

The Order of Bradán Feasa: Unit 1 – Understanding Druidry



Oakdale Grove's Reformed Druidism Training Program

*For those who seek structured guidance
in a few of the many ways to be a modern Druid,
in the spirit of the Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA),
one way among many.*

John Michael Martens, et al.

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Find a typo or continuity issue?

If you find any content that needs correction please email MNdruids@gmail.com with the version number and a description of the issue with page numbers. The editor(s) will review and make any applicable adjustments to the content, and an updated version will be released.

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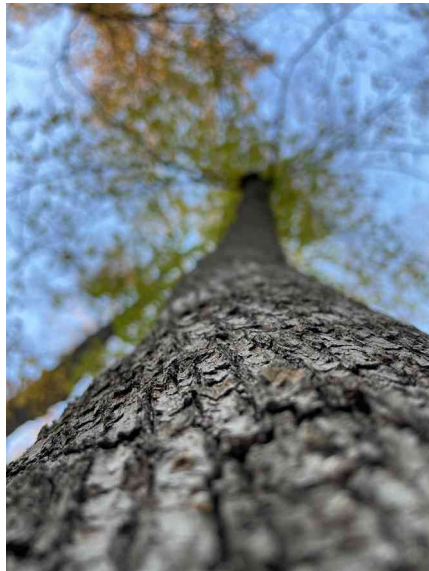
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REL026000 RELIGION / Education

REL117000 RELIGION / Paganism & Neo-Paganism

Dedication

This training program is sincerely dedicated to everyone who has approached the Reformed Druids of North America in search of useful guidance in our tradition, but was left downtrodden when told to go talk to a tree.



Rest assured, this training program will also tell you that.

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Privacy Policy

Please read this privacy policy carefully as it will help you make informed decisions about sharing your workbook and communications with us.

WHAT INFORMATION DO WE COLLECT?

Personal information that you choose to disclose to us:

In Short: We collect personal information that you provide to us such as **name** (whether you go by a real name or pseudonym), **email address**, or **other content you input into this workbook**. We collect personal information that you voluntarily provide to us when completing and submitting this workbook, expressing an interest in obtaining information about us or our products and services, etc.

WILL YOUR INFORMATION BE SHARED WITH ANYONE?

In Short: NO. We will never sell or share your information with third parties nor any other group, nor persons who are not facilitators of this training program. However, we may process or share data based on the following legal basis:

- **Law Enforcement or Safety Obligations:** We may disclose your information where we are legally obligated or required to do so in order to comply with applicable law, if we determine beyond a reasonable doubt that your safety, or that of someone else, is at risk based on information you provide to us.

DO WE COLLECT INFORMATION FROM MINORS?

In Short: NO. We do not knowingly solicit or collect data from, or market to, persons under 18 years of age. By participating in this program, you represent that you are a Reasonable Person of at least 18 years of age. If we learn that personal information from participants less than 18 years of age has been collected, we will cease correspondence and take reasonable measures to promptly delete your workbook and/or applicable information from our records.

REQUESTING CHANGE OR REMOVAL OF PERSONAL INFORMATION

Your personal information may be retained either indefinitely (if you have not completed OBF certification) or until you request us to anonymize it. Workbooks of those who have certified will be later deleted to optimize storage space. Anonymized information will be kept solely to track the number of participants over time. If at any time you want us to correct or anonymize your information, or terminate interaction, you can:

- Contact us using the contact information provided on the publishing information page.
- Specify to what extent you wish to terminate, such as: removing names, email addresses or all data in the completed workbook, etc.
- **You may be asked to positively identify yourself to ensure we know the request is coming from you and not someone else.** Acceptable methods would include emailing from the same email address which was used to submit the workbook, or (if for example your original email account is closed) by including a verbatim quotation of your own original content in your copy of the workbook (if it hasn't been already deleted to optimize storage space) to demonstrate that you have access to your own content, at which point the program facilitators could reasonably determine the termination request is coming from you and make applicable updates to your information in accordance with your request. If we are unable to verify your identity beyond a reasonable doubt, your request may be denied.

Consent & Release Form

Attestation:

I have read and understand the Privacy Policy, am 18 years of age or older, and I consent to being contacted by training program facilitators.

(If the above is unchecked, **we cannot email** you the content of subsequent training units, nor certificate of completion, nor induction to the Order of Bradán Feasa.)

Disclaimers & Expectations

Article I

The Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA) is a mostly non-dogmatic modern Druid order and has no formal study program. Individual Groves in the RDNA are operate autonomously and may form their own rules, guidelines, or create study programs. This training program is not accredited by any higher education institution.

Article II

Animal, human, and blood sacrifice is strictly prohibited in the Reformed Druids of North America. Standard ritual sacrifice items are limited to plant matter, proper beverages, or bardic arts as offerings.

Article III — INDOCTRINATION WARNING

Training programs such as this one can be viewed by some as antithetical to the Reformed Druid movement, wherein each individual is intended to find their own path to Awareness. Such study programs and the written word have the potential to “indoctrinate” the student with a single range of opinions and practices according to the viewpoints of the contributors. This program is only intended to supplement your continual education in the many ways of Druidry.

Article IV

The RDNA does not seek to convert people to or from any religion, nor does the RDNA proselytize or actively attempt to recruit new members. The Reformed Druids of North America does not make use of ritual sex nor intimate physical interaction as a custom. None. Zero. If you experience pressure for ritual sex in a Reformed Druid setting or context, you are being taken advantage of.

Article V

The RDNA does NOT claim any direct connection or lineage to the ancient Druids. The RDNA does NOT represent a “Celtic Warrior Religion” nor Celtic Reconstructionism. The RDNA does NOT condone Neo-tribalism, nationalism, nor “folkish” paganism. The RDNA does NOT condone any homophobic, xenophobic, ethnocentric, racist ideology nor related inflammatory rhetoric.

Article VI

The views and opinions presented in this program are those of the contributors and may not necessarily represent those of the whole of the Reformed Druids of North America, neither does this program content speak on behalf of all Druids.

Article VII

There are many valid ways to gain experience in Druidism besides this course. The methods herein are **by no means** considered a “one true way” to be a Druid. We encourage everyone to try different Druid training programs and to study other philosophies and world religions to further enrich your understanding of all things. This is but one way among many.

Article VIII

We expect all program participants to comply with all laws and ordinances within their jurisdiction. You are responsible for gaining awareness and understanding regulations which may affect program activities, such as, but not limited to: open flame, bonfire, and burning ordinances, park rules and

hours, alcohol statutes, blade length ordinances (for sickles and other ritual tools), apartment or housing association covenants, etc.

Article IX

This training program is open to all adults regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender identity, sexuality, socioeconomic class, age, disability, veteran status, or religion. Anyone can be a Druid.

Article X

Some activities may encourage participants to meet other Druids to form Groves, Protogroves, study groups, book clubs, etc. You are expected to understand the potential risks of meeting others in person and to be aware of safe meeting advice prior to social interaction. You alone are responsible for your well-being when meeting with strangers, and we advise only doing so in a safe public space. This program can still be completed as a solo Druid.

Article XI

Some topics within this training program mention the use of meditations, herbs, plants, incense, alcoholic beverages, and other substances which may affect the way the mind or body functions. These items are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any illness, condition, disease, or disorder, etc. Always research proper handling, storage, and use of any substances mentioned. No part of this program asks you to forgo modern medicine. Consult physicians or mental health professionals prior to performing any activities of this workbook that involve activities or substances that can affect how the mind or body works.

Article XII

This program mentions utilization of ritual blades, fires, and items involved in construction of other druidic objects. Always follow safety guidelines when handling tools, fire, or crafting materials. Never leave fires unattended. Keep flammable items at least 12 inches (30cm) from lit candles, or within the same distance of flammable items in the event the candles get knocked over. Wear personal protective equipment, tie back long hair, keep robe sleeves out of fires, etc. You are responsible for your own safety.

Article XIII

The contributors and program facilitators in the RDNA reserve the right to discontinue all interaction with participants who become abusive, disruptive, or indicate that they may have violated the law, or if they may have conducted animal sacrifice, or any other discovered transgressions, whether in association with this training program or beyond it.

Article XIV

Some of the older works cited, such as, but not limited to, Victorian Period books, are not actually recommended reading for modern Druids anymore, as some of those sources have poor scholarly quality. However, they are cited to provide historical context to help us understand the mindset and motives of a Druid during the Druidry Revival movement. These *disapproved works* with inline citations and the citations in the References section will be marked with a double dagger symbol (‡).

Syllabus

Program Title: Oakdale Grove's Druid Training Program Program Type: Self-Study, Distance Learning Prerequisites: N/A Meeting Times: N/A Cross-Accreditation in other Druid Orders: N/A Course Duration: No minimum or maximum Cost: N/A	Facilitator Contact Info: MNdruids@gmail.com Oakdale Grove C/O OBF Program PO Box 28821 Oakdale, MN 55128
Facilitators: Reformed Druids of North America: Oakdale Grove's Council of Dalon Ap Landu	

Required Materials and Texts

- Oakdale Grove's RDNA Druid Training Program digital workbook
- Device and software for viewing and entering text into PDF forms
- A journal or blog designated for your Druidry
- A functional, regularly maintained email address
- Access to Nature
- [A Reformed Druid Anthology](#), Special 2nd Edition (ARDA II)

Recommended Materials (totally optional)

- Camera or smartphone
- Walking staff
- Chalice
- Ritual garb

Program Overview, Goals, and Objectives

The Reformed Druids Of North America (RDNA) has no formal requirement for training in the path of modern Druidry. Nor does the RDNA have any training requirements for ascending to the First, Second, or Third Orders. Nevertheless, there is a demand for an RDNA training program, and this course is designed to meet that demand on a rudimentary level, as interpreted by members of Oakdale Grove and some external contributors. Since this training program is not prerequisite to ordination in the RDNA hierarchy, we have created a new *honorary* order within the RDNA called the *Order of Bradán Feasa (OBF)* for those who complete the program. Upon completion of this training program, you will be inducted into the OBF, will receive a certificate stating such, and shall have a working understanding of the following topics:

- Overview of the ancient Druids from Classical Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages
- Overview of the Druidry Revival movement in the Age of Enlightenment
- History, customs, rituals, and philosophy of Reformed Druidism
- Various practices and philosophies of broader Druidism and nature-based spirituality
- The ability to compare and contrast the RDNA against other modern Druid orders
- Enhanced Awareness of the patterns of Nature and seasonality in your environment
- Among members or external mentees of Oakdale Grove, individuals would be expected to complete Units 1 & 2 as prerequisite to consideration for elevations to the Second Order, as well as Unit 3 for Third Order candidacy.

Course Methodology

This training program depends predominantly on reading, writing essays, short answer questions, creative projects, and other activities with attestations to demonstrate that you are developing an understanding of the workbook content. When you have completed the program requirements, you must submit this workbook via email to program facilitators who will review it and determine that the requirements have been sufficiently satisfied.

Units

1. Required: Understanding Druidry: This workbook of lectures, activities, attestations, and essays
2. Required: ARDA II study course (separate workbook)
 - a) Short-answer and numerous small essays to demonstrate ARDA comprehension
 - b) ARDA Exam
3. Optional: RDNA Clergy Prep Course & Grove Governance Guide (GGG)

Grading

Your path to Druidism is unique. This program asks for a significant amount of subjective content from you in all course units. Unit 1 will ultimately have an *Incomplete* or *Complete* status. Unit 2 is the ARDA Study Course and will be validated on *completion* of short answer and essay prompts, as well as a graded exam. A passing grade on the exam as well as *completion* of Units 1 & 2 is prerequisite to OBF certification. Since there is no formal testing environment, time allotment, or proctorial supervision, **the exam is open-book**. Therefore, a higher score is required in order to pass. There is no limit on the number of attempts to pass the exam.

Program Segment	Grading Criteria
Unit 1: Lectures, Activities, Essays	Incomplete/Complete
Unit 2A: Short Answers and Essays	Incomplete/Complete
Unit 2B: ARDA Exam	Passing score of 90% or higher
Optional Unit 3A: RDNA Clergy Prep Course	Incomplete/Complete
Optional Unit 3B: Grove Governance Guide (GGG)	Incomplete/Complete

Outcome After Completion




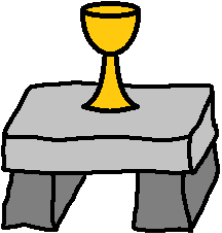

After you pass the exam and course completion has been validated, the facilitators will send you a digital Certificate of Induction to the Order of Bradán Feasa (OBF). Following certification is the optional Unit 3: RDNA Clergy Prep Course and Grove Governance Guide (GGG).

Academic Policy

For all short answers or essays, everything should be in your own words. Your entries should demonstrate that you understand the content and the essay prompts. You may work together in study groups, but your answers should be written independently by you. To receive a *Complete* status you must provide answers (or check an Attestation box when applicable) for all questions and essays except Extra Credit items. Extra Credit items can be completed in groups if applicable. Much of the course content is subjective, and in some cases the facilitators don't have a method of verification that it is you completing the work. In these cases you are subject to the Honor System. Please complete the final test on your own. All we can ask is that you complete this program with integrity and honesty.

Visual Cues

Throughout this training program you will periodically see pictograms denoting different categories of tasks. Since so many parts of this workbook are just walls of text, we're hoping these crude icons will help prepare you for the applicable mindset. Some of the topics may feel as though they belong in a different category, or maybe even multiple. What is our methodology for classifying these the way we did? Well honestly it's arbitrary and we voted on it.

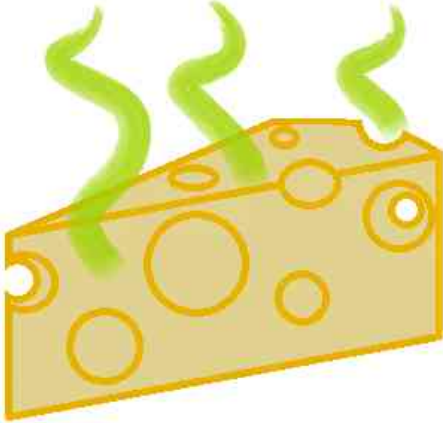
Pictogram	Indication of
	<p>Journal topic (external to this workbook). We encourage you to write down your thoughts, musings, and things you learned or want to learn. Read back in your journal from time to time to see how you've grown as an individual.</p>
	<p>Essay topic (internal to this workbook). Feel free to address the questions with short answer replies when applicable, or you can write a traditional essay. The questions are often numbered. Numbering your answers may also be helpful.</p>
	<p>Devotional topic – these are usually personal aspects of your practice that you customize to suit your situation or spiritual needs. Devotionals are typically solo activities for you to bond with Nature or the Divine, or to work on your dedications or cultivate your spiritual interests and skills.</p>
	<p>Ritual topic – rituals are not required in order to be a Druid. They don't need to be elaborate. Some of them are much like devotionals, and some can easily be performed solo, and don't particularly require a group event.</p>
	<p>Meditation topic – meditation is a rather important aspect of modern druidry, and especially in Reformed Druidism. There are so many different kinds of meditation, and we'll be exploring a handful of different kinds.</p>

	<p>Research topic – this could pertain to simply reading the content of a section, or it could ask for you to conduct further study outside of this workbook.</p>
	<p>Creative topic – lots of druids like to make things. Maybe we're not that great at making things, but we urge you to at least <i>try</i> a form of creative expression.</p>
	<p>“Please just consider trying it” topic</p> <p><i>“Thou needest only to taste once of the cheese, and thou wilt see for thyself that it be good.”</i> —Meditations 8:9, The Chronicles of the Foundation</p>
	<p>Historical topic – History is important, it provides perspective on where we're coming from, which can also provide direction for where we're going. The RDNA has a lot of its own written history that is also worth learning about.</p>
	<p>Activity topic – for situations that aren't really rituals or devotionals, but they're integral aspects of what a Druid might do.</p>
	<p>Nature topic – Druids really like Nature. You probably new that already, but we're gonna talk about it anyway.</p>
	<p>Extra Credit – these sections are regarded as optional activities because they may be more restricting or limiting depending on available resources or personal situations.</p>

Do The Ends Justify The Means?

Is this training program worth the effort? You could rephrase the question to be more like: Is trying to lead a more fulfilling life worth the effort?

You don't know if you don't try.



Bam.

Introduction

Greetings seeker of Druidism! If you've read this far you're off to a great start on what we hope will be part of your lifelong quest for Awareness. First of all, know that there are many different ways to practice Druidry. This is just one way among many. This training course will outline numerous different practices of modern Druids in general, as well as covering topics specific to the Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA).

We apologize in advance, but sometimes we will mention Druidry when referring to *Reformed Druidry* without specifying, whereas other times we will refer to Druidry *in general*, also sans specificity. When the founders created the RDNA in 1963 they also referred to Druidism as if they had a monopoly on the concept. In actuality they kind of did as they were unaware of any other Druid orders, and many that exist today would not exist if not for the Reformed Druid movement. This training program will also retain the tradition of ambiguity to keep you on your toes.

What is a Druid?

Much of this training program is centered on the Reformed Druid tradition, but also touches on Druidry in general. Let's begin with the essentials: the OBF's definition of a Druid. Please note that there are numerous and varying definitions of a Druid. This is a gray area where it's easier to say that no two Druids have the same definition of a Druid. Ask four Druids do define it and you'll get five different answers. Since we all want instant gratification, we will define a Druid (in the modern sense) as ***a solo individual or member of any of several modern movements practicing nature-based spirituality, taking inspiration from the ancient priesthood caste of Gaul, Britain, and Ireland of the same name.***

Druidry vs Druidism

There are multiple takes on this topic, and we don't consider any other variants to be *wrong*, but this is also a subject of frequently asked questions pertaining to Druids. Here we shall define both and cite examples that reinforce our interpretation, and we will use these words consistently within this training program. Henceforth, ***Druidry refers to the practices of Druids, in other words, things that Druids do.*** Grammatical parallels of words that indicate a practice include dentistry, ministry, palmistry, artistry, *et cetera*. In these cases, words that end in *-ry* denote the practices associated with the practitioner. It's literally what they *do*. Druids do Druidry.

Next, ***Druidism shall refer to abstract or intangible concepts held by the Druids such as philosophies and beliefs.*** Grammatical parallels of words ending in *-ism* include examples like nihilism, naturalism, monotheism, polytheism, eclecticism, *et cetera*. In these cases, words that end in *-ism* denote the *philosophy* associated with the practitioner. ***It's literally what they think or believe.*** Druids believe in Druidism. That said, Druidism is still a subjective array of beliefs that will be different from person to person. Modern Druidism is highly customizable which is why it appeals in so many different ways to different people.

What about Druidcraft?

There's also the word ***Druidcraft*** which in quick and dirty terms is merely **magic conducted by Druids**. When a witch conducts magic, that's witchcraft. We're just swapping out the prefixes before the word *craft* here, otherwise there's not much more to it than that.

An RDNA Training Program?

It is important to understand that there are many members of the Reformed Druid movement who would say this training course is unnecessary and that you are responsible for your own self-guided education in Druidry. Now we tend to agree with that, but a lot of people have felt that they've been turned away from this Druid order because they really just want some friggin' guidance or recommended readings. Some of our colleagues in the priesthood have tendencies to say something like "*go out into nature first, read books later.*" Some will even suggest that you don't need books at all, just your own experiences. However, we think books are very important, as they provide a more stable foundation for your inevitable experiences.

Furthermore, we've co-developed this program with fellow Reformed Druids for those who wish to utilize it. The RDNA has no official training program. Individual Groves have been granted the autonomy to organize and develop to the extent they deem is befitting of their group, granted that it doesn't go against the fundamentals of Reformed Druidism. You will notice that this PDF has fillable short answer or essay fields and check boxes to interact with. Use these features to your advantage in tracking your own progress and/or submitting it for review when you reach that point.

We do not wish for this program to be come codified or dogmatized: Putting things into written form tends to have a fossilizing effect on the knowledge contained. Part of being a Reformed Druid is to innovate new effective methods of spiritual expression that are true to you. So if some of the contents of this program don't work well for you, by all means, experiment and improvise – but if at all possible, we paradoxically encourage you to stick to the curriculum. Try it for the sake of completing it. Nothing except the *Two Basic Tenets* of belief are set in stone... actually those aren't set in stone either. We'll cover those details in *The Basics* segment.

Throughout this program we will be quoting verses from *A Reformed Druid Anthology* (ARDA), the written works of the RDNA. Part of the training will include reading from sections of the Anthology and completing short discussion questions on your interpretations of the writings. The ARDA study course section was developed by Mike the Fool in 2014. As of version 1.0 of this Druid training program the ARDA course was still a work in progress, and it may be for years to come. **Your path to Druidry should always be considered a work in progress as well.** We don't have all the answers, and most other Druid orders won't say they have all the answers, either. Even we are perpetually learning more about Druidry.

This training program will have a lot of reading to slog through, but we hope it will be both informative and engaging. There will be opportunities for your own writing, creating, meditating, and exploring as the training program progresses. Some activities may seem inconvenient for some individuals in unique circumstances; if at any point you need advice for alternative options, please feel free to contact us and we may be able to determine a potential workaround. Depending on how popular or "busy" this training program becomes, extensive one-on-one online mentorships may not a feasible training avenue. However, we will strive to maintain a commitment to helping others out in terms of understanding this program and clarifying anything on an as-needed basis.

About The Order of Bradán Feasa (OBF)

As stated in the course syllabus, whosoever completes this Druid training program including passing the exam will be inducted into the Order of Bradán Feasa, or OBF for short. OBF is a newly created druidic sodality founded for the sake of recognizing excellence in those who complete the program. It is an honorary order in the Reformed Druid movement that holds no hierarchical level, rank or degree.

For nearly six decades there was no training program in the RDNA, neither formal nor informal. There are three main ranks of First, Second, and Third Orders, the third of which is ordination to the priesthood of the Druids. Yet there were only rites of passage required for entering each order. There was no training, and it came down to when the individual felt personally prepared to ascend to each level. The OBF seeks to empower the candidate with the resources of this program, its academic references, and impetus to further one's own druidic knowledge and skills. This shall be effective insofar as to prime the candidate for the RDNA priesthood, or at the very least, to be able to discuss Druidry (Reformed or in general) with competence and confidence.

Mythos From the Fenian Cycle

Bradán Feasa is Irish for *Salmon of Knowledge* from a short but famous Irish legend involving the heroic figure Fionn Mac Cumhaill (usually anglicized as Finn McCool). Here is an excerpt from *The Coming of Finn* from the Fenian Cycle, from which OBF's name is inspired:

...He [Finn] himself went to learn the accomplishments of poetry and science from an ancient sage and Druid named Finegas, who dwelt on the River Boyne. Here, in a pool of this river, under boughs of hazel from which dropped the Nuts of Knowledge on the stream, lived Fintan the Salmon of Knowledge, which whoso ate of him would enjoy all the wisdom of the ages. Finegas had sought many a time to catch this salmon, but failed until Finn had come to be his pupil. Then one day he caught it, and gave it to Finn to cook, bidding him eat none of it himself, but to tell him when it was ready. When the lad brought the salmon, Finegas saw that his countenance was changed.

“Hast thou eaten of the salmon?” he asked.

“Nay,” said Finn, “but when I turned it on the spit my thumb was burnt, and I put it to my mouth.”

“Take the Salmon of Knowledge and eat it,” then said Finegas, “for in thee the prophecy is come true. And now go hence, for I can teach thee no more.”

After that Finn became as wise as he was strong and bold, and it is said that whenever he wished to divine what would befall, or what was happening at a distance, he had but to put his thumb in his mouth and bite it, and the knowledge he wished for would be his. (Rolleston, 2009, pp. 256-257)

It may seem ever so slightly tricky to track the details here. The hazelnuts are initially what contained the knowledge, which are then consumed by the salmon. The salmon's name is Fintan, sought by the Druid Finegas, and caught by Finn. That's a flood of featured F-names to figure out. The Druid Finegas was hoping to receive all the knowledge by eating the salmon. Instead, that knowledge was passed to Finn by accident. In addition to the knowledge, Finn also gained foresight and omniscience, or the gifts of seership.

In attaining the Order of Bradán Feasa, we can't promise you that you'll achieve the same magical powers, but once you complete this program we "can teach thee no more" but you will have a good head start in seeking out the future of your own path in Druidry.

Pronunciation

Ireland has four major provincial accents: Ulster, Leinster, Munster, and Connacht (and an unofficial fifth Minnesota accent). Bradán Feasa is pronounced slightly different in each province. The vowels more or less sound all the same according to the Ulster and Connacht accents: all sounding like *ah*. That keeps things simple, and is thus pronounced ***brah-DAH-N FAH-sah***. Sometimes the *ea* in *Feasa* is pronounced as a diphthong (a gliding vowel combination spoken as a single syllable) but that lazy Minnesota accent just wants to say *ah* instead. It's acceptable and just plain easier.

Anyone Can Be A Druid

Druidry (in the modern sense) belongs to anybody who seeks it. You can refer to the modern Druids as simply Druids. Yes, the ancient Druids are gone. When referring to the ones that are gone, nowadays it helps to specify *ancient* Druids. If you want to nitpick, then you can refer to the current ones with the prefix *modern*, but that's all there are anymore, so just say Druids. Some people get caught up on whether we should still use the word *Druid* at all anymore. **Since modern Druids are fundamentally different than our ancient predecessors, should we use a different word to identify ourselves? No.**

Besides, we kinda just did by calling ourselves *modern* Druids. We can also call ourselves Neo-Druids. The RDNA also kinda did that by calling themselves *Reformed* to acknowledge the disconnect. We don't need a new name nor a neologism to describe ourselves. **Consider the analogy of Starboard.** Ships have a *port* side and a *starboard* side. Starboard means *steering board* which was a rudder on the right-hand side of a ship, used before rear-centered rudders were widely used. Port was then the left side of the ship: the side that pulled up to docks in *port*. This prevented damage to the rudder on the starboard side. Ships haven't had starboards for about a thousand years, but we still call it the starboard side. Therefore, even though ancient Druids haven't existed for about 1,500 years or so, and the modern ones are different, it is still perfectly acceptable to call the modern ones just *Druids*.

You do not have to be born into Druidry. You do not have to be invited into Druidry. *Some* Druid orders might require invitation and/or initiation, but there's no blanket rule that applies to general Druidry. Many Druid orders actually have an open-invite, including the RDNA. Furthermore, you don't even need to join an order. Solo Druids are valid, and there are a number of resources available for those who are alone, whether by choice or by circumstance.

You do not have to study for 19-20 years in order to be a Druid anymore. There may be one or two Druid orders somewhere out there that require it, but almost all of them do not have a 19 year requirement. Consider the state of modern education vs the Iron Age. In ancient times, school was for the wealthy and the privileged. Less than 10 percent of Iron Age peoples received any education or literacy at all. Nowadays we all go through a K-12 system, receiving 13 years of education. A bachelor's degree would bring that up to 17, and a master's degree would bring that up to 19. But we're also empowered to learn things on our own beyond schooling. We have access to libraries and the World Wide Web to gather information and expand our knowledge, albeit in varying degrees of quality and veracity. The ancient Druids were specialists in a few areas, but we would excel beyond their

knowledge in other areas that would astound them.

Anyone can be a Druid.

"Druidism is open to anyone who wishes to be part of it,"

— The Epistle of Midsummer 3:2, David & Deborah Frangquist (Scharding, *et al.*, 2004, p. 90)

"People of all cultural backgrounds can find kinship within Druidic ritual and celebrations of the passing year."

(Eason, 2003, pp 2-3)

"You are free to pursue your interest in Druidry through whatever means you wish. It isn't necessary to join an Order unless that is what you want to do,"

— Portion of email transcript, OBOD Office

"To be a Druid, you can of course simply decide to be one."

(Carr-Gomm, 2022)

"You don't need to be Irish to explore and study Irish Paganism... You don't have to have Irish ancestry. Your DNA doesn't get you an automatic carry card."

(O'Brien & O'Sullivan, 2023)

"...many now call themselves Druids simply by virtue of being students of the tradition, or even by being a part of its spiritual and social community." (Restall Orr, 2004, p. 8)

Anyone can be a Druid.

Expectations and Limitations of the Order of Bradán Feasa

Considering that the founders of the Reformed Druid movement never established training or study prerequisites to any of the ranks of the RDNA hierarchy, elevation to each rank is generally determined by the ordainer's perception of the candidate's level of preparedness. Each ordainer has their own arbitrary standards for permitting an individual to ascend the ranks, and would take the candidate's motives into account.

The OBF program throws a lot of somewhat organized information at a candidate; likely more than most other ordainers in the wider RDNA would. Oakdale Grove, the founding facilitators of the OBF program, have determined that completing Units 1, 2A, and 2B would sufficiently meet the minimum recommended preparation for a trainee to be invited to the Second Order of Reformed Druidism, which is training for the priesthood and requires an oath of service.

It is important to understand, that completion of the OBF program and receiving a certificate of induction into the order DOES NOT automatically constitute *being* a Second Order Druid. Furthermore, completion of Unit 3, which prepares individuals for the Third Order also does not constitute being a Third Order Druid. Second and Third Orders require separate initiatory rites of passage that must be completed in the presence of an existing Third Order Druid.

Umm, is This a Cult?

Yeah, sort of, but it's missing many of the requisite hallmarks of a *dangerous* one.

Cult Criteria	The RDNA	Neighbor's Place of Worship
Group of people	Yup	Yup
Charismatic leader	LOL almost no leadership at all	Yup, usually
Controlling of followers	Nope, followers urged to individualize	Yup
Religious or social cause	Yup	Yup
Rigid rules	Nope	Yup
"Us vs Them" mentality	Avoid. It's a bad habit.	Yup
Recruiting others	Nope	Yup
Brainwashing	Nope	Maybe, depends on which neighbor

Cults are everywhere. The definition of a cult will vary from source to source, and on a broad enough scale, everything can be considered a cult: all religions, book clubs, scouts, college fraternities, fraternal societies like the Freemasons, celebrity and political fanbases, tech enthusiasts, etc. The key distinction to make is not *whether* they are a cult, but what the *danger* is, and to what extremes. So get comfortable framing every organization as a cult. Sometimes they'll be a technically weak match, but the *safety* of its membership is what we need to scrutinize.

Oh, and regarding our answer above, would a *dangerous* cult really admit to being a cult? We've been asked that a few times, and we usually answer deadpan "Yes, except we're nice," or something to that effect. Once we slipped up and accidentally said *no* about the RDNA being a cult. Whether you answer yes or no, it's still partially a cult. Control is a *huge* factor to consider regarding cults. Reformed Druidry and Druidry as a whole, is not about control. Our individual interests, theological beliefs, and philosophies are so diverse that there's really nothing that can *be* controlled about it without running the risk of hemorrhaging members. If the RDNA became controlling, we'd no longer be the RDNA.

The RDNA has the Council of Dalon Ap Landu as a governing body, but we haven't voted on anything since 1971. The chairperson of the council sometimes doesn't even realize they are the one who is expected to preside over council meetings, and that is their only authority. Furthermore, the chairperson of the council doesn't even always realize they're the chairperson! Major decisions must be done democratically. Individual Groves and Protogroves have a lot of autonomy in terms of deciding how they operate. Our dogma consists of Two Basic Tenets that are open to interpretation.

Is the council chairperson a charismatic leader? That too, is hard to say, mostly because they're 100% guaranteed to be rotated out in any given four year cycle, if not sooner. They cannot serve as chairperson again after that 4 year cycle. Am *I* a charismatic leader? Ha! I *am* a leader, but I have about as much charisma as a log. Though Druids *like* logs I suppose, so I dunno. It's hard enough to get people to come to rituals and casual hangouts sometimes, so I'd say my charisma need not apply. As for

brainwashing, that's what this training program is for, you're thinking, right? Well first of all we mentioned that this is not the only way to train as a Druid. We encourage our participants to continually learn beyond what this program offers. We encourage participants to make decisions with reason and sound judgement. We don't have all the answers, and we'll specify that, too. So if you're looking for brainwashing material, this is a rather silly place to seek it.

We also urge caution against that "us vs them" mentality. It is far better to avoid the paranoia, to avoid seeking the oppressed *victimhood* complex that other religions sometimes seem to crave. We are not a spirituality that is opposed to other spiritualities. We were founded on the premise that people of almost any religion could come together and celebrate in nature. In addition to such, Reformed Druids are also encouraged to learn about other belief systems to broaden their understanding. This deepens our empathy and compassion for others. Through empathy, ideally we will have fewer or no enemies to speak of.

So the Reformed Druid movement is a loosely affiliated group of Druidic individuals with a rather passive leadership, with no real power to control its adherents. We lead by encouraging others to explore their own interests, all the while celebrating what we have in common. We have some curious customs and initiations, and have taken inspiration from organizations such as Freemasonry and a few religions. We want to avoid what makes some of them seem to be more restrictive cults, though even some of them aren't so bad. We just want to put our best foot forward to help prospective members shed their doubts about our forthrightness and integrity.



Designated Daily Druid Daybook

Designate a Druid journal or blog of your experiences and how you interpret them. This is a tool to demonstrate how you grow and progress as an individual. Maybe you already have a journal dedicated to your exploration in Druidry? If so that's great! Our followup question (more of a rhetorical one) would be: *when was the last time you wrote in it?* We know it says *daily* in the heading above, but let's call that a stretch goal. Lets start with a reasonable goal of weekly entries, and if you are able to make a daily entry then that's excellent.

A lot of people who collect journals or blank books have a hard time writing in them because they look so pristine and they're afraid of somehow devaluing the book by writing in it. We know the feeling; it may just have to be a hurdle we overcome. Nevertheless some of us have acquired the occasional leather journal with beautiful specialty paper, and just started journaling in them... with a quill pen no less. Don't be intimidated by big fancy *Book of Shadows* style journals if you really want to go that route, but even a black and white composition notebook would do just fine.

You don't have to be limited to physical journals, either. You can create (or designate an existing) blog for this purpose. And with the hectic times of the 21st century, we'd be fine if your blog was on social media. A vlog on YouTube would also be acceptable. All we ask is that if you designate or make a blog or journal, that you just *don't forget that it's there*. On occasion be sure to read back on your entries to see what new things you have learned since the beginning. Some might ask what goes into a Druid journal? That's very open ended, but we would recommend considering the following topics in your daily or weekly entries:

- Always log the date (unless dates are logged automatically by a blogging platform)
- Current beliefs and interpretations
- Any meditations you conduct
- Recent observations in nature
- Current weather conditions or temperature
- Anything new you've learned
- Observations of animals
- Mention anything you've created
- Rituals performed and how they went
- Working with any deities, nature spirits, the Earth-Mother, et cetera, if applicable
- Anything else not mentioned here

Journals vs. Essays

It's good to keep a personal journal or blog for yourself and seeing how you've progressed in Druidry, but this training program will also ask for you to write essays. Anything marked as an *essay* (with the typewriter icon) shall be written right into *this* workbook, and journaling topics have the book and quill pen icon. The *essays* in this workbook are required, but *journaling* can't truly be enforced. This is just something that's relegated to the honor system.



Journal Entry: Noting a New Beginning, and Expectations

A First Journal Entry: What are your expectations in delving deeper into Druidism?

As part of this training program, designate a Druid journal (external to this workbook) for any notes you take while engaging in this program. Title your first entry "My Expectations of Druidism." Write about what you are embarking on, how you feel about it, and write down your expectations as to what you are hoping to learn about.

Attestation:

I have designated a druidry journal/blog, and I have made an entry on this topic.

Essays in This Workbook: Recommended Formatting

For whatever reason, the editors have chosen to call all the text fill-in fields *essays*. In some cases, the essay questions aren't as daunting as the word sounds. The nature of some of the "essay" questions will really only merit a short answer response. Sometimes the questions will ask for a brief response, while some questions might ask for specific details on content or number of paragraphs requested. As long as your responses adequately address the questions, the overall length doesn't really matter. What *does* matter and counts toward a *complete* status (vs incomplete) is that your responses demonstrate you are understanding the course content and are making an effort to provide acknowledgment in the spirit of the questions. The text entry fields have a fixed height, but if your responses are long, a scroll bar will appear (and that's fine).

Sample Essay: How Should Essay Text Fields be Formatted?

The following is a sample essay topic with sample responses to demonstrate best practices.

1. The essays have numbered lists for their questions. Should you include the numbers in your written responses?
2. In some situations, questions may ask things that might have a common response with the next question, right?
3. So if the questions are similar, can you combine your response to answer both?
4. When it's obviously a yes or no question, or merits a short response, is a short response fine?
5. How should the paragraphs be formatted if the questions ask for a paragraph?
 - A. What if there are sub questions and multi-paragraph responses?

1: Yes, each numbered question should have a numbered response by typing it into the text box.

2-4: Yes.

5: First, we also recommend inserting a blank line to separate your numbered responses. That way they are easier for course facilitators to review. Paragraphs should also be a minimum of three sentences, complete with standard punctuation. In general, a paragraph should not be more than six sentences, but if they have to be slightly longer to complete a thought, that is fine.

5A: Give sub questions a blank line like other numeric questions. If you have long responses, please make sure you divide them into nice paragraphs. A solid wall of text is still acceptable, but a nightmare to read.

By putting spaces between paragraphs, it makes things much easier to read. It also lets us know that you care about our time and effort going into reviewing this, and caring about the feelings of others is very druidic. Honest and thought-out essays from the heart, paired with good formatting, is our humble request.



Essay: What Brought You to This Point?

