



TRILITHON

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OF THE ANCIENT ORDER OF DRUIDS IN AMERICA

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Ancient Order of Druids in America



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Colophon

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Lucky stars above you,
Sunshine on your way,
Many friends to love you,
Joy in work and play,
Laughter to outweigh each care,
In your heart a song,
And gladness waiting everywhere
All your whole life long!

Traditional Irish Blessing

Editor's Introduction

I'll begin this issue with a personal story that brings the importance of our Druid work into sharper focus. In late 2019, fellow leaders of san Fhàsach (a chartered AODA Study Group) told me that the park where we had often held our Twilight Walks had been vandalized. Tree after tree after tree had been spray painted with "TRUMP 2020." Other trees had been painted with a swastika, penises, and homophobic slurs against Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

I first saw the damage when we returned to the park for our annual wassailing event in January 2020. (Our study group has adopted a small pawpaw grove along the creek and has returned to it to clean up trash, meditate, and plant pawpaw seeds there for several years.) The damage, the obvious disrespect, anger, and hatred, took my breath away—an in-my-face reminder that some people believe intimidation and cruelty serve their interests. My own reaction, however, was put into even greater perspective when I overheard two young women who had joined us for the event confiding to one another how unsafe they felt in the wood. This wood—our wood—where we had so long walked to encounter the sacred was now a frightening place for these two new members. Both young women were of Latiné heritage. The messages told them that they did not belong and were no longer safe *wherever* they went.

That moment crystallized for me the importance of recognizing how political our everyday interactions within Druid communities always are. Even if we choose not to be political ourselves, the work we carry out as Druids always manifests in the material world. *And that material world is a political place, whether we care to recognize how deeply political our everyday actions are or not.*

What we do as Druids matters. How we carry that work forward within our communities matters.

Before we talked the site that day, I asked everyone present to join me in a circle. I asked us all to open our eyes and to look right into the face of the vandalism and the hatred we saw, unflinchingly. I asked us to have the courage to enter the forest in a spirit of recognition ("we see you"), accountability ("we are not okay with this"), reconciliation ("we apologize for the act of desecration that has been wreaked here"), and then to work toward cleansing and release ("we release/ground our own anger and seek a different future") as we walked. I asked us all to have the courage to do the work of justice, cleansing, and setting ourselves on new footing in the coming months. We shared in our grounding and centering meditation, then walked through the

woods—releasing the cocktail of energies, calling for peace and justice, and telling the small wild area that we were there to do the hard work necessary to make change.

After our meditative walk, we gathered at the pawpaw grove and wassailed the pawpaws with joyous gusto. We tucked cider-soaked bread into the bend of the branches of a few trees, poured libations on their roots, and left apples (cut to reveal the pentagram in their core) beside them. “Oh, pawpaw trees, oh pawpaw trees, we wassail thee! Storms and winds blow, blusters and clouds go—bud well, bear well, may the spring and summer fare you well! Every sprig and every spray, bushels full, hats full, may every fruit be joyful! Oh!” As we took our leave of the wood, we discussed the need for a cleanup in the small park and thought ahead to warmer months. We left knowing that we had only made a small contribution to the space and that we all had much greater need and much more work to do than could be achieved that day.

The next day, a new member, Ryan Franks, posted a note to the group on Meetup: “I did some research last night on removing graffiti from trees safely,” he wrote. “I found some interesting information from Purdue University’s master gardeners that I might go try to apply if anyone else is interested in some Arboreal Rehab. Shoot me a text and let me know if you are interested in helping.” Ryan arranged to meet another san Fhàsach member, and they tested the cleanup method—using citrus cleanser and a scrub brush. They found that the paint could be removed from the trees without harming the bark.

With deepest gratitude to Ryan for modeling “right action,” we scheduled a cleanup day at the park for late March. On the date of our event, 11 other people joined Ryan and me to scrub trees, pick up trash, and carry the work of peace, reconciliation, and restitution forward. In our circle that day we called up cleansing and sweeping energy—time to sweep out the outdated belief systems that no longer served us and that disenfranchised so many. Time to sweep out hatred and racism and blindness to environmental devastation. We scrubbed and washed until the spray paint was barely recognizable and pulled trash from the park. We laughed and joked and found community and joy in the work.

As we worked, a family who was hiking through stopped to thank us all for our work. It was magical in only the way that a group hard at work can make magic—the energy of the space refreshed and realigned. Our work of peace and courage began to undo the wounds. It was only a start.

I am also pleased to tell you that Ryan and Alex, one of the young women I mentioned above, announced their engagement in September. They met at the wassailing event and came to know each other a little more through their work on the site, our cleanup, and other meetings in the circle. (Every blessing on them and their marriage!)

So, yes, 2020 has been a stinker of a year. But Druidry and our circle have given so many of us exactly the sorts of tools we need to face those difficulties generatively, with eyes and hearts wide open for the work we all must do moving forward.

What this event taught me was that when we honor the earth, we also honor each other. Druidry gives us tools to do both thoughtfully, with deep respect for the sacred spark within and

without, with attentiveness to the living and enspirited world.

This issue, my third as editor, brings a multitude of reflections on Druidry as spiritual tradition and daily practice, as well. Our pages are graced with familiar and new names. Our content continues to diversify, reflecting the fantastic diversity of the US-based Druid community.

Trilithon remains a team effort, like the best of today's Druidry—Dana O'Driscoll offered feedback to and support for our new authors. Karen Fisher provided the thorough and keen-eyed copyediting, and Robert Pacitti offered the design acumen that gives this journal its professional polish.

This year may have been a year that few of us will ever forget: COVID, national politics, social unrest, and continuing environmental devastation—it's almost too much to process. And yet, through this devastating year, many of us have seen exactly why the work of the AODA and Druidry matters so very much. As we share our stories and our practices, we further recognize the sacredness of our lives, our groups, and our actions.

In this spirit of blessing, bounty, determination, and connection, I thank you for joining our contributors and myself here to read, reflect, and share with us in this most sacred act.

May we carry the work of peace forward.

Moine Michelle

October 2020

Celebrating Earth, Sea, and Sky in the Faroe Islands

A Photo Essay

Mark Long

Mark Long, aka Skye, is a magical Master Naturalist who whispers to praying mantises and tickles milkweed into bashful laughter under the full moon. He is sexy as hell in hip waders. If you listen closely, you can almost hear the hog weed in his neighborhood pond singing to him. He founded and helps to oversee the Grove of the Bramble and Moon.

I have long had a passion for photography, and it is my go-to bardic art. I wanted to stretch my wings and create a photo essay of a trip I had the good fortune of taking in June 2019 to the Faroe Islands. I imagine several of you might be asking where the Faroe Islands are. To answer that question, the Faroe Islands are a small archipelago located in the North Atlantic, northwest of Scotland and east of Iceland. I was fortunate to be there to celebrate midsummer, and there I found a place very much tied to Earth, Sea, and Sky. Those forces continue to shape the land and the people that live there. It filled me with wonder and awe, as it is a landscape so different from ones that I had seen before in my travels.





In my personal Druid practice, I am called to Earth, Sea, and Sky rather than the more traditional earth, water, fire, and air. Here I really understood that call in a place that is all about those three elements. Pictured above is one of the most iconic sites, the sea stack Drangarnir.



Here is the island of Mykines, home to puffins, erupting out of the sea and reaching for the sky.



Villages were remote for most of the history of the Faroe Islands, and so cairn markers were important signposts.



Risin and Kellingin, the Giant and the Witch, came from Iceland to steal the Faroe Islands, but alas, after working all night to tie a rope around the islands, they didn't pay attention to the rising sun and were caught and turned to stone forever, casting their gaze toward their Icelandic home.



This is a land of drama where the Sea and Sky rule the land and change from minute to minute.



The beauty of this land speaks to my soul and tells me that my path is true.



The feeling of being in an ancient place was so strong that at times it felt like I was about to see dinosaurs soaring through the sky.



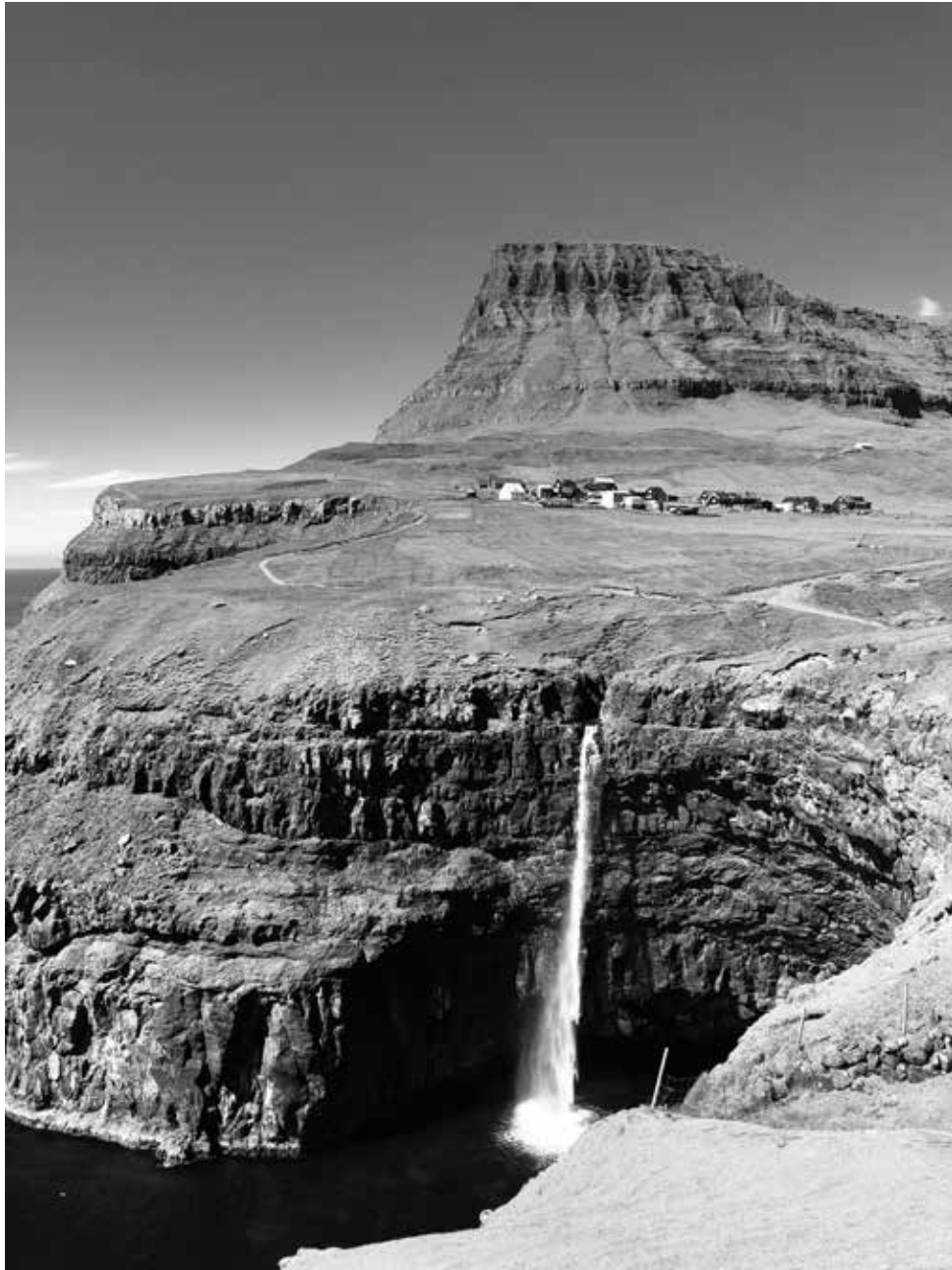
The Faroe Islands are temperate, never going much below thirty degrees or above sixty degrees Fahrenheit. However, they do have wind and a lot of it. In the winter, near-hurricane-force gales sweep the land. Because of this, almost no trees are found on the islands. This little grove was planted by the ruling Danes early in the twentieth century in the capital, Tórshavn.



A typical landscape of grasses, wildflowers, and fences but still able to see water and the sky. Raising sheep is key to the food of the Faorese people and the sheep outnumber the people by about 50,000 to 70,000. The wool is also highly valued by knitters worldwide as I was told by knitter friends who asked that I bring them back skeins of it. It is a land still clinging tightly to its culture and way of life though sheep farming and fishing but also embracing technology in a way that allows for sustainability and compatibility.



Lake Sörvágsvatn is a famous optical illusion. The lake is on the right. The sea is to the left in the picture and is several hundred feet below the lake itself.



Pictured above is Mulafossur waterfall. In a place with so many waterfalls it is hard to choose one, but this one is pretty spectacular.



On these eighteen islands, it is almost impossible to find a place where you cannot see Earth, Sea, and Sky. It is truly a magical place that filled me with magic and wonder, reaffirming the path I walk as a Druid. Creating this photo essay brought back the memories and feeling of magic I experienced traveling to the Faroe Islands. This is a different way to create a journal of our path in Druidry, one I will continue to create as I walk my path and encourage others to give it a try as well. I will leave you with this final thought:

Let the Earth grant us strength
Let the Sea wash us clean
Let the Sky fill us with breath

My Druidry: A Path of Enlightenment

Jill Frew

Jill Frew, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and light healer who has followed a Druid path for over 30 years. She is the author of the Alba Reborn Trilogy, A Guidebook to Druidry, Guardians of the Celtic Way (under the name Jill Kelly), Light Healing for Children, and May the Golden Road to Heaven Lead You Home, and is the founder of the Celtic Heaven School, a nine-month program of Druidry, light healing, and enlightenment (CelticHeaven.com).

I am moved to share my path with others, after 20 years of living in isolation much of the time, talking with fairies and Druid guides far more than any humans in the outside world. It has been a magical, roller-coaster, life-changing awakening, and I wonder so often if anyone else out there has gone through similar things. It can be helpful sometimes to learn about another's life journey, especially a Druid path that may be different from your own. New ways of seeing the worlds, both physical and spirit, come through such stories, for everyone's experiences are needed to develop a holistic sense of spirit ways and Druid work. Untried spirit adventures and methods of learning can also come through. Precise information is given below about phases of life along the way as well, the specific timing and challenges that I believe happen to all of us, meant to be helpful to anyone who wonders about the specifics of a Druid path. It would have helped me greatly know all this before I began my own walking so many years ago. May it help some of you instead.

In the very beginning, as I did a simple ceremony to let my Mom go, six months after she passed over in 1981, the Goddess came in around me in the ethers and said softly into my mind, "I will be your Mother now." Little did I know that would be a 180-degree moment, for in the blink of an eye, I was propelled to search out everything I could find about Celtic times and lore. It felt like my very life was at stake somehow, and I spent every spare moment with my nose in books on the archaeology of the United Kingdom, stone circles, Druid lore. I began having visions of myself living in those long-ago times, too, sitting in a circle of women singing as they threshed grain in a mossy field in Scotland, perhaps, or the utter stillness of priestess ceremonies in dusky caves. Inner doorway

after inner doorway opened, leading me on. But honestly, those old texts left me with far more questions than answers, some seeming too distorted or fanatical to be truth at all. This lasted 12 years.

Then I took a week-long workshop with a Druid shaman, in 1994. And that, too, was astonishing, for he showed us how to communicate with stones, rivers, trees, and how to pass through a natural portal in our minds to enter the spirit world—quite a stretch for a PhD psychologist trained in scientific methodology. On my first journey, a large crow was waiting for me in the deep silence. And it moved right into my body as we flew high over choppy seas with the wind in my face and my shoulders moving up and down in time to its wing strokes. Finally I landed on a sea-bound peninsula, where a Druid stood waiting, who quietly led me up a rise into a circle of stones that I later realized were the Stones of Stenness in the Orkneys. The lanky Druid in his warm woolen robe motioned me to sit with my back to an upright, and that stone came in around me, slowly encasing me in its gneiss-y embrace. Inside was a small chamber of quartz crystals, like a geode. Several of these opened slowly, quietly releasing images of past lives I'd lived, lives of pain and failure mainly. This tiny place held all my past-life memories, even my long-ago descent, and it was magical beyond words for me to know I'd had past lives that were influencing my present. Always, these journeys were utterly silent, my Druid guides not responding to the many questions I posed. After this workshop, all life became my family again in the most wondrous way. I began to journey regularly, to sit beneath the trees near my home. For a therapist and mother of three, life was busy and often challenging. My favorite meditation happened one morning when the day ahead felt overwhelming with responsibilities, and I was already tired from the day before. So I went out to sit beneath a copse of white pines outside my bedroom and asked for peace. And in moments, the green branches above me turned to wings, the feathered tips gently brushing my back. This utter magic filled me with joy and all the strength I needed for the clients I was so concerned about. This phase lasted two years, though I have continued to journey ever since.

Then, in 1996, I was moved to attend an 18-month school to learn energy healing, flying out to the introductory four-day session in Sedona, Arizona, which happened to be on Imbolc. On the next-to-last day, one of the teachers spoke to me and a couple of others, saying we were all ready to have a soul merge. He said if we just asked for this and set aside any beliefs that might interfere for a few minutes, it would happen. So I did that. And immediately, into my mind came a being so brilliant I couldn't see any detail, just light wafting off him in bright waves. As he moved his arm, a nine-square grid appeared on my chest, full of strange symbols like astrological signs that I didn't understand. These were being quickly removed and replaced as I heard a clickety typewriter sound in my mind. "Who are you?" I asked the being of light. "Metatron," he said. "I never heard of you," I added, and he nodded, saying, "No, I like to be experienced, not read about." And that was all. No one else in the room saw the same thing, others having completely different images and experiences in their minds, although even those not involved in this soul merge noticed the room brightening up. It was startling in the extreme! And then I saw white fire around all the doorways I walked through for 24 hours, waking up repeatedly in the night as this fire brightened around the doorways in my room. And after that, every time anyone walked up to me in class, a Rolodex of pictures of

past lives with that person began flipping through my mind's eye. On the plane home, I kept seeing past lives with my husband and my children, and had the first glimmers of understanding how all these past experiences were partially creating the difficulties in my relationships, especially my marriage. It took about six weeks to get my head on straight after that one!

In our energy school healings, we focused on areas of shadow in our fellow students and pulled them out with our fingers, handing them to the Heart of God, a misty white light that always came into the ethers when we invoked it. My teachers said we needed to read the energy until we had a feel for the belief, for the beliefs made our outer worlds fall into place. And every time I had a healing on myself, I could see the spirit world taking reflections of those recently healed fears out of my own little world, another amazing occurrence! And since it was an extremely painful time in my life, the growing realization that I had the power to change my outer world for the better drew me to my path like nothing else could. I could feel the bedrock of my life shifting, the dark recesses of pain within lighting up, and freedom beckoning in the distance.

As I did my own healing meditations every day after that, I noticed colors coming into my aura, too, staying for a week or two, and then moving out to be replaced by others. Always, these colors moved down into the earth, and the new one came in from above like I was climbing up some ladder of light. And these colors, too, had startling properties, for the challenges in my life would take a different form each time they changed, as if these colors were directing the fears that arose for healing in my world.

It is 2020 now, and I've done these healing meditations at least twice a day for 24 years, always led by Druid guides. In time, I could see a structure to these planes of light. There were initiations, too, when the outer difficulties became really intense, always followed by a move to a new location, the end of a relationship, new work, major shifts of some kind in my circumstances. I could see that all my clients, Druid or not, were going through identical phases, similar struggles in their own lives, so it is the same for everyone through life, useful for anyone to understand.

The first 18 planes, which my Druids call the sensate realms, fell away at the end of my first marriage. During my sensate years of life, I lived in a distant marriage and a large home, and was busy all the time, with zero time for the spirit world or myself. The sensate phase is marked by living within the false structures of our earth world with a focus on possessions, getting love on the outside, and fitting into a personal mold that keeps our true inner selves closed down. These binding structures build in the desire to create some very specific change on earth in due time, and this sensate phase ends with the earth initiation (the midlife brick wall).

Then came the soul phase, 44 planes. After that soul merge, the past lives in my journeys were suddenly on other star systems, not earth. And my Druid guides said I was now facing fears from my long-ago descent from heaven to earth. This time in my life was marked by power struggles with my partner, intense financial difficulties, a role reversal where I was the breadwinner and he stayed home. I tried repeatedly to get him to work, without success. Spirit was opening our inner opposite genders, but I didn't know that then. And the major gift at the end of that challenging water initiation was giving up trying to change anyone else, realizing I could only change myself. I committed to healing my own inner fears from all those past lives that were impacting my outer

world. And great was my relief in not having to worry about what anyone else was doing or feeling, which had been a heavy burden in my life from early childhood on. During this soul phase, it was fae women, devas, who came into my visions to assist me, the beings who inhabit that realm of the inner planes.

And then, after closing my practice and moving to a far less expensive location, I began a large project that took inordinate amounts of time with a looming deadline. I loved it, but I could barely breathe with all the details and preparations. This is the spirit realm, 66 planes. And there were numerous beings coming into my mind to teach me all this time as well, lots of pressure and confusion, the air initiation. But the gift of that level was the utter peace and simplicity of life after that program was over, knowing I would never, ever agree to such a hectic pace again. The beings who helped me during this phase were always djinns, male fairies, not so easy to get along with sometimes! And this was the phase when I began to hear my dogs talking with one another (the older one mostly encouraging the younger one to behave) and to have visitations from butterflies and grasshoppers giving me simple and heartfelt advice about my troubles of the day. My so-called isolation has always been full to bursting with natural friends and visitors, just very few humans.

Then came the logos phase, 14 planes, during which I began writing a book every year in meditation with spirit. The beings in my meditations during this phase were always seraphim, very strong adolescent angels. I was in a lovely space above a river with plenty of trees and room to roam. But there came false voices at this level, especially at night, lifts into high expectations with drops into despair, the insanity impulses, which turned out not to be diseases at all but simply past-life fears needing to be healed. One morning in December, I awoke with an intensely heavy energy around me, feeling like I was moving through concrete, a serious depression energy. Never did I feel that these states were real, lasting, or actually part of me at all. They were simply fears the universe was sending my way to heal. There has always been a fair amount of pain, though, as the fears come in; it's not easy. But that heavy depression took only three days to move through and life was clear again.

This was the time when my efforts to do workshops, and so on, in the outer world were always met by blockages of one kind or another, too. And I finally realized the spirit world wished me to stop pushing on my own to do anything and wait for direction from the universe before acting. My Druid guides later told me this was the will-breaking process, to bring my personal will into alignment with the greater good and the universe, very challenging for an action-oriented person like myself. There was a phase toward the end when violent images were hard to get away from, too, stories neighbors told, books, frightening folks showing up on the public trail behind my house. And at the very end of this phase came a startling love experience unlike anything I'd ever known, for this man spoke and felt exactly like Oghama, the Druid high god whom I'd come to depend on within, gentle, true, understanding, and full of love. But I found out this man was involved with another and remembered a long-ago infidelity life with him. Pain and sadness ensued—the fire initiation. But this, too, was a gift, for it opened into the realization that this Otherworldly love had been sent by the Creators through this man to me, that the Creators were the Source of love, no one else. So, They became my true Beloveds, my forever partners in life, the actual Source for everything I need-

ed, especially love. The fire initiation marks the opening of the mystical marriage path, union with the One Beloveds.

