaces and events so that families as a whole might participate—this would not only greatly assist in making our movement more robust over time, but also lead us to practices that more closely approximate the wisdom of our ancestors.

In addition to child-inclusive practices, our Druid community could forge greater pathways toward offering personal encouragement and accountability. Facing environmental crises, such as climate change, and recognizing our role in perpetuating these immense and complex problems—especially when we feel that nonhuman beings are sentient—can lead to depression and apathy. In our sensitivity to the plight of the earth and her creatures, we are both empathetic toward nonhuman beings and also vulnerable to becoming overwhelmed. Druid community can offer us encouragement not only through ritual and magical practices, but also through conversations in which we can open up about our fear, grief, and anger in the face of widespread environmental degradation. However, community must also offer accountability. In all indigenous animist systems that lead to sustainability, individual belief and personal practice are never enough to consistently produce collective conservation and sustainable lifeways. Communities support behaviors that are desirable through positive responses, and reject behaviors that harm other beings unnecessarily through negative responses. This is not to suggest judgment, but at the same time, I realized in uncomfortably turning a critical gaze on my own life that there are things I ought to be doing—both in terms of self-care to ensure I do not become overwhelmed and in terms of better choices in how I consume resources—that we need to forge ways of holding one another accountable. These could take the form of pledges we make to one another or to Druid community as a whole, an annual Thirty Days to Sustainable Habits month-long festival in which we commit ourselves to a specific change in behavior and report in, mentorships between those who have made significant advances in living sustainably in various environments (urban, rural, etc.) and those of us who seek to make these changes.

Part of this commitment to behavioral change needs to include making our regional and national gatherings into models for sustainability. There are important concerns that must be addressed in terms of ensuring accessibility across the socioeconomic spectrum and for diverse ability levels, and there is no doubt that these concerns must be inherent in building Druid community and that these affect affordability of sustainable options. However, there is

much that can be done (and has been done in Druid camps in England and at the Fairy and Human Relations Congress) that is currently only sporadically implemented in the United States, or has not been tried at all. Our choices in location, food, transportation, and other decisions that impact the environment should be brought into alignment with our values of sustainability and respecting the lives and needs of nonhuman beings. Gatherings, if they are organized in ways that demonstrate ecocentrism in action, can become sites that not only feed our spiritual connection to one another and the earth, but also encourage and teach us in the ways we can live our principles in everyday life. Druids could also unite across orders in order to provide sacred and sustainable space for animists and nature-centered Pagans both within and outside Druidry at broadly Pagan gatherings. By providing places that afford several days of consistent and deep contemplative and devotional nature-centered practice, offered in ways that are attentive to sustainability, Druids could offer new opportunities across Paganism for fellowship, encouragement, knowledge-sharing, and affirmation of commitment to the earth.

Over a longer planning horizon, we could look toward creating permanent pan-Druid spaces that provide ritual and gathering points as well as face-to-face residential Druid community. This will, no doubt, be the greatest challenge: financially, socially, culturally. Yet again, models exist (Buddhist sanghas, for example). Building communities that have physical locations and caretakers could demonstrate alternative futures that are more sustainable and connected to nature—futures that provide the necessary attributes for making change: knowledge, encouragement, and accountability. Physical, permanent Druid communities could integrate with planting sacred groves, advancing permaculture solutions to consumption, and generating lasting opportunities for a new way of living. While such goals may seem lofty, it is important to dream big. Our environmental challenges that face us as a species are big; our proposed solutions must also include the audacity to hope for equally big solutions. As Druids, we have already hiked many miles into our journey toward sustainability. We have managed to extricate ourselves from consumerist and materialist thinking, and we have built emotional and intuitive relationships with nonhuman beings. It is my hope that we will meaningfully contribute to the next step: working together to overcome the barriers of translating animist belief and spiritual practice into our everyday lives.

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Walking Meditation: Druidic Being in the World

Moine

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> "Most people are on the world, not in it—have no conscious sympathy or relationship to anything about them—undiffused, separate, and rigidly alone like marbles of polished stone, touching but separate."
>
> —*John Muir, John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*

> "I find that even an act as stimulating as walking through New York City can be a profound meditative experience. For as I walk down the street, if I stay quiet inside—either through mantra or watching my breath—I can see my consciousness being pulled this way and that by the things along the street. Each time my consciousness is pulled, it reflects some desire system. . . . Each time I notice this, I let it be, let it stay or leave as it chooses. As I do, I remain in the meditative space. . . . In this way I can walk through the city, staying quiet inside, despite the incredible panoply of stimuli that impinges upon my every sense."
>
> —Ram Dass, "Meditation in Action"

Thoreau begins his treatise *Walking* with a provocation: "I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking" (2006, p. 1). For Thoreau, who purported to walk at least four hours each day, the artful practice of walking entailed something akin to what most of us would recognize as "being in the moment" or "mindfulness."

He writes:

> "In my afternoon walk, I would fain forget all my morning occupations and my obligations to Society. But it sometimes happens that I cannot easily shake off the village. The thought of some work will run in my head and I am not where my body is—I am out of my senses. What business have I in the woods if I am thinking of something out of the woods?" (p. 6)

Thoreau's words, marked as they are by his era, yet ring with an interesting truth. I have been a long time at practicing the contemplative arts myself, walking, sitting, and noticing in various forms of meditation as my primary spiritual practice. But, as someone who has found deep solace in solitary moments of "sink time" in the forest, the simple act of being in the here and now during these walks can sometimes be difficult to achieve.

And yet, this first step—intentional presence, or what I call "Druidic being in the world"—is the threshold to much deeper meditative states that have allowed me and others to explore their personal and spiritual connections to nature in truly life-altering ways. Meditative practices (exercises that encourage stillness and increased sensory awareness) are, indeed, one of the centers of AODA-based Druidry, from practicing breath work to discursive (or themed) meditation as described and advocated by John Michael Greer, Dana O'Driscoll, and other leaders of the organization in many of their writings.[1] Movement meditations are but one example of the sorts of spiritual practices that allow initiates to focus and reorient a Druid's greatest tool: the mind. When engaged purposefully, with practice and intent, the simple act of walking can become an important element of the Druid's energetic and spiritual practice. As Adam Robersmith wrote in "Grounding in Heaven and Earth: An Introduction to the Nine Hazels Qigong," in the 2016 issue of *Trilithon*, movement- and posture-based spiritual practices

> "offer us a way other than ritual or spellcraft to develop our energetic and magical awareness. By choosing movements and postures that relate to specific kinds of magic/energy work, we can practice these skills in a way that becomes natural in mind and body and has the added benefit of supporting bodily health. Not every Druid practices magic, of course, but all of us engage with calas, gwyar, and nwyfre simply as embodied beings. We are connected to the material and spiritual worlds—to heaven and earth—as a part of the flow of life." (p. 33)

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1 See, for instance, John Michael Greer's (2004) essay "A Druid Meditation Primer" and Greer's (2006) writing on meditation and breath work in The Druidry Handbook. Dana O'Driscoll's (2017) work on the "inner landscape" posted on her blog The Druid's Garden provides numerous discussions and examples of meditative practices, including walking, healing, and deep reflection on walking the earth gently.

Druidic walking meditation is similarly an exercise of experiencing presence in the natural world—at one with it, inspired by it, flowing with it, and grounded in it.

Druids are not the only people to sense the power of walking in the woods, of course; the benefits of meditative walking practice are well documented. Walking meditation and labyrinth walking have been shown to decrease the acuteness of a number of health risks and to provide a number of emotional health benefits (see Bigard, 2009; Sandor, 2005; Sandor & Froman, 2006; Gainey, Himathongkam, Tanaka, & Suksom, 2016). Moreover, scientific evidence supports the Druidic belief in the restorative powers of the deep woods. The Japanese recognize the therapeutic potential of the deep forest with the word *shinrin-yoku*, literally "forest bathing" (Tsunetsugu, Park, & Miyazaki, 2010). When people "bathe" in the forest, they give themselves up to the many-layered experience of the forest to be healed, nurtured, and refreshed. As cited in the *New York Times*, researchers at Stanford University found that a ninety-minute walk in a quiet and leafy area improves mood and quiets areas of the brain related to stress and anxiety (Robbins, 2012). Herbalists and nontraditional healers remind us that the spiritual and natural properties of plants can have a dramatic impact upon our physical, energetic, and emotional states. Slowing down, meditating, and finding a state of mindful being in forested settings have all been shown to have dramatic impacts on brain chemistry, emotional balance, and well-being (Ambrose-Oji, 2013). Aside from the possible health benefits, surrounding ourselves with the living forest and finding quietude as a means to more fully experience our surroundings offers the opportunity to ground, rest, and refresh our physical, emotional, and mental states—a means of opening to spiritual possibilities that our hurried minds may foreclose.

This essay synthesizes and reflects on a series of techniques from different traditions to help those who would engage more deeply in the art of meditative walking. Practiced frequently, with intent and focus, the process of developing Druidic being in the world through walking meditation complements and extends the other energetic and meditative workings of the Druidic path. (For additional resources about meditation practice, see Greer [2004]; this online resource hosts a substantial reading list and other strategies to establish a meditation practice.)

Opening Space for Druidic Being

There are many different methods for walking meditation. The practice often begins with becoming aware of the breath and the body (particularly where posture can be aligned and tensions immediately released). Some leaders in contemplative traditions encourage practitioners to open all of their senses simultaneously (as a means of developing the sixth and spiritual sense). Others focus the walking meditator on a particular sense—the feeling of the breath entering and leaving the nostrils, the heartbeat or pulse in the wrist, or awareness of the sensations on the skin, for instance. Others echo overtly Buddhist traditions, with the goal of simply being present in the here and now, feeling each movement, treading lightly, moving with purpose. Some forms ask the walking meditator to focus on the mechanics of movement or to rhythmically repeat a

simple phrase to set time, motion, and breath to sound. All encourage Druids to explore their own way of being unique in the world, exploring the ways that awareness of self and world is fed by the senses.

Choose a method that speaks to you and try it out. If at any time you find your attention has wandered, simply guide it back to your chosen focus and/or choose a new technique if the first has not worked for you. It may take a bit of experimentation for those new to walking meditation to sink into a meditative state. The best advice anyone may give a new practitioner is to relax into the flow of the chosen movement and to simply let yourself sink into that sense of the now. Walking Druids will know that they are finding these sacred spaces and the unique benefits of a walking practice, when they have begun to literally feel time and space slow down and the chattering flow of thought that often fills our minds to quiet. As with any meditative practice, walking meditation asks for repeated practice in order to access its depths and truest gains.

The following approaches to walking meditation have been helpful to me over the past ten years of my own practice (a practice which preceded my turn to Druidry). A synthesis of a number of years of reading and personal experimentation, these example approaches are offered as starting points for further thought and conversation among those who value contemplative practices as one center of their Druidic path. (I have cited where I may.)

Mindful Walking

This approach to walking meditation begins with paying attention (in your own chosen order) to the flow of the body moving in space and time as you walk. Can you feel the weight of your body on the soles of your feet? How the earth rises to meet you as you place each foot? Can you feel your feet in your shoes? Is there a breeze in your hair? A lovely smell? The sunlight's warmth on your face? Can you feel how you are moving in time—the way the wind ebbs and flows, the leaves shiver, and the clouds scud by above? Let yourself feel it all and relax into it—relax into movement, relax into the flow of outer sensations, be alive and present in/to the world around you.

Slow-Motion Steps

Intentionally exacting, this approach has the meditator moving as slowly as possible, while remaining graceful and balanced. Think of a mime or a slow-motion movie: the meditator will slowly, slowly, slowly lift a foot and move it forward, place that foot with precise intent, letting the foot meet the earth in slight increments (top of toes, toes, ball of foot, arch, heel). Then, the walker will slowly shift the weight of the body forward, and pause. The goal here is to go as gradually as possible to cause the mind and body to focus on the simple act of moving through time and space alone. Over time, the meditator will become more aware of many sensations and experiences that can be overrun by the normal speed of life. Some practitioners recommend going barefoot for additional grounding and presence with this technique.

Attention to Rhythm

Some, like a contributor to James Nicol's (2014) *Contemplative Druidry* named Katy, may find that the rhythm of walking is all they need to help propel them into a meditative state. "A steady walking pace provides a rhythmic focus, and the changing scene around—experienced by all senses or each in turn—is anchored by the steady walking pace" (p. 90).

Circling, Spiraling, Walking the Pentagram, or Retracing

Walk slowly in a circle of about thirty paces (or alternately in a straight line of about twenty to thirty paces). Stop as you begin the circle again (or pause when you need to turn around). Keep your eyes focused on the earth just before your feet. Focus on the sensations of placing your feet. Deep work can also be carried out by walking a pentagram shape and invoking the elements at each arm of the star. A similar effect can be achieved by slowly walking from point to point within a pentagram form, imagining the elements giving way to one another as you progress. Spiraling slowly in and out of a central area can also be used as a pattern for meditative walking.

General Noticing

What do you see as you walk? Do you know the names of the plants? Can you see the structure of that leaf as you move? Does the sunshine on the trees dapple the earth below? Where do you see darkness and contrast? Where does the bark of a tree seem to breathe? This approach is about opening all of your senses so that you may find a focus on small details that you would otherwise miss. Unlike mindfulness, where the goal is flow with the senses, noticing is about recognizing what you see, so as to focus the senses and capture more of what you might otherwise miss. Focusing intensively on the details that surround you can bring a sense of awe, humility, and connection to your practice.

Focused Noticing

Julie, describing her practice in *Contemplative Druidry* (Nicol, 2014), notes that she often focuses specifically on a single small item she has found to begin her meditative practice:

> "I pick up some small natural object and use the four stages of lectio [a traditional monastic practice that entails reading, meditation, and prayer about scripture] with that. The first is to just simply be present with the object. The second stage is discursive thought; noticing and deliberately acknowledging the object and its features; whatever you notice about it. The third stage is prayer; how the object inspires you to consciously pray. And the fourth stage is moving into wordless contemplation. These stages can run into each other. . . . The technique can be used with a landscape instead of a natural object." (p. 87)

Focused Breathing

As many Druid authors have noted, breathing is one way to connect quickly to the power of nwyfre embodied. To tap into this current, begin by syncing your breath and your steps. Try, for instance, inhaling for three steps and exhaling for three steps. Listen to the sound of your breath as you walk. Feel every aspect of your breath—the coolness of your inhale, the rhythm, the rise and fall of it, as you walk. Where does your breath seem strained? When does it come easy and natural? How does the environment around you change your breath? Can you breathe to a count as you walk? How does this rhythm change your sensation of breath and being?

John Michael Greer describes a number of different breathing practices—the cleansing breath, the rhythmic breath, the silent breath, and color breathing—in *The Druidry Handbook* (Greer, 2006, pp. 213–219). Any of these can be adapted and used in tandem with walking to achieve different experiences of Druidic being in the world.

Energy Work

Here, the energy work you may choose to do is as boundless as your imagination and your focus. As you walk, imagine yourself carrying a white light between your upheld palms. Imagine your body as the light body or that you are surrounded by a shimmering golden shield. You can imagine the organs in your body humming and healthy. You can shroud yourself in healing light or image your blood flowing to heal a wound.

Counting

Some might enjoy repeating a particular count of steps. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—pause—nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one. Or, one, two, three, one, two, three, four, one, two, three, four, five, and so on. The purpose of counting is to get the mind to focus.

Chanting

Thich Nhat Hanh recommends a chant with an inbreath and a different chant with an exhale. His suggestions: "(In) I have arrived. (Out) I am home" (Hanh & Anh-Huong, 2006, p. 8). These chants can easily be rewritten to focus on the elements or other Druidic principles, such as: "(In) I am air and earth. (Out) I am water and fire." "(In) In all things. (Out) Peace. (In) In me, as in all things. (Out) Peace."

Beyond the Veil/Bifurcated Consciousness

Imagine that you have crossed or are able to see through the veil and are walking in the land of the present and the realm of spirit simultaneously. What do you see? Who do you see? How do you see it? Do you hear anything? Would anyone like to speak to you? What lives just beyond our mundane sight and what is its message for you? Stay with this double vision as you walk. Let it feed you. In natural sites, you may be called to go on a journey, seeing a realm otherwise

unknown that is full of natural features, beings, and stories that will be told only to you. This is also a truly profound experience at a historical site when it can be mastered—allowing you to imagine and/or see the imprint of history, our ancestors, and spirit upon the here and now.

Receptive Meditation

John Michael Greer notes that at some point, many meditators begin to need to "widen their focus instead of narrowing it" (2006, p. 229). At this stage of a meditation, you should "let the entire universe enter into your awareness . . . bring[ing] your attention back to the totality of the world around you" (pp. 229–230).

Deepening Your Walking Practice

> "I breathe in the soft, saturated exhalations of cedar trees and salmonberry bushes, fireweed and wood fern, marsh hawks and meadow voles, marten and harbor seal and blacktail deer. I breathe in the same particles of air that made songs in the throats of hermit thrushes and gave voices to humpback whales, the same particles of air that lifted the wings of bald eagles and buzzed in the flight of hummingbirds, the same particles of air that rushed over the sea in storms, whirled in high mountain snows, whistled across the poles, and whispered through lush equatorial gardens . . . air that has passed continually through life on earth. I breathe it in, pass it on, share it in equal measure with billions of other living things, endlessly, infinitely."
> —Richard Nelson, The Island Within

As Thich Nhat Hanh (2015, p. 12) suggests, reminding ourselves that "we have arrived" is key to the deep magic of walking. "When you walk, only walk," he writes. "Don't think. Don't talk" (p. 37). Many of us know the profound depths that can be encountered in the simple practice of mindful walking, but the work, emotional undercurrents, and outside influences of our lives pose constant distractions and mufflers to our ability to rest in calm, centered being. So often we end up sleepwalking, or running, or daydreaming, or being anything other than present to the world around us, the world of our bodies, the multiverse of breath and heartbeat that carries us through it all. Our inner landscape and our bodies inform each other—and so, it is crucial for many people to seek to align them.

It is not quite right to say that there is no right or wrong for this practice. More precisely, your goals and methods can be adapted to your spiritual path, needs, personal insights and self-knowledge. Luckily for the seeker and initiate, many spiritual teachers have offered important teachings on different forms of meditation and mindfulness. These may be helpful to those new to walking meditations as they experiment with incorporating Druidic walking meditation into their path work.

Some final thoughts about helpful strategies:

- It may be useful to set an intention for each walking practice to help engage the experience. An intention can be a blessing ("I bless all beings that share my path today"), a reminder ("earth, air, water, fire, spirit—in me united"), and affirmation ("I love, I am loved, I love").
- Focus on touching or "kissing" the earth with your feet in love, gratitude, and tenderness with each step. You might imagine your feet leaving an energetic imprint or shape (a pentagram, the Awen symbol, a triskelion form, or personal sigil) as you walk.
- If you notice that your focus has slipped from your original intent, gently guide it back to your intention, your mantra, your chosen focus on a sense or senses.
- Pema Chödrön reminds us to "notice the gaps" that naturally occur in our ongoing experiences—the "fleeting moments of no-big-deal me, no internal conversations, no frozen opinions" (2008, p. 13). We can invite more and more of these gaps into our waking world by pausing to let the beauty of a moment or our intention to be in the world orient our awareness.
- As you begin (and at points throughout your practice), it is often helpful to pause with feet evenly planted, to breathe deeply or focus on your breathing, and to scan the full body. Notice where you feel tension, looseness, warmth, coldness. Breathe into and send any necessary energy to these places.
- You may also wish to begin by grounding and centering in any manner of your choosing: visualizing yourself as the earth tree, bending to touch the earth with your palms, raising your arms into the magical posture of your choice, or by flowing through any number of chosen movements that open your body or release excess energy.
- You might also start with the Sphere of Protection exercise—feeling the energy of the elements all around you and the earth below your feet as you begin. (Let the powers you call up from the elements fill you, dissolving notions of where you end and the natural world begins.)
- Earthing, removing your shoes and placing your bare feet on the dirt or grass below you, is also a powerful way to ground. Many people practice walking meditation with bare feet.
- Where is your center of gravity? It may be helpful to focus on "being led" as you walk by your solar plexis or lower abdomen. Many people walk with their heads down or chins forward—to ground and realign the body, think about what your body is telling you it needs. A straighter spine? Released shoulders? Adjust your posture to stay in the moment and to increase your sense of being grounded.
- A walking meditation need not be consistently slow; proceed at any pace that feels mindful. The pace should allow you to be both fully present in your body and aware of your body in the natural world. In fact, some people may benefit from

walking strenuously without trying to focus at all, at first. This approach allows people to burn off excess energy and helps the body's natural systems to begin to kick in—more oxygen, more blood flow, a little sweat, a few endorphins—all are conducive to a deeper meditative state for many people.

- Stop wherever you feel called to do so. Place your hands on the earth, on stones or trees, and notice the details of a leaf, the soil, the moss, the ecosystem. Let the earth, the trees, the stones, the waters, speak back to you with their many mysteries and voices.

On a final note, I also recommend finding a supportive network of people who want to build a contemplative nature practice. The fellowship that comes from a common goal can lend an extra boost to (and people to share strategies and experiences with) a developing practice. In recent months, I have often led people in silent walks through local woods as a central practice in our study group san Fhàsach/In the Wilderness. I begin these walks with a short discussion of our ground rules—we agree to walk silently together, to allow one another privacy and solitary space, and to each seek spirit or connection on our own terms. I often set the tone for deeper space and sense of the sacred to open for us all by leading the group through a series of deep breaths, asking attendees to open each of the senses in turn, and through other guided meditation practices. At times, I call a circle and the elements to protect, bless, and guide us.

It is often remarkable the depth of unique sacred space this simple gathering can yield. "The forest is different every time I come here," one attendee said to me at the end of our last silent twilight walk. "I feel like I can explore it over and over." Others are excited to share the things they have noticed, seen, and felt—quite deeply—as they have discovered mushrooms, pawpaw trees, and the surprisingly simple depths that come of standing beneath winter-bare trees. Others simply remain silent as we come back together and move toward our cars. But, something in them has exhaled, stilled, released. They smile with a quieted sense of peacefulness. Many have returned to these walks for exactly this opportunity to connect to the deeper world.

Recently, the scheduled evening for a silent walk saw a wind storm blowing itself out in our region. My worries that no one would come to our walk because of the weather were waylaid, however, as two others joined me—undaunted by the brewing storm. It was desolately cold as night fell and the winds quickly chapped my cheeks and ears as we found ourselves beginning our quiet time, with a shorter than usual circle and opening meditation. All during the walk, the winds roared and bent the trees around us. I occasionally slipped out of my meditative state to look above for widow makers and other possible dangers from the wind. Someone else might have had the good sense to be a little afraid. Instead, I opened myself to the wind and the forest as usual—and found the sweet still spot of calm inside my mind's eye and body that echoes with and then becomes the still center of my

energetic consciousness during my walks toward Druidic being. For moments here and there, I could feel the wind sweeping around me physically, but also energetically—I drew long breaths to welcome its energies into my deep tissues. *Yes! Sweep through me* . . . I called to it in my mind. *May I have the freedom and boundlessness of the winds!*

And, when the scheduled time for our walk came to an end, even though the winds were still raging in the highest tree tops, making the trees gyrate wildly against the darkening sky, the three of us stood fast and watched for several more long moments in a continuing silence. It was as if we had fallen into the spell of the beauty of the woods—the power of the natural world that fuels our spiritual pursuits. As we watched the trees bend and flow and shimmy, I felt such rightness of time and place, such depth of being. It is a state I very rarely find in my home, at my altars or hearth. It is a sense readily available to me, however, when I take to walking in the wild wood.

