

TRILITHON

THE JOURNAL OF THE ANCIENT ORDER OF DRUIDS IN AMERICA

VOLUME V
SUMMER SOLSTICE 2018

Trilithon

The Journal of the Ancient Order
of Druids in America



Volume V
Summer Solstice, 2018

Copyright 2018 by the Ancient Order of Druids in America, Indiana, Pennsylvania.
(www.aoda.org)
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

ISBN-13: 978-1720886075

ISBN-10: 1720886075

Colophon

Cover art by Dana O’Driscoll
Designed by Paul Angelini using Adobe® InDesign.®



The Book of Trees: Descriptive of the PRINCIPLE TIMBER TREES and the LARGER SPECIES OF PALMS
1837

To worship the gods;
To do no evil:
And to exercise fortitude.

Triad from *Barddas, Or, A Collection of Original Documents Illustrative of the Theology, Wisdom and Usages of the Bardo-Druidic System of the Isle of Britain*

Contents

Editor’s Introduction.....I

Interview with Claire Schosser, Mentor Coordinator.....1

Devotionals.....6

Dean Easton

Three Things Indispensable: A Method for the Practice of Meditation
and the Nurturing of Insight Using Druid Triads.....11

Adam Robersmith

Sacred Gardening Through the Three Druid Elements.....18

Dana O’Driscoll

A Druid Saturnalia.....25

Max Rogers

Giving Story to the Gundestrup Cauldron: Drawing on Archaeological Evidence,
History, and Bardic Vision.....29

Christian Brunner

By the Light of the Moon: Gardening in Harmony with the Lunar Cycle.....40

William Herrington

Connection as the Core Spiritual Philosophy in the Druid Tradition.....42

Dana O’Driscoll

The Power of Words: Exploring the Roots and Resonance of Sacred Terminology.....49

Síthearan NicLeòid

Deep Ecology, Human Civilization, and the Wild: : A Review of Three Books.....54

Jason Stieber

Crossing Communities: An Interview with Jon Cleland Host, Editor, Humanistic
Pagans.....61

Moine Michelle

Poetry in this Issue

Eadha/Aspen.....70

Adam Robersmith

Solstice Poem.....72

Moine Michelle

Trilithon Credits.....73

About the AODA.....74

How to Join the AODA.....76

How to Contact the AODA.....76



Editor's Introduction

As I write this introduction, it is spring in DC and the cherry blossoms have just begun to yawn pink and red. The gentling of the winds, the warming of the sun, and hints of green on every twig presage the turning of the wheel. This issue will be released on summer solstice 2018. At that time, the sun will be high in the sky, the rivers and trails of my favorite wild spaces will be overhung and lush, and summer will roll before us: sweet, abundant, generous.

Welcome to the 2018 issue of *Trilithon: The Journal of the Ancient Order of Druids in America*, the fifth iteration of this journal and my first as editor. The team who puts this journal together—Dana O'Driscoll (former editor and current developmental editor), Karen Fisher (copyeditor), Paul Angelini (designer), and I—are so excited to share our work with you, our international community of readers. With this issue, we continue our mission to foster discussion, scholarship, and reflection about Revival Druidry, especially the diversity of the AODA membership's meditative and ritual practices. Like the membership of the AODA and other Druid orders, these pieces are diverse in focus, highly personal, and yet reflective of the depth of experience offered by the winding path of today's Druidry.

Allow me, if you will, to say a few words about the editorship of Dana O'Driscoll, who began *Trilithon* and shepherded the first issue into publication in 2014. Anyone who knows Dana knows that her energy and focus are remarkable. A mentor's mentor, Dana's vision for twenty-first-century Druidry and her close work with many of us in our variety of roles within the AODA have been a source of inspiration, guidance, and resilience. As the AODA has continued to build an international community of practitioners committed to an authentic, deep, and nature-focused path, Dana's voice and presence have been steadying and energizing. We would not be the community we are today without her many gifts. Please join me in sending Dana many thanks for the work of her hands and her heart on projects like *Trilithon*.

In this issue, we welcome new authors and see the return of more familiar names. We begin with an interview with Claire Schosser, mentor coordinator, who discusses the mentoring program and practices that will help AODA members carry out the work of the grades. We then turn to a piece called "Devotionals" by Dean Easton and a reflection on meditation and the triads by Adam Robersmith, "Three Things Indispensable." Dana O'Driscoll has offered us two pieces (reprinted from her blog, *The Druid's Garden*) for this issue, "Sacred Gardening through the Three Druid

Elements” and “Connection as the Core Spiritual Philosophy in the Druid Tradition.” Max Rogers offers us “A Druid Saturnalia” and Christian Brunner integrates history, research, and mythology in “Giving Story to the Gundestrup Cauldron: Drawing on Archaeological Evidence, History, and Bardic Vision.” In “By the Light of the Moon,” William Herrington (Moonfeather) discusses gardening in alignment with moon cycles. Award-winning Celtic studies scholar and musician Síthearan NicLeòid explores the etymology of the word “Druid” in her piece “The Power of Words” and Jason Stieber reviews three books that offer important takes on the wild and the sacred work of rewilding in “Deep Ecology, Human Civilization, and the Wild.”

I am also delighted to introduce new visions for this journal, continuing Dana’s work of honoring the many elements of nature spirituality, as calling, as work, and as manifestation. Two new features appear in this issue. The first is Awenyddion’s Call, an area for literary poetry on Druidic and nature themes. Poems included in this issue are Adam Robersmith’s “Eadha/Aspen” and my own “Solstice.” Crossing Communities offers an interview with a leader, visionary, or practitioner from a community of interest to AODA members. This issue closes with an interview with Jon Cleland Host, editor of Humanistic Pagans, an online community devoted to a paganism “firmly rooted in the empirical world.”

On behalf of our team, we hope you will enjoy each of these pieces as much as we have.

A H-uile Beannachd/Every Blessing,
Moine Michelle



KITT’S COTTY HOUSE, NEAR AYLESFORD, KENT.

The Celtic Druids
1829

Interview with Claire Schosser, Mentor Coordinator

Interview Conducted by Moine Michelle

For many Druids, the mentoring relationship is an important part of the work within each grade. For those working through the many stages of the path, mentors may provide a gentle ear, a sounding board, thoughtful encouragement, and insights into Druid practice. Mentees also deepen the work of their mentors, making it a two-way street, offering moments of reflection, fresh perspective, and a grounding in service to the international community of AODA members. (It is important to note here, as Claire asserts below, that mentors are asked to act as companions and guides on the path, not evaluators of the mentee’s progress. All mentoring relationships are held in strictest confidentiality.) In this interview, Claire Schosser, coordinator of the AODA mentoring program, discusses her Druid practice, the mentoring program’s history, and some of the ways mentors and mentees may best work together.

Trilithon: Let’s begin with a little bit about you personally. How long have you been practicing Druidry? What core practices are central to your manifestation of Druidry?

Claire Schosser: I began my practice of Druidry when I joined the AODA in November 2012, so I’ve been practicing for about five and a half years. Before I started to practice Druidry, I practiced Soto Zen for about fifteen years. I currently work extensively in Ovate areas, as a gardener and as a volunteer with the Missouri Stream Team program.

For as far back as I can remember, I have been drawn to plants, especially flowers. When I was a young girl I learned to identify common wildflowers by reading my grandparents’ field guide. Before I had my own garden, I enjoyed wandering through the Missouri Botanical Garden, watching the flowers change with the seasons and imagining the garden I would grow someday when I had some land. Someday arrived when I married my husband, Mike Gaillard, and moved into his house and the one eighth of an acre lot it stood on. Eventually, I planted the entire yard and started longing for more land. In 2002 we moved to a house on an acre lot and I began planning and planting. Besides growing vegetables and small fruits like strawberries and raspberries, I tend and harvest from fruit and nut trees, although the squirrels often beat me to the latter. I also grow herbs, native plants, and some ornamental plants.

Because of the diversity of plantings, our yard supports small mammals like rabbits, squirrels, and voles, resident and migratory songbirds, tree and southern leopard frogs, and insects, including pollinators. As the shrubs and trees have grown, I have noticed different kinds of birds who visit or stay here. We no longer see purple martins, for instance, but we now see titmice, flycatchers, and wrens, along with winter resident sparrows and juncos. During migration season, we see warblers.

I am also drawn to water. As a girl, I was fortunate to spend many summer weekends at my paternal grandparents' cottage on a pond in southern Michigan. Because the part of Missouri where we live was not glaciated, rivers and streams are much more common than lakes. I joined the Missouri Stream Team program so that I could learn what I can do to reduce negative impacts on streams and improve the quality of the watershed as a whole as well as to have an excuse to spend quality time at the local stream.

In the last three years, I have been engaged in Druid studies and practice through the Dolmen Arch course. As a result, I have developed a great interest in Druid philosophy and magical practice. After I finish the Dolmen Arch course I plan to investigate how Ovate and Druid practices might intersect in my garden work.

T: Thank you for that personal background. Let's talk now about the mentoring program that you coordinate. Can you tell us about the history of the mentoring program to date?

CS: Because the AODA is a very small organization whose members are scattered around the world, we may know few if any other members and hardly more Druids of any other organizational affiliation. As a result, many if not most of us experience a sense of isolation in our practice. Some of us must hide our practice even from those closest to us. For new members, especially, the isolation and resultant lack of guidance and companionship on the path could delay spiritual growth and may be daunting enough to lead to dropping the practice.

Recognizing this difficulty, the AODA began a mentoring forum a few years ago, but it ended when its advisors were unable to continue in that role. After the current Grand Grove members began working together, they developed the New Member Guide as a resource for new members. They also implemented the mentoring program to connect new members directly with longer-term members as they work through the candidate curriculum. The mentoring program began matching mentors to mentees in June 2017. As of March 2018, over thirty new members have been matched to one of twelve mentors.

Both mentees and mentors benefit by being part of the mentoring program. New members have another Druid to connect with, lessening the sense of isolation that often comes with practicing Druidry. Their mentor acts as a guide and a resource should they encounter some of the hurdles that can occur while completing the candidate curriculum. Mentors comment that through their work as mentors, their understanding of Druidry and their own practice grows. In the case of apprentices who wish to obtain a study group or grove charter in the future, being a mentor helps them to fulfill the requirement to spend at least twenty hours helping other people with their spiritual development in a Druid context. The mentoring skills learned in AODA's mentoring program are transferable to

other organizations in which formal or informal mentoring occurs, such as the workplace or other group activities. And mentors and mentees genuinely enjoy their work together!

T: What do you do as the mentor coordinator?

CS: I receive applications from new members who wish to be matched with a mentor and from apprentices, companions, and adepts who wish to become mentors. After I receive a request for a mentor, I check to see who is available and would also be a good match. When I make a match, I inform both mentee and mentor and provide each with contact information. The mentor then initiates contact with the mentee. When their work together ends, the mentor lets me know.

When a mentor joins the mentor program, I provide them with a copy of the AODA Mentoring Guide. The guide contains information on how to establish an effective mentoring relationship and suggestions for addressing issues that some Druids have struggled with during their candidacy. I encourage mentors to offer any suggestions on improvements to the guide for the next edition.

Besides keeping track of who is working with whom, sending to and receiving from new mentees and mentors the appropriate forms and guides, and acting as matchmaker, I am available as a resource to everyone in the program. If mentors and/or mentees encounter difficulties that they cannot work out within the mentoring relationship, they let me know and we work together to develop a solution. If we can't come up with a solution, I bring the issue to the Grand Grove and work with them to resolve the issue.

T: When mentoring works well, what does it look like?

CS: Because successful mentoring depends on establishing rapport through an ongoing connection, we ask that mentors contact their mentees at least once a month. Most often these connections occur through emails, although some pairs work together through phone calls and/or postal mail.

While each mentoring relationship is unique, it is likely that when mentors connect with their mentees, they will ask questions to get a sense about particular aspects of the candidate curriculum that the mentee may be working on. Upon request, the mentor will strategize with the mentee on how to work through any problems that they may be encountering. In later conversations, mentors follow up with mentees regarding particular issues that they have discussed and ask about anything else that may have come up since their last conversation. When successes occur, mentor and mentee acknowledge and enjoy them.

In the AODA mentoring program, mentors are companions and guides on the path, not evaluators of the mentee's progress. In addition, mentors hold their conversations with mentees as confidential: mentors do not disclose the names of their mentees or anything that they have discussed with them unless the mentee has given permission for this to occur, except in very specific and limited circumstances. This encourages mentees to be honest with mentors about

their practice and helps to remind mentors that they are guides and companions on the path, not know-it-alls or judges. Mentees and mentors alike know that when mentees succeed, it is through their own work and spiritual growth.

T: When mentoring fails, what do you typically see happening?

CS: In an organization like AODA in which members hold widely varying cosmologies and have widely varying experiences of other cosmologies, the potential exists for clashing cosmologies that sabotage the work of mentor and mentee. As mentor coordinator, I do my best to ensure that if the cosmologies of mentor and mentee don't match—and more often than not they don't—that both parties are open to communicating across the difference. That difference can be a rich source of learning and growth for both mentee and mentor.

If a clash of cosmologies does occur, as mentor coordinator, I will help the mentor and mentee work through the issue if possible. If this fails and the mentee wishes to work with a different mentor, I will make the reassignment.

Mentoring could also fail due to personality clashes; inappropriate expectations on the part of either party for their work together; or factors beyond the control of anyone, such as illness, changes in financial or employment conditions, or family changes that prevent either one from continuing in their work. Finally, the mentee may lose interest in Druid practices and end contact with the mentor.

In the case of personality clashes or inappropriate expectations, we suggest that mentors do their best to address such issues openly with their mentee. I am available to aid them in this effort. While I hope that mentors will be proactive in bringing such concerns to me, if this is not occurring and mentees want to bring it to my attention, I will work with them to resolve the issue.

In the case of the relationship ending due to factors beyond the control of either or both people involved or if the mentee stops practicing, I encourage both parties to have a final conversation to acknowledge the end of their work together and to free up the mentor to take another mentee.

T: What roles do the mentee and mentor have in establishing an effective mentoring relationship?

CS: It is the mentee who leads in the mentor-mentee relationship. The mentor cannot act as a guide to a mentee who isn't engaged with the path. The mentee's role, then, is to do the work of the candidate curriculum to the best of their ability, to note where that is difficult, and to bring those difficulties to the attention of the mentor. During their discussion, the mentee may realize that he/she already knows what to do. If that doesn't happen, the mentor may offer a suggestion for the mentee to consider. I think an openness to hearing suggestions and a willingness to try any that seem attractive or at least reasonable is an attitude most likely to bring success. Even if a suggestion doesn't work, trying it might help the mentee to come up with something else that does work.

For the mentor, a willingness to allow the mentee to set the goals and lead in the work is key. It isn't the mentor's job to do the mentee's work for them, nor is it appropriate to develop any

expectations about what the mentee should or should not do. If the mentor experiences difficulty in maintaining this level of objectivity, he or she needs to let me know so we can work together to resolve the issue or reassign the mentee to someone else if the matter cannot be resolved.

T: What changes in the mentoring program might take place?

CS: One of the goals for the mentor program is to extend mentoring to apprentices. Apprentices often face the same challenge of isolation as candidates do, along with new challenges associated with the apprentice curriculum and the spiritual development required to work through the curriculum. That work will begin this spring. Watch the AODA [internet] forum and the AODA quarterly newsletter for more information and announcements about this extension.

T: If people are interested in being matched with a mentor or mentee, what should they do?

CS: All new members of AODA receive information on how to request a mentor in their new member packet. The program is open to anyone who is a member and is working on completing the requirements for candidate. If you became a candidate before the mentor program began and you would benefit from working with a mentor, email AODAMentoring@gmail.com to request a mentor.

Apprentices, companions, and adepts who are interested in becoming a mentor may email AODAMentoring@gmail.com.

Devotionals

Dean Easton

Dean Easton is an Ovate with the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. He lives in Vermont with his wife, Sarah, where he blogs (adruidway.wordpress.com), teaches English, and strives to listen to what bird and beast, bug and beech are saying.

Online and in countless conversations, I hear the question arise several times a year: what makes Druidry distinctive? In other words, if you're looking over your options, why choose this and not that?

Sustained contact with the green world is the first practice, never abandoned, always up to date. Such contact may take many forms; one I wish to address here is the devotional. See what you might adapt to your own practice.

One Druid remarked to me that she was told in meditation, "Practice devotionals to the gods outdoors. Lighting a candle to Brigid and sitting with her, or pouring water in a bowl for the moon to infuse its energy and listening to Manannan are such devotionals. There is indeed much to be gained through these spiritual practices."

But this isn't something to take another's word for. It's not that kind of observation. Certainly as a Druid with animist tendencies I wasn't inclined by past experience to attend to gods or include them in a devotional. But part of the wisdom of a devotional practice suggests that words are meant to guide us toward our own experience of the green world and back out again, to reflect so we can experience more deeply. They're not meant to be an end in themselves. I say this as a Bard, as one who's made a living from words, as writer and teacher. From words I can fashion pointers and markers, walking sticks and lamps along the path. Then walk it.

An example: I use a short quotation from J. M. Greer as my elevator speech on Druidry. You know: the in-a-nutshell reply you make to a question about your spiritual path, when you have ten to twenty seconds, the space-time between a few floors on an elevator ride.

Druidry means following a spiritual path rooted in the green Earth. It means embracing an experiential approach to religious questions, one that abandons rigid belief systems in favor of inner development and individual contact with the realms of nature and spirit. (Greer, cited in Carr-Gomm, 2006, p. 34)

I regularly need reminders like these, because Talking Self can sidetrack me. In its extreme forms, Talking Self is that chatty, sometimes neurotic self we use—among other things—for reading and posting on Facebook, grumbling at headlines we don't like, and cheering for ones we do. It also gets us talking about Druidry rather than doing it. It can often and easily persuade us that it is all of who we are, because its medium is language and the thoughts and feelings language kindles in us. Name it, says Talking Self, trying to keep everything in its domain of names and words: rigid belief systems "R" us.

But the Druidry that calls to me most urges me out of talk and into a larger self—the being linked in its sinews and blood, bone and spirit, to all that is—rivers and streams, woods and meadows, valleys and hills, tundra and deserts, bird and beech, beast and bass and bug. Yet if I seek "inner development and individual contact with the realms of nature and spirit," one of the lovely, paradoxical ways to launch myself is with words. I say to myself "rooted in the green Earth" and feel it grow true again. I send myself outdoors again to breathe air the sun and moon have charged with life, and to watch the clouds. I run my hands across the bark of a favorite tree, a wordless greeting.

When I come back from such reconnection, I can turn Talking Self toward song or ritual—give it tasks to do it does well—but in the service of something higher than reactive gossip and self-importance and anxiety. Used to examine its own limits, as well as to sidestep and leap beyond them imaginatively in song and ritual, it's an admirable tool, one that can point us away from itself and toward something larger.

Any devotional I'm going to put into practice needs to emerge from where I am today. "Practicing devotionals to the gods outdoors" doesn't have to entail a frigid January plunge through a hole in the ice at the local lake. It may be as simple as smelling an evergreen twig I picked up yesterday on a walk, which I now hold as I meditate, the incense of a living thing on my fingers and in my nose. With such small gestures I can turn from an indoor workspace for the merest moment, while still rewilding the human self through contact with the green world. Sixteen years teaching in a private boarding high school helped me hone such devotionals out of necessity.