Everyone Starts Somewhere

A person's path *to* Druidry as well as their path *as* a Druid are as meandering and varying as all the rivers of life. Now we ask that you think back and reflect on all the incremental steps that led you to pursue Druidry. You got to this point somehow and made the decision to look into this training program. **Since everyone's journey is unique, in at least three sentences or as many paragraphs as you need, address as many of the following bullet points as you can on how you got to this moment:**

6. Have you looked into other Druid order's *study programs*?
 - A. If so, which Druid orders?
 - B. Did you start or complete any of those other study programs?
 - C. What led you to chose *this* training program?
7. How did you initially discover *Reformed* Druidry?
8. How did you initially discover Druidry *in general*?
 - A. Did you discover Druidry based on pop-culture references: books, movies, TV, games, art?
9. Have you visited an ancient sacred site that inspired you?
10. Do or did your parents practice Druidry or any form of alternative spirituality?
11. What else might have played an inspirational role that led you to Druidry?

Journal Entry: Expectations

What are your expectations in delving deeper into Druidism?

In your journal (external to this workbook), title an entry "My Expectations of Druidism." Write down your expectations as to what you are hoping to learn about. If it is many things, prioritize your thoughts in order of things you want to learn about the most. Another journal entry at the end of this workbook will have you revisit this entry.



Attestation:

I have made a journal entry on this topic.

Authenticity vs. Efficacy



Has anyone in the RDNA ever received criticism from members of other Druid orders? It's been a rare part of our experience, though there has been someone in the ADF Mother Grove who issued a rather rude rebuke of Dalon Ap Landu at a spiritual retreat once. This training program has addressed the issues with Dalon in an earlier section, but we don't think a *rude* response was merited on any account. To add some irony, this criticism was also coming from someone who was even an RDNA Third Order Druid (*in* the Order of Dalon Ap Landu).

However, modern Druid orders, are all in the same “courtroom” so to speak; we are usually judged by *outside* groups. In our experience, Celtic Reconstructionists (many of whom are very intelligent and well-read) sometimes offer condescending remarks on *authenticity*. Though as a reminder, not all Celtic Reconstructionists describe themselves as *Druids*, either. Many of them are of the opinion that the title of Druid must be bestowed by the community or Druid elders, after historically sufficient time (such as 19 years) have passed in the candidate's education. We are questioned, not just by Celtic Reconstructionists, but also by scholars in the academic community for our wild departures from known ancient customs.

“There are writers and teachers today who insist that the value of any system of Druid practice depends on its claim to historical authenticity. If Druid teachings don't copy the practices of ancient Celtic Druids as exactly as possible, this argument goes, they must not be worth much.” (Greer, 2007, pp. xvi-xviii)

Greer then tears down that authenticity argument and brings it down to his point: **that efficacy is more important, and can bring us to a modern authenticity that is meaningful here and now.**

“... our quest is for inspiration to enable us to live in sacred relationship now,” (Restall Orr, 2004, p. 20)

Once a Celtic Reconstructionist griped that modern Druid groups “...*only do what feels good, not what is right*,” (sounds like something the Orthodox Church would say). They were stating that *right* meant *historically authentic*. The statement implied that Recons want to be 100% historically accurate, which leads us to think that unless they are hypocrites, they're also in favor of historically accurate classism, slavery, human sacrifice, trials by combat, Brehon Law, and other injustices that modern Druid orders have eschewed.

"Have ye not forgotten that we are reformed, yea, even do we call ourselves by the name of Reformed, wherefore we must put behind us those things which do bring offense to our senses."
— Latter Chronicles 5:9

Simply put, modern Druid orders (and solo practitioners, too) have the prerogative to decide the most *effective* customs for themselves regardless of their historic authenticity. If we compare the 12 apostles and their customs to that of the Catholic Church, those are two vastly different practices in which the latter really has only breadcrumbs of historic authenticity left. But that's fine. The Catholic Church is only striving to be authentic unto its own practices which they have deemed are effective enough. When it comes to Druidry, no amount of Reconstructionism is going to be able to bring us back to

historic authenticity, nor should it. The more well-read Celtic Reconstructionists will understand that even they have to make concessions for the sake of our modern sensibilities. Too much has been permanently lost, which is all the more reason for us to create *new* authenticity in our own practices that meet our needs.

Essay on Authenticity & Efficacy in Druidism

1. All traditions have their own origins. They were "new" traditions once. How long does it take for a tradition to be considered "authentic?" More of a rhetorical question than anything...



Celtic Blood: No Such Thing

What Are Your Motives?

By our observations, we have noticed attrition of those who come to Druidry **solely** because of "Celtic ancestry." Granted, lots of modern practitioners of Druidry may indicate they have some Celtic ancestry, **but those who *stick with Druidry long term come to it for more reasons than just their heritage***. Additionally, most Druid orders will affirm that anyone can practice Druidry regardless of ethnic origin. That is certainly true with Reformed Druidry as well. There are a minuscule number of individuals who claim you can't be a Druid if you don't have Celtic blood. They are wrong, usually racist, and complete buffoons. They will likely get additional facts wrong without a shred of evidence to support their arguments.

No Hereditary Druids

Hereditary Druids are a bit of a controversial topic. Historians and our brightest scholars will agree that there are no hereditary Druids connecting you to the ancient Druids. One person we met claimed to be in an "unbroken line of Druids," all the way back to the Iron Age. When we asked them questions about their druidic initiation (because they'll usually say you have to be initiated, too). After I got them to stop evading the question) they said they were never actually initiated. When we asked them what they learned about Druidism from their parents, or what their parents said or believed about Druidism, there was nothing (or a "well, they were into ecology"). That is the *opposite* of an unbroken line.

Another individual once told us they were descendants of Clan MacMillan which originated in the Celtic Christian Church (which *did* keep a few pagan customs and festivals alive in folk traditions), and "are" therefore, somehow, Druids. Furthermore, by their claim, anyone with the last name MacMillan are all somehow automatically Druids. That's waxing toward the *faulty generalization* fallacy. *We* would not call this person a hereditary Druid by any means, and clerics in the Celtic Christian Church do not call themselves Druids, either.

There was the phenomenon in the Dark Ages of the *Culdees* (Irish for *Servants of God*) being an early monastic tradition passed from father to son, but eventually their customs began to resemble typical monastic traditions making it near impossible to call them Druids and certainly not pagans. In the Druidry Revival period there were antiquarians who were notorious for desperately trying to forge a connection between the modern Druids and the ancient Druids by distorting the practices and roles of the Culdees. The damage has been done – and for those that believe Culdees were always Druids, it may be difficult to change their minds. In fact a number of contemporary Culdees vehemently bristle at the tired stereotype.

There *is* a possible caveat though: If your parents are practitioners of modern Druidry, and you were raised into a druidic practice, then yes, you would be a second generation hereditary Druid. There was another individual who, in 2019, told us he was from a long line of Druids going back "hundreds of years." **This too is actually plausible**, because the *Ancient Druid Order* or ADO was founded 302 years prior in 1717. Granted they were a lot more Masonic than pagan, but the claim makes sense if initiation to that fraternal order has been a family tradition. As the 21st century progresses, we will probably see more druidic families raising their children into Druidry, and eventually someone will legitimately say they are descended from a long unbroken line of modern Druids. However at that point, Druidry might be so popular that statements like that won't matter anymore.

Blood and Genetics

Like we stated earlier, there is no such thing as Celtic Blood; it is a misnomer. *Celtic* is not a race or ethnicity. They are under the Indo-European umbrella. Look that up if you disagree. The classical *Keltoi* was the Greek name for a single Iron Age tribe among many with the same *material culture*. The word Celt later became a blanket term for anyone who shared and used those common material goods. This included common language, metallurgy, pottery, artwork, clothing and fashion accessories, etc. If your tribe used any of those items in your material culture, your culture was therefore Celtic. If you lived in Iron Age Italy but your tribe spoke a Celtic language, your culture was therefore Celtic.

Celtic material culture was widespread across almost all of Europe: From the British Isles down to Iberia and across to Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Anatolia (Turkey). They are Celtic, but not of any one ethnic origin or race other than Indo-European. Genetically, the R1b haplogroup is the one that has the most people who had the Celtic *material culture*. However, the R1b group also encompasses most people of western European descent. One anecdotal claim that bothered us was when someone said their parents took DNA tests, and the results said they *are* Druids. We're sure this individual was oversimplifying and misinterpreting the summary of their genetic makeup because **Druids simply aren't an ethnic group.**

In the Classical Age they were a social caste of individuals, and even **some ancient Greek aristocratic families would send their children to Druid schools** in Gaul to receive a good education. Marseilles, France was actually a Greek colony (Massalia) in southern Gaul since around 600 BC. They traded with the Celts regularly. In general, Greek historians seemed to write in a more favorable tone regarding Druids compared to Roman historians. It is fair to say there may have been a number of non-Celtic Druids across the Classical Age.

"...many gates were provided for men of every race by integrity and thrift to pass from a low to a high degree... there was a principle which in the process of time overthrew the barriers of race. This was the tradition of a "sacred" order not by birth or dominion, but by the mysteries of religion, philosophy, law, and the arts." (Green, 1925, p. 86)

In the historic record, there is (very roughly) a 1,000 year gap between the last of the ancient Druids (Ireland and Scotland being the last holdout) and the first Revival Druids of the Age of Enlightenment. For the most part, we've observed that individuals who start exploring Druidry solely on the basis of *heritage* might not know what to expect out of it. They might take a cursory look at some resources, then we don't hear from them again. They come out of the woodwork, and disappear just as quickly. We don't call them out on their claims because we don't want to come off as *rejecting* them or their belief in their first impression of us, but we hope that as they research, they see something in the resources that helps them better understand themselves. We'd want them to grow to see value in Druidry beyond just the ancestral associations.

Anyone can be a Druid.

Attestation:

Anyone can be a Druid.

Unrealistic Expectations When Delving Into Druidry

Druids in Questionable Sources and Gaming

Researching Druidry has always been a unique challenge because of how little we actually know about ancient Druidry. Dissecting written works from the Druidry Revival movement to the mid twentieth century (with examples of Barddas by Iolo Morganwg, The Golden Bough by James Frazer, and The White Goddess by Robert Graves) has proven cumbersome to sort out the good information from the fabrications and romanticized embellishments. The aforementioned works of Frazer and Graves may in fact have been partial sources of inspiration when the Reformed Druids of North America was being founded.

Outside of books, in the late 1990s and early 2000s the Internet was becoming a new resource for researching Druidry. It was still a challenge to sift through the available data with no certainty on the objectivity of the information. Then sometime in late 2004 it suddenly became much more difficult to research Druidry online. The RDNA has an elusive deity or entity by the name of *Dalon Ap Landu* who is *Lord of the Groves*. Try researching the epithet after 2004, and you'll see search results with references to some pop culture god named *Cenarius*.

Excitedly looking at fragmented phrases in the search results, someone suddenly thought they were on the verge of a breakthrough in trying to learn more on the origin of Dalon Ap Landu. The name Cenarius looked similar to *Cernunnos*, a Gaulish horned god. Then to their embarrassment when the page loaded, they saw that Cenarius is nothing more than a fictional (albeit antlered) druidic god and "Lord of the Groves" in the game *World of Warcraft*. They felt like a dunce for wasting so much time inadvertently researching a deity made-up for a *game*. Granted, for all we know, on a long enough timeline *all* the gods may have been made up by ancient humans.

Out of curiosity and peer pressure this person eventually played the game. World of Warcraft's depiction of Druids is very elaborately thought out, yet still very different from what we know of our historical Druids. And it wasn't long before we met or heard of individuals who come to Neo-Druidry because of games like *World of Warcraft* or *Dungeons & Dragons*, and others. Some of them stick around and understand that the game is just a game, and the depictions of Druids do have both significant similarities and differences. Then there are the few who come to Druidry thinking they will be able to cast fireballs (one person seemed *convinced* it was a possibility, and we don't think they were joking). Trusting any type of media (movies, TV, games, *et cetera*) to properly depict a Druid is good wishful thinking, but maybe at least a bit naive.

Feeling Like You Have to Connect With Deities

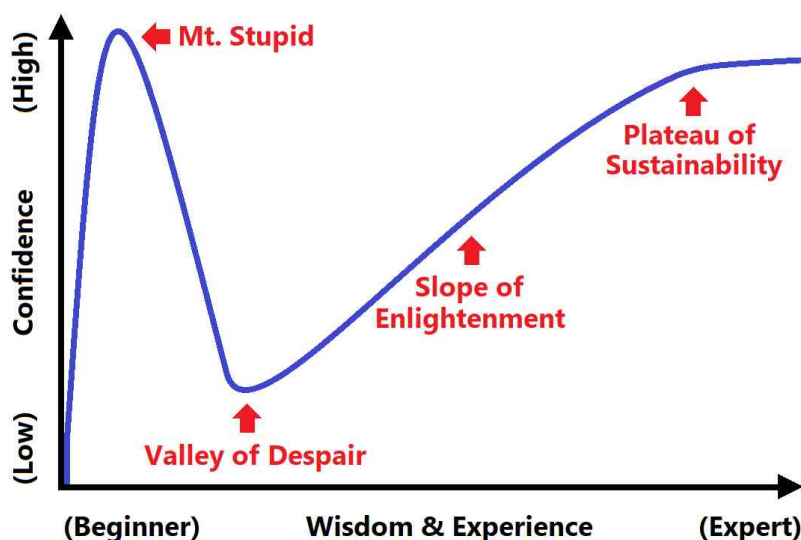
As Reformed Druids, **we recommend trying to get in touch with the Earth-Mother**, a personification of Nature. The Earth-Mother is not only divine, but we can prove she exists. We depend on the Living Earth, the ever-changing All-Mother for our survival. From her we withdraw sustenance. From her, we withdraw life-giving waters. From her we are provided with sheltering materials that keep us safe and warm. With the breath of the Earth-Mother we are protected against the ravages of the cosmos as we hurtle across the universe. If you have difficulty perceiving Nature as a goddess, don't concern yourself with *deifying* her. If you have difficulty with viewing the Earth as *sacred*, do you at least feel that you revere and cherish Nature with some heightened sense of importance? That's all we ask.

The Earth-Mother is real. She is alive. She is divine. To her we can establish a connection. If you feel you need a less metaphorical appellation to an actual goddess, as an example, maybe consider Danu (one option among many). Just don't feel like you have to limit yourself. Danu is the mother goddess of the Irish deities. Some academics believe Danu was a much older pre-Celtic Earth-Water deity who had numerous rivers named after her in Continental Europe (ie, Danube, Dnieper, Don etc). The Tuatha Dé Danann are not inherently Irish, as they invaded Ireland from someplace else.

The Dunning-Kruger Effect and its Prevalence in Newer Druids

Now before we get into this section, we're not calling anyone *stupid*. The Dunning-Kruger Effect is a type of cognitive bias where people perceive they are more knowledgeable than they really are. In a manner of speaking, some people are blind to their own ignorance. The low self-awareness and overconfidence leads them to believe they are a relative expert on something they have hardly experienced in depth. In some cases, the **naive individuals perceive that they know more than the experts** who who have devoted a lifetime to study and practice. Examples of people displaying the Dunning-Kruger effect include *Climate Change Deniers*, *Anti-Vaxxers*, and *Flat-Earthers*. We're not calling you any of these, but when average people start studying advanced topics, Druidism included, a fair number of people early on feel that they have become relative experts in the topic, and we just want you to be cautious and have some heightened awareness of it, and possibly avoid it entirely.

Dunning-Kruger Effect



If this is the first you've heard about the Dunning-Kruger Effect and the diagram here, it's important to note that we did not make this up. This relatively recent discovery among cognitive biases was hashed out by psychologist researchers David Dunning and Justin Kruger as part of a 1999 study titled "*Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments.*"

Subsequent to that, the diagram was created to illustrate the effect. We didn't come up with the names on the diagram such as *Mt. Stupid*, someone else called it that long before! The

Summit of Mt. Stupid is the highest level of confidence a beginner will perceive to have on a given subject.

An analog is the statement paraphrased like *High school kids think they know everything*. As kids we felt like a bit of a know-it-all in high school, arrogant and incognizant of my naivety. Some of us were veritable *royalty* of Mt. Stupid with our head in the clouds. We're exaggerating here, but trying to illustrate the Dunning-Kruger Effect. For me when I entered college, a whole new layer of academic complexity unfolded before me, I saw a motivational picture on a wall that said something like *College Has Taught Me That I Know Nothing*. My personal paradigm was shifting and I realized there is so much out there that I just don't know, and I had to come to terms with my ignorance.

I was still learning at the time, gaining knowledge and new experiences, but I was slipping down into

what the chart identifies as the *Valley of Despair*. This is where, despite an actual increase in understanding, beginners will gradually start to *perceive* that they will never gain full comprehension on a subject. This is where it is important to keep practicing whatever your goals are, and you will see improvement.

The *Slope of Enlightenment* is essentially where the individual's confidence in what they know increases in tandem with their actual experience and wisdom, hopefully with a modicum of humility. In Reformed Druidism, this is somewhat of a desired comfort level for Druids to strive for. It's built into our belief system. Our search for spiritual truth is a universal and an unending search. It would be shortsighted to declare that we have all the answers, but it's good to strive for Awareness as a perpetual student of Nature and Druidry.

The *Plateau of Sustainability* is the realm of a scholarly expert. This would be someone who has attained some of the highest levels of education, such as an interdisciplinary PhD with a tried and true understanding of his subject of focus and how it relates to other subjects with justified confidence. A few dedicated individuals can reach this point. (Kruger & Dunning, 1999) They may or may not feel that they have achieved Awareness or Enlightenment, but then again, the Reformed Druid's quest for Awareness is indeed an unending search for truth.

Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance.
—Confucius

But verily I say unto you: many there are who have sat for hours and have risen up knowing less than when they sat down.
—Meditations 7:5, The Chronicles of the Foundation



The Ancient Druids: What We “Know”

Knowledge Voids and Propaganda

The historical record has very little information of the Druids of Iron Age Europe. It's like trying to play chess but the board has a few holes where there should be squares, half the pieces are checker tokens, a third are backgammon coins, but all the pieces are made of ice which will melt away leaving only water damage on the wood board... and we are left trying to make sense of how things played out two millennia later. The oldest sources of information on the Druids were Greek historians followed by Romans, but many of those accounts were hearsay or referencing prior historians whose works have been lost entirely. It's a hot mess.

We have nothing that was written *by* a Druid except perhaps a few fragments of the Coligny Calendar which actually dates to the 2nd century CE in *Romanized* Gaul. With that in mind, it may not have been written by Druids at all. The rest of the accounts were written by Greeks who put their spin on interpreting the Celtic priestly caste, by Romans who usually had a condescending attitude toward the Druids, and both Greeks and Romans alike referenced each other's works in what no doubt contributed to a bit of the “telephone game” where the actual facts got distorted into the ancient equivalent of *purple monkey dishwasher*. Centuries later, Christian monks from the British Isles are the only ones writing about Druids, but with much less objectivity compared to the still-dubious writings of classical antiquity.

Writings By Early Greeks and Romans

That One Ancient Snippet Preserved by Diogenes Laërtius (c. Mid-3rd Century CE)

Diogenes actually lived from the late second to the early-mid third century CE, and may have had access to the Library of Alexandria. He is credited as preserving the single oldest reference to the Druids, originally written by Sotion of Alexandria in the early 2nd century BCE. Fourth century BCE Greek historians mentioned barbarian philosophers, but not using any derivation of the word *Druid*. The word *Druids* seems to be added by Diogenes in his paraphrasing of the earlier works.

“Some say that the study of philosophy originated with the barbarians. In that among the Persians there existed the Magi, and among the Babylonians or Assyrians the Chaldæi, among the Indians the Gymnosophistæ, **and among the Celts and Gauls men who were called Druids and Semnothei**, as Aristotle relates in his book on Magic, and Sotion in the twenty-third book of his Succession of Philosophers.” (Diogenes, trans. Yonge c 230/1915, p. 4)

None of Sotion's original works have survived the ages. Perhaps they were all lost when the Library of Alexandria was destroyed in 391 CE. The Encyclopedia Britannica Dictionary, 6th edition (1823) indicates the *Semnothei* were specifically the priests among the Druid philosophers. Later writings indicate the Druid caste were both philosophers and priests. This may indicate an earlier evolution in customs, or a poorly understood hierarchy of the Druids over centuries.

The Writings of Diodorus Siculus (c. 90-30 BCE)

“Among [the Celts] are also to be found lyric poets whom they call Bards. These men sing to the accompaniment of instruments which are like lyres, and their songs may be either of praise or of obloquy. Philosophers, as we may call them, and men learned in religious affairs are

unusually honored among them and are called by them Druids. The Gauls likewise make use of diviners, accounting them worthy of high approbation, and these men foretell the future by means of the flight or cries of birds and of the slaughter of sacred animals.... (Siculus, trans. Oldfather 1939 p. 179)

And it is a custom of theirs that no one should perform a sacrifice without a “philosopher;” for thank-offerings should be rendered to the gods, they say, by the hands of men who are experienced in the nature of the divine, and who speak, as it were, the language of the gods, and it is also through the mediation of such men, they think, that blessings likewise should be sought.

Nor is it only in the exigencies of peace, but in their wars as well, that they obey, before all others, these men and their chanting poets, and such obedience is observed not only by their friends but also by their enemies; many times, for instance, when two armies approach each other in battle with swords drawn and spears thrust forward, these men [Druids] step forth between them and cause them to cease, as though having cast a spell over certain kinds of wild beasts. In this way, even among the wildest barbarians, does passion give place before wisdom, and Ares stands in awe of the Muses.” (*ibid*, p. 181)

"They are of much sincerity and integrity, far from the craft and knavery of men among us, contented with homely fare, strangers to excess and luxury." (Ellis, 1994, p. 180)

The final quote above indicates a few meaningful virtues that are still worth striving for in your practice in modern Druidry. Through sincerity, we say what we really mean, and our words ought to be altruistic. When we conduct ourselves with integrity, we stick to our convictions; if we say we're going to get something done, we see it through, and avoid hypocrisy at all costs. Homely fare likely refers to simple foods, not indulging in anything too pretentious or snooty like filet mignon, steak tartare, et cetera. At least not regularly, but *who* even does that anyway? In turn it would generally be amicable to live a life of simplicity, *avoiding* the materialistic tendencies of accumulating goods or living in pampered opulence.

The Writings of Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE)

“The [Druids] are concerned with divine worship, the due performance of sacrifices, public and private, and the interpretation of ritual questions: a great number of young men gather about them for the sake of instruction and hold them in great honor.... if any person or people does not abide by their decision, they ban such from sacrifice, which is their heaviest penalty.”

“It is believed that their rule of life was discovered in Britain and transferred thence to Gaul; and today those who would study the subject more accurately journey, as a rule, to Britain to learn it.”

“The Druids usually hold aloof from war, and do not pay war taxes with the rest; they are excused from military service and exempt from all liabilities...”

“...In the schools of the Druids they learn by heart a great number of verses, and therefore some persons remain twenty years under training. And they do not think it proper to commit these utterances to writing... they do not wish the rule to become common property, nor those who

learn the rule to rely on writing and so neglect the cultivation of the memory; and, in fact, it does usually happen that the assistance of writing tends to relax the diligence of the student and the action of the memory. The cardinal doctrine which they seek to teach is that souls do not die, but after death pass from one to another; and this belief, as the fear of death is thereby cast aside, they hold to be the greatest incentive to valor. Besides this, they have many discussions as touching the stars and their movement, the size of the universe and of the earth, the order of nature, the strength and the powers of the immortal gods, and hand down their lore to the young men.”

The Wicker Man Myth

“Others use figures of immense size, whose limbs, woven out of twigs, they fill with living men and set on fire, and the men perish in a sheet of flame. They believe that the execution of those who have been caught in the act of theft or robbery or some crime is more pleasing to the immortal gods; but when the supply of such fails they resort to the execution even of the innocent.” (Caesar, trans. Edward 1917, p. 337, 339, 341)

To date, there hasn't been any archaeological evidence that supports this custom. It is equally fair to hypothesize that this never happened, just as much as one can also speculate that this may have been true.

The Writings of Marcus Annaeus Lucanus (Lucan) (39-65 CE)

“...death is but a point in the midst of continuous life.” (Lucan, trans. Duff, 1977, p. 37)

Lucan was one of many historians to point out that the Celts believed that when they died their souls would pass into a new body and they would live again. As a poet and a historian he just put it the most eloquently. His poetic license bleeds over into his bias when he mentioned a Druid Grove at the time of the Siege of Massalia in 49 BCE. Julius Caesar needed lumber for his siege towers and fortifications for his four and a half month campaign and was clearing away the forests outside of the city.

“A grove there was, untouched by men's hands from ancient times, whose interlacing boughs enclosed a space of darkness and cold shade, and banished the sunlight far above. No rural Pan dwelt there, no Silvanus, ruler of the woods, no Nymphs; but gods were worshiped there with savage rites, the altars were heaped with hideous offerings, and every tree was sprinkled with human gore. On those boughs—if antiquity, reverential of the gods, deserves any credit—birds feared to perch; in those coverts wild beasts would not lie down; no wind ever bore down upon that wood, nor thunderbolt hurled from black clouds; the trees, even when they spread their leaves to no breeze, rustled of themselves.

Water, also, fell there in abundance from dark springs. The images of the gods, grim and rude, were uncouth blocks formed of felled tree-trunks. Their mere antiquity and the ghastly hue of their rotten timber struck terror; men feel less awe of deities worshiped under familiar forms; so much does it increase their sense of fear, not to know the gods whom they dread.

Legend also told that often the subterranean hollows quaked and bellowed, that yew-trees fell down and rose again, that the glare of conflagration came from trees that were not on fire, and that serpents twined and glided round the stems. The people never resorted thither to worship at close quarters, but left the place to the gods. For, when the sun is in mid-heaven or dark night

fills the sky, the priest himself dreads their approach and fears to surprise the lord of the grove.” (Lucan, trans. Duff, 1977, pp. 143-145)

As much as Lucan paints a picture with his best hyperbolic prose, it is worth pointing out that the areas immediately east and northeast of Massalia (present day Marseilles) in the foothills of the alps are seismically active, and there are caves and sinkholes dotting the countryside. The groaning earth and mysterious caves might have been significant to the Druids. It seems the Romans already had a modicum of fearful respect for the Grove, as they had initially cleared the forest around it. Then Lucan paints Caesar as some sort of self-righteous hero. Given the fact that Lucan wrote of this event over a century *after* it happened, we can only speculate as to whether or not Julius cut down the first sacred oak himself.

“This grove was sentenced by Caesar to fall before the stroke of the axe; for it grew near his works. Spared in earlier warfare, it stood there covered with trees among hills already cleared. But strong arms faltered; and the men, awed by the solemnity and terror of the place, believed that, if they aimed a blow at the sacred trunks, their axes would rebound against their own limbs. When Caesar saw that his soldiers were sore hindered and paralyzed, he was the first to snatch an axe and swing it, and dared to cleave a towering oak with the steel: driving the blade into the desecrated wood, he cried: “Believe that I am guilty of sacrilege, and thenceforth none of you need fear to cut down the trees.” Then all the men obeyed his bidding...” (Lucan, trans. Duff, 1977, pp. 145-147)

The Writings of Strabo (c. 63 BCE-24 CE)

“Among all the Gallic peoples, generally speaking, there are three sets of men who are held in exceptional honor; the Bards, the Vates and the Druids. The Bards are singers and poets; the Vates, diviners and natural philosophers; while the Druids, in addition to natural philosophy, study also moral philosophy. The Druids are considered the most just of men, and on this account they are entrusted with the decision, not only of the private disputes, but of the public disputes as well; so that, in former times, they even arbitrated cases of war and made the opponents stop when they were about to line up for battle...”

“...their dignitaries wear garments that are dyed in colors and sprinkled with gold.”

“But [the Celts] would not sacrifice without the Druids. We are told of still other kinds of human sacrifices; for example, they would shoot victims to death with arrows, or impale them in the temples, or, having devised a colossus of straw and wood, throw into the colossus cattle and wild animals of all sorts and human beings, and then make a burnt-offering of the whole thing.” (Strabo, trans. Jones, 1923, p. 245-249)

“Strabo mentions that the Celts had deposited large quantities of silver and gold in lakes and that the Romans now sold off the lakes so that entrepreneurs could recover the loot.” (Cunliffe, 2010, p. 65)

As history is known to repeat itself, capitalists across history have the tendency to destroy all that is sacred to the Druids. The gold and silver deposits were most likely sacrifices to chthonic deities or gifts for sacred ancestors who had passed into the otherworld.

The Writings of Pomponius Mela (c. ?-45 CE)

Pomponius was still alive when Vercingetorix surrendered to Rome, and probably lived through a transitional time for the Gaulish Celts and the Druids. On continental Europe, the Druids were losing power, and Pomponius mentions a change in the methodology of blood sacrifices:

“Traces of their savagery remain, even though it has been banned now. Nevertheless, after they have led their consecrated human victims to the altars, they still graze them slightly, although they do hold back from the ultimate bloodshed.” (Mela, trans. Romer, 1998 p. 107)

The Writings of Tacitus (c. 56-120 CE) on the Quelling of the Druids at Mona Circa 61 CE

“Britain was in the charge of Suetonius Paulinus, in military skill and in popular report... He prepared accordingly to attack the island of Mona, which had a considerable population of its own, while serving as a haven for [Druid] refugees; and, in view of the shallow and variable channel, constructed a flotilla of boats with flat bottoms. By this method the infantry crossed; the cavalry, who followed, did so by fording or, in deeper water, by swimming at the side of their horses.

On the beach stood the adverse array, a serried mass of arms and men, with women flitting between the ranks. In the style of Furies, in robes of deathly black and with disheveled hair, they brandished their torches; while a circle of Druids, lifting their hands to heaven and showering imprecations, struck the troops with such an awe at the extraordinary spectacle that, as though their limbs were paralyzed, they exposed their bodies to wounds without an attempt at movement. Then, reassured by their general, and inciting each other never to flinch before a band of females and fanatics, they charged behind the standards, cut down all who met them, and enveloped the enemy in his own flames. The next step was to install a garrison among the conquered population, and to demolish the groves consecrated to their savage cults: for they considered it a duty to consult their deities by means of human entrails.” (Tacitus, trans. Jackson, 1937, pp. 155-157)

The Writings of Pliny the Elder (c. 24-79 CE) (And the Only Historical Mention of White Robes)

“Upon this occasion we must not omit to mention the admiration that is lavished upon this plant by the Gauls. The Druids — for that is the name they give to their magicians — held nothing more sacred than the mistletoe and the tree that bears it, supposing always that tree to be the robur [European Oak]. Of itself the robur is selected by them to form whole groves, and they perform none of their religious rites without employing branches of it; so much so, that it is very probable that the priests themselves may have received their name from the Greek name for that tree. In fact, it is the notion with them that everything that grows on it has been sent immediately from heaven, and that the mistletoe upon it is a proof that the tree has been selected by God himself as an object of his especial favor.

The mistletoe, however, is but rarely found upon the robur; and when found, is gathered with rites replete with religious awe. This is done more particularly on the fifth day of the moon, the day which is the beginning of their months and years, as also of their ages, which, with them, are but thirty years. This day they select because the moon, though not yet in the middle of her course, has already considerable power and influence; and they call her by a name which signifies, in their language, the all-healing.

Having made all due preparation for the sacrifice and a banquet beneath the trees, they bring thither two white bulls, the horns of which are bound then for the first time. Clad in a white robe [*veste* (nominative *vestis*), meaning garment, clothing, or vestment – not necessarily a *robe* at all] the priest ascends the tree, and cuts the mistletoe with a golden sickle, which is received by others in a white cloak [*sago* (nominative *sagum*) – a cloak type resembling ones typically worn by Roman military]. They then immolate the victims, offering up their prayers that God will render this gift of his propitious to those to whom he has so granted it. It is the belief with them that the mistletoe, taken in drink, will impart fecundity to all animals that are barren, and that it is an antidote for all poisons.” (Pliny, trans Bostock, 77/1855, p. 435-436)

Most translations of the legendary anecdote of the mistletoe indicate it is gathered on the sixth day of the moon. Either way it is roughly the time when the crescent moon is shaped like a typical sickle blade when held in the right hand (with the points facing left). Some translations indicate the Druids called the *moon* by a name that means *All-Healing*, while others indicate the *mistletoe* was called by the special name.

Some modern historians speculate that Pliny never actually witnessed the gathering of the mistletoe, suggesting that he copied the works of prior historians. Alexander Polyhistor wrote extensively of oaks, and may have been Pliny’s source, considering Pliny referenced many of Polyhistor’s writings. (Cunliffe, 2010)

In our own speculation, we feel that Pliny should have written down the sacred Gaulish name that meant All-Healing (*omnia sanantem* in the Latin). There are few other surviving references as to how the Druids dressed besides this mistletoe gathering ritual. Whether this actually was first written by Pliny or Polyhistor or Timaeus or any other historian, it is apparent that this reference was to the Gaulish Druids. In fact the Gaulish Druids had already been defeated and suppressed before the year 37 CE, at which point Pliny the Elder was only 12-13 years old. We doubt he ever witnessed any Druids at all. There is no way to know for certain if this mistletoe ritual and white vestments was a custom of Druids across *all* Celtic nations, just Gaul, or just that one group of Druids.

Writings By Early Christian Monks

In Which “Jesus is My Druid” Doesn’t Quite Mean What Columba Said...

There’s a well-known quote among modern Christian Druids which Saint Columba stated *Jesus is my Druid*. The most common interpretation is that Columba literally viewed Jesus Christ as the equivalent of a wise sage and spiritual leader who conducted magic (i.e. miracles). The modernized quote has brought meaningful inspiration to Christian Druids for the last few centuries. However when we take a closer look at what the saint said around that quote, it is arguable that Columba was speaking in a condescending tone.

“It is not with the sneeze our destiny is,
Nor with the bird on top of the twig,
Nor with the trunk of a knotty tree.
Nor with an act of humming.

I adore not the voice of birds,

Nor the sneeze, nor a destiny on the earthly world,
Nor a son, nor chance, nor woman;
My Druid is Christ, the Son of God.” (Ellis, 1994, pp. 85-86)

In the above poem attributed to Columba, he’s speaking against auguries (divination or omens) from sneezing, movements and sounds of birds, and scrying into tree bark patterns. He’s presumably making light of the customs of the *filii* ("super bards," the Irish near-equivalent of *Ovates* among Druids in Britain and Gaul) and Druids. He’s saying Christ is the only soothsayer he needs, and that the pagan Druids (allegedly inferior by Columba’s opinion) need not apply. A similar prayer shows up in *Annals of the Four Masters*, where a host of Druids brings in fog by magical rites, walking in circles around cairns or ancient piles of stones. When the pagan Druids refuse to be reasonable, Columba prays out loud in front of everyone and indicates that Christ is akin to a Druid but would be more reliable than the pagans.

“Colum Cille said:
O God, wilt thou not drive off the fog,
[gap: extent: 1 line]
which envelops our number,
The host [Druids] which has deprived us of our livelihood,
The host which proceeds around the cairns!
He is a son of storm who betrays us.
My Druid – he will not refuse me –
is the Son of God, and may he side with me,”
—Annals of the Four Masters, M555.2

Whether or not Columba mocked and derided any Druids at all is still open for debate. Christian monks had a tough uphill battle establishing the new faith in the British Isles. No doubt they added propaganda wherever opportunities presented themselves. The evidence is in the sheer quantity of miracles performed in early Christian era writings, whereas the Greek and Roman historians made no mention of Druids conducting *hard* magic, other than at the Mona Massacre with the notion that the *sight* of Druids casting curses struck fear and awe into the superstitious Roman soldiers.

Back to the phrase in question: *Jesus is my Druid* has intrinsically become a part of modern Druidry among those of the Christian persuasion, and it has taken on a validity that stands on its own. It’s good to know the phrase’s origin and intended context, but if it inspires you *now*, that’s what matters the most.

Iona: The Once-Sacred Island of the Druids

According to apocryphal legend, Iona was once named Island of the Druids and was almost as sacred as Mona (Anglesey). It was home to druidic temples and burial grounds, and was actually occupied by Druids at the time of Columba’s first arrival in 563 CE. The Druids, however, attempted to play a trick on Columba.

“...when Columba first landed on Iona, on Pentecost Eve, some Druids who had been there, disguised themselves in the habit of monks, and pretended they had come to that place to preach the gospel, with a request that he and his followers might betake themselves to some other place; but that Columba immediately discovered the imposture, and they resigned the field to

him. (Smith, 1798, p. 92)

Some Sort of Dark Ages Mustache-Twirling Villain

Christian monks tended to satirize the Druids as something akin to our mustache-twirling villains of mid-20th century pop culture. With all the magic, miracles, and propaganda it's difficult to determine what actually went on between the pagans and saints. Many of the Christian writings were also recorded a century or more after they allegedly transpired.

Saint Columba's Miracle vs. the Druid's Magic

“Broichan [a Druid] speaking one day to the holy man, says “Tell me, Columba, at what time dost thou propose to sail forth?” “On the third day,” says the Saint, “God willing and life remaining, we propose to begin our voyage.” “Thou wilt not be able to do so,” says Broichan in reply, “for I can make the wind contrary for thee, and bring dark clouds upon thee.” ... On the same day as he had purposed in his heart, the Saint came to the long lake of the River Ness, a great crowd following. But the Druids then began to rejoice when they saw a great darkness coming over, and a contrary wind with a tempest....