The path of Druid walking, Druidic being in the world, is so simple—and available to all who would seek it—but also amazingly profound in that simplicity. May you, too, find its undeniable rewards.

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Journey to the Stones: A Druid Pilgrimage

Patrick Ford

Patrick, a member of AODA for five years, is currently a Druid Apprentice. He has spent most of his life in the music business as a musician, performer, producer, and label owner, and his band, the Ford Blues Band, has toured internationally since the late 1980s. He took a ten-year break from the road to be close to home while he and his wife started a family. During that time he was a wild-land firefighter for the U.S. Forest Service. He first became intrigued by standing stone monuments when, at the age of eight, he saw his first photograph of Stonehenge. He was in his late thirties when he finally visited Stonehenge, along with Avebury and several other sites, a childhood dream come true. Then, while in England in the 1980s, a copy of Mysterious Britain by Janet and Colin Bord opened the floodgates for a passion that has now taken him to six different countries in search of megalithic sites. He hopes to publish a book about his journeys and experiences called Stone Journals.

Since the late 1980s, I have been visiting megalithic stone sites in Europe ("megalith" being Greek for "great stone") and have come to value them not only for the actual physical wonders they are, but also for the wisdom and healing that they can offer both physically and spiritually. The more time I spend with the stones, whether it is a single standing stone, a stone row, a stone circle, a dolmen, a burial chamber, or any other megalithic structure, the more I learn to open to, and tap into, what they have to offer, cherishing each moment no matter what interaction I might have. But for some reason these megalithic marvels have, with maybe the exception of Stonehenge and Avebury, been mostly ignored by modern Druids. This disconnect has long puzzled me. These megalithic monuments are not just the remains of some long-gone culture of ancient Britain, Ireland, or France. They are the oldest connections we have to a time when the Earth Mother was still honored and worshipped by most of the people, not just the few.

Now, I should clarify, not all Druids and pagans have ignored these stones. There are, in fact, still a few groves and covens that meet at some of these locations. I know that as of two years ago the Cotswold Order of Druids held many of their seasonal ceremonies at the Rollright Stone Circle in southern England. In Village Witch, Cassandra Latham-Jones (2011) speaks of

Swinside Stone Circle
Cumbria, England

using Boscawen-Un in Cornwall, England, for rituals. There is a nice photo of that circle in the workshops section on her website (villagewisewoman.co.uk). And I personally have attended rituals twice at Avebury (one at Beltane and the other the summer solstice) and once on summer solstice at the Hill of Tara in Ireland. Still, these are rarities rather than the norm.

I would like to suggest that for modern Druids these stone monuments could, and in my opinion should, serve as shrines to which they could travel on pilgrimage, not so much for group rituals as for more personal connections. These stone monuments are places where Druids can physically, and as a result spiritually, get closer to their historical, if not ancestral, roots. Such pilgrimages do require adequate finances, a lot of planning, and in the end a degree of physical effort, but for those who make the commitment there is so very much to be gained.

If you think about it, most religions have places of pilgrimage. Christians, Jews, and Muslims from all over the world go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem; Catholics go on pilgrimage to the Vatican; Buddhists go on pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya; Muslims go to Mecca; and so on. There are sacred places all over the planet to which people go on pilgrimage for a variety of reasons. Some are quite famous and others little known, but all have a lot to offer those who make the effort to physically get close to the roots of their beliefs. I feel that for Druids, the stone monuments of Europe can fill this role.

For example, I can think of no better place than a site like the Swinside (or Sunkenkirk)

Stone Circle in Cumbria, in the Lake District of northern England to really connect with the Earth Mother, and for me as a Druid, that is the heart of it all. It is about a mile's walk up a private road to Swinside, which sits high up on a hillside overlooking Morecambe Bay. This large ring of some fifty-five good-sized stones, many of which are still standing, is everything a Druid could ask for. From the moment you arrive, the circle, the view, and the solitude fill you with joy, if not awe. And, as you walk through the entrance stones, you know you have entered a holy place and are welcome. If all you did at that point was to sit down on one of the fallen stones and give thanks, I think you would feel it was enough. Just to be there in that place, with those stones, is something quite special. The elements surround you. The earth below, the sky above, the sea in the distance, and the fire's energy is in it all. Sitting or standing there in the circle is like being in the arms of the mother, safe, nourished, and loved.

Let me be clear that it was not (as far as we know) Druids who created all these megalithic sites. Some have been dated back over 7,000 years, well before the pyramids were built in Egypt and long before those we refer to as Druids were performing rituals in what we now call the United Kingdom[1]. And, unlike the Egyptians who kept good written and drawn records of their lives and rituals, no records of any kind were left behind by those who built these intriguing stone sites. While it is known that some of these monuments were used for burials, as human bones and ashes have been found at many locations, it is generally accepted that they were also used for other ritual purposes. No matter who actually built them, or what their original intent was, it is hard to imagine that the early Druids would not have incorporated these amazing stone structures into their own ritual practices. If you ever visit any of these sites, whether it is a single standing stone like the Blind Fiddler in a crop field in Cornwall, or the large and impressive Ring of Brodgar on Mainland, Orkney Islands, you cannot help but feel a connection to the elements that no Druid would have ignored.

In my opinion, stone circles were the cathedrals of their time, with earth for the floors, stones for the walls, and sky for their ceilings. I remember standing in the center of the massive Long Meg Stone Circle in northern England, and looking at the rich green grass carpet forming the floor inside of the circle. I slowly rotated in place, looking at the large stones which formed a wall around the circle, and then turned my gaze upward to a brilliant turquoise blue sky full of puffy white cumulous clouds that formed the ceiling over it all. I have visited many famous cathedrals in Europe and none was more beautiful or more impressive. Even if I put my own personal experiences aside, I find it very hard to believe that these stone monuments were not places of worship.

As I have pointed out, there are no ancient records of the beliefs or ritual practices of those who built these monuments, but many names and legends connect a variety of gods and goddesses with some of these locations. Callanish on the Isle of Lewis, Avebury and the Marlborough Downs in southern England, and the Hill of Tara in Ireland all have strong Earth Mother goddess connections, as do many other sites. It is also to Tara that the Tuatha De Dannan, the

1 Service, Alastair and Jean Bradbery. (1979). *Megaliths and their Mysteries. MacMillan.*

people of the goddess Danu, were said to have brought their three magical gifts, one being the Stone of Destiny, which still stands on top of the hill today. It is these same De Dannan that are said to be responsible for the construction of New Grange, home of the Dagda[2].

Actually, there are an abundance of such god and goddess-related stories throughout Ireland. The Grange Stone Circle near Lough Gur, for example, was said to be presided over by Crom Dubh, the Irish god of agriculture, and all over the Emerald Isle you will find wells and stones dedicated to the goddess Brigid.

Near Cardigan, Wales, is located the Pentre Ifan cromlech (burial tomb), which is known as the Cauldron of Ceridwen. In Bath, England, is a temple dedicated to the goddess Sulis. And, though I can find no written mention of Cernnunos before the first century CE, and that was in Gaul, the Stag is a favorite among today's British and Irish pagans and appears frequently in modern writings. "The Cernunnos Ritual" (Beckett, 2013) is a good example of such writings.

It is also known that some, if not many of the stone sites, especially the stone circles, were built with astronomical alignments which served as calendars, providing knowledge of seasonal changes and establishing with certainty solstices and equinoxes[3] (Brennan, 1983; Thom, 1967). As agriculture became a central part of human lives, this information would have become more and more important. It is even believed that some of the stone circles can predict eclipses (Ponting & Ponting, 2000). One can easily imagine that those who understood this celestial information, whether priests or rulers, would have been looked upon with great respect, and maybe even as being blessed by the gods.

The high degree of accuracy to which these ancient peoples developed their astronomical skills is revealed in several locations. The most famous may be New Grange in Ireland. This is a giant earth and rock mound into which runs a sixty-foot-long passage leading to an inner chamber. On the winter solstice, and only at this time, the sun shines down the passage through a narrow window above the entrance and lights up the inner chamber. This effect clearly marks the shortest day of the year. It is the end of one life cycle and the beginning of another, as the ray of Father Sun's light penetrates into the womb of the Earth Mother, bringing forth new life. It is quite amazing, and it was built thousands of years ago!

A similar example is the Mound of the Hostages at Tara, where the inner chamber (though much smaller in scale than New Grange) is lit by the rising sun at Samhain and at Imbolc—a solar alarm clock set for two major holidays!

Though I was born and live in Northern California, I have for the last twenty-five-plus years been making regular journeys to visit the standing stones of the United Kingdom, Ireland,

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2 Roberts, Jack. (2016). The Sacred Mythological Centres of Ireland. Bandia.

Zucchelli, Christine. (2016). Sacred Stones of Ireland. Cork: Collins Press.

Meaden, Terence. (1991). The Goddess of The Stones. London: Souvenir Press.

3 Brennan, Martin. (1983). The Stars and The Stones. London: Thames &Hudson.

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Brittany, and Sweden. Though those journeys began as just an interest, they soon evolved into a passion and a serious desire to learn all that I could about, and from, the stones.

I have read accounts by others who claim that the stones have blessed them with a variety of experiences, and actually, those of Carolyn North in *Voices Out of Stone* (Hoffman & North, 2010), I found to be somewhat similar to my own. Some say the stones have provided them with messages from the archangels and/or information concerning ancient civilizations, the story of Atlantis, and visitors from other planets or galaxies. I cannot speak to any of that. I can only tell of my experiences. The stones have welcomed me, blessed me with their energies, and given me a few basic bits of wisdom, for which I am grateful. So let me share a few of these experiences with you, and you can decide for yourself whether a journey to the stones might be right for you.

I have felt some kind of connection with rocks since I was a kid, climbing them and collecting them for as long as I can remember. But I did not have my first real experience with stones until I was about fifty. My wife and I were in Brittany, France, on vacation. I had seen some information about the standing stones in the Carnac area and felt a strong desire to check them out. I had, by that time, visited many stone sites in England, including Stonehenge and Avebury, and though being among those stones had filled me with joy, I had not really had any kind of personal experiences. I had not yet opened myself to the subtle energies of those stones. That, however, was about to change.

Arriving in Carnac, along the southern coast of Brittany, Sharon and I were soon having a wonderful time exploring the amazing stone alignments, burial chambers, and single tall standing stones. There are some 3,000 standing stones there, many placed in long rows side by side, like dominoes waiting for someone to give one a push. It really is an incredible place. But still, as in England, I had no special experiences while there. I had just been drawn to the site and was happy to have visited it.

Driving a little further to the west, and after a few stops to visit some burial tombs, we found ourselves entering a small village called Erdeven. On the right-hand side of the road we saw a large number of standing stones, and of course we stopped to check them out. This was a wonderful group of large stones, up to ten feet tall, set in rows like at Carnac, though these covered a much smaller area. After spending some time with the stones, I noticed a sign pointing down a path that said, "Les Geants." We took the path and soon came to another group of much larger stones, up to twenty feet in length, some standing and some fallen.

As I walked among these giants, I was working my way down a long row, at the end of which was a large fallen stone. It lay on the ground like a ritual altar, with other tall stones standing nearby. I began to feel a tingling in my feet that was soon working its way up my legs. It was kind of like a mild electrical current flowing into me. The closer I got to the altar stone, the stronger the sensation became, and as I approached the stone Sharon noticed something was going on. I was quite flushed, hot to the touch, and wet with perspiration. As I placed my hand on the stone, I felt a surge of energy like I had never known before. It felt like a

blowtorch had gone off under my feet and then rushed up my legs and through my body. Standing there looking at Sharon, I was overcome with, how shall we say—a strong masculine energy. I picked Sharon up, placed her on the altar, and started trying to remove her clothes. The energy was intense! Sharon, though quite surprised, remained calm, talking to me ever so softly, suggesting that this was not the best time or place. About then we heard voices of others coming up the path, and thanks to Sharon, everything appeared pretty normal by the time we heard, "Bonjour!" She had gently pushed me back away from the altar stone. I had backed up against one of the standing stones and immediately felt a calming, cooling energy flowing into me. It was as though these two stones were the positive and negative terminals of a battery. The fire inside discharged back into the earth and I soon had myself under control. I have, however, never been the same.

Many years later I was reading a book by Aubrey Burl (1985) called *Megalithic Brittany*, and in it he mentions these stones at Erdeven. He says that there is a flat stone at the end of the row of giants called the Table of Sacrifice and that the locals say, "That is where the blood used to flow down" (p. 146). That had been my altar stone and I had felt its power.

So, there you have it: my first serious experience with stone energies, and a very powerful one at that. I have only experienced that kind of energy on two occasions since, once at the Standing Stones of Stenness in the Orkney Islands, and the other at the Glenquicken Stone Circle in southwestern Scotland. Both were dramatic, but neither was quite so strong.

The next time I returned to the United Kingdom, I was suddenly much more aware of the subtle energies of the stones, and the more I paid attention to them the more I began to receive from them. When I was feeling physically tired or worn down, I would often get strong, uplifting energy from the stones, kind of like getting my batteries fully recharged. Sometimes when I had been stressed by, say, "a long drive through rain, on the wrong side of a very narrow road, with strong gusty winds, while trying to read signs at roundabouts,"

Stones Of Stenness
Orkney Islands, Scotland

I would place my hands on a stone and be blessed with a much appreciated feeling of calm and contentment as the stress drained out of me and into the earth.

I have also felt the actual healing powers of the stones. At the end of a long tour in Europe (I am a drummer), I was suffering from severe bursitis pain in my left hip. While the band flew home, I went to spend time with the stones in southern England. On a cold rainy day, I hiked across Dartmoor to find the Brisworthy Stone Circle. This is a small circle of small stones that sits in the middle of nowhere. Upon finding the circle, I spent quite a bit of time walking among, and talking to, the stones. Their welcome filled me with both joy and contentment and though I was very cold I was also quite happy to be there with them. After a while it began to seriously rain. Knowing it was time to go, though not really wanting to, I thanked the stones for their company and then I asked them for their blessings, which they happily gave. As I was walking back toward the car I realized that my bursitis pain had completely gone away. With a smile on my face, I turned and hollered down the hill, "Thank you!" "Come back," was the reply. Over the years I have had several such healing experiences while visiting different stones. Each time it took me by surprise, and each time I was grateful.

Probably my most common experience with the stones is the sense of being welcome and feeling a connection with the earth. Often when I enter a site I get the feeling of my feet beginning to sink into the earth and of a flow of energy coming up and into my body. Sometimes it is a rush of energy, but usually it is just a calm, even flow, and it can be energizing or relaxing; the stones seem to know what is needed. As I have learned to open to the stones (which is similar to entering into meditation, except here I am encouraging the stones' interaction), these experiences have become more and more common.

But then, I have also, on occasion, had stones speak to me in the most matter-of-fact way. Though the voice is heard within, it does at times startle me, as I could swear I "heard" the voice, in the regular sense of the word. Often it is simply, "Welcome." What joy that one word can bring! But then on numerous occasions I have received admonitions from the stones about taking care of the earth. "She is the mother of us all" is a phrase I have heard repeated on more than one occasion. At the Stones of Stenness I once stood with hand on stone while "Honor the earth, she is the mother of us all" pulsed through me, over and over, like a mantra.

One of my favorite interactions with stones happened at the Loupin Stanes Stone Circle in the south of Scotland. Upon arriving, I was welcomed and then thanked by the stones for making the effort to find and visit them, on such a cold rainy day. Then, after I spent some time with the stones, they encouraged me to search out a path that led to another stone circle (the Girdle Stanes) located to the south. Though I had no idea where to find this path, as nothing was visible, I had no doubt that it was there. So using a dowsing rod, I began walking around the outside of the circle and soon got a pull leading me to the top of a rise and to a small stone, maybe two feet tall. Continuing on, I followed the meandering rod for about half a mile, passing more of the stones along the way before coming to a drop-off. There on the flat below sat a large stone circle, some of which had been eroded away by the White

Esk River. I spent a couple of fun and rewarding hours at the Girdle Stanes Circle before returning to the Loupin Stanes. Once there, I sat on one of the circle stones, closed my eyes to center, and thanked the stones for their advice. I could feel their smile.

Then, making one last stop at each of the twelve stones in the circle, I thanked each one, and gave hugs to the two large entrance stones. As I walked back to my car, I was one happy fellow.

Now I know some will think I am getting a little too far out there when I say I am talking with stones. All I can say is, they started it, and I am thankful for their interaction.

I have on several occasions received visual impressions when visiting stone sites. I will not claim that I am actually seeing through a doorway to the past, but that is often how it seems. One such experience happened to me at Stanton Drew Stone Circles. I was lying on a fallen stone in the northeast circle (there are three circles at this location), relaxing after a long, taxing drive. There are eight large block-like stones about ten feet tall in this circle, and four are still standing. As I closed my eyes, I suddenly had a vision of a group of people approaching the circle up a stone avenue off to the east. They were all dressed in drab browns and whites and some were holding their hands in the air as they entered the circle. Though I heard no sounds, they appeared to be chanting or singing. I opened my eyes and the vision was gone. I turned to look to the east and saw some fallen stones off in that direction. As I got up and walked toward them, I saw that the stones appeared to be the remains of an avenue and was sure this was the avenue I had just seen! Imagination or window into the past?

Later, when I returned to my room, I looked for information on the Stanton Drew complex and found that indeed those stones had originally been part of an avenue going down toward the river to the east.

I could go on and on with what has happened to me at various stone sites, but my experiences are just that, my experiences. I do not want to imply that if you visit the same sites as I that you will have the same experiences. My wife and I have visited many sites together and come away with very different stories to tell. When visiting stone sites, we often go our separate ways and then get back together and compare notes. While we might both get the same overall vibe at a location, only on a few occasions have we both had the same personal experiences. One such occasion was at the Ballymeanoch Stones in the Kilmartin Valley, Scotland. We had wandered separately among the stones, which include the remains of a cairn, an earth ring, and two stone alignments, one alignment of two stones and the other of four. These alignment stones are rather tall (up to fourteen feet high) and thin, and quite impressive. When I put my hand on the second stone from the south in the four-stone alignment, I felt a strong surge of energy that came and went like an ocean wave, back and forth. It felt like when I was a kid standing on a branch at the top of a big old fir tree on a windy day. I began to get kind of dizzy and removed my hand. When we got back together, Sharon asked me if I had any kind of experience at that rock. She said that when she had

placed her hands on the stone, she suddenly felt unstable. It was like she was standing on a moving surface getting pulled toward, and pushed from, the stone. She found it a bit nauseating—an amazingly similar experience.

That said, what I have found over the years is that what happens between you and the stones is usually quite personal. And, in fact, your interaction with a stone, or stones, can change on repeated visits. I have visited stone circles where I received enthusiastic responses from the stones on one visit and then, on a return trip years later, found several of the stones to be unresponsive, as though they had gone to sleep.

Please understand, I am not saying that if you go on pilgrimage to one or more of these stone monuments that you will return having spoken with the Goddess, or been relieved of your arthritis pains, or having talked with rocks. But then again, I'm also not saying that you won't.

I believe that, as with everything else in life, we all seem to be born with varying natural abilities, skills, and talent levels. Some people are just born to be painters, basketball players, great mathematicians, and so on. The same applies here. While some people seem to be open to the stones' energies right away, with others it takes time. Such was the case for me. And then some people, for whatever the reason, never seem to make a connection.

I would also like to briefly mention, for those interested in dowsing, that I have found no more satisfying experiences dowsing than I have had following the energy lines in, around, and connecting, stone circles and standing stones. If dowsing is your passion you really should make a pilgrimage to the megaliths of Europe.

So, if I have piqued your interest and you can handle the expense, here are a few questions you might ask yourself to assist in making your decision.

1. How far do you want to drive, especially if you will be in the United Kingdom or Ireland where you will be driving on the left side of the road? I have been driving over there for years without a problem, but it can be tricky and discomforting in high-traffic areas. The country roads can feel very narrow with no wiggle room. If this worries you, you can fly into London Heathrow and pick up a car at the airport. You then have a choice of several stone sites within a few hours' drive. If you are willing to give it a go and extend your driving, your options will increase.
2. How much time are you willing to put into planning the journey? While some of these sites are easy to find (Stonehenge is right off the highway), many will require spending time with books, or online, looking at maps, making choices, and getting directions. The more information you gather in advance of your trip, the better your chances of successfully finding your destination. If you are counting on a GPS, you may find yourself in trouble. On my latest trip to Ireland, we gave up on our GPS on the second day of a three-week trip, and that was just trying to find a small town, not a stone circle. I was prepared with maps and directions, so we did just fine.As for maps, if you do not purchase them in advance, in both the United Kingdom and

Ireland you can get a Collins or AA Road Atlas at any service stop, which will cover the basics of getting around. If you want real detail you can buy Ordinance Survey Maps, but they cover only a small area, meaning you might need several just to cover the location you are interested in, and they are pricey. The plus is, they show terrain and smaller roads, and have many of the stone monuments marked on them, giving you a better idea of how to find your sites.

3. Are you okay with rainy, windy weather? The thing about the United Kingdom and Ireland (or anywhere in northern Europe really) is that it really does not matter what time of the year you go—you may encounter inclement weather. Summer is your best shot, but you should always be ready for rain and cold, even then. The south of England is your best chance for good weather, and the further north you go the more your chances of rain and cold increase. I recall on one trip being happy to have experienced four great sunny days in a row in the south of Scotland. Upon returning to Edinburgh I dropped off my rental car and caught a taxi into town. I mentioned to the driver how beautiful the weather had been the last four days and his reply was, "Ah, you've just seen our summer!"

If you do make the journey, and it is raining on the day you decide to go to find your pilgrimage site, will you be okay with that, or will the inclement weather ruin your trip for you? I have, on more than one occasion, found myself in full rain gear sitting with my back to a stone, allowing it to serve as a barrier to shelter me from the cold, wind-driven rain.

Boscawen-Un
Cornwall, England

As for where to go, megalithic sites can be found all over the United Kingdom and Ireland. For those interested in further reading, I would recommend *The Modern Antiquarian* by Julian Cope (1998), *A Guide to the Stone Circles of Britain, Ireland, and Brittany* by Aubrey Burl (1995), and *The Sun Circles of Ireland* by Jack Roberts (2013) as excellent sources of information. All of the stone monuments I mention in this article (except Ales Stenar in Sweden, below) can be found in one, if not all three, of these books. I also recommend the DVD *Standing with Stones* (Soskin & Bott, 2009) as a wonderful way

to actually experience what your journey might be like. They travel to many of the great stone monuments in both Ireland and the United Kingdom and I can think of no better way to be introduced to the stones.