All these practices reengage the body and give Talking Self a break. Poor thing, it needs one. These devotional practices help restore connection. They gift us with balance. For so many reasons they are, in a curious word more often associated with another tradition, *incarnational*. They literally put us back into our bodies, even as they give Spirit shapes and forms we can experience. Many forms of Spirit, many bodies to experience them: earth body and dream body and thought body and memory body. And others we no doubt haven't begun to detect or explore.

One of my devotionals hid from me in the garb of a daily task. All winter long some years ago, I laid the makings of a fire in our woodstove, crumpled newspaper and punky dry strips of willow from a branch fallen two years earlier, and thin strips of a log split and resplit and split again. Wood's our primary heat source—we're far too stingy to waste money on our electric backup, except in direst emergencies, and then the power may have gone out anyway. But the task became a devotional as soon as I shifted my attention. Splitting kindling, hauling ash, I can honor Brigid. The makings of a devotional. Not believe in her, not profess my faith that she exists, but acknowledge her in word

and flame—something quite different, I found, something whose outlines I’m still exploring. As a Druid not especially prone to noticing gods or offering them anything beyond the courtesy I try to show to any neighbors, seen or unseen, I don’t worry too much about what it means. Meaning in this



Figure 1: Loading the Stove

case—peace to Talking Self!—has come to seem, at length, mostly beside the point. This particular devotional, for this still mostly animist Druid, has taken on a theistic form. So I run with it.

As someone once quipped, more important than me believing in Brighid is Brighid believing in me. What god would care to waste attention on a human who isn’t ever here? But if I’m here and I honor her, the act brings her into my awareness. Word and flame and shaping, goddess of Bards and fire and smithcraft.

My Druid experience urges me to “abandon rigid belief systems in favor of inner development and individual contact with the realms of nature and spirit.” For me it needs to do so continually, because without the continuity of devotional practices, my rigidity will creep back in. But fire and the touch of a devotional can warm and soften and free me from inflexible habits and open me to change and love.

I met Brighid most intimately through the task of firing up the woodstove when my wife and I settled in Vermont in 2008. Fire became a daily necessity each winter (and much of spring and autumn, too). The wonder of fire and the opportunity to honor Brighid needn’t be separate from the gathering of kindling and the flare of the match. My utilitarian woodstove fire isn’t the reverential fire of Kildare, says Talking Self. But it also can be, as every morning I relight it, Talking Self set to flaming, to shaping and smithing words that can lift me out of words.

Today I’ll take out the ash to the compost pile, the midden, lovely old word. Another devotional in the making, if I choose, fertilizer for next spring’s garden. I let the freshly removed ash sit out in the hod for a week, so I’m not dumping a pile of embers outdoors on a windy day. Old ash out, new ash



Figure 2: Taking Out the Ash

Figure 3: New Fire

to the hod, new fire to the stove, whose walls are still warm to the touch. I set the kindling, whisper a sometimes wordless prayer to the goddess, strike the match, and watch as flames grow and spread.

I’ve learned over time how my devotionals have to take particular, concrete forms if they’re to exist at all for the body and senses to engage. The spiritual-but-not-religious seekers know this, instinctively keep scouting out but then as quickly abandoning forms, because they distrust forms even as they sense their value. But it’s the dead form and the opinions-and-then-dogmas of Talking Self that are the obstacle to spiritual connection, not form itself.

A Hindu prayer touches on something of this experience:

Oh, Lord, forgive three sins that are due to my human limitations.

Thou art Everywhere, but I worship thee here:

Thou art without form, but I worship thee in these forms;

Thou needest no praise, yet I offer thee these prayers and salutations.

Lord, forgive three sins that are due to my human limitations. (Smith, 1995, p. 31)

Except they’re not limitations at all: the way I do “these prayers and salutations” in time and space is with temporal and spatial forms. I find little limitation in building a fire and honoring Brighid too. They become the same thing. (Was any split I perceived localized in me?) My devotional is now a matter of intention, of choice. When I’m on another plane, I adopt its forms. (In dreams I fly, with dream power my earth body doesn’t have.) But now, here—no need to apologize for these limitations, these forms. Obsessed with freedoms, we miss what limits signify and mean for us. A shape is a limitation. Personally, I like shapes and forms. If I had no particular shape or form, I wouldn’t be “free”—I’d be monstrous, “de-formed.”

Without a form, whisper the Wise, no transformation.

Sometimes I think we seek Druidic mastery without knowing what it might look like. For me, anyway, this can show up most clearly in my practice. So I ask myself again who are some of my masters and teachers in the green world. In his *Mystery Teachings from the Living Earth*, Greer gives the example of field mice, who “limit themselves to one kind of food, and as a result their bodies and their behavior are exquisitely shaped to get and use that kind of food” (Greer, 2012, p. 42). Likewise, one devotional can take me remarkably far, I’ve found. Let me plumb the depths of that one before I hurry after ten others. Greer continues:

The same thing is true of all beauty, in nature as a whole and in the subset of nature we call human life: beauty is born when a flow of nature encounters firm limits, and the more perfect its acceptance of those limits, the greater the beauty will be. . . . The same thing is true of all power, in nature as a whole and in that subset of nature we call human life: power is born when a flow of energy encounters firm limits, and the more narrow the outlet left open by those limits, the greater the power will be. (2012, pp. 42, 53)

Devotionals, then, grow through use into practices that can be exquisitely shaped through time to accomplish a spiritual intention, in ways that ongoing contact with the realms of nature and spirit evokes in forms of beauty and power. In this case, even a goddess for an animist. *Earth rich with seed that nourishes a mouse, wind that lifts flight from a bird's wings, water rippling with breath and swimming for fish, be with me as I with you.*

References

Carr-Gomm, P. (2006). *What Do Druids Believe?* London: Granta.
Greer, J. M. (2012). *Mystery Teachings from the Living Earth*. Newburyport, MA: Weiser.
Smith, H. (1995). *The World's Religions*. San Francisco: HarperOne.

Three Things Indispensable

A Method for the Practice of Meditation and the Nurturing of Insight Using Druid Triads

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 the land at his home in Connecticut, which he shares with his partner and dog.

Three things indispensable in every art and science:
to learn; to remember; and to practise them.
Iolo Morganwg, *Barddas*

This triad from Iolo Morganwg's *Barddas* is as true of meditation as it is of any other art or science. Everything that we wish to do well requires us to learn, remember, and practice. Meditation is no different: in order to develop a successful meditation practice, we must train our minds to think in ways that our daily lives and contemporary technologies do not naturally foster. Following our triad, we must *learn* to focus closely on one thing, rather than multitask. We must *remember* to be aware of what is actually happening within us, rather than escape awareness with distractions. We must *practice* making our own way into meaning, rather than relying on endless external information to fill us up. Through these three things indispensable, meditation helps us to pierce the haze of daily tasks, to step out of the usual paths and patterns of our minds.

As Druids, we use meditation to develop the inner skills needed for ritual, for observation of nature, for magic, for study, for the Druid life as a whole. Combining the forms of meditation the

AODA encourages with Druid triads (like the one above) offers us a method for developing our skills while learning from our own wisdom tradition.

The Practice of Meditation

People try to classify meditation in a variety of ways, whether breaking it down into many highly specific categories based in methodological and cultural forms or creating oppositions of just two forms, such as mindfulness versus discursive meditation or seated versus walking meditation. Some people or traditions will attempt to claim that the word “meditation” can only mean one specific thing, but “meditation” is an umbrella term in English, encompassing a myriad of forms and frameworks.

The practice of mindfulness meditation, commonly taught in Buddhism, helps practitioners to peacefully observe themselves and maintain an awareness that is not caught in the vagaries of thoughts that ebb and flow in the mind. Contemplative practice, as described in the Western mystical traditions of Christianity and Judaism, invites the practitioner into a time of pure being (rather than doing) with the goal of mystical union with that which is beyond the self—often called God in traditional frameworks, but which may also include the cosmos, a particular location, or other beings. Prayer, a part of many different traditions, is a way of acknowledging for ourselves and to that which is beyond ourselves the things that are deepest within us: our needs, our hopes, our fears, our sorrows, our joys, our gratitude. Moving meditation—such as walking labyrinths, creating art and craft, or practicing qigong—helps the practitioner to engage bodily experience within meditation.

There are also meditative forms that require close focus on a topic or reading in order to encourage the deep exploration of ideas. In each case, the practitioner picks a reading or topic—whether by random selection or thoughtful choice—and then considers its meaning in a focused method. Lectio divina asks the practitioner to explore a text with a series of questions in one sitting and then move into a time of contemplation afterward. Bibliomancy is a form of divination that uses seemingly random choice to offer a text for intuitive exploration. Discursive meditation asks us to choose an idea, a reading, a phrase, or a question and then explore it as an inner dialogue. We may let the language roll through our minds and ponder what the words call forward within us, dissect phrases into their component parts and explore their meanings, or seek to understand what the whole thing means when taken all together.

For each of us, some methods will feel more natural than others. Certain practices may result in more dramatic spiritual growth than others. Devotees of one method or another may attempt to lay claim to their practice as true meditation or the only form that matters, but there is value and usefulness in the variety of methods that exist. Spiritual and religious groups emphasize different practices in order to achieve specific goals: developing relationships with deities, spirits, or nature; quieting the mind or the emotions in order to find inner peace; or focusing attention deeply on one thing, process, or train of thought. We need all these methods because no one method of meditation can serve every human need at every moment in time.

Therefore, we recommend a variety of meditative practices within the AODA. The first requirement of the Earth Path in our curriculum says:

Part of your time in nature should be spent in the practice of **stillness**, which simply involves sitting, keeping your mind empty of thoughts and distractions, and being wordlessly aware of everything around you. Part should be spent in the practice of **focus**, which involves detailed attention to some specific thing—a tide pool, a wild plant, the living things in a six-inch-square patch of grass, or the like.¹

Such stillness and focus are in line with the traditions of mindfulness meditation and contemplative practice. The creativity of bardic work or the rituals and movements of the Druid path can connect with practices of moving meditation. Calling upon directions, elements, spirits, or deities can be a form of prayer.

The practice the AODA most specifically teaches is discursive meditation, which helps to train the mind and spirit to attend to one idea or track of thought at a time and explore it deeply. Our focus on discursive meditation in the AODA is, in part, a way to balance practices of meditation that teach disconnecting from thoughts with a practice that asks us to fully and deeply engage with the thoughts we choose. In discursive meditation, our task is to keep our minds focused on the material we have chosen and not stray into irrelevant tangents or disconnected lines of thought. Like most meditative practices, it is more difficult than it sounds. In *The Druidry Handbook*, John Michael Greer writes, “there is one essential rule: *be aware of exactly what you’re thinking while you’re thinking it.*”² When we find ourselves wandering away from our chosen material, we then retrace our path, like following a trail of bread crumbs back to where we intended to be.³ While there are times when it is good to only observe and be, there are times when we need to intentionally shape how we think. Discursive meditation is a powerful tool for training ourselves in mental focus to support ritual, magical, intuitive, and divinatory work.

The Tradition of Druid Triads

Just as there are many worthy methods of meditation, there are many worthy subjects for meditation. Poetry, story, mythology, essays and esoteric instructions, the prayers expressing the deepest cries of our own spirits—all of these and more can offer us much from which we can learn and grow. Religious and spiritual traditions all over the world suggest to their adherents and practitioners specific material for use in meditation, from scripture to Zen koans. Although we have no limit on what materials we can use for the development of our insight, we are fortunate to have access to the tradition of Druid triads, which offers us a deep well of wisdom from which to draw the materials for our practice.

The Druid triad tradition comes to us from a variety of manuscripts, translators, authors, and editors. As with other early Celtic and Druid myths, lore, and wisdom, Christian monks took pre-Christian oral

1 “AODA Study Program,” Ancient Order of Druids in America, December 21, 2010, <http://aoda.org/curric.html>.

2 Greer, *The Druidry Handbook*, 226.

3 For a deep description of Greer’s method of discursive meditation and the preparatory work he recommends, see *ibid.*, 205–228.

tradition and recorded it in writing. The earliest texts including triads come from the works they created during the thirteenth century for the Welsh triads and the fourteenth century for the Irish.⁴ The next major collections of triads come from Iolo Morganwg’s work in *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* (for which he was a collector of old Welsh texts—and later shown to be both an alterer and creator of triads he claimed to be part of older texts) and his *Barddas*, which was published as a collection of ancient works, but later shown to be mostly Morganwg’s own creation.⁵ Although there is significant debate over Morganwg’s legacy and contribution to the Druid Revival, there is real wisdom to be found in his triads. Beyond the historical literature, contemporary Druids continue to create triads, speaking with both wisdom and wit to the challenges, opportunities, and absurdities of our time; many of them can be found online in the blogs of their authors or in collections that may include triads from many eras.

Although many cultures and religious traditions use three-part symbols and literary forms, the Druid triad has a distinct formula.

Three things named together as a category:
then named individually, first, second, and third.

For example,

Three candles that illumine every darkness:
truth, nature, knowledge.⁶

Three things that ruin wisdom:
ignorance, inaccurate knowledge, forgetfulness.⁷

Three things indispensable in every art and science:
to learn; to remember; and to practise them.

This formula is useful both as a way to help one remember these proverbs and also as a way to encourage one to think beyond binaries. Binary pairs are excellent for describing contrasting ideas: hello and good-bye, success and failure, day and night. However, they also place things in oppositions that can appear all encompassing: good and evil, alive and dead, real and fake. Triads encourage us

4 Kuno Meyer, a German scholar of Celtic literature, compiled Irish triads from medieval texts in 1906, but also wrote of triads contemporary to his time coming out of Limerick, Ireland. Rachel Bromwich, a British scholar of medieval Welsh literature, compiled medieval Welsh triads into a definitive text titled *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*.

5 A variety of scholars and sources address this idea. For a specific study of an example of Morganwg’s work, see Greer, “The Myth of Einigan.”

6 Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland*, Kindle locations 747–748.

7 Ibid., Kindle locations 899–901.

to think in terms of processes, networks, and relationships. Triads encourage us to move beyond surface-level oppositions into constellations of ideas and the ways in which they are interrelated. Triads, like meditation, help us to think differently and train our minds to be open to new possibilities.

The Nurturing of Insight

As a Druid and teacher of spirituality, I seek to create well-rounded practices that help us to engage all our capacities for awareness. I want to engage logical and intellectual focus (reason), magical and imaginative capacity (intuition), and deep or mystical connection with that which is beyond usual experience (union). The Druidic triads are substantial enough that each triad can serve as the material for a week’s exploration using reason, intuition, and union. One way to deeply explore that substance is to engage one triad through the week, but attend to pieces of it each day, like so:

- Day 1:
Read and consider the whole triad, from first impressions through overall meaning, then let your thinking come to rest as you open yourself to union with what you find to be sacred, ultimate, or worthy of your deep connection.
- Day 2:
Consider only specific words that catch your attention.
- Day 3:
Consider the first named thing, its meanings and its implications.
- Day 4:
Consider the second named thing, its meanings and its implications.
- Day 5:
Consider the third named thing, its meanings and its implications.
- Day 6:
Drawing on the previous days, consider the whole triad again and go wherever your mind leads you with it.
- Day 7:
Read the triad once through, then set it down and allow the mind to rest in and absorb what it has come to mean through your explorations.

The days have natural connections with each of our three methods of exploration, although all three methods could occur on any given day. Days 1 and 7 specifically encourage union or deep awareness. Days 2 and 6 are particularly suited for intuition. Days 3, 4, and 5 call for the use of reason. These also connect with the contemplative and discursive methods of meditation, with days 1 and 7 reinforcing the contemplative practices of stillness and focus and days 2 through 6 requiring the use of discursive meditation.

If you aren’t accustomed to this sort of meditation practice, begin with between five and ten minutes of meditation per day. It will take some time to develop your meditation muscles and to

find your own pace. A thirty-minute daily meditation would be a solid practice, but you may do best at fifteen minutes or an hour. Allow yourself to find your best time, rather than deciding upon something before you have begun. Many unsuccessful meditation practices have failed because of unrealistic expectations, rather than an inability to meditate. Starting with an achievable goal will allow you to adjust your expectations based upon your experience. When you have found your own mental and spiritual stride, you can grow from there.

In order to imagine how this practice might work, we can use our original triad as an example. Beneath each day’s instructions are examples of thoughts and questions that came to me in my own exploration of this triad.

Three things indispensable in every art and science:
to learn; to remember; and to practise them.

Day 1:
Read and consider the whole triad, from first impressions through overall meaning, then open yourself to union with the triad in mind.
Are these indispensable? Yes, I believe that learning, remembering, and practice are necessary to all arts and sciences, to all skills. Learning is the beginning, but this is not a linear experience once I have begun to learn; remembering and practicing reinforce each other and lead me back to learn more.

Day 2:
Consider only specific words that catch your attention.
Indispensable: cannot be thrown away, cannot be done without, required for progress.
What else might be indispensable to art? To science? What else is required?

Day 3:
Consider the first image, its meanings and its implications.
To learn: I enjoy learning—discovering new things, new ideas, perspectives—I don’t enjoy doing things badly. I struggle, sometimes, to engage in the process of learning when it requires steady growth of skill more than intuitive leaps.

Day 4:
Consider the second image, its meanings and its implications.
To remember: This is more than just to have a vague memory, an impression of a moment, but instead to retain knowledge and to know it solidly in the present moment without needing external prompting.
What are the things that I remember in this way?

Day 5:
Consider the third image, its meanings and its implications.
To practice them: “Them” is an important reminder that it is not just to learn

and remember the arts and sciences as goals achieved, but that the practice of the arts and sciences is the point; not just knowledge for the sake of it, but for the use of it.

Day 6:
Drawing on the previous days, consider the whole triad again and go wherever your mind leads you with it.
What are the arts and sciences in which I have engaged the three things indispensable?

Day 7:
Read the triad once through, then set it down and allow the mind to rest with what it has come to mean through your explorations.
Realization to let settle into myself: This wisdom is not about a linear process, but a larger way of becoming and a way of being.

There are so many threes in Druidry: spirit above, below, and within; nwyfre, gwyar, and calas; the three rays of Awen. Another three things I have found to be indispensable in my Druidry are the pathways to insight discussed above: reason, intuition, and union. No one way is sufficient. Each offers its own gifts, just as the various methods of meditation each have a role to play in our spiritual growth. By combining discursive and contemplative meditative forms into one week-long process, we can intentionally bring these different ways of knowing into our lives on a regular basis. By engaging the tradition of the Druid triads in this process, we can enrich our Druidry with a wider range of the wisdoms that are available to us from past and present. By practicing the art and science of meditation, we train ourselves in ways of thinking and being that connect us ever more deeply with the things that are most true, most real, most indispensable.

Bibliography
Ab Ithel, J. Williams. *The Barddas of Iolo Morganwg*, vols. 1 and 2. Kindle ed.
Bromwich, Rachel. *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016.
Greer, John Michael. *The Druidry Handbook*. San Francisco: Weiser, 2006.
Greer, John Michael. “The Myth of Einigan.” *Trilithon* 1 (2014): 19–26.
Jones, Owen, Iolo Morganwg, and William Owen Pughe, eds. *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, vols. 1–3. Denbigh: Thomas Gee, 1870.
Meyer, Kuno. *The Triads of Ireland*. Royal Irish Academy Todd Lecture Series Book 13. AlbaCraft, 2013.