Then came the move to an ecovillage, a simple childlike life, where no one minded if I talked with trees or ladybugs or meditated my days away. There was zero focus on money or power, either, a great relief. But the work turned out to be utterly exhausting, organic gardening, green building, stacking wood, cooking for 50 by myself, and loads and loads of washing bedding for workshop participants. And there were very harsh women in authority that kept coming into my life, too, typical of this level, the cherub realms, 10 planes. My healing memories related to past lives being harmed and sacrificed as a child during old matriarchal times. And it was cherubs, of course, who came to assist in my journeys then as well.

Then, in a single day, I became super manic and couldn't sleep more than two hours a night, having to leave the community very abruptly. I'd entered the sixth heaven, the diamond centerpoint, the abyss. It was a medication imbalance that took six months to correct, the bone initiation, followed by becoming obsessed with writing the first book of my trilogy. I mean, I couldn't stop, 12-hour days, six and a half days a week. And my usual isolation became even more pronounced. There were Druid gods and goddesses for all these planes of light, with very specific regencies that I was trying to figure out, and it all kept changing as more planes opened. I'd think I was finished with all the Druid lessons in the book, and then a new world would open with more planes, and I'd have to go back to all the regents I'd already written about and pull out little details to fit the new regents of the higher planes. This happened 15 or 20 times! On and on, I tried desperately to complete the manuscript, only to have more information and confusion coming in. I was literally forced to go through every level in very fine detail, meditating about every little thing, until I had it clearly in my mind, clarity always linked to my fear-healing meditations as well. (And I was learning Scottish country dancing and Scottish Gaelic at the same time, both highly detailed and confusing in themselves.) (My father, too, happened to be going through the sixth heaven in his life then, but for him it was dementia, a far different kind of mental confusion.) There were 41 planes in the sixth heaven, with gods and goddesses of one sort or another assisting on my inner journeys.

Then finally, I entered the last heaven of the inner realms. I'd been making silk scarves with tall mountains on them all that summer, and as I drove from New England to Washington state to live, I came around a curve in the road, and there was Mt. Hood across the river, majestic and utterly overpowering in its stark beauty. This was my entrance into the Diamond Core, the seventh heaven, the highest mountain still ahead. After this, I was learning and writing about the 16 light structures of the Diamond Core, 173 planes. These light structures are: the seven cosmic chakras; three for mind, heart, and action; and five more for our inner basic aspects of spirit, which I'll get to in the next paragraph. There's a diamond initiation at the end, too, my Druid guides tell me, but I haven't quite reached that yet. This phase has been marked by a consolidation of all the learning from the many steps before, finally completing that very frustrating trilogy with all the details finally fitting into place and staying put, thank Goddess! This last heaven, too, is inhabited by gods and goddesses in forever partnerships, who turned out to be the old Druid pantheon. I loved having the old Druid details finally coming into place in a way that made total sense.

Meanwhile, over all these 24 years, my Druid guides were doing things like having me make small rounds of white oak wood with Ogham letters burned onto them, sitting under all the trees of the Druid moons during the appropriate seasons, and feeling the energies of each one. I was led to understand the Druid trees, moons, Ogham letters, and their meanings and energies deeply, for it was necessary to steep in each one for weeks at a time. And silence became a way of life, as well as living in the Otherworld more than this one, but walking easily in both, switching back and forth in the blink of an eye sometimes. I love that, too.

I'd noticed early on in my healing work that everyone's energy field holds a fivefold pattern. All past life mother memories are located in the upper left arm and torso, father in the upper right, girl in the lower left leg and abdomen, and boy in the lower right, with partnership and marriage memories in the heart. I could feel that the earth holds the identical pattern; the Middle East holds memories of the beloveds, and the continents of the mother (Asia), the father (N. America), the girl (Africa), and boy (S. America). Even the USA felt the same: the father in the Northwest, mother in the Northeast, girl in the Southeast, and boy in the Southwest, with the beloveds in the Midwest. And as I sat with the eight high holy days of the Druid year, I could clearly feel how each connected with these different aspects of our inner spirits, too. For Imbolc opens the cosmic little girl, followed by six weeks of facing and healing ancient girl wounds, her specific fears coming into everyone's lives. Then the vernal equinox opens the little boy; Bealtaine, the virgin girl (adolescent); Midsummer, the virgin boy; Lughnasa and the autumnal equinox, the mother and father; and Samhain and Midwinter, the grandmother and grandfather. And inside all of us each year, too, one part of our divine or fully actualized selves is seeded at Midwinter, birthed in these same eight parts, challenged, and grown into being through these same stages to become fully realized and functional by the next Midwinter's dawn. I could feel how these stages are repeated in the Christian calendar (linked to one of those 15 light structures of the seventh heaven, the White Pentagram), too, a definite overlap of Christian and Druid truths in many areas. So, these two traditions became completely compatible inside me over the years as well, as the old illusions and hatred, one for the other, within were healed away. I have yet to meet a Druid or Christian who is happy with this (or with me, either, for that matter), but there it is. Many, many of the teachings from my Druid guides were different from any and all readings or groups I connected with in the outer world, far more detailed and rich with understandings that I haven't seen anywhere else. So now, I think the Goddess wants to teach each of us on a path of experience in direct connection with Her and the spirit/natural world, not through books but with living presences and Druid guides in the other/spirit/world.

And last, I could feel, right away in 1982, that there was a real Goddess I'd never even heard of in my Christian upbringing, a Goddess with far-reaching powers and directives distinctly different from God's. She's a Goddess who comes at a moment's call to hold and support me whenever I'm in need, a Goddess I will never deny again as long as I live. So, there are two Creators, the White Tara and Oghama, my Druid guides call them, in a forever marriage, creating all that is. They are the Beloveds of the cosmos, and Their finest creation is the love force that has healed every single thing I've drawn into it over 24 years. Because humans took on all these fears on the way down in order to renew wisdom for the universe, in cosmic gratitude, we are each given a true love and high destiny

at the end of our earth walking, when the diamond initiation is complete. It means we will each have one forever partner in utter love, and a shared world service that will lift the whole earth in some way, living in the exact image of the Creators on earth. Once everyone completes their fear-facing journey here, these global beloved partners will form beloved communities, too, each with a specific purpose before God/Goddess, with security of love, provisions, and heartfelt work to do. This is heaven on earth, the end of all our striving. It's what my Druid guides are working toward, they tell me, what all traditions serve. Me, too, now.

These teachings are distinctly different from all Druid books or folks I've learned from in the outer world. So it may help to think about these things; going inward more often than not, living in silence most of the time, slowing down and really listening to spirit voices and inner guides, not allowing tradition to bind too tightly. And many of the specifics, such as the solstice/equinox and cross-quarter-day spirit openings described here, I've never seen anywhere else. These teachings came from my inner Druid guides and have matched my own experiences for over 20 years and brought a world of clarity and understanding to my heart and mind that was completely hidden before. I used to ache, more than I can describe, to go back to Celtic times, to live there again, to hold Druid wisdom in my heart, a longing that has been fully satisfied (though I have greatly simplified the teachings to fit into an article). May you, too, reflect on these new ideas, a different structure of the universe and Druid ways. I like to let the light of Spirit flow in wild unfettered ways, not bound too tightly by the past, the illusions of the outer world. May your own way be steeped in freedom's fragrance, too. And if any of you have resonance with this path and understandings, please let me know; for I'd love to finally connect with like-minded Druid folk. Blessed be, all Druids everywhere. It's an exquisite journey.



Alchemical Personal Transmutation Within the Sphere of Protection

Selene Blackwell

Selene Blackwell has followed the flow of Awen and the path of Druidry since 2008 when she first discovered books written by Philip Carr-Gomm and John Michael Greer in her local library while attending nursing school in Ohio. Born in Illinois and raised on multiple continents, she returned to America at the age of eighteen to pursue a career as a nurse and subsequently got her master's degree as a nurse practitioner from Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Selene now lives in the Appalachian Mountains with her wife, is an avid gardener and psychology buff, and delights in playing with her two older dogs (Raven and Wren), her cat (Remus), and her pet ball python (Reece).

The biggest problem we face in this age is not overpopulation, illness, nor global warming but rather our underdeveloped capacity for collective knowing and conscious transmutative individualization. Through my learning and experiences in Druidry over the past eight years, through Jungian psychology, and with my Anishinaabe/Ojibwe mentor, this has been made clear. The state of the world reflects our collective state of mind and vice versa; both the inner and the outer worlds mirror each other. The human is bigger than the personas that they display, and should the individual consciousness awaken and heal, so too would the collective psychic wounds of our time. First this must happen through significant change at an individual level, a transformation catalyzed by the need for change, transmuted, and then reflected back into the collective unconscious for the amelioration of all.

The human's process of individuation, as per C. G. Jung, is the process of changing one's psyche by bringing the personal and collective unconscious into the conscious. Individuation as defined by Bud Harris is "a path that shows us how self-knowledge not only helps us navigate the most difficult encounters with ourselves and life but also becomes the creative force behind expanding our psychic structure and attaining a fulfilled life" (page). Individuation leads to an increase in maturity, peace, and emotional balance of the individual. This growth is seen most in the second half of life, as the young should not be obsessed with the self but rather should be learning

about the world around them (Jung, 1980). However, as the human approaches the autumn of life, they will achieve emotional success only if they succeed in entrenching themselves in understanding their own psyche; for nothing in the psyche is old, and the psyche cannot die. Jung hypothesized that through this personal individuation, the changes that were brought forth would then reflect back into the collective unconscious. I propose that this reflection back into the collective unconscious will raise the vibration of both humans and nature.

The word “nature,” in this context, is more than just the plants in your garden. It includes any phenomena of the physical world. All of nature changes us, but we also change all of nature. If the human acknowledges and embraces the forces that have effects for and against their spiritual growth, they will continue to develop their capacity for self-knowledge and thus integrate the collective unconscious into the conscious. The psyche contains the conscious and subconscious aspects of the human being, whose elements are all recognized within the AODA Sphere of Protection; it contains myriad subliminal perceptions, symbols, and instincts accumulated by previous generations.

The collective unconscious aspect of the psyche, if personified, would be “a collective human being combining the characteristics of both sexes, transcending youth and age, birth and death, and from having at his command a human experience of one or two million years, almost immortal” (Jung, 1980). Thankfully we can connect to our subconscious through dreams and visions, which communicate to us things we had not yet considered for the purpose of identifying things about ourselves that we need to work on, otherwise known as our complexes in Jungian terms.

To the unconscious, time is not linear. The Druids of old understood that time is not linear, as did nearly every ancient tribe from the Native Americans to the old tribes deep in Africa (King, 2019). The alchemical stages are not linear, as a person could be in the calcination stage regarding one internal process and also be, at the same time, in the conjunction stage regarding another internal process. The person is a complicated being who experiences many things all together: the wonder of the sky being blue, the grief of losing an elder, and love for your mate can all happen at the same time.

Alchemical Stage: Calcination

Real life is always tragic, and those who do not know this have never lived.

Carl Jung

For the alchemist, the process of calcination involves heating a substance until it is reduced to ash. Ash is considered the life-giving offspring of a fire (which is also considered a living entity in and of itself). Ash should never be blown on, as this would scatter it. Rather, the ash should be collected and cared for. In our greatest difficulties are the answers to those problems. The process of calcination is heavily associated with the element of fire, which can be a destructive force or a tempering force that seeds new life. Fire is a very important element to the alchemist and to the

Druid. Burn the fire too hot, and you can destroy forever that which you are trying to reduce. This is why we have emotional burnout in many professions—the fire is too hot inside us for too long. The opposite is also true; if the substance is not heated enough by the flames, then no calcination will happen, and ash will not be produced. Without passion, without a catalyst, there will be no movement forward on one's journey. For the human, the initiation of action toward personal transmutation involves the catalyst of fire, resulting in dissatisfaction with one's own stagnancy. If the individual does not properly embrace the catalyst of this stage, they cannot proceed to the stage of dissolution and will become stuck in a constant state of deflated ego. They will remain depressed and angry, disillusioned by the world with no motivation to improve themselves or it.

Calcination can be likened to the call of adventure for the mythological hero to start their journey. For Pwyll, prince of Dyfed, in the *Mabinogi* it was the dishonorable act of taking another man's kill for himself, and being called out for it, that made him aware of his own offense and started his mythological journey. Calcination is an uncomfortable period that brings to light preconceived notions and removes the previously cherished beliefs that hold us back. The collective unconscious is full of mythological symbolism that comes to light in all stages of personal transmutation.

C. G. Jung defines the self as the unification of unconscious and conscious, representing the psyche as a whole. Before the individual can begin to develop and understand the self and the roles other forces play in the self, they must first feel the need to look in that direction. The need for change, the need for self-knowledge, and the need for individuation require a certain degree of maturity already within the individual and must have an outside catalyst. This typically happens in the second half of life for most people. This catalyst could be anything from a death-defying, life-changing event to a simple anomaly that encourages eye-opening curiosity. I have seen this catalyst happen in an individual seeing a bird they'd never seen before. This bird ignited within their conscious a desire to learn more about the natural world around them and led to a complete life transmutation. Either way, personal investment in the process is paramount, as no one can do the work of alchemy for someone else. We are responsible for our own alchemical transmutation.

Within modern society there is a significant dissonance between nature and the human, as Aldo Leopold makes clear in every month of his *Sand County Almanac*. The realization of this dissonance within my own life was my catalyst back in 2008 that began my own path toward self-healing and Druidry. Sitting in the woods, I realized that my life was lacking. The constant pushing for better grades as an undergraduate student was unfulfilling to a great portion of my spirit. I broke down in the woods and cried, and the longing for a more balanced life was ignited within me. I realized that there were complexes in my subconscious that were inhibiting me from reaching my goal of balance and internal peace and that the only way to deal with them was not to destroy or remove them but to go through them one by one and integrate these complexes into myself.

The goal of my Druidry is to follow my own path of Awen and to learn from my ancestors of blood, place, and vocation. American society is not based on the laws of nature but on the laws created by our version of capitalism. An internal rejection of some of the societal norms and

mediocrity of the prime material you are dealing with at the time of calcination, if embraced, will lead to the success of the individual at completing this stage of psychological development and the enumeration of one's own set of personal ethics in cohabitation with nature during later processes. In fact, it is the duty of those who have reached middle age to concern themselves with understanding their own selves. For, as Jung (1970) says, if the human does not journey on the path of alchemical individuation, then as they age they will become "hypochondriacs, niggards, doctrinaires, applauders of the past or eternal adolescents." This is the work of the southern quarter of the Sphere of Protection.

Alchemical Stage: Dissolution

The collective unconscious consists of the sum of the instincts and their correlates, the archetypes. Just as everybody possesses instincts, so he also possesses a stock of archetypal images.

Carl Jung

The process of dissolution involves total immersion of the human into the unconscious. This process is mirrored by the Druid's descent into the Cave of Souls to learn from the ancients, the downward journey of the hero into the pits of fire to fight their demons, and the analytical psychologist's attention to dreams. Within the order of our daily life, it is easy to forget that we have a chaotic iceberg of emotions and symbols known as the collective unconscious always beneath the surface of our conscious ego. Our conscious ego exists because of our subconscious, for the ego did not create the subconscious but the other way around. The ancients understood this, but modern society has lost this understanding of proto-man, thinking of themselves only as the consciousness and very little more. Dissolution calls for us to embrace the collective unconscious, by understanding its symbols, its mythology, and its archetypes, to further dissolve our own conscious assumptions and unconscious complexes and accept them all as the self. Dissolution calls for us to consider the animistic thought processes of proto-man, which are so different from our own.

We have so much to learn and so little time on this earth. History and suggestive primordial images (Jung, 1935) are significant factors of change that come to light as the corrupted and artificial structures are broken down within our psyche during the process of dissolution. Our history, even if we do not know it, affects us. Even the foods eaten and the lifestyles of our ancestors affect how our bodies metabolize micronutrients (Parolol et al., 2017). What they did and how they lived matters. What we do and how we live matters. By knowing our personal history, the history of those whose land we live on, and the history of our own blood relatives, our scholastic ancestors, and our ancestors of Druidry, we are freed from their conflicts and able to live in partnership with both them and the whole self.

The metaphorical mythologies of our ancestors, across all cultures, continue to play a role within our daily lives (Hunt, 2012) through the collective unconscious. These archaic remnants, as Freud (2012) called them, are mental forms that cannot be explained by anything in that individu-

al person's life. The collective unconscious is viewed by Jung as surrounding the unconscious mind of the individual (Elgin, 1997), flowing around it and presenting it with images and symbols of the past and other humans around them to add depth and understanding, influencing the person's life and decisions without even the ego consciousness taking much notice of them. The collective unconscious is exactly what it sounds like: it is the storehouse of common human experiences since the beginning of time and the source of all archetypal forms (Forrest, 2019). The collective unconscious is full of symbols, images, and innate instincts that communicate with us through dreams and waking visions as the ego's control over the consciousness is released while asleep or in a meditative state. In order to read this convoluted mess of images, we must first look at history, mythology, and our own personal past. Without knowing the past, we are doomed to always repeat it. Without the knowledge of historical symbols, our dreams just appear to us as incoherent, irrational, silly images. Dreams of dragons or mythical monsters, three-headed dogs guarding caves or one-eyed vampires are important symbols in our psyche that tell us about the issues we are dealing with, our complexes, our shadows, and how to address them.

Like an iceberg whose greater portion is under the water, the unconscious is a greater portion of the self than is the conscious. As noted above, we connect with this part of ourselves through dream journaling and understanding our dreams and waking visions. Waking visions are not to be confused with the hallucinations of mental and physical illness. Dreams do not tell us things we already know or inflate our egos, and any such interpretations of a dream are faulty. Dreams tend to compensate and provide counterbalance for the things in our lives that we lack. For example, a man who feels powerless at work and is put down by his boss may dream of being the shining hero. A woman who degrades her sister by day may see the sister as a goddess in a dream. By taking the symbols in our dreams, listing them with our own associations, and amplifying those associations with the ideas of mythology and our histories as noted above, we can come to a good interpretation of a dream or vision. The subconscious can see what the conscious has not yet determined. A businesswoman may dream of a car crash before, in waking life, her business venture fails. Occasionally our dreams can give us hints of what is yet to come. Freud believed in the retrospective aspect of dreams, but Jung, through his own experiences, found that to be a misconception. Our dreams are best interpreted according to our present conditions and are affected by our current and future situations.

Let us take the ashes we have protected, the alchemical calcination, and gently bury them in the earth. Let us saturate these ashes, the assumptions of our ego, with the substance of the unconscious until the two are immersed together. This is our first union of two substances. From the southern quarter to the northern quarter, from fire to earth, from passion to grounding. The dissolution process can harm the ego if it is not robust enough to endure the new awareness. It can leave the person in a feeling of stuckness and confusion. However, should the ego withstand the onslaught of the understanding of itself and the individual avoid getting hung up on one complex or another, they will find themselves present in the moment, grounded, stable, and feeling at their core the breath of the ancestors. They will be able to view with impunity their personal complexes

and allow work to be done through waking or sleeping dreams told from the subconscious. This is the work of the northern quarter of the Sphere of Protection.

Alchemical Stage: Separation

I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil.

J.R.R. Tolkien

Nature's cycle is full of dualities. The death of one life provides the sustenance for another. As per Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*, all things must eat. Both plants and animals eat each other through the cycle of life. But what drives us? What emotions drive the whippoorwill to make its nightly calls? What passions encourage the man who drains a swamp to also wonder at a night sky full of stars? What brought about the myth of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? Our everyday minimal awareness of the consciousness hides the real motivation for why we do what we do. This lack of understanding of our human mind and its behaviors and the duality of our thoughts is why people study psychology. Psychologist Carl Jung explains the process of alchemical separation as an understanding of one's own shadow, or shadow work. Shadow work is important because "no one can free himself from his [shadow] without first generously occupying himself with it." As the ancient alchemists said, "we must cook the problem in its own blood" (Jung, 1953).

As one brews tea, the water is the extraction medium that effects separation between the leaves and the essence of the tea. So too does the element of water assist us in separation between the helpful and unhelpful aspects of our whole self. The western gate of water reveals wisdom. Separation reveals truth. During the process of separation, one becomes aware of authentic feelings versus culturally imposed conceptions. This process lets us resolve unhealthy relationships and revitalize healthy relationships. It assists us in brainstorming our own relation to others, to ideas, and to nature with an open mind. The shadow selves are made up of not only unhelpful qualities but also helpful qualities. This duality explores the idea that unhealthy relationships helped form us into the person we are today and gave birth to the positive aspects that help us grow. There is helpful within the unhelpful. Don't take this the wrong way: the realization of internal duality does not excuse any wrongdoing on the part of ourselves or others.

Ancestral grief, carried by the collective unconscious, also plays a significant role. Ancestral grief is the acknowledgment of trauma that precedes us; we may grieve on behalf of other creatures or plants or places that have been robbed of their nutrients. We may grieve on behalf of ourselves or our ancestors or the archetypes within us who are suffering. During my time growing up in West Africa, I felt like I had no power or control over the world around me. This was manifested in a victim archetype of a young woman who had experienced much trauma and would not, even could not, survive. I dreamed of her many times, and she was in my active imagination as a teenager. She is a part of me, and by acknowledging her I was given a passive control over my life. Sometimes she would present herself as a wounded child archetype. I grieved with

her over her own upcoming death. We as humans are the vessels through which flow the experiences of the planet (Jung, 1959), so allow yourself to grieve, to sing in joy, and to experience the irrational dualities of nature and our human experience.

The shadow side of ourselves contains all the parts of ourselves we don't want to admit to having, such as rage, trauma, laziness, cruelty, sadness, personal power, independence, emotional sensitivity, and so on. Your shadow side is not a duality of evil nor good, as these are words applied by the general culture, but rather a duality of helpful and unhelpful aspects, in relation to our own growth and well-being. The myth of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is dramatized to show the extremes of such a dualism within the individual. Dr. Jekyll is both good and evil, while playing the persona demanded by his culture of a meek and kind doctor. Mr. Hyde is his projected evil without a counterbalance, animalistic, lacking the constraints of society or culture. Both figures are unable to fully emote or communicate. As Druids, we recognize the element of water, which pervades the alchemical stage of separation, as being full of emotion and communication of that emotion. To communicate between the shadow and the ego that are combined together in the earthen cauldron of dissolution is the present goal.

Most of all, during the process of separation one learns to understand true emotions, resolve unhealthy relationships, and work through ancestral grief. One should not shy away from this process of shadow work despite how uncomfortable it may be, because the bulk of human awareness lies under the surface of the consciousness, and to come into oneness with it is the whole purpose of individuation. This is the work of the western quarter of the Sphere of Protection.

Alchemical Stage: Conjunction

No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.

Albert Einstein

The duality experienced in separation is here realized to be a false dichotomy. In conjunction begins our second effort to combine; the union of the duality creates a new form. This form takes on a triad whose mere existence begets a quaternity with nature to be whole and complete. Through this, a new understanding of "what is self" is achieved. Alchemical conjunction is also called the Lesser Stone because it is the first recombination to create just one thing: a unified human. It is a new birth through quiet contemplation and the opening of the heart to self-acceptance. This is a critical psychological steppingstone in the process of individuation.