If you do plan a once-in-a-lifetime trip, you might want to go to an area where there is a concentration of stone monuments to maximize your experience. The easiest would be to go to Avebury and Stonehenge. Avebury, which is the largest stone circle/henge in Europe, is less than an hour and a half drive west from Heathrow. A henge, by the way, is an earth ring with a ditch inside. At Avebury the henge is huge, and the remains of the circle, with its massive stones, stand within. In the surrounding area you will also find a long stone avenue, hill forts, several long barrows (West Kennet Long Barrow being something special), standing stones, the Cherhill White Horse, and Silbury Hill, which is the largest human-made earth mound in Europe and stands as proud as any pyramid. The really great thing about these sites is that they are wide open to the public with few restrictions. You can go into the long barrows, walk the avenues, and hug the stones. Avebury itself can get crowded on holidays, and some weekends, but aside from summer solstice I have never found it to be too uncomfortable.

Men-An-Tol
Cornwall, England

Located just another forty minutes to the south is Stonehenge. It really is the most impressive place and should be seen if you are in the area. However, there is almost always a large crowd and you are fenced off from the stones. The only time the public can actually walk among the stones is on the solstices, when there are as many as 20,000 people there. Not my idea of a place to go on pilgrimage. If you plan in advance, you can arrange through English Heritage for a private tour with a small group of maybe twenty-five people. These take place in the evenings after Stonehenge closes to the public, and you do get to walk among, but not touch, the stones. It is about as close as you will get to being alone with the stones.

From there, if you can go further afield I would suggest a visit to the Stanton Drew Stone Circles, a little over an hour drive further west. This is a complex consisting of three stone circles, the remains of two stone avenues, and a cove, which is three stones standing in sort of a U shape. This site will draw people on holidays, and maybe weekends, but usually it is pretty quiet. The

Drombeg Stone Circle
Co. Cork, Ireland

largest of the three circles, the Great Circle, is the second largest in the United Kingdom. Sadly, though most of its stones are still there, only a few are standing and many are being absorbed back into the earth. Nonetheless, it is impressive.

The circle to the northeast has all of its stones and half of them are still standing. The rocks are huge red blocks and I have always enjoyed their company. This is the Stanton Drew circle I referred to earlier.

The circle to the south is made up of smaller stones than those in the other two circles. Most have fallen over and they are often overgrown by weeds. Stanton Drew is a private site that is maintained by the owners and though they are kind enough to allow public access, not that many people visit the south circle, so I am sure weeding it is not high on their list of things to do. Nonetheless, I love this seldom-visited ring of stones.

I recommend Stanton Drew because it is easy access and you have a chance to be alone with stone circles in a somewhat (it is located right alongside a farm) natural environment. Also, I have had good success connecting with these stones, and the Druids Arms pub (appropriate for a Druid on pilgrimage) is nearby should fortification be required.

Another area with a large concentration of stone monuments is Cornwall in southwestern England. You could spend weeks, maybe months, there without seeing all the stone sites. The wonderful thing is that you can visit most of the stones and not encounter another soul. Some require quite a walk, but that is just a part of the experience and well worth it. Circles like the Merry Maidens, which is a near-perfect stone circle, and Boscawen-Un, with its leaning standing stone near its center, are as charming as they come. Then you have tall standing stones like the Pipers, or the Blind Fiddler, which do seriously impress. Or Men An Tol, three standing stones in a row, the middle one perfectly round with a hole in the center and looking like a large stone inner tube, leaving you completely puzzled and a bit in awe.

Off the west coast of Scotland, on the Isle of Arran, you'll find Machrie Moor, one of the most amazing megalithic sites I have ever seen. In one location, there are six stone circles, all quite unique, with one being a double circle. Each circle is situated within a couple hundred yards of another circle. The setting is perfect and the stones are alive with energy. This place is magical.

To the northwest of Scotland, you have the Isle of Lewis, and though it only has a few stone monuments, it has Callanish, which some think is the most magnificent of them all, even surpassing Stonehenge. This location requires extra plane flights or really long drives and ferries, but I must say I loved my one visit there and can't wait to go back.

If Ireland is your thing, the southwest, around Cork, has one of the largest concentrations of stone circles and standing stones you'll find anywhere, and to me, some of the most impressive. Maybe it is because I have Irish roots, but nowhere have I felt closer to the earth than when visiting the stones of Ireland.

I feel I should also mention, for those who have an interest in the Norse gods, that the south coast of Sweden has an amazing assortment of stone monuments, the most impressive of which is Ales Stenar. Rather than a circle, here the stones have been erected in the shape of a 220-foot-long Viking longboat, which is placed dramatically on a bluff overlooking the Baltic Sea. On my one visit, the moment I arrived I could feel a real sense of pride coming from these stones. As I spent more time with them I began feeling a very emotional blend of strength with comfort and sadness with joy, but throughout it all remained this overpowering sense of pride. Sadly, I had limited time at Ales Stenar, but I look forward to a return trip, with no hurries. Should this be of interest, *The Megalithic European* (Cope, 2004), is a good resource for information about Swedish stone monuments.

So, there you have just a few ideas. It is for you to decide what the purpose of your pilgrimage is and then to pick the stones to which you will travel. If you decide to go to the United Kingdom, I would recommend you start with *The Modern Antiquarian* (Cope, 1998). The book is full of relevant material and has a wonderful section (gazetteer) with photos, in which he provides information about many stone sites all over the U.K. and provides some directions. It is a wonderful resource.

Once you have decided on your place of pilgrimage, make sure to gather as much information about your chosen site, or sites, as you can. The more you learn on the front side, the

more meaningful your trip will be. When planning for one of my journeys I will search out and purchase any books I can find about the locations I am interested in. I now have quite an extensive library of books on standing stones and circles, so it is much easier (I have listed many applicable books in my resources list). I will also go online and search the Internet for websites providing information about the stones to which I might travel. I have included some of my favorite websites below. Then I will order any maps I might need so I can prepare in advance, locating stones, planning best routes, deciding where to book rooms, and so on (both books and maps can be found on the Internet). With all that information in hand, one can usually plan for a successful journey.

If you would like to use a handheld GPS for your hike, you can find the coordinates in many of the books or websites in my list of resources. To date I have just been using maps and asking questions as I travel, but a GPS would be helpful for those harder-to-find places.

Finally, some stones can be found right off a well-traveled road, while others will require much time and effort. Some sites (at least in my case) can be very elusive, and you may never find them. That said, I think you will find that the journey is oftentimes as important as the stones themselves. If you would like any assistance putting together a journey to the stones, I would be happy to help. You may contact me directly pkford@pacific.net. I wish you joy on your pilgrimage.

Websites

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irishmegaliths.ie
Megalithic Ireland, megalithicireland.com
Megalithic Portal, megalithicportal.com
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Aquifer Bed Construction: Instructions and Notes

Gordon Cooper

Grand Archdruid Gordon Cooper began his study of natural sciences, nature spirituality, and magic in 1976 while serving in the U.S. Navy. In the early 1980s he began his study of the poetic traditions of Ireland and Wales and their contemporary applications. Along that mist-wrapped variegated green road he became one of the founders of the Celtic Reconstructionist movement and a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, where he holds the distinction of being one of their Mt. Haemus scholars. Due to a growing awareness of the viability and elegance of the Lodge system and the desire to help explore North American spirit ecologies, he joined AODA shortly after its revival in 2003, and was elected to the Grand Grove in 2005. Gordon became the eighth Grand Archdruid on December 21, 2015. His formal degree includes a dual major in anthropology and Turkish language studies with a minor in natural sciences and mathematics. He has attained the rank of third dan in Hsin Lu Tong martial arts school and continues to learn and apply lessons from this discipline. He is a bishop in the Universal Gnostic Church. He is working on the AODA Home Circle Guide, which will expand on his blog series "Tools For Druid Comrades". Other projects involve building a meteor scatter detection system, new articles for the AODA website and a workshop series on Delsarte technique in ritual.

This article provides a step-by-step set of rough instructions for an aquifer bed system.[1] This bed system differs from traditional gardens in that it is watered from an artificial aquifer situated directly below the bedded plants. This eliminates guessing. It is possible to shine a flashlight down into the fill pipe and know exactly how much water is available to the plants. The advantages of this over any other system I have used (double-dug, plant and hope, measure nutrients and keep watering during unreasonably hot weather) is that you can be certain sufficient water is getting to the roots. In addition, the soil moisture stays high enough to support healthy earthworms, carry the fertilizer, and maintain the generally

1. Thanks to Helen and Larry Honeycutt-Adams for the patience to build a bed slowly enough to allow for photography of the build stages. We have two flower beds and four vegetable or herb beds under cultivation from May until mid-October.

forgotten but important microbial world that allows plants to thrive.

Anyone who cares about maintaining a consistent supply of water to plants can benefit from one of these beds. It reduces the amount of water needed. As a bonus, it allows for liquid fertilizers to be introduced directly to the plants via the water delivered to the roots. Water consumption is drastically reduced during hot seasons. I cannot give exact figures, but our water consumption dropped 15 percent once we installed aquifer beds. We have avoided fertilizer burn and dehydration with this system. The downside is that two of the components will need to be replaced over time—the Visqueen will eventually break down, get punctured, and so on, and the fabric wicking layer will rot over time, needing replacement.[2] Thrift stores are an excellent source for bundles of towels, T-shirts, and other natural fibers that can be used for the wicking layer.

Initially this bed requires more effort to construct than other garden methods—not more than a double-dug garden, but more investment in time and energies the first year and when, eventually, the wicking layer of fabric will need to be replaced. This varies from two to five years, depending on the plants being grown and other factors that cannot be established without actual usage. Please see the image of garden bed #2 in mid-June 2016 for an indication of results.

Supply List

- Enclosed garden bed, that is, a solid frame.
- A layer of Visqueen that will line the base of the bed, up to the sides.
- A wicking layer for water retention, such as bundles of old towels, gunnysacks, or similar.
- A layer of clean soil.
- Several lengths of food-grade PVC pipe (depends on the length of the gardening bed) and a two-foot fill pipe cut at a 45-degree angle that will protrude above the top of the mulch layer.
- Your plants or seeds.
- Mulch, either good compost or fine wood shavings. With this system, a layer of mulch is required to hold as much moisture in the bed as possible.

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Calculate the square footage and shape of your sheet of Visqueen. This needs to be applied as a single layer that will come up as high as the mulch layer of the garden bed. You may use tarp cut to fit, or any landscaping plastic.

2. Visqueen is a type of polyethelene black plastic that is used for gardening and waterproofing applications.

Step 2: Calculate the volume of the aquifer bed. Acquire sufficient clean, nonleaching fill such as rocks, gravel, or bricks (no preserved wood, particle board, or melamine can be in the fill). Calculate six- to ten-inch depth.

Step 3: The rubble fill goes carefully onto the Visqueen, taking care not to puncture or bunch it up. Level the fill layer. If you want to even out water distribution in unevenly sized rubble, you can lay in pipe lengths as part of the rubble layer.

Step 4: Once the fill layer has been leveled, the wicking layer of fabric goes on. It is important to get at least two layers of T-shirts or cloth sacking over the rubble layer. Set the fill pipe in one corner, bracing it in place with pieces of rubble.

Step 5: Cover the fabric with a layer of clean soil. This should be topsoil, and at least eight inches, preferably a foot.

Step 6: Add your plants and mulch layers. Garden mulch or compost is what is needed here.

Step 7: Fill the aquifer through the vertical fill pipe with clean water. Use a flashlight to check the water level. If needed, you can drop a ruler into the bed, measuring down to the floor and roof levels of the aquifer.

Step 8: Check the bed for leaks. Look for water spilling out of the sides or otherwise escaping. If it does, dig down and replace or move the Visqueen, as needed.

Step 9: Cap the fill pipe to avoid evaporation or introducing unwanted materials through the fill pipe, if desired.

Step 10: Initially, check the water level every day. Those so inclined can calculate water use and compare the time and water used to the previous year's top-watered garden bed.

That's it! If you have never built a garden bed before, there are expensive commercial systems that unpack and assemble (much like Ikea furniture), or you can scrounge, and reuse materials that would otherwise be discarded as garbage.

Humanure Composting as a Sacred Practice

Max Rogers

Maxine Rogers is the President of the Denman Island Garden Club because they couldn't find anyone else to take the job. She was a Community Garden Coordinator in Victoria where she fixed a lot of hoses. After a passionate youth spent scuba diving off Vancouver Island, working as a Reserve Medic in the Canadian Army, playing rugby, alpine skiing, sailing and getting a degree in Spanish from UVic, she developed chronic fatigue syndrome and retired to a small farm. She leads a fascinating existence on the farm with her long-suffering husband, a flock of milk sheep, geese, chickens, ducks rabbits, a large garden and an orchard. She paints and writes when she gets the time. She is currently studying as a candidate for Druid apprenticeship. She has never had this much fun with religion before.

What is humanure composting? It's just what it sounds like. Humanure composting is the simple and inexpensive practice of collecting human urine and feces in a bucket in a little commode and then taking it outside to compost in its own compost box. But, you may say, it must surely be smelly and disgusting and have the potential to spread disease! No, not really.

How can this be a part of a spiritual practice? One sacred part of composting humanure is quite simply that water is sacred. It should not be wasted or fouled. Another sacred part is that the earth and all life are held sacred by Druids. The compost that results from composting human waste, or rather manure, nourishes the earth instead of despoiling it. The nutrients are locked into the carbon, and plants understand the secret of unlocking those nutrients as and when they need them.

Flowers, trees, and bushes all grow well in this sacred compost, which nourishes everything from tiny insects to bees, hoverflies, butterflies, and moths who pollinate the blooms, and the little birds who eat insects, pollen, nectar, and berries, and the larger birds who eat the smaller, and so on. Composting humanure also reduces the nitrogen pollution from sewage that afflicts our rivers, lakes, and seashores. Do you really want to swim in a river that has human waste dumped in it? Best to keep humanure carefully on the land, where it can do a great deal of good, and out of the water, where it can only do harm.

Sacred Water

If you stop to consider that a modern flush toilet uses around 3.5 gallons of clean drinking water per flush (the old ones use up to 7 gallons a flush) and each person in a household will normally use 18.8 gallons or 71 liters of clean, fresh, potable water a day, that is a lot of sacred water being seriously disrespected and wasted. Water shortages, especially of clean, potable water, are a growing concern in many places in North America and, indeed, the world.

It makes a great deal of sense to use the humanure toilet because it uses almost no water compared to a regular flush toilet. I cannot think it a pleasant practice to soil clean drinking water when so many people and other creatures in the world suffer from not having enough clean water to drink.

I estimate that my husband and I have saved 116,654 gallons of water in the eight and a half years we have been using the humanure toilet. That is 440,555 liters of water for those of us who are on the metric system. Water being a sacred element to Druids, I am happy to be leading the charge on this form of water conservation. Besides that, I know that I am making the world a better place each day in a small but significant way by saving these essential nutrients from being wasted. I find that satisfying.

My Decision to Try Humanure Composting

It took far too long, but eight and a half years ago, we were finally able to retire to the little farm we had bought on Denman Island off the east coast of Vancouver Island here in British Columbia. We moved in on May 1 without realizing it was a sacred day.

The property was covered in junk and dog feces from the previous tenants. The house was so dirty that my husband worked on it alone for three days before he thought it was safe for me with my bad lungs to come inside. It was still filthy then and I can only imagine what it had been like when he started. So we had a bit of an uphill battle, but we were full of joy and enthusiasm.

I had heard of composting toilets years before and was intrigued. I wanted to try it because it promised to take a nasty problem and turn it into something beneficial. The first carpentry project of my life was to build a composting toilet for our farm. A great deal of swearing was involved, and I made the legs of the commode too long, with the result that people missed the bucket below and piddled on the floor for a few days before I figured out what was going wrong and fixed it. We are still using the original commode.

The Commode

The commode is essentially a wooden box that has a cover on top. The cover has a hole cut in it, which fits over the tall bucket that is the receptacle. The wooden toilet seat goes over the hole and there you have it, a very cheap alternative to sewerage plumbing. I recommend it to anyone with a permanent campsite, a cottage in the country, or anyone trying to deal with drought conditions. Such a biffy is exactly what you need in a power outage.

Please do not think I had an easy time convincing my husband to let me do this; he fought me like a tiger. He said it was insane, filthy, would stink, and would never work. When I went and made the composting toilet, according to the directions available for free online in the *Humanure Handbook* by Joseph Jenkins (2005, 2017), my husband agreed to give it a try but went around saying he loved me so much he would even poop in a bucket for me.

The Compost Pile

We made the outdoor portion of the humanure composting system out of four packing pallets held together with twists of heavy wire. I like to do it that way because it is so easy to get the pallets apart again when the compost is finished. We take two bales of hay and fluff them up in the compost box and are ready to start. The hay acts as a sponge for liquids and a reservoir of carbon for the composting process.

Common Concerns

A friend asked me if I had to scrape feces off the bottom of the bucket to clean it. I was surprised and explained that the bucket is dressed with a layer of sawdust or fallen leaves and so there is no problem in that regard. After a person has relieved himself, the deposit is covered with more sawdust or leaves. Any source of carbon will do for this.

So, every morning for the last eight and a half years now, one of us takes the bucket out to the compost area and draws back a mass of clean hay on top of the humanure compost box and pours the contents of the bucket (urine, feces, toilet paper, and the sawdust or leaves) into the compost box and then covers it back up with clean hay. The humanure bucket is rinsed out with clean water and has a dressing of fallen leaves added to it, and back into service it goes. I sometimes scrub it with a toilet brush if the sides have become dirty.

Making Good Compost

None of my compost piles stink. This is a basic tenet of composting. If your compost stinks, it needs more carbon. If it fails to heat up, it needs more nitrogen. At no time should compost stink because the stink is nitrogen evaporating back into the air. That ammonia smell is the smell of wealth evaporating out of your life.

I always start a new humanure compost box on May 1, Belteinne. It helps to pick the day you moved into your place or a day that you will not have trouble remembering. I see starting a new humanure compost box every Belteinne as an important part of my celebration of the day.

It has been well below freezing here for a few weeks this winter, which is unusual. Some of my compost piles have frozen solid but not the humanure compost pile I am working with. I think that is because it was quite large and warm, having been started on the first of May. A friend started hers in October in a cold area and it did freeze solid.

In order to manage humanure safely, each of my compost boxes has a sign on it made out of an aluminum soda can, cut open, flattened, and engraved with a pen. It states that it is

humanure and what day it will be ready to harvest. The box is filled with humanure and hay is added as a topping when necessary for one year. It is then left to sit and mature for another year. After a year of just sitting there, it is pretty much a solid cube of worm castings. It does not stink and need never be turned.

Taming Critics

My husband made me swear I would never use humanure compost in the vegetable garden, and I promised I would not. It is perfectly clean at the end of the two-year process, but I agreed because I wanted it for my flower garden. For the first couple of years, my husband refused to carry the humanure outside and insisted it was my idea and I had to do all the work. Imagine my horror and rage when my first box of humanure was finally ready to be harvested and I found it pillaged! My husband had taken several wheelbarrows of it to amend planting holes in his orchard. I was outraged, and my husband deflected my wrath by admitting it was excellent stuff and promising that he would from then on help me by carrying the bucket out.

How Guests React

I always allow guests to not use the composting toilet as we have two old-fashioned flush toilets. People are remarkably hesitant to use the humanure toilet, but I once had to insist on a guest using it because the power had gone out and with it the water pumped from our well. This friend is an old soldier and wanted to go relieve himself in a snowbank, but I pointed out that that would be a little unhygienic. I persuaded him to use the humanure toilet and he came out astounded, saying, "It don't stink." No, it doesn't! I have one dear friend who will not even go into the bathroom where the humanure commode is. She seems to be frightened of it. I suspect her potty training may have been traumatic.

The Benefits

The greatest benefit of composting humanure is the excellent end product of luscious worm castings that smell like earth in the forest. I mix this with some sand and use it as potting soil and start my vegetable and flower seedlings in it. I also fill my containers with it on the deck and have a flower garden of great vibrancy and beauty.

I showed some friends a hanging basket I had that was mad with flowers tumbling down around it. I urged them to smell it. It smelled like geraniums and alyssum. One of these friends was a wastewater engineer, and he was very impressed by what I called the ultimate expression of sewage. Now that is a practical sort of magic: to keep clean water clean and to turn smelly, foul, human waste into rich soil. This is a good trick for every green wizard to know.

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May We All Do Good Together: Permaculture, Ethics, and Druidry

Adam Robersmith

Adam Robersmith, AODA Druid Adept and Archdruid of Fire, is a clergyman ordained as a Druid priest and Unitarian Universalist minister. He works in the parish and privately as a spiritual director, specializing in formation: the ways in which people develop in their spiritual lives and practices, whatever their understanding of the universe may be. You may find him online at Oak and Thorn (www.oakandthorn.com) or knitting, reading, walking, or tending to his garden at his home near Chicago, which he shares with his partner and dog.

Imagine walking down the street—any street, every street—and as you go, when you're hungry, you are able to pluck an apple or a peach or a plum from the trees lining the sidewalks. Imagine parkland and what appear to be forests that are filled with abundant food for anyone to harvest, especially those who need it most. Imagine a landscape in which your walk to work or school or home offered you and everyone else shade and beauty and food. If that seems unlikely, you haven't yet embraced permaculture. Eric Toensmeier, a permaculturist and educator, writes:

> "Permaculture (short for "permanent agriculture" or "permanent culture") is a movement that began in Australia in the 1970s. It brings together traditional indigenous land management practices, ecological design, and sustainable practices to create landscapes that are more than the sum of their parts. Permaculture is not so much about having a greenhouse, chickens, and an annual vegetable garden as it is about how those elements are tied together to create functional interconnections that work like a natural ecosystem. Permaculture teacher and designer Rafter Ferguson came up with one of my favorite definitions of permaculture: "meeting human needs while improving ecosystem health." (Toensmeier, 2013, pp. 2–3)

While on sabbatical last fall, I took a permaculture design course—an intensive class intended to give students a jump start into practicing this form of landscape design. We

learned about soil development, ecological systems, design techniques, and plant characteristics. In the midst of one of the lectures, I had a moment in which I saw my spirituality and this way of growing the world intersect. The discussions that I thought were about gardening were really asking us, How do we live? How do we relate to the world around us and to the people with whom we share it? What are the principles by which we make our choices? In those questions, my worlds collided. In that moment, I understood that permaculture and Druidry were taking the same questions and applying them to slightly different tasks and disciplines.

Like Druidry, permaculture offers practices and teachings that guide how people live in the world. Like Druidry, permaculture offers ways to be attentive to the earth, to our creativity, and to our needs. The three foundational ethics of permaculture are what made me realize that what I thought was an ecologically sound way of gardening is actually Druidry in action. To make it simple, we say, "Earth care, people care, fair share." You could also call it "responsibility, compassion, and equity" or "stewardship, relationship, and justice." Whatever language you prefer, permaculture offers an ethical structure that encourages us to reconsider the priorities of our cultures and how we live within them.

Earth care means the obvious sorts of things: conservation, restoration. It also means understanding ourselves as part of the community of all living beings, and knowing that we have a large impact upon the way all creatures, plants, fungi, and microorganisms exist upon the earth. It means taking on the enrichment of soil and limiting our negative impacts as a basic commitment. It means planting and raising animals with a sense of the full system—the system that includes both what we intend and what exists beyond us.

People care means other obvious sorts of things: working for the health, safety, and thriving of human beings in material and nonmaterial ways. It means that we strive to educate everyone well so that we know enough to make good choices for ourselves and the world. It also means that in our care of the earth, we do not choose human winners and losers, letting some humans suffer for the comfort of others. It means that we meet our needs for community, for meaning making, for work, for entertainment, for rest. It means that we take seriously how we can best live as full participants in the ecology of the earth.