Sacred Gardening Through the Three Druid Elements

Dana O'Driscoll

Dana O'Driscoll spent most of her childhood in the wooded hills of the Laurel Highlands region of 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 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 natural building. Dana joined AODA in 2005 and, after completing her first and second degrees, earned the degree of Druid Adept in 2013. Her writings on Druidry and sustainability can be found at the Druid's Garden (druidgarden.wordpress.com).

As anyone on the Druid path knows, gardening is a wonderful way that we can interact with nature. By intentionally designing sacred spaces and cultivating them, we not only cultivate a deeper relationship with nature but also help regenerate ecosystems and build habitat for all life. The work of the sacred garden is, inherently, work that happens both within and without. And in principle, creating a sacred garden seems easy enough, but how to bring forth this garden with sacred intent can be challenging. The Druid Revival tradition offers us tremendous resources to intertwine our nature spirituality with our daily living practices, including the work of sacred gardening. While the three Druid elements, nwyfre, calas, and gwyar, are a lesser-known framework within our tradition, they offer us tools for designing sacred gardens and potential rituals for planting and harvesting.

The Three Druid Elements: Nwyfre, Calas, and Gwyar

In order to craft effective ceremonies and design to support sacred gardening, we need an underlying theory that helps us work with various flows of energy. Most people use the well-known four-element framework (earth, air, fire, and water). While the four-element system is heavily discussed in Iolo Morganwg's *Barddas* (one of the foundational texts of Revival Druidry), Morganwg also discusses a second elemental framework (later further discussed by John Michael Greer in *The Druidry Handbook*). The three Druid elements of nwyfre, gwyar, and calas have Welsh names

and pronunciations (like many other things coming out of Revival Druidry). They do not cleanly map onto the four elements, so don't try to see them that way. See them, instead, as an alternative elemental system that emphasizes different properties of the world—all elemental systems do that, generally. They serve as an archetype of things that we can see or experience or know. They are three archetypes, three ways of representing the inner and outer worlds of our experience. My definitions are expanded from the work of Morganwg and Greer.

Nwyfre (NOOiv-ruh)

The first Druid element represents the life force and consciousness within each living being. It is associated with the sky and the heavens; it represents the spirit of things, the mind. The term means sky or heaven in the Welsh language.

Nwyfre in a gardening, growing, or land-healing context refers to the spirit of life flowing through every plant. This is the spark of life that encourages a seed to grow, the magic within the plant; in some forms of herbalism, it would be the spiritual energy of the plant and the plant spirit itself. Nwyfre is not a physical thing (like gwyar or calas, see below); it is the spirit behind the physical thing. Nwyfre is often what we refer to when we talk about things unseen, energies of spaces and people. Nwyfre is also the mental processes associated with gardening—the design work, the thoughtfulness, the planning and careful consideration. It's the feeling you get when you enter the garden; it's the awareness that is awakened with a sacred connection to the plants.

Gwyar (GOO-yar)

The second Druid element represents the principle of flow, movement, and change. It is associated with the energy of water (although it is not limited to it); it represents the change that is inherent in all living things. The term means flow or fluidity in Welsh, and we can refer to it as energy flows (in physical manifestation) of all kinds.

Gwyar is responsible for the change we see in plants across the season; it's the growth of the seed from spout to adult plant and finally decay; it's the flow of the seasons moving ever forward. Gwyar is the flow of sap in the maple trees that first signals spring; it's the growth of the plants, the budding and leafing of the trees, the ripening of the fruit, and the eventual composting and decay at the end of the season. Gwyar is the flows of nutrients in the great soil web of all life. It is the principle of gwyar we see in photosynthesis, the conversion of light into energy and oxygen by plants. For home brewers, it is gwyar that allows the physical fermentation and transformation of grain or fruit into alcohol. It is this principle of flow in herbalism, also, that allows the medicine to move from the plant matter into a substance such as tea or tincture. When permaculture designers talk about catching and storing energy, we are referring to harnessing the gwyar in the land for the common good (through rain barrels, swales, solar power, and so on) (for more on permaculture, see *Trilithon* volume 4, 2017).

Calas (CAH-lass)

The final druid element is calas, representing solidity or substance. Calas is the physical

manifestation of things within the world: their form, their substance, and their distinguishing features. This is the Welsh word for “hard” or “stability.”

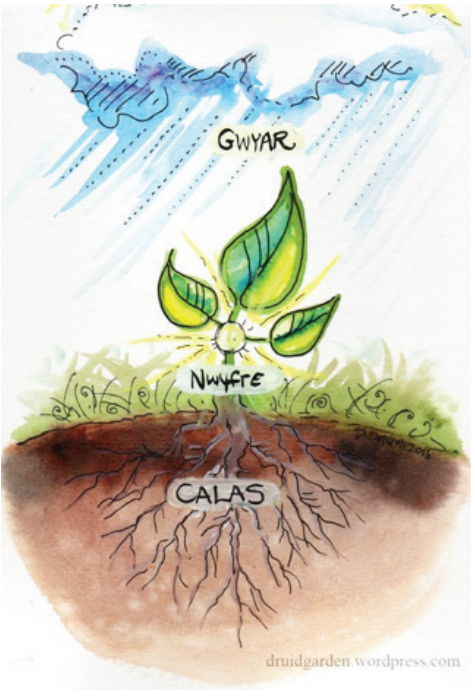


Figure 1: The three Druid elements.

of nwyfre in the laughter of the children crossing the street holding hands in the rain.

As a second example of how these elements manifest in the world, we can think about the honeybee. The honeybee’s physical body (legs, wings, abdomen, exoskeleton, eyes, tongue, and so on) represents calas. The honeybee’s flight and movement in the hive represent gwyar. The alchemical processes of the hive including the spark of life in the eggs, the nectar’s transformation into honey, and the blessing the bees bring to the land all can be represented by nwyfre.

I would suggest that if you want to use these three principles in your sacred gardening work, Druid practice, or daily life, spend time with each of them. Spend time focusing on one, meditating on one, writing about it, maybe sketching it or creating a song, and observing it in everyday life. Do the same with the other two—while these three elements are simple on the surface, profound understanding comes with dedicated study and work with them. Now that we have some understanding of the principles behind the three Druid elements, we can consider how they can be put to work in a sacred garden space.

Using Nwyfre, Gwyar, and Calas in Garden Design

One way we can use the three Druid elements is by considering their role in the garden design process and thinking about integrating them physically into our spaces. We might here think about the interplay

Calas is the physical being of the plants in the garden, the soil, the microbial life. It is calas you feel when you pick up the rich soil and run it through your fingers. It is calas that is the feeling of your tools in your hand (although it’s gwyar that makes those tools work!). It’s calas that is in the vegetables sitting in your harvest basket and ready for your plate. All of the physical manifestations of your garden—the solidity of the pathways, the size of the beds, the physical structure of the plants, the weight of the stones—these are calas.

Mapping the Elements onto the World

You can map these elements onto another triad in the Druid path—earth (calas), sea (gwyar), and sky (nwyfre). If you are interested in working with these three elements, I would start by suggesting that you spend time meditating on each of them and also spend time examining these principles at work in the world. For example, as I look down my street, I see calas in the pavement, in the trunks of the strong trees, in the physical bodies of the people walking there. I see gwyar in the rain falling on the street, in the movement of the branches in the air, in the swinging of the hands and walking of the people. I see the spark

between nwyfre (the spark of life) and the flow of water/sunlight and the land/gwyar in order to design our spaces. Let’s look at two such garden designs where these three elements can play a prominent role.



Figure 2: Sacred herb spiral.

The Herb Spiral

The herb spiral is probably the most quintessential design coming from permaculture; the spiral is built up so that the top is several feet above the earth, making it drier, and creating various small microclimates below. Some spiral designs (including mine in figure 2) include a water feature. I like the herb spiral a lot, as its simple to implement, encourages us to think about the plants and their microclimate needs, and looks great.

From a magical perspective, we can easily apply the three Druid elements to this design: the spiral itself representing nwyfre; the stones, earth, and plants representing calas; and the flow of water and areas of wetness and dryness, as well as the encouraged growth habits based on placement, represent gwyar. It’s also helpful to put a standing stone at the very top, buried a third of its height in the soil.

You’ll notice in the design drawing in figure 2 I’ve included a number of different herbs, many of them with both spiritual and medicinal significance. The top of the design starts with the herbs that like it hot and dry—rosemary and white sage being at the top of that list, perhaps with a bit of

accompanying garden sage or clary sage. From there we move into thyme and dill, who like it a bit wetter, along with echinacea (purple coneflower), a wonderful medicinal herb. Basil or lovage, too, would work wonderfully in the middle of the spiral. Chives, chamomile, and calendula fill out the bottom. Next, we get to the pool's edge. Mountain mint and boneset are two water-loving plants that would like that spot, as would any other mint. Finally, the pool itself can contain horsetail (especially if you are using sand in your pool) or calamus, two rooted and water-loving plants. This design can be modified to your own herbal interest and specific ecosystem.

A Larger Sacred Garden Spiral

We can expand the idea of the herb spiral to create a larger sacred spiral garden for vegetables, perennials, herbs, and pollinator-friendly plants. Figure 3 shows a simple design for one that honors these three elements as well as recognizing the importance of an eightfold wheel.



Figure 3: Larger spiral garden design inspired by the three Druid elements.

In this design, several stone walkways (or mulched paths) help shape the beds. All of the beds in the spiral should be no more than three to four feet across; it's harder to manage a bed any wider than four feet. The center of the garden offers a standing stone to channel solar energy into the earth as well as a sacred pool with calamus and horsetail. The edge of the pool, like the design in figure 2, is for water-loving plants, and then any herbs you want to grow work their way outward from the spiral. The outer edges (which can continue beyond what I drew) can be home to perennial berry bushes (blueberry, raspberry, gooseberry, blackberry, etc.) as well as rotating annual vegetable crops. I put nettles at the entrance to serve as guardians for the sacred space. They would require some management, but I note that so many of our forests have those kinds of protectors, and stinging nettle is not only a great guardian of spaces but an incredible medicinal and tasty food.

A Garden/Land Altar Using the Three Elements

Setting up a sacred space in your garden and acknowledging the presence of the elements is an important step to bring an intentional sense of the sacred to your space. To do this, you can use a flat stone or stump. For the three Druid elements, you might simply place a stone for calas, a bowl of water for gwyar, and some representation of nwyfre. Nwyfre might be represented by a symbol like a spiral or an Awen or else some herbs or incense (sage, mugwort, lavender, or any blend of herbs that have a strong connection with planes beyond the physical).

An alternative is to create a living altar, where you can use three plants to represent the elements: a plant with medicinal roots for calas (burdock, comfrey, dandelion, or a mushroom log), a water plant (calamus, horsetail, boneset, mountain mint, cattail, arrowroot) for gwyar, and a plant associated with the spirit realm (sweetgrass, sage) or strongly with the sky (a climbing vine like nasturtium) for nwyfre.

Two Prayers and Blessings for Garden Spaces

A Three-Element Daily Prayer

Here is a simple three-element daily prayer. I like to use something like this when I first enter the garden or at morning's first light:

Calas, the form and the shape
Gwyar, the flow and the change
Nwyfre, the spark of life
Sacred elements spiraling
Bless this [garden's/land's/place's] growing

As you say the prayer, pause after each line. If you have a simple three-element altar in your garden, you can touch the elemental representation on the altar as you pause. If you are also engaging in nature meditation, you might use your senses (inner and outer) to observe how calas, gwyar, and nwyfre manifest in your sacred garden (or surrounding landscape).

A Simple Prayer for Growing Things

This prayer, or another like it, can be used to encourage many things to grow, anything from sprouts on your counter or seeds you have started to a new garden. I use this prayer after planting my first sets of seeds in the fertile earth, transplanting seedlings, or putting in new trees or shrubs.

Say, “May the essence of the earth support you in strength.”

Pour a small bit of earth or finished compost over the growing plant, seed, or tree. If you are planting seeds, plant them at this time. As you are sprinkling the earth or planting the seeds, chant “calas” three times and envision the seed’s deep roots and the fertile earth supporting it.

Say, “May the flows of the land transmute you in harmony.”

Pour a small amount of water near the roots of the growing plant or seed. As you are pouring, chant “gwyar” three times and envision the water flowing to the seed and the seed’s growth and change.

Say, “May the spirit of life bless you in wisdom.”

Smudge the plant with a bit of herbal incense (I like sage, mugwort, rosemary, or lavender for this purpose). As you are smudging, chant “nwyfre” three times and imagine a spark of life shining outward from the center of the seed to facilitate its growth.

Say, “May the triune essence of calas, gwyar, and nwyfre infuse you with blessing and abundance.” And chant “Awen” (ah-oh-en) three times to close out the ceremony.

A Three-Element Harvest Blessing

Offering thanks for the harvest can also be done with a simple three-element blessing. This one is not verbal but rather based on movement and meditation and done in silence.

Begin by placing your hand upon the soil at the roots of the plant. Sense the solidity of the soil and the power of the roots and the soil web of life. Offer your silent thanks.

Next, hold the plant, fruit, or vegetable that you plan on harvesting in your hands. Sense within it the swirling life force, nwyfre, and send your thanks into the plant that you are harvesting from.

Harvest the plant. Next, raise your hands with the plant, fruit, or vegetable into the sky, feeling the flowing of the air and energy of the sun present.

Conclude by placing the plant in your harvest basket.

Conclusion

As you can see, the three elements of the Druid tradition provide a wonderful opportunity to work on a sacred level, creating sacred gardening practices. These kinds of practices truly contribute to a magical Druid’s garden where we might commune with nature, rebuild ecosystems, and craft our spiritual life. The above suggestions are only some potentials out of many. May the blessings and inspiration of the three Druid elements flow through your life!

A Druid Saturnalia

Max Rogers

Max 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 an apprentice for Druid apprenticeship. Her druid practice has resulted in increased contentment and a turning away from any interest in politics.

I find the culture of ancient Rome fascinating and an endless pleasure to study. I celebrate several Roman festivals, mostly the bucolic ones from the time before Rome was a republic. Saturnalia is my favorite Roman festival, and I want to share with you some of the ways we celebrate this holiday.

The festival of Saturnalia falls between December 17 and 23. December 25 is the feast day of Sol Invictus, the Unconquered Sun. From these two riotously popular festivals, the early Christians seem to have derived most of their traditions of the Christmas celebration. I celebrate both festivals.

When we first decided to celebrate Saturnalia, I invited a Christian friend to the feast. She asked what Saturnalia was. When she heard it was a Roman festival, she said, “I guess someone is going to die.” I hadn’t really been planning a *munera* (a gladiatorial competition). Saturn, who is honored by the celebration, is a very old-fashioned and egalitarian god. During his festival, all people were free and all people were equal. That is why I think my fellow Druids may be interested in this holiday.

I told her that Saturnalia was the most popular festival in ancient Rome. (It started in the city of Rome and then spread to every corner of the empire.) It was a festival especially for the delight of slaves, who got a few days off work and money to drink, gamble, and buy sweets with. The master of the house had to provide a feast for all the slaves in the household, and he, his family, and his freedmen had to serve them their meal.

Since Saturnalia is a time of feasting, I begin with menu planning. It is important to serve many small courses, pairing them with wines and liqueurs to make the evening jolly. I invite seven people

because with my spouse this makes nine guests, which is the optimal number for a traditional Roman dinner party. We invite our closest friends on the little island where we live.

We decorate the house, with a beautiful candlelit tree as one of the highlights. (We cut our trees from the unmanaged growth of an old clear-cut forest. Cutting a tree that is too close to other trees helps the remaining trees flourish.) We decorate the front door with a wreath of ivy and holly and bring in jugs of holly to decorate the house.

When all the guests arrive, I proclaim, “Today, all men are free and all men are equal.” The guests all shout out “To Saturnalia” (pronounced “E-O Saturnalia”), and I think this pleases the god Saturn immensely. It must feel very good to hear his name ring out with such gusto after so many hundreds of years of being forgotten by his children.

Likewise, the Opalia, the festival of Saturn’s wife, Ops, is celebrated on December 19. Saturn is the sower of crops and Ops is the abundant Mother Earth. Macrobius (full name Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, also known as Theodosius), author of the *Saturnalia*, a collection of ancient Roman religious and cultural lore, tells us that prayers to Ops were always made sitting on the ground so the speaker would be in closer contact with her. Unpopular emperors shortened the celebration, but it usually stretched out for most of a week of riotous partying.

The festival continued to have great popularity until the fourth century CE, when the new state religion of Rome, Christianity, forbade any pagan festivals.¹ As the entire population still feasted and enjoyed themselves, the Christians seem to have decided to celebrate the birth of their god at the same time. Many scholars think this is why there are so many parallels between Christmas and Saturnalia.

The temple of Saturn, in the Forum Romanum, was the oldest temple in Rome, and the ivory-cult statue of Saturn was said to have been stolen from the Etruscans, early on when Rome was a monarchy, before the Republic. For this reason, the legs of the statue were bound with bands of wool, to prevent Saturn from walking back to his Etruscan home. Only during Saturnalia were the bands removed and the god freed, so it was a time of great freedom for all. No courts could be convened nor wars declared during Saturnalia. It was a time for feasting, for not being serious, and for having a good time with your friends.

Each family elected or held a lottery to choose a Lord of Misrule, who would ensure that lots of drink flowed to revelers and who would sometimes give commands such as, “Sing naked!” The Lord of Misrule was sometimes selected by putting a coin in a cake—the person who found the coin was the lucky one chosen. Similar customs, and many others, related to Saturnalia lasted into the Middle Ages and beyond, even into our own rather dull time.

¹ Emperor Theodosius (reigned 381–395 CE) decreed a ban on paganism. Pagan holidays were abolished. Anyone caught practicing traditional religious practices received a death sentence and had their property confiscated. This even applied to celebrating familial rites privately in the home. The sacred fire of the Vestal Virgins was extinguished. The order of the Vestals was disbanded. Temples were vandalized and plundered of their treasures. The emperor removed the Altar of Victory from the Senate House. They didn’t really need it anymore as the gods were so insulted they abandoned Rome and the Western Empire. The city of Rome fell in 476 CE.

Public gambling was illegal, but during Saturnalia was allowed. People diced openly for nuts and coins. Games and theatrical events were held where the audience was showered with sweets and fruit. Special spiced wine, called *mulsum*, was served for the festival and at other great events, such as the *Triumph of a Successful General*.

To make *mulsum*, Apicius, author of “De Re Coquinaria” (On Cooking), the only cookbook to come down to us from Roman times, says to take a cup of white wine and a pound of honey and heat it in a saucepan until dissolved. Add a teaspoon of ground pepper (some scholars who translate these recipes suggest he meant nutmeg, which makes more sense to me), a pinch of ground saffron, a crushed bay leaf or spikenard leaf, one teaspoon of ground cinnamon (or mastic), and two dates. Mix this well and add three and a half quarts of white wine. Serve at room temperature with the first course, the *gustatio*, or serve hot to complement an evening of pleasant conversation.

We serve a similar mulled wine, the German *Glühwein*, which differs from *mulsum* in having orange juice and grated orange rind in it. We also use the rosé wine we make from a collection of different grape varieties in our tiny vineyard.