Having worked through the elements of fire, earth, and water, we have now reached the final element in the quaternity: air. Air is the element of intellectual understanding, of reason, of lofty ambitions and realizations, and so on. It is the color of daffodils and new spring to the Druid. The alchemist does not view color in the same way as the Druid. I do not associate with the

alchemist, so I will not go further down that line of thinking. One should be aware of synchronicities happening during this time that make clear the path ahead. Keep your eyes open, for “everything is becoming and changing. Nothing stands still” (Kybalion, 2007). This union of opposites leads to the birth of new possibilities.

It is through the process of conjunction that the Druid may create their own inner world on the astral plane or elsewhere that allows the unconscious to start to become present in the outer world of the consciousness. This creation of your own world is in direct correlation with the Kybalion’s maxim “All is mind.” Because, as described here, the process of creation and manifestation through the Will (masculine) acting on Nature (feminine) created the Universe. Here is a duality, Will and Nature, creating a triad, the Universe, in quaternity with the All.

There are no feelings of “must” or need, as in the fire or earth phases, but rather the unconscious starts to bubble up into the consciousness, and the Druid who has learned to listen now trusts their instincts and feelings to guide their hands and thoughts. There is active healing and joy at the feeling of balance and peace that has been born through the chaos.

Alchemical Stage: Fermentation

Deep within the center of my being, may I find peace.

Druid Peace Prayer

Fermentation, also called the dark night of the soul, is the fifth operation in alchemical transformation. After the joy, comfort, and success of conjugation, one should not stop on the journey. Fermentation is not comfortable. It is a dirty process, but it does extract life from our low substances. In chemistry, fermentation is defined by the extraction of energy from carbohydrates in the absence of oxygen. Humans are agents of change. To create change, one force must act upon another, like an alchemist in his laboratory transmuting iron to gold.

The telluric currents are energy currents from the deep earth, strong and chthonic work that encourages us not to hold onto what is bogging us down but rather to let go. We are human, and our mortality is unavoidable. The result of a proper fermentation will be an individual who lives life prepared for a conscious death, who lives in the present without fear of the future nor the past but in harmony with both. If fermentation is achieved, then the old aspects of ourselves that were unhelpful that we recognized previously can finally be discarded and allowed to rot.

For the individual to move forward in the process of individuation, the new, unstable, weak being created in the last phase must experience an inner death so that the self may be re-created into a higher level of being. This is the second threshold of the mythological hero who, after defeating the mighty evil dragon, must themselves die so that they may be reborn. This is seen when the hero falls asleep right after vanquishing their foe but has a dream of reuniting with a dead lover or relative. The hero’s fermentation may be experienced as a profound stillness, a vision,

a silence, or a transportation down to the underworld to commune with the dead. It involves rot and decay that leads to a renewal of spirit. The chaotic telluric energies enfold the self like a temporary tomb so that the individual may experience a second death and awaken in alchemical transmutation.

Prayer and hermitation are the most effective works during this time because the process of fermentation does not start from within but without. Inspiration from outside ourselves is key to this process. For the Druid, they may find it in Awen, in prayer, in meditation, and so on. The completion of fermentation is the beginning of the final journey toward individuation.

Alchemical Stage: Distillation

*I think one's feelings waste themselves in words; they ought all to be distilled
into action which bring results.*

Florence Nightingale

Distillation is the act of refining a liquid with heat and cooling. The human self has realized all its parts, both the conscious and unconscious, and integrated them all as self. Fermentation has created new energy and new life in the spirit. Now is the time when the solar currents take over from the telluric currents, and one can no longer hide away from the world.

This is a time of action and integration of one's spiritual life into daily practice, a time to put thought into practice and create new habits. Some habits may be rejected as ineffective, and some may turn into a lifestyle. It is up to the individual to decide which practical actions are most effective for their continued growth and well-being.

During this stage, the human may struggle with developing and putting into practice their own personal ethics created on their own personal beliefs. Experimentation with thoughts, ideas, ethics, and ideals is important as it shows the human what they truly resonate with and what falls flat. Or, in the terms of scientific distillation, experimentation will show what has the same boiling point and what has a different boiling point that doesn't belong in the refined substance. Distillation is a cathartic process of unification, a necessary struggle against the final aspects of our baser instincts that inhibit growth. It is the final challenge of the mythological hero as they return to the known world a unified and solid person.

To continue to be a hermit during the time of distillation is to use one's own inner world to escape truly living in the outer world. To fail to distill results in neither the development of personal ethics nor their integration into action. This effectively stunts one's spiritual development. An example of this is seen commonly in spiritual leaders who appear to have a high degree of self-realization and then are arrested for illegal behavior. Socialization with others and communion with the collective unconscious are the most effective tools during this time as the person continues to try out their new ethics and habits with the purpose of integration into practical spirituality.

Alchemical Stage: Coagulation

We seek peace, knowing that peace is the climate of freedom.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Coagulation is the last step in the alchemical transmutation process. To coagulate is to thicken or congeal liquid, represented by rich symbolism such as life-giving blood, reddening, freedom, and wholeness. The problem we identified in calcination has been dealt with, has died, has been transcended, and has been implemented practically into our lives. The spiritual body has been materialized and the physical body spiritualized. As Carl Jung said, “Do not compare, do not measure. No other way is like yours. All other ways deceive and tempt you. You must fulfill the way that is in you” (Jung, 1999).

To be a well-rounded individual does not mean that one is perfect. Individuation is not equivalent to transcendence. We are all on our own journeys, afflicted and assisted by our shared collective unconscious. The prism of the human self is unified in coagulation as the dots are connected within the Sphere of Protection: fire, earth, water, air, telluric, solar, and now center. We are the philosopher’s stone. Peace, self-love, self-compassion, and wisdom are found as we step into the center of the self. We exist, semisolid, but in full integrity. The mythological hero is now the world dancer, a master of outer and inner worlds, of telluric and solar currents, and has the freedom to live their life.

Despite this apparent ending, coagulation is simply another beginning, returning to the first step of calcination. Everything is a cycle. As stated by the Kybalion’s Principle of Rhythm, the process of change for any human is always ongoing. Alchemical transmutation may have completed simply in order to begin again, although perhaps not as large or in a completely different way. The wheel turns and the cycle continues, without beginning and without end but full of change.

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The Unintended Path

My Magical Journey in Creating Ogham

Alisha Jondreau

Alisha grew up in northern Ontario along the shores of Lake Huron, and currently resides to the east in the Nipissing region. Although mixed ethnically, she grew up learning an Anishnabae spirituality, and the magical tradition of her Indigenous family as a child. The Anishnabae culture inspired a love of beadwork, which she has pursued. Alisha has been doing beadwork for twenty-four years, and has been producing 3-D beaded flowers, plants, and animals for thirteen years (see [Www.sparklingwolf.com](http://www.sparklingwolf.com) or [lilsparklingwolf](https://www.instagram.com/lilsparklingwolf) on Instagram). She joined AODA in 2019 after reading The Druidry Handbook. She has enjoyed discovering ways to combine her traditional magical practices and culture with AODA teachings and formats.

While reading John Michael Greer's books *The Druidry Handbook* and *The Druid Magic Handbook*, I came across the Ogham. The Ogham is an alphabet often used for divination. The series of lines in the fews reminded me of Norse runes. The alphabet immediately grabbed my attention. I was instinctively drawn to it and had the urge to use it. I kept rereading the books, and about the Ogham; my mind simply wouldn't let it go. I was instinctively pulled toward using it as a divination tool, and had chosen to do my Druid exploration on it. I immediately set to work looking for Ogham sticks, tiles, or a deck of cards. There were many lovely options, but none of them spoke to me. Finally I decided I would have to make my own set. I have no prior experience with wood-working, and was concerned about the skills needed to pull this off. My dad and grandfather had often carved and whittled while they hunted, fished, and camped. They were happy memories for me. I was familiar with the process, but had no experience of my own. Once my set was completed, I realized it had qualified me for a Bard exploration. Even though this exploration was originally unintended and unplanned, I cannot deny the experiences and valuable lessons I learned along the way.

I had managed to find a copy of Rev. Robert Lee Ellison's *Ogham: The Secret Language of the Druids*. This book detailed not only the various Ogham alphabets but their uses as a written language, lists, codes, cyphers, gestures (the gesture ogham is said to have used parts of the body such as the person's shin, nose, or hands to form the ogham, similar to sign language), and divination tools. There were also instructions on creating Ogham (although the author uses disks or

“coins,” the process worked very well for sticks). In his book, the author instructs you to spread out your blank disks or sticks, and move your hand over them slowly while focusing on the few meant for the piece. There will be a sensation of yes or no. While choosing my pieces, I needed to record which letter went with which disk or stick. Once my Ogham was complete, and in its permanent container, it was placed under my mattress or pillow, or near my head for a week while I slept before it was used for the first time, allowing the Ogham to connect to my subconscious. After reviewing my books, I readied myself to harvest the wood.

I went outside into my yard. I grew up practicing a Native American (commonly referred to as Indigenous where I am) tradition, which has very specific methods when harvesting materials or items from nature. It's very similar to the method taught in the AODA with the exception of offerings in gratitude for the materials or items harvested. I slowed my breathing to be even and steady while I thought of my request. I would need enough wood to practice the new skills I needed to develop, and make my finished Ogham set. There was a familiar sensation of anxiety as I thought about this. Divination causes anxiety for me. I accepted the sensation and acknowledged that I would need to work on my anxieties in order to practice my Druid exploration. I took a breath and asked out loud if a tree, or trees, would be willing to allow me use of their wood for my Ogham. Enough to practice and create one set is all I would need. Almost immediately I felt a response from the apple tree in our front yard. We harvest apples from this tree every year. The apple directed me to cut off three branches that had died and needed to be pruned. I would be able to use the wood for practice, my set, and any other use I saw fit with what remained. I thanked the apple tree and directed my husband to the appropriate branches. Once the branches had been cut, I collected them and placed them inside my workshop to dry.

While the branches dried, I read about the Ogham again, reviewing Greer's and Ellison's books. I wanted to ensure I was familiar with the letters. After two weeks, the branches were dried enough to start working with them. I had spent some time thinking about the size of my sticks. I remembered that apple wood can splinter and peel. I needed to expect rough ends that would need to be trimmed off. The final pieces would be roughly the size of my pinky finger. Using lines on my right hand from the tip of my pinky to the first line below the bottom knuckle, I marked the branches to be cut. With my husband's help, the branches were cut into pieces. I had thirty-five in total, with enough wood left over for future projects, or extra wood for practice if it was needed. I collected my sticks and placed them in a box for safe keeping while I prepared my next step.

To ensure strong visualizations while working on my Ogham, I practiced writing the letters and saying them out loud properly. Eventually I took small sheets of paper and wrote a letter and the name on each, and collected my box of sticks. I focused on my breathing until it was even and steady. Starting with Beith, I held my hand over the box of sticks. Picturing the letter and saying the name out loud, I allowed my hand to slowly drift back and forth over the sticks. When I felt a stick “call out” to me, I collected it, wrapped, folded, and tied the paper with its name around the stick, and put it aside. While selecting sticks for my Ogham, I became aware of different sensations as I searched for various sticks. The most common sensation was a tugging or

pulling in my hand that got stronger or weaker as I moved my hand closer or farther away from the stick. Some gave me a throbbing, pulsating, or heartbeat sensation that would increase or dull as I moved. Another sensation I experienced occasionally was a change in temperature. My hand felt as though it got warmer or colder while it moved. At no point were any of these experiences or sensations negative or uncomfortable, but instead each stick felt pleased or satisfied with the selection. Once I had selected all my Ogham sticks, I placed the wrapped sticks back in the box and set them aside for practice. It was time to start working with the wood.

I held a stick in my hand, and remembered watching my dad and grandfather working with apple wood when I was a child. I moved my hand over the stick, feeling its texture and allowing the memories to come. Apple wood can peel away, leaving a deep groove. Working with it would require a gentle hand and patience. Rushing would cause me to damage my material. I noticed the piece I was holding had bark lifting from the wood. Using my fingers, I peeled away all the loose bark. Most of it came away easily. The bark was black from age, and long dead. The wood underneath had interesting red or dark streaks. Small sections of inner bark remained attached in some places. I used a fine X-Acto knife to shave or peel the inner bark from these areas without cutting into the wood. Pleased with my success in removing the bark, I moved on to my next piece. The second piece seemed to be a younger branch that had died more recently before being cut from the tree. I remembered watching Grandfather shave off newer bark with his pocketknife. Using my own knife, I attempted to do the same. It was effective, but if I tried to move too quickly, or slipped with the knife, it caused me to notch and cut the wood. Sometimes I accidentally shaved a section of wood off as well. I knew with more practice I would get better, have a more delicate touch with the knife. I was concerned that the amount of practice required could be more than the material I had harvested. The third piece I reached for seemed to have both qualities of the other two. Sections of the bark had blackened and lifted, but others were still tight to the wood. I picked off the bark by hand that would lift off easily. For the sections of snug bark, I tried the X-Acto knife. The thin blade worked well to shave off the bark, and any notches or cuts were much less severe. I removed the bark from three more sticks, using whichever method worked best for my current skill level. It was a slow process, but I felt confident enough in my ability to move on. The four sticks left untouched were set aside as spares in case a stick had a “change of heart” later.

I had considered using a rotary cutting tool to trim off the rough ends or limbs. I had a powerful urge to use a hand tool instead. Using hand tools would allow me to make a deeper connection to the wood. While working with any form of power tool, safety generally requires that the wood be secured and hands kept away from the material. Hand tools are slower, but I feel the tool moving on or through the wood. I can feel the change in texture while sanding by hand. I would feel the difference in layers as I cut through a section. These sensory experiences would help me create a powerful connection to my tools. After some thought, and research into various handsaws, I settled on a coping saw. Placing one of my practice sticks in a vise, I set to testing my new tool. The saw's fine blade allowed me to cut off the rough ends and awkwardly angled limbs easily. The coping saw allowed me to get a finer and smoother cut than I would have gotten

with an electric tool. I felt I had more control over the cutting this way. Although I wanted to hold them in my hand as much as possible, my sticks were too small to safely hold by hand while cutting. This was the only time I was unable to hold the sticks as I worked. Once I had trimmed down all of my practice pieces, I moved on to sanding.

Using a coarse medium grit, I slowly sanded down my cut edges and smoothed out any tool marks or rough edges. The coarse paper, if pressed too hard, would leave lines in the wood. I realized quickly I would need several stages of sanding to ensure a smooth finish. Ultimately I ended up using five grits: coarse medium, medium, medium fine, fine, and ultra fine. I experimented with steel wool and a polishing grit for the last step. The steel wool left fine hairs on the wood. I abandoned the wool in favor of the high-grit polishing paper. With my first stick sanded to a smooth finish, I attempted to carve and etch a letter into the wood. This proved difficult and messy. The smooth wood made it virtually impossible for my blade and edges to catch on the wood. My tools slid easily on the wood and caused accidental cuts. I took a medium-fine-grit paper and sanded over my piece again. The rougher finish allowed my edges to catch, but my slight shaking from anxiety symptoms made me slip often. Suddenly I had the idea of a pen engraver—one smaller than a rotary tool, less powerful. Something small that I could use carefully and slowly without the pressure required for the hand tools. I would burn the character into the groove afterward to create a nice clean line. Carefully I packed my pieces away. It would take me time to acquire an engraver and wood-burning kit.

Once my tools arrived, I sat down to work. I attempted a smooth piece again and quickly realized it still needed to be rougher. Despite how easily the engraver worked, it would still slip or skip if the surface of the wood was too smooth. I experimented with various stages of sanding combined with the engraved and burned letter. Finally satisfied with my process, and confident in my ability to re-create the final product, I packed away my tools and pieces of wood, and prepared myself for the work on my Ogham sticks.

It was important to me that I focus on the letter and its meaning as I worked on the Ogham. I wrote each letter and its divinatory meanings in a notebook, speaking quietly to myself as I worked. This way I would be able to repeat the name and meanings out loud as I worked with each piece. With all twenty-five Ogham fews recorded, I meditated on what I was about to create. I was anxious, but prepared to let it go while I worked.

When I was ready, I sat down to work. I steadied my breathing; even and slow. I have learned over the years that controlling my breathing allows me to let go of anxiety. As I set up my work space and prepared my tools, I considered what I was about to do. Creating magical tools is a special work. Was I prepared for this journey? What would I learn along the way? With my space ready, I took a breath, and let it go slowly. I experienced a sense of relief. It was like gently floating along the current of a river, rather than swimming against it. Gently I pulled Beith from the box and cut the tie holding the paper wrapped around it. I took a moment to stare at the letter. I said its name out loud as I unwrapped the stick. As I worked with the stick, I repeated the name and its meaning continually. Gently I removed the bark, trimmed the edges and limbs, sanded, engraved, burned, sanded, and polished. With Beith complete and sitting in my hand, I

took a moment to observe it. Gently I turned the stick in my hand, running my fingers over the wood, feeling its texture, and running a finger over the letter. I experienced a sensation of peace that was foreign to me. It was subtle and powerful at the same time. It was a disorienting sensation at first. I've felt calm, safety, satisfaction, and pleasure from my work in the past, but this was different! My anxiety levels can be extreme. I had never experienced moments of genuine peace. This was new! After a moment I settled into the sensation. It was wonderful—this perfect peaceful moment in my anxiety-filled day-to-day.

This became my process for each few I completed. Approximately two weeks later, I completed the last letter. It was time to seal my pieces. Again I had an instinctive urge. I had become accustomed to insights, urges, or intuitive sensations. They had become a natural part of my working process by this point, so I listened. This time I was urged to use a natural method of sealing the wood. Beeswax came to mind. I researched various methods of using beeswax as a finish and spoke to a friend of mine that had worked with apple wood and beeswax before. I took my practice pieces and folded them into a large heating pad to get warm. Once the wood was hot, but cool enough to handle, I rubbed beeswax onto each stick. The heat from the wood melted the wax and allowed it to be absorbed into the wood. A soft rag was used to buff the sticks and rub any wax on the surface into the wood while it was still warm. I was very pleased with this method. The wax brought out rich colors in the wood and gave it a soft shine. I gathered my ogham and folded all them into the heating pad. As I had done while making the sticks, again as I sealed and polished each stick I said its name and meaning out loud. Sticks with creases, folds, or holes were packed with wax and heated again and again to ensure a good seal. Finally my sticks were complete. I placed them in a bag made by a family member I am very close to. For seven nights I slept with the Ogham sticks at my pillow. If I went out, they went with me. Occasionally I would have the urge to mix them in the bag with my hand. I had a sense of anticipation and a pleasing tingling sensation when I touched them.

I experienced many sensations and intuitive urges while working on the Ogham. At first they were intense, and sometimes disorienting. It wasn't until I accepted them and really listened that they softened. Once they did, they were gentler, but also clearer—like I had accepted guidance rather than fighting against it. There was always a sense of peace while I was working. I easily sat and worked for several hours at a time. The sensation of peace continued while I worked. The once-foreign sensation had now become easily recognizable and enjoyable. It was easy for me to stay focused; I would take short breaks, and often wanted to continue, or not delay too long. At the end of the work session, there was a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, and exhaustion. The kind that tells you, you've worked hard. My levels of anxiety around divination decreased as I worked. By the time I had completed the set, I had very little anxiety remaining at all. In fact, I wanted to use them. Looked forward to it even.

There are some experiences that stand out more than others. As I worked, I often felt the wood take on a personality. The name being marked into the wood gave it individuality. No longer was it simply a part of an apple tree—now it had a name. With a name came meaning and a personality unique to each stick. Some were gentle and quiet. Others were loud or more intense.

Some even gave the impression of requiring extra work before they would reveal themselves. While working on Ngetal, I cut myself while removing the bark. I remember thinking how appropriate that was—to wound myself before its personality would be revealed. There was always a sense of finality when I burned a few onto a stick, an impression that this was the final piece. The name burned into the wood ignited the spark, and birthed something new.

In retrospect, I can easily recognize the flow of energy as I worked on the Ogham. As I set up, all my unrelated thoughts would drift away. Anything not connected to the woodworking seemed to wait at the door, so to speak. It was an unusual sensation for me, but comforting, like taking a break. The calm and focus I was experiencing was the gentle flowing of creative energy. That moment of sitting and thinking about my work opened a door and allowed the energy to trickle in as I made room for it. Once I settled into working, there was an intense concentration and the ability to maintain that concentration as I worked. I can see now that this was a building of energy. The energy flowed through me and into my work. Eventually I would tire. A natural exhaustion from the physical effort and intense concentration would occur after multiple sticks had been completed. While packing things away for the day, I would feel the energy slow down, drift away, and dissipate. I would be left tired, but proud of the work, and satisfied with my accomplishments for the day, even when I had expected to complete more than I did. I genuinely believe this energy is what allowed me to work with such focus above and beyond what I normally manage to achieve.

This has been a fantastic experience for me as a whole. I genuinely enjoyed woodworking. There was great value to me in learning this particular art. It allowed me to learn a new skill that connected to my past and family, but also connected me to my new tradition. I was able to bring something of my past and my heritage onto my new path. There's a sense of balance in that. My exploration in woodworking may have been accidental, or unintended, but it has ignited new interests. I have since started other projects with wood and am currently planning more. I still experience a sense of peace while working. I believe this provides me with a healthy and sometimes needed break from the anxiety I live with in my day-to-day life. I have a confidence now that I lacked before. I have always admired woodworking, but I have always felt as though I wouldn't have the skill, knack, or ability for it. I'm far less likely to question that now. I have the confidence to learn, try, and then try again. This confidence has spread to other projects. I had previously put painting aside after a couple of failed attempts, but I've recently started painting again. Now as I paint, I focus on letting go. The calm and peace arrives, and the energy flows as I paint. The flow is shorter, less intense, but even this has been a valuable experience for me.

Not only has it allowed for creating or connecting with my various projects, but it has taught me valuable lessons as well. I have learned to be flexible—with time, myself, and my work. A clock should not dictate how much I work or complete, or when to start or stop working. I need to be flexible, not only with my work but myself as well. After all, I am the individual that's part of a whole. I cannot be shaped into what I am meant to be if I rush the process or force myself into a shape I think I should be. I have learned to accept the flow, not just while I create, but while I myself am being shaped. By doing a Bard exploration I have become aware of the many

doors and paths available to me, and the curiosity to learn, discover, and connect to more. Whatever or wherever this new path takes me, I feel better equipped for the journey, or at least better prepared to face the lessons yet to come.

For anyone considering their explorations or studying the Ogham, don't shy away from areas that weren't planned. By following my instincts and intuition, I have had very beneficial and valuable experiences that I would have missed out on by insisting on following my original plan. It was at least two weeks after I had completed my set before I realized I might qualify for a Bard exploration. An email was all it took to confirm this. There is often a feeling of not having the skill or ability to learn a particular art or trade, but skill and ability aren't what's important. It doesn't matter if my Ogham is artist or professional quality. What matters is that I myself am satisfied, and enjoyed the work. My skill and ability will naturally improve as I work. I will gain better tools, or more tools for other projects as I go. This was a completely new skill set to me. I messed up, gave myself minor scrapes and cuts, had moments of frustration. Persistence and study were the key. I had to take the time to read, study, and talk to friends or peers with experience. For those concerned or considering, if you take the time to do the same, you *will* see results from your work!

My exploration was an unplanned journey. Such a path is often not recognized until we've completed that journey or are already in the thick of it. Embrace it, walk it, complete the path you've found yourself exploring unintentionally, and see where it's brought you. By embracing the lessons and the intuition along my own unintended path, I have learned strength, confidence, and awareness of more options than I originally knew of. Take the unintended path and see where it leads. It might surprise you!