Fair share means that when there is a surplus, it is made available to all appropriately, and none of us consumes more than we need. We return to the earth what helps to enrich it, from compost to clean water and air. It means that we attend to wise limits upon how we use the resources of the earth. It means that we all accept our appropriate portion of the responsibility for the harms that we do. And it means that we make sure that there is enough of what is good to go around to all who need it.

Since permaculture learns from the wisdom of indigenous land management practices, it seems only right that we also seek to understand how indigenous ethics and worldviews support those practices. Speaking to the citizens of the United States as a whole, G. Peter Jemison, a faithkeeper of the Seneca Nation, says:

> "If you have been given responsibilities, you must really attend to those responsibilities.
> You start to think in terms of the people who come after me. Those faces that are coming from beneath the earth that are yet unborn, is the way we refer to that. They are going to need the same things that we have found here, they would like the earth to be as it is now, or a little better.
> Everything that we have now is the result of our ancestors who handed forth to us our language, the preservation of the land, our way of life and the songs and dances. So now we will maintain those and carry those on for future generations.[1]

In many indigenous communities, the ways of meaning making and ritual that others identify as religion are not some separate thing you can choose to believe in or not. Those ways are simply part of what it means to be a person. Religion is not a thing one does; it is an integrated way of life. Many of us in this country have lived in a world that sees religion as optional. Whether we grew up with that sort religion or without, we Druids have chosen our way of knowing the world and living in it. Whether we use the language of religion or not, we must practice this way of knowing—our Druidry—until it is so ingrained in us that it is part of what it means to be a person.

By *living* Druidry rather than *believing* in it, I hope to leave every part of the world I touch at least a little better than before. I'll fail sometimes. We all will. Yet, by learning better ways and putting them into practice, we make Druidry a living practice and our lives a more integrated part of the whole ecosystem. This thing that I once thought of as a better way to garden gives us far more through the ethic of earth care, people care, and fair share. Conservation isn't enough if it doesn't care for the people. Wealth and abundance for people isn't enough if it isn't available to all existences with equal opportunity. Equity and fairness won't matter if we have nothing good left to share, if we have no way to survive upon a desecrated earth.

In the face of those challenges, permaculture gives its practitioners real-world steps to making things better. It shows people how to build fertile soils from cardboard and compost and the plants that enrich the earth—and reminds us that we must build our own capacities for growth through education and practice and collaboration with one another. It says that smaller, incremental steps and careful observation of what's actually happening around us allows us to develop solutions that meet the problems we observe, rather than the ones we believe or imagine are occurring. It says that planting the right things together—like corn, beans, and squash—means that they will help one another grow well; that is true of ideas, too. Our framework of Bard, Ovate, and Druid wisdoms help us to bring our Awen, our sacred inspiration, into the world through creativity, understanding of the world we live in, and how we make meaning with one another. Each helps the other to grow well within

1 I have not found the original source of this quote. The best I have come to is online (PBS, n.d).

us, encouraging us to live in ways that are more meaningful than materialism, self-interest, and apathy.

Wendell Berry, in this excerpt from his poem, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front," writes to hold before us these great goals, these seemingly utopian dreams:

> "Ask the questions that have no answers.
> Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
> Say that your main crop is the forest
> that you did not plant,
> that you will not live to harvest.
> Say that the leaves are harvested
> when they have rotted into the mold.
> Call that profit. Prophesy such returns.
> Put your faith in the two inches of good rich soil
> that will build under the trees
> every thousand years. (Berry, 1987, p. 151)"

Permaculture says: don't just put your faith in that two inches of soil that builds on its own, but get out there and build it yourself! Moreover, build it faster than two inches every thousand years in the places that need it most. We know how to do that. Place compost and paper and leaves in layers upon hardened ground and it will become loose and moist and ready for growth. It says that we should consider wanting different things, more sustainable things, fewer things so that everyone and everything receives its fair share of resources and nurturing. Utopian dreams of city streets lined with apples and peaches and plums, or of being able to value nothing as a gift or compensation—they're beyond what most of us can imagine. The ethic of earth care, people care, and fair share, though, that's a real thing that can guide us forward into a world that is at least a little better than the one we have now.

Druidry doesn't just ask us to dream of a better world, one in which we imagine that someday all will be well; instead, it tells us to listen to our Awen, to nurture our relationship with everything around us through ritual, ecological wisdom, and creative expression.

Human beings seek out religion to live differently than we would if we didn't connect with something deeper and larger than our everyday existence. We practice religion to keep our attention on what is good, perhaps even utopian, but worth aiming toward. We rely on ethics and commit to the actions that ethics require to point us in the direction of what we might otherwise stumble toward . . . or away from . . . without some guidance. I hope that you will consider one additional ethic that might shape your Druidry for the good of all things: earth care, people care, fair share. If the dreams and practices of permaculture speak to you, I hope that you will consider it as a path that can support your Druidry. However we name it, however we practice it, may we all do good together.

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A Druid's Guide to Permaculture: Permaculture Design Through the Five Elements

Dana O'Driscoll

Dana O'Driscoll, Druid Adept and Archdruid of Water, spent most of her childhood in the wooded hills of the Appalachians in western Pennsylvania, making mud pies, building brush cabins, and eating berries. Thankfully, little has changed, and she can still be found searching out tasty mushrooms, gathering herbs, and playing her pan flute for the trees. Dana enjoys various kinds of wildcrafting and is often covered with paint, dirt, or both. She is a certified permaculture designer and is working toward a more resilient, self-sufficient lifestyle through beekeeping, perennial agriculture, animal husbandry, food preservation, herbalism, and much more. Dana joined the AODA in 2005 and, after completing her first and second degrees, earned the degree of Druid Adept in 2013. Her Druid Adept project explored connections between permaculture and Druidry. She joined the Grand Grove in 2014 as Grand Pendragon and was elected an Archdruid in 2015. She is chief editor of Trilithon: The Journal of the Ancient Order of Druids in America and runs Hemlock and Hazel Grove in western Pennsylvania. She is also a Druid-grade member in the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids, a bishop in the Gnostic Celtic Church, and a member of the Druidical Order of the Golden Dawn. Her writings on Druidry, permaculture, and nature can be found at the Druid's Garden (druidgarden.wordpress.com).

Humans have looked to nature as the ultimate teacher; nature is the sacred text from which all wisdom flows. As Druids, we know the more time you spend in nature, the more you align with her rhythms, and the more you discover her many teachings. One of the ways for working with nature's patterns in our daily lives is through the practice of permaculture. Permaculture is a design system, rooted in the patterns of nature, that gives us tools to regenerate and heal our landscapes, to rebuild our relationship with our lands, to make sure that everyone living on this earth has a fair share. As it is commonly taught throughout the world, permaculture is seen as an outer practice focused on humans interacting with the land and each other. In other words, it is a set of ethics, principles, and tools that we

can use to rebuild our relationship with nature and help bring healthy abundance back to the land. Even though we think of permaculture as a principle for designing spaces in the outer world, using a Druid's view of permaculture allows us to also see its usefulness to our inner lives.

In this piece, using a Druid Revival lens, we'll explore how the principles of permaculture design not only relate to the outer work of healing the earth but also work as mantras for inner spiritual transformation. In other words, as we do the outer work of permaculture, we gain inner spiritual transformations, and as we do the inner work of permaculture, we can see those manifestations in our outer lives. This, of course, reflects the hermetic magical adage, "as above, so below; as within, so without."[1] Specifically, in this piece, I'll be introducing the permaculture design principles through the lens of the elements and animals connected to Revival Druidry. We'll explore definitions of permaculture and design, the principles themselves through the elements of spirit, air, fire, water, and earth, and then how these principles can be used for inner spiritual development and for outer Earth Path work.

Permaculture Stars
by Dana O'Driscoll

1 This is a modern rendition of a phrase that first appeared in *The Emerald Tablet* of Hermes Trismegistus. Translated by Isaac Newton, the original phrase reads, "That which is below is like that which is above and that which is above is like that which is below to do the miracles of one only thing." The Emerald Tablet was widely regarded by medieval alchemists as the founding work of the alchemical and hermetic traditions. The earliest known text of it appears to have been written in Arabic between the sixth and eighth centuries CE, but it has long influenced esoteric philosophy and, certainly, the Druid Revival

What Is Permaculture?

Like Druidry, permaculture does not have a single definition. However, one I like to use is this: Permaculture is a system of principles and ethics, rooted in nature, that helps us regenerate ecosystems and rebuild connections (between ourselves, the land, and each other) while also providing for our own needs. Permaculture is rooted in the idea that we can live abundantly and richly while also improving the land and ecosystem around us, that we can be in partnership, working with nature, rather than against it. Permaculture includes three ethical guidelines that help shape the work: people care, earth care, and fair share (which are covered more in "May We All Do Good Together" by Adam Robersmith, this issue). Permaculture also includes a set of design principles, the number of which varies based on who is teaching them. These principles, like mantras, give guidance for how to do everything from putting in a garden to designing a small community. Permaculture also has a series of associated techniques for land regenerative work: sheet mulching and no-till gardening, perennial agriculture, systems thinking, designing for ecological succession, niche analyses, repurposing and redirecting waste, catching and storing the sun's energy, and much more. The goal of permaculture, in the words of practitioner Ben Falk, in the end, is not to do less harm (as many of the sustainability movements, especially consumer-driven ones, imply), but rather that humans can be a force for good.[2] This is a powerful idea—that we can actively regenerate and heal our lands, and that there are simple tools and methods for doing so that anyone can engage in.

Permaculture originated as a modern movement in the 1970s. In the tradition of many hermits, Bill Mollison got fed up with society, went into the forest, spent a lot of time observing and simply being present among the trees, and found wisdom there. Lucky for us, he eventually came back out with his first draft of a set of permaculture design principles and ethics, which he refined with his then-student, David Holmgren. They began writing about them and teaching them to others, starting a global movement, a movement that continues to give us specific tools and thinking patterns to help us respond to the many challenges of our age.

As I see it, permaculture was giving a new treatment to ancient truths. Humans through the centuries have understood—and enacted—these principles and ethics based on nature and tempered by their own common sense. But, for modern humans living in postindustrial times, these principles and ethics are new in the sense that we haven't had these ways of knowing taught to us in family or cultural traditions, in our livelihoods, or in our formal educational systems. The foundations of permaculture, likely obvious to other cultures and times, are no longer part of our cultural tradition or human knowledge. Beyond the obvious land regenerative and community benefits, I see permaculture as aligning with the Druid tradition in a number of ways. The following are some benefits that I see permaculture offering Druids.

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2 Ben Falk shares this view in the movie Inhabit: A Permaculture Perspective. This movie is a great introduction to permaculture for those interested in learning more.

Permaculture aligns beautifully with an earth-honoring, earth-centered spiritual practice. Because permaculture focuses on designing from nature's patterns, it helps continue aligning us to the rhythms of the seasons, and regenerating landscapes intersects with spiritual and earth-centered seasonal celebrations, meditations, and studies. Specifically, in the AODA path, we do a lot of the same kinds of activates that are promoted in permaculture: systematic observation and interaction in the natural world, thinking about cycles and the earth as a whole system, and living an earth-honoring lifestyle.

Permaculture offers us hope. Many who hold the earth as sacred have difficulty paying attention to the news and reports of degrading ecosystems, mass extinctions, oil spills, and much more. Many feel lost and overwhelmed with what's going on in the world. Things move so quickly, stuff happens, and we find ourselves always trying to keep our balance, being reactive instead of proactive. The permaculture principles offer us specific tools to move from a place of reactivity and of asking how we can do less harm to one of proactivity, and asking where we can do good. In other words, they are tools of personal empowerment.

Permaculture offers us tools for empowerment and change that are not culturally appropriated or tied to any person or belief. I think the fact that permaculture isn't culturally appropriated is key in an age when so many things seem to be appropriated or disconnected from their original context. These are universal principles, rooted in nature's systems and used all over the world; they can be applied uniquely in different contexts.

Permaculture is one outer practice to complement the inner practice of Druidry. The Druid tradition gives us many tools for working on our own inner landscapes and spiritually aligning with the living earth; permaculture can give us tools to do the same in the outer landscape.

Permaculture as a Design System

Permaculture is, at its core, a design system that works in harmony with nature's own methods. Before going into more depth about the specific principles of permaculture, it is helpful to dig into what a design system is so that we have a sense of the potential use and framing of the principles. Basic definitions are a great place to start. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* suggests that to design is:

- To plan and fashion artistically or skillfully
- To plan and make (something) for a specific use or purpose
- To think of (something, such as a plan); to plan (something) in your mind
- To form or conceive in the mind; contrive; plan
- To assign in thought or intention; purpose

Design includes the practice of planning, in the mind or on paper, for some purpose. Design is about goals—what we plan for in advance and the steps we must follow to bring a larger vision into being. Part of this design work is, of course, setting intentions and following through with those intentions (the proactivity I discussed above). Designs in permaculture aren't just simple

Four Elements
by Dana O'Driscoll

plans, they are creative *responses* we can use to better adapt human needs to natural systems. Further, implicit in these definitions of design is also the sense that design isn't simply about planning ahead, but rather, that there is an art to the process. Creativity, the flowing of Awen, must be part of our designs. In this sense, the vision, creativity, and skill central to design ties to the entire line of Bardic arts—working with the hands, with the mind, with the flow of Awen to bring forth spaces, places, communities, and more. This flow of Awen comes, in permaculture, as in Druidry, from the living earth itself. Further, because of design's ability to connect us to the creative energies of the natural world, the principles of design are useful to us, as much for everyday life as for trying to decide where to place our new vegetable garden or orchard, to develop better systems for our schools, or to find meaningful ways of bringing our community together.

In essence, the design puts us into a proactive space where we can use skills of thoughtfulness, planning, and creativity to do good in the world. The permaculture design principles offer us a kind of compass and road map for that journey ahead. I see them a lot like lights and markers along an otherwise dark path—we stumble in the dark, but the light of the principles helps guide our way. So let's now turn to the specific design principles and see how they can be used in both our outer and inner lives.

Permaculture Design Principles Through the Elements and Animals of the Druid Revival Tradition

What follows is my own synthesis of the permaculture principles through lenses present in the Druid Revival tradition; it is a synthesis of the core of permaculture connected with some of the cores of Druidry.[3] Specifically, I have connected the five elements (spirit, air, fire, water, earth) and the beings connected with the Druid Revival tradition (stag, hawk, salmon, and bear).[4] By mapping the design principles onto the five elements and their traditional natural associations, and by including several new principles that fit a nature spirituality lens, I hope to make these principles accessible and meaningful to Druids in our tradition.

The design principles I'm presenting have undergone several transformations from mainstream permaculture teachings. For one, different permaculture teachers have offered their own take on the principles, and multiple sets of them are in circulation; I've had to select those most appropriate, drawing from numerous sources. For two, mainstream permaculture doesn't consider the spiritual or inner perspective (see, for example, Holmgren's [2002] take on this subject); yet as a Druid, I know that these principles go much deeper. In some cases, I have kept the design principles the same as they were originally written where they are fitting for the purposes of this presentation. But in other cases, I have adapted these principles to be most applicable to those following nature-based, earth-centered paths. This means that I may have given them a more appropriate name that will better resonate with our values. In other cases, I have created new principles that are rooted in spiritual traditions honoring the living earth. For those familiar with permaculture design principles more broadly, I've included the original design principle and source when necessary.

Additionally, here I am presenting not only outer principles that we can work with (in line with the original design principles) but also their inner equivalent (that is, realms of experience beyond the physical). As the ancients understood, and certainly as our own tradition understands, the rich landscape of the inner realms directly reflects our outer landscapes—and when we do work within, it manifests in the outer realms. Our bodies, and our lives, are a different of landscape from the external one that a permaculture designer would typically explore, but the principles can apply all the same.

And so, let us now journey through the elements with our animal, bird, and insect guides from the Druid Revival tradition, and learn more about the permaculture principles and their potential use in our lives. Each of the sacred elements and their associated animal, bird, or insect guardian hold a triad of principles.

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3 I've drawn principles from four sources: Holmgren's (2002) *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability*, Mollison's (1988) *Permaculture One*, as well as Kay Cafasso's Sowing Solutions Permaculture Design Certificate course (https://sowingsolutions.org/) and Pandora Thomas and Lisa DiPiano's Permaculture Teacher Training for Women course (https://www.eomega.org/scholarships/pttw16).

4 In order to accommodate the five-element system rather than the four-element system common in the Druid Revival, I have added the "bee of inspiration" tied to the element of spirit. This addition is my own.

Spirit Principles: The Wisdom of the Bee

On the outer landscape, the principles of spirit, through the magic of the bee, ask us to observe what is around us, to rethink and resee those experiences, and to understand the connections to all things. Bees are master alchemists; they transform nectar into honey that can stay preserved for up to 1,000 years. Bees embody the principle of transformation, teaching us that we can work our magic upon our earth, especially if we work collectively. On the inner landscape, the principle of spirit and the magic of the bee ask us to do the same work of transformation.

Principle 1: Observe, Interact, and Intuit

Outer: This permaculture principle is simple—it asks you, before you do anything else, to spend time observing your surroundings, interacting with them in a nonjudgmental way, and using your intuition to guide you.[5] We can gain incredible insight from this simple activity, and using the information before us is a way into all else. All living beings use this principle: observing, interacting, and working on instinct to survive and thrive. We do this in AODA, where we spend at least fifteen minutes a week in nature in stillness and focus. After enacting this practice over a period of years, many AODA members realize that it is one of the most powerful practices we have as Druids. And as we know, these observations alone allow for transformative work in our own interactions with nature.

In permaculture design, it is typical for a designer to spend a full year observing a site before completing a plan. This leads the designer to understand the energy flows through the land: how the light changes and where it is concentrated, what wind patterns there are, any pollution patterns or hazards, the grazing and movement patterns of animals, the resources that are present, where the water flows and how it collects, and much more. These observations are key—before we make any changes to what exists, we must first understand the site as it is. This same observation can be used in community sites as well.

Inner: On the inner landscape, this first principle is critically important as the crucial first step in the transformations to come. Typically, in this culture we don't spend much, if any, time stepping back to fully observe our own patterns, behaviors, thoughts, and feelings because we are typically up close and living those experiences. Stepping back and simply understanding those patterns is key.

Observation here is simply the act of nonjudgmental understanding and acknowledgment. There are many ways to observe, interact, and intuit on our inner landscapes, including Druid retreats, pilgrimages, journeys, meditation, open listening, stepping back in an intense moment to resee a situation, or keeping a journal of our thoughts and feelings (which can help us understand patterns in our lives). These are all observation techniques that can help us better understand ourselves and our own patterns. Once we have a sense of our own patterns—conscious, subconscious, and unconscious—we are in a better position to do inner landscape work and healing.

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5 This principle is derived from Holmgren's "Observe and interact."

Principle 2: Reflect and Revise

Outer: Reflection and revision focuses on careful evaluation of our plans and making changes based

on that reflection—note here the difference between observation (nonjudgment) and evaluation (judgment).[6] The work of doing this allows us to engage in transformations in our own thinking and, thus, the outer world.

On the matter of reflection: tremendous value exists in simply stopping what we are doing and carefully thinking and meditating upon our actions in order to determine qualities about them: Is this good? Is it helpful? Is it productive to me? Reflection, through meditation, journaling, and quietude, is a cornerstone of nature-based spiritual practices as well as permaculture. The second part of the principle, revision, here suggests that we do something with our reflections—that we enact, and be open to enacting, some change. Revision is a process where we shape and hone earlier ideas into something better. Part of revision is being open to those changes and not being too committed to any particular approach. Sometimes, it takes us working through a project or meaningful change partway before we see a better way we can do something.

As a practical example in the outer world, perhaps you put in an aquifer bed system (see "Aquifer Bed Construction," by Gordon Cooper, this issue) and realize that part of it isn't working properly. You could be stubborn and try to make it work or live with it as it is, shrugging your shoulders. Or, you could sit back, reflect on what could have been done differently, and go about the diligent work of rebuilding it based on those insights.

Inner: In the inner realm, stemming from the first principle, observe and interact, the ability to critically reflect on our experiences and patterns and revise is tremendously helpful as it facilitates our own transformation, growth, and healing. This is where evaluation comes into play. It might be that we need to resee painful or difficult experiences in our past and work to transform them. There are lots of ways of doing this, depending on the nature of a painful experience. For example, I find it helpful to revisit an old wound and explore what good has come of it (for example, I have experienced a number of traumas in my life, and it has really helped me by transforming my hurt and using it to help others). Reflection and revision also ask us to look at where we, perhaps, wronged others or wronged ourselves and allow us to think about how we can grow to ensure that never happens again. Revision allows us to move forward with the promise of change for the future. Meditation on these issues is one of the primary tools I use for this work, although I also use the visual arts (and art journaling for healing) when I feel led.

Principle 3: Work on Multiple Levels

Outer: There are a few ways to think about working on multiple levels, derived from both systems theory and hermetic occult philosophy.[7] On the side of systems theory and our outer

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6 This is derived from Holmgren's "Apply self-regulation and value feedback."

7 This is a new permaculture principle derived from my Druid-permaculture practice. A good re-

realms, an awareness of multiple levels and nested systems allows us to engage in designs that are functional on multiple levels. One set of levels is the micro/individual, and the macro/system; another set of nested systems would be the larger ecosystem, the microclimates that exist in a specific place, and the flows of energy (water, light, nutrients) that cycle through each of those systems. When we recognize that a single element is part of a larger system, that transforms the way we think about that system and about that element. Working on multiple levels encourages us to think in these two perspectives at once and consider the interplay between them. The bee, as both an individual and as a superorganism, helps us better understand this principle: a solitary bee functions on her own, but does so as part of that larger hive (system of bees) working for collective good. And through that collective work, the bee transforms raw plant materials into honey, wax, and propolis.

Inner: On the inner side, this practice is perhaps best epitomized by the magical adage I opened this piece with, "As above, so below, as within, so without." The underlying idea here is that what we do on the inner planes has a direct impact on the physical plane. Similarly, what occurs on the outer planes has an impact on our inner realms. This also applies to us as people—the inner work we do (reflection, meditation, ritual) impacts our outer living, and vice versa. It is a principle that is well worth including here, as it has been enacted by humans upon the landscape for millennia. Outer transformations lead to inner transformations, and vice versa. Damaged lands lead to damaged people. We heal the land and, through that work, we heal ourselves.

Inner landscape work affects multiple levels within our lives. One such level is the relationship between our inner worlds and outer realities: how we manifest inner hurts or joy as our outer realities; also, how inputs from the outer realms become our inner states. A second way to consider this principle from an inner landscape perspective is through the levels of the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious (which I consider a connection to the higher self). When we are pained, we are often not only pained consciously, but that pain works deeply within us, causing us to behave in ways that we aren't always conscious of. Sometimes, we have to work on things consciously for a time to do some deep inner healing work. And then our subconscious and unconscious take over, facilitating healing at those multiple levels. A third way to think about this principle on the inner landscape is the connections between the mind, body, heart, and spirit—understanding that all of these levels need our attention and that they aren't separate from each other. We can maximize our own growth by attending to these levels and working with them through healing, reflection, and ritual work.