On December 17, before my guests arrive, I open a Grove in the usual way and then invoke Saturn and ask for fertility and good fortune. I have a small farm, and I feel Saturn really is the right deity to ask for protection of my flock, gardens, orchard, and pastures. Other Druids will choose to invoke other gods with very good results, I am sure. Even Druids who do not farm the land can ask for blessings on the land and forests around them.

I use the Grove ritual out of *The Druidry Handbook*, but when I come to speak to Saturn, I first loosen my long hair from its French braid to show that I am now unbound and free as I should be to celebrate the Saturnalia. I speak to the god directly without a script and simply ask for his blessing and that he prosper my farm, my animals, and my family.

After that, we decorate the tree with antique ornaments, painted goose eggs, and red and white candles in special holders that clip on the branches. We set lit candles around the room, because Saturnalia is also a festival of light returning to the world.

After the guests have arrived, I start the first course with an egg dish because every formal Roman meal began with eggs and finished with fruit. They had a saying, “from eggs to apples,” which meant to do something completely. The dishes served for the *gustatio* are small and light. I usually serve deviled eggs or little sizzling hot omelets folded over cheese and served with *Glühwein* or home-bottled juice and club soda. Trays of pickles, olives, pâté, hummus, and antipasto are set on the coffee table along with homemade crackers. We make most of the dishes for this feast from produce from our farm. We produce our own wine, as well. My guests always tease me about not growing the olives myself! Our guests love all the tiny courses.

For the *fercula*, the main course, I usually serve something easy to eat, such as sliced sautéed duck breast, spiced lamb rissoles, steamed vegetables or a salad, and sliced bread and butter, paired with a simple red wine. The feast takes place on a low table, because I do not have a proper *triclinum* with couches for my guests. We manage sitting around the coffee table, but the food needs to be

easy to eat one-handed. With so many little dishes set out, it is important to keep the *fercula* light because the guests still have to get through the *mensae secundae*, the dessert.

For the dessert, I put out dishes of *membrillo*, a sort of bright-tasting fruit leather we make from quince and honey, an aged cheese made from my sheep milk, and an apple pie made with our apples and home-rendered lard. (If you have never tried real pork lard in pastry, you are missing out!) After this, I serve glasses of homemade liqueurs, which are really easy and inexpensive to make. My signature liqueur is *rosolio*, which is made from spirits, honey, and wild rose petals. So you see this feast is a culmination of the whole year’s work on our farm, and our guests really enjoy it.

Being on December 17, Saturnalia makes a great beginning to the festive season. It is easy for guests to come because the season is not too advanced and there is not too much competition. It is also a good holiday to share with secular and Abrahamic friends, as it is not too threatening. After all, who can argue with a day of freedom and equality?

I hope I have given you enough ideas on how you too can start your own Saturnalia tradition. I have yet to mention gifts because that is not a big part of the festival. Small gifts of candles, sweets, or nuts were exchanged to signal a close relationship. We still have some of the Saturnalia gifts from Roman times, because they used to give gag gifts of beautiful ceramic sweets and other silly things. So let your hearts be light at Saturnalia and enjoy this lovely festival!

Bibliography

Greer, John Michael. *The Druidry Handbook: Spiritual Practice Rooted in the Living Earth*. Boston: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2006.

Macrobius. *Saturnalia*, vol. 1, books 1–2. Edited and translated by Robert A. Kaster. Loeb Classical Library 510. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.

“Theodosius I.” *New World Encyclopedia*, November 24, 2015. http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Theodosius_I&oldid=992275.

Giving Story to the Gundestrup Cauldron

Drawing on Archaeological Evidence, History, and Bardic Vision

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 folklore 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, Ovates and Druids, working on becoming a tutor and Druid celebrant. Several of Christian’s articles have been published in “Touchstone”, OBOD’s monthly newsletter, “Druidenstein”, OBOD’s German magazine, and previous Trilithons. He is also the Author of three books in German: a novel, a cookbook for the eight festivals of the year (which is being translated into English), and a book on his research on Alpine lore and customs. The latter is available in English under the title “Mountain Magic: Celtic Shamanism in the Austrian Alps” (at www.lulu.com and other online bookstores like amazon.com and Barnes and Noble).

The cow licked salty ice blocks. After one day of licking, she freed a man’s hair from the ice. After two days, his head appeared. On the third day the whole man was there. His name was Buri, and he was tall, strong, and handsome. Buri begot a son named Bor, and Bor married Bestla, the daughter of a giant. Bor and Bestla had three sons: Odin was the first, Vili the second, and Vé the third.

Prose Edda

Uranus and Gaia had many children together and eventually they had grand-children. Some of the children became afraid of the power of their own children. Kronos, in an effort to protect himself, swallowed his children when they were still infants. However, his wife Rhea hid their youngest child. She gave Kronos a rock

wrapped in swaddling clothes, which he swallowed, thinking it was his son.

Once the child, Zeus, had reached manhood his mother instructed him on how to trick his father to give up his brothers and sisters. Once this was accomplished the children fought a mighty war against their father. After much fighting the younger generation won. With Zeus as their leader, they began to furnish Gaia with life and Uranus with stars.

Greek creation myth

The well-known Celtic preference not to put anything of a spiritual nature into writing—to avoid it becoming stale and deprived of further creative expansion—has left us with a number of voids and a lot of questions. For example, we do not have a sense whether all Celtic tribes have a common genesis. Perhaps this is because the Celts are not a single people, but rather a conglomeration of tribes and peoples, each of which had their own tale of origin, but none significant enough to survive the grinding millstones of time. Perhaps this was a story Christian monks did not dare put to parchment, for it conflicted just too much with their own ideas. Or perhaps there was simply no story to tell.

Most peoples on this globe have explained their beginnings through a story of how the world and particularly the human species came into being. It is thus almost unthinkable that the Celts didn't have some lore around this matter as well, defining themselves as a conscious species. But what would that story have been? What was the origin song the Druids of old recited within their tribe? What might have caused children and adults alike to sit with gaping mouths and wide eyes at the hearth fire, listening to the story of how they had come to exist?

Today we can only assume. But we do have glimpses into our past that allow us to piece together a possible scenario, a story that may have fascinated young and old.

In this article, I would like to delve into one of these glimpses, based on an item crafted beautifully in silver and brought from somewhere in the Danube river valley all the way to Denmark, for a reason about which we can only speculate: the Gundestrup Cauldron. Probably fashioned by a Thracian silversmith (though possibly on commission by a Celt), the cauldron depicts scenes and figures seemingly telling a story of gods and magical beasts now familiar to those who study Celtic mythology, history, and folklore.

What was that story? Was it Celtic to begin with? And if so, was it so well known that a non-Celtic craftsman could hammer such detailed and inspiring imagery into plates of silver, conserving the tale for the future without writing a single letter?

Theories about the cauldron's motifs abound. Few are as compelling to me as the one pitched by the late Strasbourg archaeologist Jean-Jacques Hatt, a specialist on the old gods of the Gauls. Hatt pointed out elements similar to the Gundestrup Cauldron's story that appear on several Gallo-Roman reliefs, such as the Fishermen's Pillar in Paris and other reliefs in Saintes, France, and Trier, Germany. From his studies, Hatt put to paper a well-supported argument about what the pictures on the plates could mean, and even attempted a correlation between them.

Of course, Hatt was an archaeologist, a scientist. I, on the other hand, though fascinated by science, approached the story as a Bard, not with mere fact finding in mind but with engrossing

storytelling as my aim, even if applying artistic license lavishly meant embellishing a few dry facts into a grandiose tale. This is nothing new, though. It's something Bards have done for eons, stirred by the poetic inspiration we know as Awen, sometimes using the technique the Irish call *imbas forosnai*. We know from stories that the Bards of old would withdraw into a dark room, a small cave maybe, limiting any sensory stimuli other than the weight of a stone on the solar plexus. From other Celtic lands we learn that sometimes all that is needed to instigate bardic creativity are three drops of a certain potion. And further north, the Skalds of Iceland let us know that imbibing mead is what calls forth poetic inspiration. However one goes about this prophetic work, the core of bardic creativity is to call upon divine inspiration and come up with a captivating tale.

The Story

How the Old Gods Came into Being

A long, long time ago, when dragons still ruled the land and the mountains spit fire, the oldest of all gods, Dis Pater, came back from his travels through the vast expanses of the dark night skies. With his bright helmet and shiny cloak, he appeared on the horizon, soon to be seen in his full glory of ice and fire. Excited about his return, he and his wife, a mighty goddess of equal age and wisdom, made love for a whole month. From this reunion, their first son Taranis was born. But Dis Pater had to journey on, and did not return for another seventy-six years. But when that time came, he again lay with his beloved consort and sired his second son, Esus. Another seventy-six years later, Teutates, the youngest, was born. Dis Pater traveled on, returning every seventy-six years to feast and to bed his consort, the mighty goddess of old. However, as the eons passed, Dis Pater became old and weary and could no longer satisfy his wife. But, having sired three sons, the old god yearned for a daughter. Knowing that the strength of youth had receded from his loins, he suggested to the goddess that she should offer her thighs to Belenus, the sun, to have a daughter with him. So the goddess bade farewell to her beloved husband, and he gave her a beautiful white horse. And she mounted it and rode into the sky. Dis Pater watched as she slowly disappeared, growing smaller and smaller every day. And after a fortnight had passed, he no longer could see the white horse, and he knew that she had consummated her new marriage with the Shining One. From this union sprang Anu, the Mother Goddess.



Figure 1: The old god, Dis Pater (God the Father), the dragon tamer (not slayer).

The old goddess, however, remained torn between her admiration for her former husband and her passion for the new one. And thus she continued to ride her white horse along the firmament; some days she would leave the court of Belenus, and Dis Pater would see her approaching his castle, the white horse becoming larger and larger. Then, after she had shown her full beauty to her husband of old, she would ride back to Belenus, growing dimmer and dimmer until she united with the Bright One.

Dis Pater and Belenus loved the Maiden goddess equally, and outdid each other with gifts to her: white-capped mountains and lakes glittering like diamonds, coats of forests and shawls of grass, and animals of all forms and colors—even one species that could walk on two legs and make fire. And as much as the Maiden's fathers loved her, she loved them back. She vowed to never leave Belenus and her mother's side and to stay near both of them for all eternity. And whenever Dis Pater came to visit the realms of Belenus and the White Goddess of the night sky, the Maiden made sure to bring forth extra abundance at harvest time, so that the creatures she nurtured and protected could shine in their best light, to please the visitor from the dark corners of the universe.

The Old Gods Come of Age

When Dis Pater's sons came of age, it was ancient tradition that their father would assign each one a personal duty. His eldest, Taranis, had dark, long hair, olive skin, and a great, dark beard. But despite all those dark features, he had the brightest blue eyes anyone has ever seen. When his gaze fell upon you, it felt as if lightning blinded your eyes. Taranis was also known to anger easily, his voice shouting like a clap of thunder. Thus, Dis Pater decided that Taranis was to be the ruler of the sky.



Figure 2: Esus in the form of Cernunnos, the horned god. He holds his brother, Teutates, symbolized by the ram-headed serpent, in one hand, and a torque in the other. He sits between stag and wolf, so that the latter cannot go after the former. On the right, a dead person rides to the islands of the dead on a dolphin. He is chased by a beast, symbolizing the potential for a cowardly death, but led on by a massive bull.

appropriate. But Teutates begged and pleaded and argued until Dis Pater gave in and ruled that his youngest should be responsible for these particular creatures. Teutates's stubbornness became legendary among the people, who would say that he was strong-headed like a ram in spring. They also were

in awe of his great godly powers and thought of him as the Great Worm. Later generations would call him a dragon.

Deciding on the duty of Esus was a different matter. He was neither the oldest nor the youngest, and liked all the creatures roaming the land, not only the humans. He was drawn neither to the sky nor to the water. So Dis Pater waited a fortnight, until his former wife came to visit him once again. When he saw her on the fifteenth night in her full beauty, he called upon her and her wisdom, to decide what would become of Esus.

And so they agreed that he should be the ruler of the animals half the time, and ruler of the underworld the other half of the time. Esus was content with his parents' decision, for he did not enjoy being in one place for any long period anyway. During the light half of the year, he even shape-shifted into an animal, wearing a set of mighty antlers, growing a thick coat of hair over his entire body, and having hooves instead of feet. He strove to be the best ruler of his kingdom, and he would hold court to hear the complaints of every animal. And so it came that he would pass judgment on the relationship between stag and wolf.

However, Esus was only able to do that for half a year. When he no longer roamed through the forests and made sure that the animals respect the laws of nature, he retreated into the underworld to spend the other half there when nature withdrew from the onslaught of winter.

He was not idle there either, for Esus was king to the souls his brother Teutates sent into his realm. But only cravens had to descend into the underworld, chased by ferocious dogs. Brave heroes were allowed to ride on to the Summerlands. Esus was, however, very lonely during the dark half of the year in his dark, underworld realm.

He was not idle there either, for Esus was king to the souls his brother Teutates sent into his realm. But only cravens had to descend into the underworld, chased by ferocious dogs. Brave heroes were allowed to ride on to the Summerlands. Esus was, however, very lonely during the dark half of the year in his dark, underworld realm.

At that time, it so happened that the other child of the old White Goddess, the daughter she had with Belenus, came of age as well. She had grown to be the most beautiful woman that ever was. But, like Esus, she was restless, too, and no god could call her his own. When she slept, the plants withered and the land froze. But when she roamed the earth, she became green and produced plenty of food for all living creatures. Taranis fell in love with the beautiful goddess when he first laid eyes on her. He filled his lungs with air and blew it out so hard that the creaking of the trees could be heard for leagues.

Anu and Her Lovers

At that time, it so happened that the other child of the old White Goddess, the daughter she had with Belenus, came of age as well. She had grown to be the most beautiful woman that ever was. But, like Esus, she was restless, too, and no god could call her his own. When she slept, the plants withered and the land froze. But when she roamed the earth, she became green and produced plenty of food for all living creatures. Taranis fell in love with the beautiful goddess when he first laid eyes on her. He filled his lungs with air and blew it out so hard that the creaking of the trees could be heard for leagues.



Figure 3: Teutates (his curly hair resembling the ram's horns) passes judgment on two fallen soldiers. Both bring him a boar as a sacrifice, but while the one on the right is a coward who is chased into the underworld by a ferocious dog about to devour him, the brave soldier on the left will journey into the Summerlands.



Figure 4: The Maiden goddess with her long hair stands between two gods. Based on their hair and beards, they can be identified as Taranis (left) and Esus/Cernunnos (without antlers) on the right.

months. And he looked as handsome as ever. Anu gazed upon the god and fell in love instantly. Esus invited her to his cavern to seek shelter from the cold storms, and she agreed with delight.

Now it was custom in these older days that a woman could offer her thighs to anyone she wanted to. But Taranis, who saw his wife disappearing with his brother, was furious. He summoned the darkest clouds like a horde of hellhounds and sent them over the lovers' cave. In his jealous rage, Taranis grabbed his most terrible weapon of all, the lightning wheel, and threw it down upon Esus and Anu. It was as if a god of war descended from the skies, exploding as he touched the earth.



Figure 5: Taranis holds a wheel, symbol of his power and of lightning. The warlike figure's posture is akin to a lightning bolt. Beasts left and right symbolize the dark thunder clouds, whereas the griffins are typically attributed to Belenus and the ram-headed serpent to Teutates.

But it was hard for Taranis to approach Anu to tell her of his love. Every day, Belenus jealously watched over his daughter from dawn to dusk. Yet she had fallen for Taranis as well and wanted to make love with him without her father seeing them from his perch high up in the sky. So Taranis covered the land with a layer of clouds, under which he and Anu could frolic without being seen.

One autumn day, when Taranis began to send the cold winds of the north over the land and the trees dropped their leaves and the animals sought shelter in their nests, Anu walked upon the land for the last time, just as Esus emerged from the deep forest. In preparation for his annual descent into the underworld, he had just dropped his antlers, which he, as Cernunnos, had worn with pride over the past

But seeing that was too much for Anu's father, Belenus. He could not witness his daughter being treated that way without interfering, and so the sun god sent his army of griffins into the dark clouds, to disperse and lighten them, and to transform them into rain, thus watering the land before winter came. Anu stayed with Esus all winter long. When they awakened and looked at each other, they were overcome by passion and made love for a whole fortnight. Anu became pregnant and bore so much fruit and crops that animals and people had plenty for the whole year.



Figure 6: An army of mounted knights with decorated helmets and foot soldiers armed with lances and shields march on, led by Teutates (the ram-headed serpent). In the rear we see an officer with a longer sword, and the musicians with their carnyxes. On the right, the Druid revives fallen soldiers in the Cauldron of Rebirth. The soldiers carry a leafy tree.



Figure 7: The mother goddess (Anu) appears in the sky, symbolized by the rosettes. She is protected by the strongest animals known to the Celts, elephants. The beast underneath her is flanked by her father's griffins.

Teutates, knowing his brother's ire, summoned a large army of warriors to accompany Anu on her ascent to the sky. A great parade of soldiers appeared, with lances and ornate shields. Their officer wore a beautiful helmet and was armed with a long sword, and his dog charged ahead. Musicians accompanied the army's march with tremendous sounds from their carnyxes, and the troops carried a tall tree with them, for the goddess to climb up into the sky. A Druid bathed soldiers who fell

But spring was also the time when Esus changed. His hair began to cover his whole body, and he grew a mighty set of antlers. He had to leave Anu and roam freely in the deep forests. Anu understood. She had given the gift of plenty to the world, and so it was time for her to be with her other husband, Taranis, for a while. But would he accept her back in his lofty fortress in the sky?



Figure 8: With the help of their dogs, the people hunt for the sacred bulls in a mystical forest. Taranis's beasts overshadow the scene.

in the battle against the sky god in the Cauldron of Rebirth so that they could continue their strife in protection of the Earth Mother. A vanguard of mounted knights stormed ahead under the banner of the ram-headed great worm. With so much help, Anu ascended to the skies again to be with her summer husband, Taranis.

The People Worship Anu

Now that it was summer, Anu lived with her husband, Taranis. The people looked up and saw her ruling the sky, protected by her father's beasts. Taranis sent clouds and rain over the land to water it and ensure the health of the crops. And when it was enough, or sometimes too much, his father-in-law, Belenus, would send his griffins against the thundering clouds of Anu's ill-tempered husband.



Figure 9: A god accepts the sacrificed stags (probably from the scene on the missing plate) with a smile.

And when the people had brought in the harvest, they wanted to thank the gods for their support: Anu for her gifts, which she had brought forth with the help of Esus; Taranis for the water he sent down onto the earth; Belenus for the warmth he provided; Cernunnos for the beauty and balance of nature; the old White Goddess for illuminating the night sky; and Teutates for all his help to his beloved creatures, the humans. And every seventy-six years or so, they also celebrated the return of Dis Pater, visiting the creation he and the old White Goddess had brought forth.

And to celebrate their devotion to the gods, the people went into the deep forest to hunt down three mighty bulls and three mighty stags. They sacrificed the bulls and the stags. The god accepted the gifts.

The Annual Battle over the Maiden

The people loved the Maiden Anu so much that they, with the help of Teutates, aided the goddess in her descent into the underworld each year. Her father Belenus sent her a raven, informing the goddess of Taranis's rage over having to share his wife with his brother once more. The soldier and his dog, both of whom Teutates sent as the vanguard to protect the goddess during her descent, were slain by the sky god's vengeful beast. But then the hero Smertrius entered the eternal battle and killed the beast Taranis had sent after his wife, and celebrated their victory. And so Anu's maidens braided her hair and made her beautiful for her return to her lover Esus. When that was done, the maidens shape-shifted into cranes and thus were able to accompany their lady to Esus's realm.