Learning a completely new skill or art can be intimidating and frustrating, but it can be done. Whether we take a class, read how-to guides, seek advice or tutorials, or simply decide to dive in and learn through trial and error, we'll gain incredible experiences. Despite our lack of experience or knowledge on a topic, we can learn about it, if we are willing to follow through. My goal was simply to learn enough basic skills to create a set of Ogham sticks to the best of my ability, and that is what I did. The arts are about more than skill; they are a doorway to our own intuition and the magic of creation.

There is a thing that happens while working with the arts. We suddenly get the urge to change a method, technique, colors, or process. This is our intuition. There is energy flowing while we work. This energy allows us to enter a more receptive state, and that is the result. Whether we believe it is a spirit, deity, or our own instinct, it is worth pursuing. By following my own intuition, I was able to have some deeply spiritual experiences. These experiences will stay with me for life, and have allowed me to be open to others as a result.

My intuition urged me to use hand tools, and be able to hold my Ogham in my hand as often as I could. My grandfather used to tell me that while he whittled or carved, the spirit of the wood would whisper to him what shape it wanted to take. That art was literally a magical process. I would watch as a stick or block slowly turned into a basic shape, develop limbs, features, and fine details until an animal finally emerged. These animals always seemed to have their own personality. No matter how many bears my grandfather whittled, each one was different in its own way. This is

what the magic of creation looks like. As we work, we connect with the spirit of the material we use. As we give it shape, energy flows through us and into our art, giving it the spark of life. While we work, that spirit will guide us in what it wishes to be, and we bring that shape into the world. The energy we channel while working will give our art its own personality, its own shape, and a life of its own.

When we intentionally sit to work with a spirit in this way, we can receive guidance, instruction, and knowledge from it. It can help us understand how to work with the material, use it, and harvest it. The spirit itself will teach us. This can be an invaluable magical practice. I sat and listened to the spirit of the wood while crafting my Ogham (a magical tool), and spirit helped me. This showed in the intuitive decisions while crafting, and “yes” or “no” responses while choosing sticks. In the end I have a tool that is deeply connected to me, not simply because I made it, but because I worked with the spirit of the tool itself. According to many occult teachings and various magical traditions and cultures around the world, the item we craft ourselves is often the most potent. This is something I have found to be undeniably true in my experience with crafting magical items. There is a potent magical energy that is woven into every part and process of the object, and it also carries a part of us.

If you are feeling an urge to make your own tools, do it. Learn the craft you need. Be bold, brave, and determined. Push through the struggle or self-doubt and follow through with your goal. You will have tools magically tied to your use of them, a new skill to enjoy, and your own wealth of new experiences and observations.



The Feminist Druid

Making Way for New Stories, New Work

Moine Michelle (Michelle LaFrance)

Moine Michelle is a contemplative druid, who lives at the confluence of the Anacostia, Washington Channel, and Potomac in southwest, DC. Her work entails teaching writers to love every stage of the writing process and research on community-engaged writing practices. In her free time, she can be found kayaking, hiking, listening to live music, and hanging out with a joyous eight-pound chihuahua, a one-eyed Shiba Inu, and a newspaper man.

This essay was created for the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids Mount Haemus Scholarship series. Moine Michelle is the 4th AODA member (along with John Michael Greer, Gordon Cooper, and Dana O'Driscoll) to be recognized by OBOD with this prestigious honor. The Mount Haemus Scholarship series includes a lecture and a printed essay through the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids. As in tradition of previous AODA-member Mount Haemus Awardees, we present her essay in its entirety.

It is fitting that I offer this essay in the same year that Eimear Burke has been installed as the new Chosen Chief of the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids, the first woman to hold this position. Not inconsequentially, it is also a year after Dana O'Driscoll stepped into the role of Grand Archdruid of the Ancient Order of Druids in America. Dana is the third woman to hold the position of Grand Archdruid in the AODA, following Dr. Juliet Ashley in the 1960s, and Betty McCloud Reeves in the 1980s. It's just terrific that these two women have moved into global leadership positions for the largest worldwide Druid organization and the oldest U.S.-based Druid organization.

They join many other women who have been shaping Druidry since the revivalist era through their leadership, writing, artistic projects, activism, and community building: Fearn Lickfield, chief of the Green Mountain Druid Order; Jhenah Telyndru, founder of the Sisterhood of Avalon; Ellen Evert Hopman, cofounder of the Order of the White Oak; Emma Restall Orr, who

founded the Druid Network; and authors Danu Forest, Joanna van der Hoeven, Nimue Brown, Sharon Paice MacLeod, Cerri Lee, Mara Freeman, and Penny Billington—just a few that come immediately to mind and by no means an exhaustive list of the numerous authors, bloggers, and creative writers we might recognize. Today’s global Druidry owes a significant debt to the women who have led, volunteered, staffed, organized, written, taught, posted, crafted, advocated, and offered their visions for this spiritual tradition.

This essay celebrates these Druid women, the role of women in Druid history, and the contributions of women to modern Druidry as a global spiritual, religious, and eco-conscious movement. It is also a feminist reflection on the present and future of modern Druidry. In Druidic fashion, I’ve adopted a triadic form for this work. I begin by recognizing the influence of the earliest feminists on the radical origins of Revivalist Druidry, as well as the contributions of women to Druidry’s reestablishment and growth as a spiritual and religious practice in the twentieth century. I then celebrate the contributions of feminists working in today’s twenty-first-century Druidry. Finally, I emphasize how the feminist sensibilities already encoded into today’s Druidry might help us to imagine an even more overtly feminist future for Druidry and its diversifying communities. Each of these three sections begins with a retelling of a traditional folktale that offers a touchstone for consideration.

Feminism, the set of philosophies, theories, and practices driving this essay, proves difficult to define, because it has been a political and social movement for well over 300 years. What most people think of as “feminism” has become a quite malleable, big-tent term for a number of competing concerns, projects, and stances. Dictionary definitions often focus on the equality of “the sexes” and a commitment to women’s rights, interests, and choices. “Intersectional feminists” take these beliefs a step further, seeing dimensions of individual and group identity (such as race, class, sexuality, ability, age, religion, and geography) as interwoven standpoints that cannot be teased out from one another. These feminists recognize that people often experience oppression quite differently from one another because of the complexities of identity, embodiment, and social situation. Gender oppression operates hand in hand with forms of subjugation that go by other names (D’Ignazio and Klein, 2020).

Other feminists have focused on the ways that universalized understandings of the human experience, such as those that organize medical, social, political, and educational research efforts, among others, center white, middle-class, male experiences and bodies as the norm, thereby marginalizing others, including women, people of color, LGBTQ people, and the differently abled, in ways that are difficult to recognize. Some have named this structure the “patriarchy” and have sought to address the everyday invisibility and internalization of patriarchal power within our social groups and organizations. They would argue that these unrecognized “masculinist” structures cannot help but leech into our everyday contexts, like smaller, self-governed spiritual groups and the things we do within communities of practice. Even if we ourselves do not participate in overt sexism or engage in open discrimination, our ideas about how groups might be structured, what leadership and leadership styles might look like, our patterns of communicative practice, and all sorts of other norms may be filtered through and inflected by patriarchal expectations.

Folklorists have argued that feminists first talked back to the power structures of their eras through folktales, especially those that were shared between women as they worked in spaces reserved for them, such as kitchens, hearths, and homesteads (Ashley, 2019). I call these folktales “kitchen table myths” because of ways they commonly depict women who question social roles, norms, and status. All stories provide us tools by which we come to know and imagine ourselves and our relations to others. Stories in general emphasize our values, provide common emotional touchstones, and build a shared sense of purpose and possibility within and across communities. Bringing experiences, relations, and patterns to visibility via story has been an important social intervention for many individuals and groups throughout history, particularly those seeking to change the status quo. For many women, kitchen table myths offered opportunities to resist and critique the power structures that sought to define them and to offer alternative visions of their social roles, abilities, and relationships.

It will not be hard to see feminist motivations and sensibilities in the three stories I share here, which highlight the strength, courage, intelligence, autonomy, and problem-solving abilities of women. Moreover, as these stories highlight sensibilities that are already active within and further fostered by today’s Druidry, they also offer a sense of what values Druids might continue to emphasize should we wish to work toward yet more equality and representation within our communities.

Our current era gives urgency to efforts to tell the types of stories that simultaneously inspire us as individuals and call us toward more effective forms of communal action and social understanding. As we face global climate catastrophe, as our global political and social systems are increasingly called out for their complicity in racial and socioeconomic disenfranchisement, and as the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed that we really are all in this together, people in Western nations are often seeking new models of social organization and governance. As overtly feminist stories, the tales shared here offer exactly these models of resistance, vision, and social organization for the future, as they underline the values we are called to emphasize in our relationships and open a shared sense of purpose toward ecological, social, and socioeconomic justice.

The Tale of the Seal Wife

This first story was collected in the Orkney Islands by William Trail Dennison and originally published in the *Scottish Antiquary* in 1893. “Selkie” was the name for “seal people” (seals who could take human form) in the Scottish Highlands and there are many, many stories about human interactions with selkies, collected across the Highlands and in Ireland. The selkies were said to be exceedingly fair of face and body, as well as charismatic and joyful in their human forms.

This story begins with a handsome and popular goodman in Wastness, known for his skill with the ladies. But, it was also known that this goodman would not choose a wife. No matter how his family and friends chided him or how many

young women complained that he had trifled with their hearts, he remained unentangled.

"I have trials enough without being tried by a wife," he was heard to say. "If Adam had not been a fool, he might have been a happy man in Eden to this day." The old wives of the village would scold the goodman, "Take heed yourself or you may also be bewitched someday."

"Ay," the goodman said, "when I can walk to the mainland without getting my feet wet at all."

Well, it came to pass that the handsome goodman was walking the shore at low tide, when he saw several selkie folk, women and men, gathered on a flat rock. On the other side of the rock, lay wide open sea.

The goodman crept upon them until he got right to the edge of the rock where the selkie played. He watched them with wonder for a long moment—they were the most beautiful people he had ever seen. They were all naked and their pale human skins were without blemish. Their seal skins lay crumpled in small heaps on the rock, as well.

The goodman seized the closest skin and clutched it to his breast. He had grown up hearing the stories around the fire, so he knew well what, or who, he had captured. He tucked the skin under his arm and made for home, hearing a doleful weeping and lamentation rise from the waves behind him.

The selkie woman he had captured was a wretched sight to behold, leaving the water and following him down the beach. She sobbed in bitter grief, holding out both hands in eager supplication, while tears rolled down her fair face. "If there's any mercy in your human breast, please give me back my skin."

But, the goodman's heart would not soften. He wooed her ferociously, as she begged for her skin, unrelenting until he wrung from her a reluctant submission to live with him as his wife. What could she do? Without the skin she could not live in the sea. Without clothes or means she could not live on land.

So, the selkie woman went with the goodman and became a thrifty, dutiful, and kindly goodwife. She bore him seven uncommonly beautiful children, four lads and three lasses. And she did her best to appear happy, even merry at times. Yet she spent many hours longingly looking out to sea. As the years passed, she taught her children strange songs, that no ears on earth had ever heard before. No one could mistake but that she was a creature of the sea, parted from the land and kin of her heart.

Over the years, the selkie wife had often looked for her skin, but not one of her determined searches had turned it up. She had searched up, and she had searched down; she had searched but, and she had searched ben; she had searched out, and she had searched in, but never could she find what she sought.

One day, her youngest daughter changed her mother's fate. "Did you know that Da hides a bonnie skin in the roof just there?" The youngest daughter pointed to the "aisins," the space between roof beam and thatch. The daughter had seen the father take the skin down while everyone else was asleep.

The selkie mother quickly climbed the rafters to reach into the secret space—and there was her long-lost skin! "Farewell, my little darling!" she said to the child and raced to the waves.

A wild cry of joy could be heard above the crash of the surf, as the selkie woman flung on her skin and plunged into the sea. A male of the selkie folk met her just beyond the shore and greeted her with equal joy—he had been waiting all this time for her return.

The goodman was rowing home and saw them both from his boat.

The selkie wife uncovered her face and cried out to him: "Goodman of Wastness, farewell tae you! My life of the sea is my truest love!"

And that was the last the goodman ever saw or heard of his bonnie wife.

As this tale clearly emphasizes the power dynamics between men and women, humankind and wild creatures, it not only foregrounds the mistaken belief that mankind has dominion over the natural world, it also echoes with the messages of today's consent culture and the feminist principle of reciprocity. The good man of Wastness holds the selkie woman against her will. He gains children and the work of her hands and emotions because of his theft of her skin. I need not belabor the message that this is not a right relationship with the natural world nor underline the lessons of feminism 101 conveyed—all people must have freedom to make choices, even bad or unpopular ones, and they must be offered equal respect. We cannot simply take from the natural world, we must see ourselves in respectful relation to it.

And clearly, the message this story sends about respect for the wild world and its many beings, natural and supernatural, resonates with the sensibilities that have shaped today's Druidry. In Druid work, we greet and honor those beings we seek to build relationship with—from the tree and plant teachers we meet along our journey, to the ancestor-allies we remember and cherish, to the figures and mentors we discover in our inner groves. The respect that is signaled in asking, listening, and recognizing that we do not own these figures—at best we collaborate with them *when they are willing*, we learn from them *when they choose to be* our teachers, and we recognize that they owe no obligation to us (even if they are a part of ourselves we have only just recognized)—is central to the ethos of today's Druidry.

This reverence for the natural world began with the earliest Revivalist Druids, who rekindled Druidry in an era coincident with the rise of enlightenment, romantic poetic traditions, and political radicalism. Iolo Morganwg, author (or conveyor) of the Druid's Prayer and self-styled "Bard of Liberty," was known as a poet and writer of spiritual tracts in his era, but was also a renowned seditionist, dissident, and abolitionist. Resonant with the story of the selkie woman's cap-

tivity, historians of Unitarian Universalism and Druidry have noted that Morganwg wrote many of his initial Druidic tracts while in debtors' prison in Cardiff (Klein, 2018). Morganwg's earliest Druidic works were inspired by his love of the Welsh countryside where he often walked and by news of the indigenous ways of the American Indian. Famously, Morganwg refused to sell sugar from slave plantations in his Cowbridge bookshop and, throughout his life, he condemned the slave trade and was an ardent reader of abolitionist literature (Jenkins, 2012). (When push came to shove, however, after years of refusing monies from his brothers' Jamaican plantations, Morganwg accepted the legacy so that he could establish his children in their own trades.)

Moreover, while Morganwg was not a supporter of the feminist cause—the politics of his age precluded women from “active citizen[ship]” (Jenkins, 2012, 98)—his political and literary associations brought him into close contact with several figures of early feminism. While we cannot say these figures directly influenced Morganwg's Druidic tracts, they were visible and vocal feminists within his era, so their indirect influence is altogether likely. During his tenure in London, Morganwg attended social gatherings hosted by Elizabeth Stuart Bowdler, a writer, and her daughter, Henrietta Maria Bowdler, a literary editor. He visited the salons of Elizabeth Montagu, a British social reformer, patron of London artists, literary critic, and organizer of the Blue Stocking Society. (Montagu was known as the “queen of the Bluestockings”; Jenkins, 2012; Dobbs, 1976). Morganwg likewise moved in literary circles with the Wollstonecrafts, including Mary Wollstonecraft, who published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. He also admired, and took some inspiration from, the writings of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, whose poetry, essays, and social criticism aroused public consciousness against war and slavery.

It is altogether likely that feminist tracts passed through Morganwg's hands, as well; he was a bookseller and voracious reader of political writing. Morganwg was well informed about the social experiments of the era (many of which highlighted equality between the sexes, if not free love, and a return to living close to the land), particularly the experiments of the Quakers in the British Isles and the US—where scholars root many early strains of the feminist movement (Abray, 1975). Our understandings of radicalism have expanded quite a bit since Morganwg's day. Many of today's Druids, animists, and eco-activists now hold that trees, rivers, and animals are nonhuman persons. Many of us would argue that nature itself has inalienable rights. So, it is not too far a stretch to imagine that Morganwg's thoughts on women may have advanced to reflect our era's ideals, as well.

The feminist influence upon Druidry comes into yet clearer focus when we recognize the more direct work of women Philip Carr-Gomm (2003, 161) has named the “Founding Mothers” of Druidry. Among these foremothers, the two most recognized are Vera Chapman and Doreen Valiente. Knowles's (2012) online biography of Chapman notes that she is “best known as the founder of the Tolkien Society of Great Britain” and “an accomplished author herself,” having written the Arthurian trilogy *The Green Knight* (1975), *King Arthur's Daughter* (1976), and *The King's Damosels* (1976). She met Ross Nichols through their mutual involvement in the Ancient Druid Order and served as the Pendragon of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, founded by Nichols in 1964. Like Morganwg, Chapman believed in social reform and economic justice,

though she chose not to focus her energies on overt political action.

Doreen Valiente, held by many to be the “mother of modern paganism,” is often recognized for her poetic and moving Charge of the Goddess, a witches’ liturgical text that popularized what is now a well-integrated eco-feminist ethos in pagan circles. Shortly after the 1952 repeal of the British Witchcraft Act, Valiente was introduced to Gerald Gardner, became the high priestess of the New Forest Coven, and collaborated extensively with Gardener to update his Book of Shadows. Ashley Mortimer, a trustee of the Doreen Valiente Foundation, argues that “the Gardnerian cult,” as we know it today, would not have seen the popularity it has achieved without Valiente’s organizational acumen or her “inspirational and poetic additions.” We might say the same thing for Chapman, who was a friend and ally to Nichols and who maintained papers and memorabilia central to OBOD’s continuation following Nichols’s death in 1975. Both women were advocates for other women and for ecological awareness; Valiente was further known for her outspokenness on pro-choice, pro-birth control, antiracist, and anti-homophobic issues.

Carr-Gomm emphasizes the influence of these two founding mothers on twentieth-century paganism, but particularly the influence of Vera Chapman upon the new Druidry. Chapman drew on noteworthy academic credentials “that rivaled” Nichols’s own, as well as a similarly deep affinity for history and poetry. She maintained her friendship with Nichols and held the position of Pendragon until 1991, seventeen years after Nichols’s death. It was Chapman who gave Carr-Gomm the draft manuscript that became *The Book of Druidry* and other documents that still inform OBOD’s liturgies and philosophies today (Knowles, 2012).

And, of course, any historical treatment of the role of women and feminist ideals in today’s Druidry is incomplete if we do not recognize the many women who have written about pagan traditions, magical working, and the centrality of reverence for the earth to pagan practice, from Margot Adler to Starhawk to Z Budapest, to Selena Fox and Olivia Robertson—all who, in some way, have directly and vocally advocated for the power of women, the power of earth-based practice, and the role of women in forming, leading, and sustaining our global networks of pagan community. The contributions of these feminist foremothers, those in the shadows of their male peers and those who stood out visibly and on their own terms, amplify the morals of the “Tale of the Seal Wife”: respect for others and their choices, reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships with all living things, recognition of our place in the web of existence, *and consent*. Indeed, these women remind us that these sensibilities are crucial to effective relationships, meaningful spiritual practice, and sustainable communities.

Kate Crackernuts

This story was collected by folklorist Andrew Lang (1889) in the Orkney Islands and first published in *Longman’s Magazine* in 1889. It was later edited and republished by Joseph Jacobs (1890/2005) in his collection *English Fairy Tales*. It has inspired a series of children’s books, a play, and a musical score for piano.

We begin with two stepsisters, both named Kate. Kate who everyone admired as “beautiful” was the king’s daughter, and Kate who was instead “sensible” was the daughter of the queen.

There were jealousies—who would be surprised? Everyone knows beauty and sense are often coveted. Particularly in a royal household. And sometimes, beauty is even perceived as a threat.

And so, the queen set out to diminish beautiful Kate. She brought in the Henwife, which is always a bad sign if you know these types of stories, and after three attempts, the Henwife put a spell upon beautiful Kate’s head so that it took on the appearance of the head of a sheep.

Sensible Kate was said to love her half-sister. She could not tolerate this offense or let her sister come to further harm. She wrapped her sister’s head in a silken cloth and took beautiful Kate away from their first home, seeking a new place where both sisters might live quietly and without harm.

After some travel, the sisters found a household where the king had two sons. One of the sons was quite sick, suffering what the people of his era called a “wasting disease” (which we now know as any number of difficulties of body, mind, or spirit). Mysteriously, whoever watched over this young man by night . . . vanished without a trace. The household’s members saw immediately that Kate was sensible and gratefully offered her the post of nursemaid.

The first night of her new post, when all the household had just fallen into the depths of slumber, the sickly young man suddenly rose from his bed as if he were not troubled by sickness at all. Kate followed him as he—as if in a trance—made his way to the stables, saddled a horse, and climbed upon it. He did not even notice when she drew herself up behind him to share the ride. Where he would go, she would go.

And ride they did—through the fields and over the hills and finally into the woods—where Kate filled her pockets with hazelnuts, ripe upon the branches, should she be hungry later. And, finally they came to a clearing in the woods and within that clearing rose a green, faery hill. The hill opened and Kate rode inside it with the young man.

There, she slipped deftly into the shadows and watched as the young man was greeted merrily by the good people within. She watched him join them in dancing until the first hint of dawn—until he was so tired and ragged of foot, he could barely stand. And, she stealthily rejoined him—when he climbed onto his horse and rode home.

It could only have been a dream, she thought, as the young man returned to his bed and lay in restless fatigue through the day.

But the second night, when all the household had fallen once more to slum-

ber, the young man again rose—hale and healthy, though deeply entranced. And, Kate slipped onto the horse he saddled and rode with him again over the hills and through the wood into the faery mound. She collected hazelnuts from the forest trees as they passed, just as she had the night before, filling her pockets.

They entered the faery mound and again she watched him dance himself into distress. But this night, she ventured a little more beyond her stealthy shadows—and encountered a baby, who played with a faery wand. Kate overheard some other faeries saying that the wand would undo any enchantment—and she thought for certain that this might help her once beautiful sister return to her former self. And so, sensible Kate cracked open and rolled a hazelnut toward the baby's feet. . . . The baby squealed and waved its fat arms. She rolled another hazelnut—and another, and another—until the delighted baby dropped the wand.

Kate snatched up the wand and hid it in her pocket as the baby ate the nuts. And she rode home that dawn, with the wand and the young man, who lumbered to his bed stricken with exhaustion. Kate touched the wand to her sister's sheep head and returned her to her beauty.

The third night, Kate once more rode with the young man and filled her pockets with hazelnuts as they passed through the wood, but this time she rode determined to free the young man from his enchantment as she had freed her sister. This time, as the young man danced, Kate again stole through the shadows to see what she could learn about the faery mound. She again found the baby. The baby now played with a bird and Kate overheard other faeries saying that three bites of the bird would break any faery spell. She thought perhaps that might help the young man who was dancing himself into exhaustion each night.

So, again, she distracted the baby, cracking open and rolling hazelnuts across the floor . . . until the baby dropped the bird and Kate was able to tuck the bird into her pocket. Kate returned home with the young man, who fell exhausted into his bed upon his arrival. Kate then cooked the bird, and woke the young man to spoon three bites into his mouth. The faery enchantment fell away from him and he was cured.