Air Principles: The Wisdom of the Hawk

The air principles focus on integrating our knowledge and wisdom to see more paths before us and using the power of air through our logic, intellect, knowledge, and ability to recognize patterns. These principles ask us to embody the energy of the hawk: first to fly

source on systems theory is *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* by Donella Meadows and Diana Wright (2005).

high, take stock of what is before us, and offer us new ways of experiencing and interacting as we begin the path toward positive change. On the inner realms, the air principles ask us to use our knowledge and logic to work through inner problems before us. The hawk soars above the mountains and, in doing so, it allows us to gain a new perspective through the application of our minds.

Principle 4: The Problem Is the Solution

Outer: This is one of my favorites of the existing permaculture principles, and for good reason.[8] We spend so much of our lives hearing about the problems that plague our world and feeling unable to address any of them. This principle turns that powerlessness on its head and suggests that the solution to any problem lies within the nature of the problem itself. For example, lawns are contributing substantially to climate change and the loss of ecological diversity; and the solution is there before us: change the nature of the lawn by turning it into a vegetable garden or ecosystem. Often when we look at problems not as insurmountable obstacles but as opportunities, we can do a tremendous amount of good. This principle reminds me of the Hanged Man card from the tarot—when one needs a new perspective, it is best to hang from a tree by one's foot and see the world in a new way. Practicing this line of thinking can aid us tremendously in developing our ability to see the solutions within the nature of the problems before us. In order to do this, of course, we have to draw upon the principles already discussed: observing, interacting, using our intuition, and working to reflect and revise.

Inner: Sometimes, limitations in our thinking prevent us from moving forward. We become stubborn, using words like "can't" or "impossible." Some people are defeated before they begin. They go to face a problem already believing they will fail, and they haven't taken the time to find the solutions through the problems they face. That, in itself, is a magical act that disempowers and undermines a person. Or, people use words like "I can never change" or "these problems are too big" or "this is how I live," accepting the situation and feeling defeated. We don't just hear this on the outer landscape, but we also apply these ways of thinking to our inner worlds. This is self-defeating talk, and with this talk, the problems really are insurmountable—but they need not be. There is always a way forward; this principle asks us to turn the problem on its head, look for the solution within that problem, and use the problem as an opportunity rather than a hurdle. I like to use the AODA's discursive meditation as a key practice to work through problems of this nature and see the various perspectives.

Principle 5: Mushroom Eyes

Outer: This principle is one I first learned as a wild food forager and mushroom hunter.[9] As a mushroom hunter, you not only have to be on the lookout to spot mushrooms, you also have to know what you are looking at (and whether it is safe to eat, whether there is enough

8 This is one of Mollison's original principles.

9 This is a new principle derived from my Druid-permaculture practice.

of it to harvest, whether it is ready for harvesting, etc.). Mushroom eyes can apply to much more than just mushroom hunting, obviously, and coming to a situation with the knowledge necessary; before we can act, we must see, and in order to see, we must understand. Observation and interaction are part of this, but mushroom eyes ask us to understand intimately what we see. You might think of this as seeing through different lenses—when you put the lenses on, everything is colored by that experience. But these are lenses of knowledge and wisdom. Think about the hawk here—he knows exactly what he is going for when he sees his prey. Animals teach their young skills necessary to survive; and humans, as part of nature, used to teach the same natural lessons to their own offspring. In AODA, one of the ways we encourage mushroom eyes is through the study of ecology—reading nine books on nature during the candidate year and engaging in Ovate studies helps us develop our own mushroom eyes.

Inner: One of the unfortunate cultural sicknesses we have at present is what herbalist David Winston calls "hardening of the mind." The mind, like the heart, can harden to the point where we become so set in our ways that we can't see beyond them. We close down; we refuse to see anything other than what we want to see. Taking on the principle of mushroom eyes asks us to get beyond the hardening of the mind by applying multiple lenses and many approaches with which to see the world. This can mean working to see something from someone else's point of view, or someone else's set of experiences—or to see something with our own comfortable lenses removed. It asks us to cultivate an openness and wisdom to see into the heart of issues within and without. A second way of considering the principle of mushroom eyes for inner work is through the importance of ternary thinking within the Druid tradition. Western civilization loves binary thinking and often, issues are framed as having only two sides when the reality is that three, four, or even dozens of different perspectives may occur. I try to cultivate this practice in my own life by talking to those of diverse perspectives about their experiences, practicing deep listening, and really trying to put myself in other people's shoes.

Principle 6: Design from the Patterns to Details

Outer: Sometimes, when we are working to solve a problem, we focus on a specific thing we want to do (e.g., I want to build a waterfall in my backyard) without thinking about the overall patterns (In this case, is there an existing resource flow? What is the overall pattern in the landscape? Does a waterfall make sense there?).[10] Often, designing this way leads to trouble because you may have the specific elements you want, but you are missing the larger goals and purpose of the design. This principle asks us to start with the biggest picture, like the outer edge of a spiral, and slowly work our way into the details of the problem. We think about the patterns of nature and energy first, and then work our way down to the specifics of that design. By starting with the larger patterns that nature provides, we can more effectively design—and attend to—the small stuff.

10 This principle is one of Mollison's original principles.

Inner: The hawk flying high asks us to consider our overall goals and patterns, and to use those overall goals and patterns to enact change on a daily or even minute-by-minute basis. It's not enough to say "I want to change"; rather, we need to set the broad goals that can help us work down to the specifics. Articulating our overall goals and time frames for those goals in big terms, seeing how they can weave into the existing patterns of our lives, and then creating a long-term plan are all simple ways to develop inner landscape designs. There are lots of ways to do this: I like vision boarding (a kind of meditative collaging), which allows my subconscious and spirit to speak, rather than using my conscious mind. Second, I like setting personal goals for myself—not just what I want to accomplish, but what I want to cultivate (like good listening skills, joy in my life, less tangible things). Setting goals, even for our own inner transformation, can help fuel our growth. For example, if I wanted to work on my own sensitivity to others, I might set that as my larger goal and then set weekly goals of self-monitoring when I am easily upset or offended. I check in on the progress of my yearly goals during the seasonal holidays—and set new yearly goals for my own growth and development at each spring equinox.

Fire Principles: The Wisdom of the Great Stag

Fire is about energy and change, and these three principles embody what we can do with energy and the many shifting changes around us. The great white stag is present in these principles as he lords over the forest: change is a constant on our great earth, and it is the many cycles such as the path of the sun that we can harness for better life and living. Fire is also the fuel through which we enact transformations on our inner landscapes. The stag in the heat of the chase facilitates our own healing and growth.

Principle 7: Catch and Store Energy

Outer: We live in a time of tremendous expenditure and waste of energy—this principle suggests that we catch and store that energy instead and transform it.[11] If we look at a forest as our example, we see that forests are masters at harnessing and storing any energy available: the trees grow branches in fractal patterns to maximize the storage of solar energy; that solar energy is used over and over again as trees drop leaves, nuts, or they themselves decay, cycling through the whole forest system. In our own lives and designs, catching and storing energy to put to productive use is a key principle. This energy is any resource: external resources like sun, wind, or water and inner resources like time, joy, or passion. Humans currently have an unbalanced relationship with energy, in that we think it's abundant and free, and that unbalanced relationship causes devastation throughout our lands. This principle, then, asks us to be mindful about existing energy flows and how they can be most effectively used. Practical applications of this principle include building swales, rain gardens, ponds, and rain barrels to store and sink water into the earth rather than letting it go down into

11 This is a permaculture principle from Holmgren.

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by Dana O'Driscoll

municipal water systems. Solar ovens, hayboxes, solar hot water heaters, and windmills are other examples of ways to catch and store energy.

Inner: On the inner landscape, we can pay attention to our own energy flows and find out how to best harness them—for being masters of our own energy is one way to help us grow. Ultimately, how much energy we have on a daily basis determines everything in our lives: how we can pursue and adapt to our creative gifts, how we can meet our goals, how we balance our life and work, how we balance other demands—attending to our energy, and harnessing it for the things we really want to manifest, is key. Many ways of doing this exist, and I'll share just a few here. First, we can explore ways of balancing our own energy and cultivating the positive aspects of energy in our lives (the AODA's Sphere of

Protection ritual is useful here). Second, we can draw upon plant allies (especially herbs like nettle and lemon balm) for restoring our own energy reserves. Finally, and most importantly, we can see how our resources—especially our physical energy—are being replenished. If we are constantly drained and overworked, we are not catching and storing energy for our own growth and work that is most important to us. We can evaluate our personal lives, work lives, and family lives to see how our energy is being used, and make sure it is in line with our goals (see Principle 6 above).[12]

Principle 8: Spiraling Changes

Outer: You might think about your own Earth Path changes as like spiraling slowly up a mountain.[13] You don't climb a mountain all at once in a straight line, and you certainly don't do it without preparation, ongoing evaluation, and occasional breaks. When we enact spiraling changes, we focus on what is manageable for us in that moment and how to build momentum over time. In reality, it is the small things, done over a period of time, that leave the most lasting impact. Rather than starting big and going all out with a three-acre design that we can't maintain, we can create a small garden at first, and grow that garden as we can (paying attention, always, to our own energy flows). We don't want to burn ourselves out with trying to do too much, too quickly. Consider the long-term plan rather than just the short-term gain in any design you enact and plan for succession. This principle also asks us to consider the role of ecological succession: in permaculture, we try to create settings that can be sustained for 100 years into the future, not just the immediate goals of tomorrow. We design knowing how the land will change as each species grows into its full height and space.

Inner: This inner principle suggests that when we make change, we need to make it in a way that is both slow and spiraling; these changes in our inner landscapes are more effective than rash quick ones that can't be maintained. This principle is about learning to sustain our own energy in our inner landscapes and our own healing and growth over the long term. Spiritual development and inner work is a long-term project; think of it as like a snail shell where we are ever growing, and yet coming back around to visit things again and again from a deeper perspective. As part of this, the use of small daily reminders and rituals can help keep you on the path of positive change: a daily ritual like the AODA's Sphere of Protection combined with five to ten minutes of daily meditation can offer tremendous growth in your life in the long run (which is part of why AODA requires them in our curriculum).

Principle 9: Creatively Use and Respond to Change

Outer: Change happens whether or not we want it to; the world is always moving.[14] Rather than see change as a bad thing, in permaculture we anticipate and embrace changes as a way to open up new possibilities and growth. This closely ties to one of the air principles, "the problem is the solution." We

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12 A really interesting perspective on life energy and work is found in a book called *Your Money or Your Life* by Vicki Robin, Joe Dominguez, and Monique Tilford (2008)—it will totally change your relationship with your work!

13 This is derived from Holmgren's principle, "Use small, slow solutions."

14 This principle is one of Holmgren's: "Creatively use and respond to change."

often see change as a negative thing—perhaps we like how things are going and we don't want things to be different. But change brings opportunity. Here's an example: I try putting up an arbor and my grape vines are so abundant that the thing collapses without adequate support. A creative response to this is to cut the vines back, use the cuttings for wreaths and making artist charcoals, and then I can build a better arbor that allows me to sit under it.

Inner: When I was in North Dakota some years ago, I went on a trail ride near Theodore Roosevelt National Park. The horses had walked this trail so many times over a period of decades that at points the trail was five or six feet deep and quite dusty—we were literally walking in a deep rut in the desert made by those horses' hooves. This is a physical representation of a deeper truth: we can get stuck in the neural pathways of our own thoughts, especially if we engage in the same thoughts over and over. The changes that occur outside us can be a reminder that we either have to learn to adapt or be like those horses, unable to see out of the rut that we have inhabited for so long. We will inevitably encounter some difficulties, but things are still going to change and be changed whether we adapt or not. A key part of this work is embracing change as an opportunity for growth. A good book on this subject is Carol Dweck's (2006) *Mindset*.[15] She describes two mind-sets that people can have: the growth mind-set (where change or challenge is viewed by an individual as an opportunity for growth) and the fixed mind-set (where change or challenge is viewed as something to defend against). Seeing change in a positive light and looking for the good and opportunities even in challenging situations can facilitate our own growth as human beings in the long term.

Water Principles: The Wisdom of the Salmon in the Sacred Pool

The salmon and the element of water focus our design thinking on interconnections and relationships—and the three water principles ask us to attend to those connections. In order to be effective as practitioners and designers of permaculture, we have to pay attention to many relationships. Permaculture, like Druidry, is ultimately a path of understanding and facilitating connections and relationships with the world around us and others, and the energy of water helps us do this very thing.

Principle 10: Integrate Rather Than Segregate

Outer: When you look at a typical vegetable garden, you see the veggies all in nice little rows, just waiting to be eaten by whatever pest enjoys that particular crop.[16] The more of the same crop that is planted, the more the pests will come to have their dinner. Permaculture sees things differently: a healthy forest, after all, is never a monocrop but rather an integrated system of many plants that perform multiple functions: nitrogen fixers, dynamic accumulators

15 See her TED talk for more information: Carol Dweck, "The Power of Believing You Can Improve," TED, November 2014, https://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve

16 This principle is one of Holmgren's, "Integrate rather than segregate."

of nutrients, soil builders, and more. By integrating multiple elements in a design, we allow them to work with each other in harmony. This principle asks us to consider diversity in our designs; a diverse ecosystem is more resilient—it can handle pests, disease, and drought much better than a monoculture cornfield. So, too, is a diverse group of people more resilient. This principle asks us to consider how each part in a system is related to each other and to the whole system. This principle suggests that parts work best when they are working together, rather than in isolation. This principle also builds on the spirit principle of working on multiple levels and understanding better how each individual part plays a role.

Inner: There are certainly many ways to work to integrate rather than segregate on the inner planes. The one I'll focus on here, however, is one that plagues so many of us in the Druid community: the desire to live a whole, authentic, and unified self. So many of us find ourselves in unsupportive environments where we don't feel we can be unified, and so we live fragmented lives. We are Druids in our houses or forests, and professionals in our workplaces and parents or children in our families—and this fragmentation grates on our souls. Part of this means, of course, finding ways of being open about who we are that allow us to navigate those tricky boundaries; a second part of this means living our principles and living in honor with the land through Earth Path work. A third part might involve conversations with loved ones about our paths, sharing slowly as they are ready. This work is certainly not easy, but it is worth working toward: the integration and fullness of living who we truly are.

Principle 11: Layered Purposes

Outer: This principle suggests that each aspect in a design can serve multiple purposes.[17] For example, meditation works for calming the mind, focusing thought, relaxation, and spiritual development (that's at least four functions; there are others). My chickens produce eggs, create compost from household and garden waste, till up the garden at certain points of the year, provide enjoyment and companionship, and reduce problematic insect populations. The more purposes a single element has, the more effective the design. Any single plant or animal species in the forest offers an example: an oak tree provides shade, captures the energy of the sun, prevents erosion, drops leaves to offer habitat, offers nuts, and so many more things. When we design with this principle in mind, we can maximize any one element's effectiveness within a system (especially in small spaces). For example, if you only have room for one potted plant, a lemon balm offers a pleasant tea, a way to freshen the air, and has calming, rebuilding, and nervine (nervous system healing) medicinal effects.

Inner: Layered purposes suggest, on the inner landscape, that many of the things we do can have more than one purpose. One of the challenges I put before me, for any inner work, is to see if I can find more than one take away or outcome from it: perhaps meditation gives me peace of mind, helps me work through a difficult problem, and reconnects me with

17 This is derived from one of Mollison's principles, "Each element performs many functions."

nature. Seeing the multiple purposes of our daily spiritual practices is useful for realizing their richness.

Principle 12: Use the Edges and Value the Margins

Outer: As a wild food forager and herbalist, I know that the margins are always the most abundant and diverse in an ecosystem—that's where I go for much of my medicine and food.[18] The edge of the pond or forest is where the activity is happening, where the bursting of life is taking place. This same principle can be applied to many other things: it is often at those edge spaces where we find the most interesting things happening. This can be the space between a forest and a field, the edge of your yard or even the spaces between two people, the spaces where we overlap.

Inner: When I was taking my permaculture teacher training course a year ago, Lisa DiPiano shared the idea of "pushing your edges" with her students. Each of us has an edge space—this is the space where we move from comfort to discomfort, the space where we don't quite feel as at home, or the space where we are really in new territory. Perhaps for our inner landscapes, these are the edges between two parts of ourselves (the professional and the Druid), or the spaces between the light and the darkness within us, or the other places where we feel less comfortable. It is important to safely explore those edge spaces, as those are the spaces of the most change and growth. It can be helpful to push just beyond our comfort zone—not so far as to get overwhelmed, but just far enough to know we are experiencing the discomfort that comes from learning and growing. You might think about the edge space like the rings of a tree: a tree grows each year, its bark expanding and another layer of life being added. Each time we push our edges, we are like the rings of that tree, growing stronger and more steady the more we are able to engage those edges and integrate those experiences.

Earth Principles: Wisdom of the Great Bear of the Starry Heavens

The element of the earth and the great bear focus on material things: what we do with the resources that we have and how we gain those resources. The earth principles ask us to manage and understand our own resources so that we can live in an earth-centered way, both internally and externally. The bear and his medicine is often of root, seed, and stone.

Principle 13: Obtain a Yield

Outer: This basic principle says that we should work to obtain some kind of yield for our efforts.[19] It's frustrating to put time and effort into something that does not yield rewards of any kind—and it's difficult to sustain energy when one is not seeing a yield. In permaculture, the idea of a yield is not limited to that which benefits humans (like a crop of tomatoes). Yields can certainly include food and medicine (the most obvious) but also intangibles like

18 This is one of Holmgren's principles: "Use the edges and value the margins."

19 This is one of Holmgren's principles.

beauty, harmony, and peace. Yields in the natural environment can include blooms for nectar; fruit, seeds, and nuts for wildlife; habitat; soil fertility; erosion prevention, and more. This principle asks us to go beyond our own immediate needs and to understand, ultimately, that the abundance of nature is for all to benefit from. Nature is a great provider, and intentional design can help maximize the many yields she offers. This principle also asks us to see a yield beyond that which is physically beneficial to our own lives.

Inner: This might seem on the surface like a principle that wouldn't fit in inner landscape work, but truly, it is one of the most important ones. The fruits of our efforts—of spiritual practice, of going into nature, of daily meditation, of inner healing work—can be difficult to measure and take stock in because the yields are less tangible—but not less real. I think it's important to consider our yields in our own lives: What do we cultivate and bring forth? Happiness? Peace? Creative gifts? Nurturing of others? Calmness of spirit and mind? One of the ways I like to recognize the fruits of my efforts is to keep regular spiritual journals (a practice I started over a decade ago in my AODA work). Then, usually at the spring equinox, which was the time when I first began the Druid path, I take time to review one or more of those journals and to consider my journey ahead. It is a tremendously useful practice, one which allows me to see just how far I've come and recognize the yields that I've gained. The many yields we can have may include clarity, peace of mind, joy, creative projects, self-expression, depth and understanding, better relationships with loved ones, and more.

Principle 14: Waste Is a Resource

Outer: Our culture is drowning in our own waste; if anything, industrial culture is a producer of waste above all other things.[20] Waste piles up in our landfills, in our homes, in our oceans, all through even the wildest places these days. Industrial culture's goal of this waste is to send it away; but as we Druids know, the earth is a closed system and there is no such thing as permanently away from any of us. In permaculture, waste (of any kind) is seen as a resource that has not yet been given a proper place. We can work to, as Holmgren says, "produce no waste" by focusing our efforts on redirecting waste streams toward productivity. For example, human fecal waste and urine can safely be used as a fertilizer under certain conditions (see "Humanure Composting and How It Can Be a Sacred Practice" by Max Rogers, this issue). Old office paper can be turned into greeting cards using basic hand papermaking. Spent grains from brewing can be added to the compost pile or used to create biogas, and so on. Producing no waste goes far beyond recycling and instead encourages us to reenvision our waste streams and work to eliminate them.

Inner: We have a lot of waste in our culture, in both our outer lives and our inner realms. In the inner realms, this often includes the wasting of our own time and energy on things that do not help us grow or heal. Monitoring our own wasted time (for most, especially with

20 This is one of Mollison's original principles.

electronic devices) and turning that waste into a resource that we can use is a really important part of our inner landscape work and growth. This is not something you do once but rather is a continual process of self-monitoring and adjusting. Limiting time on social media, removing television from our lives, and monitoring other potential waste streams all can help us get back in tune with ourselves and turn waste into a productive resource.

Principle 15: Embrace Renewables

Outer: Stemming from the permaculture ethic of earth care, one of the major issues we have in industrialized culture is an overdependence on fossil fuels and other nonrenewable sources of energy and goods.[21] Our planet has finite resources and the extraction of these resources is causing increasing suffering, destruction, pollution, and habitat loss. In permaculture, we instead embrace things that are renewable or free (like the sun or wind for energy). When we integrate renewables into our designs, we slow and/or eliminate our dependency on fossil fuels. Integrating renewables often focuses on shifting away from fossil fuel use or other materials derived from fossil fuels (like fertilizer) and into renewable energy use.

Inner: On the inner landscape, we might think about those things in our lives that renew and replenish versus those things that drain us (temporarily or permanently) and work to embrace renewing activities. This might mean that we spend time with certain people or we work to bring in certain activities that we enjoy and that bring us energy and peace. We don't want any "fossil fuels" in our inner landscapes, burning up and polluting the place! If we are not engaging in renewing activities, we will never be able to have enough energy for the inner transformations and healing that we seek. Taking time for renewing activities each day (even a quiet cup of tea and ten minutes of meditation) as well as renewing days when we are able (perhaps in line with the wheel of the year) can help us here.

Weaving the Design Principles into Practice

Just as we weave together the elements in rituals and in our own lives, so too can we weave the different permaculture principles into our daily living. As I discussed in the opening, these principles aren't just useful to us as designers when we are planning new gardens, homes, or community spaces, but also can be useful to us as mantras for meditation and just as principles for daily living. In fact, I try to use the principles as I go about my daily practice, calling upon one or another when I'm trying to make a decision or establish living patterns. And so, I use them for everything from themes for discursive meditation to mantras for daily living—here are three ways they can be used.

Good Decisions

First and foremost, the design principles help us make better, smarter decisions that are earth centered and earth honoring. When I'm deciding how to do anything, the principles

21 This is derived from Holmgren's "Use and value renewables."

are there, helping guide my decision. For example: I'm faced with the prospect of a bunch of leftover food after an event that I hosted on campus. The design principles offer some simple solutions through "produce no waste" or "waste is a resource." How then, can I turn this waste into a resource? Take it home, compost it, feed it to a friend's chickens, and so forth—and plan for this in advance.

Good Design

Of course, beyond immediate life decisions, the principles offer us much in the way of good design. This is to say, if we use the principles for good design, we can work to create our spaces with intention and forethought in an ethical, nature-centered way.

Meditation Mantras

The third way that these principles work is as mantras for meditation. Deep meditation and reflection upon the nature of the design principles can lead to a more robust understanding not only of how to use them in your life, but in interacting with and understanding nature. For example, "use the edges and value the marginal" leads us to understand nature's patterns, but also my own spiritual practices.

It has taken me many years to come to this understanding of permaculture and how it maps onto the Druid animals and elemental symbolism. I hope that this framing, along with my new additions and revisions to the principles, is a useful way of understanding these principles and how they can work in your life and connect to your own Druid practice.