So it happened every year that the goddess descended to be with Esus at Samhain, and ascended to be with Taranis at Beltane, ensuring an everlasting balance of life. And to ensure that Anu and Esus would mate every year to bring forth a plentiful harvest, the people prayed and the Druid would embark on a journey into the Otherworld to meet the hero Smertrius.

When he approached the hero, the Druid told Smertrius that the people had successfully hunted the sacred bulls and stags and that the animals would be sacrificed in honor of Anu, so that she could escape the underworld in spring and walk the land once more. Smertrius celebrated and protected the bull from dogs and beasts.

The Story's Foundations

When crafting a song of gods and men, and particularly of their creation, from images



Figure 10: A woman braids the hair of the goddess, who receives her father's messenger raven. Taranis's hound chases one of the cranes, which is a maid of the goddess traveling into the underworld. The beast has already slain a soldier and his dog.



Figure 11: The goddess Anu smiles as the hero Smertrius kills the beast Taranis had sent (left), after which Smertrius celebrates his victory with a dance.



Figure 12: The Druid touches the god Belenus in devotion and is therefore allowed into the underworld. There he meets the hero Smertrius, who celebrates.



Figure 13: The sacrificed bull (whose horns are missing) are protected by the hero Smertrius against Taranis's dogs.

rather than from well-known tales, one must obviously concede that none of it can claim to have been a story told in ancient times. Yet there are, of course, a few guidelines that help in fleshing out the figures and scenes we see on the Gundestrup Cauldron.

One such guideline is that it is believed that the Celts of Gaul and even the earlier ones might not have worshipped their gods in a quasi-human form, but rather as personifications of the most important components that made up their lives: the sky, the sun, the moon, weather, nature, and the underworld. This is not unlike the very old gods of the Greeks, for example, when Kronos was simply time or Gaia was the earth.

When I began attributing such basic concepts to the figures on the cauldron, it felt as though Dis Pater would be the original creator. Through his association with dragons and the fact that he does not play a big role in the everlasting changes of seasons and the eternal feud between sky and earth gods, he may as well have been a rare visitor, like Halley's comet (which is why I chose the time period of seventy-six years between his encounters with the old goddess).

For the latter, I had two possible entities to choose from: the moon and the earth. The moon being a figure of the night sky as much as the comet, and considering that creation comes forth from darkness, it made more sense to choose the nightly moon as Dis Pater's consort. Also, the earth goddess, in spring being the Maiden, seemed more appropriate to be the younger daughter of the old goddess. And finally, the concept of an ancient White Goddess made the moon feel the better choice. Interestingly enough,

though, there is no plate on the cauldron that shows the moon. Yet it is inconceivable that this celestial body would not play an important role in the creation myth. Thus I borrowed an image from the later story of Rhiannon to describe the interactions between Dis Pater and the White Goddess.

From there, I was able to follow Jean-Jacques Hatt's thoughts on what the plates show, only in a different order. But since the cauldron was found in pieces, there is no final word on the order of the plates as of yet.

All I had to do was to meditate deeply on the images the Thracian silversmith drove into the metal plates. Lying on the hard floor of my basement, or in the grass in my backyard during moonless nights, with a beautiful specimen of amethyst resting on my solar plexus, the little figures and beasts on the plates came to life. I could hear the carnyx honk its intimidating battle cries, the barks of the ferocious dogs and the hisses of the savage beasts. The maidens sang ancient tunes when braiding the goddess's hair and thunder struck when Taranis hurtled his terrible wheel to Earth.

Creating and telling stories is a core element of bardic life, and so fulfilling. Yet is that the end of this story? Certainly not. So why fret over the lack of written knowledge left behind by the Celts? Rather, let's connect with beautiful imagery like that depicted on the Gundestrup Cauldron, invoke the flow of Awen, and create our own story of gods and humans.

Bibliography

Krön, P. *Die Kelten in Mitteleuropa: Salzburger Landesausstellung im Keltenmuseum Hallein, Österreich*. Salzburg: Amt der Salzburger Landesregierung, Kulturabteilung, 1980. (Exhibition catalogue, *The Celts in Central Europe*, Museum of Celtic Culture in Hallein, Salzburg, Austria)
Hatt, John-Jacques. *Celts and Gallo-Romans*. London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970.

By the Light of the Moon

Gardening in Harmony with the Lunar Cycle

William Herrington

Will joined AODA in 2014 and is presently working through the second degree curriculum. He is also a GCC deacon as well as a student in the Dolmen Arch course.

During my candidate year, I developed a keen interest in the practical application of coordinating my efforts with the energy of natural cycles. I began not only by paying attention to those which are obvious, such as the seasonal changes, but by seeking out less overt cycles and observing the influences attributed to them, such as the moon's effect on plants. I learned early on that prior to their abandonment during the Industrial Revolution, these practices were in common use stretching back into antiquity. There seems only one reasonable explanation for the persistence of these patterns and beliefs: they worked.

My small garden became a wonderful do-it-yourself laboratory for exploring these hidden influences, particularly how working in harmony with astrological lunar cycles impacted the growth of my garden. Along with providing some of our food, a place for physical exercise, and a venue for conversation, my garden was a familiar, semiregulated environment, where results from any experiment would become clear to me in a short span of time—an ideal space to observe these subtle forces in action.

I should note that my intent here is not to provide an in-depth treatise on astrological understandings of the moon and its cycles, or the complex relationship between plants and planets. There are many published works that cover this academic information in depth for interested parties. Instead, this is an effort to share with you a specific practice I have used successfully to improve my garden, one you may be interested in trying yourself. Again, for that purpose it is not important why gardening according to lunar cycles works; it is only important that it does work.

The method I use is very simple. It amounts to nothing more than purposely scheduling various gardening chores to be done when the moon is in both a phase and sign conducive to that chore. For instance, I plant when the moon is waxing (first and second quarters, or new moon to full moon) and is in a sign promoting fertility such as Scorpio, Cancer, or Pisces. During a waning moon (third and fourth quarters, or full moon to new moon) in a dry, barren sign, I weed and remove pests. Aries, Gemini, and



Figure 1: *Around the Moon* by Jules Verne
Drawn by Émile-Antoine Bayard and Alphonse de
Neuville (1872)

Leo have all given me good results. I will admit I do favor Leo, as it is my birth sign, but in all honesty, it hasn't demonstrated greater efficacy than the others.

I sow seeds, plant, or transplant during a waxing moon in a fertile sign, and I weed, prune, or remove pests when the moon is waning and in a barren sign. That's all there is to it. Using this guideline, more of my seedlings survive transplanting, produce better, and appear to be less prone to disease. Of course, these are personal and subjective observations. I'm not concerned with how much bigger the plants grow or how many more tomatoes there are per plant. For me, it is enough to know that there are more.

All of the information needed to apply this to your garden can be conveniently found in the current edition of *Llewellyn's Moon Sign Book*. This almanac, published annually since 1905, contains tables covering moon phase and sign for each day of the year. Along with gardening, material is included for using the lunar influence to benefit a number of other activities, such as brewing beer. *Astrological Gardening* by Louise Riotte, originally published in 1989, also contains a wealth of practical knowledge interspersed with interesting information such as how the behavior of birds and bees changes before a rain. I use both books as references for

my own work in the garden and recommend them to anyone seeking to harmonize their lifestyle with natural cycles.

In closing, let me remind readers that we are engaging with subtle influences here, and while they are useful, they are also limited. For instance, a waxing moon in a fertile sign is not going to overcome immediate meteorological conditions causing a drought. The meteorological conditions have a much stronger effect.

May you be blessed in your Druid works by the holy powers of nature.

References

Llewellyn's Moon Sign Book. Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn, 2017.

Riotte, Louise. *Astrological Gardening*. Pownal, VT: Garden Way, 1989.

Connection as the Core Spiritual Philosophy in the Druid Tradition

Dana O'Driscoll

Dana O'Driscoll spent most of her childhood in the wooded hills of the Laurel Highlands region of 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 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 natural building. Dana joined AODA in 2005 and, after completing her first and second degrees, earned the degree of Druid Adept in 2013. Her writings on Druidry and sustainability can be found at the Druid's Garden (druidgarden.wordpress.com).

In a comparative study of religion, it appears that all religions (or spiritual paths) have a set of core orientations or philosophies that form the underlying foundation upon which the religion and practice rests. This core philosophy is like the seed from which the entire tree of the religion grows. The tree that grows from the seed might branch in different directions, but all of those branches tie back clearly to that single seed. For example, in many forms of Christianity, we might see that core seed as salvation; this seed forms the bulk of Christian thought, belief, and action. In some forms of Buddhist thought, the seed is freedom from suffering. This core orientation helps shape the path, forms the foundation of what is considered right thought and right action on that path, gives the path purpose, and offers particular gifts to its practitioners or to the broader world. And most importantly, this core orientation drives a number of underlying morals, values, and assumptions that practitioners of that path hold.

Druidry is many things to many people, and the joke is that if you ask five different Druids about what Druidry is, you'll likely get seven different answers. As scattered and diverse as the modern Druid movement seems to be, and even as diverse as AODA itself is, I believe that we too have a core philosophy and at least three expressions of that philosophy. And so, in this article, I'll explore and articulate what I believe to be the core underlying philosophy of Druidry: connection.

Sources of Inspiration

The flow of Awen for this article comes from a few places. First, part of my insight comes from being in a leadership role as the Archdruid of Water in the AODA. In that role, I interact with many Druids at multiple points along their paths. This includes those new to Druidry—I hear about what they are seeking, what they hope to find, and why they joined the tradition. Later, I see them as they move through our curriculum, deepening their own understanding and interaction with nature. I also read the exams at the end of their time working through parts of our curriculum—so I'm hearing of the experiences of many on the Druid path who have taken up this spiritual practice in a serious way. Second, part of my inspiration is personal; it comes from my experience in working through the complete curriculum in two Druid orders, AODA (first, second, and third degrees) and OBOD (the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids' Bardic, Ovate, and Druid courses) and coming to deep understandings over a decade of time about that work. Finally, I have attended and been part of many gatherings, online groups, and various initiatives in the Druid community in the midwestern and eastern United States. This article represents a synthesis of what I've read and discussed with others, and what I've generally understood over a period of time. But there is also another piece here—I'm also considering the overall trajectory of the Druid tradition itself: not what we are or were, but where we are heading and what potential exists for Druidry in the future.

On the Druid Revival

To understand what I believe to be the underlying core philosophy of Druidry, we first need to delve into the history of the Druid Revival and then move up to the present day. As Grand Archdruid Emeritus John Michael Greer has noted in multiple places, it is no coincidence that the very roots of the Druid Revival were established at the same time that industrialization rose in the British Isles. Farmers and peasants who had lived, sustained, and tended the land for countless generations were driven from their homes to work in factories (e.g., by the highland clearances and enclosure acts in Scotland in the eighteenth century).¹ During this time, we see the rise in machine-based worldviews, that is, that humans are machines (and can work like machines, act like machines), and that nature is just another machine (we see the outcome of this thinking everywhere today, particularly in industrialized agriculture).

Our spiritual ancestors watched this scene unfolding: the land stripped of her resources for industrialization and progress, the growing emphasis on produced goods over communities, the rampant pollution and exploitation, the relegating of humans, animals, and the land to the status of a machine. It was during this time that our spiritual ancestors reached deep—and creatively—into their own history to return to an earlier time when humans and nature were connected. This of course, describes not only the work of Iolo Morganwg (*Barddas*) but many of his contemporaries. The Druid Revival sought to reconnect with nature through ancient roots in a time when society was heading in the opposite direction. I believe it is the same reason that people today are so drawn to the Druid tradition—something is missing for them and a big part of that something is a connection with the living earth.

¹ Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances*.

Now, a lot of the early Druid Revival works and authors have been discredited for creating texts they claimed were ancient, drawing upon found materials that they had created themselves.²I find these attempts to discredit Revival authors problematic because they do not understand these texts in their own context. These early attempts at bringing back the ancient Druid traditions, I believe, were people’s response to living in an age that was quickly stripping the lands of their resources and filling the skies and rivers with pollution. They were working within the ethical and citation traditions of their age (and not ours) and seeking a response for their time. To me, the most important thing here is that our practice in the Druid Revival movement (of which AODA is a part) is descended from these original Druid Revival works, and that tradition was a spiritual response that emerged during the very beginnings of the current age of industrialization. These historical roots offer us much wisdom as we are living with the outcomes and consequences of the same industrial force.

Industrialization, with so much promise at the time, brought much harm not only to our living earth but to the preindustrial communities, customs, and ancestral legacy of the common people. The persistence and growth of the modern Druid tradition in these times, then, is not surprising. For over 300 years, our tradition has sought sources of inspiration and reconnection from the ancient Druids. It is in this perpetual seeking of reconnection that we can see how Druidry is, in some ways, a very human response to the larger wheels of industrialization that have been thrust upon most of us in the Western world. In other words, Druidry is us finding our way home.

Overall Druid Philosophy: The Power of Connection

What our spiritual ancestors in the Druid Revival were seeking, I believe, was (re)connection, a way to have a closer relationship with the living earth and with their own heritage. Through this history, we can see the seed planted that has grown into the modern Druid movement. It is this same connection that draws so many to the Druid path today and keeps so many of us practicing this spiritual tradition.

In the modern Druid movement, it is through the power of connection that we rekindle and learn how to cultivate a sacred relationship with nature, how to find and express our own creative gifts, and how to practice our path in a way that brings us wholeness and joy. When people come to the Druid path, this connection is what they often are seeking.³

In this way, Druidry is a direct response to the disconnection that those living in Westernized culture have experienced: seeking to reconnect with nature, with our own gifts, and with ourselves. So now, I’m going to walk through three expressions of this underlying philosophy as connection through nature, connection to one’s creative gifts and arts, and connection to one’s spirit. These certainly aren’t the only expressions possible—but I do see them as central to Druidry today.

2 See, for example, Constantine, *The Truth Against the World*.

3 As an aside, interestingly enough, there are at least two denominations of Druidry (philosophies deriving from the Druid Revival and those breaking with the revival and seeking to reconstruct ancient Celtic religions). While all are descended from the Druid Revival traditions, in the 1970s some went on to seek to reconstruct ancient Druid practices and teachings. I think that these two currents of Druidry do still share an underlying core philosophy of connection, even if it manifests incredibly differently and may not have the same three expressions I share below.

Connecting to Nature

To say that the Druid path is about nature seems obvious—but Druidry is more than just being about nature. I can read books about nature and never set foot in the forest; I can know things about nature without ever connecting to it through the heart. Book knowledge alone does not give me a connection to nature, but simply some disconnected facts about it. When people ask what Druidry is about, the first thing most share is that it is a path of nature spirituality, that it embraces nature and relationship to nature at the core of its path, or that it honors nature through various activities (like seasonal celebrations). Yet an individual Druid’s relationship toward nature is multifaceted. I see this nature orientation as having at least three different aspects.

Nature Is Sacred

One of the key aspects of the Druid tradition is the belief in the inherent worth and sacredness of nature. In the broader world, many humans focus on what nature offers us, that is, what do we get out of it? What can this plant do for us? I have found that as students begin to delve deeper into the Druid path, a lot of the “what can I get from nature” orientation shifts to “nature has inherent worth.” Certainly, this is present in AODA’s first-degree curriculum, and it’s not surprising that I see this in work I do for AODA—people begin taking up this path without any clear sense of the role of nature in their lives, but after a few years of Druid study, observation, seasonal holidays, and the like, they have a profound shift in orientation toward the living earth. The shift here is learning to value nature simply because it exists and because we are a part of it.

Further, sacredness implies care and connection: we have deep respect, reverence, and awe concerning nature. We see it as something to be protected, preserved, and cherished. In the same way that other spiritual paths may see a shrine, city, or church as holy, we Druids see the living earth, her systems, and all life upon her as sacred. As part of this sacredness, Druids recognize the importance of living in harmony with nature.

Relationship to Nature

When we think of how humans treat a sacred thing, a couple of possible iterations occur. One is that we might put it on a pedestal (literally or figuratively) and admire it from a distance, keeping it safe and secure. Although some conservationists take this approach (for very good reasons), this is typically not the orientation that Druids take toward the living earth. Instead, most prefer to cultivate a sacred and powerful relationship with nature by interacting with her, connecting with her, and learning how to tend their relationships effectively instead of just observing from afar. Part of this relationship is that nature offers us teachings and deep understandings when we connect. This may involve regular visits to natural places and simply being in nature or performing various ceremonies in natural settings. Many Druids take this relationship further, working to tread more lightly upon the earth and live sustainably, participating in active healing of the land, planting trees, and more (and practicing permaculture; see “A Druid’s Guide to Permaculture” in *Trilithon*, volume 4). Relationship implies that we not only take, but also give back.

Connecting to Nature's Cycles

Another major part of orientation toward nature is becoming an active observer and participant in the cycles of nature. Nature has many cycles through which we can observe and participate, cycles of the celestial heavens (the cycles of the sun or moon) that are tied to the land (seasons), or the cycle of nutrients through plants, fungi, and soil, or even the cycles of water upon the land. The cycle is a critical part of the way that Druids think about nature, and we build our sacred holidays and sacred activities around it, through gardening and foraging and other such activities.

And so, connection with nature is certainly at the core of the Druid tradition, but at least two other types of connection also seem central to this path.

Connecting with One's Creativity and the Flow of Awen

A rekindling of our creative gifts, the bardic arts, and our human gifts is a second core part of the Druid path. In fact, one of the core symbols of Revival Druidry, and a term we chant in our rituals, is Awen. A common definition for Awen in the Druid community is “creative and divine inspiration.” It was likely Awen that flowed through the ancient bards as they crafted their stories and songs and delivered them to audiences all over the British Isles.⁴ It is Awen that flows from an inspired pen, hands, and body as we learn to once again express ourselves and be whole. It is Awen that has been systematically stripped from us as we allow commercialized creations to take the place of our own. And it is the inspiration of Awen we seek as we reconnect with our own creative gifts and expressions.

Let's again tie this to how Druidry itself came to be and what it responds to. Modern commercialization and commodification teach people how to be good consumers rather than to provide for their own needs. Today's entertainment industry in the United States is a trillion-dollar affair, and a big part of cultural participation is watching TV and movies, playing games, listening to music—all created by other people and purchased at a price. Our core birthright, that of performing our own stories, songs, poetry, dance, music, visual arts, sacred crafts, has been stripped away by these industries. It is a sad thing, I think, to sit around a fire in silence with a group of people in the twenty-first century because nobody knows what to do or how to entertain themselves (instead, they pull out the cell phones). The fire is silent, the stories and songs are stilled—the Awen has yet to flow into the hearts and spirits of those there. But each person has an inherent ability to let the Awen flow—through music, drumming, dance, song, stories, artwork, woodwork, and so many more things. In fact, if you come to a Druid event you'll see a different kind of thing: a vibrant eisteddfod. An eisteddfod is a bardic circle, a chance to share one's creative gifts with a larger community, and it is one of the many ways that the Druid path encourages people to reconnect with their own creative gifts. It is through the practice of the bardic arts that we can reconnect with our own spirits and create incredible things that empower us, encourage us, and help us heal.