This story has a happy ending. Kate agrees to marry the young man, who is impressed by her—who wouldn't be? She is not just sensible, after all, but courageous and smart and someone who gets things done. And beautiful Kate, her stepsister, agrees to marry the other brother. And we all know that when two people marry in a story, they live happily ever after, so imagine the joy when the two couples are married.

There are many reasons that I have always loved this story—from the ways it subverts the traditional evil stepmother trope, to the humorous image of a beautiful woman with the head of

a sheep, to the ways that sensible Kate, as protagonist, is unthreatened by her sister's beauty, to the sisters' refusal to stay in her jealous mother's household and sensible Kate's determination to rescue them and the bewitched young man. Kate Crackernuts's fearlessness and quick thinking throughout the story are remarkable. I particularly love that hazelnuts, the nut of ancient knowledge in the Gaelic imagination, figure so well in the problem solving Kate undertakes. In my version, I took the liberty of adding more about Kate's pockets—the place she stashes the hazelnuts, the wand, and the bird—because I read somewhere once long ago that the first pockets for European women were secretly hand sewn into petticoats, providing young women a place to hide novels. Few things say *resistance* and *smart women are cool* to me like a pocket.

And, sure, this fairy tale, even in my telling, is not perfectly in sync with today's ideas of liberation for women. Like most fairy tales, the two sisters inevitably end up married—which is how the issues women faced were most often resolved in previous eras. Jacobs's 1890 version ended with a note about the weddings, “the sick brother [wed] to the well sister, and the well brother to the sick sister,” which is the sort of irony-tinged denouement that appealed to the Victorian reader.

But this story does offer us an important model for thinking about the ways we see women working in Druidry today. For at the center of today's Druidry lies a conundrum. To be part of any Neopagan movement in the twenty-first century means to be familiar with eco-feminist principles, such as goddess worship, the global empowerment of women, the challenging of traditional religious structures that limit women's roles and experiences, and the equation of environmental and social activism with human/women's rights. And while we may celebrate the women I've discussed above and recognize their significant contributions to today's Druidry, the image of “the Druid” in popular understandings somehow yet resonates with white maleness, masculine power structures, and male-dominated histories.

“If you were to ask someone to describe an *historical* Druid,” the organizers of the “Women in Druidry” conference in the summer of 2020 explain, “most [people] would overwhelmingly paint a picture of a wise old man with a long grey beard and white flowing robes” (Sisterhood of Avalon, 2020). The conference organizers note that the Druid's historical association with the “elite and learned social caste in ancient Celtic cultures,” as well as the social power of their traditional roles as “priests and augurs, teachers and judges, transmitters of history, and holders of sacred memory,” continues to align Druidic figures with masculine forms of prestige. Ellen Evert Hopman additionally notes that “the Druid,” a historical figure, is quite often associated with Christian monks and the stories told by Roman authors, who focused their attentions on male leaders in Celtic and Germanic cultures as a matter of their own cultural and historical blinders. So clearly, one piece of the work of today's Druidry is to recover and circulate more about the historical contributions of Druid women in previous eras, putting some pressure on the masculinist centers that dominate popular consciousness.

Moreover, there may be people in this audience who are wondering whether we still need feminism, particularly within the Druid world. The presence and contributions of women in the Druid world seems pretty unassailable, after all. In the last five years alone, 31 of 54 (57 percent)

total nonfiction publications about Druidry as a spiritual, religious, or magical practice were authored by women (Carr-Gomm, n.d.)—so, why would we argue that feminism is an important force that needs to be recognized in Druidry today? Haven't we, in the developed world, let alone in communities brought together by earth-based spirituality, achieved equality between the sexes? Isn't the work of feminism realized?

I'll acknowledge, too, in the wider world, particularly in the US, the term "feminist" remains a point of contest for many people. The work of feminism has lost a good deal of currency in the ongoing culture wars. In US-based popular media cycles, Twitter-verse takedowns, and political commentaries, feminists are often man-hating, bothersome, uptight killjoys. (They are also often fat, ugly, and unlovable in the popular imagination and popular media.) Negative stereotypes about women, and feminists, are not new, by any means. They are as old as stories. Wherever there are women standing up for their rights, or the rights of others, for our planet, or for children, there are likely to be stories that paint those women as betrayers of a natural order.

A component of our effort, then, requires us to think about how these inheritances and realities—our histories, our current cultural orders, our resulting habits of mind—may tacitly inform today's Druidry as philosophy and practice. On that account, it seems, our work really is only just beginning. We've done well in creating space for Druid women to write, think, and imagine today's Druidry, but the presence of women as Druid leaders and active community members is just one step toward a more overtly feminist consciousness—we must also carefully think through how unrecognized expectations and sensibilities may yet restrict our conceptions of Druid practice.

The forthright and prolific Nimue Brown (2012) confronts one example of the type of habitual thinking we might disrupt. In a blog post, Brown argues that invocations of the Goddess are not necessarily a *de facto* means to empower women. Tropes such as the Maiden-Mother-Crone standard, often superimposed upon the characters of pagan ritual and the cycles that order the natural world, may instead diminish representations of women to their biological relationship with reproduction. Moreover, some Goddess forms reiterate the passivity and male-centric views of women that feminists have often sought to trouble. Brown describes one example: "earth mother, endlessly fertile, her divine thighs always open to the God/Priest/King . . . focused on being penetrated by a male." When the Goddess is "beautiful, eternal, untouched by human degradation" and "surprisingly benevolent, given how the majority of us treat her," she is merely a male-focused ideal, Brown argues—a "pristine, untouched world that never existed." Brown suggests that these images drown out the abusive relationship humans have had with the earth, toxically supporting the "beneficent tolerance of abuse" as an ideal.

For much of human history and across cultures, many spiritual traditions have approached masculinity and femininity as binary oppositions—reinforcing particular characteristics or natural features as inherently masculine or inherently feminine and calcifying conceptual differences between what is male and what is female. Feminist thinkers have additionally urged us to decouple biological sex from cultural expressions of gender, understanding gender and gender characteristics as fluid and performative aspects of personal identity. "No one is born one gender or the other," eponymous gender theorist Judith Butler (1990) has argued; rather, "We act and walk and speak

and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman.”

Nicole Youngman (2012), a sociologist and a Druid, underlines these distinctions in a blog post: “Sex has existed for billions of years, and has created the possibility for complex life forms to evolve; gender is a *human invention*, a set of ideas that is constantly changing.” Youngman further notes that medieval magical systems often assigned gender to “things like stones, elements, planets, herbs, etc., that have no literal sex (much less gender).” For Youngman, this equation of the natural world and related characteristics “risks making comparisons with how men and women are supposed to feel or behave . . . ie, mountains are somehow ‘masculine’ because they are towering, strong, and immovable, while bodies of water are somehow ‘feminine’ because they are passive, nurturing, and accepting.” Aligning gender characteristics with the natural order is problematic, according to Youngman, because “historically, those sorts of assertions have been used as a proxy for ‘the way God wants it,’ and have been made to justify some pretty heinous social structures, like slavery, the ‘doctrine of discovery,’ and keeping women barefoot and pregnant.”

Such quite traditional sensibilities about men, women, and their societal roles, Brown and Youngman remind us, have long regimented storytelling traditions, particularly stories enshrined by national mythologies and patriarchal systems. We see these outdated gender norms reflected in Arthurian tales, for instance, where men are almost exclusively knights and wizards, women are noble ladies, maids, crones, witches, or fallen, and the ideals of Christian purity often structure relationships, quests, and romantic ideals. We see them at work in many mythological systems that enshroud pantheons of gods and goddesses. We might still learn a good deal from these stories, allowing our future to be informed by the wisdom of the past; but we also have yet to build a commonly recognized set of alternatives to or ways of reimagining these traditional stories, as well. There is absolutely nothing wrong with choosing to embrace the traditional gender roles offered in these histories for one’s self; but we still have work to do to ensure that outdated ideals of gender do not sustain blind spots or forced expectations for others in our shared practices, rituals, and philosophies.

In my own efforts to rethink the role of gender in Druid practices and our communities, I personally owe a great debt to my LGBTQ friends, who have consistently demonstrated gender as a fluid and dynamic form of creative play. (Butler [1990] famously called this “gender trouble.”) Bodies, sexual orientations, and identities rarely fit neatly into narrow or exclusive categories. My friends who are drag performers, for instance, have often superseded cultural expectations and defied perceptions in ways that make the performativity of gender identity all the more visible. My trans friends have shown me that the surface characteristics of bodies and sexualities are less important than the openness of hearts, minds, and communication. Their lived activism insists that we see all forms of embodiment, emotional experience, and personal expression as sacred, lest we exclude and devalue those whose expressions of gender (or lived embodiment, such as race, ability, and other markers of personal identity) defy our categories.

Ideals of gender fluidity also resonate strongly with the traditions of animism that I’ve encountered, which have pushed me to embrace “myriad multiplicity” in my conceptions of the natural world. Most recent animist principles, Graham Harvey notes, encourage a radical move

away from modernist, binary, and oppositional ideals which have sought to categorize and systematize our understandings of the world around us. “Animists celebrate plurality, multiplicity, the many and their entwined passionate entanglements. . . . All dualisms are, at best provisional and/or contingent,” Harvey notes (2006, xiv–xv). Many animist cultures have foregrounded instead that all expressions of existence, in their infinite pluralities, are sacred and can be our teachers, should we open to their messages.

Finally, the story of Kate Crackernuts emphasizes “an ethos of care” (Kirsch and Royster, 2010; Gilligan, 1982) that resonates with Druidic principles of authenticity and respectful connection. Crucially, Kate’s return to the household where she cures the bewitched young man and her beautiful sister reminds us that much of our most important work takes place in the real world in which we live, particularly within our everyday relationships. Druidry is not separate from the real world, this story suggests, and we are wisest when we honor our interconnections and move with compassion as we seek to solve problems and build community. Personal healing is often best complimented by interpersonal healing, this story suggests.

The proactive model Kate presents, cracking open the wisdom we have gathered, models living with care. As this story, and others like it, root our attention in a mindful service to others, we might additionally affirm the shared feminist and Druidic values of proactivity, problem solving, inclusivity, empathy, and coalition building.

The King and the Foal

I first heard this story told by Sharon Gunn at a Gaelic Society event (in Vancouver, Canada) and later by Seumas Gagne at a Slighe nan Gaidheal event (in Seattle, WA). It can be found in *Tales Until Dawn: The World of the Cape Breton Gaelic Story-Teller*, a collection of stories told by Joe Neil MacNeil (1987) of Cape Breton, Canada.

This story begins with a widower who lived with his only daughter. The daughter was extremely smart, she was kind, and she was good in every other respect. But the angry king sent for the widower—they had had some falling out—and the king said to the widower that he had one day to answer a question: What was the most plentiful thing in all the world? If the widower could not give an answer to the king, the widower would be put to death.

The daughter noticed that her father looked extremely sorrowful that day. She asked him what his trouble was and the widower told her how things stood. “And why did you not tell him the answer when you were there?” the daughter asked. “Couldn’t you tell him that there is nothing in the world as plentiful as sides? It does not matter at all how plentiful anything is in the world; there are at least two sides to it and there are many things which have more than two sides. There might be, for example, an inside and an outside and a top side and a bottom side

and on some things a far side and a near side. You can name sides as being more plentiful than anything else.”

The following day the widower went before the king and gave him that answer: “There is nothing in the world more plentiful than sides.”

The king was taken aback and frowned, unsatisfied.

“My proof is this,” replied the widower quickly. “There are at least two sides to everything and however plentiful anything is, it must have at least two sides. And there are some things which have three sides and others have four sides.”

“I am satisfied,” said the king, raising his hand. But the king demanded that the widower answer yet another question lest he lose his head: What is the wealthiest thing in the world?

The widower went home and his daughter saw right away that he was sorrowful. And so, the widower told her the king’s question and that he would be put to death if he did not have a satisfying answer on the morrow.

“And why did you not tell him the answer?” the daughter asked. “Could you not tell him there is nothing as wealthy as the sea? Name anything on earth, and the sea is much larger than that and it contains more of everything.”

“By virtue of that, the sea is the wealthiest thing in the world,” the widower agreed. He returned to stand before the king: “Nothing on earth is wealthier than the sea.”

The king bristled. “Am I myself not wealthier than the sea?”

“Oh, no indeed, by your leave,” the widower continued. “The sea is larger than the rest of the world; it is larger than the land and it contains more of everything. For those reasons alone, it is the wealthiest thing there is.”

“I must confess that I am satisfied with that,” said the king.

But the king bade the widower to return the next day to answer the question: What is the swiftest thing in the world?

And he told the man that he should lose his head if he could not answer.

The widower appeared very downhearted at home that evening.

The daughter asked him what his trouble was, and the widower told her. “And why did you not tell him the answer?” the daughter asked. “Could you not have told him that there is nothing in the world so swift as thought? You simply think of being in any part of the world at all—far away on the other side of the world—and there you are in your thoughts. There is not a bird or a horse or any other creature who could go over to the other side of the world as swiftly as your thoughts would travel.”

“By virtue of that, thought is indeed the swiftest thing in the world,” the widower agreed. The next day he stood before the king: “Thought is the swiftest thing in all the world.”

“Oh, no indeed,” the king disagreed. “I have a horse as swift as that.”

“Indeed, no,” said the old widower. “Your thought can be on the other side of the kingdom or the other side of the world so swiftly that there is not a horse or a bird nor any other beast who could take you there in the same time.”

“I am satisfied with that answer,” said the king, as he looked the widower up and down shrewdly. “But tell me. Did you come to these answers on your own or did you find an aide somewhere?”

“My daughter is always of great service to me,” replied the widower. “It was she who offered these answers.”

So, the king arranged to meet the daughter. And after a short time, the king saw her intelligence and character and asked for her hand in marriage, and she agreed. But the king gave her this condition: “If anything were ever to come between us, you must depart and leave the castle immediately.”

The daughter agreed to his condition. “I must impose my own condition, too,” she said, “or I will not be in the least willing to agree to any conditions whatsoever. If anything were to come between us and I must leave the castle, you must permit me to take three loads out of the castle as I am leaving.”

The king agreed. The conditions were made binding, and things were going ahead happily enough after the marriage. Their firstborn was a bonny boy. He was put in a cradle, and the daughter would rock him back and forth as she spun, or knitted, or sang. And they were very happy.

But it so happened that a foal that did not belong to the king got lost on the mountainside and was mixed in with the king’s geldings. And the foal followed the geldings into the king’s stable. When the farmer came to claim the foal, the king claimed that he had the right of ownership over the foal since it was in the king’s stable, and the man could not get his foal back no matter how he tried.

Word of the daughter’s intelligence and goodness was well known, so the farmer paid a visit to her while she rocked her son in his cradle and the king was away.

“Here is what you should do,” the daughter said after hearing his tale. “Bring along a bucket of salt and begin sowing it in the field when you know the king is near. The king will come to see what you are doing—say to him then that you are sowing the field with salt. Be sure to talk as if this is the most usual thing in the world. And when he asks you whether you believe the salt you are sprinkling on the field will grow, say to him that it is just as likely that salt would grow as it is for a gelding to have a foal.”

So the farmer came over early in the morning, and he was sprinkling salt onto the damp earth.

The king went over to him. “Do you really think that the salt will grow from

the ground?”

“It is just as likely for salt to grow as it is for a gelding to have a foal,” the farmer said.

And the king was not happy, because he had been shamed and had then to part with the foal. “This is your doing,” said the king to his wife, “giving advice to the farmer.”

She did not deny it.

“You have allowed this to come between us. I am sure that you remember the conditions,” the king said.

“Oh yes,” said she, “I remember them very well. All of them.”

“Then, you may go in whatever direction you please, but you must go out of the castle immediately,” the king said.

“I will go,” said she. “But I will also have three loads to take out of the castle, because if I hold to your condition, you must hold to mine.”

So the daughter filled a chest of gold and silver and jewels and all sorts of valuables and carried that out of the household and put it outside on the road. She then returned and lifted up the cradle with her bonny boy inside it, and that was the second load that she was allowed to take to the road outside. And I am sure the king was looking at the chest of gold outside and looking at the baby boy in his cradle and holding his temples, because he had agreed to those conditions.

But the daughter came next to the king’s side and hoisted him over her shoulder. She carried him out as well and set him beside the chest and the cradle on the road.

And that is the story of the king and the foal.

This kitchen table myth strikes me as a deeply resistive tale that fosters respect for women’s intellect, a recognition of the gifts and properties of others, and a call for leadership that is grounded in humility, accountability, and sincere connection. Like our previous two stories, this story demonstrates the importance of holding dear our closest relations, and the deep and healing work we do when we honor others and are accountable to them. This particular story also highlights the importance of courage, close and respectful listening, and the need for creative, even quirky, solutions to common issues.

And, like many feminist stories, this story is also specifically focused on the workings of power within and around our public roles. For Druids, stories like “The King and the Foal” suggest a mindful approach to political dynamics and leadership. Western cultures are steeped in hierarchies—political, workplace, academic, and community. But we can see where these models have led us—ecological devastation, inequity, and social divisions. New models of leadership and group dynamics are vital in an era when so much of what we truly value as spiritual people—the ecosystems that we revere, the political systems that we have relied upon, the economic systems

that have sustained some of us—are splintering and collapsing. Stories like these teach us to be clear about the expectations, habits, and values we carry into the spaces where we work as individuals and within groups, providing examples of connection and transformation. They teach us to courageously challenge powerful institutions, to walk in humility, and to hold to our own guiding ethics.

These types of stories suggest that we might more mindfully choose what we will carry along our paths, creating shared Druidic spaces where all members have equal opportunity and responsibility to speak, to think, and to engage. This story also suggests that we navigate disagreement as an expected, positive, and healthy process, and build resilient and authentic connections through respectful and active listening. Especially for those who view themselves as leaders or agents of change in the twenty-first century, these skills are not just about building Druid communities—they are quintessential to fostering genuinely open, cooperative, and just ways of being in the world. And they are the types of relations and leadership skills Druids are primed to model for others, in a world hungry for authentic connection, deeper wisdom, and belonging.

Druids have much to learn from and offer to the coalitional movements rising nationally and globally in these last few years. Black Lives Matter and global protests against police brutality have made us aware of the everyday racial oppressions that undeniably order our world. #Me-Too, #TimesUp, and the prosecution of high-profile abusers have made visible the scale of sexual harassment people undeniably encounter in the everyday. A new movement to bring awareness to the importance of consent has structured conversations in schools and public groups, including pagan circles, highlighting the ways gender norms snare us all and require a responsible accountability to others. Permaculture and ecological groups have worked toward greener city, suburban, and rural living. We note that these groups and their stories teach Druids not only that our spiritual lives are inseparable from the world around us, but that—as humans, more generally—we must more mindfully honor others, seek true equality, and reflect on our roles within these global structures of power and domination if we are to authentically live in alignment with Druidic ideals. This is personal work, this is political work, and it is work we do in relation with others in the everyday.

A Pause, Not a Conclusion: New Stories, New Work

I will conclude by recognizing that these are just three of the overtly feminist stories we might find if we search archives and storytelling traditions; there are likely hundreds more, from many different cultures, time periods, and perspectives, yet to be shared within Druid community, offering the same sorts of reflective and intriguing models for expansive, progressive, and experiential understanding. The question I would bring today is whether we can find or compose yet more imaginative stories, stories that draw from the past but take us in even newer directions, stories that celebrate and reconfigure gender, stories that help us to confront and manage the many challenges we face in today's communities and ecosystems. What other sensibilities might we also emphasize, and what more might these stories teach us about twenty-first-century Druid practice

and community?

As we face unprecedented global, national, and local challenges, the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves take on a significant weightiness. Beneath all the layers of gender, race, sexuality, class, nationality, and history—those social forces that are always unforgivingly structuring our experiences and movements in difference—our stories will continue to root us in time, space, and shared purpose. They will continue to shape our work and our realities, fueling our imaginations and our relationships.

If stories hold many powers, one of the greatest is the power to change minds, to lift hearts, and to bring us together in and across our differences. So, I end here today, not with a conclusion, but a pause and an invitation. I invite you, in coming months, to share the stories you have most cherished and learned from with me and to reflect with me upon what your favorite stories teach us and how they enable us to share in common purpose. I invite you, in coming months, to share the stories you've written, dreamed, and lived with me and others, inviting us to learn and walk with you into our shared future. I look forward to hearing the new stories we will bring to our work as Druids, to the unfolding of our cocreative efforts to reimagine the world, and the transformations these stories enact.

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Wildcrafting Druidries

Inspirations through Nature, Localizing Practices, and Pattern Literacy

Compiled by Dana O'Driscoll with ideas and input from the AODA community

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One of the strengths of AODA Druidry is our emphasis on developing what Gordon Cooper calls “wildcrafted” Druidries¹—Druid practices that are localized to our place, rooted in our ecosystems, and designed in conjunction with the world and landscapes immediately around us. Wildcrafted Druidries are in line with AODA’s recently released seven core practices and values that include placing nature at the center of our practice, including practicing nature reverence, working with cycles and seasons, and personal observations. But taking the first steps into wildcrafting your practice can be a bit overwhelming, and can be complicated by a number of other factors. What if you are a new Druid and don’t know much about your ecosystem? What if you are traveling a lot or transient? What if you just moved to a new ecosystem after establishing yourself firmly somewhere else? This essay will help you get started in building your own wildcrafted Druid practice and covers including using nature as inspiration, localized wheels of the year, pattern literacy, nature and relationship, and finding the uniqueness in the landscape.

Since October 2019, AODA has been hosting quarterly “community calls,” which are meetings using online software that are open to AODA members and friends, where we discuss aspects of AODA’s Druidry. In our April 2020 call, with the theme of wildcrafted Druidries, ap-

¹ Gordon Cooper, “Wild-crafting the Modern Druid.” Ancient Order of Druids in America, n.d., <http://aoda.org/publications/articles-on-druidry/wildcraftingmoderndruid/>.

proximately thirty AODA Druids shared their experiences in wildcrafting. This article represents some of the many ideas and suggestions expressed during the meeting and shares how different Druids are wildcrafting their practices. These ideas can be grouped under several larger themes: using nature for inspiration and connection, localizing wheels of the year, engaging in pattern literacy, and recognizing the uniqueness of the landscape.

Nature as Inspiration and for Connection

While the principle of wildcrafting seems fairly universal among AODA Druids, in that all Druids find some need to wildcraft to varying degrees, there is no set method for beginning this practice or what the practice may entail. The details of how a Druid wildcrafts vary widely based on the ecosystem and the individual Druid's experiences, history, culture, and more. What an individual Druid chooses to follow is rooted in the dominant features of that landscape, what they choose to focus on in the ecosystem, and how they choose to interpret and build a relationship with their landscape. Here are some of the many practices members described:

- Following the path of the sun, paying attention to the amount of light in the world, and looking for changes in the landscape that appear at the solstices and equinoxes (a fairly classic practice)
- Following clear markers of the season based in plant life: trees blooming, sap flowing, colors changing, tree harvests, dormancy, and more
- Following clear markers of migrating birds (e.g., robins arriving) and/or the emergence or stages of life of insects (e.g., monarchs flying)
- Following animal patterns and activity (nesting behavior, etc.)
- Following weather patterns (e.g., time of fog, monsoon season, rainy season, dry season, winter, summer, etc.)
- Following patterns of human behavior or other natural shifts in urban settings (e.g., when the tourists leave, patterns of life in your city)
- Recognizing that some places do not have four seasons and working to discover what landscape and weather markers mark your specific seasons
- Drawing upon not only ecological features but also cultural or familial ones (family stories, local myths, local culture)

Transient Druids or those who travel a lot may have a combination of the above, either from different ecosystems that they visited or from a home-base ecosystem, where they grew up or live for part of the year. There is obviously no one right or wrong way to create your practice.