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Interview with Adam Robersmith, Archdruid of Fire, AODA

Interview conducted and transcribed by Paul Angelini, Grand Pendragon. Adam Robersmith, the AODA's Archdruid of Fire and preceptor of the Gnostic Celtic Church program, completed his Druid Adept degree in 2016 and also joined the Grand Grove that same year.

Paul: How did you first become introduced to Druidry?

Adam: Prior to a formal introduction, I grew up with parents who were engaged with the outdoors and very engaged with nature. So I remember in my youngest years going out to hunt wild rhubarb with my mom, and looking for raspberries and that sort of thing where we lived in Minnesota. We would collect the rhubarb and then come back and make pies. As a kid, I had this sense that the outdoors was not just for playing, although that was true, but also that it's actually fruitful and useful, and something to be in relationship with. I started being introduced to what specific plants were and what they were for, and what sorts of plants and places were safe, and what sorts of plants and places weren't.

When we moved from Minnesota to Illinois, we ended up on a quarter acre of property with a house that was densely planted. There was an herb garden, a vegetable garden, ornamentals, and trees that were great for climbing. We had elderberries, Concord grapes, strawberries, apples, raspberries, and an asparagus patch. There were the things my parents planted as well as the things that were there before we arrived. Just down the street from the house and down this hill was a creek that was wild. We'd go down there to play, even though none of our families or parents wanted us to . . . or we'd go out and play in the cornfields. I was usually outside when it was possible to be. During the summer and fall, we'd be outside playing and if I was hungry or thirsty, we didn't really go inside. Instead, we would go through the yard and see what was ripe and what was edible, or turn on the hose and get some water. For me, there was this sense of the world as friendly, and helpful, and sustaining. A place that I felt very comfortable in a relationship with.

Although I was raised Lutheran in terms of going to church, the actual practice of my life was really deeply involved with the natural world. I was very interested in science and biology. I liked to garden and take care of plants. As I got older I read a lot of mythology, legend, and story, too. I started exploring my Irish heritage more deeply than St. Patrick's Day and all that. Over time, it became clearer to me that there was something substantial in the stories and in my heritage that I wanted to engage with. Eventually, I found a community of people in college that were earth-centered, but not all Pagan. Some were Episcopalian, Hindu, and other things, as well as Western-style Pagan.

And so I started reading about Celtic Paganism of various kinds. There were things that didn't really resonate with me and others that did, so I followed the paths that interested me the most. I read the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* and the *Mabinogi*; I read books on Celtic folklore, symbolism, and myth. That led me into more specific forms of Druidry. I read things about ancient Druids that were more scholarly, and some were less scholarly but beautifully described. I read about Druid Revival Druids and considered what it would be to be a Druid myself. I bought a Celtic harp and learned to play it. I developed my skills as a storyteller. I learned techniques of divination and practiced them often. But I never really said, "I'm a Druid!" I waited until after I lived in Ireland after graduating from college for that.

While I was in Ireland, I had my backpack, my harp, and my bodhran (the Irish frame drum) with me. I was basically wandering around playing and learning songs, exploring the country. While I was doing that I had a lot of people say to me, "Oh, so you're a Druid!?" And my response was, "Well . . . ehhhhhh . . . uh, I don't know that I'd call myself that." Eventually enough other people called me a Druid that I started having to really take that seriously. My experience in Ireland was that if they call you that, they're generally not mocking you. To a certain extent it's amusing, and to another extent, it's a recognition of how you appear within the cultural framework. When I got back to the United States, I kind of settled into thinking of myself as a Druid, a solitary Druid. Eventually, I started looking for a Druid community and somebody said to me, "Hey, have you heard of the AODA? It's this really little thing. They seem to be trying to do something. You might have a look." And so I looked at the website . . . and all of a sudden I felt, "Oh! That's the one! That makes the most sense." And so that's how I found my way here.

Paul: Fascinating.

Adam: Yeah. It's kind of a long and tortuous story (laughs).

Paul: (laughs) It kind of mirrors Gordon's story a bit, because he was a member of OBOD for many years, but he never self-identified as a Druid until people started calling him a Druid, and eventually he identified as one.

Adam: When I read his description of that from his interview in *Trilithon* last year, I said, "Oh, that sounds familiar!" (laughs).

Paul: (laughs).

Adam: I had friends who were part of OBOD and friends who were part of ADF. I looked at both of those and thought, "That's just not really the thing that's going to work for me." And then when I found the AODA, I think a big part of what made me say "Oh, this makes sense" is the way in which we're held together by values, and actions, and ethics. We're held together by practices that we think are important, and by a method of learning that we think is valuable, but within that there is lots of room for understanding how the universe works in different ways. That works really well for me, because I am also an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister. That kind of openness is very much akin to what Unitarian Universalism practices as well. It was easy for me to see both of these paths working well together.

The AODA and Druidry have been very much about nurturing my inner life, my personal spirituality; I wanted to be part of a Druid community to have a spiritual place that balanced my ministerial work and role. That's changed. Where at first Unitarian Universalism was public and the AODA was personal, now they're each in both places for me. I'm on the Grand Grove and I'm doing this outward Druid work; I serve as a Unitarian Universalist minister with a particular focus on spiritual formation and spiritual practice. Each is intrinsic to me now in a way that I think only happens when you practice something long enough that it deepens with time.

Paul: What attracted you to the AODA in particular?

Adam: That room for cosmology, that room for a variety of ways of imagining the universe to work. I tend to be very uncomfortable when I'm in groups of homogeneous people. I find it really disquieting to have everybody say, "Yes! We all think the same way!" or "Yes! We all do the exact same things!" Our way of being Druids was much more comfortable for me right from the beginning because there was space for difference and complexity—and not just space for it, but an appreciation and valuing of it. I also liked that we were clear about the curriculum: these are things we want you to learn, and this is the way the program of study is going to work. I like to have a sense of where I'm going, or how things are going to work, so I understand what I'm aiming toward and how I'm going to get there. Having a curriculum that is well defined and clear is very important and useful to me. The combination of openness about how one can understand the world within the clear guidance about who we are and what we do made me feel at home.

Paul: So it was having that kind of openness to different ways of being, and cosmologies, and having a clear path forward? As you were saying, "Do these things, etc."

Adam: Exactly. There wasn't a "Do these things, and then there's going to be this great mysterious threshold that you will pass through, and until you get to that, you have no idea what's coming up on the other side." I've never been fond of playing guessing games, I suppose, or having to wait and see, "What might this mean?" I'm always up for learning. I'm always up for exploring new things, but having a sense of "Oh, I can see where this path is likely to take me, and it's a path that I will happily agree to travel" was important for me.

Paul: When did you first join AODA?

Adam: I think it was 2007. Pretty early on in the "Let's pick the AODA up and put it back together" period of time. Shortly after visiting the website, I contacted the order, and got into contact with JMG. I sent an email pretty quickly and said, "This is who I am. This where I've been. This is what I do—does this make any sense at all?" He was very welcoming and clear, saying, "This is who we are and what we do." That was really encouraging.

Paul: How have the principles and practices of the AODA enriched your life, and how do you integrate or enact Druidry in your own daily life?

Adam: The way our Druidry engages spiritual practices or disciplines—the energetics of ritual, the Sphere of Protection, the Communion Ceremony of the GCC—is something that I really value. The more that I have practiced them, not surprisingly, the more value I see in doing them, and the easier it becomes to make them a more regular part of my life.

I very, very much value our Earth Path ethics: not just admiring the earth, or thinking about it spiritually, but saying, "We have a responsibility to change how we live to be better stewards of this world, in order to better nurture the land that sustains us." I was composting and gardening and recycling and so on for many years before I became a member of the AODA. When I became part of our order, I saw that the AODA's ethics were deeply in line with how I felt about the world, and also encouraged me to go beyond just those things that were just, "Oh, well, I do this because it's good for my garden, and because I think it's valuable, and it reduces my trash." It's more than that. It's, "Yes, all of that—AND!" By caring for the earth, for the land I live on and live with, I'm also fulfilling the spiritual goals that I have. I'm being encouraged to consider using a different kind of electric light in my house because I cherish the world. When my place of work changed, but I couldn't move closer to the job, I knew that it was time to trade in my car on a hybrid, negotiate working three long days at the church, and then work my other time from home.

The AODA says to me, "As part of your life as a Druid—this isn't just a mental thing or a feeling thing—you need to make choices that will allow you to live in ways that have integrity with what you said you believe and what you said you are going to commit to." That's a big piece of how Druidry ends up in my life on a daily basis. It's a matter of integrity: "I have said that I value this. I've said that I practice this." I actually do these things in my life, rather than just think about them. Therefore, when larger questions come up, or even small questions come up about choices I'm going to make, I have a structure and a support system and a foundation that help me make the decisions that I hope I would make anyway. With Druidry, I can say, "Yes—all of these pieces surround me and aim me in this direction that I think is right, and valuable, and sustainable."

Paul: So AODA was a natural extension to things which you've already embraced as an individual on your own path before you defined it?

Adam: Yeah! So when I grew up on this tiny little Garden of Eden rural plot of land with my family, we had the mulch pile: the grass clippings, and the various plant trimmings, and the kitchen scraps, all that sort of thing. That kind of action for me is, "Oh, this is just what you do," because it's a smart thing to do. In some ways, our path was easy for me to step onto, because it aligned well with things that were already important to me. It also helps me extend beyond that initial path and say, "And here are more ways to live well and wisely. Here are other things you can do." So now I've taken a permaculture design course . . . and I don't know if I would have necessarily gone that route in terms of my gardening education without the encouragement of Druidry to say, "Wait! How can this be even more fruitful? How can I better take care of the ground?" Instead, I might have said, "Oh, I really love the principles of classical Chinese garden design. I'll go take a course in that." That would also be fantastic—and maybe I'll do that someday—but being part of the AODA has helped direct me to make choices and think about the learnings and the practices that I want to develop. I don't know if that makes any sense (laughs).

Paul: (laughs) It does. It makes perfect sense, actually, and I think it may be helpful to our readership to have the different bits and pieces that tie into your own personal philosophy and your approach to Druidry.

Adam: I think that's something that's true for us all. We all come to this with a variety of experiences, educational backgrounds, and communities and belongings. By bringing all those things together and then moving through our study program, we end up led into new ways of thinking and trying things that we may have not found on our own. We see where all of the parts come together and synthesize. That's really the point of spiritual community and religion—to encourage us all to find ways to engage more deeply and to connect more fully.

To become better than we might if we were just stumbling through life without that sort of structure to surround us.

Paul: So in 2016, you were admitted into the Grand Grove as Archdruid of Fire. Could you tell us about that experience?

Adam: It was early 2016. I had finished up my third-degree project in the end of 2015. Originally, I figured, "Oh, it'll just take me a few years to do the project. That'll be fine." In the end, it took me six to seven years to fully do it. I was working on developing a Druid qigong form and it was really important to me to not just have it just be something that looked good on paper. I wanted to practice it, so that I knew that it was actually useful and did what I thought it would do. I spent years practicing it and deepening my thinking about it. In the fall of 2015, while I was on a sabbatical for my congregation, I just sat down and wrote the practice manual that was my third-degree project, and turned it in. After that, I was asked to do some volunteer work for a while prior to joining the Grand Grove, and then in the late winter–spring of 2016, they asked me if I would consider becoming an Archdruid. After some questions like, "Okay, what is it that you actually need me to do? What is this going to mean?" and some careful thinking, I quite happily said yes.

Paul: Would you like to share some of the contributions you've made thus far as Archdruid of Fire?

Adam: During my pre–Grand Grove volunteering, I started processing membership applications. I have continued that as Archdruid of Fire, which is fantastic, actually, because I have gotten to know people as they're coming in. Many of the people who are really active on the forum right now are people that I have seen through their applications or have asked questions I've answered.

I think the contributions I've made since joining the Grand Grove have really begun by my saying, "Hey, I'd like to talk to everybody—at least as many people as will talk back with us." When I first came in, I proposed contacting our membership, starting with our third-degree members, to introduce myself, hear a little about them, and get to know our membership—the active ones, certainly, but also those people who have been a little disconnected for a while. I wanted to see if there are folks that, with a little more contact, would actually like to dig in again and become more involved. I began by contacting all of the third-degree members that I could . . . and then I talked with second-degree members. Now, we are in the process of finishing up contacting all of the folks who have been granted the first degree. Dana O'Driscoll, our Archdruid of Water, and I have divided up those folks, because there are just too many for one person to try talk to with any speed.

Next, we want to check in with all of our candidates, but that will require more people than just Dana and me. What's great is that the mentoring program we're developing should also give us the help we need to connect with our candidates as well. At each of these contact points, we're asking, "What do you need from us? What are you working on? How is it going? Are there things that are working well for you? Are there things that are challenging, or that are obstacles to your ability to progress and grow? And what can we do to better serve our membership?"

We've learned some important information about what people want, need, and enjoy. We've reconnected with people and simultaneously introduced this new forum structure. We're also now bringing in new methods of communication like the newsletter. I think the new Grand Grove and Archdruid configuration is one that is really strongly invested in increasing our interconnections with one another through things like the forums and the newsletter, and expanding our groves, study Groups, and now, home circles. We'd like to expand our ability to be face-to-face with one another.

Two other things that I'm working on are the development of our history research team and gathering our order's materials into some sort of library or archive. We're bringing members together to pool resources and find information that tells us more about our history: links to other organizations, where we have been and come from, and who some of our early folks were. I also want us to have those materials and more collected in an accessible way. I really hope to develop a library of third-degree projects—online and possibly in hardcopy—so that material can be available for the membership. I would like for people to be able see what is it other people are studying and learning, to share the knowledge we are developing. Some folks have taken their third-degree projects and turned them into something that can be used publicly or has been published, but I would really like to see us have that record for the projects that aren't published.

In 2017, we're at the point where we need to review the curriculum. So, in addition to the AODA curriculum review, we'll also be looking at the Gnostic Celtic Church to see if there are any changes that we want to make in there as well. Since I am now the Preceptor of the GCC, that's something that I'm looking at very closely. I think for the most part, it's actually in fine shape. There are certainly things I have learned through my work and study—I specialize in spiritual formation—that can be applied to the GCC. I'm excited to grow and develop what we are doing there.

Paul: Well, it certainly sounds like you've got a lot of excellent contributions you've already got underway, and it's been only just about a year.

Adam: Yeah. Yeah. I'm trying to pace myself (laughs).

Paul: So I understand you have a certificate in permaculture design. Would you like to share an explanation about what permaculture design is for our readers that may be unfamiliar?

Adam: It is a large body of practices and ways of thinking about how we interact with one another and the natural world. I look at permaculture as a method of imagining how human beings live that takes ecology, and sustainability, and best practices for human society seriously. Permaculture deals with landscape design, but also asks, "So how do you build your house? How do you make your house something that is functional and sustainable? And how do you structure your life so it is functional and sustainable? And how do you work with the land that you are on so that it, too, is functional and sustainable?"

With a permaculture mind-set, gardening is not just a matter of monocultures for ease of planting and harvesting with machines, but rather a way of thinking that considers how we plant and shape our gardens or crops so that the plants work well together. Permaculture design challenges us to emulate ecological systems to be productive in terms of our needs. It challenges us to figure out how to embed ourselves in those ecological systems for maximum yield with minimum input of energy . . . with minimum effort, realizing that *minimum effort* will never be *no effort*. If we want to harvest, we have to put in some work. The goal is to structure things so that we don't have to be weeding everything all the time, and that we are not taking lengthy trips to the farthest reaches of our land and our spaces for the things that we need every day. The things that we need every day should be closest to home, and the things that we require least often should be furthest away.

These are some very basic design principles that I think are very important. What I most value about permaculture is the ethical structure from which everything else grows. The easiest, shortest phrasing of that is: earth care, people care, fair share. We are taking care of the earth; we are taking care of one another; and we are making sure that everything in the system is adequately supplied, and that surpluses benefit the widest number of people, or the system as a whole. Fair share means that, if I end up with a bumper crop of tomatoes, I'm going to distribute them to people. I'm going to be sure they get used rather than rotting on the vine. Fair share also means that when I have an abundance of kitchen scraps, and garden refuse and all of that, that goes into my compost so that earth that I am trying to take care of gets the benefit of what it needs from the abundance that I have.

Paul: Has permaculture design inspired or influenced your path as a Druid in any way, and, if so, do you have plans to integrate some of those principles and practices into AODA?

Adam: I've been reading about permaculture for years. Although my parents weren't permaculturists—they didn't know anything about that at all, as far as I know—they tried to

structure the plot of land we lived on so it was useful and made sense. As I grew up and started planting my own gardens, what I realized is that I really value interspersing my ornamentals and my edibles, for example, and that I liked the idea of companion planting, figuring out what plants thrived near one another, and seemed to help each other grow well, and with minimum pests. I wanted to make my gardens beautiful, but logical and easy to maintain.

And so I was following what I'd learned as a kid and reading books like Hemenway's *Gaia's Garden* before really saying, "Ha! I think I'm going to actually pursue this permaculture thing." I knew I wanted to create a large new planting bed in my front yard. I knew, too, that I wanted to do it in a way that felt like I was doing the best for the land on which I live. So I took a permaculture design course in the fall of 2015, and incorporated that information to make that bed work. Rather than using herbicides and tilling the soil, I used more organic and natural ways to make the bed, composting the grass in place underneath a thick layer of mulch. I decided to plant four new trees, and rather than putting in ornamental redbuds, which are beautiful, I did two quinces and two late-flowering apricots. And then it went on from there: "I would like some rhubarb. Where am I going to put that? And I'm going to put in strawberries. Where will they go? How can everything go in so that it works well together?"

The permaculture design course was useful to me, not just because I had a piece of ground I was starting from scratch with, but also so that I could look at what I had and say, "Ah! How can I transform the parts of this that aren't quite in line with the most productive and most beautiful yet? And how can I do that without disrupting everything that's already here?" One of the things that's really important to me in gardening and in landscape is having sacred spaces built within the design, so I have a shade garden that is a hidden sacred space on our property. Then, having looked at those spaces through the permaculture design lens, I was able to say, "Ah! This spot in the shade garden would be a perfect place to put in a red currant bush, and this would be a great way of incorporating this gooseberry over here." It's been wonderful to see how, even on a fifth of an acre, how dramatically it can go from being a standard suburban landscape to fruitful and abundant, as well as beautiful and sacred.

Making this space into a Druid's garden that is living and thriving, that is well-balanced, productive, and sacred, has been a deeply reverent process for me. Seeing how it has shaped my spiritual life over the last year is also an inspiration to ask, "Are there ways in which we can then bring some of these ideas to our membership?" Not everyone needs to become a permaculture designer. I don't think that's likely. I do think making people more aware of the possibilities is good—aware that even in small steps, there can be changes you can incorporate. You don't have to plant a food forest right now. You may never have a food forest. You may never live in a place where that's even possible, but some container gardening might actually create the kind of space that you want. It might be something that's wonderful for the herbs

for your kitchen and supports the insects and bird life in your area. I think some of the things that come out of permaculture, whether large or small, are ideal Earth Path changes. In some of our upcoming materials there will be more things about permaculture. For example, in this issue of *Trilithon*, there are permaculture-related articles.[1] I've written something about permaculture ethics. I think that's very exciting. I think one of the beauties of the AODA is that we give lots of different possibilities for ways in which people can make good, sustainable change in how they live, and I think that the various practices and ways of thinking about the world that are part of permaculture can be useful.

Paul: Do you have a vision for where you see the order going, say the next five to ten years?

Adam: I'm hoping that we will continue this movement towards greater communication and interconnection among people. For people who like a solitary practice and program of development, that option will always remain. In engaging with our membership, we've heard that there are lots of people who are longing for other people to talk to, other people to engage with and learn from. My hope is in the next five years, we will have continued to expand and deepen the ways in which we engage with one another: online, over the phone, through distance things where necessary, but also very much in person. I would like to see the AODA hold a gathering of some sort, whether it be a retreat, or a conference, or whatever. I would like to see us hold an event that brings people together from across our membership—within and beyond the United States—or do a set of regional gatherings if that's more feasible. I would really like to see us find ways to bring people into deeper and deeper contact with one another. I think that that is useful for the development of the order, certainly, but also for personal spiritual growth and support, for many of us. I don't have a lot of goals in terms of "How big must our membership be?" or "How many groups must we have?" My thoughts are very much about "How can we make it possible for the people who need us to find us? And how can we make the people who have found a home with us—no matter how many people that is—how can we make sure they have the most valuable, most spiritually nourishing, most fruitful, and most abundant experience we can possibly provide?"

Paul: Is there any kind of plant or tree which you have a special affinity for as a Druid?

Adam: There are lots of them! I have a particular love for oak trees and roses, and, in fact, I have a half-sleeve tattoo of oak leaves, acorns, roses, and rosebuds on one of my arms. I've always loved eastern hemlocks. I have paintings of birch trees, paper birches, all over my house. I think that a lot of my affinity for trees has to do with the trees that I have developed relationships with over time. One of my favorite climbing trees was a paper birch. I've always

1. See Adam Robersmith's "May We All Do Good Together: Permaculture, Ethics, and Druidry" essay in this issue.

grown up with apple trees all around, and have a deep love of apple trees. We had an oak tree on our property that I lived on, that we had started from an acorn, and is now this massive, massive tree in our front yard of my parents' home. I develop a relationship with a particular tree, and then something about that relationship carries over into my feeling and affinity for other similar trees. So there was a willow tree that was growing near a creek on a college campus that I went to that I just fell in love with, and now whenever I run across a willow tree, especially a weeping willow on a creek bank, there's something resonant about it that calls to me.

Paul: Have you any parting words that you'd like to share with the AODA community?

Adam: Just that I'm excited about where we are now, and where I think we're going, and that I would encourage people to stay in contact with one another and with the Grand Grove about things that they want, things that they are excited about, questions or concerns that may have. I think our goal among the members of the Grand Grove is to continually improve and deepen and expand what we understand our Druidry to be. By having our membership stay engaged and in conversation with us, we'll be able to do that far more effectively. I'm looking forward to continuing to talk with folks and learn about what they need and what they hope for.

Interview with Dana O'Driscoll, Archdruid of Water, AODA

Interview conducted by Kelly Trumble, Grand Almoner, and transcribed by Atilio Baroni, Druid Apprentice. Dana O'Driscoll, the AODA's Archdruid of Water and chief editor of Trilithon, completed her Druid Adept degree in 2013 and joined the Grand Grove as Grand Pendragon in 2014. In 2015, she became the Archdruid of Air and now serves as the Archdruid of Water.

Kelly: The first question I'd like to ask you is what drew you into Druidry and how do you feel your life changed as a result?

Dana: I guess I'll start with my childhood. I grew up in the Appalachian Mountains, in the Laurel Highlands region of western Pennsylvania. My grandfather would take me into the woods with my cousins and we would spend a tremendous amount of time there. A lot of my friends in that forest were trees and mushrooms. We built cabins, made trails, enjoyed playing in the stream; every day we were in the forest. It was—and still is—a very sacred space to me. When I was fourteen, that forest was logged. All of the elders of the forest, many of whom were my dear friends, were cut. I didn't go back into the forest for many years.

Then, when I was in my twenties, one of my closest friends, a person I loved very dearly, died. He was twenty-seven at the time and died of cancer. It made me completely rethink my religious path, my life, and my choices. At that time in my place of deep mourning, I finally went back into the forest of my childhood. After all those years, I was able to see that forest regrown and healing. It was so incredible. Shortly after that, I joined AODA and started working through the curriculum.