⁴ For example, Taliesin, in the *Book of Taliesin* from the thirteenth century (likely from much older sources) in the poem “Festival” writes, “I shall sing of the Awen. . . . I know when it minishes; I know when it wells up; I know when it flows; I know when it overflows.”

Connecting to Individual Truths and a Personal Path

Most traditions have a set of core teachings, a sacred book, and a big part of the transmission of that tradition is to teach these materials to others and ensure that the beliefs and rules are followed by practitioners. In Druidry, nature is our sacred text, and each human's relationship and interaction with her is different—we live in different ecosystems and climates, and engage in different kinds of work with the land, different cycles and seasons, and different needs. Because of this, we recognize and cultivate the development and pursuit of a personal path, and in the Druid tradition, these differences are celebrated rather than minimized. If you join a Druid order descended from the Druid Revival, we do have some common frameworks and practices, of course. In AODA, we have a common set of practices that gives us a framework; these include celebrating the solstices and equinoxes, working a ritual called the Sphere of Protection, engaging in lifestyle changes, planting trees, observing nature, discursive meditation, and practice of the Druid, ovate, and bardic arts. However, the specific expressions of a particular member's own inner truth are central to the way in which those practices manifest, and are central to which additional practices are taken up.

This is to say that Druidry is a spiritual path that takes creativity, inspiration, and work: it is up to the individual to establish a personal practice, a personal cosmology, and no two Druids are the same. While most religions tell you what to believe and how to believe it, this is not the case with Druidry. I have found that this particular aspect of the Druid tradition is really difficult for new Druids and non-Druids to wrap their heads around, because to them, religion or spiritual practice requires adherence to a rigid, prescribed set of beliefs and behaviors. It takes a lot of conversation to explain the difference, that a religious practice could actually be something different. The question “What do Druids believe?” doesn't seem to be right question to ask. Two Druids likely have the same larger philosophical orientations (as shared here) but not necessarily the same specific belief systems with regard to the nature of divinity, the possibility of life after death and reincarnation, the belief in spirits, and so on. For many Druids, there are some common themes, but these common themes don't extend to all Druids. But what certainly seems to extend to all Druids is the seeking of a personal path and connecting with that personal path at the core of one's being. And this is an honored and sacred thing within our own tradition. (And so, better questions might be “What do you as a Druid believe?” or “What do you do?”)

I see finding and following one's own path as an inherently connecting kind of work: you develop a personal Druid path by exploring your own meanings and what resonates with you, what connects to your own beliefs, your lifestyle, the work you feel you are to do in the world. It is through exploring these connections that you are able to settle upon a set of beliefs and practices that ring true. The more you practice, the deeper those connections become. You might think of this like a path through the forest—there is underbrush when we begin, but the more we walk the path and establish what that path is, the easier it becomes and the more it is open to us.

A Triad of Druidry

You might notice that my own presentation of the philosophy of connection in Druidry comes

in a three-part form. The following is a triad of this presentation (a triad is a common teaching tool in the Druid tradition descended from Irish and Welsh tradition).

Three philosophies of Druidry:
Connecting to nature
Connecting to our creative gifts
Connecting to our souls

It is through the connection to nature that we can be inspired, foster our creative gifts, and ultimately find our own paths deeper into ourselves and our core beliefs, practices, and work in the world.

References

Constantine, M. A. *The Truth Against the World: Iolo Morganwg and Romantic Forgery*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007.
Richards, Eric. *A History of the Highland Clearances*. London: Croom Helm, 1985.
Morganwg, I. *The Barddas of Iolo Morganwg*, vols. 1 and 2. Edited by J. Williams Ab Ithel. London: Forgotten Books, 2007.

The Power of Words
Exploring the Roots and
Resonance of Sacred Terminology

Síthearan NicLeòid

Síthearan NicLeòid (S. P. MacLeod) is a Harvard-trained Celticist, teacher, author, and grant-funded researcher who specializes in authentic Celtic historical religion, Celtic mythology and folklore, and early Celtic music, ritual, and poetic traditions. She has taught Celtic literature and mythology at the university level, is a Celtic-language singer and musician, and teaches workshops and distance-learning training programs. She is the director of the Eólas ar Senchais research project, whose goal is to research and restore Iron Age and early medieval pagan-era Celtic instrumental music and vocal art forms in socioreligious context (i.e., music, song, chant, and the declamation of poetry in historic forms of Celtic ritual). She is the author of Celtic Myth and Religion: A Study of Traditional Belief; Celtic Cosmology and the Other-world: Mythic Origins, Sovereignty and Liminality; Early Celtic Poetry and Wisdom Texts: The Three Cauldrons, The Song of Amairgen, and Other Literary Creations (forthcoming); The Divine Feminine in Ancient Europe: Goddesses, Sacred Women and the Origins of Western Culture; and a contribution to Celtic Myth in the 21st Century: The Gods and Their Stories in a Global Perspective (University of Wales Press, 2018).

As we walk a sacred path, we often encounter special words that evoke a strong feeling inside us. These could be deity names that inspire us to learn more about the myths and attributes of certain gods and goddesses, and perhaps draw us to form a sacred bond or relationship with them. Other words seem to evade definition, to hold within them some kind of meaning or mystery that is just beyond our grasp. One of these words is the term “Druid,” and many ideas and suggestions have been put forth regarding what this word means, including popular theorized meanings like “oak wisdom” or “knowledge of trees.” But in order to find out what the word means, we need to step back in time a wee bit and examine the word as it appeared in the original Celtic languages. The Old Irish word *druí* (plural *druid*) and the Middle Welsh word *derwydd* (plural *derwyddion*) are cognates, or linguistic equivalents. Where did these words come from, and what do they mean?

To answer that, we must travel back even further in time, about 5,000 years, to the region north of the Black Sea. Around that time, groups of people living there began to travel east and southward (into parts of the Middle East and India) while other groups traveled west and northward (into many parts of Europe). For that reason, the language that they spoke is referred to as Indo-European. Many popular ideas float around about these people, who were theorized to be patriarchal invaders who oppressed the people of an earlier goddess religion and matriarchal culture. There is actually no evidence for that theory at all, and the movement of early Indo-European people seems to have coincided with the spread of farming and other cultural aspects.¹

What is most interesting is that we don't have any inscriptions in their language. So how can we say what language they spoke? In the 1800s, English speakers living in India noticed interesting similarities between some English words and their equivalents in Sanskrit. This led to a fury of linguistic exploration, and linguists noted that there was in fact a whole family of related languages whose connection had never before been noted. These included all European languages (except Finnish, Basque, Hungarian, and Estonian) as well as Hittite and Sanskrit. By comparing how these languages were the same—and in what ways they differed—and by working backward and examining earlier forms of these languages, linguists were able to arrive at a theorized protolanguage (Proto-Indo-European, or PIE) which, if their theories were right, was the parent language. Amazingly, by using PIE as the model for a parent language, by moving forward in time again and following linguistic rules of language change, the theory actually worked.² How amazing that these linguistic specialists, even at that fledgling stage, were able to reconstruct such an ancient language in this way.

So one of the ways we can deduce the root word (and original meaning) of words in the Celtic languages is to look at the Indo-European roots of those words. Those are the sources from which these intriguing words come, and these roots have much to tell us. The word “Druid” comes from two Indo-European root words, the first of which is **deru*, which in PIE means “to be firm, solid, steadfast.” That root word changed over time in the various Indo-European languages. To begin

1 For information about Indo-European cultures and languages, the following books are recommended: J. P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology and Myth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991); David W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). It should be noted that the theories of Marija Gimbutas concerning Indo-Europeans obliterating matriarchal cultures and religions prior to the Iron Age have been challenged and fully discredited by scholars for decades; unfortunately, this information has not yet reached pagan circles, where her contested theories still abound. Mallory and Anthony have useful input on this topic. For an exploration of the actual roles that goddesses and sacred women played in Europe during the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Iron Age, and early medieval eras, see S. P. MacLeod, *The Divine Feminine in Ancient Europe: Goddesses, Sacred Women and the Origins of Western Culture* (London: McFarland, 2013).

2 See Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans*; Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language*. Another interesting resource is Carl D. Buck, *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

with, let's see how it changed in the Germanic branch of languages (which includes English), one of many branches of the Indo-European language family tree.

One variant of the root **deru* (known as a suffixed variant) was **drew-o-*, which gave us Germanic **treuwō*, from which came Old English *trēow* and eventually modern English *truce*. That same variant form changed in another way, giving us Germanic **trewam*, from which came Old English *trēow* and finally modern English *tree* (this may be one of the sources of confusion about the possible connection of “Druid” with “tree,” which is clarified below).

Another variant of **deru-* was **dreu-*, which provided a number of interesting words, including Old English *trēowian* or *trūwian*, “to trust”; Old Norse *tryggr*, meaning “firm, true”; Old English *trēowe*, also meaning “firm, true,” which gave us modern English “true”; and the Germanic abstract noun **treuwithō*, which gave Old English *trēowth*, “faith, loyalty, truth.”³ So in the Germanic branch of the PIE family tree, we can see some related meanings arising. However, it is important not to jump to the conclusion that the PIE root word **deru* means “true” or “tree,” and that therefore the first part of Druid means “true” or “tree.”

There are two reasons for this. The first is that as we saw above, the root word **deru* in PIE means “to be firm, solid, steadfast.” The second reason is that the word derivations we have been exploring thus far come from the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family tree. We need to explore the Celtic branch of that family tree, for that is where the concept and original words that became Druid in English have their origins.

In the Celtic branch of the Indo-European languages, we find a different set of meanings arising from the same PIE root words. In these Celtic languages and cultures of origin, there are two root words that we need to examine. The Old Irish word *druí* and the Middle Welsh word *derwydd* come from older Celtic roots **dru-* and **wid*, giving a compound word **dru-wid*. The root **dru* derives from the PIE root word meaning “firm, solid, steadfast,” and in this context it means “strong.” The second part of the compound, **wid-*, means “seeing,” giving us a meaning (in Celtic languages) of “strong seer.”⁴

There are two more roots we need to look at in order to clear up confusion about what the Old Irish word *druí* or Middle Welsh word *derwydd* mean. As we just saw, the Indo-European root word **wid-* means “seeing.” It is a form of the PIE root word **weid*, meaning “to see.” That root provided some interesting new words in the Germanic languages, which include a suffixed form **weid-to-*, which gave us Old English *wīs* and finally modern English “wise”; a form **wid-*, which gave us Old English *wit(t)*, meaning “knowledge, intelligence”; and the form **wid-ē-* (with the participial form **weid-to*), which later provided modern English words like “view, vision, advise, survey,” and many more.⁵ Interestingly, in another branch of Indo-European, the suffixed o-grade form **woid-o* gave us the Sanskrit

3 Calvert Watkins, *Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 16.

4 Watkins, *Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, 17. The English word “Druid” arose when English speakers talked about the historical Druids—from the plural form *druid* of the singular form of Old Irish *druí*. Amusingly, then, when we say “Druids” in English, we are double pluralizing the word, and are actually saying “Druidses”!

5 Watkins, *Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, 96.

word *vedah*, meaning “knowledge,” and thus the well-known word Veda as in the Rig-Veda.⁶ This is a lovely example of how Sanskrit and Old Irish are related—albeit distantly in both time and space.

How then did the notion that the word “Druid” means “tree wisdom” or “knowledge of oak” arise? One possible source of confusion is that the o-grade form of **deru-* was **doru*, which in Sanskrit meant “wood, timber.”⁷ Some people may have theorized that this was somehow the same as Old Irish *dair* or *daur*, meaning “oak,” which in some grammatical situations was spelled *daro*. However, this is the genitive case of the word, and specifically means “of oak.” Another popular theory was that the first part of Druid meant “door.” The Old Irish word *dorus* means “gateway, doorway, opening, or entrance,” but the presence of the *-s* shows us this is not the same as **doru*. One must be trained as a linguist to make connections based on the science of linguistics, and not just on things that look similar.

One other influence, I believe, has caused much of the confusion. The Roman author and naval commander Pliny wrote his famous work *Natural History* in the first century CE. In one section he comments about the ancient Celts of Gaul (roughly equivalent to modern France and Belgium). In *Natural History* XVI (249–251), he states that the Druids of Gaul held nothing more sacred than mistletoe and the tree on which it grew, “so long as” (probably meaning “especially if”) it was oak. He stated that the Druids even chose groves of oak for that reason and performed no rites without its foliage. Pliny goes on to say that the Gaulish Druids considered anything growing on oaks (and here he may mean leaves, buds, and acorns) to be “sent by heaven” (i.e., a blessing from the gods, perhaps especially celestial deities or those inhabiting the upper world); in the case of mistletoe (and perhaps other plants that might take up residence in or on an oak tree) this was a sign that the tree had been chosen by a deity.⁸

So far, so good. We know that in other Indo-European cultures, there was a connection between celestial or thunder gods with the eagle, the wheel symbol, and the oak tree.⁹ In addition, in early Ireland the oak tree was considered one of the chieftain trees in the Ogham alphabet, and could serve as a *bile*, an ancient or venerated tree under or around which sacred tribal assemblies might be held.¹⁰ However, Pliny makes one more remark—a speculation rather than an observation: “As a result it would seem that they are even called Druids from the Greek word for oak—*drus*.”¹¹ The inhabitants of the classical world are infamous for viewing their own cultures as bastions of civilization, and therefore those who lived outside of their world were barbarians. This could have given Pliny a sort of cultural impetus to see a Celtic word as deriving from a Greek word. He could not

6 Watkins, *Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, 97.

7 Watkins, *Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, 17.

8 Stanley Ireland, *Roman Britain: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1996), 183–184.

9 See the chapters on religion and religious terminology in Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans*; and Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language*.

10 George Calder, ed., *Auraicept na n-Éces: The Scholar’s Primer* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), 275; Michael Newton, *Warriors of the Word: The World of the Scottish Highlanders* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2009), 237–238.

11 Ireland, *Roman Britain*, 184.

have foreseen the formation of an entire field of study (Indo-European) and the linguistic science (rather than speculation) that ensued.

A variant of our original PIE root word **deru-* comes into play here. The lengthened zero-grade form of **deru* is spelled **drū*, which later gave the Greek word *drus* meaning oak, and even later the word *dryad*.¹² Pliny made a lucky guess here, in terms of a vague connection between the Celtic word *druí* and the Greek word *drus*. They are distant cousins in a way, but as we have seen, the Celtic words *druí* and *derwydd* do not come from a root meaning “oak/tree” or “truth.” Those are meanings that arose in the Germanic family of Indo-European languages, but not in the Celtic languages. The words *druí* and *derwydd* are Celtic language terms that refer to a highly trained group of people who were storehouses of sacred Celtic cultural and religious knowledge, perhaps undergoing training for up to twenty years.

The historical Druids would have learned theology, natural history, mythology, the names and functions of the gods and goddesses, ritual and visionary practices, and much more. There is no reason to doubt Pliny’s statement regarding the sanctity of the oak. However, the words for “Druid” in the Celtic languages clearly mean something different than “oak knowledge” or “wisdom of trees”—but they still suggest something very sacred. These venerated and honored ritualists, theologians, judges, and teachers were known for their ability to use their knowledge and sacred visionary techniques to see into the otherworld, perform divination, and communicate with the gods, which are roles that the classical authors clearly stated that the Druids fulfilled.¹³ In this era we can aspire to become strong seers by learning authentic information about the historical Celtic Druids and respectfully weaving that knowledge into this time and place. We can work to honor the accumulated and time-tested wisdom of several millennia, preserving this traditional wisdom and bringing it forward along the spiral of time.

12 Watkins, *Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, 17.

13 Ireland, *Roman Britain*, 176–185.

Deep Ecology, Human Civilization, and the Wild

A Review of Three Books

Jason Stieber

Jason is a Texas native and semi-retired archivist and oral historian. After 25 years of working in galleries, libraries, and museums (affectionately known as “GLAM” institutions in the profession), he could no longer live under the hegemony of cultivating a glamorous CV. He decided to turn his passion for growing things into a mid-life career change. He now lives in Cumberland, Maryland where he runs his own landscaping company, serves as AODA’s secretary, and talks to his rescue orchids. He is an Ovate in the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids and an AODA Candidate. His primary free time occupations include growing as much of his own food as possible, hiking in any weather, memorizing poetry, and fussing endlessly over a series of crane bags that “just aren’t right.”

Invasive Plant Medicine: The Ecological Benefits and Healing Abilities of Invasives by Timothy Lee Scott, Healing Arts Press, 2010

Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth by James Lovelock, Oxford University Press, 2016

The Practice of the Wild by Gary Snyder, Counterpoint, 1990

Please allow this writer the indulgence of a biographical opening. Because the books reviewed here have been in print for a while, one of them through multiple, illustrious editions, this review isn’t a report on new thinking but rather a synthesis of one man’s summer reading, note taking, and splashing around in the waters of deep ecology. All three books were read in the order reviewed here, one after the other without forethought to their relationship to one another, and my encounter with them exemplified the curious synchronicities that inform and enrich the life of magical people.

By the summer of 2017, I had begun the course work for OBOD’s Ovate grade and had spent much of my intellectual energy that spring developing a bibliography for independent study of natural philosophy—ornithology, herbalism, and permaculture design in particular.

I encountered Timothy Lee Scott’s *Invasive Plant Medicine* during a workshop on land healing offered by Dana O’Driscoll at the first annual OBOD Mid-Atlantic Gathering US in Pennsylvania in the spring of 2017. It wasn’t in my bibliography yet, but as a professional gardener, I was captivated by the idea that weeds, even the most prolific and apparently damaging, might be useful as medicine for people as well as the land.

Though too often repetitive and featuring odd polemic block quotes from an author whose identity is unclear, Scott’s book is subversive, shocking, and necessary reading. It reveals the arrogance, racism, and greed at the heart of modern campaigns to eradicate invasive plants. Even more surprising, it outlines how well-intentioned environmental and conservation groups often play into the hands of big agriculture.

We all understand that humanity’s time on earth has been brief when compared to the geological aeons during which the planet’s biosphere has evolved. However, it seems an enduring feature of our ecological thinking to consider natural processes within human time frames. Conservation efforts are often focused on maintaining current mixes of native species without regard for the fact that every species begins its time in a given locale as an immigrant and will someday die off, evolve into a new species, or move on to more salutary climes. These processes take millennia or more and depend on wind, fire, disease, and even the mobile guts and hands of animals like us. Scott refers to these as “Gaian dynamics at play,” and he clearly subscribes to James Lovelock’s original Gaia hypothesis (more on this later). To what extent should we feel justified in believing ourselves separate from or above these Gaian dynamics? Is it arrogant to assume that our intellect is so powerful that we know better than Gaia which plants belong where? How far back in time must we look to find the dividing line between native and immigrant? According to Scott, perhaps the very notion of native is simply a false construct, whether we are talking about plants or people.

If we attend to the language surrounding discussions of invasive plants and their classification as such, we will notice a disturbing parallel to language employed by nationalist xenophobic political movements. Words like alien, noxious, aggressive, and villainous do not denote a deep understanding of complex ecological relationships and dynamic systems. They represent a fixed notion of local species purity that is utterly at odds with Gaia’s continuously adaptive mechanics and her contempt for borders.