Another important issue discussed in our meeting, tied to using nature as inspiration, is viewing nature through a lens of connection rather than objectification. When we look at a tree, what do we see? Do we see the tree as an object in the world? Perhaps we see it as lumber for building or as a producer of fruit for eating. But what if, instead, we thought about the interconnected web of relationships that the tree is part of? What is our relationship with that tree? Thus, seeing nature from a position of relationships or connections and not just objects is a useful practice that helps Druids build deep connections with nature.

Wheel(s) of the Year: Localizing and Adapting

The concept of the wheel of the year is central to Druidry. Druids find it useful to mark certain changes in their own ecosystems and celebrate the passage of one season to the next—practices we define in terms of a wheel or cycle of the year. But to Druids who wildcraft, the wheel of the year should be a reflection of nature's cycles and seasons, things that are local and representative of the ecosystems that they inhabit. While many traditional wheels of the year assume either a four-fold or eightfold pattern and are based entirely on the path of the sun and agricultural holidays in the British Isles, this system does not map neatly—or at all—onto many other places in the world. The further one gets from anything resembling the temperate ecosystems of northwestern Europe, the less useful the traditional wheel of the year is with its associated themes and holidays (e.g., a Druid living in South America experiences a completely different wheel; a Druid in Maine is going to be hard pressed to see any first signs of spring at Imbolc). This diversity encourages many Druids to build their own wheels of the year.

Some Druids in different parts of North and South America reported having only two seasons (rainy and dry), while others reported up to seven different distinct seasons in their wheel. Wheels of the year might be marked by the kind of events described in the bullet points above: the return of a particular insect to the ecosystem, the migration of birds, the blooming of a flower, the first hard frost, the coming of the rains, and so forth. Even if you live in an ecosystem that is similar to the classic wheel of the year, you still may find that you want to adapt parts of it to your specific experiences, practices, and connections.

Here are some practices that you might do to start building your own wheel:

- *Nature observation:* You might start by observing nature in your area for a full year and then noting: What is changing? What is different? How important are those changes to you?
- *Interview the old timers and wise folks:* Talk with the old farmers, wise women, grannies, and

grandpaps in the area who have an innate knowledge. Ask them how they know spring has arrived, or that fall is coming, or what they understand to be the seasons. You might be surprised at the level of detail you get!

- *Look to local farms and agriculture.* Most traditional agricultural customs and products are directly dependent on local ecosystems. You can learn a lot about important things that happen in your local ecosystem by paying attention to the agricultural wheel of the year and what is done when. If you have the opportunity to do a little planting and harvesting (in a garden or on your balcony), you'll also attune yourself to these changes.
- *Look to local customs and traditions.* You might pay attention to regional or local fairs and festivals and/or look at regional calendars to see what the important dates are. Some of these may be contemporary customs from much older traditions (like Groundhog Day) or customs that were observed formerly but no longer are (like wassailing in January). Reading about the history of your region, particularly feasts, celebrations, and traditional activities, might give you more insight.
- *Consider family observances.* Some families develop their own traditions that might be worth considering. For others, family traditions may come from a religion that you no longer want to associate with, and that's okay too.
- *Consider where the energy is.* What is this season about? Where are the energy and power in the land at present? What is changing? Observation and interaction will help.
- *Speak with the nature spirits.* Perhaps the most powerful thing you can do is to connect with the nature spirits or spirits of the land and see what wisdom they have for you (using any number of inner communication or divination methods).

Pattern Literacy: Nature's Archetypes

All Druids seeking to wildcraft and connect deeply with the world around them would benefit from understanding what permaculturist Toby Hemenway called “pattern literacy.”² Patterns are nature's archetypes; they are the ways that nature repeats itself over and over through broad designs, traits, configurations, features, or events. Each unique thing on this planet often represents one or more patterns. Learning pattern literacy is useful for all Druids as a way of starting to engage with and develop wildcrafted Druidries and symbolism.

Let's look at an example of pattern literacy from the plant kingdom to see how this works. The rose (Rosaceae) family is very large, including almost 5,000 different species globally—such

2 Toby Hemenway, “Becoming Pattern Literate,” November 20, 2015, <https://tobyhemenway.com/1246-becoming-pattern-literate/>.

as blackberries, apples, hawthorns, plums, rowans, and much more. Members of the rose family are found on nearly every continent in the world. Rose family plants have a number of common features, including flowers with five petals, five sepals, and numerous stamens, and serrated leaves (often arranged in a spiral pattern). If you know this pattern, then even if you don't know specific species in the ecosystem you are in, you can still do some broad identification—you can recognize a plant as being in the rose family, even if you don't know the species or genus. As I write this, our apple trees are blooming, producing the beautiful fivefold petal pattern that so clearly marks them as part of the Rosaceae family—and within a few weeks, our hawthorns, blackberries, and raspberries will also bloom. Each of these four plants will show the same general bloom pattern: the fivefold flower. This information about Rosaceae's fivefold pattern—along with lots more like it—comes from a book called *Botany in a Day*, which I highly recommend to anyone interested in learning plant patterns.³

For those Druids who are transient, traveling, or looking to connect to a new ecosystem, pattern literacy offers you a powerful way to form immediate connections in an unfamiliar ecosystem. Connections are formed through relationships, experiences, and knowledge—you can have a relationship with one species and transfer at least part of that connection to similar species in a new area. With pattern literacy, you can learn the broad patterns of nature and then apply them in specific ways to new areas where you are. Once you can identify the larger patterns, you are not lost any longer; you are simply seeing how a familiar archetype manifests specifically where you are. These kinds of immediate connections in an unfamiliar place can give you some anchoring in new places.

The best way to discover patterns is to get out in nature, observe, and interact. Reading books and learning more about nature's common patterns can also help. In addition to *Botany in a Day*, mentioned above, you might be interested in looking at Philip Ball's series from Oxford University Press: *Nature's Patterns: A Tapestry in Three Parts*. The three patterns that he covers are *Branches*, *Shapes*, and *Flow*.⁴ Mushroom and plant books also often offer keys or key features that repeat over many families (e.g., shelf mushrooms, gilled mushrooms, boletes, agarics, etc.). These kinds of books are other good sources of information. Learning nature is learning patterns—and pattern literacy is a critical tool for Druids.

Recognizing Uniqueness in the Landscape

Another useful way of wildcrafting your Druidry is thinking about what is unique and special about your landscape, such as natural features, beauty, diversity, or insect life—and these unique features can include a land's journey through history and restoration from adversity, the story of

3 Thomas J. Elpel, *Botany in a Day: The Patterns Method of Plant Identification*, 6th ed. (Pony, MT: Hops Press, 2013).

4 Philip Ball, *Nature's Patterns: A Tapestry in Three Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), part 1, *Shapes*; part 2, *Flow*; part 3, *Branches*.

that land. Finding and connecting to these features may give you a way of seeing how your land is unique in a very local way. Some landscapes have old-growth trees, others have huge cacti, others endless fields of flowers, and still others huge barren mountains with bold colors. Each landscape is different, special, and unique.

For transient Druids, traveling Druids, or Druids who are new to an ecosystem, recognizing the uniqueness in the landscape has added benefit. It allows you to focus on what is special and best about the landscape you are in rather than focusing on a landscape that you miss (e.g., being able to appreciate the prairie for what it is rather than focusing on the fact that there are few to no trees). Thus, this offers a way of orienting yourself in an unfamiliar environment.

Ready, Set, Wildcraft!

Wildcrafting your Druidry can help you develop a connection with your landscape, and thus find new ways of deepening your practice. Find the cycles, find the patterns, discover what is unique, and discover what changes—all of these suggestions can help you better understand the world around you.

Introducing AODA's Seven Element System as a Framework for Ritual and Land Blessing

Dana O'Driscoll

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A useful way of understanding any system of spiritual practice is to look at the framework it offers to understand reality. These frameworks vary widely from one spiritual tradition to another: some use a complex system of deities, myths, places, or stories to help explain and represent reality. Some commonly known frameworks are the Norse Nine Worlds framework, Traditional Chinese Medicine's five-element system, or the Kabbalah of Jewish mysticism. AODA has our own framework that is elemental in nature: the seven-element framework. The seven elements used in AODA's practice are the three aspects of spirit (Spirit Above, Spirit Below, and Spirit Within) as well as the classical elements of earth, air, fire, and water.

Any framework offers a way to represent the world, a way to put the complexity of matter and spirit into an accessible form that can be worked, adapted, and understood. It gives us larger archetypes or symbols to draw upon and a basic system that can be expanded in infinite ways. Elemental frameworks like AODA's provide a simplified system to represent the complexities of reality. The elements are symbols, which are simplified things (e.g., a word, an image) that represent much more nuanced and complex concepts. Symbols help us interpret and understand the world, and offer us frameworks not only for meditation and ritual but also for daily life.

Once you have an understanding of AODA's system of representation, you can work with it in myriad ways to develop your own unique practices, adapt it to your local ecosystem,

and so forth. This framework manifests in core AODA practices through the Sphere of Protection and seasonal rituals, like those found in the *New Candidate Guide*. This article offers a more thorough overview of the seven-element system with some historical connections and suggestions for localizing and adapting this system, and then demonstrates how to create new rituals through a sample land-blessing ritual.

The Four Elements

The first part of AODA's energetic framework is the four classical elements. The elements of earth, air, fire, and water or some similar equivalent were part of many ancient cultures, including those of ancient Greece, Persia, Babylonia, Tibet, and China. In ancient Persia around 600 BCE, the philosopher Zarathustra (Zoroaster) seems to have originated—or at least first written down—the four-element theory, saying that the four elements are “sacred” and “essential for the survival of all living beings and therefore should be venerated and kept free from any contamination” (Habashi, 2000). In ancient Persia, the failure to keep the four elements pure (as in unpolluted or uncorrupted by human hands) could anger the gods. If only the modern world had such wisdom!

As in ancient times, today the elements can be seen as both physical things (e.g., the soil as earth, fire as fire, water in a stream) and metaphysical. Thus, we can see the four elements represented in nature and in Revival Druid symbolism, but also physically in the human body as well as emotionally. For example, earth in the Druid tradition is tied to the energy of the bear, trees, and stones on the physical landscape. We can see representations of earth everywhere we look—in mountains, stones, caves. It's also tied to the personality qualities of determination and perseverance, the physical qualities of having a strong body or a high constitution, and the metaphysical qualities of grounding and rootedness. If we trace the idea of an earth element back through traditional Western herbalism, we also see earth connected to the melancholic temperament, which indicates a deeply reflective, introspective, and quiet individual. Thus, each element offers a conceptual framework to help classify and categorize aspects of our world. Having these concepts ready is quite useful when you want to call upon any of the above with a single word or symbol. For example, if I want to bring these qualities into my life, a simple thing I could do is trace the symbol of earth in the air each day (in AODA, it is a circle with a line pointing to the earth), carry a stone in my pocket, or lie upon the earth.

Earth is the element tied to the direction north, to the dark moon, to the energy of winter and midnight. We find earth physically in mountains, stones, trees, and the land itself. The energy of earth, manifesting metaphysically, offers grounding, stability, strength, and perseverance. Earth encourages us to be grounded and stable in our work. In the Druid Revival tradition, earth is often symbolized by the Great Bear, manifested both in the heavens as Ursa Major and also on earth as a physical bear, who represents many of earth's qualities.

Air is the element tied to the east, to the waxing moon, to the energy of spring and dawn. We find air physically in the wind, the sky, the clouds, the rustle of the leaves as they blow in the

breeze. The energy of air, manifesting metaphysically, offers us clarity, knowledge, wisdom, focus, and objectivity. Air encourages us to temper our emotions with reason, evidence, and clear thinking. In the Druid Revival tradition, air is symbolized by a hawk soaring in the air at dawn.

Fire is the element tied to the south, to the full moon, to the energy of summer and noon. We find fire physically as a literal fire (such as a campfire or one in your fireplace) but also in the combustion of any materials to create heat and energy (in the modern world, oil or electricity). The energy of fire, manifesting metaphysically, has to do with inspiration, transformation, creativity, passions, and will—how we direct our lives and what we want to bring into manifestation. In the classical texts, fire is often closest to the divine, as it is a transformative agent. In the Druid Revival tradition, fire is symbolized by a stag, often depicted in a summer forest.

Water is the element tied to the west, to the waning moon, the energy of fall and dusk. We find water physically in rivers, lakes, oceans, springs, streams, storms, and even in our own bodies. The energy of water, manifesting metaphysically, offers us intuition, emotion, healing, wisdom, connection—particularly connection with nature and spirit—and flow. In the Druid Revival tradition, water is symbolized by the salmon of wisdom, originally coming from the Fenian cycle of Irish mythology (Nagy, 2017), where the salmon who lived in the well of wisdom ate nine hazelnuts and was later caught by Finn, who cooked the salmon and ate it, thus receiving its wisdom himself.

The Three Aspects of Spirit and the Three Currents

Drawing upon the earlier work of the Greek writer Empedocles, who introduced the four elements to the ancient Greek world, Aristotle added a fifth element, Aether (spirit) to the four classical elements. The original four elements were considered four states of matter, with the fifth being a connection to the metaphysical (that which is beyond the physical). In AODA, we recognize three aspects of spirit—Above, Below, and Within. These are tied to the three currents of energy on the land, expressed in the Druid Revival, and most certainly understood by many ancient peoples across the world, as being connected with the energies of the heavens and the earth (Pennick and Devereux, 1989).

Spirit Above: The Solar Current

The solar current is the energy—physical and metaphysical—that comes from the sun, our ultimate source of life. This current is associated with things in the sky: the heavens and birds such as hawks, eagles, and roosters. Additionally, certain plants also draw and radiate solar energy quite effectively—in my own experience and bioregion, dandelion (dominant in the spring), St. John's wort (dominant at midsummer), and goldenrod (dominant in the fall) are three such plants.

Solar energy, being directly tied to the sun, changes based on the position of the sun in the sky. That is, solar energy is different at noon than it is at dusk, dawn, or midnight. It also changes

based on where the sun is in the wheel of the year; the energy of the sun is different on June 21st, the summer solstice, than it is on the winter solstice, December 21st in the Northern Hemisphere.

Other bodies in our solar system and more broadly in the celestial heavens are connected energetically to the sun. In *The Druid Magic Handbook*, Greer (2008) notes that other planets in the solar system directly reflect the energy of the sun, so the study of astrology can help us understand the manifestation of the solar current at various times. This is all to say that solar energy is ever powerful, and ever changing, in our lives.

We can see the solar current manifested in the world's religions—Christianity, for example, is a very solar-focused tradition. Pictures of saints or Jesus often include rays of light shining down from above or a halo of light around the person's head. Buddhism, likewise, focuses on achieving higher levels of consciousness and being—which are solar in nature. Anytime you hear about ascension, the light of the sun, and so on, that's solar energy being connected to and drawn upon. Part of the allure of these traditions is in transcendence—since the material earth is problematic and imperfect, we can ascend to more perfect realms. From a Druid perspective, the problem with focusing only on ascension is that it separates the living earth from all things sacred or holy—I believe that part of the reason for the pillaging of our planet is the solar emphasis in dominant world religions. The earth, then, is seen only as a resource to be taken, not as sacred in and of itself. Thus, in AODA Druidry, we balance working with the solar current with two other currents, the telluric (Spirit Below) and the lunar (Spirit Within).

Spirit Below: The Telluric Current

While the light of the sun comes down to earth, the telluric current rises from the heat and energy of the earth itself. The molten core of the earth drives the movement of earth's tectonic plates and thus shapes the landmasses on the surface. These landmasses, along with the energy of the sun and the composition of the atmosphere, determine our climate (Ruddiman, 2013). The great soil web, in which millions of organisms are contained in a single teaspoon of rich soil, also supports all life (Lowenfels and Lewis, 2010). Thus, we can see the importance of the microbial aspects of soil in the larger patterns of life on this planet.

The telluric current's name comes from Tellus, a name for the ancient Roman goddess of the earth. She was also known as *terra mater* or Mother Earth; later, this was a Latin word, *telluric*, meaning “land, territory or earth.” These ancient connections, then, are present in the name itself, where the earth and her energy were often personified and worshipped as divine.

This telluric energy starts at the center of the earth and rises up, through molten flows and layers of stone, through the groundwater and underwater aquifers, through minerals and layers of fossils in the crust of the earth. It takes its shape from what is on the surface: plants, trees, roads, rivers, valleys, and so on. As Greer notes in *The Druid Magic Handbook*, it is powerfully affected by underground sources of water (aquifers); springs and wells have very strong concentrations of telluric energy. This helps explain both why sacred wells, throughout the ages, have been such an

important part of spiritual traditions around the world, and why we can use spring water for healing and energizing purposes. This also explains why hydrofracking, which taints the underground waters themselves, is such a terrible practice.

As R.J. Stewart (1992) notes in *Earth Light*, it is from the currents of the earth that nutrients flow from the living earth into our bodies, regenerating them (both physically and metaphysically). The telluric current embodies the light of transformation and regeneration. The telluric also represents the dark places in the world, the energy found in caves and deep in the depths of our souls. Telluric energy sometimes is about confronting the shadows within ourselves and realizing that those are part of us too. It is about lived experience—the act of being—rather than rationalizing and talking about. In *Lines on the Landscape*, Pennick and Devereux sum this up nicely: “For us, the sense of traveling through a dark and elemental landscape, pregnant with magical and spiritual forces, is no longer experienced. We have separated ourselves from the land and live within our own abstractions” (1989, 246). Take a minute to think about the word “dark”—in modern Western culture, it is immediately associated with evil (showing our strong solar bias). But darkness can be a place of rest, of quietude, of inner learning and knowing. Fewer traditions work primarily with the telluric current—the Underworld tradition (see R.J. Stewart’s line of books for an example) is one. Many forms of shamanism, where the practitioner is going down into the depths of the earth or their own consciousness to seek allies and assistance, are also telluric in nature. These traditions are frequently concerned with transforming the here and now, and seeing the earth as sacred, understanding the sacred soil upon which life depends.

Spirit Within: Awakening the Lunar Current

A third current—the lunar current—can be created by consciously bringing the solar and telluric currents together in union and balance. As Greer writes in *The Druid Magic Handbook*, “When the lunar current awakens in an individual, it awakens the inner sense and unfolds into enlightenment. When it awakens in the land, it brings healing, fertility, and plenty” (2008, 30).

We can see ancient humans’ deep knowledge of the three currents and their interaction reflected in the ancient ley lines upon the landscape—for example, Cusco, Peru (which means “navel of the earth”), had at its center the Inca Temple of the Sun. The Coricancha (the emperor) sat at the heart of the temple; radiating the light of the sun outward from this temple was a large web of straight lines reaching into the countryside (Pennick and Devereux, 1989, 251). On the other side of the world, we see the same principles at play in China, where the Chinese emperor sat on his throne in the center of the Imperial Palace (the Purple Forbidden City), centered on the imperial road and with gates leading outward in the four directions (251). In these and in other ancient civilizations, the rulers, associated with the sun or considering themselves as “sun gods” or “sons of heaven,” radiated solar energy outward via

these “transmission lines” to bless the earthly manifestation of the telluric current. The ruler was the personal awakening of the third current, who sent it out for the bounty and health of the land.

The lunar current also helps us resolve the binary created by the telluric and solar currents and the perception of that division—it shows us that unification is possible, and art of awakening the lunar current can be part of our spiritual practice. Nwyfre flows from the awakening of this third current, through the alchemical synthesis and transformation of the other two.

Using and Adapting the Seven-Element Framework

Above I’ve presented the bare bones of the seven-element framework, drawn from associations with antiquity and the Druid Revival. But in AODA practice, we encourage Druids to develop their own “wildcrafted” and ecoregional Druidries. So a Druid living in California might have a different interpretation of these elements in their landscape than one living in Pennsylvania. Each Druid can adapt these basic meanings and directions as they see fit for their own wildcrafted Druidry. As your own understanding of the natural world may deepen, you may also find your symbols and connections for the four elements changing, which often happens with AODA’s practice.

As a way forward with adapting and connecting to dominant energies in your own local ecosystem, here are a few suggestions. You can tie each of the four classical elements specifically to what is happening on your landscape (which is part of why we encourage you in AODA to engage in both nature observation and learning about your local ecosystem through books and classes). In parts of the United States and certainly in other parts of the world, the local cycle of seasons bears little resemblance to the classic cycle of a growing season through the summer and a cold, snowy winter. Druids in such areas need to observe their local seasonal patterns carefully and adapt their concepts of the seasons and elements accordingly. Here are some questions to help you get started:

- **General:** What kinds of symbols are you most strongly drawn to (animals, stones, plants, trees, landscape features, deity, etc.)? Thinking about what you are most drawn to can help you decide how to localize the symbolism.
- **Earth:** Where does the element earth most strongly manifest in your landscape? Does this change across the seasons? What animals may be associated with earth? (Those that burrow, hibernate, or have shells like tortoises are potentially good choices here.) What plants have strong roots and/or medicinal roots?
- **Air:** Where does air manifest in your landscape? How does this change across the course of the seasons? What air animals or birds are most dominant in the landscape? What plants have an air quality (e.g., those that release seeds, like dandelion)?

- **Fire:** Where does fire manifest in your landscape? How does this change across the course of the seasons? Do you live in a seismically active area? What plants or animals might be associated with high summer or hot, dry times? What plants or animals might offer other fire energy?
- **Water:** Where does water manifest on your landscape? Where is the largest body of water? What are dominant aquatic animals or plants that are local to you?
- **Spirit Above, Below, and Within.** For me, the three aspects of spirit represent the metaphysical, not the physical, so I don't concern myself as much with representing them directly in the physical world (like the four elements above). Instead, I choose representations of them that fit my understanding of the energy they bring. You might ask: What can represent the sun? What symbols can represent the earth? What symbol best represents me as an actualized, spiritual being for Spirit Within? You can also tie these to plants, animals, and other natural features if you feel so led.

Here's an example based on my local bioregion in western Pennsylvania. I wanted to tie each of the four elements to herbs in the local ecosystem so that I could paint them on grove banners and have a local herbal version of my Sphere of Protection. After observation, interaction, and studying herbalism, I came up with four herbs. Air is dandelion, tied to the fact that it blooms in the spring and welcomes back the sun with its sun-like shape and color. Dandelion is also excellent for air and east because it turns to seed and blows in the wind. Monarda (bee balm) is tied to fire. It blooms in high summer, in sunny as well as forest settings, bringing that fiery energy to the landscape. It has a very fiery taste and can fight infections, making it a strong fire plant. Cattail is tied to water and the west. Cattail comes into dominance in the fall, as the long brown flower heads begin to bloom as we approach the fall equinox. Cattail is also water loving, found on the edges of ponds and waterways, and makes an excellent wild food source, providing nourishment. Finally, I tie wintergreen to earth, as earth is associated with the winter solstice and the north, and very little is green then. Wintergreen stays green all winter, when you can harvest both the green, minty leaves and the bright red berries. These four plants, all growing in my local ecosystem, help me connect more deeply to the elements. The three aspects of spirit are tied to sacred trees that I always use for the purpose (which are private to me, and hence, that I will not share here).