....Our Columba, therefore, seeing the furious elements stirred up against him, calls upon Christ the Lord, and entering the boat while the sailors are hesitating, he, with all the more confidence, orders the sail to be rigged against the wind. Which being done, the whole crowd looking on meanwhile, the boat is borne along against the contrary winds with amazing velocity.”
(Adamnán trans. 1945, pp. 148-149)

This legend took place recently after Saint Columba *cures* Broichan of a terminal illness with a magical stone (see also section on Painted Pictish Pebbles), so here Columba's biographer Adamnán is painting Broichan as an ungrateful little bitch in abject defiance of the kindness of the saint.

Columba Saves the Filí

In 575 CE, the last year of King Aedh of Connacht, Aedh nearly destroys the pagan *filí* (bardic seers, equivalent to an Ovate). Columba (himself having been trained by a bard named Gemman) advised Aedh to simply limit their political power. (Hyde, 1980). We know it is the *filí* being talked about here because *regular bards* in ancient Ireland were simply minstrels, entertainers, and eulogizers when the occasion called for it. The *filí* were far more advanced, also being versed in satire and had to commit laws, hundreds of stories, and folklore to memory in addition to their work as diviners.

“And though it is well known that the bards in Columba's time, were become a nuisance to society in general, and extremely adverse to the views of those who had propagated the Christian religion, yet at the great Council of Drimceat, when all the other members unanimously agreed upon their being put to death, and an end being put to the order, Columba alone interceded in their behalf, and by his great influence the bards were saved.” (Smith, 1798, pp 92-93)

These ultra-bards survived Ireland's conversion to Christianity and eventually were absorbed into the church. For all we know, their descendants of tradition may have been the ones who satirized the last Druids in medieval Irish manuscripts. Before English rule ultimately had the order of *filí* disbanded, there were still superstitious people who “believed that poets could ‘rhyme to death’ animals and men,” (Cunliffe, 2010, p. 97) which reminds us of a certain *Monty Python* sketch (the funniest joke), but

never mind that right now. We mentioned a bard named Gemman that Columba had been studying under. At least one source indicates Gemman was in fact a Druid, which would make even more sense if Columba was originally training to become a Druid before he converted.

"He had studied under Gemman, a druid poet." (Green, 1925, p. 152)

That One Time When Columba Prayed the Nessie Away...

“When the blessed man was sojourning for some days in the province of the Picts, he was obliged to cross the River Ness, and when he had come to the bank, he sees some of the inhabitants burying an unfortunate fellow whom, as those who were burying him related, a little while before some aquatic monster seized and savagely bit while he was swimming, and whose hapless body some men, coming up though too late in a boat, rescued by means of hooks which they threw out.

The blessed man, however, hearing these things, orders one of his companions to swim out and bring him from over the water a cobble that was beached on the other bank. And hearing and obeying the command of the holy and illustrious man, Lugne Mocumin, without delay takes off his clothes, except his tunic, and casts himself into the water. But the monster, which was lying in the river bed, and whose appetite was rather whetted for more prey than sated with what it already had, perceiving the surface of the water disturbed by the swimmer, suddenly comes up and moves towards the man as he swam in mid stream, and with a great roar rushes on him with open mouth, while all who were there, barbarians as well as brethren, were greatly terror-struck.

The blessed man seeing it, after making the Salutary Sign of the Cross in the empty air with his holy hand upraised, and invoking the Name of God, commanded the ferocious monster, saying: “Go thou no further, nor touch the man; go back at once.” Then, on hearing this word of the Saint, the monster was terrified, and fled away again more quickly than if it had been dragged off by ropes, though it had approached Lugne as he swam so closely that between man and monster there was no more than the length of one punt [barge] pole. Then the Brethren greatly marveling, seeing the monster had gone back, and that their comrade Lugne had returned to them in the boat, untouched and unharmed, glorified God in the blessed man. And even the barbarous heathens who were there present, constrained by the greatness of the miracle which they themselves had seen, magnified the God of the Christians.” (Adamnán, trans. 1945, pp. 136-138)

So to summarize in script form...

Columba: Oi! What happened?

Picts: Nessie made a wee snack of our kin!

Columba: Lugne, go swim across this dangerous river and bring me a rock from the other side.

Lugne: Sure thing boss.

Nessie: Rawr!

Columba: For Christ's sake Nessie, feck off!

Nessie: Yipe, yipe, yipe, yipe!

All (except Columba): Wow!

Columba: (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

Narrator: And the moral of the story is that it's alright to exploit the life of your friends for the sake of demonstrating a miracle. Our only question is: did Lugne ever get the damn cobble, or did they just rescue him and call it a day?

Basic Values of Druids



Druidry has no universally defined set of values, which makes it tricky to pin down. In terms of *basics*, we can start with what values Druids might have in common.

Reverence for Nature: We find it hard to believe that there could ever be a Druid who does not have some degree of appreciation for the natural world. This could range from a deep respect to all-out worship, depending on the individual. Many Druids seek to establish a connection with the Earth and with Nature. We're not here to conquer it, but to acknowledge that we are part of it. The Earth is a deity that we can prove exists.

Subcategory – Trees: One thing that almost all Druids mention is a love of trees that (at least in part) drew us in. After all, even the ancient Romans observed that the Druids had something to do with trees and were the “knowers” of the oak.

Subcategory – Environmentalism: Stewardship, using our natural resources wisely, seeking balance, and taking care of our only home planet are important to modern Druids. The Industrial Revolution in part led to the increase in popularity of the Druidry Revival Movement. Many Druids promoted getting back to nature in a world where mills, factories, and machines began to dominate the landscape and take its toll. With deforestation, mining, and waste, we also have a concern for the animals that we should be sharing the world with.

Peace: According to Roman historian Strabo in his writing *Geographica*, the ancient Druids “... prevented armies from engaging when drawn up in battle array against each other.” In the Druidry Revival Movement, many members were liberal Christians and Unitarians. The English Civil War and the Jacobite Rebellions, carrying overtones of religious superiority (Protestant vs Catholic) were ongoing or still fresh in the memory of the people. Many of these Revival Druids wanted a more peaceful existence and spirituality. Naturally, they liked the notion that the ancient Druids had the power to halt warfare. Pacifism stuck around as a popular value in just about every modern Druid order.

Balance: Many Druids strive to practice mindfulness and moderation, while understanding that nature is about giving and taking. Even as there is day, so must there be night. There are many Druids who embrace the dark and the light equally, while others see that the world is already saturated in darkness and strive to balance that out, and that takes its toll on us. That brings us to the importance of self care. When we have too much of one thing that wears away at the heart, we need to give some balance to our own lives on a personal level.

Creativity: Many Druids have some form of creative expression. The bardic arts aren't limited to just poetry and song. We are also artisans, hobbyists, and craftspeople. We create sacred artwork, ritual tools, jewelry, supplies, and more. We may be in varying states of skill, but hey, everyone starts somewhere.

This is where we go out on a limb (oh the pun!) and cover additional values that we would hope most (if not all) Druids have. If there's any single modern druidic writing that encompasses values, it's the *Druid's Prayer*, originally written by the bard Iolo Morganwg and has since been adapted into numerous versions. OBOD has an excellent page on the *Druid's Prayer* that may merit searching for.

The next eight values (through *Goodness*) below are right out of the prayer.

Protection: Okay, so who doesn't want to be safe? Protection is universally important, particularly for people with fringe beliefs and practices. This is not limited to only physical protection; it can certainly also mean magical and spiritual protection as well.

Strength: We're willing to bet this is primarily in the sense of nonphysical strength. This can mean emotional strength, courage, integrity, dedication, perseverance, and more. And yes, there are probably some body-builder Druids who mean "strength" *literally*.

Knowledge: The ancient Druids would take up to 19 years (vaguely like achieving a Master's Degree today) to commit everything to memory. That included history, lore, law, medicine, astronomy/astrology, magic, theology, philosophy, logic, sacred geometry, and others. Of course with modern literacy, we can learn things much faster with the written word. That doesn't mean we're committing it all to memory, but we have the added ability to conduct research in the modern era and access knowledge almost instantaneously. We have a thirst for learning, which fosters a path to Awareness. Many of us are also on a quest for truth and discerning correct knowledge from the incorrect. There is a lot of misleading information out there and we feel it is important to get it right.

Understanding: This could be better interpreted as *wisdom*. Wisdom is applied knowledge, which first requires us to understand what we know on a deeper level. Wisdom is often achieved through experiences. For many, Druidry is an experiential lifestyle, not just merely a nature-based spirituality.

Justice: The ancient Druids served many purposes, and some were looked up to as judges and interpreters of the law. Unfortunately we can't all be judges, but perhaps not all ancient Druids were judges anyway. Through logic and reason we can think and act justly. Living beings are deserving of fairness, equity, and equality.

Love: Concern and compassion for our fellow beings comes to us through the most powerful emotion. Sure, Nature can be cold and emotionless, yet Druids still feel a driving force to gaze out at her beauty in love, wonder, and awe. (Regarding wonder and awe for Earth, see also [[this video](#)] on the *Overview Effect*.) For many, love is just part of the deal. (Reid, 2012)

Divinity: Not all Druids believe in a higher power, but many do. Some Druids are hard polytheists, believing in many deities. Some Druids are soft polytheists, believing that the gods are aspects of one divine source. Some Druids are pantheists, believing that everything is divine, and deity is everything. Some Druids are panentheists, believing everything is divine, yet deity is also a separate being. Some Druids are monotheists and liberal Christians. Some Druids are spiritual but not religious. Many Druids, in addition to some of the above categories, are animists, believing that everything has its own spirit, even rocks and plants. Because of the flexibility in this category, *it really doesn't make a difference how you perceive divinity to be a Druid*. Write that down.

Goodness: Above we mentioned balance. To avoid contradictions, we should state that balance is good in *most* situations, but not all. We certainly don't need Evil to balance out Good. We don't want half the world population to be racists, for example... *zero* racists is a good balance. Humility is also important. Druidry is not about egoism, nor power struggles, nor conceitedness.

Community: The ancient Druids were the spiritual leaders of their communities. Strabo mentions in *Geographica* that the Gaulish Celts "...would not sacrifice without the presence of the Druids." (Side note: most modern Druid orders condemn animal or human sacrifice.) We advance faster when we work together, such as in study groups, organizing events, or completing projects.

Leadership: Whether we are leaders of our communities, of our Groves, or how we lead our lives by example, leadership is important. There are many solo Druids out there, and that's perfectly fine. Solo Druids are their own clergy, and leaders of their own spirit. Many solo Druids feel they can get more accomplished if they follow their own guidance at their own pace. (Restall Orr, 2004)

Healing: The ancient Druids were the physicians to their community as well as spiritual leaders. They knew of all the healing herbs and some were even skilled as surgeons. Kind reminder: being a modern Druid does not automatically make someone a doctor. Please don't try to treat anyone's medical conditions with herbs or surgery unless you are a certified and/or licensed practitioner. In the modern era, people also sometimes come to Druidry so that they can *heal* from prior toxic religions where they may have faced a slew of varying abuses: emotional, physical, psychological, and/or otherwise.

There are certainly many more values that Druids have that might not be listed here, but this is a good start. We are grateful with special thanks to our friends in Northern Roots Grove & Druid Alliance of North America (DANA) who helped ensure that this is a well-rounded list.

Essay: Values

1. Can you think of any values not mentioned above that you think are important to many Druids?
2. Were you surprised by any of these values, either now, or back when you first heard of them?



Reformed Druidism: The Basics

Because Even the Ancient Druids Were Once New in Their Traditions...

Back in early 1963 at Carleton College when a small group of students were in the earliest stages of druidic development, even before they called themselves *Reformed*, they started out as just Druids practicing their own brand of minimally researched Druidism. There were no other modern Druid orders yet. Coincidentally the RDNA was created just a year before The Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (OBOD) was formed in the UK. The only other groups who called themselves Druids were *fraternal societies* that functioned more like, or as offshoots of, Freemasonry. They were holdouts from the Druidry Revival Period that spanned from the 18th to early 20th centuries, and a few that continue to the present.

The Ancient Order of Masonic Druids in America (AOMDA), a vestige of the Druid Revival era had been defunct since 1961, just two years before the RDNA was created. John Michael Greer eventually rebooted AODA in 1976, dropping *Masonic* from their name and turning it into a mystical order. Greer, the Grand Archdruid emeritus of AODA is a prolific author and has a variety of great books on ecology and Druidry. He is also a Third Order Druid (the first level of the priesthood) in the Reformed Druids of North America, but we're getting ahead of ourselves.

In the Introduction we defined in brief what a *Druid* is as far as this training program is concerned. For a proper *long answer* we should differentiate between three distinct eras of Druids in chronological order.

The Ancient Druids

First there were the ancient Druids who were only mentioned in a few Iron Age Celtic cultures by Greek and Roman historians, and much later recorded by Irish monks in the Dark Ages with those writings being copied into the Medieval Period. They were described as an elite class of priests in the British Isles and Gaul (modern day France and parts of west-central Europe). The Druids were the most respected group in Celtic society, even above warriors and chieftains. They served as astronomers, advisors, lawyers, physicians, educators, and more. In society, only the Druids could communicate with the gods, and the populace would not even make sacrifices unless a Druid was present. These Druids were *mostly* wiped out by the Romans by the middle of the first century CE in Gaul and Britain. The rest in Ireland, Scotland, and other insular Celtic nations faded away by attrition as Christianity took hold. The last Druids were most likely gone entirely before the dawn of the Viking Age. There would be no new record of people identifying as Druids for about a thousand years. (Green, 1997)

The Revivalist Druids (Early Neo-Druidism)

The development of the movable type printing press in the mid 15th century CE would soon make way for the revival of Druidry. Over the 16th and 17th centuries, old handwritten manuscripts (some of which may have been stolen from monastery libraries during the Reformation) containing information on the ancient Druids were being converted to print. Books were becoming more affordable and being published in much larger batches than ever before. A wealth of knowledge was becoming widely available for a fraction of the cost. Scholars and academics began learning more about ancient civilizations, and a niche-interest in the ancient Druids was on the rise. By 1717, the *Ancient Druid Order* had formed alongside (and somewhat similar to) Freemasonry.

Different denominations of Christianity were emerging as well as different philosophies on spirituality

and our existence in general. The Druidry Revival movement attracted all manner of unique individuals making them difficult to describe overall. In their quasi-Masonic lodges they might seem just like any other fraternal or benefit society: with camaraderie, rituals, robes, esoteric rites, all while trying to reclaim the benevolent aspects of their forgotten ancestral heritage. The term *Neo-Druidism* arose during this time period, though this training program will refer to it as early *modern* druidism, sometimes even omitting *early* for generalization.

“Dangerous Deists”

The Reformation and Age of Enlightenment also came with a slew of new spiritual and philosophical concepts. In the 17th century, Deism emerged as a philosophy or even a “natural religion” which had many different interpretations, but was focused on reason and understanding of the sciences which were becoming topics of heightened interest. Deists were considered to be dangerous freethinkers by most Christians of the time. Deism contributed in part to the popularity of Revival Druidry, with the aspects of Nature, academics, and philosophy. (Cunliffe, 2010)

Some members of the Anglican Church adopted the emergent Latitudinarian philosophy which professes that strict adherence to doctrine and practice (orthodoxy and orthopraxy) are detrimental to one’s individual spirituality and overall well-being. They advocate for meditation and spiritual inquiry which fosters meaningful spiritual growth on an individual level. This contributed to the development of the concept of *pantheism* wherein the universe and everything in it is divine, therefore all of nature is sacred. People from all of these breakaway groups were drawn to Neo-Druidism. (Greer, 2006)

Contemporary Neo-Druidism (Which Began With the RDNA)

Today Reformed Druidry is often dismissed as a joke. By some it is not even regarded as a Druid order. To dismiss the RDNA as a joke is a rather willfully obtuse way of interpreting its origin and lasting legacy. The most accurate way to describe our origin is as a *semi-serious protest movement* against mandatory chapel attendance at Carleton College in 1963. The RDNA has no connection to any revival era Druid groups or fraternal societies. The main founder of the Reformed Druids, David Fisher, claimed at one point that he was already a “Third Order Druid Priest,” allegedly ordained while in high school. That is regarded as *highly unlikely* considering how much initial research he and the other founders conducted in the college library while they sculpted the Reformed Druid movement.

Fisher previously tried to create a fraternity, but Carleton College prohibits them. He was also a member of the Order of DeMolay which is an offshoot of Freemasonry for teens. In the RDNA there are a few hints that this brand of Druidry may have taken inspiration from DeMolay. Though now it is now very secular, in its early days, Carleton College was affiliated with Congregationalism. In March of 1963 the college issued the following mandate: *"Attendance is required at the College Service of Worship or at the Sunday Evening Program or at any regularly organized service of public worship. Each (ten week) term every student must attend seven of the services or religious meetings."* (Carleton Registrar, 1963, p. 138)

To satisfy the requirement, students needed to have clergy sign off on an attendance slip to prove they were there and submit the slips to one of the deans for credit. Fisher, a devout Episcopalian, felt that forcing people to attend a religious service was detrimental to any potential spiritual fulfillment (harkening back to the Latitudinarian philosophy). A small group of others (of numerous religious and non-religious affiliations) were inclined to agree. They banded together (some say on April Fools Day of 1963) and concocted a way to protest the mandate. They would meet outside, and anyone of any religion could attend their services, celebrating what they have in common and interpreting the content in their own way. Fisher would lead the services and sign the attendance slips for the attendees. They just needed a name and a theme.



Howard Cherniak proposed they call themselves *Druids*. He said that's what his parents always fill out on surveys that ask about religion, opting for the "other" category. It made sense with the idea of outdoor services. This is probably when Fisher claimed to already be a Druid priest, yet for some reason the founders still had to retreat to the library to research the ancient Druids, formulate rituals, and come up with a universalist philosophical system that virtually anyone could agree upon. By Beltane they had ironed out enough to get started.

They still didn't know much about the ancient Druids, so they added the caveat that they were *reformed* which gave them a lot more creative license. Furthermore **none of them were pagan**, which was another way they were reformed. They almost took the name of *Reformed Druids of America (RDA)*, but Cherniak reminded them he was Canadian, so to be more inclusive and politically correct they made it a continental phenomenon and the *Reformed Druids of North America* was born.

No Animal Sacrifice

Perhaps the most famous reason that the Druids call themselves *Reformed* is because of the near-schism that almost might have torn the Druids apart. On the third week (May 18, 1963) they decided to consecrate the stone altar they had built (and rebuilt due to vandals dubbed the "Anti-Druids"). Some Druids felt they should sacrifice a chicken since animal sacrifice was a custom of the ancient Druids. Cherniak reminded them that they were *Reformed* in part by departing from the controversial practices of old. After a bit of debate, for the sake of unity the Druids agreed to never perform animal or blood sacrifice. It is strictly forbidden in RDNA rituals.

Then came time to petition the deans for credit. The college's Dean of Women was accepting all of the women's chapel attendance slips signed by Fisher for the Reformed Druids. However, the Dean of Men was rejecting all slips submitted by the men. This double standard created a loophole for the Druids, and in their protest they would continue to claim religious discrimination until a time that their petition would be accepted. The plan was that if they would get recognition, they would denounce themselves as a hoax to highlight the absurdity of the chapel attendance mandate. In the meantime, some of the several dozen Druids were finding deep and meaningful spiritual experiences in this protest movement.

So, the RDNA Was a Joke, Right?

Just a little... but *semi-serious protest* is still more accurate. Another common premise in the RDNA is paraphrased as: *If you can't find humor in your own spirituality, what's the point? Lets add some perspective as to the validity of the Reformed Druid movement by looking at other important things that may have started out as a joke.*

- In 1887, Susanna M. Salter of Argonia, Kansas became the first woman elected as mayor of any

town in America, all as the result of a prank. The news became a sensation, after which other women began running for office with noteworthy success, setting the stage for the women's suffrage movement.

- The first wristwatches were a gimmicky fashion novelty that the *New York Times* described as a “*silly ass fad*” in 1916. During World War I, wristwatches proved indispensable in coordinating precision-timed tactics, whereas pocket watches would take a couple more seconds to fumble with.
- While sharing a few pints in 2004, a men's health charity, the *Movember Foundation* started out as a tongue-in-cheek way to raise awareness for prostate cancer by growing a mustache during the month of November. In the first 10 years they raised and donated over \$500 million to cancer research and other men's health causes.

So, even if the Druids at Carleton College started out as a semi-serious protest, or prank, or a hoax, or an all-out joke, Reformed Druidism is still valid and relevant today. The RDNA stands up as a Druid order and expressive form of spirituality in its own right.

Modern Druidry, You're Welcome

If it wasn't for the Reformed Druids of North America, the following diversity of Druid orders would have never been created:

- Due to disagreements over what Druidry should look like, in 1976 two offshoots called the *New Reformed Druids of North America* (NRDNA) and the *Schismatic Druids of North America* (SDNA) were created at the same time, both by Isaac Bonewits who had joined the RDNA in 1968. The NRDNA appealed to those who were more pagan leaning, and the SDNA appealed to those who were *exclusively* pagan. The SDNA also detached from its responsibility to the RDNA & NRDNA's *Council of Dalon Ap Landu*: the governing body of the Reformed Druid movement.
- Due to disagreements over what Druidry should look like, the SDNA faded out, and Isaac Bonewits adapted a few new principles to the SDNA concept creating *Ár nDraíocht Féin* (ADF) in 1983. ADF is geared toward hard polytheists and permits its members and Groves to honor the gods of any Indo-European hearth culture.
- Due to disagreements over what Druidry should look like, a schism took place in ADF and the *Henge of Keltria* (HoK) was created in 1988, focusing on just the Irish Celtic culture and mythological cycle.
- Due to disagreements over what Druidry should look like, a schism took place in HoK and in 1997 the *Order of White Oak* (OWO) was created as a Celtic Reconstructionist Druid order.
- Due to disagreements over what Druidry should look like, the *Reformed Druids of Gaia* (RDG) was created in 2006, *inspired* by the RDNA but not formally connected. The RDG created a Druid order for people beyond the continental boundaries of North America, though in truth, Reformed Druidry can be practiced anywhere; the *North America* part of the name nowadays merely serves to indicate its *origin*.

Contemporary Neo-Druidism Elsewhere

A year after the RDNA formed, across the pond in the UK in 1964 the *Order of Bards Ovates and Druids* (OBOD) was founded by Ross Nichols, splitting off from the *Ancient Druid Order* (ADO). OBOD and RDNA originally had no knowledge of each other's existence, so OBOD would certainly exist pretty much as it is today. OBOD focuses on the Welsh mythological cycle, and the mysticism and

sovereignty of the sacred landscape.

In 1976, The *Ancient Order of Masonic Druids in America* (AOMDA) would be revived after its long hiatus, changing its name to the *Ancient Order of Druids in America* (AODA). AODA focuses more on individual spirituality than on group spirituality, emphasizes ecological awareness, and is affiliated with the Celtic Gnostic Church. In 1979 the *British Druid Order* (BDO) would emerge in the UK with a similar structure to OBOD and took inspiration from numerous pagan and metaphysical organizations.

There are maybe a dozen additional small scale modern Druid orders and independent Groves around the globe, and we'd say they're probably all worth checking out or researching to see if they can help meet your spiritual needs. As far as I know, **all Druid orders (RDNA included) and Groves we've taken a look at do allow you to have cross-affiliations with other Druid groups** with one exception. Nevertheless it would be good due diligence to inquire, because if they don't permit cross-membership we'd personally avoid them as they might have additional freedom-limiting restrictions for their followers.

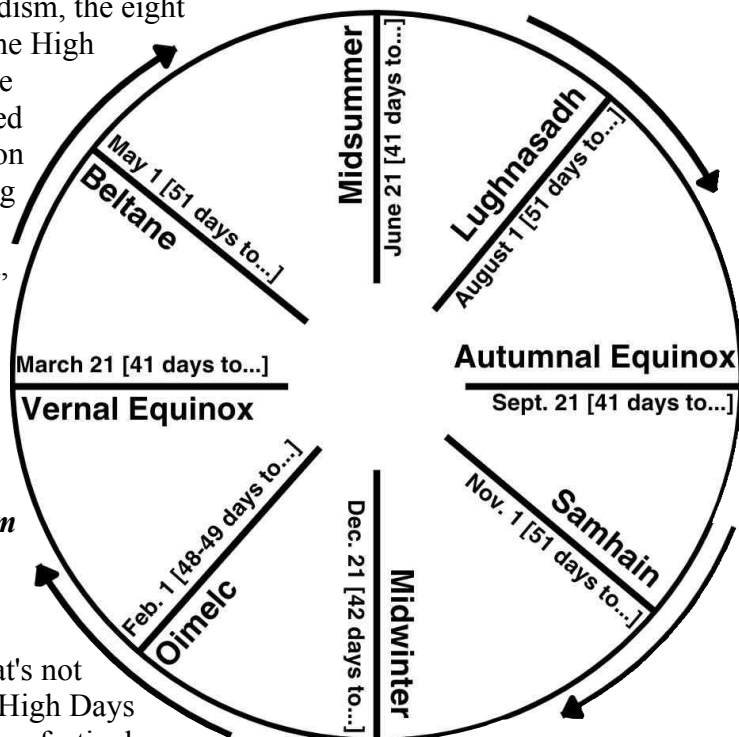
The one aforementioned exception is the *Celtic Druid Temple*, which requires you to write to the office of your existing religion that you no longer accept their beliefs and that you renounce your membership. They even have a standard "Excommunicate Me" form for Catholics who want to be trained in the *Ard Druí* Course. (Celtic Druid Temple, 2020)

The Holidays of the Wheel of the Year

Any reader familiar with the neopagan holidays already knows what we're talking about here. For others just getting started, this should be a helpful resource. There are eight major festivals in the western neopagan calendar. In Reformed Druidism, the eight Wheel of the Year festivals are referred to as the High Days. No shroom or stoner jokes, please. In the Wiccan tradition, the eight High Days are called Sabbats. You may have heard the Britishism "on high days and holidays," referring to something that happens on special occasions but not every week. The High Days actually still align, more or less, with modern secular and religious observances.

Let's refer to the diagram on the right, and start at the top and go sunwise (clockwise). **The name and spelling conventions used here are the standards in Reformed Druidism (and not necessarily the standard of other Druid orders),** and set for the northern hemisphere. First off you might notice that the sections in the wheel are unevenly spaced. That's not

just my shoddy graphics design skills, but the High Days actually aren't equidistant from each other. Some festivals are 41 days apart, and some are 51 days apart. The length of February also adds some inconsistency. This is why solstices and equinoxes are off a day sometimes. None of the calendar systems are perfect.



Midsummer is the summer solstice when the days are the longest, usually on June 21 when the Earth is tilted toward the sun over the tropic of Cancer. It is a time when the solar aspects are at their highest potential, metaphysically speaking. In Anglo-Saxon based practices such as Wicca, this holiday is also referred to as Litha, meaning *mild* (where we also get our word *lithe* from), and also the name for the month that occurred from modern June and July, likely with floating dates tied to the lunar cycle.

Lughnasadh (LOO-nah-sah) takes place on August 1, and is the first harvest of the fall season. It's Anglo-Saxon name is Lammas, meaning "loaf mass" which aligned with the wheat harvest. In Irish Gaelic, Lughnasadh is the name for the month of August, named after the god Lugh (much like the way our month of August is named after Roman emperor Augustus Caesar). Lughnasadh is sometimes referred to as the Festival of Lugh, which *he* created in memory of his foster mother, Tailtiu (TALL-chew).

The **Autumnal Equinox** is usually around September 21, and is when the Earth's equator aligns with the sun. The length of the day and night are both 12 hours at this time anywhere in the world, and the sun rises due east and sets due west, no matter your location (except inside the Ant/Arctic Circles where the sun will still be at the horizon at an angle). Basic local astronomy is amazing, and very Druidic. (Carr-Gomm, 2003) Equinox sunrises/sets also prove that the Earth is spheroid, and not flat. Equinoxes are regarded as metaphysical times of balance in the forces of nature. During the foundation

of Reformed Druidism, the Autumnal Equinox was left out of the book of customs, merely because the founders didn't see any real emphasis placed on this High Day by the ancient Druids, though there certainly is sufficient academic evidence for it now. At the time of the RDNA's foundation, the Autumnal Equinox occurred before the fall academic calendar even started at Carleton College, so the student Druids wouldn't even be on campus at the time, and they placed emphasis on group practices in Druidry. Today it is now celebrated in the RDNA. In Wicca, this High Day is usually called *Mabon*, which despite being named after a Welsh god, is a very modern designation of a High Day.

Samhain (SOW-win) takes place on November 1, and means "Summer's End" in Irish Gaelic. It is also the name for the month of November. It is also considered to be the Celtic New Year when everything is dying back or being culled as the Season of Sleep sets in, as the dormancy of winter resets everything. The *eve* of Samhain has its modern observance of All Hallows Eve, popularly known as Halloween. Technically, Samhain (like the other festivals) begins at sunset of the evening prior to the High Day. So if you celebrate Samhain on October 31, you're not wrong, especially if it's after dusk. Like all High Days, Samhain is a liminal time when the veil that separates our world and the Otherworld is the thinnest. Samhain being the Celtic New Year amplifies that liminality, and that veil can be absent entirely. This is why there is the superstition that spirits can cross between the worlds effortlessly at that time. It is a time-between-times. Sunset on the eve of Samhain enhances the already amplified liminality.

Midwinter is the winter solstice, when the length of day is the shortest in the northern hemisphere. This typically takes place on December 21 when the Earth is tilted toward the sun over the Tropic of Capricorn, and the southern hemisphere as its summer solstice. This is a time in the northern hemisphere when the solar aspects are at their weakest potential, metaphysically speaking. In Anglo Saxon and other Germanic/Scandinavian traditions, this is called Yule. Of course today, Yuletide has been absorbed into Christmas traditions. Linguistically, it's good to keep in mind that Yule is not a Celtic term, but a Germanic one. Still, lots of Druids will call this time of year Yule out of simplicity. After all, it has fewer syllables than *Midwinter Solstice*.

Oimelec (IMM-ulk, or depending on which dialect of Gaelic, EEM-olk, or even OY-velk) takes place on February 1 and is Irish Gaelic for "Ewe's Milk." This high-day is most commonly rendered as *Imbolc* which actually may have a different etymology translating to "in the belly" referring to pregnant ewes. This High Day coincides with lambing season. In the Irish climate, it also happens to take place when the first signs of spring are manifesting in the land. The daffodils and snowdrops begin to bloom, and by this time the days are getting noticeably longer. Saint Brigid's Day was later grafted onto this holiday, as well as Candlemas, when candles for spiritual use are blessed at this time. Brigid is a goddess of smithing and poetry. This adds creativity aspects to the holiday, when the introspective concepts of wintertime start to come to fruition. The secular observance of Groundhog Day is celebrated on February 2 in the United States and Canada as a means to informally predict how much longer winter will last.

The **Vernal Equinox** takes place around March 21, and is when the Earth's equator again aligns with the sun. The length of the day and night are both the same again. During the foundation of Reformed Druidism, both Equinoxes were left out of the *Book of Customs* (as mentioned above). At the time of the RDNA's foundation, the Vernal Equinox at Carleton College was always on the week of Spring Break, so the student Druids wouldn't even be on campus at the time. and they placed emphasis on group practices in Druidry. Today it is now celebrated in the RDNA as another time of balance in the

forces of nature. In Wicca and other Germanic branches of neo-paganism, this High Day is commonly referred to as Ostara, which is named after a *possibly* fictitious Germanic goddess proposed by Jacob Grimm (Hutton, 2008, p. 261)

Beltane (BELL-teyn) takes place on May 1, and is Irish Gaelic for "Bel's Fire" referring to the shining fire god Bel (the RDNA uses an obscure Victorian spelling: Be'al). This High Day marks the beginning of Summer (which is why *Midsummer* marks the *middle* of summer) and celebrates the fertility of the land. Beltane does not mark a new year, but Reformed Druidism was founded on Beltane of 1963, and is thus the RDNA's New Year according to our own calendar system. Beltane of 1963 marked Year of the Reform (Y.R.) 1, so technically the pre-planning weeks before hand were Y.R. 0. Beltane of 1964 marked Y.R. 2. So whichever numeric anniversary year it is for the RDNA, the Calendar year is that number plus one. The 50 year anniversary in 2013 was therefore Y.R. 51. How important is it to know what year it is in Reformed Druidism? It isn't, but if you're a Grove Preceptor or an ordained Third Order Druid, it's a good idea to at least know how to calculate it if someone asks you.

Relatively Unnecessary Minutiae of the Wheel

There are quite a few additional details to the wheel of the year, such as seasons and knowing what High Days are *fire* festivals, and which ones are *solar* festivals (especially since we have bonfires for *all* of them). Are these details super relevant to your practice? Perhaps in conversation, but really not that much in practice. Half of the High Days are fire festivals. Those are Beltane, Lughnasadh, Samhain, and Oimeic. The four with the Gaelic names are all **fire festivals**. The solstices and equinoxes are the **solar festivals**. Though naturally, we light stuff on fire for all eight of them! The solstices and equinoxes are also known as the **quarter days**. Each one occurs on the quarter of the year, give or take a week. The Celtic fire festivals are the **cross-quarter** days, which occur at the times about half way *across* the quarters.

High Day	Fire or Solar	Quarter or Cross	Season	Waters of...
Beltane	Fire Festival	Cross-Quarter	Samradh	Life
Midsummer	Solar Festival	Quarter	Samradh	Life
Lughnasadh	Fire Festival	Cross-Quarter	Foghamhar	Life
Autumnal Equinox	Solar Festival	Quarter	Foghamhar	Life
Samhain	Fire Festival	Cross-Quarter	Geimredh	Sleep
Midwinter	Solar Festival	Quarter	Geimredh	Sleep
Oimeic	Fire Festival	Cross-Quarter	Earrach	Sleep
Vernal Equinox	Solar Festival	Quarter	Earrach	Sleep

The Gaelic Seasons of the Year

In Reformed Druidism specifically, the seasons of the year are [rarely] referred to by their Irish Gaelic names of the seasons. Beltane begins the season of **Samradh** (SOW-ra) meaning *summer*, which includes the festival of Midsummer. Lughnasadh begins the season of **Foghamhar** (FOE-war) meaning *harvest*, which includes the festival of the Autumnal Equinox. Samhain begins the season of **Geimredh** (GEV-ra) meaning *winter*, which includes the festival of Midwinter. Oimeic begins the season of **Earrach** (ARE-rakh) meaning *hind [end of winter]* and is thus *spring* which includes the festival of the

Vernal Equinox. In the RDNA it's generally beneficial to at least recognize these terms when you hear or read them, but there's no need to remember to use the Gaelic terminology; spring, summer, fall, and winter in plain English are just fine.

The Summer and Winter Halves of the Year

Lastly in the table there are the times where the Waters-of-Life and the Waters-of-Sleep are used. This is something that you will encounter much more often in Reformed Druidism, *and* is much easier to remember. The RDNA year is divided into two halves: the summer half and the winter half. While some people might suggest that the equinoxes are a logical cutoff between the two, they're not. Beltane is when the summer half of the year begins, and Samhain is when the winter half of the year begins.

From Beltane up to Samhain, the Waters-of-Life are consecrated in ritual, to reflect the bounty of life that is present upon the Earth-Mother. Those are color coded in red on the table, corresponding to the red clerical ribbons that are worn by Third Order Druids in the RDNA. Then from Samhain up to Beltane (color coded in white on the last column of the table), the Waters-of-Sleep are consecrated in ritual, to reflect that the Earth is a mother that sleeps but never dies.

In RDNA ceremony at Beltane, Third Order Druids will exchange their white clerical ribbons for their red ones, and they will consecrate the Waters-of-Life (with a notably higher ratio of whiskey to water) instead of the Waters-of-Sleep. In RDNA ceremony at Samhain, Third Order Druids will exchange their red clerical ribbons for their white ones, and they will consecrate the Waters-of-Sleep (which do not contain whiskey) instead of the Waters-of-Life. In the other three festivals of the summer half of the year, RDNA clergy will just wear their red ribbons, with no need to change them out. Likewise for the other three winter festivals, clergy will just wear their white ribbons.

The RDNA Belief System

What are the Two Tenets of Reformed Druidism?

In the Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA), there are only Two Basic Tenets of Belief:

- 1. The object of the search for spiritual truth, which is a universal and a never-ending search, may be found through the Earth-Mother, which is Nature, but this is one way among many.*
- 2. And great is the importance, which is of a spiritual importance, of Nature, which is the Earth-Mother, for it is one of the objects of creation, and with it we do live, even as we struggle through life do we come face-to-face with it.*

A Common Variant on the Tenets

The tenets in the above format are slightly simplified and politically correct variations of the original formatting as outlined in *The Book of the Law 1:5-6*. There is another variation which is notably different and is referenced from time to time in the literature of the Druids. It is presented below from a 1965 informational flyer that the Druids had on hand for those curious about the Reformed Druid movement.

- 1. One of the many ways in which the object of Man's search for religious truth can be found is through Nature: the Earth-Mother.*
- 2. Nature, being one of the primary concerns in Man's life and struggle, and being one of the*

objects of creation, is important to Man's spiritual quests.