Scott also presents the reader with startling numbers demonstrating how lucrative the notion of plant invasions has become for producers of herbicides. At the time of writing, the U.S. government spends around \$1 billion annually through the Department of Agriculture on efforts to eradicate invasives. Most of this money purchases herbicides or funds their distribution and marketing. However, this number does not even begin to approach the many billions of dollars spent by farmers, conservation groups, and lawn-proud householders on these toxic substances. Some local jurisdictions actually fine landowners for failing to spray herbicides on particular classes of “noxious weeds.” Of course, these regulations enjoy the vigorous support of big ag’s government relations (lobbying) divisions.

Arguments for the eradication of invasive species usually follow a few lines. The invaders choke out native species. They reduce biodiversity. They negatively impact wildlife food sources and

habitats. But have we examined these claims thoroughly or simply accepted them on authority? Scott argues the latter.

Many species of plant that flourished in North America before the arrival of European colonizers, including the Jerusalem artichoke, goldenrod, aster, and blackberry, spread as vigorously as any newly introduced species. Some species like hackberry and black walnut are antisocial allelopaths, pumping a special toxin into the soil to keep neighbors away. Such behavior from a foreign plant is automatic grounds for extermination by Roundup. Natives get a pass.

According to Scott, most publications that accuse invasives of reducing biodiversity fail to back up these claims with any hard data. In fact, many studies he cites have found the opposite to be true. Invasives may be pioneer species and healers in a long succession of species to reclaim land after human disturbance. Human disturbance of ecosystems is, in fact, the most powerful enemy of biodiversity. Monocultured fields, logged forests, toxic mining sites, overgrazed pasture, and the cracked pavement of highways, railroads, and power lines is precisely where we find invasives flourishing the most. Perhaps we should consider whether or not these plants have a Gaian role to play, unwittingly by our hand, in healing the damage we have wrought.

One of the most important gifts of Scott's book is Part 3, "Guide to Invasive Plants: Medicine and Ecological Roles." The book is worth buying for this section alone, and I refer to it often. It is here the author has chosen twenty-four invasive species to highlight in encyclopedic fashion for their medicinal and ecological benefits. His entries include notes on harvesting and preparing these plants as well as their pharmacology in Western herbalism (where applicable, since most plants classified as invasive are from Asia), traditional Chinese medicine, and Ayurveda. One can't help but be amazed to discover that plants flourishing in a given zone of environmental distress are often the best plants for treating human diseases that result from that particular environmental problem. They also do double or triple duty healing the land. Some take up toxic substances and chemically disarm or disassemble them through various processes of phytoremediation. Some clean wastewater while others enhance the bee nectary and enrich soil nutrients. Practically all of them control erosion of topsoil. Gaia finds the most efficient solution, healing herself of the damage we've done while offering us a cure for our self-inflicted wounds into the bargain.

But who or what is Gaia? The Gaia hypothesis was developed by independent English scientist James Lovelock in the 1960s and '70s while on contract at NASA to develop instruments to detect possible life on Mars during what became its Viking 1 and 2 missions. Named after the Greek word for earth, the hypothesis proposes that the composition and temperature of earth's atmosphere is intelligently and actively regulated to support optimal conditions for life using a web of biological processes. Lovelock is careful to avoid theistic language; however, it's difficult to come away from reading this slim scientific volume without a sense of this intelligent force as a being of immense beneficence and ingenuity. Perhaps that is why the name of his theory—but not the scientific particulars—has received such opposition since its first publication in 1979. Lovelock himself has questioned his own construct since its original publication, yet the book remains important for its clear illustration of the balanced planetary network that supports conditions for life on earth.

Lovelock and his fellow scientists were stymied by the problem of finding potential life on other planets by looking at the chemical clues available to them from long-range instruments. It had already been discovered that the atmospheres of both Mars and Venus are composed almost entirely of carbon dioxide, while earth's atmosphere is a stew of multiple highly reactive gases. This suggested to Lovelock that Mars and Venus must be lifeless because life reduces entropy, or that tendency of energy in the universe to dissipate in uniform concentrations. The atmospheres of Mars and Venus were at the end point of that entropic tendency, uniform in composition without any flux of additional elements. Essentially, nothing was breathing or farting on our nearest planetary neighbors. Life concentrates energy rather than letting it dissipate. Since there was no spare chemical energy on Mars or Venus, they must be lifeless.

Earth, by contrast, is in a state of extreme chemical disequilibrium. This disequilibrium creates the energy gradient (electrical voltage is a good analogy) necessary for biological processes. Oxygen, for instance, binds easily to other elements, as when iron rusts, or is used as fuel in the metabolic fire of all animals. Thus oxygen is constantly being depleted from the atmosphere, while at the same time plants produce it in precisely the right amount to keep its atmospheric concentration at 21 percent. Even one or two percentage points higher, and wildfires would break out every time lightning struck. Salt is constantly added to our oceans from the flow of rivers and depleted just as quickly through the activity of ocean biota. This balancing act is not just chemical. Three or four billion years ago, our sun was approximately 30 percent cooler than it is today, yet the mean temperature has remained relatively constant and indeed optimal for life despite fluctuating solar energy.

Lovelock's argument is that Gaia is a cybernetic system of active controls, constantly monitoring temperature, ocean salinity, and atmospheric composition. Cybernetics is an area of mathematics pioneered by American mathematician Norbert Wiener. It concerns "self-regulating systems of communication and control in living organisms and machines." Lovelock uses the example of the oven in your kitchen. Set to a temperature of, say, 400 degrees, a sensor in the oven detects when the temperature falls too far below 400 and activates the heating element. When the temperature rises too far above 400, the system deactivates the heating element. The actual temperature in the oven is rarely at exactly 400, but oscillates around the optimum. This is a simple cybernetic system at work.

Gaia likewise consists of mechanisms to sense and control the environment. However, she composes her systems from individuals and communities of living beings. According to Lovelock, "the whole process has the advantage of built-in yet flexible control systems, based on the responsiveness of living organisms to changes in their environment and their capacity to restore, or adapt to, conditions which favour their own survival." Like any system, Gaia probably has vital organs as well as other systems that are secondary or redundant. Lovelock proposes that these vital organs reside in the tropics and along continental shelves and consist primarily of microorganisms in oceans and wetlands. Humans are relatively unimportant.

It isn't until the last two chapters that Lovelock tackles the question of humanity's place in the Gaian scheme, and it is here that the book both thrills and disappoints. In many places, Lovelock seems to doubt our capacity to destroy Gaia or unbalance her at all. Elsewhere, he's practically

alarmist. His primary concern is with our exploding population and the destruction of wild ecosystems necessary to feed so many billions of people. He is particularly worried about our impact on oceanic microorganisms because he believes these to be one of Gaia's vital organs.

Lovelock's solution isn't back-to-nature romanticism but a firm understanding of global ecological realities grounded in science and a commitment to leave undisturbed Gaia's vital organs. This requires a global, technologically advanced civilization capable of monitoring its own impact. But how do we get from here to there? Lovelock highlights the conundrum in the final pages of his book:

As society became more urbanized, the proportion of information flow from the biosphere to the pool of knowledge which constitutes the wisdom of the city decreased, compared with the proportion entering the wisdom of rural or hunting communities. At the same time the complex interactions within the city produced new problems requiring attention. . . . Soon city wisdom became almost entirely centred on the problems of human relationships, in contrast to the wisdom of any natural tribal group, where relationships with the rest of the animate and inanimate world are still given due place. . . . Let us hope that this alienation is coming to an end.

Lovelock is of course talking about our relationship to the wild. By the time I finished this book, I was deep in thought and discussion with my friends in the Druid community about what a healthy global human civilization would look like. How can we refashion our own lives in a way that encourages the manifestation of this new order? What can we do as individuals in a small community of religious minorities? It seems no mere coincidence that I next picked up a book by one of my favorite poets.

Gary Snyder is widely reputed to be the poet laureate of the deep ecology movement. His book *The Practice of the Wild*, originally published in 1990, is a collection of essays, stories, and adapted lectures about the possibilities of rewilding human thought, life, and civilization. Quotable and delicately polemic in a way that only a poet could muster, Snyder takes the reader on a journey through his own life as a logger, Zen monk, and homesteader, as well as through North American folkways and even interspecies sex to imagine a global human civilization that is sustainable and attuned to the rhythms, discomforts, and pleasures of the wild. His argument is not limited to how we produce and consume, however. Snyder's most urgent plea is for us to reintroduce our imaginations to their own wilderness areas, to revise our skill sets and our language, and engage in the same "etiquette of freedom" shared by every living (and nonliving) thing in the wild. His is a deeply animist vision:

Wilderness is a *place* where the wild potential is fully expressed, a diversity of living and nonliving beings flourishing according to their own sorts of order. In ecology we speak of "wild systems." When an ecosystem is fully functioning, all the members are present at the assembly. To speak of wilderness is to speak of wholeness. Human

beings came out of that wholeness, and to consider the possibility of reactivating membership in the Assembly of All Beings is in no way regressive.

Like Lovelock, his argument is not merely a back-to-the-land retreat from modernity, although that strain is present in his thinking. Rather, he urges us to include city life in the equation—to recognize the wild in urban spaces as well as the woods and mountains, and to allow that recognition to inform all of the good work humans do in cities. He desires a civilization of wildness. But what does this civilization look like? He begins with a recognition of Lovelock's Gaia:

The power that gives us good land is none other than Gaia herself, the whole network. It might be that almost all civilized agriculture has been on the wrong path from the beginning, relying as it does on the monoculture of annuals. . . . The sorts of economic and social organization we invoke when we say "civilization" can no longer be automatically accepted as useful models. To scrutinize civilization is not, however, to negate all the meanings of cultivation.

Snyder advocates bioregionalism and permaculture (though he does not use that word) as solutions. We must each learn to become native to our place and engage in bioregional culture, foodways, music, stories, geography, plant medicine, and modes of production. We must cultivate the land in ways that are natural to our habitat. And we must observe its cycles. Global networks of commerce, education, research, and exchange are important, but too much dislocates us. It alienates us from the wild in ways that make us ignorant, helpless, cruel, and mired in spiritual lassitude. Ethically adrift and addicted to our cold comforts, we become toxic to our environment and to each other.

Snyder also highlights the importance of myth, song, and art. Quoting the eminent structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, he reminds us, "the arts are the wilderness areas of the imagination surviving, like national parks, in the midst of civilized minds." Music and the arts connect us powerfully to the spirits of a place and open us to that source of knowledge that makes us whole.

Despite his grudging respect for city life, there can be no mistaking that Snyder's way forward is anarchic and largely hostile to complex, modern states and the cultural and spiritual uniformity they require. Wholeness may come at the expense of efficiency, great wealth, and fresh flowers from Chile at the supermarket in January. But for Snyder, the death of what he calls the "Growth Monster" will reveal that its spiritual, ecological, and economic costs were even higher. "Out in the forest it takes about the same number of years as the tree lived for a fallen tree to totally return to the soil. If societies could learn to live by such a pace there would be no shortages, no extinctions. There would be clear streams, and the salmon would always return to spawn."

Responses to ecological distress tend to sort themselves into two broad categories. The first is that all environmental stressors can be mitigated, escaped, or completely overcome by dint of human ingenuity and technology. The notion of clean coal, research into cold fusion, seed banks, carbon capture, colonizing other worlds, and global climate accords are examples of this thinking.

Our capacity for innovation will outpace our rapacity, the argument goes. This is the science fiction model. However, if there is one take-away from all of human history, it should be that the more we have, the more we desire.

The second surmises an unavoidable, gradual, if not catastrophic, breakdown of the global economic system with its attendant famines, wars, and social upheavals. The end point of this thinking is that the human race, and perhaps the entire biosphere, will either die or will regress to a preindustrial level of technology. After a period of reset, perhaps *Homo sapiens* will have learned its lesson and will proceed with the work of elaborating a global civilization that doesn't extract, exploit, and despoil its own resources and people. This is the romantic, millenarian vision that grips most Druids and pagans today. It has dangerous kin. White nationalist preppers, Christians scanning the Book of Revelations for numerological proof of the apocalypse, and religiously motivated terror cells all share a set of assumptions, strategies, and even desired outcomes. In some sense, these groups fervently hope to see the end of the world. It's an ego trip as old as the first civilization and feeds our desire to feel uniquely placed in human history. Assuming the collapse does arrive, it seems unlikely that the peaceful Druid ecovillages many of us envisage (this author included) would be able to defend themselves against more violent, less altruistic communities. After several centuries or millennia of human conflict and reconsolidation, what are the chances that the global civilization to reemerge would even remember the policies that killed the first?

Is a civilization of wildness even possible? Quoting novelist and poet Jim Dodge, Snyder offers us a comforting thought. "The chances of bioregionalism succeeding . . . are beside the point. If one person, or a few, or a community of people, live more fulfilling lives from bioregional practice, then it's successful."

With so many factors beyond our control, how do we act from a place of serenity, grace, and courage? I believe these three books point the way. Observe your environment before you alter it. Gather community. Share stories and songs. Learn about your bioregion. Go native. Cultivate a relationship with your weeds. Enjoy hard work. Craft beautiful things and give them away. Global change is fashioned by one individual at a time making a difference in their personal lives. In the end, I think I'll take Gary Snyder's suggestion that "a life that is vowed to simplicity, appropriate boldness, good humor, gratitude, unstinting work and play, and lots of walking brings us close to the actually existing world and its wholeness."

Crossing Communities

An Interview with Jon Cleland Host, Editor, *Humanistic Pagans*

Moine Michelle

In a new series, Trilithon offers an interview with the leader of a pagan organization whose mission, identity, or practices of worship and belief complement those of the AODA. Interviews are sought and included out of the desire to expand understandings of the range of practices claimed by pagan and Druid practitioners in the twenty-first century. The views expressed in this interview belong solely to the interviewee.

Members of the order may already be familiar with the community website, Humanistic Paganism, whose tag line reads "Paganism firmly rooted in the empirical world." Led by managing editor Dr. Jon Cleland Host, the site hosts pieces written by those who identify as naturalistic pagan, animist, scientific pantheist, atheist pagan, pagan humanist, and Druid naturalist, among many others. Jon holds a PhD in materials science from Northwestern University, has been employed as a researcher at Hemlock Semiconductor and Dow Corning, is the holder of eight patents, and has published numerous scientific papers and peer-reviewed articles, including in the journal Nature. Jon graciously agreed to grant us an interview in February 2018.

Trilithon: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your work with the naturalistic pagan movement?

Jon Cleland Host: My own history starts out with a very common story. I was raised Catholic and, unlike some, was still solidly Catholic in my teens. But then I started to see contradictions. Logical problems, like, "If God is just, why are non-Catholics sent to hell, if they are raised in another religion?" etc. I even booked a time with a priest to discuss them. I thought that since the Catholic Church had been around for well over 1,000 years, with tons of top-notch scholars, these silly questions must have been figured out many centuries ago. The priest offered trite sayings that didn't

answer the questions. It began to dawn on me that the answers *didn't exist!* Such a huge shift takes time, and it was years before I could look at things based mostly on evidence instead of how I had been taught to see things. Looking at the evidence, it became clear that the traditional religions had grown from real needs, and been invented by people, partially to gain power over others. I became the stereotypical atheist, eschewing religious observations because they weren't based in reality.

But, eventually, I found this to be a little bit too empty. I'm human—I need emotional connection, color, vibrancy. I realized that humans for well over 5,000 years, and probably much more, have been finding deep significance in the yearly cycle of the sun, and especially the sunrise moment of the winter solstice. So I started celebrating, noticing, and being deeply moved by this one moment in time when our ancestors stood in fear and hope, and when we, with understanding given by science, can stand in confidence that the sun will return. These powerful moments gained strength every year, connecting me to billions of lives of people who, like me, strove to attach meaning to the best and most reliable understanding of the world around us.

I met my wife around that time, and with that powerful connection growing every year, it was only natural for us to add the summer solstice to our celebrations. Other celebrations were added over time, until we were celebrating the wheel of the year. We realized how moving, how awe inspiring, we found this approach to be—drawing on the grand universe as revealed to us by science, and celebrating that connection with the wheel of the year and other pagan metaphors.

We discussed a lot of names for what we did, and settled on naturalistic paganism because it both described what we were (instead of what we were not, such as “atheist”), while also being clear (“naturalism” has a clear philosophical definition—“no supernatural”). That was 2003. We started a webpage (Naturalpagans.org), and a Yahoo group followed (Naturalistic Paganism). It was many years later that B. T. Newberg founded humanistic paganism (having arrived at the same idea independently). B. T. explains this history and the longer-term history of naturalistic paganism in this post.¹

T: Your community also serves naturalist pagans and scientific pagans. How are they the same or different from humanist pagans? Is it possible to be both at once?

JCH: Yes, these different terms mean roughly the same thing—seeing the world naturalistically (with no supernatural), basing views on evidence, while one's practice is pagan. The different names are mostly a result of the recent resurgence of this path—so that many people are coming to it on their own, and so come up with their own name for it, before finding out about our growing movement. Different people can of course have different definitions, but in general the differences are small. “Naturalistic pagan” seems to be the most common umbrella term in use now. To find or join any of them, some of the groups out there include:

NaturalPagans.org: blog site aggregating several naturalistic pagan blogs

1 B. T. Newberg, “Exploring the Historical Roots of Naturalistic Paganism,” Humanistic Paganism, June 9, 2015, <https://humanisticpaganism.com/2015/06/09/exploring-the-historical-roots-of-naturalistic-paganism-by-b-t-newberg/>.

Naturalpagan.com: landing hub site for naturalistic paganism

Facebook groups: PaGaian Cosmology, Naturalistic Pagans, Atheopaganism (and UK), Pagans for Secularism, Humanistic Paganism, Rational Pagans, Pagan Renewal

NaturalisticPagan Yahoo Group

T: How do these stances change a person's relationship to pagan practices, other pagan groups, or paganism at large?

JCH: They don't have to change anything, but often do (and did for me).² Let's look at those in turn.

Pagan practices, I think, entailed the least amount of change. I'm quite happy joining a circle that invokes the Goddess, raises energy, performs magic, and so on. I internally see these things naturalistically, and even if I know that most other Pagans there see them supernaturally, that's perfectly OK with me. The power and effectiveness of these words and actions is what is important. Practices or rituals which I personally craft may have a different feel and have less explicit supernaturalism—or they might not. I've seen plenty of rituals written and held by naturalistic pagans which were indistinguishable from polytheistic rituals. Private devotions calling on this or that deity as a metaphor for human archetypes can be exactly the same as those calling on the same deity as a literal, distinct person.

Other pagan groups usually have different beliefs, and often very different beliefs (this is true not just for us but for all pagan groups). We pagans are a wildly disparate bunch, and even trying to categorize the different paths in our big tent of paganism is difficult. I've found John Halstead's “four tentpoles” of nature, deity, self, and community to be a useful metaphor (putting naturalistic pagans near the nature pole, with some community), but even that is only a start.

Does every Wiccan think that the Egyptian gods worshipped by Kemetic pagans actually exist? Are some agnostic at best? If one doesn't spend any time acknowledging or even knowing the name of a given deity, how close is that to being atheistic about that deity? I'm sure the answers vary widely from person to person, and from group to group, with there probably being plenty of cases where this or that group or person doesn't really think that the gods of this other group are literal people. In the same way, we naturalistic pagans might not fully believe the same things another given pagan group believes, but that's usually true of any two pagan groups. So I think that it often doesn't change things very much, but can in some cases (such as, sometimes, the most strident devotional polytheists, for example).