I've been practicing Druidry for about eleven years now, and when I started my path I was really into hard-core video games, tabletop games, and so on as a lifestyle. I was a consumer; I didn't question my choices; I shopped at big-box stores like Walmart. I was pretty much a typical American. Starting with the Earth Path changes in AODA, and over a period of years, I moved from that typical American place into being someone actively working to heal

the land and living in a sacred manner. In that time, I learned herbalism, received my permaculture design certificate and my permaculture teacher training, and even ran a homestead for five years, growing most of my own food. Everything about my life has changed, and all of it stems from my experiences on the Druid path and in the AODA.

I really think a lot of it changed because of the simplicity, yet power, of those Earth Path changes. Each year, making three changes and sustaining them, making another three changes, sustaining them. The changes are like wildfire; you don't just make three—you start making all kinds of changes. That's what happened to me.

Kelly: Do you feel that's part of the reason you came full circle, back to that childhood forest?

Dana: Yeah, I think so. When I went back into that forest after all the years, the hemlock stumps were full of incredible reishi mushrooms, *Ganoderma tsugae* mushrooms. Now, these are one of the most healing substances on the planet. That whole experience taught me about the sacredness of life and helped me heal. I realized that the forests' response to the cutting was to grow the reishi and share it with me. That nature would always be a source of healing.

Kelly: Do you live near there, again?

Dana: Yeah, I do. I had a homestead for five years in Michigan, and I really wanted to return to my own land here in Pennsylvania, and so I did. It has been in some ways a hard homecoming, because the fracking boom happened while I had been gone (off getting my education and working). Despite the drilling, I really felt compelled to return to the land of my blood and birth, so I did. I've only been back about a year and a half, and I'm still thinking about what kind of living in the long term I want to do, and getting some good clarity about that. I'm doing a lot of stuff in the meantime; living in a walkable town, teaching a lot of plant walks and herbalism classes, helping to run the AODA, other things.

Kelly: Giving back to the land, from your new life as a Druid.

Dana: Yeah, exactly. The Druid path and the land have given me so much. I only feel it is fair to return as much as I can.

Kelly: Can you talk about what your favorite seasonal holiday is, and how you usually celebrate it?

Dana: I actually love all of the holidays, for different reasons. It's like asking me what my favorite season is, because whatever season it is is my favorite! I love the interplay of the dance of light

and dark, and the sun, but I think I'll talk about the spring equinox.

When I joined the AODA, it was actually around the winter solstice. I was so intimidated by the idea of ritual because I hadn't really experienced it. I had grown up as a child in fundamentalist evangelical Christianity, which I abandoned in my late teens, but then I didn't have anything to replace it, so I had been a secular humanist for a while before I became a Druid. I had no idea how to do ritual. I was terrified by it and wasn't sure of its meaning or purpose.

Into The Forest
by Dana O'Driscoll

So the winter solstice passed, and I didn't do my initiation. And then Imbolc passed, and I didn't do my initiation. I finally got the nerve to do the initiation ritual at the spring equinox. Of course, everything that could've gone wrong did, and yet the ritual still had a tremendously good effect, as initiations are apt to do.

Ever since, the spring equinox has me coming full circle and thinking about my last year as a Druid, as a human being, as someone working to heal human-land connections. And so, it is a time for me to affirm my commitment to my Druid path. I really love journaling, and one of the things I like to do during this holiday is review what I've written in my journals for the last year, take stock of any spiritual goals I've set and how I met them, like if I want to reduce my electricity use by 15 percent, or if I really want to know this plant's spirit in a deeper way. I also start a lot of seeds for my garden at that time. I spend time with maples and spend time outside doing maple sugar. I also begin doing pysanky eggs (a type of batik egg) that is a magical family tradition. I do lots of other things, but those are the bigger things I do at the spring equinox.

Kelly: How would you say that you bring Druidry into your everyday life, to your work, or in your relationships?

Dana: That's the real challenge, isn't it?

Kelly: It is!

Dana: Because I'm moving into my second decade of Druidry, which makes me feel tremendously old, I can say one of its greatest gifts is that it can be lived in a quiet way. Five or six years ago I came to the conclusion I was going to live every day in a sacred manner and see my life as a sacred journey. This was living my path—the idea that I somehow was always working in a sacred grove. When I had my homestead I actually set up a permanent sacred grove there, around the property, and worked that homestead as part of my sacred work. I feel I'm always working to bring that in and trying to see the world through the lens of a Druid. That can be difficult at times, especially when you are forced to participate in parts of our present culture.

I practice a lot of permaculture; it's one of my outer expressions of Druidry (and I have an article on permaculture and Druidry in this issue of *Trilithon*). I teach at a local university as my profession, and even though I don't teach anything related to ecology, I do use a lot of permaculture, whole-systems thinking, and nature awareness into the teaching I do. I also do a lot of writing and editing.

In general, one of the things I'm trying to do in my community right now, especially because I'm not actively homesteading, is teaching people about plants through herbalism classes and plant walks. The plant walks I do to benefit organizations that need to raise funds, so I take a donation for the walk and donate it. I'm pairing with organizations that are feeding the hungry, cleaning up our rivers, and things like that. It's a really great way for people to come out and learn, "Hey, dandelion!" "Hey, Japanese knotweed!" These have real roles in our ecosystem. We can eat them and enjoy them—they're not just things to spray or get rid of.

I feel like that is really public work I'm doing, and it makes me feel really good, like I'm really living that practice. And I don't have to use the word "Druid" in order to do it. And yet, it is sacred work nonetheless. Of course, I have a lot of work to do—we all do—but that kind of work I do feel good about.

Kelly: What do you feel is your most important role as an Archdruid in the AODA?

Dana: I'm doing a lot of different things at the moment for AODA, but by far my most

important role is in mentoring our members and helping people along their path. As I said earlier, when I joined AODA, I had no idea what ritual was, I couldn't imagine why anybody would do the Sphere of Protection as a daily practice, and I remember some of my really funny, early questions on the Yahoo Group we had at the time: "What is the point of ritual? Why do we do it?"

John Michael and Sara Greer helped answer those questions and many others, and they have both been wonderful mentors. And so, when I do this work now, I remember how lost and confused I was, and then how this path, this long practice of Druidry, has completely changed my life for the better. I try to give people a little bit of that. Working with people where they are, explaining to them: "Just try and make these three changes. Sustain them." I work to help them grow where they're planted, so to speak, showing them doors, helping them open the doors, connecting them with resources. Just really trying to nurture and support our members. And I'm always asking, "Okay, how can the order best support people and their gifts?" I do a lot of that also through my work as the editor of *Trilithon*, where I try to find people doing interesting things, asking, "Can you write about this? You have something important to share!"

Kelly: As many of us know, it's really difficult to remain on a spiritual path, so what advice would you give to members on how to keep our practice going when things get tough and time is so limited?

Dana: I think it is difficult to remain on a spiritual path, and there are at least two reasons that I can think of. There are external reasons: it's difficult now to be a Druid today. It's particularly difficult to live with your eyes open, your heart open, and your mind attuned to nature because of everything that's happening ecologically. It is so much easier to pretend not to see, to look away. We have to attend to these things without going mad, to find the balance between them. I've actually written a lot about how to attend to these things, and practice self-care while doing so, on my blog (The Druid's Garden: druidgarden.wordpress.com). I've also been highly influenced by the work of Joanna Macy and her practices to facilitate the Great Turning (her book *Coming Back to Life* is really a good read).

A lot of people have difficulty in the contrast between their everyday life and their spiritual path. For example, maybe they're trying to support their family doing work they don't want to do, or having to buy things they don't want to buy, or feel they have limited choices. There's this disconnection between what we hold sacred and what is happening out there.

In this case, I think attending to our own lives is empowering, asking ourselves, "What do we have control over?" Well, we have control over ourselves. Maybe I can't control everything that's going on in that larger system, but I can do something here and now that'll help

Sacred Earth
by Dana O'Driscoll

me. Maybe I'll sprout some seeds and give them to friends; maybe I'll arrange community education events for teaching people reskilling, and so on. To me, finding those bridges and finding what we can control—and be empowered by—is really important.

But I think beyond the external challenges, one of the greatest challenges we have in staying on a spiritual path is learning that we are human, letting ourselves fail, and not being hard on ourselves when we do. There were times in my life where I lost my path for a while. I questioned what I was doing. Honestly, we all do that. And when that happens, we can be really hard on ourselves. But remember: the spiritual practice is for you, for your own development. The more we embrace that spirituality, and understand that we're flawed people and that's okay, the more the path opens before us, and the more peace and joy we can have in it.

Second, if all else fails, daily work and time in nature are always really good to fall back on. Keeping up your Sphere of Protection, keeping up your meditation, in difficult times when things are dark. Doing just that foundation is good. Spending time in nature is what I do when I'm struggling with remaining on this path, and remembering why I'm on it.

The seasonal approach is also really important because it teaches us valuable lessons. We have dark times; we have times of light. That's true in a spiritual practice as much as in daily living. Being okay with that, and saying, "This is the time to do some composting because it's Samhainn," or "This is the dark time of the year; it's the winter solstice in my life" is important. I

always remind myself that even if I am presently in darkness, at some point I'll return to the sun of the summer solstice. There are times when I'm meditating an hour a day, out in the woods three or four times a week, having these great spiritual epiphanies, and everything is going great. There are also times where I am doing just the daily SOP and short meditations, and feeling kind of stagnant. I've now recognized that these low times are when my subconscious needs to be working through these things. But getting into the woods helps me clear any blockage and move forward.

Kelly: Not everyone may know that you're an amazing artist. In fact I have a number of your beautiful paintings on my wall and on my altar. Could you talk about the intersection between your art and the Druid path you follow?

Dana: I love being a Druid, and one of the things that originally led me to Druidry was the idea of Awen, the flow of divine inspiration and creativity. I remember reading about Druidry and Awen and saying to myself—a spiritual path where creative work is celebrated? Count me in! One of the things our culture has unfortunately done is to take away our ability to create; it's like our culture wants to create everything for us: our entertainment, our functional living, even our work. A lot of people who could create are instead disempowered, and what I love about druidry is that it embraces the bardic arts as a core to our being.

My bardic arts are writing, jewelry design, and painting, as well as a lot of functional crafts like leatherworking, candle making, nature dyes, hand papermaking, and more. I'm learning shoemaking (cobbling) now, which has been a real challenge! Knowing that when I go into my art studio, or when I go out into nature to wildcraft inks, that these acts of creating are part of my spiritual practice is so awesome! I don't know how else to describe it.

I try to weave nature-themed art into every aspect of my life, and try to give it away often as a way to bring it into the world. I developed a tarot deck called the Tarot of Trees and self-published it in 2009, and it's still available. That was actually a big part of my AODA second degree. Under the old curriculum there were spirals, and I chose divination and art. My art spiral was creating the deck, and the divination spiral was practicing and studying so that I could understand the tarot.

The Druid path actually helped me get back into my art. Another aspect of that awakening I had when I was in my twenties was that I hadn't done art for so many years. I grew up in an artistic family; my parents were both graphic designers and fine artists. When I was a child, I had this art-filled life. I knew the color wheel before I could read. We live in the Rust Belt, and my family struggled with the economic downturns, so what was originally a good career for my parents (a home business) turned out to be challenging. This was especially later in the

1990s and the 2000s as so many businesses left the area and they lost a lot of good customers. We ended up falling on some really hard times, and eventually I gave up my dream of doing art and fell into gaming instead.

When I lost my friend, became a Druid, and all these things happened to me, I suddenly found myself in this spiritual tradition that said, "No, embrace your art, embrace that creativity, let that Awen flow." It gave me free license to start painting, and I did, and that's another of the gifts of Druidry from my perspective.

Kelly: The spiritual path as the art, and the art as the spiritual path, it's the same thing.

Dana: Yeah! Exactly. They are one and the same; expressions of the other.

Kelly: It definitely shows in your artwork. The last question is, do you have anything else you'd like to share with our members?

Dana: One of the things I noticed on the mentoring work I'm doing is that it's important to let your spiritual path unfold as it will. Obviously, you need to put hard work into doing it, but you're still going to be a Druid in five or ten years. So understand you don't have to learn everything in the first year or two, but rather give yourself time to grow and learn. Think of it like you are planting a seed. You are tending that soil, you are watering it, and you can trust that it is going to emerge and grow. That's how the Druid path is, particularly in the AODA. There is always more to learn, always new paths to take. So enjoy the journey!

With that caveat, though, I'd like to encourage everyone to explore the different aspects of the Druid tradition. I think it is really important to understand that we all can be Bards of some kind, whether it's creating stories or songs, poetry, artwork, dance, crafts, etc. Invest in that; find some way to let the Awen flow through these bardic arts. We can also all be Ovates, learning the plants and the plant lore. There's so much we have lost and that we can contribute and regain on behalf of our communities. And we can all be Druids, learning history and lore, divination and magic. This is a very rich path, even for somebody like me that likes to dabble in a lot of different things. I've never gotten bored of being a Druid. Enjoy that journey. Embrace it like a slow kayak ride down a meandering stream, and have fun with it.

Kelly: Thank you for the interview, Dana, and I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me.

Dana: Thank you so much, Kelly!

Betrayal, Gifts, and Imprisonment: How the Ordeals of the Goddess in Story and Myth Reflect and Affect Human Life

Christian Brunner

Christian F. Brunner was born in Austria and lived there for more than 30 years before he moved to the United States in 1997. In his teenage years, he started to research ancient and contemporary indigenous methods of alternative healing, and practiced with a group of pagan naturopaths in Vienna for several years. This practice, based on folk lore and customs of the Alps, has been the core of his work for more than two decades, and has eventually lead him to Druidry. Now, he is a Druid of the Order of Bards, Ovate and Druids, working on becoming a tutor and Druid celebrant. Several of Christian's articles have been published in "Touchstone", OBOD's monthly newsletter, and he contributed to the previous Trilithon. He is also the Author of three books in German: a novel, a cookbook for the eight festivals of the year (which is currently in translation into English), and a book on his research on Alpine lore and customs. The latter is available (at lulu.com and other online bookstores like amazon.com and Barnes and Nobles) in English under the title "Mountain Magic: Celtic Shamanism in the Austrian Alps".

> "We have been mystically orphaned of the Mother and denied the wisdom that we would have gained from her. When Goddesses are dethroned, leaving only the presence of Gods, all society suffers."
> Caitlín and John Matthews, Walkers Between the Worlds

In *Trilithon*, volume 3, I had the pleasure of introducing a gem of ancient Goddess worship hidden in a song still sung by women working the fields on the steep mountainsides of the Austrian and Swiss Alps. In this article, I would like to explore some of the many other ways the Goddess has survived in story and myth in the German-speaking lands, particularly in the southern German regions of Bavaria and Austria.

The Goddess

Before we delve deeply into the ways the Goddess appears in song and lore still sung and told in German-speaking (and that includes Anglo-Saxon) Europe, let us first explore why we are talking about a female deity in the first place.

To understand the origins of Alpine Goddess lore, we need to go far back in time. Prior to the Neolithic Revolution, for nomadic tribes following the migration patterns of wild game, the worship of deities may have been related to the animals that were hunted. An ancient bear goddess, who later morphed into a god, possibly called something like Artus (eventually giving the name to the mythical King Arthur), may just have been such an animal deity of the hunter-gatherers. But with the rise of farming as the main source of food for bigger social units (i.e., beyond one family or clan), a new understanding of the pantheon seems to have emerged. Just as women give birth to children, the soil, dark and fertile as a woman's womb, gifted the tribes with her offspring, edible crops of all kinds. The little 30,000-year-old figurine called the Venus of Willendorf seems to indicate that people back then already worshipped the spirit of the earth, the spirit of the land that fed and sheltered them like a mother. The goddess Gaia of the Greek pantheon, for example, who brought forth Uranos (the sky) herself and then, with him, gave birth to the Titans, among them Kronos, the Titan of the harvest, father of Zeus, is just one of many pieces of clear evidence that European people of old revered a great goddess from whom all life stems. This concept spawned numerous strains of lore. In those originating from the British Isles, we find her in stories of kings being married not only to their human queen, but also mystically with the sovereign of the land, herself again the spirit of the very soil the people inhabiting the kingdom live on, and from.

Seasonal changes are another important observation dating from the Neolithic that we still find in fairy tales. Other than regions close to the equator, the temperate climate zones on this planet are subject to an annual cycle of changing weather and rising and falling temperature. In order to successfully grow and harvest crops, people were forced to submit themselves to the realities, and challenges, of this yearly rotation of seasons. And, to make sure that future generations could benefit from the experiences of the previous ones—to avoid reinventing the wheel every year, so to speak—people packed their knowledge about the Goddess and about the seasons into stories.

The Goddess as a Single Figure: Frau Holle

Let us start with a mythical expression of the mother goddess that still treats her as a single personification of the land, not a trinity, like other, later manifestations of the same deity. Her name alone is of linguistic interest. "Holle" has its etymological roots in the Indo-European word *kailo, meaning something whole, uninjured. From this root derive words like holy (German *heilig*), holly, hail (the greeting), to heal (German *heilen*), and German words like the noun *Heil* (salvation) or the adjective *heil* (safe). The German words for the elder bush, *Holunder* or *Hollerbusch*, are other examples of such derivatives.

Of the many stories about Frau Holle, the one that made it into the collection of German fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm is probably the best known. There, a girl, tasked by her wicked mother to spin as much wool as humanly possible, loses her spindle. It falls into the village well and the girl has to jump after it into the dark abyss. She loses consciousness, and when she awakens, she finds herself in a meadow. In the distance she sees a house, and walks toward it. Along the way, she is asked to perform a few tasks of compassion—shaking the ripe apples from a tree that can't hold on to them much longer and taking bread out of an oven before it burns. When she arrives at the house, Frau Holle offers to employ the girl as a maid. The girl is particularly diligent, and so Frau Holle lets her perform some Goddess magic: The girl is allowed to shake out the pillows filled with goose feathers, whereupon snow falls down on earth. After a year and a day, the girl, stricken by homesickness, asks to be relieved of her duties. The Goddess discharges her, yet not before she showers the girl with gold.

In this fairy tale, we don't learn much about the Goddess herself, but we do learn about her devotees, or even priestesses. Clearly, a person worthy of the gifts the Goddess will give must be able to overcome her fears—in this case jumping into a dark void—to travel into the Otherworld. One of the most striking pieces of evidence that the girl is in the Otherworld is that she had to travel downward to get there, but, against all laws of physics, she finds herself in a realm above the land, where she learns to make it snow. Because the story also tells about the girl's sister, who is the opposite of devotion and therefore eventually gets fired and punished by Frau Holle, it has been categorized as a 480D fairy tale, "stories about well-behaved and naughty girls" (Aarne & Thompson, 1961). While this categorization is not wrong per se, it is a stark simplification of the depth of the myth and obviously does not take into consideration the otherworldly aspect of the tale, or

Figure 1. Frau Holle statue at the Frau Holle Pond near the Hoher Meissner in northern Hessia. Photo by Dirk Schmidt, 2009.

the philosophical question underlying the plot: is it worth it to suffer and devote my life to a deity?

We can find a number of Frau Holle myths, probably older than this particular fairy tale, in the area around the Hoher Meissner, a mountain in Hessia, Germany. While archaeologists have found several grave sites of Celtic origin in Hessia, this region is certainly on the northern continental border of the Celtic lands, with heavy influence by Germanic tribes. Nevertheless, on the mountain in question, there is an extremely deep, yet small body of still water, called the Frau Holle Teich (Frau Holle Pond). The myth sings about the pond being an entrance to Frau Holle's underground realm, with a castle made from silver and vast gardens filled with flowers, fruits, and vegetables. Frau Holle is said to seduce hunters to come down with her into her realm. These are all themes typical of Goddess myths, and we will hear more about romances between the Goddess and men later on. Young women would take a bath in the pond as a fertility ritual.

Figure 2. (Salige Maidens Fountain) in Innsbruck, Tyrol, Austria. Although a more modern sculpture (by Hans Plangger, 1958) it shows the deep connection people in the Alps still have to these mythical figures. Photo by Leitzsche.

Often, the giving nature of the Goddess comes through in the stories of Frau Holle. In some, however, we learn of her dark side, the one that takes lives. Particularly, it is said that she takes the lives of children and of women giving birth, taking their souls down with her to her underworld kingdom. However, the souls of the taken do enjoy a bounteous life with the Goddess. In some tales, young women disappear from the world for years, during which they are educated by Frau Holle herself to become her priestesses upon their return to the world of the living. Sometimes, these women are empowered to wield some magic themselves (Göttner-Abendroth, 2005).

The Goddess as the Sovereign of the Land: The Salige Madln

As folk on the path of Druidry, most of us are familiar with stories in which the land appears as a lady, to kings, to their sons, or to the unsuspecting young man for whom she has some great feat in store. For the purposes of this article, I would like to introduce another, Alpine manifestation of the spirit of the land.

Frau Holle is a figure of lore and myth mostly in central Germany (Hessia, northern Bavaria). In

the Alps we know of the Salige Madln. Let us begin again by linguistically deciphering the meaning of this term.

First, *Madln* (mawdln) is the plural form for *Madl*, Austro-Bavarian dialect for the German word *Mädchen* (girl). There are two important concepts in this one little word that we need to explore. One is that we are talking about more than one figure, and it is no coincidence that usually three of them appear in the stories. The other concept is that the term "girls" almost seems dismissive when we are referring to holy ladies of the land. However, there is a very good reason for that. But before we delve into this apparent blasphemy, I would like to ponder the question why three of these girls so often appear in stories.

Figure 3. Rural woman in Austria with typical braided hair knot. Photo by author.

Sometime between the carving of the Venus of Willendorf and the painting of church altarpieces in remote valleys of Tyrol depicting three women with the names Wilbet, Ambet, and Borbet, the thinking of people of old seems to have evolved from worshipping a single Goddess to venerating a Goddess trinity. We can only guess why, but one thought would be that folks began to understand the different natures of the Mother Goddess. On one side she creates, provides, and on the other she takes. The land produces crops, feeds the people. And at other times the land slides down mountainsides, burying people underneath. The Goddess enchants women with her force to create new life, but every single one of us is taken by her again eventually.

Refining this dualism yet a bit further, these myths observe the fertility patterns of a woman's lifetime as well as the yearly turn of the seasons, distinguishing three major segments: growth (spring), maturity (summer and autumn), and rest (winter). We will come back to this theme later, but for now the most important factor is that Alpine lore often talks about three godly figures representing the land, expressed in the plural form *Madln*.

And then there is still the issue of why we call the goddesses "girls." This can only be understood when considering the Christianization of the region. To refer to these deities as goddesses, or even ladies, would be contradicting Catholic Church dogma, which—in plain

and simple words—was a dangerous, even life threatening, thing to do. To avoid the appearance of heresy, stories were crafted to be less threatening. Who could complain about stories where a young hunter runs into three beautiful girls deep in the forest?