The Tenets in Plain English

1. *Spirituality can be found in Nature*
2. *Nature is important to my spirituality*

The Tenets Oversimplified, yet a favorite among many Reformed Druids

1 & 2: Nature is Good, and likewise unto the first, Nature is Good!

The Oversimplified Tenets, Adjusted for Realists and Agnostics

1 & 2: Nature is Nature

This objective interpretation appeals to agnostic and atheist Druids. It is much more scientific, as nature can sometimes seem ambivalent and also hazardous. **You certainly can be an atheist and a Druid.** There is nothing written that says you have to believe in the old gods or any gods at all in order to call yourself a Reformed Druid. For an atheist or agnostic Druid, all references to deities are metaphors for our perceptions of the (still immensely powerful) forces of nature. Metaphors still have extensive value as they inspire our imagination and curiosity. In lieu of what many call *spiritual* or *religious* experiences, the energizing *endorphin rush* of being in nature and celebrating our existence throughout the passage of space and time is just as significant.

No doubt some of you have noticed some loaded words in the tenets: *religious, creation, and man's*. Let's take a closer look at those terms to expound on their broader implications.

Religious: Considering that Reformed Druidism wasn't intended to be a *religion*, it's a bit ironic that it is mentioned in the tenets. To some members of the Reform it is a philosophy or a way of life, while for others it *is* a religion. At the very least it's a convenient word to use for a philosophical group who has *priests* who preside over ritual ceremonies and sing chants that have verses like *O Earth-Mother we praise thee* or like *Hail Belenos, to thee all praise!*

So in some renditions of the Two Basic Tenets, *religious* truth is swapped out for *spiritual* truth because lots of Druids are spiritual but not religious. It can be argued that if you're already religious, you're probably a spiritual person, too. Conversely, it's less likely for one to be religious but not very spiritual. At that point people are just going through the motions. If you don't like the use of the words *religious* or *spiritual*, you could substitute *higher meaning* or another mystical catchphrase that suits you, and it will still retain the core essence of the tenets.

Creation: The Earth-Mother is *one of the objects of creation*. Long story short this is open to interpretation. According to one of the founders, Norman Nelson said:

"...we never bothered about the implications of that; a creator." (Scharding et al., 2004, p. 68)

Likewise one of the later founders, David Frangquist stated:

"The phrase "objects of creation" does not necessarily imply a single Creator, but it does imply an important link between the spiritual and the material realms." (Scharding et al., 2004, p. 528)

We always like to point out that even the real, scientific, cosmic forces that were unleashed at the moment of the Big Bang led to the eventual chaotic *creation* of the Earth. It really doesn't matter how any given Druid interprets the word. When the founders pieced together the tenets, they wanted to have something that people of almost any religion could agree with on a basic level. And while we're on the topic of creation, **you certainly can be a Christian and a Druid, too.** David Fisher went to seminary after graduating from Carleton College and became an Episcopal priest.

Man's: In the middle of the last century it was inequitably a "man's world," and it was part of the status quo back then to say things like *mankind* or "the object of *man's* search." The Druids were quite the progressive lot though. Not only were they immersed in their own social justice cause of fighting religious discrimination, but eventually became more politically correct in their language and practices. The founders had ordained two women to the priesthood by 1965: Mary "Dannie" Hotz and Deborah Gavrin (Deborah later married David Frangquist, and together they are still helping Reformed Druidry flourish today. **Marta Peck (at right in photo) became Arch-Druid in 1968, making her the first ordained female leader of any modern Druid order.**



DRUIDS ON HILL OF THREE OAKS
Fox, Savitzky and Peck appease the earth mother
(Bastasz, 1968, p. 1)

Of all the leaders of the Mother Grove at Carleton College between 1963 and 2023, about 49% have been women, elected in accordance with the terms of the Grove Constitution. The original language of the tenets is still preserved in the writings of the Druids for historical context, though now numerous non-sexist, politically correct variations abound, keeping up with the times and living up to the legacy of inclusivity. The Mother Grove of the Reformed Druids of North America has also been progressive in that they have elected two transgender Arch-Druids, another first among modern Druid orders.

The Reformed Druids of North America has a very flexible or "open source" approach to spirituality. The closest thing to *dogma* in Reformed Druidism are the Two Basic Tenets themselves. Wicca has the *Wiccan Rede* of nearly four-dozen verses (which many eclectic Wiccans might eschew at least a few of). Asatru has the *Nine Noble Virtues* which aren't necessarily a list of beliefs but rather a code of conduct to strive for. *Conservative* Abrahamic faiths have hundreds of rules, covenants, and commandments. The Two Basic Tenets are simpler, easy to remember, and still plenty virtuous.

Reformed Druidry is *inclusive* by nature, and anyone can be a Reformed Druid if they believe in the Two Basic Tenets. Organizationally, philosophically, and ritualistically, there's a lot more that Reformed Druidry has to offer for those who seek it out (which this training program will cover), but many find satisfaction with just the Two Basic Tenets. If you too have found complete satisfaction as a Druid after reading the tenets, then there is no need for you to complete this training program. If you have a thirst to press on in this course, we are excited to hear that! Well, if we were there in person we'd be excited to hear that, but you get the idea.

Devotional: Applied Philosophy



For your first devotional exercise in this training program, we have the time-honored petition of the Two Basic Tenets. The tenets are definitively all that you really “need” in order to be a Reformed Druid. So, in the numerous ways of interpreting the tenets, do you agree with them?

Now they who subscribe to the Basic Tenets of Reformed Druidism, as prescribed in the Book of the Law, they are accepted into the body of Druidism which is the organizational body of Druidism only.

—Customs 1:2 (Scharding, *et al.*, 2004, p. 5)

Attestation:

I understand and agree with the Two Basic Tenets of Reformed Druidism.

By checking the above box, you are now part of the organizational body of Reformed Druidism. By making a personal declaration that you believe in the tenets, it means *you are a Reformed Druid*. There's a saying in the RDNA that goes *Once a Druid, always a Druid*. That is pretty much going to be the case until the unlikely event that you start hating nature, which we obviously hope will never be the eventuality for anyone. In Unit 2 of the training program you'll read through *The Customs of the Druids* and see that you may be able to take things to the next level as a Reformed Druid, by entering the First Order. For now, you're a member of the *Order of the Acorn*. Ahead in this training program is a rite of passage you can use as a self initiation or self dedication ritual if you like.

As we had mentioned, by checking that box, you are now *organizationally* a Reformed Druid as described in *Customs* Chapter One of *The Chronicles of the Foundation*. The chapter continues that one can be part of the *spiritual* body of Reformed Druidism by partaking of the Waters-of-Life in ritual, even if you haven't attested belief in the tenets yet. Furthermore if you accomplish both: to declare belief in the tenets *and* partake of the Waters-of-Life in ritual with a Third Order Druid present, then you would be part of the *whole and complete body* of the membership of the Reformed Druids.

The Venn diagram on the right should help a little. The left circle with the acorn represents the Order of the Acorn, for those who declare that they agree with the Two Basic Tenets. People in that left circle are *organizationally* members of the RDNA only, yet still members.



The right circle with the chalice represents those who have attended a spiritual service (ritual) in the RDNA and have drunk from the Waters-of-Life, but didn't declare their belief in the Two Basic Tenets. That's fairly common, especially among visitors. It's totally fine, too, but by partaking of the Waters in the services, they technically join as *spiritual* members only, but not as organizational members. Then lastly for those who attend rituals, if they both partake of the waters *and* declare their belief in the Two Basic Tenets, they are consecrated as a First Order Druid by the presiding Third Order Druid. That puts them inside both circles of the Venn diagram with the numeral 1, and then are thus of "the whole and complete body of membership of the Reformed Druids."

Rites of Passage: The Order of the Acorn

What is a Rite of Passage?

A rite of passage is any type of ritual or ceremony that marks a transformative moment in someone's life. Graduation ceremonies, marriages, mitzvahs, confirmations, inaugurations, going away or retirement parties, *et cetera*, are all examples of common modern-day rites of passage. Arnold van Gennep, an early 20th century ethnographer, outlined that rites of passage typically have three main segments: *separation*, *liminality*, and *incorporation*. In some rites of passage the three phases can sometimes blur together, or may seem nonexistent. The three phases can seem clear cut or vague and amorphous, given the wide variety of rites. Not everything will fit the pattern perfectly, though in most cases this will make sense.

The initiate must first remove themselves or be removed from the current status quo. This is the moment of *separation* from whatever it is they are leaving behind as they embrace change. Once the ceremony has begun, there's a point that the initiate is at some sort of metaphysical crossroads. They have made a symbolic step in a new direction, but the experience isn't over yet. Maybe in the ceremony, they just did something they've never done before, or declared something like "I do." Yet something more must be done before completion. They are in a gray area: a transitional state of *liminality* and the finalization step is yet to come. Once the ceremony is at its end, something seals the deal. A declaration, handshake, kiss, bestowal of something, receiving a title, certificate, or award, or one of any number of possible actions marks the achievement. At this moment, the initiate begins the *incorporation* of their new phase of existence. Everything leading to that moment has now come to fruition, and they emerge as a new person on some level. (Ayot, 2015)

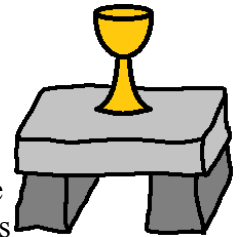
Thus We Come to The Order of the Acorn

Originally to become a Reformed Druid, you had to drink the Waters-of-Life in a Grove service in the presence of an ordained Third Order Druid. Eventually, rites of passage were created for formal consecration or ordination to the First, Second, and Third Orders. Founder David Fisher already claimed to be a Third Order Druid Priest from high school, but like we mentioned earlier, that's highly unlikely. Nevertheless, even ancient Druidry was made up at some point, so we like to say Fisher has *founder's privilege*.

However, the rules for entering the First Order and above always implied the initiate had to be physically present. This poses a problem for those who want to become a Reformed Druid but live in remote places like Nipper's Harbour, Newfoundland or North Platte, Nebraska. Luckily for everyone, Mike the Fool (30th Arch-Druid of Carleton Grove Emeritus) created the Order of the Acorn in 2002. It is a rite of passage for self dedication to the "Zero Order" of the RDNA. It is geared toward Druids who are solo whether by circumstance (geographic isolation) or by choice.

Two Ritual Variations

In 2015, Oakdale Grove adapted the script (because not much in the RDNA is set in stone) for Druids who join as members during the winter half of the year, which is a time when First Order Ordinations usually don't take place. That way, new members had a quick rite of passage to welcome them as members of the Grove. Then on or after Beltane they could enter the First Order in traditional fashion. Oakdale Grove's version could also be useful for starting a Protogrove with druidic friends.



Order of the Acorn Ritual: Original Version

This original version was created by Mike the Fool in 2002. You are *not* required to perform this ritual for the OBF training program, but it is offered here for those who desire to use it in self-dedication. It does not bind you to any future obligations other than perhaps a reverence for Nature.

Praise

(Insert whatever warm-ups you think necessary. Perhaps a song.)

Invocation

O Dalon Ap Landu and Earth-Mother, I know not the ways of the Druids, yet I wish to become one. I cannot join their activities, yet I wish to act. I know not when I'll enter Orders, but I wish to start now. Please bless my search, and fill me with wisdom and Awareness.

Offering

(of some seeds, preferably acorns)

Declaration of the Two Basic Tenets of Reformed Druidism

I wish to be a Reformed Druid, I believe that:

1. The object of the search for spiritual truth, which is a universal and a never-ending search, may be found through the Earth Mother, which is Nature; but this is one way, yea, one way among many.
2. And great is the importance, which is of a spiritual importance, of Nature, which is the Earth Mother; for it is one of the objects of Creation, and with it we do live, yea, even as we do struggle through life are we come face to face with it.

It is an unclear path that I begin today, but I will learn by doing. I offer you my activities in the time to come as a sacrifice, whether it be for a few days or many years. During this upcoming year, I intend to do the following: _____.

(Something along the lines of how you plan on growing as a Druid)

Please show me your favor, by bringing the path of the proper Druid across mine, in the proper way, at the proper time, at the proper place. If I am to follow this course by myself, so be it with great wisdom and small discoveries from your lessons around me.

Meditation

(Think on the signs that may appear during this ceremony.)

Conclusion

Be there with me through these trying times. Thank you.



Order of the Acorn Ritual: Oakdale Grove Version

This version was adapted in 2015 by members of Oakdale Grove and was modified for scenarios where the initiate has an *assistant* who can read this script for them. Again, you are *not* required to perform this rite for the OBF program. You might consider using this if you are creating a new RDNA protogrove as a way of welcoming in each member (including yourself).

Opening Declaration

An acorn aspires to grow to be a mighty oak, reflecting outwardly the immortal essence that is known only to the acorn. As ordinations to the First Order customarily require a Third Order Druid to be present, the Order of the Acorn offers kinship to those who may be solo by choice or by circumstance.

Praise

(Insert whatever warm-ups you think necessary. Perhaps a song.)

Invocation

O Dalon Ap Landu, O Earth Mother, attend us now. Come and dwell within our Hearts. Open our minds, eyes and ears; as we gather in the ground of our being in the face of Belenos, the sun. Enkindle in our hearts thy flaming spark which is perpetually prevailing throughout all life. Is there anyone present today who wishes to enter the Order of the Acorn and be counted among the members of the Reformed Druids of North America? [*option:* members of the Protogrove] If so, please present yourself to the center of the circle. You know not the ways of the Druids, yet you wish to become one. You desire to join our activities interwoven with your own search for truth. O Earth-Mother, please bless this seeker in their search, and fill them with Wisdom and Awareness.

Offering

- Have you a sacrifice for the Earth-Mother? If so, offer it up as a token of your spiritual quest. (*Seeker offers a small plant-based sacrifice, preferably acorns*)
- Do you wish to become a Reformed Druid [*option:* and join the fellowship of this Protogrove?]
- Do you believe Nature is Good and look towards her for Knowledge, Awareness, and Inspiration?

It is an unclear path you begin today, but you will learn by doing. Offer the Earth-Mother your activities in the times to come, whether it be for a few days or many years. During the turn of the wheel of the year, may the Earth-Mother show you her favor, guiding you along the path to become a Reformed Druid of the First Order, in the proper way, at the proper time, at the proper place. If you ever must follow this path by yourself, so be it with great wisdom and small discoveries from your lessons around you.

Meditation

Think on the signs that appeared during this ceremony and what may appear after.

Conclusion

May the Earth-Mother be with you during these trying times. You are hereby a Druid in the Order of the Acorn [*option:* and a member of _____ Protogrove].

On the Orders, or "Ranks" in the RDNA



Most Druid orders have their own ranking system for their members, based on varying levels of initiation. A rather common three-tiered ranking system in Druidry is the one where the candidate studies for a year and meets certain benchmarks before they achieve the level of Bard. Then they can undergo another year of study before they achieve the level of Ovate, or Seer. Then they undergo a third year of study before they achieve the level of Druid. Wicca, a modern religion based on ceremonial witchcraft, has three *degrees* of study, each of which is also a yearlong process before the student is initiated to each degree.

The Three Main Ranks of RDNA

In the Reformed Druids of North America, there are three main ranks, and a few dozen others, most of which are special interest levels. Some of those levels require that the Druid is ordained as clergy. In the RDNA, the ranks are properly referred to as Orders. The three Orders of the RDNA are:

1. First Order
2. Second Order
3. Third Order

First Order Druid is the title bestowed upon anyone who attends an RDNA Grove's ritual and gets initiated. It could be their first day ever of exploring Druidry; there is no wait time or prerequisite study. The Grove must have a presiding Third Order Druid (who is usually also *elected* by the members as the Grove's Arch-Druid) who consecrates diluted whiskey as the Waters-of-Life (Between the high days of Beltane and Samhain). A non-alcoholic alternative should be available for those who cannot have alcohol. The seeker can actively petition the Arch-Druid by reciting the Two Basic Tenets, but the Arch-Druid usually recites the Tenets and then asks if the candidate agrees with them. When the candidate answers in the affirmative, they drink the Waters-of-Life, and are declared to be a First Order Druid.

The initiate has no additional responsibilities or obligations: neither to the Grove, nor to the RDNA. Many initiates might then return to their solo practice, or they might join the camaraderie of the Grove. They could also form their own RDNA Protogrove, especially if they traveled far for their initiation. So one of the major differences between the RDNA and other modern Druid orders is that in the RDNA, **the First Order initiation can be immediate**. Another difference is that it should take place in the summer half of the year. A third noteworthy difference is that most Druids in the RDNA prefer to remain a First Order Druid. There's no huge push to achieve the Second or the Third Orders, mostly because of the additional responsibilities of those Orders.

Second Order Druid is the title bestowed upon any existing First Order Druid who gets initiated to the Second Order after preparation and feeling a call to serve. The Second Order necessitates planning in advance for both the candidate and for the Arch-Druid. The rite of passage has additional questions asked of the candidate, is anointed five times, and drinks an undiluted chalice of whiskey as the Waters-of-Life. Again, non-alcoholic alternatives should be discussed and made available if needed.

This rite of initiation may also resemble hazing, considering the drinking of undiluted alcohol in a not-so-small quantity. There's no prescribed volume of whiskey in the RDNA, but for this rite of passage, Oakdale Grove limits the chalice to two shots. This is where we remind readers that the RDNA was indeed founded by college kids, but we take the safety of our Second Order candidates very seriously

and will even ask if they require an alternative to alcohol.

The big reason that not many Reformed Druids enter the Second Order is because that is for candidates who feel a higher calling to serve their community as ordained clergy. **The Second Order questions entail the candidates attesting to their oath of ministerial service.** Not everyone wants to be clergy, and not everyone feels that Druidic ministries are something they'd be comfortable with doing, especially on the long term. The Second Order itself is *not* considered ordained clergy. If anything, the Second Order is analogous to an Episcopal *Deacon* or even a *Deacon* in a DeMolay (Freemasonry "lite" for children of Freemasons) lodge.

In Christian denominations that have the role of a Deacon, that role is often referred to as *Lay Clergy* for members of a church who can lead certain parts of services or provide religious instruction and liturgical readings. Deacons don't have to be ordained, but some are ordained but prefer to remain a Deacon. Deacons in DeMolay are there to assist candidates as they go through their initiations. The RDNA's main founder, David Fisher, was a member of DeMolay, thus we can deduce that there are two likely bases of inspiration here. So very much like Deacons, Second Order Druids also have a modicum of responsibility.

In a Reformed Druid Grove, aside from the elected offices of Arch-Druid and Server, there is also the elected officer of Preceptor. The Preceptor must be at least of the Second Order. Their role is to assist the Arch-Druid in ceremonies, and they have a speaking role in the ritual scripts. The Preceptor is also responsible for handling all secular Grove matters. Basically that means they're also a bit of a Grove secretary. Furthermore, in Oakdale Grove, the Preceptor should also serve as a mentor and a public relations spokesperson. In theory, they should be able to lead an hourlong "RDNA 101" seminar at a public library to help others learn about Reformed Druidism. That is never a requirement that they speak publicly about Druidry, but hypothetically they should be able to do it.

Since all Second Order Druids are thus candidates to be a Preceptor, in Oakdale Grove, we want our Second Order Druids to have thoroughly attested to their ministerial commitment. That means that they should also be knowledgeable in the history, laws, customs, meditations, and liturgies of the RDNA, and able to serve as Preceptor if need be. Other than those responsibilities, the Second Order Druid is essentially preparing to enter the Third Order.

Third Order Druid is the title bestowed upon any existing Second Order Druid who gets ordained to the RDNA priesthood. The Third Order has the official nickname of the *Order of Dalon Ap Landu*. The candidate's preparedness is assessed by an existing Third Order Druid. Originally in the RDNA, the *Council* of Dalon Ap Landu, the governing body of the Reformed Druid movement, would collectively review the candidate's preparedness to determine if they would undergo the rite of passage and receive ordination. Autonomy was ultimately left to the individual Third Order Druid who could decide on their own when their candidate is ready. As a courtesy, it is still important to *inform* the Council of any new ordainees, because that is the only main rank of the RDNA where membership is meticulously tracked (to prevent charlatan infiltration, which has been attempted multiple times before).

If a member of the Order of Dalon Ap Landu determines that the candidate is prepared, the candidate will undergo an All-Night Vigil. This is a minimum of a 7 hour period before sunrise where the candidate is awake, meditating all night, outdoors, communing with the Earth-Mother. Food is not permitted, nor are caffeine or any mind-altering substances. It is a period of semi-supervised fasting,

under the watch of at least one Third Order Druid (the more the merrier). The candidate is free from electronics, electricity, indoor plumbing, clocks, or any other modern conveniences. At dawn if they didn't fall asleep, the candidate would then be ordained as a Third Order Druid Priest, receiving their liturgical vestments of their red and white shoulder stoles (ribbons).

Third Order Druid has the authority to consecrate the Waters-of-Life, to ordain others up to the Third Order, to establish new formal Groves (anyone can establish a Protogrove), and has additional authorizations as part of their ministerial role. Oakdale Grove gives out formal credentials for Third Order members (aged 21+) to file as a Marriage Officiant in the State of Minnesota, providing the candidate with the requisite *Letter of Good Standing* and an ordination certificate bearing the Grove Seal and their legal name. They are not required to register as clergy with the state unless they wish to be able to conduct weddings within Minnesota. Most other states have more relaxed or nonexistent requirements for registered clergy. In order to conduct *regular* rituals there is no need for them to register with the state, only for marriages.

Other Ranks in the RDNA

Sometimes there are those who want to join, but can't travel (or can't travel very far) in order to be initiated to the First Order in person. In those cases, an informal "Zero Order Druid" level was established for the RDNA in 2002. We really don't call it the Zero Order because it sounds mean, but we do call it the **Order of the Acorn**. This informal order within the RDNA is indeed one rank below that of First Order. For many druids who are solo by choice or by circumstance, it has become a meaningful self-dedication rite of passage that anyone can conduct solo, or they could get a trusted friend (or a fellow Protogrove member) to recite an adaptation of the script. The self-dedication script is actually a bit more elaborate than the First Order initiation script.

Oakdale Grove uses an adaptation of it in the winter to welcome new members until spring. Rites of passage for First, Second, and Third Orders are usually not conducted in the winter half of the year. Sometimes we have new people come to the Grove in the winter months, who enter the Order of the Acorn. They will later join the First Order once initiations are reopened at or after Beltane.

Higher Orders of the Priesthood

There are ten numbered higher orders of the priesthood above the Third Order.

4. Fourth Order – Order of Grannos
5. Fifth Order – Order of Braciaca
6. Sixth Order – Order of Belenos
7. Seventh Order – Order of Sirona
8. Eighth Order – Order of Taranis
9. Ninth Order – Order of Llyr
10. Tenth Order – Order of Danu
11. Eleventh Order – Order of the Morrigan
12. Twelfth Order – Order of Arawn
13. Thirteenth Order – Order of Aengus

These orders have their own areas of focus, and serve to inspire further spiritual inquiry. The Fourth through Seventh Orders were populated in the early years of the Reformed Druid movement. At that

time, the Eighth through Tenth Orders were proposed and named, but were not officially populated by any members of the priesthood. The Eleventh through Thirteenth Orders were proposed within the last two decades, but only the Order of the Morrigan has three non-clergy devotees in it as *Acolytes* of the Order. The higher orders were created numerically. They ran out of candidates after the Order of Sirona was established. Each higher order has its own council, and that council must vote with a minimum of three members to appoint someone to the next higher order.

That means that in order to populate the Order of the Morrigan with actual clergy, the Council of Sirona needs three members to vote to appoint someone to the Order of Taranis. Then the Council of Taranis needs at least three votes to appoint someone to the Order of Llyr, and so on. Once a higher order is formally established, any Third Order Druid could then be initiated directly to another populated higher order. They would not have to go through the higher orders sequentially once the orders are formally established. After being ordained to the Third Order in 2013, I was ordained directly to the Sixth Order in 2015, and the Seventh Order in 2017. As of 2023, the Order of Sirona is still trying to build a council. There are two members, and we'd need three before we could vote to appoint someone to the Order of Taranis.

Non Numerical Higher Orders and Side Orders

Luckily, at some point, some Reformed Druids began to establish non-numerical higher orders. Those are special interest orders that don't need to be established sequentially and don't require their own councils. As we mentioned earlier, there are a few dozen higher orders. If the Order requires the candidate be clergy, they are called higher orders. If they aren't required to be clergy, they are sometimes referred to as side orders (and sometimes short orders or tall orders just for the sake of a pun).

A Few Non-Numerical Higher Orders Served by Oakdale Grove (subject to additions)

- Order of Ogmios
- Order of the Mistletoe
- Order of Belisama
- Order of Arvalus
- order of druids minor (always lowercase)
- Order of Hephaestus

The Politics of Druidism



Anyone can be a Druid. In theory, Reformed Druidism should be able to transcend all political orientations. Some combinations of Druidry and politics, however, would seem to be paradoxically mutually exclusive. There remains a largely unanswered question on how people of some political beliefs can reconcile their support for the beauty of the Earth-Mother, and their support for *seemingly* contrary political and economic opinions. We will **not** say they *can't* be a Druid. As Reformed Druids, that would be out of line.

However, since Druidism *is a faith in questioning, not in answering*, we can only seek to better our understanding of those who think differently, and with compassion, even if we perceive it to be contrary to the Earth-Mother's well-being. Everyone starts somewhere, and we all have much to learn. To quote a line from the liturgy, *we seek to further the process of evolution in ourselves and in our groups, and throughout all time and space*. That means our views can and will change. Perhaps people's seemingly contrary understandings will evolve to harmonize more amicably with the Earth-Mother in due time. Maybe we will gain insights into what validates their Druidism by their own perceptions. We should strive to achieve this Awareness with an open heart, as reacting in anger would only cloud our sense of reason and harden ourselves against them, thereby limiting our own growth as well.

A Real Life Example

In the time leading up to the United States 2020 presidential election, somewhere on social media, Druids mentioned something to the effect of *protecting the Earth-Mother against those who would harm her*, paired with an obvious political stance. There was one individual, let's call him "Cletus," who expressed an opinion that Druids should stay *apolitical*. Furthermore, Cletus said to "stay on point" and stated that making political statements "cheapens the message." Ok, we get that. For now, let's just ignore the attempt of Cletus to censor a fellow Druid. Yes, it's un-Reformed of him to censor another, but there's a bigger issue in the perception that Druidry does not or should not intersect with politics.

Some people are into Druidry solely for a single aspect: maybe solely for escapism or solely because Druidry tends to be anarchic. Statistically, most Druids happen to be liberal in terms of ideology. Reformed Druidry has an added appeal to libertarians in particular: in the aforementioned term *anarchic*. This is understandable because the RDNA was founded to *protest a mandate* of coerced religion. It was designed to appeal to *anyone* (regardless of political or religious belief), and the last vote of the Council of Dalon Ap Landu included the interpretation that individual Groves have their own autonomy (decentralized powers). Libertarians view this as aligning with their virtue of *self-determination*. We will again declare here that *anyone can be a druid*. And as Reformed Druids, we come together to learn from each other and experience new perspectives which *should* lead us to a heightened sense of Awareness and empathy, thus bettering ourselves collectively in the process.

Though since around 2016, there have been growing numbers of *far right* Druids for some reason. Some of them overtly espouse views that are contrary to the premise of the diversity, equity, and inclusion that have been central to the spiritual basis of Reformed Druidism. Some express views that are self-admittedly (and sometimes *proudly*) extremist. Often they seem uncomfortable disclosing *how* they reconcile Druidry with voting against druidic environmental interests. Now the RDNA wasn't founded as an ecological movement, but founder David Fisher stated there was a concern for ecology

from the start (see "Enter the Reformed Druids" below for the full quote).

The right-wing extremists in the wider Druid movement (not just the RDNA) seem to be aware of their hypocrisy and just don't want to come to terms with it, or they just don't *care*. The problems continue with an alarmingly increasing number of white supremacists trying to racially glorify their brand of Druidry as a "Native European Religion." It is an innocuous buzz phrase they use to locate others like themselves, as well as recruiting others to their viewpoints, sometimes being as subtle as possible.

In 1963 when the Reformed Druid movement was founded on a liberal arts college campus, they never had to worry about Neo-Nazis. They only had the few "Anti-Druid" vandals who toppled their altars when the Druids weren't there. Even then, the Druids avoided the *us versus them* mentality and said little more than "beware." Sometime circa 2019, the Council of Dalon Ap Landu was discussing the problem of Neo-Nazis trying to get into Reformed Druidism. The answer was a resounding *rebuke* against Neo-Nazis in the RDNA. Unfortunately, there weren't enough members of the council present to constitute a quorum in order to vote and make an official statement, but we were reminded that individual Groves have the autonomy to declare such, thus Oakdale Grove issued a statement against Neo-Nazism and other inflammatory rhetoric.

The Paradox of Tolerance

"If we extend unlimited tolerance, even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society, against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them." (Popper, 2012, p. 581). Nazism has already infiltrated and caused irreparable damage to Germanic neopaganism such as in Asatru and Heathenism (both Norse and Germanic). Druidry is also in the early stages of being coopted. By being "tolerant," Druidry as a movement would inevitably undergo the same internal destruction that is happening in the Asatru/Heathen communities. It's not that we need to stop it before it becomes a problem; it *already is* a problem. *One or more* person(s) who are part of a hate group is a problem. Zero would be better. We need *good natured* members to be able to feel safe in the RDNA, and in wider Druidry. Thus, we must prevent extremists from causing further harm, and urging them to *Reform* from their harmful ideologies.

Modern Druidry Has Always Been Political

Druidry, **a nature-based spirituality**, is political, *de facto*. It always has been. Look at the Industrial Revolution as it began three centuries ago, and look at how the Druidry Revival movement sprang up as a knee-jerk reaction to it. Those early modern druids saw the destruction and exploitation of the Earth-Mother expanding exponentially. Profit and power were sold to the highest bidder with no regard for stewardship or sustainability, and the expansionist industrialization quickly became a hallmark of capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism.

As Druids, we should be concerned for the environment. Over our lifetimes we see our own cities grow and expand. We see farms and beloved woodland bulldozed for suburbs of houses that most people can't even afford. We see winding country roads get re-graded, cutting into hillsides and filling in low areas with meter upon meter of cement, gravel, and steel pilings just to straighten out the road. New scars upon the Earth-Mother open up as we quarry and mine the land. The water clarity is diminished by mining runoff that is deemed "within acceptable tolerances" while beloved fishing spots dwindle and succumb to extirpation.

Enter the Reformed Druids

In his 2004 interview, founder David Fisher recalled that Reformed Druidism

“...has very little ethical importance, except sort of benign concern for nature and ecology. Perhaps some pacifism.” (Scharding, *et al.*, 2004, p. 914)

In tandem with that notion, the Reformed Druid movement began in 1963 as a protest against the conservatism of coerced religion. In the early 1970s, Richard Shelton was the 8th Arch-Druid of Carleton College Grove and Chairperson of the Council of Dalon Ap Landu. He wrote *Exorcism in Time of War*, which invoked the *Curse of the Druids*, the latter of which is a well-guarded secret in the Reform. The Druids were protesting the Vietnam War, and Shelton created a ritual spell in his effort to put an end to the war. Shortly after Shelton used the exorcism, then-US president Nixon announced the ceasefire in North Vietnam, and the Reformed Druids claimed partial credit for their magical role in the peace accords.

Back to Cletus

We'd have to say that *we are* staying on point as members of the Reformed Druid movement. We won't say Cletus can't be a Reformed Druid; he certainly can be, and we cannot exclude him, but it does sound like there is room for self improvement on his part. Druidry as a whole is a vague amorphous blob that means something different to everyone. If saying we want to protect the Earth-Mother from exploitation is some sort of *cheapened message*, then what is it that Cletus wants us to deliver in terms of Druidry? Just neat robes, whiskey, and fancy empty words? If there's something about Druidry that makes Cletus feel uncomfortable, then he needs to *feel* that discomfort in order to grow as a spiritual being, and *extend his limitations* as we so eloquently put it in our ceremonies.

This *needed* to be said. Otherwise our written Grove Policy rebuking members of hate groups would just be empty words. We still have yet to see or hear a convincing defense as to how extreme conservative Druids reconcile the nature-loving and environmental aspects of Druidry (not to forget diversity) with the exploitative habits of the political causes they support. There's always a dismissive, condescending attitude they exhibit, and it really only sounds like they *know* they have flawed reasoning and don't want to address their hypocrisy. Furthermore, their other common responses tend to incorporate a *red herring fallacy* where they try to change the subject to attempt to get off the hook of answering the question. Being evasive doesn't look good either. Why can't they just answer the questions without making it about something else?

Anyone can be a Druid. Some just need to go *deprogram* themselves first. Affiliates or sympathizers of hate groups will never find fellowship in Oakdale Grove. You don't *have* to be a liberal to be a Druid. You can be a libertarian Druid or a conservative Druid. And there are... but read the room. Read the Earth-Mother. We ought to consider the *environmental* impact of the economic causes or politics we support. Regardless of political orientation, we should all be considering the impacts of our choices. Something to meditate on.

The Ethics of Reformed Druidism

AKA Becoming a Better Person

A devotional for the self.

We just covered that RDNA founder David Fisher stated the RDNA "has very little ethical importance." Furthermore, Fisher also expounded on this in his first letter addressed to all Druids after his time as the Chairperson of the Council of Dalon Ap Landu. He called this one-page letter from April 12, 1964 *The Book of Faith*. Verse 5 states the following:



"Druidism boasts no ethos. Since Druidism has never claimed to be a religion, dogmatism has always seemed incompatible with the organization. This does not mean that, as an individual Druid, I have no ethic, nor that any others who call themselves Druid are without beliefs as to what is right and wrong. As Druids, however, we can only affirm a mutual desire to ask ourselves questions about the meaning of life, and about the degree to which religious truth can be truth for us." (Scharding, *et al.*, 2004, p. 33)

We are reminded that the RDNA wasn't founded as a religion. Though over the past half century and longer, it has come to meet the religious needs of many individuals. It has certainly evolved in complexity since 1963. Some members will even state that their religion *is* Reformed Druidism, that this order *has become* their religious truth. This means that by his own words, even David Fisher himself cannot take that away from them.

He addresses the topic of ethics in religion in part because the RDNA was discriminated against by the administration at Carleton College. The administration claimed that the RDNA didn't fit enough criteria to be an actual religion. First off, it does seem like Fisher had preemptively painted himself into a corner by not making the RDNA a religion to begin with. One of the "missing" criteria was a lack of ethics or morals that members should live by. The only thing that comes close in the RDNA is the unending quest for Awareness, or for spiritual truth. However, it does not tell us how to find that, and certainly doesn't tell us how to treat the world or other people in it.

Awareness = Wokeness

This is where we go out on a limb and take an in-depth look at the RDNA concept of Awareness (into one possible direction among many), and how to be a better person. Awareness can mean so much more, but as Reformed Druids, it would be beneficial to the entire order if our Awareness was tied into our self-conduct. In Awareness, we are expanding our knowledge of, well, as much as possible, really. By learning the perspectives of others, we can possibly understand what other people in the world might be going through. This increases our empathy and compassion for anyone who may be struggling or suffering. Those previous two sentences, are pretty much what it is to be *woke*, without putting a spin on it. The Reformed Druids were already being woke in the 1960s, at least in terms of religious coexistence.

First and foremost, know thyself:

- Expand your self-awareness
- Know your strengths
- Know your weaknesses
- Know your limits

- View yourself objectively; don't put yourself on an unnecessary pedestal and don't belittle yourself
- Be true to your ideals; monitor your own actions and avoid hypocrisy

Be free from anger:

- Forgive others (forgiveness exists in many religions)
- Shed resentments
- Never let rage fester
- Release negativity like evaporating water

Be responsible:

- Don't pass blame
- Don't make excuses for things that are within your power to change
- Support others who need help to the capacity that you can

Listen!

- If people meet the *reasonable person* standard, listen with an open heart and open mind
- Empathy deepens interpersonal connections
- Show compassion

Admit when you're wrong:

- Be willing to apologize; no exceptions
- Show humility
- Take constructive criticism with grace

Be polite:

- Express gratitude
- Be kind and civil
- Remember that we don't know what battles other people may be fighting inside; what we do or what we don't do could affect someone's life

Respect:

- Demonstrate integrity; if you say you can commit to doing something, follow through with it
- Be dignified in your conduct and words
- Treat others with dignity

Next Steps and Other Considerations

In addition to your conduct toward others, also remember that Awareness is an unending search. Find new things to learn. Consider ways you can push the boundaries of your comfort zone. Seek growth opportunities for self-improvement. Explore volunteer opportunities, or contribute to the advancement of your community. Instead of trying to achieve more happiness, realize what already makes you happy. Take that a step further; Rabbi Hyman Schachtel wrote: "Happiness is not having what you want, but wanting what you have." (Schachtel, 1954, p. 37)

Establish Goals

Consider the simplicity of goal-setting. Think of all the things you'd like to accomplish. Life can be too

short. The pandemic and plenty of other catastrophic events all have a tendency to remind us that life can be cut short with little or no advanced warning. Things like that inspired so many people to learn a new skill, or get things done that they perhaps never imagined that they'd achieve.