The point here is that you can take this basic framework and start to adapt it in various ways. These adaptations can certainly tie to your Sphere of Protection but also can be useful in a multitude of other ways. Once you have a sense of AODA's framework, you can use it (or parts of it) for a wide variety of ritual and nonritual purposes. What this framework does is give you just that—a framework to work in and to explore. Some of many ideas include:

- As a source for the flow of Awen, to help you compose seven related poems, paintings, crafts, or representations.

- As a source for rituals and ritual framework, exploring one or more elements throughout the year or all elements in one ritual for a specific purpose.
- As a way to connect your Druid studies, focusing on each of the elements for a period of time, moving from air to earth and then into the three aspects of spirit.
- As a way to focus meditations, considering, for example, the role of each of these elements in your life.
- As a way to interact with nature, observing the power of each of the elements across the course of the seasons.

We'll now look at one such application of the seven-element framework to develop a land blessing ritual.

Sample Seven-Element Ritual: Land Blessing and Protection Ritual

Many traditional land blessing ceremonies include using some form of energy to bless and protect a space. This ceremony draws upon the energy of the seven AODA elements for blessing and healing. This ceremony is ideally done while walking the perimeter of a piece of land you want to protect and bless. If you aren't able to walk a perimeter due to the size of the space or other considerations, you can adapt it by simply calling in the elements. I would suggest that before doing this ceremony, you do deep listening with the land to make sure such a ceremony would be welcome. (It almost always is!) This ceremony has individual and group variations.

Land Blessing Ceremony for a Solitary Practitioner

Materials:

A bowl of lightly salted water and a smoke cleansing (smudge) stick (with a candle or lighter to relight)
A bowl of herbs, soil, or sand for marking the circle of Spirit Below.
A wand, staff, sword, or knife for tracing the circle of Spirit Above.
A bell, rattle, or drum for sounding Spirit Within.

You can place all materials on a central altar and/or lay them on the ground. Prior to the ritual, select a central stone, tree, or other natural feature to be the anchor for the energy that you will be raising.

Declare intentions. Start the ritual by declaring your intentions in your own words. For example:

“The purpose of this ceremony is to bless and protect this landscape and allow regeneration to happen. I am here as a healer, friend, and fellow inhabitant of this land. May peace abide in this working and throughout this land.” If you choose, you can also use the AODA’s solitary grove ritual to open up this space at this time. (I would suggest doing the first part of the opening but not the SOP, as the rest of this ritual is essentially a variant on the SOP.)

Make an offering. You can use your own words or say, “Spirits of place, spirits of this land, I make this offering to honor and acknowledge you. Guardians of this place, of matter or spirit, be with this place.” Pause and wait for any messages or feelings before continuing.

Fire and air. Walk the perimeter of the land and/or in a large circle within the land for the next part. As you walk, begin by blessing the space with the four classical elements of air, fire, water, and earth. First, bless and clear the space with air and fire, using your smoke purification stick. As you walk, visualize the elements of air and fire strongly in this place (you can envision them as yellow and red light). As you walk in a deosil (clockwise) pattern, chant: “Smoke of healing herbs and sacred fires that purify. Clear and bless this place.” When you return to the place you began, pause and envision the energy of air and fire.

Earth and water. Now, bless and clear the space with water and earth. Again, envision the elements strongly in this space (you can envision them as blue and green light). Take your bowl of water and flick it out with your fingers as you walk. Say, “Waters of the sacred pool and salt of the earth. Clear and bless this place.” When you return to the place you began, pause and envision the energy of water and earth.

Spirit Below and telluric current. Move to the center of the space. Say, “I call upon the three aspects of spirit, which connect the worlds. Let the spirit which flows within all living beings bless and protect this place today and always.”

Draw a circle on the ground deosil, as large as you would like. Alternatively, you can once again walk the perimeter of your space. As you are drawing your circle, mark it with the herbs, flowers, or sand. Move to the center of the circle and place your hands on the earth. Pause and envision the currents of energy deep within the earth. Say, “I call to Spirit Below to bless and protect this land. Great telluric current that moves through this land, great soil web of all life, I ask that you fill this land with your energy and blessing.”

Pause and envision the currents deep within the heart of the earth as green-gold, rising up from the core of the earth as a green ray, radiating outward and blessing the land around you, bathing the land in a gold-green glow.

Spirit Above and solar current. Using your hand or other tool (wand, staff, etc.), draw a circle in the air above you. Alternatively, if your space is small, you can walk the perimeter with your hand or

tool in the air. Move to the center of your circle and raise your hands to the sky. Pause and envision the energy of the sun and the movement of the planets, all providing energy and influence. Say, "I call to Spirit Above to bless and protect this land. Sun that shines above and the turning wheel of the stars that bathes this land in radiance, I ask that you fill this land with your energy and blessing."

Pause and envision the sun radiating the solar current down to you, a beautiful yellow-golden light. Envision the stars and planets, each contributing their own light. This light blesses the land around you, bathing the land in a golden glow.

Spirit Within and lunar current. Using the drum, noise maker, or a simple chant, begin to reach out to the spirit within all things. The spark of life, the nywfre that flows within each thing, this is the power of Spirit Within. Place your hands on a living thing on the land, such as a central tree or stone, and sense the spirit within it. Say, "I call to Spirit Within, the enduring spirit within all things. Spirit that connects us all, I ask that you fill this land with your energy and blessing."

Pause and envision the spark of life and spirit of all things, rising up from within. Envision the other six energies coming to the central point where you have your anchor stone or tree and see the energy pouring into that anchor point, only then to radiate outward to the surrounding land being protected.

Deep listening and divination. Make space for the land to communicate with you before finishing your ceremony. For this, I suggest either deep listening (if you have honed your skills), nature observation, or using a divination system. Allow yourself to grow quiet and let the voices of the land speak to you.

Gratitude and closing. Close the ceremony by thanking the seven directions as follows, or doing AODA's solitary grove closing ritual.

Move to the east and say, "Spirits of the east, powers of air, thank you for your blessing this day." Move to the south and say, "Spirits of the south, powers of fire, thank you for your blessing this day." Move to the west and say, "Spirits of the west, powers of water, thank you for your blessing this day." Move to the north and say, "Spirits of the north, powers of earth, thank you for your blessing this day." Move to the center, and put your hands on the earth. Say, "Spirit Below, power of the telluric current, thank you for your blessing this day." Raise your hands to the heavens. Say, "Spirit Above, power of the solar current, thank you for your blessing this day." Cross your arms over your chest and close your eyes. Say, "Spirit within all things, power of the lunar current, thank you for your blessing this day."

Group Ceremony Variant

This ritual can be done in a group setting. If you have less than seven people, divide up the ele-

ments between you. You can also split up earth and water, and air and fire, into separate elements (see language below). If you have a larger group, multiple people can carry a representation of the element and/or some other energy-raising object, such as a bell, drum, or rattle. Language for all four elements is as follows:

Air: “Smoke of healing herbs and sacred fires that purify, clear and bless this place.”

Fire: “Sacred fires that purify, clear and bless this place.”

Water: “Waters of the sacred pool, clear and bless this place.”

Earth: “Salt of the earth, clear and bless this place.”

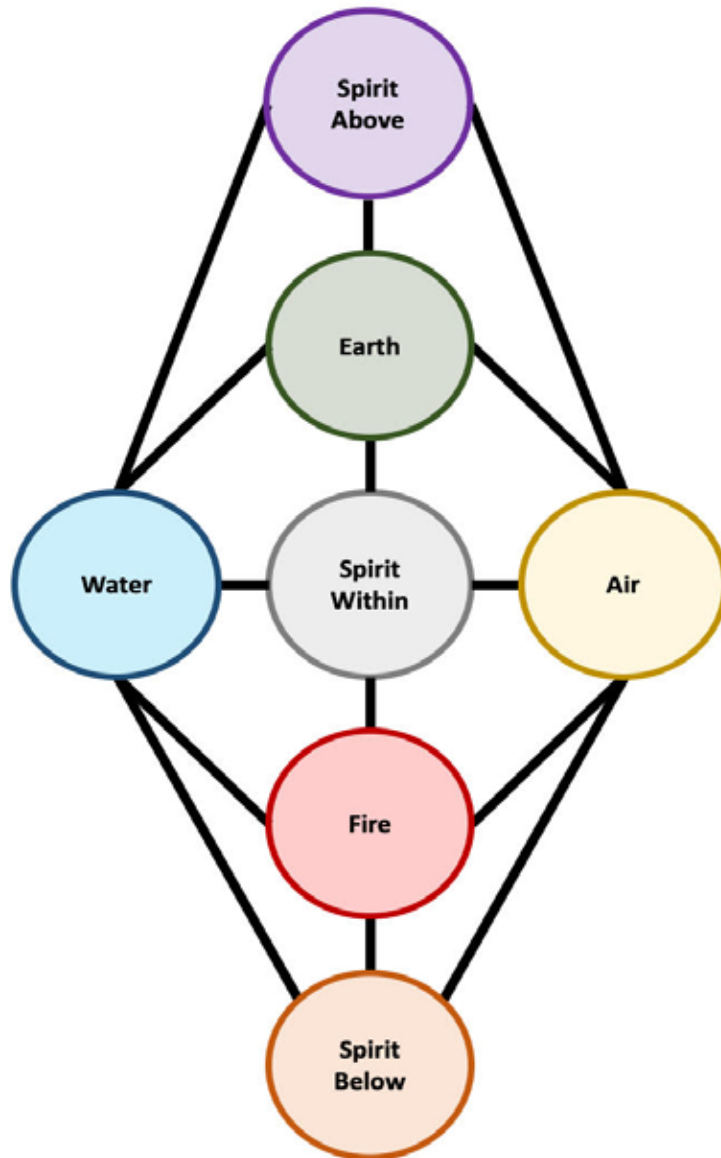
Conclusion

I hope this article has provided a deeper insight into the elemental framework of AODA and how this framework can be adapted and used. Aligning with AODA’s nondogmatic approach to nature spirituality, it also offers wide possibilities for connecting to other kinds of frameworks, such as those of other religious traditions that our members may be working in.

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SEVEN ELEMENT FRAMEWORK



Ancient Order of Druids in America, www.aoda.org

Interview with Kathleen Opon, AODA Grand Almoner and Member Outreach Coordinator

Interview conducted by Claire Schosser, AODA Mentor Coordinator and Archdruid of Fire

Claire Schosser: Let's begin with a little bit about you personally. How long have you been practicing Druidry, and what led you to Druidry and the AODA? What core practices are central to your manifestation of Druidry?

Kathleen Opon: I have been formally practicing Druidry since joining the AODA in 2015, but my interest in Druidry goes way back, so far I don't even remember when it started. When I began my AODA studies, I found Druid books in my personal collection that I had read many years ago. I believe this interest probably began in my teens with an interest in Wicca and nature-based religions in general.

What led me to Druidry is a complicated question. My religious/spiritual history is long and convoluted. I spent much of my life searching for something to replace the Catholic dogma I grew up with. By the time I was seven years old, I was questioning the Catholic religion, wondering why it was considered totally unacceptable to believe in the Divine in any way different from theirs. Interestingly, what I remember thinking is, "Why is believing in the Catholic 'God' better than worshipping a rock? Believing in something is what is important!" So even back then I was aware of the power of the elements and the earth that could even be manifested in a stone. But being a child, I had no choice but to listen to my parents in this regard.

By the time I was a teen, however, my search for an alternative began in earnest. Between the age of about fifteen and the time I joined the AODA thirty-two years later, I studied everything I could find about every way of worship I could imagine. This led me through various manifestations of Christianity and eastern religions as well as various forms of witchcraft. I continue to use practices I learned from Buddhism, Hinduism, and Shinto along with my nature-based practices.

In 2012, I joined the Sisterhood of Avalon, a mostly online Celtic women's mystery

Group. This was my first major public step away from Catholicism and one I had to largely hide from my very religious mother. When I joined the Sisterhood, I hoped to one day enter their seminary program to become a priestess. However, just as I achieved the prerequisites to do this, the program went on hiatus with an indefinite return. I felt that my dream of ordination had been crushed, but instead of just sitting around waiting, I again started searching, this time for a Druid group. In truth, I missed the presence of men in my spiritual community (the SOA is only for women). It felt unbalanced and a bit ungrounded. This search brought me to the AODA, which appealed to me because of its open, flexible curriculum and welcoming presence. Most important to me, though, was the Gnostic Celtic Church and the renewed promise of attaining my goal of becoming ordained. My mother died in January of 2015, leaving me completely free to worship however I wanted. I performed my candidate initiation in May of that same year and began my studies to become a deacon and then a priestess within the GCC.

The core of my Druid practice is meditation and prayer. I perform ritual several times a month, at the full and dark moons as well as the eight wheel-of-the-year holy days. Ritual is a great comfort for me and allows me to connect deeply with the elements and Mother Earth.

CS: Thank you for that personal background. Now please tell us a little about the Gnostic Celtic Church and how you became interested in becoming a priestess in the GCC.

KO: The Gnostic Celtic Church is the religious branch of the AODA. It acknowledges and celebrates the existence of a power beyond our human selves, but does not dictate how one experiences or connects with that power. It appealed to me that the GCC approaches personal spiritual growth in a way that relies entirely on each person's individual gnosis, meaning personal knowledge and inspiration. The church is evolving, which also appeals to me as it gives me an opportunity to participate in a real way in its growth and development. People who are interested can visit "Teachings of the GCC" (<http://aoda.org/aoda-structure/gnostic-celtic-church-gcc/teachings-of-the-gcc/>) for more information.

As I mentioned earlier, the church was actually a very big reason I joined the AODA, so I came into it a bit differently than I imagine most people do. I wanted from the beginning to become a priestess because I saw the Gnostic Celtic Church as the perfect way for me to manifest my own spiritual growth and my love of the Divine as well as a way for me to develop a way to not only serve God, but to serve the Earth and the people who live upon her.

CS: As a priestess in the GCC, how might you work with AODA members in general and those who are in training to be ordained in the GCC in particular?

KO: This question can best be answered by explaining a bit about my Druid Adept project, which I am currently in the process of completing. The goal of my project is to create an umbrella of service to the AODA and its members that consists of developing AODA-specific life stage rituals,

organizing a virtual study group to help members feel less isolated, and offering Druid-friendly spiritual guidance.

Becoming a Certified Spiritual Guide (I just this month [January 2020] completed my certification program), along with being ordained as a priestess, will allow me to address personal spiritual needs, questions, and difficulties of the members of the AODA. It also allows me to work with Adam Robersmith, the GCC Preceptor, in supporting, mentoring, and guiding interested members along the path of their discernment and formation as potential clergy.

The discernment process for potential clergy consists of personal study and contemplation along with regular contact with a priest/priestess or bishop. This contact can be via telephone, video chat, or email. The purpose is to help potential clergy discover whether the GCC clergy path is right for them and what direction that path may take. If it is discerned that they are a good fit for the church, the process moves deeper as they search within themselves for the best way for them to manifest their commitment to their spiritual growth and their place within the GCC.

CS: What do you do as the Member Outreach Coordinator, and what need within the AODA is the position designed to address?

KO: In April of 2019 I was contacted by the Grand Grove and asked if I would be willing to develop a new position that would provide a contact point for members and conduct outreach to gather information on how members were experiencing the AODA. They were curious why so many members were joining but then virtually disappearing, never moving up through the curriculum. Of course I said yes and developed what is now the Member Outreach Coordinator position.

At the end of each month I send an email out to people who have been members for 3, 6, 9, and 12 months. I started with new members from last April and hope at some point to reach out to veteran members whom I have not yet contacted. The email contains a series of questions, such as what they like about the AODA, what they think of the curriculum, what they find challenging, whether or not they have a mentor, and what suggestions they may have for improvement. While I don't get a response back from everyone, the responses I have gotten have been conscientious and thoughtful, so I have been able to share valuable information with the Grand Grove that they can then use to make improvements to the group. In addition to gathering this info, I also answer questions and help members deal with problems they may be having as far as knowing who to contact for what, etc.

CS: How does the AODA Online Study Group that you created and moderate work? Is it open to new members, and if so, how can someone join the group?

KO: As I mentioned earlier, the Online Study Group is part of my Adept project. The group is called Oak and Ether: Oak for the physical manifestation of the group, where initiations and

meetings/trainings can be held in person, and Ether for the online manifestation, where we gather every four to five weeks to discuss curriculum issues; practice prayers, chants, and rituals; socialize; and plan for upcoming holy days. Several times a year we have an open group, run by one of the members, where we do something fun. For example, we recently did an “altar show and tell” where we showed off our altar tools and other spiritual tools in our own space. The group is a great way to connect with other members who are serious about their work here. We are open to new members twice a year, around the winter and summer solstices. For information about the group (you need to be an AODA member to join), interested people can email me at oakandether@gmail.com.

CS: What are your plans for developing a set of AODA-specific life stage rituals?

KO: I am excited to start working on this part of my Adept project! My goal is to develop a set of rituals celebrating life transitions, such as having a baby, naming a baby, moving into “cronedom,” getting married (or however one describes their decision to commit to a relationship), getting a new job, house blessings, perhaps first menstruation, things like that. I am planning to post to the forums asking for ideas of how AODA members envision or would like to envision these rituals, as well as researching historical Druid life stage celebrations, and discerning through meditation and prayer my own ideas. It is my hope that, once developed and approved by the Grand Grove, these rituals will be available to members on the AODA website and/or in some physical form.

CS: Can you tell us a little about what spiritual direction or guidance is and how it may benefit AODA members? How can members contact you for more information?

KO: Spiritual direction or guidance is a gentle process of helping people who are seeking a deeper connection with their own experience of the Divine find their way. In order to be certified as a spiritual guide, a person needs to complete an educational program and an internship, supervised by an experienced practitioner.

Before beginning my journey within the GCC, I had never heard of spiritual direction. During my discernment process to become a priestess, Adam suggested I find a spiritual director. I had no idea where to look, and when I did find sources, I was unable to find anyone with any knowledge about Druidry. Eventually I settled on a spiritual director who works out of the non-denominational chapel where my husband and I were married because she was very interested in working with me and learning about Druidry. After my first session with her, I felt so inspired that I wanted to become a spiritual guide so I could help others, particularly those in my Druid community, feel the same. The program I went through is specifically interreligious and interspiritual and has a large focus on working with people who are searching for their own understanding of the Divine. We gain experience with people of all faith traditions as well as with people who identify as having no specific faith tradition.

In my work as an AODA mentor, in my outreach work, and within my study group I have encountered many people who are seeking guidance in the area of spiritual/religious faith and/or the Divine. Many people struggle with incorporating Druidry into their lives instead of, or in addition to, the faith tradition they practice already. Within the GCC, the spiritual formation process requires mentoring and guidance. As a certified spiritual director, I can work with people seeking this type of specialized guidance. For more information about spiritual direction and Druidry, members can email me at infinitepathwayssd@gmail.com.

CS: Thank you for your answers and for everything you are doing for AODA!

KO: It has been my pleasure. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my work!

A Year and a Day

An Interview with Grand Archdruid Dana O'Driscoll

Moine Michelle

A year and day holds special significance for many Gaels and peoples of Britain. Formal betrothals were often for a year and day, with the bride and groom equally enfranchised to determine whether the marriage would be finalized via an official wedding. Fosterages, too, would be tested out for a year and a day—if a child was not a good fit with a family, he would return home to his parents after this trial run.

We grant that a year is not a long time, but as a full solar cycle, it is an excellent benchmark for growth and change—and an excellent opportunity to reflect on the past, present, and future of AODA's many initiatives. Dana O'Driscoll took a few moments to answer our questions about her first year (and a day!) as the leader of our organization.

Trilithon: Let's start with asking about your favorite strategies for reflection—a question that seems particularly relevant for the author of two different divinatory systems, the Tarot of the Trees and the Plant Spirit Oracle. What do you do when you wish to think deeply about where you've been, what you're up to, and where you are going?

Dana O'Driscoll: I think that reflection is so critical for inner spiritual life and spiritual development. I take a fairly broad view of that, which may include formal things like rituals or meditation, bardic practices, and also moments in everyday life.

Discursive meditation, ritual, and journeying allow me to think deeply through aspects of my life, experiences, or spiritual path. I consider this a kind of deep reflective practice that helps with my spiritual self-development. For example, in creating the Plant Spirit Oracle, those were a set of extended pathworkings I did with the plants—and through those I not only learned about the plants but also about myself.

I also like to reflect through journal writing, and I keep a number of different journals. I have a nature journal, a garden journal, a dream journal, a general spiritual journal, and a journal

of big ideas or thoughts for the future. These different journals allow me to document and reflect upon aspects of my life that are important to me. At this point, I have a literal small wooden chest full of old journals, and every spring equinox, I like to read through some of them to reflect on that journey.

I also do a lot of reflective practice through my bardic arts. I work primarily in watercolors, leather, and woodburning/pyrography, and I think that watercolor really lends itself well towards reflective work. I can paint a scene, experience, or something from my inner work as a way of reflecting and deepening my understanding of that image or scene. This is actually how I ended up painting two divination decks—both were an exercise in learning and reflecting on the world, meditating on concepts or themes, or in the case of the Plant Spirit Oracle, specific medicinal plants in my local ecosystem.

Another reflective technique is simply going out in nature and taking the time to be present with the living earth. Going on a hike, taking the kayak out on a river, and so forth, are all good methods for reflection. For example, for the last year I've been doing some deep work with the oldest and largest oak tree on our property—a Northern Red Oak (*Quercus borealis*). Just today, I was working on harvesting acorns from this amazing oak and processing those nuts into acorn flour (quite a process). The repetitive practice of picking up the acorns allowed me to spend time in reflection about my experiences with oaks over a long period of time and how those experiences led to this deep moment with the acorns and the oak tree.

This example, I think, really helps to share one of my philosophies about reflection—we can take small moments during our day to pause, to take a breath, and to think about where we are, where we are heading, and so forth. Because to me, that's part of what Druidry is really about: connection to the living earth and reflection and time spent cultivating that connection. It is such a useful practice to developing a spiritual inner life.

T: You've been a Druid and a recognized voice in US and international Druidry for many years, as well—how have you seen Druidry change in the time you've been participating in and contributing to the movement?

DO: I'm going to talk specifically about Druidry in North America and in the US, because that's where I live and where I have all of my experiences. One of the big shifts I think is in the growth and development of in-person Druid communities in the US. When I first joined AODA and later OBOD, we had almost nothing in the way of Druid gatherings or communities. I was completely isolated and literally felt like I was the only Druid living in the state of Indiana (where I lived at the time). Fifteen years later, we have some pretty rich and long-standing Druid communities, groves, and gatherings (many of them pan-Druid) and so if you want to go meet some Druids and participate in an eisteddfod, you can do that, and choose a number of groups to do it with.