The most vehement animosity we have received has been from individual groups or individuals. I get the feeling that when we personally don't see evidence for a given deity, that very fact can be

2 The question implies that the person was a nonnaturalistic pagan first, and then became naturalistic (because if they weren't pagan to start with, none of those relationships would exist at first, and so would not change). People can arrive at naturalistic paganism by being a polytheistic pagan who then loses belief in gods, or they could arrive (as I did) from first being naturalistic, then adding pagan practice. I don't know which origin is more common. I've met many naturalistic pagans of both kinds. Though I've probably met more who started out as atheists, that could be simply because that's my route, so I know a lot of atheists. I'd love to see some data on this. I'll be answering these assuming the former path (a pagan becoming a naturalistic pagan).

threatening for those who worship that deity, in a way that parallels how Christians respond so negatively toward atheists. In fact, research has shown that this negative reaction is at least partly because the existence of atheists threatens a Christian's assurance of going to a heaven.³ I don't know if anything similar is going on with some pagan groups, but I do think that our common rejection of the idea of hell for unbelievers makes it a lot easier for all of us to accept each other regardless of differences in belief.

Regarding paganism as a whole, adopting a naturalistic worldview doesn't seem to change the relationship very much. After all, as discussed above, we already have pretty disparate beliefs (and some Satanist groups are already explicitly atheistic regarding all gods anyway).

T: What are some of the biggest misconceptions people might have about humanist, naturalist, or scientific pagans?

JCH: As with so much else in this interview, I'll give my best guess—but that's what it is, a guess. We would need systematic data to see which incorrect ideas are widespread, and all I've got to go on are my own personal experiences, which are, for all of us, often not representative of reality.

That said, I think that the biggest misconception is that we are extremely rare. Naturalistic paganism is a view that one can arrive at from any pagan tradition, or from atheism, and I'm constantly coming across pagans from various traditions (Wicca, Druidry, Kemetic paganism, Asatru, Hellenism, etc.) who (often quietly) tell me that they too see all their tradition's deities and invocations as metaphorical. It seems that we naturalistic pagans are already present in most ritual circles, most sacred groves, and most altars. If one comes across as not open to naturalistic pagans, then the person one is talking with or sharing sacred space with will usually know better than to let on that they are a naturalistic pagan.

Another reason I suspect that we are not rare is the fact that new naturalistic pagan groups keep popping up as people come to this view, find each other, and think that they are the only ones. Some of the many groups can be easily found online, such as those listed in the first question.

Another common misconception seems to be that we are really all that different, or that one could never see things from a naturalistic, evidence-based perspective. I've seen plenty of examples where very theistic, supernaturally based Pagan friends mentioned to me years later that they were becoming more agnostic, skeptical, or even atheistic.

T: Animism seems to be more and more visible (as a way of identifying) in the U.S. pagan community. Why do you think that is?

JCH: I'm not sure animism is becoming more prevalent. It may be, and I'd love to see data on this.

3 Corey L. Cook, Florette Cohen, and Sheldon Solomon, "What If They're Right About the Afterlife? Evidence of the Role of Existential Threat on Anti-atheist Prejudice," *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, April 27, 2015, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1948550615584200>.

If so, it could be a result of the wider cultural move away from Christian monotheism. Christian identification is dropping rapidly, by around 1 percent a year in the United States (which works out to about 400 people every hour of every day!). In the 1960s, some aspects of paganism seemed to mostly be about being "not Christian." That's an important first step to finding one's own spirituality, but it's just a first step (for those of us raised Christian). As that step becomes less needed and less important (because Christianity is fading on its own), more diverse ways of approaching spirituality are being explored, including dropping the idea of gods being few in number and very powerful.

I find animism to be wide and deep enough to hold a wide range of views. I suspect that for many animists, the exact ontological nature of the rock or river spirit they are talking to is unimportant. For me, I find my own approach to animism to be compelling. As I've learned more about deep time, about biology, about our universe, every new fact shows the long tail of history behind everything I see. I approach a waterfall and see the slow eons of erosion leading to the cliff forming; I see each water molecule falling, each coming from a different place—this one from a drop of rain which came from the Pacific evaporation, and before that a river in Slovakia, that molecule having passed through a nearby raccoon, after being in a frog that the raccoon ate, and before that condensing as dew, after being evaporated from the Amazon. Or before the most recent erosion, the river forming after the area was scraped flat by a glacier, and the geologic rock deposition before that. These and so many more aspects stretch out behind the waterfall, giving it a life, indeed a spirit, of its own, unlike any waterfall or other feature in the galaxy. To speak to this waterfall fills me with awe, reverence, and respect.

This same process happens just as quickly with every rock, tree, and creature. For living things, we not only have all the processes described above, but we also have the record of parents, grandparents, and more, encoded in DNA and stretching back over 4 billion years, including a whole long list of very different creatures, through and past our common ancestors who gave rise to me as well. These are the venerable, wonderful, and important spirits which spring up all around me on any walk in the woods, and any time I open myself to see them.

T: How do you describe your own beliefs?

JCH: I have to admit that the question makes me feel a bit odd. "Belief" sounds to me like "something I'm convinced of regardless of evidence." Dictionary definitions for "belief" are along those lines (and I don't think we can just make up new definitions of words at our whim). If that's the case, then I guess I have no beliefs—I'm not convinced of anything regardless of evidence. I do have best guesses for things, all of which are at least a little tentative pending more evidence. For instance, we have tons of solid evidence for atoms, germs, plate tectonics, and an earth which is 4.6 billion years old. In all of those and many more, I accept the tentative conclusions of the experts based on the evidence they have.

So I tentatively accept all areas of knowledge where there is a consensus of the experts. That's a lot of knowledge! Not sure where I stand on a factual question? With that information, you can look it up. Does it look like something I said contradicts mainstream science? Let me know—I could be wrong.

I have a hard time seeing how anyone could rationally deny any of those facts. To do so would seem to require the person claiming that they know better than thousands of scientists from dozens of different countries, with different ideologies, all using peer-reviewed and repeatable methods as part of the best tool we know of in the universe to estimate the truth. I hope I'm not so arrogant as to claim that I know better than people who know so much more than I do.

But what about areas where there is little if any evidence? Such as, "What are my beliefs about the existence of parallel universes, or the state of matter in the center of a black hole?" My answer: "I don't know." I have no problem openly not knowing. In fact, nobody can know on those questions anyway, so my options would be to pretend I know, or to admit that I don't know. I choose to admit I don't know.

What about areas in between, where there is some evidence, but not a lot? I'll have some guesses, but they are less and less certain as the amount of evidence and expert understanding decreases.

I do think that there is enough evidence to suggest an answer in a lot of areas that are controversial among the general population. I'll give a few of my less popular views here.

How about the question of thinking after death? What do we know? We know that every single provable example of a thinking thing has information-processing structures—be they neurons arranged in a brain or metal pathways in a computer. Further, we know that every physical change to these structures changes the thinking. We can change a computer's output by changing the chip, or change a person's thinking by administering a chemical drug or mechanical brain damage. We can see the brain growth and resulting change in thinking between a two-year-old and an adult. So what physical changes happen to the brain after death? A lot of physical changes! It is completely dispersed, often with no structures left remaining and the atoms incorporated into different organisms and landforms across the earth. It seems very likely that there is no thinking after death. My best guess is that there is no afterlife for this reason.

I can similarly see no plausible mechanism for reincarnation, nor solid evidence for it, so my best guess is that the adherence to reincarnation is better explained by our need to give answers, even if they aren't real, than that reincarnation is actually happening. Do I know? No.

Similarly, there have been plenty of studies of out-of-body experiences, all of which failed to show any information gained beyond that which could be easily guessed (like, "I saw doctors in the operating room. They had masks on and were leaning over my body. There was a machine plugged into the wall," etc.). Numbers placed on cards above the person, facing the ceiling, were never able to be given. I'd be happy to revise this view if new, repeatable evidence comes up. The same goes for prayer healing people, magic spells supernaturally affecting the world, divine healings (why are amputees never healed?), divine revelation (why do these never contain useful information? If I were an omniscient god, the first thing I would tell someone would be, say, the cure for cancer, or fusion power, etc.), and so on.

Regarding all of these, I think that sticking to the evidence is often important to prevent real harm to real people. For instance, if I were to fail to speak out about alternative cures for cancer, I could be encouraging someone to forego real treatment and instead drink ginger tea. We have plenty of data on the result of that—the patient has a much higher chance of dying, and at least

hundreds of real people die preventable deaths due to this every year. I think it would be immoral for me to contribute to that.

T: Your blogging often points out that naturalist pagans have the same sorts of deep experiences as do other pagans who follow more traditional models of worship, energy work, and cosmology. Can you tell us a little bit about how you work toward those deeper spiritual experiences?

JCH: Spiritual experiences are one of the most wonderful parts of being human, at least to me. That soaring feeling of being connected to our universe, to other humans, to our entire web of life, to this grand saga stretching billions of years into the past and into the future is something that no one should have to live without. But no approach will bring those experiences with certainty. I've found that a number of practices can make them more likely and deepen our lives in other ways too, including smaller experiences in the same direction. Human connections and working toward a better future for everyone have proven to be an essential foundation. Those include family, friends, fellow activists, people helped (especially if you don't know them), and other aspects of what we might think of as a normal life. A video describing one of my own spiritual experiences, and some thoughts about it, is on YouTube.⁴

In addition to those, I have several spiritual practices which would take too long to describe in detail, so hopefully overviews will be sufficient. One of these is sacred space. For me, in addition to some locations worldwide (see the next section), my stone circle helps with this requirement. With a stone circle (even a very modest one of just four or eight moderate-sized stones), one can connect with our ancestors who have built stone circles to denote sacred space for thousands of years, on all continents (except, of course, Antarctica). I begin every day with a morning dedication in my stone circle, followed by some small spiritual practice, like meditation, gratitude, etc. Here it is:

From the Great Radiance, stars!
From stardust, oceans!
From crashing waves, life, and death!
From the struggle to survive, awareness.

I am the dimly seeing, thinking Universe.
I hear my Ancestors, who made me, who live in me.
Together we call to future generations
In whom we will live
Today, as before, we make their world.

Another is community ritual. Here is where I happily join pagan rituals of many different traditions. So many people are so much better than I am at drawing up sacred energy, and leading

⁴ Jon Cleland Host, "Spiritual Experiences—Are They Real?," YouTube, July 2, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsbOcsXURmY>.

rituals that leave me touched to my core. My life would be so much more empty without their skill, and without the community around us. A community Samhain ritual we held is on YouTube.⁵

Spiritual pilgrimage—whether one has a deeply moving vision there or not, they touch your life and put your own place in context. They bring vastly more knowledge, and not just dry data, but rich, emotional feelings, remembered and tied to a place and to ideas that otherwise would not nearly be so strong and visceral. They help me feel the gratitude and awe about our wider earth—of at least a small fraction of all the wonders that are known and unknown. More can be found on YouTube.⁶

I’ve found that my Cosmala is an essential spiritual tool, whether kept on my altar at home, brought with me on a business trip, or held in my stone circle. A Cosmala is a string of sacred prayer beads, where each bead represents a chosen event in our history from the Big Bang (or Great Radiance) until today. I use it for meditation, touching each bead and feeling gratitude for that ancestor, for pilgrimage, and more. Instructions to make your own are available online.⁷

You might have noticed ancestors coming up often. My gratitude toward my ancestors—all of them, including nonhumans!—is a major part of my spirituality. A video describing why is on YouTube.⁸ More spiritual practices can be found at the Humanistic Pagans site, and a video describing one of my own spiritual experiences, and how we naturalistic pagans see them, is on YouTube.⁹

T: Are there any questions you wish you were asked about naturalistic pagan practice or belief?

JCH: Yes—and they are the same questions I think should be asked about all pagan paths, and indeed all spiritual paths. The question is, why? Why do this? Does your practice only benefit you, as a narcissistic way to indulge yourself? Or does your practice make the world a better place? How? How does it help us move toward a just, healthy, peaceful, and sustainable world?

Are your beliefs based on evidence that anyone, regardless of religion, can see and agree on? Do those beliefs help move us toward a world where everyone can learn to reach our full potential? Does your spirituality recognize and care about people of all creeds, of all races, of all types around our world? Does it honor and nourish our web of life? Does it make you a blessing to those around you and to future generations?

If a naturalistic pagan doesn’t have good answers to these, I suggest they find a spiritual path that does, whether it is naturalistic paganism or not.

5 Jon Cleland Host, “Community Samhain Ritual,” YouTube, August 9, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ms2EeXjj1to>.
6 Jon Cleland Host, “Naturalistic Pagan Pilgrimage—[Stardust, Contemplating],” Humanistic Paganism, July 18, 2017, <https://humanisticpaganism.com/2017/07/18/naturalistic-pagan-pilgrimage-stardust-contemplating/>.
7 “Cosmala or Universe Story Beads,” Solstice and Equinox, 2012, <http://solstice-and-equinox.com/universebeads.html>.
8 Jon Cleland Host, “Why I Care About DNA and Ancestors,” YouTube, October 27, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTZ37-UQW6I>.
9 Host, “Spiritual Experiences—Are They Real?”

T: Thank you for your time and your insights, Jon.

Those interested in learning more about Naturalistic Paganism are encouraged to visit Humanistic Paganism (<https://humanisticpaganism.com/>), Naturalpagan.org, the Facebook groups listed above, and the blog aggregator Naturalpagans.com.

Eadha/Aspen

Adam Robersmith

The body is not the trunk, nor the trunk and roots,
nor the trunk and roots and branches and leaves;
the body is each and every aspen in the grove, from
the eldest in the center to the youngest, outermost.

The body is the grove.

Shiva is the Lord of Destruction, who obliterates
what he loves when it is the right time for renewal;
Shiva is the One who knows the need for change,
and without fear or hesitation brings a loving end.

Shiva, bring a loving end.

The grove is strongest in its changing, in its constant
cycle of growth and destruction in concentric circles;
The grove is one body, transforming itself, renewing
itself, without fear or hesitation even in days of pain.

The grove is transforming.

Shiva is gently caressing each mature tree into decay,
touching each with a lover's skill and amorous heart;
Shiva is the master of petit mort, that moment which
opens the beloved to possibility, to new growth, again.

Shiva, open the beloved.

The body is the grove, the grove is transforming.
Shiva, open the beloved. Shiva, bring a loving end.
The body is the grove, the grove is transforming.
Shiva, open the beloved. Shiva, bring a loving end.



***Populus tremula.* LINN.**

Figure 1: "A History of British Forest-trees: Indigenous and Introduced"
By Prideaux John Selby
1889

Solstice Poem

Moine Michelle

Lay a head wreath
Of yellow blossoms
At the mouth of
This day.
Mimosa flowers sighing
Pink into
The late morning.
Water and
Fire,
Solstice—
New moon on this longest day.

At the river's edge,
We make our
Offering:
Basil and mint
Echinacea
Black-eyed daisies
Sunflowers
Dahlias
Asters.

It is the season of
Elderflower cordial,
Lemon balm biscuits,
Golden fat.

O Summer,
Bring the wood
To full leaf—
Shade this circle,
Our faces smeared
With mud
And lit with play.

Trilithon Credits

Moine, 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.

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.

Paul Angelini, Layout and Design

Paul Angelini has been an assitant on the Trilithon staff for the past three years, and a member of the AODA since 2013.

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.

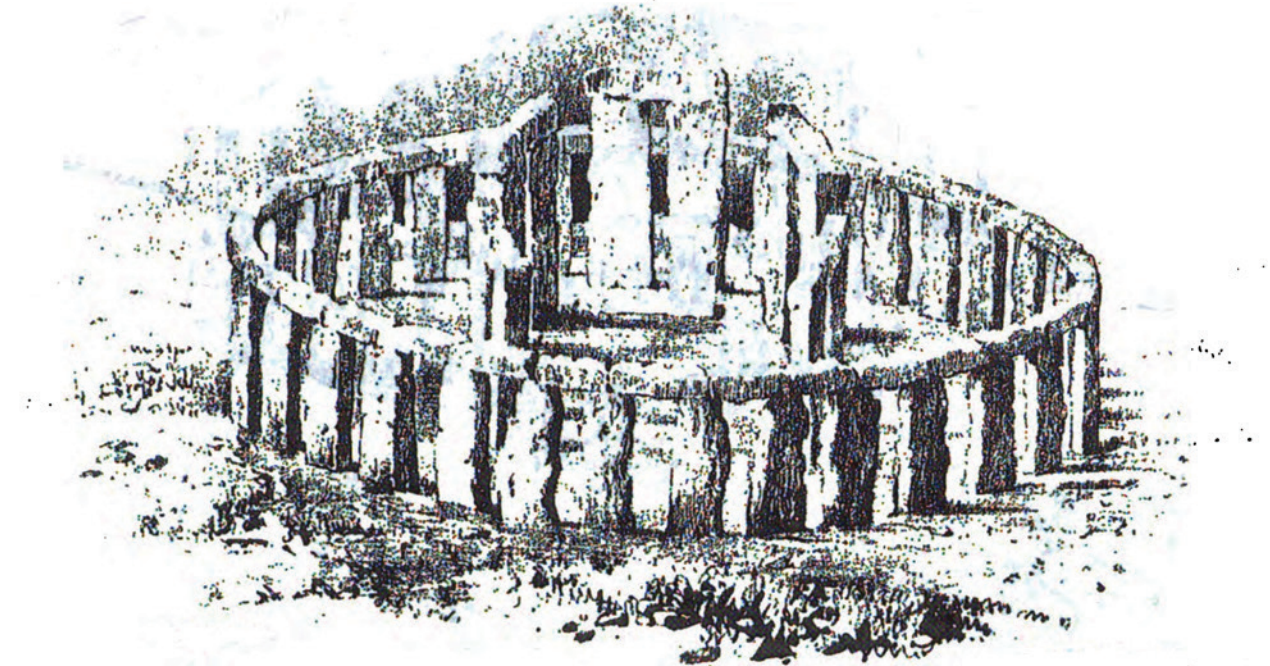
Its roots in the Druid Revival give the AODA certain features in common with esoteric societies such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. It offers an initial ceremony of reception into the order, followed by three degrees of initiation—Druid Apprentice, Druid Companion, and Druid Adept—which are 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, Moine Michelle, at trilithon@aoda.org

Contact the AODA

Contact the AODA Grand Grove at info@aoda.org

Mailing address:

AODA
PO Box 1002
Indiana, PA 15701

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, Greater Hartford area of CT

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.

Contact: ladyoceanstar@gmail.com
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
Led by David P. Smith, Druid Companion, duir@cox.net
Open to new members and performing initiations.

san Fhàsach, Greater DC
Led by Moine Michelle, Druid Companion, mlfpoet@gmail.com
Open to new members

AODA Home Circles

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

Home Circle, Sacramento, CA
Led by Jose Esparaza, AODA Candidate, anzuya312@live.com

Three Rivers Circle, Spanish Lake, MO (north of St. Louis)
Led by Claire Schosser, Druid Apprentice, cschosser@yahoo.com

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.com





West Seattle Sound. Agfachrome, Rolleicord V.
Photograph taken by Grand Archdruid Gordon Cooper

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.

From the rising sun, three rays of light;
From the living earth, three stones 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.