Consider SMART Goals

Whoa, I bet you didn't expect us to plop the concept of SMART Goals in front of you! BAM! For some of you who are already familiar with SMART Goals, I'm sure this is an eye-rolling portion of the OBF Druidry training program. Perhaps we're giving you flashbacks of workplace goal-setting and career development or advancement sessions brought down upon you by middle-management. Well sadly it applies to advancing your Druidry too, not just your career or "J-O-B." For anyone who is unfamiliar with SMART Goals, it is an acronym of five criteria for optimizing your goals, hopes, and dreams.

S – Specific (don't be vague)

M – Measurable (there should be a way to gauge progress and or results)

A – Assignable, Attainable, or Achievable (it is not too lofty a task for you to do it)

R – Relevant or Realistic (it pertains to your current area of expertise or expands a skillset)

T – Timely (goal has a period in mind for a point of completion)

(Duran, 1981, p. 36).

So a goal that perhaps might *not* be so SMART would perhaps be along the lines of wanting to buy 200 acres of land, building a druidic retreat center, and a solar farm or wedding venue for passive income. Especially if you don't have the means to get started on any part of that. Have you figured out where any of that money is coming from just to get the land (and maybe some liability insurance) for it? An actual SMART goal might be something closer to wisely investing in solar energy. That's specific enough. It will have measurable dividends and you'll likely learn more about investing at the same time. By starting small you can achieve results quickly. It is realistic enough to be an entry level goal, and it is something you could theoretically do within the next year, versus the next few decades.

Journal Entry: How Druidry Has Impacted Your Life

How has Druidry affected you so far?

In your journal (external to this workbook), reflect on any changes you have seen in your life since starting down the path of Druidry. Has your wellbeing improved in some way? Has Druidry already helped you to be a better person?



Attestation:

I have made a journal entry on this topic.



Meditation

What is Meditation?

Meditation is one of the core practices associated with Reformed Druidry. It is the act and art of willfully altering your state of mind to focus on something. It is quiet reflection of a personal nature. There are so many different forms of meditation that even if you are unfamiliar with the concept, you may have technically meditated before. A lot of people unfamiliar with meditation believe it would require them to clear their mind. Rather, that's a form of meditation that even experienced Buddhist monks have difficulty achieving. Some people like to say it's *impossible* to clear your mind. We're not so sure it's absolutely *impossible*, but still extremely difficult. In the RDNA we don't really want to achieve a clear mind anyway, so **don't worry about trying to clear your mind** because we won't ask you to.

One of the Essentials of Reformed Druidry

You don't necessarily *need* rituals. You don't *need* ranks or fancy titles. You don't *need* robes, vestments, altars, or golden sickles. However, meditation *is* important. It has so many positive benefits for the mind, body, and spirit... and like we said, it is an essential part of Reformed Druidism. Benefits of meditation include reduced stress and anxiety, lower blood pressure and heart rate, improved cognitive function, and serves to punctuate a hectic life with moments of peace, thereby lightening the spirit.

The Importance of Breath

A key component of most forms of meditation is *breathing*. Mindfulness Meditation instructors place emphasis on taking deep breaths: in through the nose and out through the mouth, all the while matching the instructor's own cadence. Inhale slowly and deeply, hold that breath for just a moment, exhale slowly, then pause before inhaling again. To be honest, this technique quickly became a chore for some because they might not have the same lung capacity as the instructor. The distracting matter could arise of needing to breathe more frequently and not holding one's breath as long as the instructor does. Matching my breathing with the instructor's might feel too unnatural to some. For the most part, **matching their cadence doesn't matter**. Breathing through the nose or mouth doesn't seem to have any significant impact either. With practicing on your own and just taking deep breaths at your own comfortable pace, you could easily reach an *Alpha state* (more on Alpha in a moment).

Just breathe with patterns that fit your lung capacity. If you're experiencing allergies, have a stuffy or runny nose, that may be a mild hinderance. Try tilting the head back and breathing solely through the mouth. Tilting your head downward or leaning forward would likely increase postnasal drip. Here are some additional helpful yogic breathing tips from the book Discover Inner Peace:

"Imagine that you are inhaling truth, insight, and pure spiritual energy, and exhaling illusion, egotism, and the negative energy of emotions.... Deep, regular breathing is a tried-and-tested way to generate mental calm." (George, 2000. p. 104, 105)

Altered State of Mind – Naturally

So **what is this Alpha state** we just mentioned? When you reach an ultra-relaxed sensation of calmness and peace, your brain starts producing alpha wave electrical patterns across your synapses. Once those brain waves are synchronized and uniform, that is when you are in an Alpha state. Another keyword here is *practice*; don't expect to be able to achieve an Alpha state all at once. You might notice this shift when the busy mind begins to declutter. Don't get too excited when you reach that moment because the

sudden excitement of attaining that state could snap you back out of the meditative mindset altogether. If that happens, just keep practicing. The more you meditate, the easier it will become to return to the Alpha state, sometimes in mere seconds. (NTNU, 2010)

With practice or luck you may even enter a *Theta state* of much deeper meditation. **The Theta state is shared with the dreaming stage of sleep, but can be reached while awake and meditating.** You will have the sensation of being somewhere between asleep and awake. In my own experiences I managed to maintain awareness and lucidity while in a Theta state. This is the perfect state of mind for *Shadow Work*; or addressing things embedded and often ignored in your subconscious. Theta states are the place to be for benefiting from self improvement, connecting with your deeper self, and acknowledging thoughts or feelings you've previously pushed out of the way. (Bergland, 2015)

Don't Do Drugs

Most importantly, meditate *sober*. Avoid recreational or controlled substances, as they are needless crutches. You should practice meditation sober in every way, and train yourself to achieve the altered state of mind by your own power. *You do not need* alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, marijuana, peyote, datura, salvia, shrooms, ayahuasca, aconite, or anything else in order to meditate. Take nothing stronger than a typical cup of herbal tea. The key is to *practice* meditation according to your own abilities.

In fact caffeine (being a common drug worth mentioning) has been found to be detrimental to meditation. It doesn't stop you from meditating; I've had plenty of caffeinated sessions, but it's just easier on the brain if you're substance-free – and I've felt the difference. When you have a caffeinated beverage, it can take up to six hours for just *half* of the caffeine to break down. After another 6 hours you will still have roughly a quarter of that still remaining in your system. Depending on how much caffeine affects you, you may just want to have meditations before the coffee, or much later after you've finished it. Then again, perhaps you might enjoy the added challenge of caffeinated meditation?

Full Disclosure on the Alcohol Tidbit

We want to talk about the use of alcohol in RDNA rituals during the summer half of the year. Alcohol consumption and meditation do happen in the same rituals, however that does not imply that it is by any means a required aspect of the meditation. To be absolutely clear, we never pressure attendees to drink the sacramental whiskey (AKA the Waters-of-Life). That's entirely up to the individual attendee. Also, entering the numerical orders (First, Second, Third Orders, and above) *does* involve partaking of the sacramental whiskey, however it is the Grove Arch-Druid's responsibility to have a non-alcoholic alternative available at every ritual. The Second Order rite of passage has the candidate drink a chalice of undiluted whiskey (perhaps about 100 mL). For rites of passage, if the candidate requires an alternative to alcohol, the candidate and Arch-Druid will reach a reasonable compromise. In the winter ceremonies, we'll almost always be using non-alcoholic beverages by default.

If you're ever interested in entering the priesthood of the Reformed Druids of North America, the prerequisite All-Night Vigil is a supervised ordeal of meditation and fasting. It would be highly beneficial to start practicing different forms of meditation now. It's gonna be a long night, and you just never know what you'll learn while meditating on your Vigil.

RDNA Style Meditation

If you attend a ritual in the mode of the Reformed Druids of North America, you might hear a scripted line "O Earth-Mother, cleanse our minds and hearts and prepare us for meditation." And much of what

comes next is more or less a guided meditation. The script spoken by whomever is presiding guides the attendees into a ritual mindset, focusing together on the purpose of the day. At Oakdale Grove's ceremonies, if there are guests or visitors who might be wholly unfamiliar with RDNA style rituals, at the opening welcome, the designated bard will make a statement like "The opening invocations and centering help us ease into a ritual and meditative mindset. Breathe slowly and deeply as we guide you through the next few moments."

Before the close of a typical RDNA ritual, there's a final segment of silent, open meditation. It is usually prompted by the penultimate announcement: "And now for a moment of silent meditation, reflecting on all that has happened here today, taking in the sights and sounds of nature, with slow and deep breathing, kindling your curiosity within." In our rituals led by Reformed Druid elders, the final silent meditations never went much longer than one minute. Ours might last between 30-45 seconds, but it really seems just about right, however short. Feel the wind on your face, hear it in the whispering trees, enjoy the songs of birds or the murmur of water if it's nearby. Anecdotally I've heard some other Grove's rituals that were mostly meditations, or had 10 minute segments of it. It really comes down to determining what your fellowship wants.

Zen & Mindfulness

Meditation in the Reformed Druid movement is partially based on the style of Zen Meditation and a blend of similar styles;

"...the RDNA's services drew mostly upon Hinduism, Buddhism and Liberal Christian thought. One reason for this, as I've stated, is the remarkable availability of coursework on Asian religions, languages and overseas studies in Asia provided by Carleton College during the Founding Years. [...] This Asian preference is especially seen in the Carleton RDNA's fond love of Zen Buddhism and Taoism..." (Scharding, et al., 2004, pp. 643-644)

Zen and Mindfulness Meditation have a lot in common, both stressing an awareness or focus on breathing, observation of your thoughts and sensations. In Zen meditation you are encouraged to dismiss stray thoughts (which takes practice) whereas Mindfulness meditation encourages you to observe your stray thoughts with a passing curiosity, somewhat like watching traffic go by. To further the analogy just let those thoughts drive on by. Don't try to stop them or ask where they're going or why they're on that road. There are a few more minor differences between Zen and Mindfulness Meditation, and it wouldn't hurt to look into external resources on the topics.

Meditation Tips and Tricks

Clean Up

Even if we're meditating with our eyes closed, we might be hyperaware of our space being in a state of disarray. If you may be inclined to get stressed over clutter, then take a few minutes to at least partially straighten things up. Just be careful not to exert yourself too much, because reaching a meditative state might take longer if you get your heart rate going while power-cleaning. Granted, it's equally possible to meditate while exercising if your body is moving rhythmically and you're breathing deeply. Just don't get upset while having to clean up. Never get angry or stressed about meditation or it will neutralize the benefits.

Minimize Distractions

Our life of modern conveniences is so full of distractions: sounds, lights, white noise, anything that fills the emptiness. The world is growing loud. Take a moment to notice what you're hearing right now. Is it perfect silence? Is something whirring? Music playing? Are you wearing Air Pods? Dear gods, are you streaming videos or watching TV while scrolling through this workbook? Like drugs, music is also a crutch, but music can help with the mindset (and it's not a harmful substance) so that's a win.

Music as a meditation aid is still thoroughly enjoyable. Just try not to use music every time. If you do like meditation music so much or feel that you need it, designate separate times for both silent and music-aided meditation. You should still continue to practice meditating in silence, and on other occasions music can be added as a treat. Perhaps you live in the city and have noisy neighbors, traffic, sirens, and construction sounds. Maybe you live on a farm with machines and noisy animals. Maybe you've got crickets and cicadas or screaming kids. The key component of silent meditation (or any kind, really) is to *minimize* your distractions.

You can use meditative music to cover up background noise if you really need to. Other ways to optimize your setting is to have a dimly lit space. Sure, you can meditate in full sunlight, or in a basement closet at night. Generally speaking, it is beneficial for your space to be *not too bright*, and *not too dark*.

Get Comfy

Wear clothing that is comfortable and not tight or restrictive. If you have a billowing Druid robe and lightweight pajama pants, try wearing those to meditate. Whatever you do, strive for total comfort. If you like yoga pants, wear them. For most meditations, you can sit on the floor, on a cushion, chair, couch, or bed. Don't lay down, because that would just invite you to fall asleep. In RDNA rituals, standing is the standard posture, generally with legs shoulder-width apart for stability. A staff might help steady you while standing. For Mindfulness Meditation it's best to sit forward on the edge of a cushioned chair with the palms of your hands resting down on your knees with your legs straight and your feet flat on the floor.

Counting Down From 10

Aside from practicing slow deep breathing, there is the *countdown* visualization. At first it can be tricky to meditate or reach an Alpha State by breathing technique alone. One of the common analogies I've been told is to imagine a 10-story escalator ride down, and each level down is less busy. It is a guide to descend into your subconscious mind. Technically speaking we'll start our descent from the 11th floor of our mind. Take that first slow inhale breath as you begin to descend to the 10th floor. Halfway between the eleventh and tenth floors, exhale while slowly saying "ten" in your mind, letting it take up the entire exhalation until you pass the edge of the floor. Then inhale slowly as you descend to the ninth floor, exhaling when halfway down while slowly saying "nine" in your mind until you pass the edge of that floor.

Follow the pattern of one inhale and exhale between each floor. Count down even to zero if it helps you reach that "basement" level: the depths of your subconscious. If you need the escalator to keep going, or if you lose count, it's okay to start over from 10 again until you feel that shift into deep relaxation of the Alpha state. If you've ever entered the London Underground at Westminster Station or Waterloo, do you remember those deep escalators that led to the platforms for lines that ran far below the Thames riverbed? If it helps to meditate, think of going down 10 flights of *those* escalators.

As a Druid, the escalator analogy can feel like an awkwardly unnatural method of descent. Dungeon or castle stairs, mine shafts, or ladders down an empty well are alternative ideas. Whatever helps *you*. My preferred alternative is to visualize myself adrift in a canoe or coracle (small round Irish boat) with no oars on a large lake. The lake is egg-shaped, and I gradually drift toward the narrow end, which has an outlet to a stream or narrow river. To count breaths, you can imagine a connected chain of lakes, or massively tall trees at regular intervals along the shore, standing like gateways. Here the goal is to keep drifting until you reach that Alpha state of deep relaxation.

“But I Can’t Concentrate”

For Mindfulness Meditation, if you’re trying to focus or concentrate, you’re doing it wrong. *Focusing* on relaxing is a counterproductive effort. Concentration is more likely to generate Beta Waves in the brain which is more suited for memory or studying and related thought processes. If you’re having trouble with your breathwork, it really just takes practice. If any mental visualizations are difficult to maintain, find a visual focal point to physically look at. Watch a candle flame burn, or wisps of smoke floating off of incense while you breathe slowly.

If you get to a point that you have completely zoned out, slowly try to become aware of any thoughts passing by. The keyword is Awareness. The Reformed Druids designated Awareness as one of our primary goals in life. Mindfulness Meditation emerged more than a decade later from the psychology community and it fits right in with Druidry. Once we have *awareness* that we’ve zoned out and we can observe our thoughts while in a state of deep relaxation, then it becomes meditation.

The first few times you meditate it is very normal for it to feel like its not working. When I was enrolled in Mindfulness Meditation classes at work, during an early session one of my coworkers burst out laughing and said she just can’t do it. It really broke the rest of us out of our state, depending on who it was effective for at the time. The instructor assured us that everyone can do it, and it might just take time and repeated practice, as would taking up any new skill. I was able to return to a meditative state in about 30 seconds that day. That was exactly the case, just like taking up any new skill. We all improved, albeit at different paces. We became proficient, occasionally had our off-days, but were empowered to meditate on our own.

What to Do in an Alpha State

Just being in this state of mind has numerous benefits for the mind, body, and spirit. If all you care to do is to observe your passing thoughts with a detached curiosity, then that is good. If you were hoping to do some *shadow work*: addressing your repressed thoughts and feelings to strive for resolution and self improvement, that is good. If you want to focus on enhancing your kindness, sincerity, or love of all beings, perhaps even for yourself, that is good. You can focus on relieving tension in your body, letting go of past pains whether physical, psychological, or emotional. You can focus your creativity to capture inspiring thoughts.

What to Do in a Theta State

If you’ve managed to reach an ultra-deep state of relaxation where your perceptions shift again and you feel completely detached from the area around you, as if you are now existing entirely *within* your meditation, you may have achieved a Theta state. This is all on the condition that your mind is awake and you haven’t inadvertently fallen asleep while meditating. This could happen if you meditate while tired. This is the state of mind where you can delve into creative imagery for problem solving or engage in *soul flight* as a form of recreational meditation if you want. This state of mind is also

associated with dreaming when you are asleep, so any imagery journey you make would effectively be a blend of actual dreams and waking thoughts, and for this purpose that is just fine.

An Anecdote on Theta States

The first time I reached Theta in a meditation state, I started out drifting down my “waterway” countdown. I had to start my counting over a few times until I reached the initial Alpha state. My busy mind kept thinking I was going to have to visualize a river delta opening into the ocean due to how long it was taking. Finally I was in an Alpha state: very relaxed, no longer feeling the need to count down from 10 again. My river had narrowed to a moderately paced stream, maybe 20 feet across. The banks were lined with rocks, a dark pine forest grew on both banks, and my sky above was overcast. It looked much like any river in northeastern Minnesota. I just drifted for a long time not expecting anything, just a gentle canoe ride in light rapids.

Then I entered Theta. The imagery in my mind was doing its own thing entirely. The environment stayed the same, but things started happening that I wasn’t consciously creating. The stream began to narrow. A large fish leaped out of the water in front of my canoe and dove back in. After my meditation I spent a while looking up fish species until I saw the one in my vision, which was a Chinook Salmon. In my meditation after being visited by the salmon, a very large fox peeked out from behind a pine tree and immediately receded back into the dark woods. The stream narrowed so that I might have been able to touch the rocky banks on both sides.

The stream curved and flowed at a brisk jogging pace. Two figures in full-length Carolina blue robes stood on opposing rock ledges. They held long boughs of birch crossed high over the center of my stream, as if I was part of a procession. As my canoe approached I saw that they were my late paternal grandparents. They did not look at me but only across the water, into each other’s eyes. Their only acknowledgment of me was the arch of birch boughs they held up for me, and I passed under them, unable to stop. Two more figures in blue robes stood ahead, also holding an arch of branches. They were my grandmother’s parents. They stood in the same posture, with the same gaze into each other’s eyes. I hadn’t seen my great grandfather in a quarter of a century, and I had never known my great grandmother, but there they were in silent fanfare.

After that vision I was alone on my journey again for a long time. The rapids in the river churned more turbulently and my stream widened back into a river. The rocky banks became steeper and I was surrounded by boulders. The clouds darkened and purple lightning skittered across the sky. My meditation was becoming less comforting, and I gradually felt as if I was entering into a part of my subconscious that was in turmoil and chaos. Up ahead my river split around a rocky outcrop of an island covered in pine trees. The river didn’t look safe ahead and I didn’t want to find out what was in store for me.



Editor’s reconstruction of the final vision of the meditation

Always Emerge Gradually

Not being prepared to address that part of my psyche, in my mind I stopped my canoe and gently removed the visual elements. This brought me back into an Alpha State and I started to become aware of my surroundings. I knew full well how jarring and disorienting it can be to *snap out* of a meditation. I became aware of the carpeted floor I was sitting on. I became aware that I was sitting propped up

against my bed frame. I could feel the polished stones I was holding in my hands as something to fidget with in order to relax faster. I became aware of the ambient music I had playing, and noticed the slight discomfort in my back that I had totally forgotten about during the meditation. I kept my eyes closed well after I knew I had ceased meditation, and mentally reconstructed my room in my mind until I knew I could open my eyes for a seamless transition back to the present moment. I sat there for a few more minutes before actually getting up, refreshed and feeling great.

Open Meditation: Practice Your Breathing

Time to Meditate and Tell

Using any meditation technique mentioned above, or even one not listed in this workbook at all (though practicing any of the ones we just detailed would be nice), practice your deep breathing and meditate for 15-30 minutes. Don't worry if it doesn't work out the first time. If you fall asleep, that's no problem. There's a form of meditation called *Yoga Nidra* that is basically a sleep meditation anyway. If that happens, don't be afraid to mention it in your essay below.



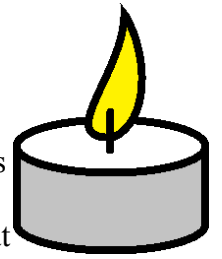
Essay: Tell Us About Your Meditation

In a brief summary, answer the following six questions. There are generally no wrong answers.

1. What was your physical setting before you began your meditation?
2. What distractions did you have (if any), and how did you address them?
3. What countdown visualization aid did you use (if any) while doing breathwork?
4. Could you tell if or when you achieved entering an Alpha State of deep relaxation?
5. Were you able to enter a Theta State if you tried?
6. How did you feel as you emerged from your meditation?



A Druidic Meal Blessing



There is (for the most part) no wrong way to bless a meal. There have been a handful of times that we were approached about the topic of blessing food in a Reformed Druid style. Since not all Reformed Druids have the same base-religion it was tricky to formulate something that could be used by almost any Druid. Granted it would allow for either literal or metaphorical interpretation when the gods are mentioned by name, just like any other RDNA ritual. If you don't like mentioning the gods by name you can always omit them and just give thanks directly to the Earth-Mother, the Waters, and the Sunlight like a Land-Sea-Sky blessing.

An important function of a meal blessing is to remind us that food isn't just for satisfying our hunger. By the act of blessing our food, it is consecrated unto us as something special: yes, for our nourishment, but also to raise our spirits or imbuing it with other symbolism. At the very least we ought to extend our gratitude for the food, how it came to us, and who we may be sharing it with. If in the unfortunate event the food is underwhelming, by contrast its blessing is all the more potent.

If you celebrate a *Feast of Gratitude* in the autumn, it would be a very suitable time to give thanks to the Earth-Mother and the sun for their bounty. Samhain would also be a suitable time for such a feast:

"But the eve of the first of November was the Hallows Eve or *Samhain*, when the fires were a thanksgiving to the sun at the end of the harvest." (Bonwick, 1895, pp.204-205)

In the *Roots of Gratitude Blessing*, we start by blessing the food itself, then branch out (pun intended) one sequential step back, blessing those who prepared the food for us. Then we take more steps back to retrace the entire journey of our sustenance, extending our gratitude for the once-living food, back to the Earth-Mother, back to the water and the sunlight that made life possible, and back to Be'al for our Awareness. Lastly, like the *Tree of Life* whose branches connect back to the roots, we bring the blessing full circle, extended to those with whom we are sharing the meal. This last step can be omitted for those who are solo and it still works just fine. Again, there's really no wrong way to bless your meal in a druidic fashion. Be creative but above all, be sincere.

Roots of Gratitude Blessing

So that we may bless and consecrate this sustenance to our life force,

We give thanks to those who have prepared this meal for us.

We give thanks to those who have brought these provisions to our table.

We give thanks to the laborers who have worked hard, from fields to markets, and places between.

We give thanks to the plants and to the animals who have died so that we may live.

We give thanks to the Earth-Mother, the source of all nourishment.

We give thanks to Grannos, to Sirona, to Taranis, to Llyr and to Danu, whose waters flow with the essence that sustains life within, on, and above the Earth-Mother.

We give thanks to Belenos whose light and warmth allow life and water to exist upon the Earth-Mother.

We give thanks to Be'al, the source of our Awareness of these blessings.

And we give thanks to Braciaca and to present company for sharing this feast in joyful fellowship.

May the Lord of the Groves unite us in the roots of our gratitude.

So be it.

Devotional: Daily Druid Devotional

By Pat Haneke of Akita Grove

A Druid Missal-Any, Autumnal Equinox, 2002



I do this (almost) every day, and it is my incremental regimen, beginning with a cup of steaming coffee. No too much at any time, but like a snowball rolling down the hill (or Milo of Croton carrying a calf up the stairs everyday) it strengthens your wits and brings you into a greater communion with the world of Nature and profusion of ideas around you. Most of it is stuff we do everyday, but taken one step further in Awareness. It becomes rather difficult to continue finding new examples after a hundred days, and it thus would be an excellent journal activity during the 182 days in the Time of Sleep between Samhain and Beltane. It's as easy as 1, 2, 3.

Every day, when possible:

Editor's Note

You don't have to do this writeup *every* day; we're only asking this activity to be logged here *once*. Nevertheless, if you feel like performing this devotional regularly on your own, that is encouraged.

The Triples

- Take one idea of whose veracity you're sure of, and think of three counter arguments against it or three people who would object to it.
- Take one idea you think is wrong, and think of three supportive arguments or people who would support it.
- Now, take one idea that you're unsure of and bring it up in conversation with three people.

Editor's Short-Answer Essay

1. What idea or concept did you reexamine?
2. Has your perspective shifted?
3. Has it helped you empathize with people who hold those opposing opinions (regardless of who is "correct")?

The Doubles

- Notice one parallel or lesson between Nature and human society; such as nesting and mortgages.
- Resist one urge and give into another urge every day; until you are master of them.
- Notice an opposite in the world; and see if you can find a "gray" example.

Editor's Short-Answer Essay

1. Did you find a parallel? If so, what was it?
2. What was an urge you resisted or indulged in?
3. Did you find a "gray" example of something previously thought to be black & white with no other options?

The Singles

- Touch a new and different organism every day. If you don't know the real name, give it a temporary name.
- Read one page that you don't have to, on a topic you don't know much about.
- Greet or salute one person you've never acknowledged before.

Editor's Short-Answer Essay

1. What was one of the organisms you found?
2. What topic did you read a page on?

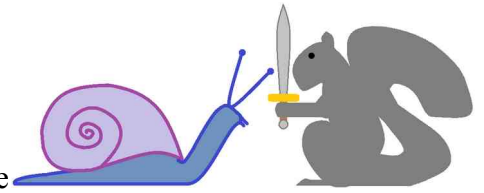
The Zeroes

- Listen to someone without a preconception of them.
- Do nothing for a moment in the midst of your busiest time.
- Purposely skip one of the previous activities.

Editor's Short-Answer Essay

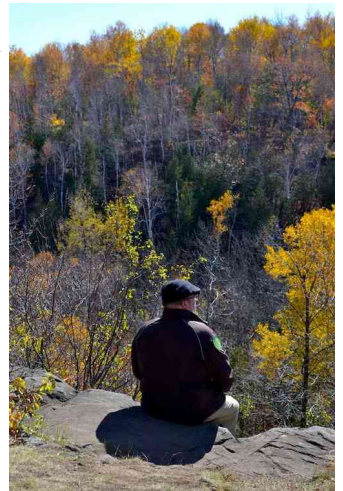
1. How did you feel about your impromptu momentary break?
2. You could also skip an activity you had planned for the day. If so, what did you skip and how did that make you feel?

Activity: Sit Spots



What is a sit spot? It is a place that you like to go and sit! Aside from the obvious, this is probably an activity you have done before. We see them in movies from time to time. A character will take someone somewhere special, and say they sometimes go there to be alone and just think, or clear their head, or just *exist*. It is even considered a form of meditation: the *quiet contemplation* type. This is an activity in which we live in the moment, and stop taking things for granted. A sit spot is a place where we deliberately stop to appreciate nature with inward reflection.

Find a place that's sacred to you, preferably outdoors. Go there as often as you can. You can have multiple sit spots, but for the sake of this exercise, try to find one that you can conveniently visit with consistency. It should be a place that you feel safe enough to sit still, remove all distractions, and do nothing but *experience* nature for an extended amount of time. You should be able to sit comfortably, and not be disturbed by others. Focus on your breathing, taking slow deep breaths at a cadence that works for you. If it all has a calming effect, you're in the right place! **If your access to spaces like this is limited, that's fine.** If it's an apartment balcony, a bus bench, a garden, or an indoor chair by the window, and that's what you can do, it is still possible to achieve this goal.



Use all your senses.

See the visuals of the landscape, the geometry and shapes of all the things upon the bosom of the Earth-Mother, see the living things, or they way that they have interacted or left their mark on the world, the interplay of light and shadow.

Hear the breeze blowing by, rustling in the leaves, the songs of birds, the trickle or flow of water, the voices of children, or the hustle and bustle of the mundane world. If you hear traffic and airplanes, think of the busy lives of others, and consider what they're missing out on. Maybe they too are on their way to appreciate life in some way that fulfills their own needs.

Feel the wind, the texture of what is within reach, the warmth of the sun, moisture in the air, or rain upon your face. Contemplate the Earth-Mother's constant embrace: gravity – *that* one always gets to us philosophically). She's always drawing us to her with an unseen force. Urban Druids will feel the hum of the city all around them. Human activity is also a force of nature, though sometimes we have strange ways of expressing that. Appreciate the human strangeness.

Smell the scent of the earth, the pines of the woods, the flowers of the fields, the salty musk of the sea, or the decay of the city if that's where your spot is. There's a really nice park next to the wastewater treatment plant. Don't sit there.

As for **taste**? Don't eat rocks! Maybe don't go licking lichen at your sit spot. Go ahead and consider having a mindful snack at your sit spot. Savor the flavors in conjunction with being open to the rest of your senses. Contemplate how life is sustained and thrives through nourishment. Some food has evolved to taste good for the sake of propagation. Much of our food, even healthy stuff, just tastes good... explore why that might be.

Intuition and Empathy

Then branch out into your intuitive side now that you've acknowledged the physical. Has your perception shifted since sitting down in nature? At the very least do you feel more relaxed since sitting there? Is there a sense of awe or wonder that wasn't there a few minutes beforehand? What else do you pick up from this spot in terms of feelings, emotions, energies, memories, or moods?

Try journaling your experiences while you are at your sit spot.

Attestation:

I have journaled at least one entry at my sit-spot.



Other Observations

Photograph your sit spot from the same angle on every high day. Are there subtle changes you wouldn't normally notice as time goes by that you can see only in the photos? Does that inspire further study into learning about those changes? Follow your curiosity. Contemplate how all of this together makes you feel. Then contemplate on how we fit in, as the Earth-Mother has given rise to humanity over the eons. Though, we've really only been here for the blink of an eye on the scale of deep-time. Ponder if our ancestors might have felt the same as we might in this moment. Do we contrast that much from our ancestors? Consider how they even felt different about our connection to the divine.

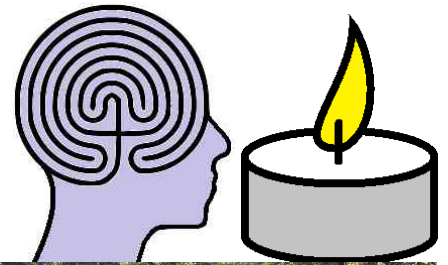
These shifts might not come all at once, nor on the first few tries, but part of what makes sit-spots great is that the more you return to them and practice expanding your Awareness, the more you will notice. You might feel a sensation of peace sooner each time, always working on the long deep breaths in a cadence that is comfortable for you. Then hopefully in the short term or perhaps long term, you will build on your connection with nature and expand your Awareness.

Essay: Describe Your Sit Spot

1. What do you see? What is your sit-spot?
2. Can you describe something about it for each of the senses (as applicable)?
3. How has this sit spot made you feel?



Devotional Meditation: Gratitude for Food



A Mini Picnic With a Purpose

In the hustle and bustle of the 21st century, it's easy for us to inadvertently take the foods we eat for granted. It's easy to blindly believe that when we go to a grocery store, *most* of what we're about to get will be prepackaged in plastic, glass, cans, or cardboard. Even if it's fresh fruits or vegetables that aren't prepackaged, there's such a disconnect from the Earth-Mother under the glow of fluorescent lighting in the climate-controlled warehouse environment. Don't get us started on processed foods. Let's focus on what's fresh.



Start by going out and acquiring a special plant-based treat that has grown up from the Earth. Anything grown using hydroponics or aeroponics is fine, too... mostly since we can't tell if something was grown that way. Furthermore, we recommend fruits or vegetables that can grow abundantly in your region. Avoid anything exotic or imported. If a standard grocery store is all you have available to you, that is fine. Though, for a special devotional ritual such as this, we would recommend paying a visit to a local food co-op or a farmer's market if there's one nearby. Bonus points if you can harvest something from your own garden. Foods that have grown under your care already have an established connection to you.

Select something that requires minimal preparation, whether they're fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, or a humble combination thereof. For the sake of simplicity, here I'll be referring to them as *fruits*, regardless of what you opt for. Don't choose mushrooms for this particular exercise because they aren't dependent on photosynthesis and you'll be exploring that in your meditation. Give your fruits a thorough wash. Place them in a container made from natural materials, such as a wicker basket, a wooden bowl, or something made from pottery. At the very least avoid plastic food containers – not just for the sake of aesthetic, but to also foster a mindset in tune with nature. Compostable containers would also work if that's the only pragmatic storage you have.

The Devotional Meditation

- Find a place in nature that is special to you. Maybe you already have a place like this; it could even be your sit spot. If it isn't already, visualize this place as your open-air temple.
- Bring the fruits of the Earth out to your sacred place, and set them before you
- Sit down: whether on the ground, a bench, picnic table, *et cetera*
- Before you begin, **relax**. Especially if you biked or hiked to this spot. Your heart rate and respiration might be up. Let's bring them down a bit.
- Utilize your meditative breathing techniques to physically prepare yourself for this exercise
 - This shouldn't be rushed; make sure you have plenty of time
- Take one or more of the fruits of the Earth from your bowl and hold them in your hands
- Meditate on the stages of their natural lifecycle: soil, rain, sunlight, seeds sprouting, and so on
- Meditate on the relationship between the Sacred Sun and Hallowed Earth
- Ponder the magical biology of photosynthesis; how land plants have evolved over the last half a billion years just by taking in the warmth of the sun, nutrients of the soil, and water
- **Partake of the fruits while meditating on these things with a sense of awe and wonder**

- Think of our deep ancestors: how they thrived on these or similar fruits, celebrated fertility festivals, and gave thanks for the bounty to the deities of their understanding
 - Meditate on times of scarcity or famine, and that our ancestors were fortunate to survive
- Look up and around at all of Nature; she has sustained us for countless generations
- Ask yourself the question: *Do I sometimes take this for granted?*
 - Contemplate those who might live with constant food insecurity. How does that make you feel? Perhaps you too have ever experienced food insecurity? How might we tackle that issue?
 - Let your inner well of gratitude fill; extend your hand or touch the Earth and say *thank you*
- Return a portion of the Earth-Mother’s bounty to her as an offering up to her beauty. Even as we too must one day return to her, meditate on the soil of the Earth; as it was once part of living things, and someday it will be part of living things again.



Bear in mind that we’re not trying to feed wild animals (such as bears... couldn’t resist the pun) so your libation to the Earth-Mother should be relatively small. It’s probably fine if you are able to offer the libation to a water feature.

Essay (Short Answer): Your Gratitude for Food

For these questions there are generally no wrong answers.



1. Where did you source your food of choice?
2. What did you select as your food of choice?
3. To what extent has this exercise shifted your perceptions? How do you feel when doing this?

Altars in Druidry

“...the altars were heaped with hideous offerings, and every tree was sprinkled with human gore.” (Lucan, trans. Duff, 1977, p. 145)



At right: altar at the center of the stone circle in the upper arboretum of Carleton College, Northfield, MN



A Flair for the Dramatic

The ancient Druids (and the Ovates who did the dirty work) probably did see blood-soaked altars. Roman poet and historian Lucan wrote about a chance discovery of a druidic altar in a secluded Grove in his *Pharsalia*. Lucan was great at writing propaganda for the Roman Empire, furthermore he was born almost a century after the events he was writing about. Imagine writing an epic nationalist prose about World War I based solely on one military general’s journal. It’s by no means a 1:1 comparison, but it gives a bit of perspective that not only was Lucan exaggerating via poetic license, but his source material might also have been exaggerated and was surely biased to begin with.

In modern times, seeing an altar in a church is one thing. It’s usually a wooden table, or sometimes built of fine stone. Most people don’t give it a second thought. On the other hand, if you plopped a crude stone altar outside, maybe something slightly more primitive, then people tend to say it’s a bit creepy for some reason. There aren’t many iconic altars in pop culture, except for perhaps the *Stone Table* from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, upon which Aslan is sacrificed by the White Queen. Whether or not that’s what people associate with altars in the woods, there is still something mysterious about them.

In the craze of the Druid Revival movement, new stone circles and druidic follies were raised by enthusiasts with extra money to spend. Stone altars took center stage in the pomp and theatrics of neo-druidic pageantry. They were a much tamer and romanticized throwback to a darker time, and probably for the better.



Above: Gorsedd Stone Circle, Bute Park, Cardiff, Wales

A Reformed Druid Obsession

When ye come together that ye might worship, shall ye come together in Nature, that ye might offer up on the altar of stone your sacrifice of life.

—Customs 5:4, *The Chronicles of the Foundation* (Scharding, *et al.*, 2004, p. 6)

In 1963, the first year of the Reformed Druid movement, the Druids seemed to be obsessed with constructing altars. Their first altar was a portable record player covered in a cloth, but then they built one out of stone. The first stone altar was destroyed by vandals dubbed “the Anti-Druids” and the

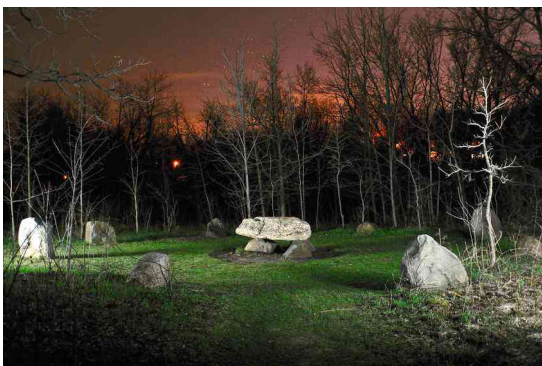
Druids rebuilt it. Once it was completed, the sun shone through the clouds on an overcast day, right onto the altar, and they felt it was a good omen. The Anti-Druids came back and wrecked the altar a second time, and the Reformed Druids rebuilt it a third time, but with mortar between the stones. They put a protective curse on the altar, and one of the known vandals then sprained his ankle.