Another thing that is changed is a much stronger emphasis on local and wildcrafted Dru-

idries (to use Grand Archdruid Emeritus Gordon Cooper's term). Druidry in different parts of the world needs to be localized and different, and that movement has really taken off, particularly within AODA (including in the New Candidate Guide and Apprentice Guide). We offer many more resources for wildcrafting your own Druidry. Also, AODA members alone have developed multiple North American Oghams, including John Michael Greer's Pacific Ogham and my own Northern Appalachian Ogham (an Ogham Dana developed from trees native to Appalachia). So it's exciting to see Druidry move in that very necessary direction.

T: What would you say have been the historical strengths of AODA as an organization?

DO: AODA has such a rich and complex history, and yet, so much of it is also unknown. I think one of our strengths is obviously that we are still here—108 years later, we are still a Druid order and are gaining hundreds of new members.

I'm also really happy to say that I'm not the first female Grand Archdruid—but the third. As early as Dr. Juliet Ashley in the 1950s, we had a diverse leadership, and I think that's something to be proud of. Ashley, for example, helped transform our order, brought the Sphere of Protection in, restructured our rituals, and so on. Ashley was a major figure in the occult community here in the US throughout much of the twentieth century, and it is fantastic to see her legacy live on.

T: What projects led by Druids or figures within US Druidry have made the biggest impact upon your own practice? Why?

DO: I certainly wouldn't be the only member of AODA to cite John Michael Greer's work and teachings as a massive influence on my Druidry—and certainly John Michael's works are some of the primary influences on me. Of his works, *Mystery Teachings of the Living Earth*, *The Druidry Handbook* (of course!), *The Druid Magic Handbook*, and *Inside a Magical Lodge* were all highly influential on my own development as a Druid. He also has just been an amazing friend and mentor to me for many years.

I would also credit a number of works outside of Druidry as influential to my Druid path. Learning about permaculture design, through the works of Toby Hemenway and Rosemary Morrow's books, was enormously influential. These practices, and later studying permaculture and getting my permaculture design certificate and teacher certification, really helped me think carefully about my own Earth Path practices and aligning my inner principles with outer actions. These helped me live as a Druid, not just practice spiritually. Another author in that same vein is Wendell Berry, whose poetry and nonfiction (particularly *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*) taught me so much about interaction with the land and the living earth. Likewise, John O'Donohue's works have been very influential.

T: You yourself are a devotee of the bardic arts in many forms—you draw and paint, you make music, you script ritual—how have these art forms contributed to your sense of your practice as a Druid?

DO: After fifteen years as a Druid, I'm really happy with the integration I have with the different paths of Druidry (Sun, Moon, and Earth within AODA) and the three paths of Bard, Ovate, and Druid. My art studio contains both medicinal plants and altars where I do my ritual practices, and integrating these spaces is reflective of how I see those integrations in my life. Those different paths have coalesced into a cohesive whole.

My bardic practices are a form of meditation, of thinking and spirit manifested in physical form. I often do meditations and journeys and then bring forth what spirit conveys; in this way, I see myself as a vessel for the Awen and inspiration of the living earth. I also like to explore nature meditatively and deeply through the visual arts, primarily watercolor, leatherwork, and wood. I make my own paints from local rocks I forage as well as my own inks, working to reflect the colors and energies of my landscape.

Music is another bardic art I enjoy. I play panflute and often take it into the woods with me, do ritual with it, and especially, do the work of land healing. That's not something I have any mastery over (unlike my writing or art), but it is still something that is important to my path.

Finally, I do write, and consider writing another bardic art that I have achieved some fluency and success in. I like the meditative practice of writing, and most especially, I like how writing can be such a powerful tool for thinking and growth. I understand something much better as I write it, as the act of writing requires me to clarify and expand my ideas. That's a powerful tool for spiritual growth as well as helping others on the path.

In all of these different art forms, I see them as integrated with my other practices. My flute ties to my Ovate practices, sacred herbalism, and land healing. My Druid practices are greatly enhanced by my watercolor and visual art, while my service to the community is often through the written word (things I write for AODA, such as content for our New Candidate Guide, home circle guide, and Apprentice Guide, and on my blog, *The Druid's Garden*).

One of the things that attracted me to AODA and for which I remain grateful is the inclusion of creative practices and the bardic arts as part of our tradition. To connect to creativity is part of our human heritage and something accessible and so healing to all.

T: How has the AODA, a US-based Druid organization, influenced today's Druidry? Have US practices shifted or led to new directions for Druidry?

DO: We often get the question about how AODA Druidry differs from, say, OBOD or ADF, and this is part of why we released the AODA Vision Statement (www.aoda.org/vision). This is what I offer people who want to know about what we do and why we do it. Given this, I think that AODA has at least three major contributions to Druidry today.

First, AODA Druidry emphasizes wildcrafting and localizing your Druidry to a degree that, as far as I am aware, no other Druid order does. We put nature and one's local ecosystem central to what we do, which creates a Druidry that is tied deeply with nature outside your door (as opposed to nature in some far-off place you may never have visited). Given the importance of tending to nature, honoring nature, and meeting the predicament we face as a species at present, I think this distinction can't be understated. Thus, our Druidry is inherently localized and connected, and members decide their own wheels of the year, symbolism, and connections.

Second, AODA Druidry emphasizes a personal spiritual path and allows for flexibility among different kinds of traditions. Thus, we likely have the largest population of Christian Druids in our order, while we also have atheist Druids, animist Druids, polytheist Druids, pagan Druids, and many more. I'm proud of our ability to craft an order and a curriculum that allows people who have diverse beliefs and birth religions to come and be part of AODA. We work hard to encourage those of diverse paths to feel welcome and comfortable.

And third, AODA focuses on personal responsibility, action, and reciprocity with nature. While our members certainly love to go into the woods to have spiritual experiences, you'll just as likely find them organizing trash pickups, planting trees, and volunteering in ways that honor nature. I think it's important in the twenty-first century, with so much of nature threatened and in danger, that we walk our talk. And AODA Druidry does that clearly with ongoing Earth Path practices that teach us all how to tread more lightly and rekindle those ancestral relationships of living in harmony with the earth.

T: What were your goals when you started your new role? Have they been realized in part or whole this year?

DO: Prior to taking over as Grand Archdruid, I had been in service to AODA for seven years. Four of those were running the AODA's journal Trilithon and as the Grand Pendragon, and three more were as an Archdruid of Air and later Water. So when I stepped into the Grand Archdruid position, I had already done a lot to keep the order running, had a sense of what our strengths were, and also had identified some areas that we really needed to work on. For example, because we are spread out, we needed more community and also more resources to assist our members in making the most of AODA, getting through their degrees, and feeling supported. Thus, I helped establish our mentoring program and get our newsletter going. I also made major contributions to all three of our member publications: the New Candidate Guide, the Apprentice Guide, and the AODA Guide to Home Circles, Study Groups, and Groves. Seeing how well received these materials have been is amazing.

Those continue to be my goals: to make sure our members have the support and resources they need and that the organization is serving them; to continue to build community within our organization; and to work to celebrate the diversity within our organization. I really want to empower our members to collectively build a twenty-first-century tradition that responds to the

challenges of the age and supports them in their paths.

Now that I've been in my position for a year, I'm also turning to another goal and considering how AODA can leverage our resources to make a difference in the broader world. The global predicaments of climate change and mass extinction are here, and what humans do in the world in the next ten to thirty years is going to shape the future for years to come. I hope that AODA and our members can continue to do good and be in service to the living earth and that our organization can be part of shaping the world in a way that honors nature.

T: What project(s) or conversations are you most proud to talk up?

DO: I'm so happy that we were able to release the vision statement—that's something that I had drafted over a period of years and with input from many people. The vision really helps us both define what AODA already does well and also offers us some new and exciting directions to go in as an order. Now we have a vision we can share, enact, and meditate upon, tied to our symbolism. I'm also incredibly pleased with the Apprentice Guide and AODA groups guide that we released in the last year. These documents, all of which have many contributors, represent major steps forward for our organization in all three of the goals I outlined above: supporting our members, building community, and helping us do good in the world. I'm really excited by the support and feedback we've been getting on these documents.

It's also been extremely exciting to see some of the recent third-degree projects that members have completed or are working on. We have so many interesting projects ongoing now, from garden citizen science experimentation to nature study, from ritual writing and development to community service. It's exciting to see how those AODA projects are shaping the world. Conversations about our practices have happened more frequently since we started up our community calls, workshop series, and most recently, our Candidate and Apprentice calls. Those calls, which happen about monthly (and you can get the schedule for upcoming calls in our newsletter or forums) really allow people to come together, share practices, and grow. I've gotten so many good ideas for material for revisions to our New Candidate Guide and articles for our website from those calls. We have amazing members with a diversity of expertise and experience to share.

AODA has recently had multiple Mount Haemus scholars through OBOD, including a recent triad of Michelle LaFrance, myself, and in the near future Larissa White; the three of us are joining John Michael Greer and Gordon Cooper from previous years. It is exciting to see that our order is producing fantastic scholarship about Druidry and our path. That's part of what makes AODA exciting—this is a dynamic order full of good people who are doing good things. Finally, I'm really proud of the volunteer base that our organization has. We have many, many volunteers who keep this organization running, and it's exciting to see how much we are able to accomplish.

T: What issues do you think the organization will need to face in the near future?

DO: A key issue, and one we'll be taking up in some workshops and discussions over the next year, is thinking about how to navigate the challenges of this age as Druids. Taking up the Druid path means that you are connected to nature and honor nature. But yet everywhere we look, nature is under assault, threat, and attack. It's really, really hard to be a Druid right now. As I write these words, most of the West Coast in the US is burning (and even out here in Pennsylvania, the smoke is everywhere, discoloring the sun and the clouds). This season has been the hardest in western PA, hit by late frost in the spring, early frost in the fall, and a severe drought. I could list countless environmental challenges we face—that are growing increasingly worse by the year. Individual Druids and the larger Druid community, as well as the AODA community, need to have real tools for facing these challenges. This includes spiritual self-care, but we also need tools that let us do something and make a difference. As more and more Druids experience environmental issues directly, these conversations and challenges, I believe, are going to take a central role in our practice.

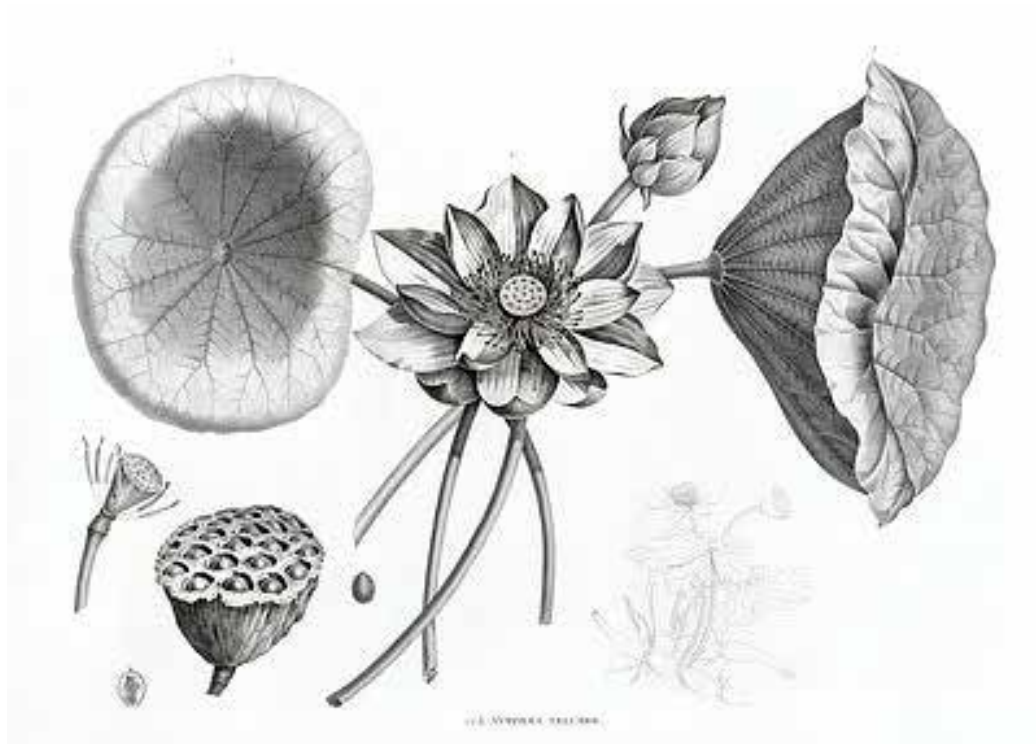
I think another challenge that the organization is facing is access and broadening the scope of some of our practices. Thanks to the valiant efforts of Kelly Trumble, Kathleen Opon, Robert Daniel, and our mentoring program, we have a lot of feedback from our members as they have gone through the curriculum, places they have struggled, or challenges that they faced. I'm pleased to say that we are working to address these issues in our revision to the curriculum (coming out in 2021). We've already released a statement for adapting our practices for differently abled persons based on this feedback, but we are working to do more. For example, we have a lot more members now than ten years ago that are transient Druids, living in vans or tiny houses, and thus, tree planting or even choosing a single ecosystem becomes more difficult. So we are really looking at our practices and thinking about how they can be adapted for more diverse circumstances. We want to meet people where they are and allow the curriculum to be something that empowers them, not an impediment because of their life circumstances.

T: Thinking forward . . . what do your instincts and divinatory messages tell us about Druidry twenty-five years from now, fifty years from now, or 100 years from now?

DO: One of my favorite books is Joanna Macy's *Coming Back to Life*. In this book she argues for something she calls the "great turning," when people will abandon the previous paradigm of growth at all costs and unfettered capitalism and shift to a new earth-centered and honoring paradigm. I don't think this shift is going to come easily or quickly, especially given the political climate here in the US at present. At some point, in the not so distant future, humanity is going to be faced with returning to nature and living in balance with nature as one of the few choices if we are going to keep our world habitable. I firmly believe that a return to nature spirituality is going to be one of a large patchwork of related paths and practices that offer us methods and techniques to "come back to life" and life-honoring practices. Because we've been doing this for over 100

years, I think we will have something really powerful to offer to that great turning. While that future is certainly fraught with peril, it is also full of promise.

T: Thank you for your leadership, your time, and these thoughts, Dana.



Attentiveness to Alders

Jason Stieber

Jason Stieber is a poet and writing instructor living in Salem, Oregon. He is currently reading for his MFA in Creative Writing at Portland State University and serves as Associate Editor for the Portland Review. Long walks with his dog Hanakatoba (Miss Tobi) while listening to trashy romance novels on Audible are his favorite ways to cleanse the intellectual palate.

Not just green but a colloquy of yellows,
catkins like amber jewels dangle from
sunlight on a thousand tambourines.
The skin is not ghostly white like all skin
broken by boomerang moss pasties,
a narrow trunk for sway.

Numbered three dancing sisters,
you'll grow thicker now since
contractors splintered the old
grey oak beyond the hedge of thuja.
Don't hoard your windfall of light.
Attend to the holly
and the stunted maple at your feet.
Like them you were planted poorly
by an odd-angled beast.

Do you chafe at the beep beep
that betokens Reverse?
Do the little backhoe quakes
startle you from a troubled sleep?
What is your next move?

They say you have no hands, but
that is not what I have found.

Na Cailleach 'S Coille: and Old Woman and the Wood

Moine Michelle

*

On this winter-shocked rise,
Where she cranes her broad face to the sky:
The crows are flocking by the dozens,
Their black bodies,
Feathered stories against the snow-gray clouds.

*A' Chailleach: Grandmother of the snows,
Shieling-matron of small things, the hardest things,
And those that are stones and silence.
She is blessed of the sleeping seeds,
Noiseless forests, and solitude.*

*

Ice is falling on the forest.
Snow gathers where branch and trunk
Become knuckle, become fist.
The trees, the crows, the sky.
This is *na Cailleach* whispering:
There is no secret, there is only work.

*

Nothing longs for fire here.
An old woman of stones
does not shiver or ache or sing.
Sitting on her haunches,
Her hair is white as spore.
Her silence is the lesson.

*

She does not need combs, when she has fingers,
She does not need brooms or teacups.
Each spring, the doe will come nibble from her palm.
The crows will reel and fluster.

*

The sick will come to her.
The women with no breast milk will come to her.
The men felled like oaks, bleeding, will be brought to her.
Time shaves
Inches from the mountain.
The snows fall, melt, gather,
Flow into the sea, enter the belly of the salmon.
The arch of each year—
The forest, the stones, the waters,
The blood that thins with age—
Is ever toward justice.
This is the way.

*

Our pockets will fill with pebbles and acorns.
There will be boots in the snow, then the grass,
Hide and felt on our shoulders,
Sorrow in our braids.
We may have fires under stars,
We may be beautiful and futile and deaf to the courage of the world.

*

A' Chailleach:
Woman of owls, felled antlers, the roaming dead,
Blessed of women, grave mantels, jars of dried leaf,
Wheat chaff, ribbon, stones, abandoned feathers.
White boned one, face of rivers and corries,
Haunting the edges of the wood.
Smoke on the edge of the lake.

*

Nothing is forgotten.
Each night,
Crows pull up the sunset's colors.
The hills murmur and creak.
She cups these workings, too, to her ear, to her mouth, and nods.

Trilithon Credits

Moine, *Editor*

Moine is a contemplative Druid (AODA Candidate), writer-poet, and Scottish Gaelic learner who lives in southwest DC. 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.

Dana O'Driscoll, *Developmental Editor*

Dana O'Driscoll is a druid, homesteader, wild food enthusiast and permaculture practitioner living in the Laurel Highlands of Western Pennsylvania. She currently serves as the Grand Archdruid of the AODA and holds the title of Ollave Adept. She blogs regularly at The Druid's Garden Blog (<https://druidgarden.wordpress.com/>) and is the author/illustrator of the *Plant Spirit Oracle* and *Tarot of Trees*.

Robert Pacitti, *Layout*

Robert Pacitti is a druid and magician from western Pennsylvania. He is a member of several druid orders and has been a member of AODA since 2013. He enjoys spending time with flora and fauna, especially his fanciful guinea hens.

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, charts 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>

How to Join the AODA

The Ancient Order of Druids in America welcomes applications for membership from people 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 Emeritus, nwlorax@gmail.com
Open to new members, performing initiations.

Hemlock and Hazel Grove, Indiana, PA

Led by Dana O'Driscoll, Druid Adept and Grand Archdruid, danalynndriscoll@gmail.com
Currently not accepting new members, but available for initiations.

Three Roads Grove, Springfield, OH

Led by Lady Oceanstar, Druid Adept, ladyoceanstar@gmail.com
Currently not accepting new members, but available for initiations.

Two Ravens Grove, Pipe Creek, TX

Led by Timothy Whitmore-Wolf, Ovate Adept and Archdruid of Air
timothy.wolf@wolfhavenfarm.com
Open to new members, performing initiations.

AODA Study Groups

Purple Coneflower Study Group, St. Louis Metro (Spanish Lake), MO

Led by Claire Schosser, Druid Companion and Archdruid of Water

PurpConeGrp@gmail.com

Open to new members, performing initiations.

Oak and Ether Grove, Online

Led by Kathleen Opon, Druid Adept and Archdruid of Fire, and Tamara Lowry, Druid Apprentice, oakandether@gmail.com

Open to new members, performing initiations (online initiation still in development).

Ocean's Mist Study Group, Warwick, RI

Led by David P. Smith, Druid Companion, duir@cox.net

Open to new members, performing initiations.

AODA Home Circles

Gary Oak Circle, Hillsboro, OR

Led by Larry Keyes, AODA Apprentice, LEKeyes@hotmail.com

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

The Circle of the Great Aspens and Reeds, Kaysville, UT

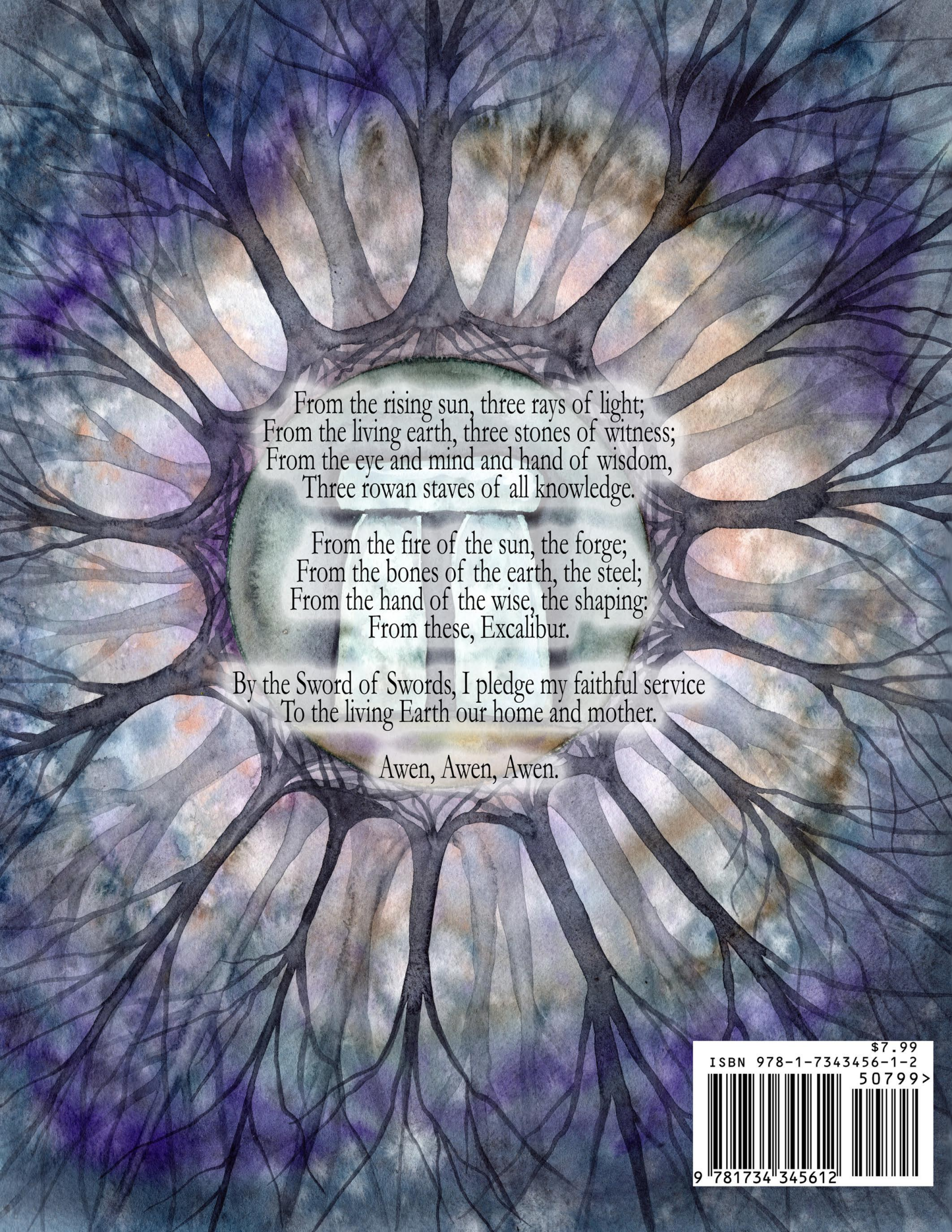
Led by Brenda Holmes, brenda0951@yahoo.com

Three Staves: Contemplative Druids DC, greater DC

Led by Moine Michelle, Druid Companion, and Skye, Druid Apprentice

mlfpoet@gmail.com; marknashburn@gmail.com





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.

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