The attribute *Salige* offers further context. The word means *seelig* in Standard German, which, in the context of religion, is the state one is in—and must stay in for several years—before being pronounced holy, a saint, by the pope. In essence, the Salige Madln are almost, but not quite, holy; almost, but not quite, ladies. And as such, they are no threat to the church and thus remain untouched in lore. They remain beautiful, while other former gods and goddesses are turned into brute giants, mean gnomes, and wicked hags. Salige Madln have long blonde hair, are clad in white, and appear with a divine vibrancy. That is not misogynist dreaming, but simply an idealistic image of women in this area of Europe. The long blonde hair has significance, as only unmarried women are allowed to wear it in public (or unknotted). Once a woman is bound in matrimony, her hair is braided into elaborate knots and no longer flows freely. Only her spouse may see her hair unbound in their private chambers, and only in the labor of childbirth are the knots undone to allow energy to flow. The Salige Madln are generally not bound in matrimony (except sometimes for a while); they are virgins (*Jungfrauen*, "young women") in the original sense of the word: not at all untouched, but definitely unbound. Sometimes they are therefore referred to as *Wilde Frauen* (wild women) (Haid, 2002).

Following are a couple of tales that tell us, secretively as it were, of the lady of the land in her appearance as Salige Madln or wild women.

> "Once upon a time, a wild woman came to a farmer in Heimbach in Tyrol and worked as a maid on his farm. Since she was so capable and diligent, the farmer's son soon asked her to marry him. She gladly agreed, but with one condition: "You must never question me when I do something odd, even if you do not understand why." The young farmer promised and happily married his beautiful bride. For a few years, everything went very well. The cattle increased, and the fields, the stable, and the household were under a lucky star. One morning, the wild woman said, "Today we need to cut the crops!" But it was only early summer and the harvests were not yet ready. The farmer did not understand that at all and asked, annoyed, "But why?" At that instant, the wild woman left the house and was never seen again (Falkner, 1963)"

The theme of the marriage between a man and an otherworldly woman is well known in the Celtic lands. As in this Alpine tale, the man often fails to keep a promise he made her upon their wedding. The stories of the first Doctors of the Pheryllt[1], sons of an earthly man

1 Pheryllt or Fferyllt, mentioned in the Red Book of Herghest and subsequently in the Mabinogi.

and a lady of the lake, come to mind, or the tale of the selkies. But here, there is another layer that I would like to uncover. In this legend we learn that the farm prospers significantly after the farmer's son and the Goddess entered the bond of marriage. In other words, the farmer is committed to treating the land as if it was his loving wife, caring for it as if married to it. Thus, the gifts of the Goddess are plentiful. But then the farmer begins to challenge the wisdom of his wife, and in essence his old beliefs, because a new faith has arrived in the land, a faith that questions and belittles the old one. At this point, the wife, the Goddess, can do nothing but leave. When she does, there are undesirable consequences. Readers of *Trilithon*, volume 3, will remember that I described a similar caution in the "Song of St. Margaret": The land withers when the Goddess leaves.

But there are not only stories lamenting the olden days, warning folks of the disastrous consequences of denouncing the Goddess. The next tale about a Salige as the sovereign of the land tells us about the interactions between farmers, their wives, and the Goddess.

> "The old folks of the village of Tschachoritsch near the river Drava in Austria's most southern province, Carinthia, tell the story that one of the Salige Madln often came to the farm of the local stove fitter[2]. One time, the wife of the stove fitter found the wild woman sleeping in the couple's marital bed. Because the wife knew that this was a Salige Madl, she let her sleep, and picked up the woman's blonde hair that reached all the way down to the floor. When the Salige woke up, she thanked the stove fitter's wife for her thoughtful gesture and gifted her with a ball of yarn, saying, "The yarn shall never end until you say that you've had enough." (Graber, 1941)"

Clearly, the stove fitter's wife's reaction to finding another woman in her marital bed is somewhat remarkable. There is no jealousy. The woman even makes sure that the Goddess's hair—note that hair was once believed to hold a person's magical powers—does not get dirty on the floor. When we consider that the Salige Madl is in fact the land itself, the relationship between the stove fitter, himself a farmer (as craftspeople were typically both in those days), is only of a quasi-sexual nature. This second marriage of the farmer with the land, in the form of a Salige, ensures the survival of the family. Thus, the woman is not at all jealous, in fact even understanding and supportive, of this extramarital relationship. As a thank you for this deep understanding, the Goddess presents a magical gift to the woman.

There are hundreds of tales of Salige Madln in Alpine lore. As the saying goes, each valley has its own version. Later I explore another typical Salige Madln myth.

Translated in a variety of meanings, most commonly as 'chemist, druggist, alchemist and magician.'

2 Trades-person who makes stoves, particularly the type covered with ceramic tiles (tile or cockle stoves).

Stories of the Cyclical Nature of the Goddess

While the tales of Frau Holle and the Salige Madln focus on the activities of the Goddess and her interactions with humans, both in her form as a single deity and as a trinity, respectively, there are also stories about her life, as it were. In the temperate climate zone of northwestern Europe, we can observe major yearly changes due to the angle at which the sunlight hits the ground, warming the soil. The lower the angle, the colder it is. This is when we experience winter. On his daily path, the sun just skims over the horizon. When the path of the sun rises above a certain height, and the angle gets steeper, the soil changes. This is first recognizable at the beginning of February, when the Irish—and with them many in the Pagan community—celebrate Imbolc. In the Alps, we acknowledge this moment with the Lichtmess festivities, which literally means "light measurement." Farmers would stick poles vertically into the ground and measure the length of the shadow to determine the right time to begin particular farming activities. During spring, the sun climbs even higher in the firmament, causing the first flowers to bloom and the winter seed to break through the surface of the soil. A few months of heat and rain cause the crops to ripen, harvest follows, and with that a sinking of the sun's path toward the horizon once again. The land eventually dies, only to be awoken once again by the sun in the next year.

Figure 4. Illustration of Schneewittchen by Alexander Zick, 1886. The image shows the connection between the Goddess and the animals long before Disney made this feature an integral part of his commercialized version of the story.

Now, with this cycle of nature in mind, let us look at some well-known fairy tales and how they relate to the seasons of the year.

Snow White

We all know this old fairy tale recorded by the Brothers Grimm. It tells the story of very special girl, born to a loving queen and king. The mother dies, and when the princess matures, her stepmother, the wicked queen, grows jealous and tries to kill her. It takes three tries to put Snow White into a deep, unresponsive sleep. Winter befalls the land. But when a young knight in shining armor arrives, the maiden awakes again, and with her the land.

Laying the seasonal changes in the temperate climate zones over this fairy tale, we see the birth of the girl and the death of the queen, her mother, as the winter of the previous season. Quite literally, the wish for a child happens in winter, when the queen pokes her finger while embroidering, sitting at the window framed with ebony wood. The queen then asks for a girl with skin as white as snow, lips as red as the drops of blood, and hair as black as the ebony of the window frame. We will get to the meaning of the colors momentarily, but for now let's stick with the flow of the story and how it relates to nature. The girl grows—spring—to become a woman, old enough to be fertile and to provide—summer has arrived. This is when she becomes a threat to her antagonist, the evil stepmother. The wicked queen learns from her magic mirror that she may be replaced by the maiden for good, and so she plots Snow White's demise. That takes a while, but she is closer to success every time, just as it takes autumn a while to cool down the land, before the freezing grip of winter can kill off vegetation. At the same time, Snow White has retreated into the land, expressed by her journey to the dwarfs, dwellers in the Underworld. When the evil queen—and we can surely equate her with the Snow Queen of the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale of the same title—finally succeeds, winter has come once again. And it is a long one. But eventually a knight in shining armor, a symbol of the sun, arrives and reawakens the maiden (Storl, 2014).

Snow White and Rose Red

I have already mentioned the combination white, red, and black in the story of Snow White. Snow White, herself bearing a color in her name, has lips red as blood, skin white as snow, and hair black as ebony. In German, Snow White is called Schneewittchen. In this story, "Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot" in German, we have two sisters, one with "white" and the other with "red" in her name. And there is their mother, a widow, who is therefore wearing black. Again, the color combination we touched upon in the previous section.

In my article in *Trilithon*, volume 3, I explored this unity of three women wearing white, red, and black dresses. These are the women depicted in the sacral paintings mentioned above, who morphed into the three saints St. Katherine, St. Margaret, and St. Barbara. The women in the church pictures are dressed in these significant colors and carry the old symbols of a wheel, a worm or dragon, and a tower representing the castle keep. In even older paintings, their earlier names appear next to them or in the title: Wilbet (with reference to the wheel), Ambet (or One-bet), and Borbet. It is also interesting to consider that "borm" is the etymological root for words like warm and womb. "Bet" means "eternal." Some might translate their names as the Eternal Wheel or Cycle, the Eternal One, or the Eternal Womb. In later pagan literature, these three figures, goddesses really, are also referred to as Maiden, Mother, and Crone. The Maiden wears the white dress symbolizing virginity and innocence, the Mother's red dress represents her fertility, and the black dress of the Crone indicates the inevitability of the grave (Kuttner, 2003).

Figure Salige Fräulein Brunnen 5. Gustave Doré's 1867 engraving showing the court fast asleep after Sleeping Beauty fell victim to the spell.

This is one reason why we can be so sure that Snow White is primarily a story about the Maiden, although she carries the colors of the Mother and the Crone as well. After all, she becomes both when she matures like the land in summer and withers in the realm of the dwarfs, dwellers in the mines, which are nothing less than Mother Earth's womb.

And in Snow White and Rose Red, we also have three women, living together in a house, carrying the Goddess's colors either in their name or as their garment. The story is about this family of three who hosts a bear (an animal often associated with the Goddess, as I noted above, not least of which because it retires in a cave over winter just like her), to give him shelter against the cold and to keep him safe from a hostile gnome. In spring, the bear has to leave, but when he walks through the gate, his fur rips and gold shines through the tear. Soon, the bear comes back as a prince clad in gold—once again, the return of the sun—and takes Snow White in marriage.

Again, we find a description of at least two seasons in this fairy tale. The story seems to be much newer than Snow White, and therefore much less replete with symbolism.

Sleeping Beauty (Little Briar Rose)

Another fairy tale, much better known than Snow White and Rose Red, is Sleeping Beauty. Again, it is about the birth of a princess—the sovereign of the land to be—and an adversary who tries to kill her. In a version known under the title "Little Briar Rose" that is older than the one collected by the Brothers Grimm, it is also a fairy who casts the spell on the ill-fated princess, but the circumstances are much more complicated than in Grimm's variation. In Grimm, it is just the thirteenth fairy that was not invited to the naming ceremony because the court didn't have enough place settings. However, the older version of the tale sings of the oldest of the fairies, whom the king and queen had invited, but who was absent, nowhere to be found. It was apparently typical for aging fairies to travel far and wide. But the oldest fairy still came back in time for the naming festivities, angry though about the procedural faux pas that the invitation was not extended to her, but to the twelve other fairies below her in rank. The last and youngest fairy hid behind a curtain when the oldest fairy cast the curse that the girl would die when she turned eighteen. And thus, the youngest happened to be the last fairy to make a wish for the newborn, and that wish was to reduce the death curse to one of a long sleep.

Because the curse entails the girl pricking her finger with a spindle when she is eighteen years of age, thereby falling into a 100-year-long sleep, the king orders all spindles to be removed from the kingdom. Of course, upon her eighteenth birthday, the maiden explores remote areas of the castle and finds an old woman at a spinning wheel—the ancient image of a goddess spinning the thread of fate comes to mind. The maiden does not know what that instrument is, because no such thing is allowed in the kingdom. She points at it and pricks her finger on the sharp top of the spindle. The curse is fulfilled and she falls asleep, and with her everyone else in the court. In the following 100 years, hedge roses completely cover the castle. A few princes and adventurers attempt to cut their way through the thorny hedge, but fail and die, caught in the ever-growing thicket of deadly thorns. The land turns barren and cold. Only when the 100 years have passed does a prince in shining armor—once again the sun—cut with his mighty sword—the sunbeam—through the rose hedge, finds the maiden Goddess, and kisses her awake. With this kiss of warmth, not only the lady, but also her land awakens to the bliss of spring.

Keeping the Goddess Alive in Story

All these tales of Frau Holle—Ms. Holy, the Salige Madln as the trinity of the lady, the sovereign of the land, the Goddess, and of the cycle of the seasons articulated in the lives and plights of the Maiden—are attempts to keep the knowledge of the Great Mother alive. The stories have survived the Catholic Inquisition, Martin Luther's puritanism, the rise of

science in the Era of Enlightenment, and even Walt Disney. We all ensure—in most cases without knowing—the survival of this awareness of the giving nature of the Great Goddess and the wheel of the year simply by sitting down at our children's bedside and singing to them these old enchanted myths. And I would propose here that it could be seen as one of the challenges of the bards among us to deeply delve into these old stories, to learn them—their older versions—by heart, and tell them to a spellbound audience, children as well as adults.

A Plea from the Goddess

In this last section I explore two versions of one myth—there are many more to be found in Alpine lore—that open up a treasure box of knowledge about the Goddess.

> "Where we find the village of Grabenweg near Pottenstein in an idyllic valley in the Austrian province of Lower Austria today, snow-covered barren rocks once towered on either side of the desolate land. Only a few folk lived in this unforgiving area, in which only scraggly sheep could find a few clumps of grass here and there. A young shepherd knew of a few patches tucked away in the mountains and herded his flock there every day. Once, on the day of the summer solstice, he sat on a boulder and played his flute. With a great thunder and a glistening flash, a sparkling crystal palace appeared right in front of him. The door flew open and a beautiful maiden with long, blonde hair and dressed in shimmering white invited him in, telling him that he had broken, in part, a cruel spell with his song; a spell that kept her imprisoned in the crystal palace. Then she asked the astounded shepherd if he were up to lifting the curse entirely. The young man, falling in love with the maiden immediately, agreed to come back at the next summer solstice.
>
> When he returned the next year, the crystal palace appeared again after the sun set and the church bell had finished ringing. He entered and at once an enormous snake slithered hissing toward him. But remembering his promise to the maiden, he kissed the snake on its head, losing consciousness at that very moment. When he awoke, he found himself alone in the mountains again. But now, they were no longer covered with ice, and the barren rocks were not as high and desolate any more. Another year went by, and when the shepherd returned at the summer solstice, he once again entered the palace. This time, a monster with gnashing teeth approached him. He was so frightened that he almost forgot his promise. But then he mustered all his courage and kissed the monster's head. Awakening from his unconsciousness, he saw that the remaining rocks had given way to green rolling hills.

> The last year went by and, as promised, the young man came to the spot where the crystal palace appeared after the sun had sunk beyond the horizon. This time, there were three maidens with long, blonde hair and dressed in shimmering white. One of them, with whom he had fallen in love years before, waved encouragingly at him. The shepherd entered the palace. But this time, a gigantic dragon hurled itself against the young man. All his bravery left him at once, and he fled from the monster. He was so frightened that he didn't even hear the whimpering calls of the maiden.
>
> Soon, the people from the valley began to miss the young man and it was not until the summer solstice of the next year that they found his corpse where he had run from the dragon. The valley, however, has been covered with lush, green meadows ever since."

Not unlike events in the story of Frau Holle, we encounter an innocent person—the shepherd—who is asked to perform some deeds of devotion to the Goddess, here clearly represented by a Salige Madl. We can just infer from the circumstances of where she lives that there are two others like her, and that she obviously wields some powerful magic. Playing music on a liminal day, a day of major change (the solstice) out in a remote place can only lead to entering the Otherworld, in which the young man is suddenly able to see the land as represented by its sovereign. He can also see the dark side, and the power, of the land. When asked to face these powers, he does, albeit only up to a certain point. His devotion to the Goddess prompts her to change the landscape for the better for the people, her children. This detail, the changing landscape, is rather unusual, yet it is exactly why I have chosen this particular one. It shows us very clearly the power of the Great Goddess, and also the power of devotion to her.

As practitioners of Druidry, we embark on a journey beyond time and space. Liminal times and places make it possible for us to enter the Otherworld. Like the farmer's son in the earlier Salige Madl tale, we can not only visit the spirit of the land in our travels into the inner realm of our consciousness, we can also choose to enter into a deep relationship with that spirit, expressed in the story as a marriage. If we honor the Goddess like the stove fitter's wife does by caring for the Salige Madl's hair, or by returning to her place frequently to face the challenges of devotion, we will surely be gifted with some of her magic; whether that be a resource such as the never-ending yarn or something as large as a change in the land for the benefit of all.

The next tale suggests that there is another great achievement in store for us as the people who celebrate different facets of Druidry. It sings of devotion, courage, and failure, and most importantly of a favor the Goddess asks from us. It is a favor that will benefit us greatly and, if we are willing to fulfill her request, mustering all our courage, may also benefit the land and all people. The following story is—in its core—very similar to the previous one with the

shepherd, yet it is not so much about the powers of the Goddess. This tale, of which there are many varieties in the Alpine region, speaks about a plea from the Goddess, one that is not easy to fulfill, but that would offer us immense wealth.

> "Where the Reinegger Farm is located today, three Salige Madln lived within its walls many years ago. Passers-by would sometimes hear them lament and cry and sing sad songs.
> About a hundred years ago, the owner of the farm walked around the courtyard late at night to check if the barn and stable were locked. All of a sudden, she saw a beautiful woman with long, blonde hair standing in the moonlight. Her stature was majestic, but her face expressed sorrow and grief beyond words. "Do not be afraid," the phantom said in a friendly voice. "I will do you no harm. You have been chosen to free my sisters and me from our prison. I therefore ask you to come with me to the ruin up there on the hill.
> ""I can't," the farmer's wife replied. "My heart is trembling with fear."
> Now the beautiful woman started to cry bitterly, fell to her knees in front of the farmer's wife and begged, "If you take pity on me and my sisters, you will make yourself unbelievably happy. There is only one thing that might frighten you: a large snake will come toward you and slither by. It has a bunch of keys in its mouth. When the creature is close to you, muster all your courage and take the keys away from the snake."
>
> It took a while for the frightened peasant woman to get past her fear, but she finally agreed to partake in the adventure. With that, the Salige Madl disappeared.
>
> At midnight, the countrywoman stood alone in the eerie, dark forest, and lo and behold, a huge snake slithered down from the nearby rock. Its scaly body glittered horribly in the moonlight. The creature slowly came closer, and soon the farmer's wife heard the jingle of the keys. But then, gripped by unbearable horror, she exclaimed, "All the good saints praise the Lord!"
> At that moment, the serpent disappeared and the forest was once again immersed in deep silence. And as it had been for a hundred years, people could hear the lamenting and crying from behind the walls of the ruin (Graber, 1941)"

If you feel so inclined, interrupt your reading here, prepare for Druidic contemplation, and meditate on the meaning of this tale, especially the key. What does it unlock? And why is it brought to the farmer's wife by a snake (a "worm")?

Whatever the results of your own contemplations, here is one suggestion for how to interpret this tale. For a brief moment, we have to put ourselves into the shoes of those of our ancestors who walked the soil of Europe in early medieval times, when Christianization began to reach from its stronghold in the urban centers into the rural areas. For many at this time, the new faith did not provide the same synchronicity with the seasons as the old one did. There was much resistance, and the old knowledge of rituals and ceremonies to ensure plentiful harvest went underground. Forced to adopt the new faith from far away, people wrapped their own, local belief into the mystery of song and story. And everyone had to hide their love of the Goddess deeply inside, imprisoning the Great Mother. Together with the campaign to suppress the Goddess came the further suppression of her human likeness, woman. Her power, finding expression in the snake, the worm, was demonized.

The story here expresses the hope, though, that one day someone will be strong enough again to look into the eyes of the big snake, with awe, yet without fear, and take the key to unlock the Goddess, Frau Holle, the Salige Madln, from their prison deep within ourselves. We could, as we embark on the path of Druidry, choose to be the ones to take on this challenge. The tale gives us much guidance for it. First, we would need to take on the task of searching for the Goddess, and it is suggested that we will find her deep in the dark forest of our inner self, dwelling in a ruin. In order to bring her back from this dreary place, we will need to muster all our courage to stare into the abyss of knowledge and wisdom. Not only are these two virtues hard to come by, they also require us to develop a strong ethical compass to withstand the taunting onslaught of this power of knowledge. We must learn to wield them in a way that benefits our community. Power is a shiny tool, glimmering like the scales of the snake that represents it, but we mustn't get sidetracked by its seductive lure. And we must not falter. Because through knowledge and wisdom, which we gain through contemplation, practice, ritual, and service, we will receive the key that unlocks the memory of the Goddess, finding her alive and well. Then we are no longer orphans; we are reunited with the Great Mother.

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AODA Groups Contact List

AODA supports three kinds of groups:

Groves, which perform initiations and provide regular ritual, ceremony, and support for members. They are led by a Druid Adept in the AODA and are officially chartered.

Study Groups, which perform introductory initiations (the candidate grade and first degree) and engage in regular ceremony. They are led by a Druid Companion in the AODA and are officially chartered.

Home Circles, which are able to be led by any AODA member. The principle of the home circle is simple: it is a group of people who meet regularly, learn from each other, and engage in a number of activities surrounding druidry. See the *Home Circle Manual* for more information (release forthcoming).

AODA Groves

Delsarte Grove. Bremerton, WA

Led by Gordon Cooper, Druid Adept and Grand Archdruid.
Contact: nwlorax@gmail.com
Open to new members, performing initiations.

Grove of the Wise Fox, Chicago, IL

Led by Adam Robersmith, Druid Adept and Archdruid of Fire.
Contact: druid@oakandthorn.com
Grove of the Wise Fox is currently not accepting new members, but is available for initiations.

Hemlock and Hazel Grove, Indiana, PA

Led by Dana O'Driscoll, Druid Adept and Archdruid of Water.
Contact: danalynndriscoll@gmail.com
Open to new members, performing initiations.

Three Roads Grove, Springfield, OH
Led by Lady Oceanstar, Druid Adept.
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Three Roads Grove is currently not accepting new members, but is available for initiations.

AODA Study Groups

Kawartha Study Group, Peterborough, ON, Canada
Led by Dennis Delorme, Druid Companion, sarezrael@yahoo.ca
Open to new members and performing initiations.

Ocean's Mist Study Group, Warwick, RI
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AODA Home Circles

Home Circle, Minneapolis, MN
Led by Marcus Baker, AODA Candidate, animasaru@gmail.com

Home Circle, Sacramento, CA
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Three Rivers Circle, Spanish Lake, MO (north of St. Louis)
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Home Circle, Oakland, CA
Led by Adam Milner, Druid Apprentice, carmiac@gmail.com

Circle of the Seven Spirals, St. Augustine, FL
Led by William Herrington, vdc9119@aol.com

The Circle of the Great Aspens and Reeds, Kaysville, UT
Led by Brenda Holmes, brenda0951@yahoo.com

Awen, Oak, & Sage Home Circle, Salt Lake City, UT
Led by Daniel Cureton, danielcureton@gmail.coom

Photograph taken by Grandarchduid Gordon Cooper
Strawberry. Bremerton, WA, c .2014.
(Rolleicord III, light red filter, Fomapan 100 souped in Rodinal 1:65 @ 17 minutes. On a tripod, using a +1 Rolleinar closeup lens.)

From the rising sun, three rays of light;
From the living earth, three stone of witness;
From the eye and mind and hand of wisdom,
Three rowan staves of all knowledge.

From the fire of the sun, the forge;
From the bones of the earth, the steel;
From the hand of the wise, the shaping:
From these, Excalibur.

By the Sword of Swords, I pledge my faithful service
To the Living Earth, our home and mother.

Awen, Awen, Awen.

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