When the third stone altar's mortar had set, the Druids wanted to consecrate their altar to the Earth-Mother. The group was torn between sacrificing a branch of oak leaves or a live chicken. Reason and modern sensibility won out, and that's when *all* Reformed Druids agreed to ban blood or animal sacrifice in ritual. This third altar lasted almost a year, but the mortar didn't hold up over winter which allowed the altar to crumble on its own. They then built what they considered to be a masterpiece altar, with better fitting stones, careful mortaring, and a place for a fire underneath and a hole through the center of the altar for the smoke to pass through. It was completed and guarded overnight while the mortar dried. The Druids felt triumphant, but within a week or two, the altar was destroyed and the stones were removed by the Anti-Druids so that it could not be rebuilt again.

The Reformed Druids lamented the loss of their four stone altars, and decided to venture out to a more secluded location. A tree-covered hill stood nearby, and they said they'd go to that hill and dub the trees *honorary oaks*. The trees on the hill turned out to be real oaks anyway, so they interpreted it as a good omen. The hill even had a glacial granite boulder embedded on top which made for a perfect altar, onto which they carved the Druid Sigil. They called that place the *Hill of The Three Oaks* (eventually dropping "-The-" from the middle of its name) and that hill is still a sacred place to the Druids today. A new permanent stone circle was built in 1998, after it had been sighted in different parts of the woods, sometimes being moved by the Druids overnight. Part of the legend goes that a mysterious entity helped at least one of the Druids lift the heavy stones as if they weighed almost nothing, but that's a story for another time.



Above: the Druid Sigil inscribed on the altar stone on the Hill of Three Oaks. The Sigil is roughly three inches wide. Left: the new stone circle simply dubbed the "Druid's Circle."



Reformed Druid Altars on a Budget

Look out your nearest window. Spot the nearest patch of grass. There's your budget altar. Although Reformed Druids are said to have an *altar fetish*, it doesn't make them required. The ground is the simplest universal Druid altar. So why is anything more

elaborate even remotely necessary? What is the point of an altar? The key word is *pragmatism*. It helps keep whatever is on it *above* the ground. That is really its fundamental function. Generally an altar keeps things within arms-reach, likely somewhat level, and hopefully stable. That's the basic task of an altar. Even the early Reformed Druids were thinking pragmatically. So what makes a Reformed Druid altar? Let's be clear; altars are for things. You do not *need* things. Entire rituals can be performed without accouterments. However, if *things* help you get into the right frame of mind, and if you like the pomp and theatrics of altars (and a nice chalice), then you are also like us; and we say go for it! (Restall Orr, 2004) We almost always hold rituals in public, so we're not able to build a fancy altar on public

property. Thus we use travel altars.

One of our first travel altar kits fit entirely in a small satchel, one that was a little too small to hold a laptop. It held a chalice, a small book of liturgy, a bottle of whiskey and another of spring water, and a stone tile intended for pillar candles. For RDNA rituals it's important to have a second chalice available that contains a non-alcoholic alternative to whiskey. The second chalice didn't fit so well with everything else in the satchel, so we acquired a larger messenger bag. Then we found a larger portable altar stone that held both chalices.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, we quickly learned that whiskey, being only 40% alcohol, did not continuously sterilize our germs while sharing a chalice. Remember, the whiskey is also ceremonially *diluted* with spring water. In order to adapt a tradition of sharing a common chalice, we started bringing two pitchers to our rituals, and asked attendees to bring their own ceremonial cups. Sometimes we'd have one or two extras in case someone missed the memo or forgot to bring a cup. The new adaptation has worked well. For larger events known to have a high turnout, we'll also bring recyclable cups, though as a regular practice that will cut into your whiskey budget, but go with what works for you and your Grove. Your ceremonial cup can be as basic or as elegant as you prefer. Metal, stone, glass, a plastic travel mug, they're all fine. Remember it's not what the Waters-of-Life are served in or from, but rather that you consecrate them unto yourself, as you drink, in a way that is meaningful to you.

Regarding altar stones, for about \$11 (2023), Kaytee makes a 10×6 inch polished granite slab called a “Chin Chiller” for pet chinchillas to sit on and keep from overheating. I've been using that for years now and only one person noticed what it was, not that it matters. The larger messenger bag allowed us to fit more accouterments into it, including larger (and more) copies of the liturgical books to pass around. The granite slab definitely helps keep the chalices level when the altar stone is placed on the ground.



Don't forget to check out garage sales, car boot sales, secondhand or charity shops, flea markets, et cetera for altar supplies. At a secondhand store we found a long black marble cheese board for \$4.99, which was a nice find because the original Pottery Barn price tag on the bottom indicated it was originally worth \$49. We know we paraphrased this already, but you don't need an altar slab, and if you do have one, they don't need to be made of stone.

At Samhain of 2014 we had the opportunity to meet Mike the Fool. He bestowed Oakdale Grove with copies of long out-of-print Druid books, gave a special chalice to Anna Smith (the provisional Arch-Druid of Carleton Grove at the time), and gave us a small luggage cart so that we wouldn't have to carry everything around in a messenger bag. The cart presented a bit of a dichotomy and struggle between the inner *minimalist* and the outer *aestheticist*. We had slowly been finding ways to minimize the amount of stuff we brought to rituals, while maximizing the overall experience itself. However, our creativity and love for aesthetics won out. We outfitted the cart with two wooden boxes that could be stacked, and attached clasps to the boxes so they could be fastened to each other both right side up, or with the top box upside down depending on



how we wanted to contain and transport the altar supplies.

It gave us incentive to bring even more ceremonial paraphernalia to rituals, like firewood, vestments, potluck items, and even more copies of liturgy books! The boxes could be left attached to the cart or removed and set on the ground during rituals. Either way, it brought the granite altar slab and the chalices at least two feet off the ground and within better reach. We also realized the granite Chin-Chiller slab only covered half of the top of the altar, so we got a second slab. Together, they now cover the green linen [napkin] altar cloth entirely to the point that the cloth seems a bit needless, but it looks nice. There's no official altar setup method, so go with what works, and go with what you like!

Altars, Working Tables, & Shrines (and the difference between the three)

It is possible to nitpick that our wooden box on wheels where we set a granite slab and chalices upon technically isn't an altar, but rather a *working table*. A **working table** holds all the ritual props up off the ground, and is usually a pedestal where the plant-based sacrifices are set before they are cast to the ritual fire. According to the original Reformed Druid custom, yes, the chalices were placed on the *sacrificial altar*, but the offering, an oak branch or something, was tucked under the belt of the Arch-Druid. The Arch-Druid would offer the sacrifice to the altar and divine whether or not it was accepted.

Typically, Oakdale Grove's custom is that the offerings sit on the *working table* and we cast them to the flames. **The ritual fire is technically the altar here.** Lo and behold, a fire "altar" tends to accept any flammable sacrifices hungrily! All manner of things end up on an altar, so it's a gray area that there are numerous opinions on. An **altar** can be used as a place where sacrifices are offered. It can be used as a shelf for sacred objects such as relics, curios, tools, incense, and other items, much like what a working table already does.

It can also serve as a *shrine*. **Shrines** are typically a focus point of prayers and devotionals to specific deities or ancestors. Outside of Druidry, shrines can also be made to memorialize the deceased, or can be devoted to saints, causes, and influential people. Depending on the function or how you use it, your sacred ritual surface can be a working table, and an altar, and a shrine, or any combination thereof. You could even have one of each that is separate from the others: an altar to offer libations and sacrifices, a working table to make or set sacred sundry items like incense or herb sachets, and a shrine for prayers and veneration.

Creative Topic: Construct an Altar



But I Don't Do Altars...

To be clear, you do not *need* to keep an altar for longer than the purpose of this segment of the workbook. Each Reformed Druid is different regarding what they feel they may need materially and spiritually. For this creative project, we *are* asking you to make an altar, but if it's not your thing, you can deconstruct it when you are done.

This is a very open-ended assignment in which you can unleash your creative forces. You can construct a travel altar, perhaps something as simple as an Altoids tin with a rock or polished worry stone inside, or as elaborate as a table-height stone cromlech. Heck, you could even make a social commentary by building an altar out of post-consumer waste and use it to sacrifice cash to the capitalist gods of greed. We would encourage making an altar from naturally occurring materials such as wood or stone, but repurposing or upcycling created or manufactured objects will also suffice. It keeps things out of landfills a bit longer. At the very least in our *opinion* you should have some sort of rock (or a living potted plant) on the surface of the altar. It is a piece of the Earth-Mother and therefore is a physical representation of divinity. If you have poor lighting conditions, you could probably even get by with a patch of moss in a ramekin, or an enclosed jar or mini terrarium.

Stealth Altars

Some of you may be in a situation where people you live with would disapprove of your altar or your Druidry for whatever reason. That's where a good *stealth* altar comes in handy. There's no wrong way to build one, but the simplest one is a potted plant. If you work with the four classical elements of Air, Fire, Water, and Earth (which the RDNA does not, but you can if you want to), a living plant represents all elements in one. It gives us the air we breathe. It uses the fire of the sun for photosynthesis. It drinks the water in the soil. It nestles in the potted earth. I sacrifice pieces of my salad or veggies to it, burying it in the soil as an offering. It replenishes the soil with the nutrients of my offerings. In doing so, I am in the service of the Earth-Mother, albeit a very tiny portion thereof.



You can also create a memorial shrine (featuring mementos and/or photos of ancestors who have passed away) to function as a stealth altar. Memorial shrines have an innocuous atmosphere of innocent sentimentality. At most people might ask you about whomever you are memorializing if your shrine is a conversation starter. Ceremonial candles and incense on your shrine probably won't be questioned as much either. If you have any small heirlooms or mementos such as a locket, or everyday objects that an ancestor used, those items grouped together would fit in nicely on a memorial shrine.



What Altar Supplies Do You “Need?”



Short Answer: NONE!

The Reformed Druid movement wasn't overtly intended to be anti-consumerist, but by default it is very compatible with ecological non-materialism. That's great if you're on a budget; even the founders of the RDNA were on a college student budget. They were resourceful and used what they had on-hand for the most part. Ritual robes were literal bedsheets, liturgical stoles were satin ribbons (and they still are). They bought all their trappings at the local Ben Franklin Five & Dime store (somewhat akin to a Dollar General, but with far more "hometown" character). You can still *be* a Reformed Druid without needing any of that though.

Longer answer: You can opt-in to using whatever tools you might want, but here are some basic tools that help in an RDNA context.

Chalice

If you plan on practicing Reformed Druidism, particularly any of the extant written rituals thereof, you might want to have a chalice. Most of the rituals incorporate a chalice that traditionally contains diluted whiskey from Beltane up to Samhain. Then from Samhain up to Beltane it contains spring water or something non-alcoholic. Alternatives to alcohol are always fine for any reason, but something strong should be used in the summer half of the year. The type, material, or shape of the chalice truly does not matter. You can use a plastic travel mug if that's what's keeping it out of a landfill. Antique stores usually have something nice, but get a lead (Pb) testing kit from a hardware store to make sure the antique goblet is safe for use if it's made of metal, glazed ceramics, or cut crystal. Wine glasses are a fine option, though not very durable. Ceramic or stoneware pottery are also a good choice. If you know of any potters who do custom work you could even commission someone to make one with a Druid Sigil decoration on it if you like.



If you are just an attendee of an RDNA ritual, in a post-pandemic world it's a good idea to bring your own chalice. Until 2020 it was customary for everyone to share one chalice in the ritual. Yay germs? Not anymore. Plus we now know that the alcohol in the whiskey is not strong enough to sterilize the rim of the goblet between sips. For those presiding over a ritual, if you're providing the sacramental beverage for all attendees, we would recommend getting a **pitcher** to consecrate and serve from.

Altar

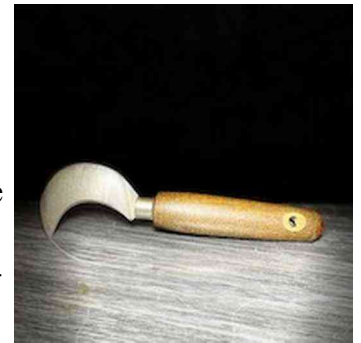
Altars are a suggestion to the extent that they give your chalice a place to sit rather than on the ground. There's no sacred geometry to worry about in terms of layout, height, or other dimensions. There is also no requisite material that it needs to be made out of. You could use a block of limestone, a granite countertop remnant, a marble cheese cutting board, a travertine or other clay flooring tile, a bamboo tea tray, et cetera. Heck, the first altar the Reformed Druids used was a portable record player covered in a white cloth. They may have felt that it was an inferior altar, but it was *pragmatic*.

Oakdale Grove's travel altar consists of two stackable wooden crates. The top crate is reversible for use as storage and carrying. When turned upside down, the underside becomes the top of the altar. Whichever way is facing up, it interlocks right-side up or upside down with brass toolbox latches added onto it. We use a large linen napkin as an altar cloth held down by two granite chinchilla cooling slabs

from the pet store (the Kaytee “Chin Chiller” for those wondering). The boxes that comprise the altar stand 22 inches high which is a bit low, but still *keeps everything within arms reach* – and that’s the point.

Sickle

In the greater pagan community and particularly Wiccan circles, the sickle is also called a *boline*, or knife with a bow-lined (curved) edge. Sickles actually aren’t mentioned in the original RDNA writings, but back then it was customary for the priest presiding over the ritual to cut a sacrifice of an oak branch and tuck it under the belt until it is offered to the altar or fire. For this purpose, *any* good sharp knife will do. If you want it to be sickle-like as an homage to the writings of Pliny the Elder about the Druids gathering mistletoe, that’s also befitting of a modern Druid. You can use an actual sickle, or bill hook, grape hook, pruning knife, hawkbill knife, carpet knife, plain pocket knife, gardening shears, etc.



Disclaimer: you are responsible for your own safety when handling knives. Also, be cognizant of state and local laws or ordinances regarding the carrying of knives and legal limits on blade length. Three inches is a common blade length limit, therefore we recommend the Ontario Knife Company Grape Hook with its two inch blade. It just needs to be maintained and kept free of rust because of its carbon steel blade.

Pliny the Elder mentions the Druids used a golden sickle to gather mistletoe. No golden sickles have ever been found in the archaeological record, however bronze sickles were still being used in the Iron Age. The Druids may have preferred to use them because (and we speculate) bronze sickles might have had a more “vintage” appeal than iron. We further speculate that the Druids who might have used bronze sickles probably kept them highly polished, which would have a similar appearance to gold. How very ceremonial of them! We painted one of the steel sickle blades with a Krylon 18kt gold leafing pen which does a decent job.

If you want a knife that is generally more historically accurate and common to the ancient Celts, consider looking into replicas of a *La Tène* style ring-hilted knife. They were your everyday multipurpose knife. The handle had a ring at the end to hang the knife on a peg or attach a cord. Among archaeological finds the blade length varied but curved up to a point. The handles sometimes curved down and were likely leather-wrapped. It is reasonable to also speculate that the Druids might not have always used special or fancy ceremonial tools, but were pragmatic and used what was readily on hand. Surely we can do the same these days as well.

Plant Sacrifice

It’s always good form for a Reformed Druid ritualist to have a plant-based (and *only* plant-based) sacrifice or offering. We mentioned above that customarily the sacrifice is an oak branch tucked under the priest’s belt, but it doesn’t have to be oak anything. You can have a bouquet of arranged flowers, a selection of pristine acorns, leaves, vegetables, or anything from a myriad different plants taken with mindfulness, humility, and respect, acknowledging our own mortality in the process. We sacrifice the plants that are valuable and special to us, symbolically setting them aside so that we cannot benefit from their use, and instead we offer it back to the Earth-Mother, dedicated to her beauty. You can offer it directly into a



ritual fire if you have one, or onto the altar.

If you have a depositional pit or a water feature, those are also historically accurate options if that's something you want to do. Depending on what the plant offering is, you might also be able to offer it back to the Earth-Mother as a deposit into your compost. What an offering that you are directly enriching the soil, literally dedicating it to the fertility and to the renewal of life! All that compost would be used to bring us blessings in the future. Now that's what we call *applied Druidry!*

Fire

The key phrase to always keep in mind is *if both safe and legal* there should be a fire. If you're at a ritual space that does not normally permit fires, or if there's a drought or burning ban you can definitely still complete a rite without a fire. College dorm residents with just a personal solo practice *do not* need fire or anything that burns. Offerings and sacrifices can be made using the elements of Earth, Water, or Air (such as placing appropriate offerings in the trees for birds to carry off).



If you make a whiskey libation to the fire, mind your robe sleeves as you will have a sudden but brief fireball with a typically dimmer flame that's harder to see than the rest of the fire unless it's nighttime. Make sure *nobody else* is leaning over the fire or in close proximity for any reason. Instead of casually pouring the whiskey into the fire, cast it quickly with your arm held high and pull it back immediately when the cup is empty. Maybe don't perform a libation like that if you're in a grove of trees with low branches, especially if they're pine.



Fire Bling

Now this is only a recommendation for those who will regularly use fires in their practice, especially if indoors. Find some heavy or gaudy jewelry that you can designate as your "fire bling." It is supposed to be something large, awkward, or that you otherwise wouldn't wear outside of that setting. It is your constant reminder that you have an open flame. Don't put the bling on until you're lighting the fire, and don't take it off until the fire is out and won't reignite. Once the fire is completely extinguished, take the *fire bling* off, and don't wear it until there's an open flame again.

I use one of my grandfather's old rings. It's heavy silver with two turquoise stones set into it. It's such a large ring that I can't get my hand into my pocket while I'm wearing it. With the added weight I almost never forget that I'm wearing it. Sometimes I'll start to take it off, but then I remember I have an open flame, so I either have to leave the ring on, or put out the candle or incense charcoal disk. It has been a very effective reminder.



I would generally advise against buying *new* jewelry for this purpose. In my case, it is an item I inherited from my grandfather. The silver had already been mined once but the ring gets to continue on with a second owner. Used jewelry is always more ecological than buying new. Check out thrift or antique stores for large gaudy items that can be used again. If you're concerned about the energy left over from the previous owner, just give it a good cleanse in a bowl of water under the light of a full moon overnight, or for three nights, or whatever you feel is a good cleansing method that won't damage the piece (because some methods can damage jewelry – sunlight for example can make gemstones fade).

Does it have to be jewelry? No! Heck, you could make a bracelet out of sticks and twine. You could make a tiara out of an upcycled coffee can with pop tabs on strings that clink against the sides. You could make a necklace out of jingle bells and big puffy craft store pompoms. Use your imagination for creative solutions, but the key is to have something attached to you that is a constant reminder that you have an open flame. After all, we're just trying to reduce the risk of setting fire to things that aren't supposed to burn. Don't leave a flame unattended and such. Flammable bling is probably not the best idea anyway.

Those are the basic accoutrements used in Reformed Druidism. They are purely optional in themselves and certainly nothing more is needed. All else is up to you depending on your aesthetic and what you want to put into your experience.



Essay: Describe Your Altar

1. Do you have an altar, working table, or shrine, or at least make a temporary one?
2. What is on it?
3. What does each item mean to you?
4. If you've had it a while, is your altar dusty? Are "non-altar-things" sitting on it?
5. Rearrange the items on it – how does the new placement make you feel?
6. If you feel you can't or shouldn't build one, would you be willing to elaborate as to why? For those who don't have altars, a lengthy response is not required.



Devotional: Ritual Cleansing

Most spiritual paths incorporate a form of spiritual cleansing. Some churches will have stoups of holy water or baptismal fonts near the entrance, usually limited to Catholic, Lutheran, or Episcopalian denominations. Orthodox Jewish synagogues may frequently or occasionally make use of their mikveh, while some devout practitioners might have one in their own home. In Islam, ritual purification can be achieved through an ablution prayer or through ceremonial washing. Hinduism also has water purification rituals, usually in sacred rivers. Wiccans might perform a banishing rite to remove negative influences from their workspace before conducting any other magic. Among the different faiths, these ritual cleansings are prerequisite to starting other religious tasks, or are simply traditions of basically hitting a spiritual reset button for the self.

What does ritual cleansing or spiritual purification look like in Reformed Druidism? Well, nothing is doctrinally prescribed, so you don't have to worry about it. However, methods of ritual cleansing may in fact be helpful for you: if not on a spiritual level, perhaps on a psychological level. The act of taking purposefully unusual steps can often help us get into the frame of mind to prepare or help us focus on druidic activities. The Druid order Henge of Keltria recommends storing your ritual garb with sachets of aromatic herbs, and taking a bath with seasonal herbs and harp music will release physical and mental tensions. In *Ár nDraíocht Féin*, a cleansing segment is an early part of their Core Order Of Ritual, in which any cleansing technique is generally acceptable.

Early Reformed Druidism does make a few mentions of purification or being pure. We'll take a quick look at them to highlight the only places where derivations of *pure* or *cleanse* are mentioned.

*And none shall be chosen save they shall be **pure in spirit** and save they shall have bowed themselves down in humility before the powers which are manifested in the Earth-Mother.*
—Customs 3:3 (Scharding, *et al.*, 2004, p. 5)

This verse is from the section of the Book of Customs regarding candidates for the Second Order of Reformed Druidism. There is actually no further mention of what it takes to become purified or what constitutes being pure of spirit, but it is mentioned in conjunction with *humility*. That is important for candidates for Second Order, because that rank is for individuals who wish to dedicate themselves to the *service* of the Earth-Mother and to the community. Thus the candidates must shed themselves of ego, pride, and narcissism. **Therefore we can deduce that *reforming our bad attitudes and habits* is a long-term method of purification.**

*Then shall ye pass amongst you the Waters-of-Life, that ye may know the continual flow and renewal of life. For they shall taste of the very essence of life, hallowed in the bosom of the earth, and **purified** by the worship of Druids.*
—Customs 5:5-6 (Scharding, *et al.*, 2004, p. 5)

Quite a few times, keen Reformed Druids will contemplate on what the above verse possibly means. Interpreting the syntax directly, it seems that Druids worshipping whiskey purifies the Waters-of-Life. That is quite the curious premise. When it comes to "worship" in the RDNA, everyone is welcome to worship whomever they perceive to be the divine. Interpreting that verse literally would seem to cause problems for Reformed Druids of Abrahamic faiths. Furthermore, in our decade-plus of practicing Reformed Druidism, never once have we actually *worshipped* the whiskey we consecrate as the

Waters-of-Life... not as far as we can tell, at least.

Perhaps it is better to mentally divide that verse into its separate clauses. Reformed Druids will internally express their worship or reverence in a way that is spiritually relevant to themselves. Thus, let us say that those independent acts of worship, however diverse between the attendees, is in itself a silent method of purifying the Waters-of-Life. Then when we partake, that purification is passed onto ourselves. **In this sense, the method of purification of the self is consecrating the Waters-of-Life, extending reverence or worship to whomever we individually honor, and then drinking the Waters.**

O Mother, cleanse our minds and hearts and prepare us for meditations.... Hear now, we pray thee, our Mother, as we offer up this sacrifice of life. Accept it, we pray thee, and cleanse our hearts, granting us thy peace and life.

—Order of Common Worship, Simple Summer Version (Scharding, *et al.*, 2004, p. 232)

Here we have excerpts from the Liturgies section. These ones are straightforward *prayers*. It doesn't really get much simpler than that, and may completely suffice for some Druids. As Druids, and especially as Reformed Druids, we are encouraged to discover and explore forms of spirituality that are compatible with our uniquely individual needs. We are also encouraged to create customs for ourselves when extant customs are lacking. In that way we are also embracing the bardic arts through our creativity. Druidry is not a monolith. It is alive and malleable. So don't let yourself sink into the assumption that *we gotta do it a specific way*.

When I began practicing Reformed Druidry, I took on a bit of a "druidic tonsure" the day before each Wheel-of-the-Year high day. In simplest terms, I was just buzzing my head myself with a 1.5mm clipper guard. Symbolically, I was casting off the woes that had accumulated since the last high day for a fresh new beginning. This act was also surprisingly cathartic. I immediately follow up with a ritual shower. I'm not big into baths, as I perceive running water to be much more cleansing than sitting in it like a teabag. I have handmade bar soaps designated specifically for this cleansing rite, using a scent I prefer to associate with self-purification. Sometimes I'll light some matching incense, though I don't use incense that often to begin with. Just whatever you do, feel encouraged to get creative!

Creative Topic: The Staff

By Emmon Bodfish

Samhain 1990, *A Druid Missal-Any*



To become a Druid in the RDNA mode, the first quest you must fulfill is the search for your staff. This is the first rung of the ladder. If you own land, a staff can best be found on that. If not, a friend's acreage, roadsides, a Druid Grove or sanctuary, even deserts or wasteland can be explored. There you must walk through the woods or wild, natural areas, not a garden or a farm. Look for a fairly straight, fir staff of waist to shoulder height. It should be at least as thick as your thumb and no thicker than your wrist.

Saunter with relaxed vision, open to what may catch your attention: a wind-fallen bough or deceased and seasoned sapling trunk that appeals or "calls" to you. Or as another Druid once put it: *Silently ask the question: "Who wishes to come? Who will help me?" Your staff is your basic tool, your compass point and anchor in the Work, your ground, your guide, your identity-piece, and magically speaking, your best friend. It must come to you of its own volition.* It should feel ready and right. For this reason, on no account cut a living plant!* And it should not be oak. Firm, seasoned wood that has aged and ripened is best.

When you have found a potential staff, sitting with it for a while, cross-legged, but not lotus position, is good.** Sit as Cernunnos is portrayed sitting on the panel of the Gundestrup Cauldron. Hold it vertically, pressing the foot into the ground and lean on it. Will it support you on the mundane as well as spiritual plane? If it is the right staff, you should get a feeling of "Yes" and the longer you sit with it, the more it should please you. As another phrases it: *"Sit with it. Drink in its presence. Let your energy flow into it. If it's right, it will become yours."*

If you were here or at another RDNA Grove, then you would bring your staff and present it at the next regular Service. If you are currently unaffiliated, you should instead (when you have found your staff) write back to us and **tell about your quest, how you found your staff, what wood it is, and what you experienced sitting in contemplation with it.** If you have been doing the Protogrove Service for yourself or with other unaffiliated Druids, present it at your next new or full moon service. When you have thus found your staff, then you will be ready to start doing the *Four Salutations of the Day*.

The more you meditate with your staff, or use it in the Salutations, contemplative exercises and "magic workings" (I don't like to use that phraseology; it has been overused in the wrong contexts and debased, but there is no other as widely understood), the more you will charge it with your energy, and build up a good set of associations around it. It will then act as a reservoir of these, and will help you get into the proper *mindstate [sic]* for sacred work, even when your energy is low. These hours of meditations, workings, or repetitions of the *Salutations of the Day* are, to use a mundane analogy, your deposits in your supernal back account. You build it up with your good energy. It has also been compared to practice put into learning a skill, or a language, or to building up muscle, to wit supernal weight lifting.

Take whichever of these analogies helps you (or none if that suits). The staff is one of the basic RDNA objects, (robe will come later), the basic tool, symbolic of all possessions and tools, and probably the first too that humanity picked up and thereby separated ourselves from the animal kingdom. (Yes, I

know other animals use tools but no other creatures carry a possession with them, identify it as “mine,” through they make pick up a stick to pry or poke something.) It is your “bag of gold for the passage,” the “ball of thread you unwind in the labyrinth,” your anchor in this World and your tester and touchstone in Others, and someday when you are lost and panicked on a journey in the Netherworld, it may find you. This is an important quest.

Begin it now. (Bodfish, 1990, p. 3)

Editor’s Note

*I like to say back in old days, *they had to cut down a few trees to build a stone circle*. If depending on your geography or other limiting circumstances you are unable to find a suitable dead branch to make into a staff, leave some extra offerings in exchange for taking a tree’s life (or part of it). I also see no prohibitions to using an oaken staff, particularly if that’s your only option due to living in an oak savanna.

**If you already have a designated staff, it wouldn’t hurt to go through the bonding steps outlined in paragraph three.

Viewpoints on Theology



Theological Diversity in Contemporary Druidry

One of the most common questions we get is something to the effect of: *Can I be a Druid and a [insert religion] at the same time?* The short answer is almost always *yes*. In Reformed Druidry, the answer is definitely *yes*. It was designed as a means for people of virtually any religion to come together and celebrate what we have in common; the Earth-Mother, or Nature. The rituals and customs are intended to be highly metaphorical yet open to different interpretations by everyone. If you don't want to worship Nature directly, by the grace of your own theological beliefs, Nature can be a *symbol* of what you *do* believe.

On Judeo-Christian Druids

One of our acquaintances in the Reformed Druid community inquired about Christian Druids in the RDNA:

One thought came up: RDNA isn't exclusively pagan. Considering the devotions to the Earth Mother, to Be'al, and Dalon Ap Landu, how do the Christians among you manage? I'd be interested in hearing from them about the integration of RDNA spirituality with Christian spirituality, since my grove is way below the Bible Belt, and I'm very likely to encounter some interested Christians.

—J.R.

One of our understandings of Reformed Druids who are also Christian is that the Divine can go by many different names simultaneously. To some Soft Polytheists, Danu, Llyr, Marduk, Apollo, Shiva, and others are different aspects of a whole divinity. This is just one interpretation among many. Even within Abrahamic faiths, God has many names such as Yahweh, Elohim, El Shaddai, Allah, et cetera. Never mind that some scholars hypothesize those names *may have been separate gods* from an earlier Canaanite belief system. *Elohim* is also grammatically plural of *El* (God), referring to *multiple* gods.

Some members of the Druidry Revival movement several centuries ago believed that the ancient Druids were actually monotheists who practiced antediluvian Hebrew mysticism, though Greek & Roman historians never seemed to make note of such. Theologians such as Reverend Henry Rowlands concluded the ancient Druids and the Celts were bred into existence by Gomer, one of Noah's grandsons via Japheth.

“Now among the sons of Japheth, it is generally allowed (and there are great authorities for it) that Gomer was the founder of that nation out of whom the Gauls and Britons descended.”
(Rowlands, 1723, p. 292) †

The early Revival Druids who were also Christian theologians (including many who were ministers) went on to explain that the ancient Druids practiced human sacrifice because they "missed the memo" after that one time God told Abraham not to make a blood sacrifice of Isaac. The vague description of the ancient Druids wearing robes were just barely reminiscent of Jewish ritual vestments. The theologians made a pretty convincing argument for its time, despite the wild liberties taken to try to connect the two cultures. Of course two and three centuries ago there was no such thing as genetic testing which would ultimately demonstrate that people of Celtic descent are in genetic haplogroup R1b, and people of Canaanite descent are in genetic haplogroup J, meaning there is no genetic

connection to the time of the flood myth.

The Bardo-Druidic Creed

Aside from attempting to connect the Druids directly to named descendants of Noah, other Christians in the Druid Revival period were adapting and creating philosophical insights to contribute to the growing movement. Reverend Dr. James developed the *Bardo-Druidic Creed* which drew in numerous converts to Druidism after initially being published in 1844 and later refined:

“There was one God. There were five elements – earth, water, fire, air, and heavens. The soul – refined, vital, and imperishable – is a lapsed intelligence, regaining happiness by transmigration. Creation improved as man improved, and animals gradually became men. Man develops by experience in different states of being. Celestial beings aid man in development. Ultimately all will be happy, and evil finally extinguished.” (Bonwick, 1895, p. 63) ‡

Interestingly the original version from 1844, being much more longwinded, even includes a much more verbose description of how *animals gradually became men*. It described the *theory of evolution* a whole 15 years before Charles Darwin published it in *The Origin of Species*. Therefore, Druids were evolutionists even before scientists were.

Philosophy is Key

A key distinction to make is that the founders of the RDNA often stated that Druidism is more of a philosophy if anything, though for some the RDNA has become a religion in its own right. Please remember that the Reformed Druids of North America was founded in 1963. We like what David Fisher said about the foundation in his interview:

“...it was never meant to be a genuine alternative world religion. We didn’t set it up that way. It has no doctrine to speak of except a vague kind of pantheistic matron theology. It has very little ethical importance, except sort of benign concern for nature and ecology. Perhaps some pacifism. It has no notion of divinity other than a pantheistic one, or panentheistic one. So it wasn’t meant to be a replacement for religion.” (Scharding *et al*, 2004, p. 845)

Christian Druids in the Modern Era

To many members of the modern druidic community, the concept of Christian Druids can be tough to grasp. This mindset can come from those in the Druid community who are practicing polytheists, agnostics, and even some who might be lapsed Christians. A common question frequently comes up asking how Christian Druids can reconcile the two forms of spirituality, when Christianity itself is perceived to be so rigid. Though there's a key detail. Christianity is so diverse within itself; there are *thousands* of denominations within the Christian faith, with varying degrees of rigidity.

Many people who happen to find Druidry might be coming in order to *heal* from an abusive form of Christianity that to them, was too rigid. Regardless of our original faith backgrounds, we really only hear the nightmare stories about some of the most rigid denominations: the *fundamentalist* branches of Christianity. We hardly ever hear any shocking stories from moderate or liberal Christian denominations. Yes, abuse absolutely happens in them, and it can happen anywhere, but the fundamentalist ones seem to have the highest rate of hypocrisy that it is a much bigger deal when we

learn about it. Non-fundamentalist Christians are less likely to interpret the Bible literally. This makes the metaphors in Druidism, and particularly Reformed Druidism, all the more appealing to liberal and moderate Christians.

"I went out in Nature not to worship her, but Nature was more of a catalyst for me to establish an intermediary connection to Divinity."

— Anonymous

Another Christian Druid commented that Druidry proved to be an effective means to explore nature mysticism under the auspices of their personal faith. The concept of **Religious Naturalism** re-emerged in the time of the Enlightenment, becoming popular with Protestant ministers and theologians as a way of discovering the divine by means of exploring the *sciences*, such as *they* were a few centuries ago.

"Who is it that provides for our wants and pleasures with so much goodness and munificence? Go and ask universal nature: the hills and the valleys will inform thee, the Earth will teach thee, and the heaven is a mirror in which thou may behold the Author of these blessings." (Sturm, 1791, trans. 1832, p. 243)

Christoph Sturm was heavily into Natural Philosophy, so much so that any of his given reflections for the days of the year could appear to be rather pagan the way he personified Nature. Most of the time reading through [Sturm's Reflections](#) seems like it would make a cute little pagan manifesto if the publisher would do so much as change references from *God* to *Goddess*. We're not advocating for that, but merely trying to illustrate the point that Christian nature enthusiasts have always been in the modern Druid community who were empowered by books such as that one.

Some of Oakdale Grove's membership are also Christian: one stated that Jesus shows up in a way that is needed for the individual, and that may come across in the forces of nature or the deities of our perceptions in Reformed Druidism. In Dr. Larisa A. White's 2021 *World Druidry Survey*, out of the 725 Druids who participated, 20% of them indicated they were Christian Druids (White, 2021, p. 142). This result seems congruous with a (non-scientifically conducted) survey within the Reformed Druid movement that took place circa 2012. At the time, roughly one quarter of Reformed Druids identified as Christian Druids. Christians have been an integral part of the modern Druidry movement for the past 300 years, and we're not trying to sound crass, but they don't need to explain themselves to us.

Saint Columba

Saint Columba, in the sixth century, is sometimes quoted as saying "Jesus is my Druid," though technically that quote is a distortion of the original medieval Irish manuscript in which Columba was praying in a derisive tone, loud enough for the Druids present to hear, saying:

"My Druid, he will not refuse me, is the Son of God..." [emphasis added]

—Annals of the Four Masters, M555.2

Fortunately in Ireland there was no pagan genocide, just a gradual conversion roughly from the fifth to eighth centuries. There was a continuation of the pagan holidays (and a goddess or two) surviving in the Celtic Christian Church that has hybridized the old ways with the new, much to the chagrin of the Catholic Church.

“Even St. Bernard [of Clairvaux], in his *Life of Malachy* [mid-12th century CE], referred to the Irish as ‘Pagans, while calling themselves Christians.’” (Bonwick, 1895, p. 71) ‡

Saint Brigid

If there's any one saint who has inspired modern Druids the most, it's Brigid. She was born in Ireland circa 451-455 CE. Her mother gave birth to Brigid in the doorway of the house, right on the threshold between the inner and outer realms. This liminality plays into Brigid's life; in one role she is a Druid, and in another role she is a Christian. Her father was the Druid *Dubhtach*, who raised her on milk from cows that came from the Otherworld. She learned the ways of Druidry and later converted to Christianity, though never really ceased to be a Druid, either. She founded a monastery at Kildare (*Cill Dara* in Gaelic means "Church of the Oak," which is apocryphally said to have been on the site of a school for female Druids. Christian theologians believe her to have been a real person who happened to be named after the goddess Brigid. Saint Brigid's feast day was placed on Oimele to align with the festival of the same goddess. The lore and symbolism between goddess and saint are now forever intertwined. (Ellis, 1994)

Saint Francis of Assisi

Saint Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of animals and of ecology. He is probably the second most compatible saint for Druidry. One of our Grove members had a pocket devotional and read to us a song by Saint Francis called *The Canticle of the Sun*, which was so pagan-leaning it could make your jaw drop:

“Praise be to Thee, O Lord, for our Mother the Earth, who sustains us and nourishes us, bringing forth diverse fruits, flowers of many colors and the grass.” (Francis, 1224/1907 para 14-15)

The canticle even mentions all four classical pagan elements: wind, water, fire, and earth. The canticle would make a beautiful daily devotional prayer for all Christian Druids, Catholic or otherwise. There are numerous values associated with Saint Francis of Assisi. Some of the more commonly cited core values include:

- Community building
- Compassion for others
- Peacemaking and justice
- Reverence for Nature

The more you read on Saint Francis of Assisi and the writings associated with him, the more you see just how compatible it is with Druidry. Isaac Bonewits controversially declared in *The Book of Changes* that:

“We worship the Earth-Mother as the feminine personification of Manifestation, Be'al as the masculine personification of Essence.” (Scharding, *et al*, 2004, p. 58)

While one can appreciate that a lot of Reformed Druids disagree with that claim entirely, there is a similar interpretation to Isaac's that works a lot better: The Earth-Mother is the *physical* manifestation of divinity, and Be'al (who is a source of Awareness), is the *nonphysical* manifestation of divinity. Some who agree might swap out manifestation with representation if they believe more in archetypes.

To a Christian Druid, *Awareness* might be a synonym for *The Word* in John 1:1 of the New Testament. A Christian Druid's personal focus might be the embodiment of Spiritual Humanism that Christ espoused: living a life of simplicity and benevolence to mankind, championing social justice and pacifism as the son of their god had advocated. Part of the reasoning for Be'al as a source of Awareness comes from Meditations 7:13:

"In the silence of your being shall ye find that which is not of your being; and in the Earth-mother shall ye find that which is not of the Earth-mother; in Be'al shall ye be made aware, and your awareness shall fill you." (Scharding, *et al*, 2004, p. 13)

Some Christian Druids are striving to gain knowledge of the Divine that was removed from the Bible for "not fitting the model" of power decided at the Council of Nicaea (such as, but not limited to, the Gnostic Gospels). Reformed Druidry has helped Christian members gain a new perspective in their individual beliefs. For some, the RDNA has been a safe haven for people to find an alternative means of spiritual expression or find healing from a prior toxic congregation.

The RDNA tenets of belief, the rituals, and the customs have been open to interpretation in each person's own way, for the sake of inclusivity and escaping the restrictions of conformity since its inception. In Oakdale Grove, the Reformed Druid liturgy is very colorful, though it doesn't make statements that we're pagans or polytheists, but is written to keep things pluralistic and welcoming to people of a diverse range of spiritual backgrounds, and everyone gets something different out of it.

Atheist and Agnostic Druids

There are many people who come to Druidry through the natural sciences and through rational thought. These siblings in Druidry may be drawn in by the ecological and environmental causes that Druidry champions in the modern age. They don't have to believe in the old gods, nor in any gods for that matter. They might really appreciate the "Nature is Nature" interpretation of the Two Basic Tenets. They also might like a good ritual with its colorful use of metaphor. In lieu of *spiritual* fulfillment, they might be there for *philosophical* fulfillment, or for the endorphin rush of being in good company with others who want to celebrate the change of the seasons and the progression of time.

"Natural or nature-based spirituality requires no belief in the supernatural." (Restall Orr, 2004, p. 74)

"...there is no need to explain this in terms of 'belief in the supernatural;' indeed, the very phrase is devoid of meaning to the Druid, for there is nothing *beyond* nature." (*ibid*, p. 164)

List of Common Theologies Among Druids

Any given Druid can express one or more of these forms of spiritual belief, or they could express a theological belief that is not listed here. Syncretism is very common among Druids. There are so many additional ways to view theology besides these ones, so please just bear that in mind. The following list is not a list of religions, but rather, a list of the different ways that the divine can be perceived.

- **Agnosticism:** Not adhering to theological perspectives, but neither rejecting any outright.
- **Animism:** Belief that all *things* have their own spirit, including inanimate objects.
- **Atheism:** Rejection of any theological or supernatural perspective.

- **Deism:** Belief in an abstract divinity that does not interfere with the universe (or with anyone in it) supernaturally in any way.
- **Duotheism:** Belief in two deities (i.e. a God and a Goddess, or Lord and Lady).
- **Henotheism:** Belief that multiple gods exist, but is only devoted to one.
- **Humanism:** Generally non-theistic, but not necessarily a *faith in humanity* either, but rather a faith that we can advance ourselves through the sciences, philosophical enlightenment, and through technological developments.
 - **Secular Humanism:** Advancement comes from logic and reason, rejecting the supernatural.
 - **Religious Humanism:** Humanism that views certain abstract or religious concepts as being necessary to our human existence, such as hope, ceremonies, rituals, and a communication of humanitarian values through metaphor.
- **Kathenotheism:** Belief in the existence of many deities, but only devoted to one at a time.
- **Monotheism:** Belief in only one deity.
- **Pantheism:** Belief that the divine is *in* everything, but is still also separate.
- **Pantheism:** Belief that the divine *is* everything, and everything is divine.
- **Polytheism:** Belief in multiple deities.
 - **Hard Polytheism:** Belief that all deities are unique, separate from each other, and have their own agency.
 - **Soft Polytheism:** Belief that all deities are different *aspects* of a central divine source.
- **Syncretism:** Combining aspects of two or more religious practices in a manner that works.

Journal Entry: Is something is missing from your practice?

Do you feel that something lacking in how you practice Druidry?

In your journal (external to this workbook), write down some of the main aspects of your spiritual practice. As things come to mind of what you incorporate, consider anything that you feel is a bit of a *void* in terms of your spiritual or religious needs. If you feel that your needs in this capacity are being met, write that down! For anything that's missing, expound on your thoughts, meditating with pen and ink (or your keyboard or vlog or whatnot) as to what you might be able to do to make sure all of your spiritual needs are being met in your practice. Maybe it's not clear, or maybe the remedy is not that simple. Getting your thoughts down is a very good first step.



Attestation:

I have made a journal entry on this topic.

“Official” Deities of the Reformed Druids

What deities are invoked in the RDNA?

Well not much is “official” in the RDNA, but at the core of the RDNA “pantheon” is the Earth-Mother. After all, she is the only one mentioned in the Two Basic Tenets. Nine other deities are commonly invoked. Having anything in an *official* capacity in the RDNA is relatively rare. Don’t worry if a deity you hoped to see isn’t listed below. When the Reformed Druids originally hashed out the details, the deities in the list seemed like enough to get *started* with. Plenty of other gods and goddesses have been mentioned in RDNA ceremonies over the decades, including Greek, and Vedic deities. So if you hoped to see some different *Celtic* deities in the RDNA, you are certainly at liberty to incorporate them and still call it Reformed Druidism. So here is the list of the *more common* deities mentioned or invoked in the Reformed Druid movement:

1. **Earth-Mother** aka the Mother Earth, Nature with a capital N, open to interpretation.
2. **Be'al** according to some Druid Revival resources, an ancient Irish supreme being, literally translates as "Shining One" and perhaps "Lord," open to interpretation.
3. **Dalon Ap Landu** Patron of the 3rd Order. The name was sloppily back-translated in 1963 by founders of the Reformed Druid movement to mean *Lord of the Groves*, who *is* an entity mentioned by Roman historian Lucan. To some Druids today, Dalon is less of a deity and more of a dryad, concept, or thoughtform entity, open to interpretation.
4. **Grannos** Gaulish god of healing springs, patron of the 4th Order
5. **Braciaca** Gender-ambiguous Brythonic deity of grain, malt, and drink, matron/patron of the 5th Order
6. **Belenos** Gaulish god of healing, in the RDNA particularly of emotional wellbeing, with strong solar associations, patron of the 6th Order
7. **Sirona** Gaulish goddess of healing springs (consort of Grannos), matron of the 7th Order. In the RDNA she is also indicated as a goddess of lakes and rivers, though historical evidence of this is lacking.
8. **Taranis** Gaulish spelling of the pan-Celtic god of thunder, patron of the 8th Order
9. **Llyr** Welsh god of the sea, patron of the 9th Order
10. **Danu** Irish fertility goddess, matron of the 10th Order

Be'al

If there’s one deity (or metaphor for one) in the RDNA that might raise the hackles (or perhaps mild concern) of some Christian Druids, it’s probably *Be'al* due to the similar spelling of the Canaanite *Baal* with his numerous spelling variations. Be'al with the apostrophe shows up in rare Druid Revival era books, and was by some, considered to be an ancient Irish supreme being:

- “The Gaelic name, which may be anglicized into Be'al, signifies "Source of All.”” (MacLeod, 1895/1912, p. 429) ‡
- “*Be'al* was the source of all being,” (Bonwick, 1895, p. 129) ‡

MacLeod also states there’s *no* academic evidence that links Be'al with Baal. In reality Be'al is more likely related to Bel, the deity that the festival of Beltane (*Bealtaine* in Irish Gaelic) is named after. In the RDNA, Be'al is sometimes referred to as *Lord*. Coincidentally Baal and it’s many spelling variations also literally mean *lord*. Beelzebub translates as *Lord of the Flies*, Baalshamin means *Lord of the Heavens*, the Hebrew given name Bealiah means [*the*] *Lord is Yah[weh]*. Be'al (in the RDNA) is simply a title meaning *Lord*. It’s a placeholder for whomever you need it to refer to. The main

takeaways about Be'al are: that he is not Baal (unless that's how you want to interpret him), the RDNA founders probably referenced the above sources in developing the order's cosmology, and if you're uncomfortable with saying Be'al you can substitute your preferred placeholder deity, or use the title Lord.

Dalon Ap Landu Who?

As you can tell by now, the Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA) is a quirky Druid order. Before it was created in 1963, all the other existing Druid orders were Masonic or at least quasi-Masonic societies, whose members published books of sometimes questionable scholarly quality by today's standards. In creating the neo-druidic RDNA movement, the founders took to the libraries and were inspired by the dubious Victorian era writings on Druidism.

For the most part, the RDNA founders did just fine in creating an entirely new brand of Druidism. The RDNA would be the first Druid order to be described as *neopagan*, much to the chagrin of a majority of the early members who did not consider themselves pagan. Referencing an eclectic handful of Celtic gods and goddesses in ritual, the Reformed Druids chose to honor them as aspects of Nature, which they dubbed the Earth-Mother. They incorporated Be'al as the source of Awareness, whose namesake was borrowed from Druidry Revival writings.

Somewhere early on, the RDNA found Dalon Ap Landu, allegedly meaning Lord of the Groves in Welsh. In an interview between Michael Scharding (30th Arch-Druid emeritus of Carleton Grove) and David Fisher (First Arch-Druid emeritus of Carleton Grove and founder) in 2004 there was this exchange:

MS: One of the other mysteries is the origins of Dalon Ap Landu.

DF: That, I think, was a phrase discovered by Norman, or by someone else, a member of the Druids, in their research, as a phrase meaning Lord of the Groves. And we adapted it. I can't honestly remember who it was that dug that up. (Scharding *et al*, 2004, p. 844)

Some of the books they were reading in the library included the twelve-volume set of Frazer's Golden Bough and Graves' The White Goddess. Both of those have received strong criticism for shabby scholarship and are no longer considered recommended reading.

"We have seen him on the bosom of the Earth-mother; huge woody arms raised to the sky in adoration, strong and alive; and we have called his name Dalon Ap Landu."

—Meditations 4:12

The above verse from The Chronicles of the Foundation suggests that Dalon is a sacred tree, most likely an oak. For those with less literal interpretations, he could be a dryad or tree spirit. He could be a *Cernunnos* epithet, a *Genius Loci* (spirit of place), or the *Green Man* among other interpretations. For the most part, Dalon Ap Landu is the name given to the Third Order, and the name given to the council which Third Order Druids become part of: the Order of Dalon Ap Landu, and the Council Of Dalon Ap Landu, respectively. Some Druids even speculate that Dalon Ap Landu is a collective consciousness of all Third Order Druids, especially when Dalon is invoked in just about every Reformed Druid ritual during the priest's consecration of the Waters-of-Life.

James Forlong, a Victorian era Oxford scholar, mentions in his book Rivers of Life a Scottish deity

called *Duw Keli*. Unfortunately any Celtic words he uses are all spelled phonetically, making it difficult to cross reference the name without knowing the proper spelling of *Keli*. *Duw* is certainly the phonetic spelling for *dubh* which is Irish and Scots Gaelic for *black*, and *du* is Welsh. In researching Scots Gaelic we see that *coille* is the modern spelling of the word for *forest* and in Welsh it is *celli*. Forlong translates *Duw Keli* as *Him of the Dark Grove* (with the implied preceding genitive pronoun devoid of explanation) (Forlong, 1883). We feel one step closer to finding *Dalon Ap Landu*, or at least to finding a historical reference to a Grove god. Despite this we still have some doubts as to the validity of Forlong's writings.

Then we serendipitously chanced upon reading about a neolithic chambered tomb on the Isle of Anglesey called *Bryn Celli Ddu* which means *Mound [of the] Dark Grove*. It made us wonder if it was once inside a grove of trees, or was it dedicated to a primordial nature deity? Anglesey was essentially the "Vatican" of the ancient Druids, however the burial mound was last used in the Bronze Age before it was sealed. Nevertheless it would have had a supernatural and mysterious ambiance to the Celts when they arrived in the Iron Age.

Then we take into account some of the ancient Roman writings on the Druids. Sadly, there are only about 10 full pages on the ancient Druids that survive from Greek and Roman times. The Romans were biased in their writings, so could we be more inclined to trust them than some of the fishy Victorian writings, or the other way around? The Roman historian Lucan wrote that *even the Druids feared to disturb the Lord of the Grove*. He was likely exaggerating, but there it was: Lord of the Grove, a deity of place, in the historic record. (Lucan, & Duff, 1977)

When it comes down to it, *Dalon Ap Landu* is just likely to be a shoddy back-translation of *Lord of the Groves* in Welsh. The biggest problem is *Ap*; it sticks out like a sore thumb because it means *Son of* in Welsh. At *Paganicon* in 2019 we had the opportunity to speak to Kristoffer Hughes, one of the guests of honor whose first language is Welsh. We told him about our struggle to find the origin of *Dalon*. Kristoffer broke down each syllable of the name, telling us how each part can be tweaked and interpreted in several ways, but not a single one of them aligned with *Lord of the Groves*. Perhaps we've reached an impasse until someone discovers whatever book it was that Norm Nelson found that name in, though Fisher did say it was *adapted*.

There are plenty of Reformed Druids who view *Dalon Ap Landu* as just a made-up deity. Some have a minor problem with it, some don't. Some people get hung up on it and feel like they can't be a Reformed Druid. Take it for what it *strives* to mean: a master of trees that was real to the ancient Druids. The Third Order in the RDNA is officially nicknamed the *Order of Dalon Ap Landu*, and the governing body of the RDNA is the *Council of Dalon Ap Landu*. It is merely a unique name to append to the Third Order and its council. When you name something, you give it power. "*Dalon Ap Landu*" only gets about 500 search results on Google, but he still might actually be in a forgotten book somewhere.

"She was and is a Druid who dares to ask the boldest questions, such as *why should I follow Dalon Ap Landu?* For the work of *Dalon Ap Landu* is not dependent on his name, but by your actions the work of the Third Order may be done."

—The Book of Vigils, Part II, 17:3 & 17:9



Fire Meditation

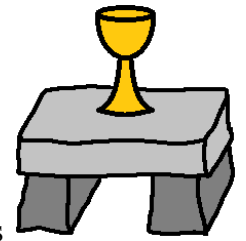
Meditation is a hallmark of Reformed Druid rituals and practices, and meditations can take many forms. They can be something as simple as a quiet contemplation, experiential open meditations such as in the RDNA liturgies, Mindfulness, or more complex forms such as guided meditations and pathworking. Fire meditation, or fire gazing, is also a very good multifaceted utility. It can be an effective tool for finding insights that we may be seeking. It can also be used for pyromancy: quite literally fire divination. From a scientific perspective, the meditative aspect can elevate our brainwaves to an *alpha state*, which helps with creativity and problem solving.

Fire gazing has been used in Reformed Druidry since its founding years. You can use a bonfire, fireplace, or perhaps even a pre-recorded video of a cozy fire. Naturally, we would recommend a real fire though, whenever possible. Fire gazing can also be accomplished via candle staring, though the single flame's intensity can cause retinal spots to occur due to the small point of radiant light haloed in darkness. That tiny point of contrast could also cause eyestrain, but our eyes can adjust much better to a larger fire. And for those who feel really adventurous, you can try a fire meditation within your imagination.

For bonfires, any time of day will work just fine, however nighttime is best in our opinion. At night the glowing embers at the base of the fire stand out, flickering in their own patterns complimentary to the flames. Considering that fire generally involves the burning of flammable objects, please take standard safety precautions, and as with almost all meditations (except Yoga Nidra) please avoid falling asleep, especially for fire meditations.

To begin, find a comfortable seated position a safe distance from the flames and projectile embers. Standing is fine, too, but an important aspect of most meditations is entering into a state of relaxation. Slow your breathing patterns with comfortable, deep breaths. Then start gazing into different parts of the fire to get a feel for what each part is doing. Watch the high dancing flames, watch the bases of the flames, and how they start to split and merge together. Watch the smoke waft, billow, ripple, and curl. Watch for small flickers of fire that come seemingly from the air itself. Watch the glowing coals as they incandesce, glowing yellow, orange, red, and then darken as they turn to white cinders. Listen to the crackle of the wood, as the old sap and moisture boils inside, hissing as it burns and evaporates.

Watch the patterns in every aspect of the fire. One area might continue to draw your attention back to it. Maybe it is the little rogue flames that wisp out of nothingness. Maybe it keeps forming a pattern or a shape that means something to you. Does it form part of an image? This is where the subjectivity comes into play. We don't have the answers for you, but you hold the responsibility for your own interpretations. If you feel you are receiving messages or instructions, think through their implications. Never do anything that a reasonable person would consider unsafe.



Focused Imagination Rite of Empowerment (F.I.R.E.) – a Technique for the RDNA

Previously we mentioned a fire meditation in your imagination: a visualization of fire. This F.I.R.E. ritual segment is a method written for the RDNA that uses *nonphysical* flames. The rite can be adapted for focusing your energy and thought process into whatever your next task may be, whether metaphysical or mundane. It is good to have a real fire as well as the one within your imagination. If you also build a real bonfire, keep it just out of arms reach (quite literally, for safety). Since you might potentially have a real fire on your hands, we really need to emphasize that you don't actually put your hands in real flames, and certainly not close enough to cause any degree of burns. This is why we're emphasizing the use of your imagination for specific steps of this technique. It can also be done without a physical fire; that's fine. **Just don't touch real fire.** How many other ways can we word this?

The rite speaks of your dominant and receptive hands. Typically, *dominant* correlates to which hand you use the most, such as for writing, and *receptive* correlates to the other hand. If you're left handed, left is likely your energetically dominant hand for casting, and your right is receptive for receiving. If you think your hand used for writing isn't the same as your energetically dominant hand, trial and error may be necessary. Surely either hand can accomplish both sending and receiving; it's not black and white. In any real task, your dominant hand is good at both sending and receiving, like playing ball. So trying to remember which hand is energetically *this or that* isn't worth fretting over.

The F.I.R.E. Technique

A fire burns before you, and the object of your task sets beside you. Slow your breathing to a comfortable rate of deep intentional breaths. Stand upright in an assertive posture; your feet are shoulder-width apart. Feel the Earth-Mother beneath you. The pull of her constant embrace is unwavering. Look down at the ground, continuing your breathwork. She is our rock, our roots, our foundation. In your posture you find yourself in balance with her embrace. She holds you close to her, while your legs hold you up in equilibrium. With each inward breath, visualize her strength rising into where you stand, stone and earth drawing up in coalescing symbiosis. Pay attention to your emotions. Feel the stability and reassurance that you can now begin your task.

Look up to the fire again. Continue your breathwork. What you see before you are real flames, now see their greater likeness within your minds. We all have an inner fire, blazing away brilliantly. This is your hallowed powerhouse. Gaze into your sacred fire. This fire has the will to be something greater than it is. This is your vitality. This is what drives us to extend our limitations. This is the force behind our will. The fire draws from the Earth and from the Air. You are its controller, not its fuel.

You are there. This is your inner fire. Feel the intensity of the heat of the flames. Let it be real unto yourself. Realize the synergistic nature of this blaze as it fuels your vitality and provides focus for your intent, as you fuel it by your will. Continue your slow deep breathing. Now – extend your limitations; you are at your inner fire. In your mind, step closer to it, and extend your energetically dominant hand. The heat intensifies. The fire grows, responding to your hand. You may feel apprehension or fear of the pain. Do not doubt yourself, and do not let the sense of foreboding overcome you. Breathe deeply, still slowly, with intent. Amplify the flames to engulf your hand; **they do not burn you.** Recognize this power within yourself, acknowledge your authority over it, and embrace it as a gift.

Raise your other hand: your energetically receptive hand, to the fire. Take in the flames, the power, the warmth, and the light into your palm. You are surging with vitality! You are rooted to the ground with a cosmic whirlwind shining within you. You feel charged, as if pure light is radiating from you. Now, with both hands in this inner fire, you and the flames are boosting each other exponentially.

Visualize or chant up to three times with increasing intensity, or as many times as necessary:

*From the heart of the fire,
To the heart of my being,
To the heart of the fire,
From the heart of my being:
A whirlwind, ever brighter,
(optional) **the power of the universe flows through me.***

Monitor your emotional state, breathe. Now you can channel your will and intent to aid you in your task.

The object of your task sets beside you. Clasp your hands together, and turn from the fire toward your task, legs still shoulder width apart. The earth moves with you. As you focus on it mentally and/or visually, you are still surging with the power of the universe, now flowing palm to palm and through your heart. You are now about to funnel as much energy as needed into the task through your dominant hand, **but with your receptive hand clenched shut.**

No more cycling the power; it is time to cast. Feel your emotions again. Open your dominant hand toward the task. Unleash the power of the universe. Visualize the release stronger with every steady exhale. If catharsis helps, release your emotions with the energy in tandem. Scream if it helps. Don't hold back any tears. The task is filled with primal incandescence as the energy and intent is directed into it.

As the energy flows, the whirlwind continues to push with a cosmic force. Eventually it begins to slow. At this point, you can consider whether you want to keep the remainder for yourself and let it dissipate over time, or if you wish to return it to the fire. The latter may help you get back to a balanced state. You don't want to cast more energy than you gathered, as you might end up feeling drained afterward.

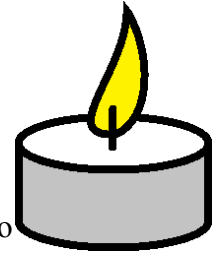
To return the remaining energy, face the fire. The earth again turns with you. Raise your dominant hand toward the fire, palm toward the flames but not in them, and let the whirlwind slow more with each exhale until it stops. The brilliant cosmic glow diminishes to the level of normal ambient light, but still shines within you. Let the fire in your mind recede and merge into the small bonfire that blazes before you.

Then open your receptive hand with your palm facing the earth. The energy flow now begins to be entirely passive. Continue your slow, deep breathing. Feel the earth receding from your legs, so that you and the Earth-Mother are no longer anchored to each other, but remember her embrace still holds you close to her. If you did cast out more energy than you gathered, maybe eat or nap to recuperate.

The F.I.R.E. Technique, high level outline

- Slow, intentional breathing (every step), inhale helps intensify
- Root into the earth
- Visualize fire
- Dominant hand in flames, charge
- Receptive hand in flames, cycle and charge
- Whirlwind and radiant light, boosting with the chant
- Clasp hands, continue cycle
- Task: Dominant hand discharge, receptive hand clenched, cathartic release, exhale helps discharge
- Return remainder to fire, fire diminishes
- Open receptive hand toward earth when whirlwind is neutral
- Release from earth anchor

Devotional: Weekly Higher Order Deities



Seven is a sacred number in Reformed Druidism. Consecrating the chalice calls upon the Sevenfold Powers. There are seven higher orders of the priesthood. Carleton Grove consecrated seven altars. We also already happen to have seven days in a week. The days also happen to have dedications to the sun, moon, and to Norse and Roman deities. Incidentally, the RDNA's seven higher orders of the priesthood also take the names of seven deities, though from four different Celtic pantheons.

- **Sunday: Belenos**
- **Monday: Sirona**
- **Tuesday: Grannos**
- **Wednesday: Llyr**
- **Thursday: Taranis**
- **Friday: Braciaca**
- **Saturday: Danu**

That just leaves out the Earth-Mother, Be'al, and Dalon Ap Landu, but they can have devotionals whenever the occasion calls for it. Heck, you can mix and match anyone you like anytime anyway! This *is* the RDNA after all. Whenever there's an oak tree at a spare moment we can ponder the mysteries of Dalon Ap Landu, or whenever we see the ground at a spare moment, then we ponder the Earth-Mother. Maybe the mysteries of Be'al can be pondered while gazing across the vastness of the galaxy at night.

The seven higher orders of Reformed Druidism are additional levels of the priesthood, each corresponding to the aspects of the deity for which it is named. We've already covered the deities in a much earlier module, but glossing over them again will help us retain those details. The higher orders of the priesthood are also numbered, though the numbers were really only important in knowing which order they were created. Third Order is also called the Order of Dalon Ap Landu. Once a Druid reaches the Third Order, they are a member of the RDNA priesthood, and thereafter, the numbered orders also have names. One minor drawback is that the days of the week in order do not correlate to the sequence of the RDNA's higher orders, meaning this is not an effective mnemonic tool for that purpose. Instead, the days of the week have a deity shoehorned in, loosely based on the day's correspondence to the Norse and Roman deities.

On Sunday we honor Belenos, corresponding to the Sixth Order. He is a Gaulish healing deity whose chariot pulls the sun across the sky. The RDNA interprets Belenos to *be* the sun itself, but it is important to know that most academics tend to strictly refer to him as being a healing deity (Green, 1997)... who *shines*... and his chariot pulls the *sun* across the sky... but 'shh, don't call him a sun god.' For many these days he serves double duty with the perception that he has some sort of solar associations as well as healing. Healing *thermal* springs have also been attributed to Belenos. One of his healing specialties is also emotional healing. For those who still think he's a sun god, which we think is a fair belief in any case, you can think of him as a "Vitamin D Deity." Think of how we feel about sunlight on our face after it's been so gloomy. The world is painted in color and light. We feel better automatically if the sun comes out. Sunlight also helps our body process Vitamin D, a lack of which can lead to us feeling down, as well as causing a host of other physiological maladies. For those

who would still argue that Belenos is indeed a sun god (and a healer), a morsel of truth:

"Belenos was the lord of the sun, light and warmth... Belenos was appealed to in times of sickness, reflecting the pervasive belief in the healing and sustaining powers of the sun."
(Fleming, 1996, p. 26)

On Monday we honor Sirona, corresponding to the Seventh Order. She is a Gaulish goddess of healing springs, and is also likely to be a star goddess. The RDNA also considers her a goddess of lakes and rivers, which historically speaking is a big stretch. If they're spring-fed then there's even more credence there, but it's important to keep current on the academic understandings of the deities (maybe with the exception of Belenos, but never mind). What does she have to do with the moon on a Monday? Well, nothing really, but like the moon, her auspicious time is at night. Votives have been offered to her as a prayer for healing of physical ailments. The votives, usually carved objects, often feature a depiction of the ailment itself: a bandage over an eye, an arm in a sling, a hand clutching anywhere in pain, and so forth.

On Tuesday we honor Grannos, corresponding to the Fourth Order. He is also a Gaulish god of healing springs. They really loved those springs! Why Tuesday? What does he have in common with Tyr, the Norse god of war? Nothing. Is Grannos even a war god? No. Is Tyr a healing deity? No. Earlier we did use the word *shoehorned*. Grannos simply gets Tuesday for the fun of it, enjoy.

On Wednesday we honor Llyr, corresponding to the Ninth Order. He is a Welsh deity who *is* the sea. His son is Manawydan, also referred to as the *son of the sea*. In the Irish pantheon, you have the similarly named Manannan Mac Lir, who is the Irish sea god, and also the son of the sea. For anyone curious about linguistic differences, you'll find that Llyr and Lir are pronounced quite differently, but it would be good to try pronouncing Llyr correctly. Lir is phonetically pronounced like *leer* which is nice and simple. The double-L sound in Welsh however, is not a normal L at all, but has an *alveolar lateral fricative* hiss at the start of the L sound, pretty much like a *lateral lisp*. The L sound can be so subtle that it sometimes doesn't even sound like it's there at all. Think of the way Sid the Sloth from "Ice Age" pronounces his S, especially when he says *sloth*. If sloth was a Welsh word the way Sid pronounces it, it might be better off spelled as *Lloth*. It's a hiss from the back of the mouth with the tongue constricting the flow of air, while faintly trying to make an L sound. Hope this helps, good luck!

Llyr has nothing to do with Wodan/Odin; this too was an arbitrary designated day. What if you're nowhere near the sea, like in Nebraska? There are so many ways to go about this. First, this isn't set in stone. It's just one idea among many possibilities. You can always tailor this list to suit your own spiritual needs. Second, if you'd like to find a way to honor the sea, at least for the sake of remembering the higher orders of Reformed Druidism, there are plenty of options to serve that purpose as well. Got any rivers in your area? Do they eventually lead to the sea? Visit them and meditate on their connectedness. Even with canals and dams, the rivers are still a direct connection to the sea. Find out how long it takes for that water to reach the ocean from where you are. Rain drops certainly have been in the sea. The water we drink has been there, too. Sea salt is the very taste of Llyr. Enjoy a fish and chips basket on Wednesday. Wow, two big paragraphs for Llyr, plus a lesson in linguistics!

On Thursday we honor Taranis, corresponding to the Eighth Order. He is a Gaulish god of Thunder and all weather. Finally, a thunderer on Thursday! One of his symbols is the wheel, perhaps a metaphor for the sound of rolling thunder. A witty pun in the RDNA is the exclamation, "Hail Taranis!" Though

we don't want him to take that literally as a request. In the RDNA's Order of the Mistletoe, a non-numerical higher order, mistletoe is regarded as a gift from Belenos that is rained down by Taranis. So if mistletoe grows in your region, you could also salute him at the trees it is growing in (a method that could also be done on Sundays for Belenos). Mistletoe is a parasitic plant that never grows on the ground, therefore it comes down from above. Technically it is propagated from bird droppings of those who ate its berries from another tree. You could also simply go out and feel the wind, go cloud-gazing, or just wear a wheel pendant and meditate to rain machines.

On Friday we honor Braciaca (They/Them), corresponding to the Fifth Order. They are a Brythonic deity of malt, barley, and other grains. Braciaca has a distinctively feminine name suffix, but the Romans equated Braciaca with Mars' agricultural aspects, and specifically beer brewing in Britain. Linguists and historians can't seem to completely agree on whether Braciaca is male or female, but does it really make a difference? Braciaca says the weekend is here, so have a beer and celebrate! If you're gluten free, you can substitute anyone else, of course. The Dagda may be suitable; he'd be fun to hang out with on weekends, and you can honor his oats, as he loved porridge!

On Saturday we honor Danu, corresponding to the Tenth Order. She is the matriarch of the Tuatha De Danaan in Ireland. She represents the ancestral connection, she represents fertility of the land, at river valleys in particular, and may be linguistically connected to a number of rivers throughout Europe. The Order of Danu in the RDNA is also a designated *memorial* level, which all Reformed Druids enter upon passing away. The Tenth Order can also have living members through initiatory rites, though officially nobody in the RDNA has entered the Eighth, Ninth, or Tenth Orders yet as of the first edition of this program. Celebrate the fertility of the land, remember your ancestors, visit a river where it is vast.

Like we often emphasize, this is not the only way. You can mix & match, customize, ignore, or even turn it into a multi-week devotional for even more deities. You could even reorganize these in rank order if you want to learn them better in sequence. To that end, leaving out the current correspondences and shoehorns, practicing the higher orders from Sunday in sequence would be:

- **Sunday: Grannos (4th)**
- **Monday: Braciaca (5th)**
- **Tuesday: Belenos (6th)**
- **Wednesday: Sirona (7th)**
- **Thursday: Taranis (8th)**
- **Friday: Llyr (9th)**
- **Saturday: Danu (10th)**

Ideas of additional higher orders have been proposed or developed if you wanted to extend this to a two week devotional cycle. The 11th, 12th, and 13th Orders have been tentatively reserved with the Morrigan (Irish goddess of sovereignty and war), Arawn (Welsh god of the underworld), and Aengus (Irish god of youth). Other higher orders without a designated number that already exist (but aren't listed in ARDA) include Ogmios (Gaulish god of eloquence) and Epona (Gaulish protector of horses and goddess of abundance and prosperity). There are also Orders being proposed or in development including the Orders of: Sucellos (Gaulish god of boundaries and protection, also associated with outward hospitality), Nantosuelta (Gaulish goddess associated with households and abundance, in the RDNA specifically – inward hospitality; depictions of her holding a birdhouse invokes *innkeeper* energy), Arvalus (Gaulish god of agriculture and time), and Belisama (Gaulish goddess of victory and courage). Are your deities missing from this list? Shoehorn them in! The RDNA is customizable!

Research Topic: Your Regional Geography and Geology



By Johayan Sycamore Bear

Of the Enlightenment Given by the Earth Mother

As children of the Earth Mother, we must stop and look around us. Not just to smell the roses, but to also recognize the very land that we live upon and the many gifts that she offers us.

Landforms and Geology

Research how the land forms and geography of your area affect the people who live there.

Where I was raised, it was flat boring cornfields punctuated by the occasional creek in a deeply incised valley. Growing up, I didn't have a full understanding of what I was seeing. Now, having studied geology and geomorphology – the changes in the land from geologic processes – *geo* (earth) *morph* (change) *ology* (study of). The landscape had been worn smooth by the last glacial advance around 12,000 years ago. The lack of well-developed valleys was another clue to the youth of the landscape.

One thing I was always curious about was the river that flowed through Peoria, IL near where I grew up. It is a small river in a very large (wide) valley. Post-glaciation as the ice sheets melted, the ancestral Mississippi River flowed down that valley! The remaining Illinois River was a mere trickle compared to the volume of water that had surged down the valley during the glacial retreat. In the current day, the Illinois River is a major artery for barge traffic bringing the corn and bean crops down to New Orleans to be exported worldwide! (Kolata & Nimz, 2010)

With easy access to corn and the river, a thriving whiskey industry arose! From 1844 to 1919, there were *at least* 73 distilleries on the Peoria County tax rolls. By 1890, 40% of *all* alcohol was produced in Peoria. (Alexander, 2023)

When I go home now, I see the land around me in a whole new light and realize there is a whole history that was never taught and it makes me think of the mysteries of our local landscapes hold and the need to look into them.

The knowledge of how the Earth Mother is ever-changing is one of the many things that we as Reformed Druids revere and, by learning more about it, we attune ourselves to the Earth Mother.

Human Presence and Landscape Changes

As I discussed above, I grew up surrounded by corn fields and dairy farms. Not all that exciting is it? Or is it?

There was a strange volcano-like hill just outside of town (the Hill). It was absolutely forbidden to go out to it. *Was it really a volcano?* was a common school kid question. It wasn't. It was the mining spoil from an underground coal mine that had been tunneled under the town around the turn of the 19th century. The former mine affects the town even today. The shafts and drifts were held up by timber beams that over time have rotted away and collapse from time to time. A few homes have had foundation damage from the collapses and surface shifts.

A few miles south of town, it was more extreme! I lived just north of a large strip mining area where coal was close to the surface and dug out in large amounts. Yes, it is a terrible thing for the Earth Mother but it does have some positive effects. There are hundreds of lakes near my hometown, many of which are stocked with fish. I spent many a summer with my dad fishing in those lakes and more than a few pairs of glasses are in those lakes as I was a klutzy kid.

Indigenous History

The history of the Indigenous peoples is littered with so many tales of displacement, genocide, and broken treaties.

Has the Indigenous history of your area been saved? If so, how does their view of the land differ from contemporary views and how much of it is the same?

The Illiniwek and Peoria Nations had recorded history going back as far as the Cahokia culture of the Mound-builders. Cahokia, around 200 miles distant was one of the largest cities on pre-settlement America and existed from around 700 to 1400 CE, covering nearly six square miles and a population of 100,000 at its peak. Most of the Peoria Nation's pre-settlement history has been lost.

The Illinois Confederation is more well known, often referred to as the Illiniwek or Illini. It was a group of around 12 tribes. They were seasonal and traveled to gather the best fruits and animals. They understood both the weather and landforms of the region and used them to their advantage, yet did not exploit them. They lived in harmony with the land.

The legacy of both nations is common across Illinois with many place names that were anglicized and kept. The town of Peoria is one example, the Cahokia Mounds (the largest archaeology site in the US) is town of Cahokia. The territorial capital and first state capital was in Kaskaskia (named after one of the Illinois tribes) which has subsequently been reclaimed by the Mississippi! Nature finds a way. (Legends of America, n.d.)

I could write a small novel on the geologic history of Illinois but if you are truly interested in your local geology: Look to see if you can find the "Roadside Geology of (Your State)" or the Geology Underfoot book for your state/region.

Outside of the United States where I live, many countries and local government agencies have detailed histories and often the geological history as well.

Go in peace and in service of the Earth-Mother,

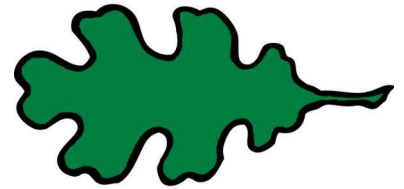
Johayan Sycamore Bear
Order of Dalon Ap Landu

Essay: Geologic History of Your Region



1. Did mining dramatically alter the landscape in your area? Surface and underground mines have a major impact on the land.
2. Did flooding, dams, or other natural disaster force your town or nearby area to be relocated?
3. How has the landscape changed over time?
4. What other local geological processes happened throughout ancient history?
5. When in geologic time was your area underwater? Under lava? Under ice? Underground? (If applicable)

Nature Topic: Collect and/or Identify Tree Leaves



This task may pose a minor challenge for those of you who live in deserts or beyond the Arctic or Antarctic Tree Line. If it helps serve the purpose of this task, if there are no trees, you must return here with a shrubbery or else you will never pass. Ok that's an inside joke, but basically any plant will do, even if it is just lichen on a rock. In urban environments, trees might be few and far between, and you might learn that some of them aren't even endemic to your area. Nevertheless, what we are trying to accomplish here is understanding which trees (or a shrubbery), are common in your area.

You don't necessarily have to take their leaves, but it is sometimes something we as Druids just happen to do. Even now as I type this, I can see leaves and acorns that I collected late in the summer as well as a year ago or as far back as 2019. Behind me tucked away is a manila folder labeled "Leaves" which is bristling with more that I collected in 2019, a shoebox in storage has even more. I could pull several books of my shelves and find dozens of leaves being pressed from this year and last. Why do we feel the compulsion to collect small mementos of nature? Something about those trees I tell you...

If you'd rather leave the leaves in situ rather than taking them, you can photograph them or download one of the leaf or tree identification apps that uses a smartphone camera. If it still exists while you're using this workbook, we suggest you use *PictureThis*. In good focus and lighting, we've found it to be highly accurate. Tree identification books written for your region will also be available at your local library, or you can purchase one. Whether you take pictures of the leaves or collect them, you could bring them into the library, take notes in a notebook, and then later create a scrapbook for them if you feel like it.

Pay close attention to what types of trees are often found together with other certain types. If there are different groups of "tree friends" paired together that aren't paired in other areas, take a look at the surrounding landscape. Does it seem to make a difference whether you're on high ground, flat land, slopes, wetlands, or valleys? Do you happen to know what kind of soil conditions they are in? Some trees like acidic soil, some neutral or alkaline, some like sandy soil, and others like it moist. Some trees don't seem to care and they're content to grow anywhere. Find out if they are invasive, native, or introduced into your area.

If it is winter, start by looking at evergreens, but then keep an eye out for *marcescent* deciduous trees. Where we are in Minnesota, we get some pretty frigid winters. Temperatures easily drop to the same as your kitchen freezer setting. But we also have deciduous trees that display *marcescence* in winter; they hold most of their dead leaves until spring. Northern pin oaks hold their leaves until the spring buds push them off. Swamp-white oak and American hop-hornbeam (AKA ironwood) hold many or most of their leaves all winter, too. Oh and don't forget to occasionally put down the books and **go talk to a tree!**

Attestation:

I talked to the tree.



Essay: Common Trees in Your Area

We understand that biodiversity can vary significantly from region to region. If diversity is lacking, try to identify at least five common trees in your area. Remember as an alternative, we want a shrubbery! If there is immense diversity in your area, you don't have to conduct an *exact* statistical analysis of your observations, but a ranked *estimation* of which trees are most common will surely suffice. If biodiversity is bountiful, then we'd like to see a listing of 10 to 30 tree species. Thirty sounds like a lot, but you'd quickly realize just how abundantly varied life can be upon the surface of the Earth-Mother. So, in a list what we'd like to see are the following

1. 10 or more different tree (or shrubbery) species if possible, but no greater than 30
2. Any applicable observation on soil types that are obvious enough without test kits
3. Whether some are invasive, native, or introduced but benign
4. List any of your identified trees which are *marcescent deciduous*, if applicable

Research Topic: Who Called Your Region Home Before You?



Over the history of our existence, people have migrated from place to place for thousands of generations. At some point for all populated places, there were the first people who migrated to that place. If their descendants are still there, we call them indigenous. Maybe in some cases, indigenous people have moved or had been displaced by other migrations. Take Ireland for example. In the mythology from The Book of Invasions, there were six waves of migrations to the island. Archaeologically, we know that the Stone Age peoples lived there for thousands of years before people from Bronze Age cultures in continental Europe arrived. The Celts arrived from Europe another 1500 or so years later, eventually followed by the Anglo-Normans in the medieval period.

If you're in America, there's a similar motif. Depending on the region, there were waves of different nomadic Paleo-Americans, and different cultures based on the tools we've found archaeologically. As cultures came and went, the Mississippian Cultures sprang up and developed great cities and cultural centers that were hubs of a continental trade network. Those societies broke down, and gradually the modern tribes came into their own. Then Europeans arrived and displaced just about all indigenous tribes.

The purpose of this task is to learn about the history of your area, looking at the big picture, and to develop an understanding of the peoples who called this place home before you, and in generations past. Perhaps you are descended from those who were indigenous to your area. Perhaps your ancestors have had a presence for one or two thousand years. Perhaps your arrival is much more recent, whether a couple generations ago, or even within your own lifetime. To you, it is the home that you know.

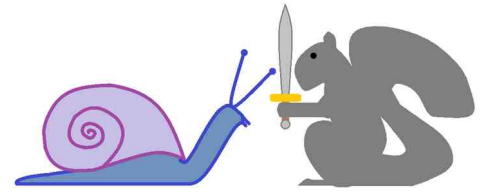


Essay: Ancestors of Place

In an essay, write about the history of the people in your area:

1. Which culture called it home in an earlier era?
2. Who was there before *them*? And even before *them too*?
3. Can you find ancient place names in your area on a map? Is the name from another language?
4. How many major historic periods are there in your area?
5. Can you find any historical indigenous group names of an ancient culture or tribe who had been displaced? If you're in Europe, North Africa, or the Near or Middle-East, did the Romans make a record or a map of tribes in the Classical Period that indicates who they were? Regardless of where, can you learn more information about that culture, what they may have been known for, and what was important to them (farming, sea-faring, smithing, warfare, art, etc)?
6. Are any of those groups ones that you might be willing to honor in some way, such as by merely *acknowledging* them as being the *ancestors of place*?

Activity: Sacred Pilgrimage



Some people feel that the word *pilgrimage* is a loaded word, and perhaps they feel they do not wish to associate it with their Druidry.

Pilgrimages tend to evoke the notion of visiting Abrahamic sacred sites, such as to the Holy Land, or to ancient churches in Europe that have relics of saints. *Pilgrim* evokes imagery of Calvinists in buckle-shoes shooting at turkeys. The good news is that we don't need to get hung up on the word pilgrim or its derivations. Pilgrim simply comes from the Latin word for foreigner: *peregrinus*. It is important to know that pilgrimages as a spiritual tradition go back to time immemorial, in almost all belief traditions. It all comes down to the significance of various places that people of that spiritual tradition revered. If you can't handle the word *pilgrimage*, you can settle on something like *spiritual tourism* or something else instead.

The Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (OBOD) places a high importance on the concept of sacred pilgrimage. With much of their membership being in the UK, they often recommend visiting the ancient sites right there in the Isles, Stonehenge and Glastonbury Tor being two prominent sacred sites to the Druids. Although they encourage visiting the sacred sites in Britain, they will also state that there are quite possibly some sacred sites near where you live, wherever that may be. Will they necessarily be associated with the Druids? Perhaps not, but we also know that stone circles like Stonehenge predate the Druids by thousands of years, depending on the site. Nevertheless, they may have *become* sacred to the ancient Druids, and certainly to modern Druids of today.

What is the purpose of a pilgrimage?

This varies. Commonly, the function of a pilgrimage serves to walk in the footsteps of your *ancestors of spirit*: the people who would have held compatible beliefs similar to yours in the past. You see, feel, and experience things as close to the way they might have in their time. Psychologically, this fosters empathy and humility. It gives the pilgrims the opportunity to feel closer to their predecessors, and perhaps find a higher level of spiritual understanding and insight that they didn't yet have.

Pilgrimage can also take a more mundane form of tourism, as we hinted at up above. In special places, spiritual tourism might bring someone to pay closer attention to the history, or to the architectural features of a venerated structure, and perhaps they merely experience the thrill and excitement of being there for its own sake. Maybe they're visiting a birthplace or grave of an inspirational person, such as a great leader, a poet, a martyr, or a founder.

When I lived in Ireland in 2004 for a semester of college, that was an unforgettable array of experiences. Catholicism wasn't part of my upbringing, but every other weekend I would travel and visit medieval cathedrals, gazing up in awe at the ingenuity of those who had carved and built stone arches that reached soaring heights under perilous working conditions a thousand years before I was born. I'd go see standing stones from the Bronze Age, and megalithic tombs from the Stone Age.

While my classmates were bored to tears about "another pile of rocks," I was moved to tears in the tomb at Newgrange when I saw there were even more hidden carvings on the stones of the tunnel than the ones that were showcased in photos. You couldn't see them on the way in, but with the daylight casting shadows on the contours on the way out, I noticed those slabs were covered in carvings, slowly being worn away by tourists' shoulders in the narrow passage. I stopped to touch the inscriptions, pondering what the symbols could have meant to the person who carved them 5000 years ago. It made

me wonder, *what have I created that will be appreciated 5000 years from now?* That whole introspective moment was an unexpected pilgrimage unto itself. The people who built Newgrange were chronologically farther away from the Druids, than the distance of time elapsed between the first ancient Druids and today. Even knowing that, my pilgrimage to Newgrange was the catalyst that propelled me into studying Druidry. There were a lot more resources on modern Druidism at least, compared to "Neolithic Revival" practices.

Sacred Pilgrimage in the Western Hemisphere?

So we've covered visiting sacred sites to Druids in the UK and Ireland, but that seems to be ignoring a larger issue. Most practitioners of Reformed Druidism tend to reside in North America. What ancient Druid sites do we have? In terms of ancient... none. And what of indigenous sacred sites? There's a lot to unpack regarding indigenous sites. First and foremost, we should not be going deliberately to indigenous sites to perform Druid rituals there. Yes in many cases you can go visit those places with reverence, awe, and respect. We can still visit them and gain a sense of empathy and humility. We can acknowledge them as the *ancestors of place*, but not as ancestors of spirit unless we happen to be recognized as official members of that tribal community. We absolutely have to be careful that we're going there out of respect, and must avoid cultural appropriation.

So as examples, we should never have druidic solstice rituals at places like Cahokia, or Samhain rites at burial mounds and such. That would be textbook *cultural appropriation*. We certainly can visit the ancient sacred sites, whether they are preserved or returning to nature. If we can learn something while we are there about those indigenous peoples, all the better. Learning what happened to those peoples would also be important: to know whether their descendants are still here, or elsewhere, to know whether their land was ceded fairly, or through broken promises and treaties, or exclusively by violent force.

When learning about those who have come before us, strive to learn from the people descended from whomever created those sites. Elevate indigenous voices, for they have been talked over for far too long. The demographic has definitely changed over the last few centuries, and in tandem with that change, new places of pilgrimage have arisen. They are perhaps not nearly as impressive as Stonehenge, but there are different places of pilgrimage we can come to revere, and they can be very close to home.

The Easiest Pilgrimages

Then there are the parks systems: state parks and national parks. National forests that, yes, will undergo logging, but with increasingly sustainable methodology. Regional park reserves, nature preserves, scientific natural areas, native plant restoration projects, and protected waterways abound. These places can serve to protect the natural beauty of an area. Visiting them for the beauty alone is valid enough for them to become places of sacred pilgrimage on an individual basis.

If getting to any of those places is an issue, consider the options of a minimalist Druid; even a patch of grass in your yard that is greener than the rest can be a personally designated sacred space. Maybe won't always be there. Nature can be ephemeral like that. It reminds us of the impermanence of all things. Maybe the next healthy patch of grass will be in a different spot. That would make for an interesting pilgrimage that is nomadic unto itself!

There are also manmade places of modern sacred pilgrimage. Specifically for Reformed Druidism, the

Carleton College Arboretum has a handful of sacred sites to the Druids in close proximity to each other. Monument Hill is the location of the first rituals of the RDNA. It is our dream that our history will be inscribed on the blank side of the obelisk on the hill, the other three sides indicating the location of a log house at which the first church services and first wedding occurred in Northfield, Minnesota. The first Druid altars were nearby the obelisk, one of which was rebuilt three times due to vandals and weather. The Hill of Three Oaks also bears an altar stone with the Druid Sigil inscribed into it. That is regarded as the most sacred site to the Reformed Druids, and is highly sought in pilgrimages. The Druids' Den is a secluded hollow in the woods, formerly the site of a fire pit that aided many Vigils. The Druids' Circle is a stone circle of eight boulders with an altar standing at the center.

All over the continent, there are places where people have built replicas of Stonehenge, some of which are on private land, others of which can be visited. There are several websites that serve as directories to find them. So far a quirky favorite is *Carhenge* in Alliance, Nebraska. It's made of old cars jammed vertically into the ground and stacked, all painted gray. The silliness is perfect for the likes of the RDNA! There are also directory websites of other standing stones that you can visit, and sites that catalog meditation labyrinths that are open to the public. Meditation labyrinths are an excellent option for quiet contemplation. Some of them have themes, some of them are on Church property, but many of them invite people of all backgrounds to appreciate and meditate in their community labyrinth.

Even Stonehenge Was New Once

Stonehenge was built in several phases, and changed appearance over time. Currently its earliest known construction phase was likely as log posts in the ground. Was that site already a place of sacred pilgrimage back then? Maybe it was, or maybe it was a place that was newly selected. Now keep in mind that *newness* of something does not invalidate its significance. If you've already been practicing Druidry for some time, and let's say you had your own self-dedication rite, or you were initiated by someone else. What if you went back to that place? Would it feel special to you in some way? Then you do go back there and BAM, that's a pilgrimage site. Especially if it is an accessible space, somewhere in public, where you can return again and again, you can go through those motions, renew any commitments in an annual self-affirming ceremony. Then if you someday start conducting initiations, or help someone with their self-dedication, you can take them there to that special spot, and it can become sacred to them as well, to which they might return sentimentally time and again.

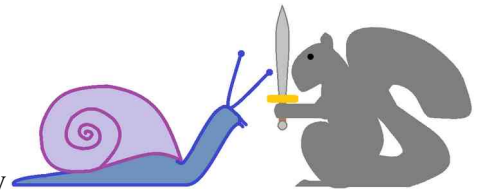
Essay: A Quest for Pilgrimage Sites

In an essay, find a local space that is, or can become sacred to you, for the purpose of experiencing a sacred pilgrimage. If you're really isolated, that is understandable. Indicate if there is anything that impacts any potential visits to that sacred space. If so, try to find an alternative solution, like a favorite tree you like to see along the road, or a patch of moss thriving in the shade somewhere. It can also be something as simple as a historical or geological marker.

1. Describe your selected pilgrimage site(s)
2. What makes it special to you?



Activity: Consecrate a Healing Tree



Along Minnehaha Creek in Minnetonka, Minnesota, there is Big Willow Park. In the park is an abrupt glacial hill that the creek wraps around, and long ago a mansion stood on this place, its foundation still visible in a few spots. Towering junipers guard three corners, protective totems in their own right, standing watch amid a grove of mature burr oaks. A young burr oak stood among the buckthorn; a liminal area upon the hilltop. On the eve of the full moon, I gave offerings to this tree to consecrate it as a Wishing Tree.

A Ubiquitous Ancient Practice

The concept of Wishing Trees, Prayer Trees, Witch Trees, Cloutie Trees – whatever colloquialism we call them, is recognizable by almost every culture. I've seen one at Ojibwa burial grounds on a peninsula of land along the shores of Lake Superior, one at the Tobernalt holy well in County Sligo, Ireland, and numerous in Karelia, Russia at Gora Sampo on an isthmus of land between two lakes. These sacred trees seem to be associated with water sources.

After making offerings, I cut strips of linen and tied them to the boughs of the young oak, each one was a prayer of healing for someone in need. As this custom spans all cultures, one could easily suggest it may have a common root in much older ancient practices. So, I now have a tree dedicated to healing, situated on a hill, above a creek of flowing water. Most of the land on the hill has been reclaimed and is returning to nature. There is a well on the hill that once supplied water for the mansion, but it has been capped long ago. **In time, may this hill become a place of power and of healing, and a place of sacred pilgrimage.**



The photograph below is one of the Wishing Trees at Mount Sampo, where the tree is better translated literally as a “Tree of Desires.” This again harkens back to the legendary Sampo, a thaumaturgical device that was said to have been forged in Karelia. The Sampo was a machine that would mill out flour, gold, and salt whenever it was needed – never running out, though it became lost at sea while it was being fought over. Gora Sampo, or “Mount Sampo” is a place of ancient power and healing, steeped in legend and myth of *The Kalevala*, the ancient Finnish epic that inspired the character of Gandalf in *Lord of the Rings*. In part (along with the Germanic myth of the Ring of the Nibelung) the Sampo myth also served as inspiration for *The One Ring*.



Right: One of the Wishing Trees at Gora Sampo, Kosalma, Republic of Karelia, Russia

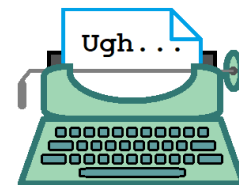
Common Courtesy

One of the most common causes for concern at healing trees is overloading the boughs. The tree still has a life to live. Too many ribbons on the branches will not only impose excessive weight on the branches, but can also crowd out the foliage. The tree will suffer when it's just trying to do its job. When tying ribbons to your healing tree, *never* use synthetic fabric. Stick to authentic natural textiles like cotton, linen, wool, or silk. Most synthetic fabrics are made from petroleum products, so let's just keep polyester, satin, nylon, rayon and the rest off of our sacred trees. Tie your ribbons in a single knot.

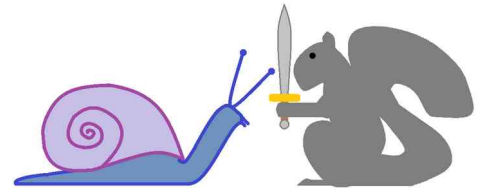
When the healing energies have done the best they can, the elements of nature will sweep the ribbons away. This includes birds pecking them away and building nests from the fibers.

Essay: Tell Us About Your Healing Tree

1. What species did you select for your healing tree?
2. Did you choose it for any of its metaphysical correspondences?
3. What did you offer the tree in exchange for its consecration unto healing?
4. Is it on your property or off in a wooded park somewhere?
5. By chance is one of these healing trees already established in your vicinity?
6. Talk to the tree. Did you talk to the tree yet? ...AND???



Activity: Watch the Sun Rise and/or Set



First and foremost: looking at the sun can cause several long-term and short-term problems with your eyesight, even from a very short period of exposure. Solar retinopathy can set in, and eventually lead to cataracts at a younger than average age. In the following section for all scenarios, we humbly ask you to strongly consider using adequate eye protection when observing sunrises or sunsets. Regular sunglasses, regardless of UV filtering coatings, are generally considered inadequate protection. You can also consider constructing a *camera obscura* from a cardboard box and viewing the sun through it.

Maybe you've already watched the sun in motion when it is at the horizon. Maybe you've even had the pleasure of driving down the road when it's rising or setting directly ahead. How beautiful, right? With all the other traffic zipping by you as high-speed silhouettes while you rush to or from home. But it hits differently when you can stop what you're doing, and pause from the hustle and bustle of the mundane world and take a few moments to deliberately watch it set or rise.

I remember watching the sunset with intent for the very first time. I was a kid living in the east metro of the Twin Cities. I biked out to a prominent ridge that had the highest elevation in my county. You can see for miles on the east or west slopes of that ridge. From there, the Twin Cities looked like a sparse network of water towers poking out above a forest. It's a wonderful place to live with all these trees. There are about 2 million people around the area, but we have so many trees, it's magnificent! Minneapolis was actually ranked number one for US cities with the most tree cover in 2023, but I digress. From that ridge, I could even see the three tallest buildings in the Minneapolis skyline. The city is tucked in the Mississippi River Valley, but at 22 miles, there's also a bit of skyline lost to the curvature of the Earth-Mother as well.

The disk of the sun touched the horizon. Something changed, something within me. The sunset felt important. I was *supposed* to be there, on that ridge, at that moment. Seeing the sun moving, the amount of the disk that touched the horizon widened, and then narrowed again as the Earth turned away from it. My worldview shifted. I remembered that I was an inhabitant of a very unique planet within the solar system, suspended in the vastness of the cosmos, an incalculable distance from any other planets like our own. The first exoplanet, *51 Pegasi b*, (now named *Dimidium*) had been discovered just a couple years prior. I was reminded of my own humanity, thinking of the 6 billion people on our planet wondering if they're taking our existence for granted. I was moved to tears.

I was experiencing the *Overview Effect*. This usually happens to astronauts when they see Earth from space for the first time, but it can happen on Earth, especially when there's a really nice view from a mountaintop, or places of extreme natural beauty. At that moment, if your heart is open to compassion, the cynicism, triviality, and pettiness that we fuss about from day to day, the consumerism and materialism that fuels our greed, and our quarrels and conflicts, all finally seem to dissolve and make way for altruism and sincerity. (Reid, 2012)

That was a pivotal moment for me, in regard to how my individual spirituality was developing. The sun itself became important. Even though it's just some giant fireball that we're careening around, I was reminded how much we depend on it for our existence. It was around that time in my youth that I started wondering why the solstices and equinoxes were marked on wall calendars like any other holidays, but we don't do anything to celebrate them. I didn't really know how to celebrate a solar

festival back then, but at the very least I started coordinating parties and hangouts with my friends. Those seemed to work out quite well, especially just in naming them Solstice or Equinox Parties.

But we're here to talk about watching the sunrise and sunset!

"Quite right, quite right," said John the Verbose as he dropped his monocle and set down his sherry glass, picking up his dusty old tome by the light of the fireplace. "Now where were we? Ah, yes..." Watching a sunrise or a sunset can have a very powerful emotional impact on you. If it has no lasting impact, perhaps at least it was a fleeting moment of beauty.

We're willing to guess that it's easier for most people to arrange to watch a sunset than a sunrise, with the exception of morning people who might actually have the free time to do so. Perhaps we're usually in the fond practice of being asleep at sunrise, but that means that when we get up early with the intent of watching a sunrise, it could really become more meaningful to us as a result. Then the tricky part is finding the opportune place for it. Prominent hills are the best candidates, but if your area is flat or even nestled in a deep mountain valley, that's just fine, too. You'll want to be aware of park rules if it's in a public space. Often they'll have "relative time" rules like "park opens 30 minutes before sunrise" and "closes 30 minutes after sunset." If they have exact hours, it might be prudent to check sunrise and sunset times before planning your visit.

Another helpful tip is to know which direction the sun will rise or set. There are plenty of free solar position apps and sky maps. [NOAA's website](#) has a solar calculator, where you can put in your location and find the sun's azimuth (degrees from north) at any given time. Even though it's run by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, it will calculate the solar position from any vantage point in the world. Bring a compass (or use a compass app on your phone) to determine if a viewing location would be sufficient for the time of year you intend on viewing the sun.

In terms of increasing your safety from the sun's rays, foggy, humid mornings or hazy evenings, perhaps with a thin layer of clouds, would help mitigate the harm from the bright piercing rays. Ultraviolet light however, can go right through haze and clouds. Also always be vigilant for your own physical safety when the sun is beyond the horizon. Whether you're in a busy city park, or out in a rural area, be mindful of other people in the area or wild animals. It can still be relatively bright, but it could always be a time that predators are nearby.



You don't have to stare at the sun to appreciate the moment. Seriously, please don't. There is so much more to take in. The entire horizon has a visual texture to it. The way that faraway places have muted colors, low areas have deeper shadows, and even the way rays shine past the edges of trees, hills, and buildings, is all part of our experience while living in that moment. Above all, try to enjoy the sunrise or sunset, and be open to whatever feelings and sensations arise! (Restall Orr, 2004)



Essay: Your Experience of the Sun on the Horizon

1. Did you watch a sunrise, a sunset, or both?
2. Describe the setting of your vantage point(s)
3. How did it make you feel?



Extra Credit: Stake Out a Solar Alignment

We understand that not everyone will have a lawn upon which to put up a stone circle, or even hammer some marker stakes into the ground. Many of us live in apartments, townhouses, or with homeowners who might not understand or approve of us doing druidic landscaping. Some of us do have our own property, but maybe the only open space is north-facing, making this task self-defeating. Sure it would be possible to make a temporary array of stakes in a public park and then take them down when you're done. Some parks are starting to designate "Nature Exploration Areas" where they permit people to build things with branches, rocks, and fallen logs. Even considering that, we've decided to make this practice an *extra credit* activity just to simplify it. After all, historically the Druids were not particularly known for putting up standing stones. It was the Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures who had built stone circles and alignments, long before the Iron Age Druids existed. The Druids would have used the stones though, as they served as excellent calendars.

Sundials

The simplest solar alignment that you can set up with little effort is a sundial. It uses the sun's shadow cast from a single point, which can be used to tell the solar time. However, that will be slightly different from a clock set to your time zone. If it is noon in your time zone, and your time zone is hundreds of miles across, the sun is going to line up with noon much sooner on the eastern end of the time zone than it would on the western end of the time zone, all the while standard time will show noon being somewhere in between. If Daylight Saving Time is active, then your clocks will be an hour ahead of what the sundial shows.

You can create (or cheat and purchase) a sundial and align it to true north. Making a sundial could actually be more fun. There are several common kinds of sundials to choose from, and plenty of home kits you can build. You could build one from a flat round charcuterie board, and even attach a compass to help align it when you bring it outside. You could also really just hammer a big stick into the ground and check when solar noon is at your location compared to standard time. Then plant a rock or another stick at that time of day where the shadow is being cast. Each hour thereafter, plant another stick, then mirror the pattern to fill in the AM hours or complete them in real-time the next day.

Solstice & Equinox Alignments

A more complex long term activity would be to start with your central stake in the ground, then gradually build a circle around that central stake by watching the sun rise and set behind it. Plant a stake not only where you are standing relative to your central marker (thus establishing the radius of your circle), but where the sun rises on the opposite end of your circle as well. Then you've established the sunrise marker in conjunction with the central marker and the marker at the opposite end of the circle. Repeat at sunset. If it's cloudy on the solstice, equinox, or other days you are establishing alignments, you can try again for two or three subsequent days, and the sun won't have deviated that much yet. Of course you can also cheat with a solar position app, or use an online calculator such as at [NOAA's website](#). When the circle is complete, you can replace the central stake with an altar if you like. Traditionally, most stone circles do not have altars or standing stones in the center, but you can do whatever you like with your alignment if you choose to build one, whether it is temporary, poles in the ground, or all out stones!



Meditation: The Four Salutations of The Day

By Emmon Bodfish, ODAL

Written circa 1986

With photos circa 2022 of the steps included by the editor

Many readers who have been doing the Proto-Grove ritual on their own for awhile write to us asking “What is the next step?” and “Is there a Druid training program?” There is no Druid Training program yet for those not involved in active Groves. We are working on it. But meanwhile a fruitful place to start your training is with the Four Salutations to the Day. If you have been at one of the regular bi-monthly Summer Services of an R.D.N.A. Grove, you have heard the invocation of the “three ways of day and one of night.” In this contemplative exercise you will be marking these four turning points of the day with a short, specific ritual, an active meditation in which you will be learning several basic essentials of all psychic or meditative work. It will keep you mindful of your intention to train and of your specifically Druidic vocation and heritage.

These four times, “*trathan*” in the old *Gaidhlig*, are noted in Welsh and Irish folklore as magical times when the “other world” is especially close to ours and communication or passage between the two is easiest. The old epic and Bardic poems speak of these times as power-times when spell working was done and an adept person might receive a vision or message from an ancestor or a patron Deity, a moment when a bard, inspired, might speak a prophecy. These are DAWN, NOON, SUNSET, and STARS. STARS is usually interpreted to be midnight. [*Editor's note: You can even use these Salutations with the moon, too.*]

One of our former Archdruids recounts that when an acquaintance of his was traveling through rural Ireland recently he found that the cottagers stayed indoors or stayed quiet around the noon point of the day. When he rose to go out, or to move on about some mundane business, they would say, “Oh, sit a while. Have another cup of tea.” When asked, they would say something vague to the effect that it is a tricky time, unlucky to be bustling about. He did not ascertain whether they did not know why this was so, or if they were just cautious in talking about such matters to a stranger. Most, he felt, did not know why, and this taboo on activity is the last little remainder in folk memory of the old custom of observing the *trathan*.

The first purpose of the four Salutations is to put you in tune with the natural, celestial rhythms of the day and the changing seasons. The second purpose of the Salutations is a meditative practice, to practice entering an altered state of consciousness at will. The third purpose is to remind you of your Druidic commitment and to organize your day around the four natural turning points of Earth’s time clock, providing stop-points in which you take stock of your day, of the passage of time, of nature and your own existence in it.

You will begin by learning to achieve mental silence, to stop thought, and to hold your mind silent for the time it takes the Sun to rise or set. In the temperate latitudes this is about two and a half to four minutes counted from the Sun disk’s first contact with the horizon to its last contact, assuming a flat horizon for averaging’s sake.

The first skill to be mastered in the Salutations is the ability to hold the mind silent. You must learn to stop thought. By thought I mean the sentences that are normally running through your mind all day and

in your dreams at night. I do not mean becoming unconscious, hypnotized, nor losing awareness of yourself or your surroundings. In the Silence you will in fact become more aware than usual of your immediate surroundings. Some Eastern sects consider this the only “true” form of meditation. This is “outward directed” mediation, as contrasted with inner contemplation, “astral travel,” or hypnotic trance. It is harder than it sounds, at first, though most people can do it for a few seconds right off. That’s enough to start you. Here are some techniques to help you get further into that state and to help you learn to use it. In this wordless state, your consciousness may be turned by your will either inward or outward. In the Salutations it is turned outward. It surprises many people to find that they can perceive, and in acute detail, without any thoughts or words going through their minds. You will progress through this silent space to other states of consciousness. As you are able to hold the Silence longer you will learn from it and be able to explore with it.

1. Repeat a simple phrase, silently in your mind until all other thoughts cease, then let the phrase grow fainter and fainter and fade out. For the solar Salutations, “Hail Belenos!” This is a crutch; drop it as soon as you can.
2. Enter the Silence. Listen to your breath. Listen as though it were the most important instructions you were ever to hear, and which you must memorize. This will stop your mental sentences.
3. Listen to all the ambient sounds as if they were music.
4. Think to yourself down in to the heels of your feet and the heels of your hands. Feel yourself exist.

In doing the Salutations four times a day, you are learning to enter a different state of consciousness at will, regularly and often. These three: will, consistency, and practice are the keys to meditative and psychic progress. The goal is to be able to enter, at will, the state of consciousness that you will need in order to do a particular psychic or spiritual work. Small amounts of frequent practice achieve more than an occasional long session.

Do the four Salutations by the celestial clock, at Dawn, Noon, Sunset and Stars whether you are “in the mood” or not. This way you will become capable of entering this clear, silent state at any time, regardless of moods and circumstances, “to find a refuge outside the passions” of the moment, as an old book says. This practice builds and furnishes that refuge, a base-of-operations, for your further work. When you can hold silence for twelve to thirty seconds at a time, alert, eyes open, taking in perceptions as far around toward the corners of your peripheral field as you can, you will notice that things look different from the way that they do in your normal, “mundane” state of consciousness. I won’t list the changes because I do not want to bias your perceptions, the self-fulfilling prophecy trap. Not everyone gets all the different changes, but you will discover yours. (Write to the *Missal-Any* when you do, we like feedback, and we can answer questions individually.) These changes will be your signal that you are in a meditative state, at the Silent Place, rung one of the metaphorical ladder of meditative training. When you have completed the Salutation, then, in line with the third purpose, take some time to consider from this higher perspective what you have been occupied with since the last Salutation. It is a step in getting control of your time, your habits and your life.

The Four Salutations of the Day

[DAWN]

Stand, waiting for the first bit of the sun's disk to appear over the horizon. Hold your staff in front of you, your hands in front of your breast bone. Your left hand is above your right hand and the staff is not touching the ground.



When the first bit of the sun's disk clears the horizon, turn your staff horizontal and raise it over your head in one motion. Breathe in a full breath as you raise the staff, and at the same time step to the right with your right foot. Hold the breath; silence your mind. Your arms and your legs now form two triangles and you are looking at the first sun through a "trilithon" formed by your arms and staff.



Holding the breath, turn your staff back vertical, and, holding it at arm's length, exhale slowly as you lower the staff between your gaze and the morning sun, momentarily blocking it out, until it seems to rise again over the top of the staff. *[Editor's note: you're forming a "staff eclipse"]*



Let go your left hand from the staff and holding it in your right, sweep both of your arms up and outward, breathing in until you reach full extension. Your head, arms, and legs form a pentagram, your

lungs are filled with the new air and you are fully open to the morning light. This is true even when there is rain falling in your face in the winter. Then you are open to that truth, that dawn and that aspect of Nature. You hold mental silence here in the open position until the sun's disk clears the horizon.



When it is free of the last horizon (trees, buildings, mountains, freeway on-ramps, whatever is between you and the setting or rising sun), sweep your hands up and together over your right hand, as you inhale. Hold the breath for an instant, then begin slowly exhaling as you turn the staff back to vertical again and lower it again with your line of sight and the risen sun.



Continue on down, touching your staff to the ground, arms fully extended and your head bowed between them. Concentrate on the ground and your staff and feel the earth energy move up the staff, through your arms and to your lungs as you inhale another full breath. Raise your head and pull your staff in toward your heart as you straighten up and inhale fully.



Your hands on your staff, touch your breastbone. Hold silence. Perceive the dawning light all around you. Take several (three to nine) calm breaths. Then as you exhale, lower your staff and step right bringing your feet together and the staff to rest on the ground between your two big toes. Press it down. "Ground down" mentally; return to the mundane mental level and worldly functioning. The day has

begun.



At **NOON** you face due South. At solar noon, as opposed to clock noon, the sun will be at the highest point in the sky that it will reach that day, and it will also be directly South. **The movements and the breathing for the NOON Salutation are the same as for the DAWN**, however do not look directly at the noon sun. Look at the southern horizon directly below it. Feel the rays and the warmth. Hold silence in the open position for twenty four breaths. Finish the Salutations as at DAWN.

At **EVENING** when the sun is about to set over whatever is your local western horizon, take your stance facing it. When the sun's disk touches tangent to the first bit of the horizon, inhale and raise your staff over your head in the first movement of the Salutation. Holding silence, draw it down between yourself and the setting sun until the sun reappears over the top of the staff. Breathe out as you do this. Move to the open position as before and hold it out as you do this. Move to the open position as before and hold it in silence until the last bit of the solar disk is about to sink below the horizon. At that moment, inhaling, bring your arms up and together with the staff between you and the sun. Then as in the other Salutations, exhale as you bring the staff down to ground at arm's length in front of you, bowing forward as the last gleam disappears under the horizon. Feel yourself "bowing down the sun" in synchronization with it. When you feel the ground energy move up along the staff, through your arms, and body, inhale, mind silent, eyes totally perceiving. Hold your staff and hands at heart level as before. See the night begin around you. One day is over; a new day has begun. Press your staff down to the ground again at your feet. "Ground down" mentally. Come back to the mundane world, refreshed. Recall what has happened since NOON.



At celestial midnight, **STARS**, the sun is on the other side of the world directly below your feet. At this midnight or just before you go to sleep, do the Salutation to the STARS. Face the North Star. Calm your mind. Recall what you have been doing since the last Salutation. When you have achieved mental silence once more, then raise your staff over your head and inhale. View the North Star then raise your staff over your head and inhale. View the North Star through the "trilithon" of your arms and staff. The rest of the Salutation proceeds like the NOON Salutation. Here you will draw your staff down until the North Star seems to rise over the tip of it. You hold silence in the open position for twenty four breaths, then complete the movements as at NOON. Ground down. Retire. Sleep.

Editor's Notes & "Quick Guide" on the Salutations

Emmon's instructions indicate to silence the mind. Since that is something that even an honest Buddhist monk would admit to being difficult, rest assured that even if the mind wanders, the Salutations are still a very refreshing meditation, and can be completed successfully even with the distractions of thoughts. If it helps, there are plenty of key things you can easily focus on. These are salutations to the sun or the stars. You can feel the warmth of the sun while it is upon you, and focus your thoughts on that sensation. If it's a chilly day or night, you can focus on that, or on the anticipation of warmth of the sun returning. You can also focus on your breathwork, finding your relaxing cadence.

Emmon mentions writing your observations to the *Missal-Any*, referring to *A Druid Missal-Any*, an RDNA newsletter publication from the 1980s to the early 2000s. It was a play on *miscellany* and *missals* the latter of which are a form of religious instruction for specific times of the year, usually in the Catholic church. Emmon was the first editor of the *Missal-Any*. The publication continued for a few years after his death, but since then there have been two different RDNA newsletters: *Druid Inquirer* and *Connexus Of Reformed Druids (C.O.R.D.) Biquarterly*. C.O.R.D. is current as of the first edition of this training program, but in the future there may be a new newsletter for the RDNA. Whenever in time you exist, always check for the latest publications, and by all means, feel free to share your musings with whomever the newsletter editor may be!

Salutations Quick Guide

Reading about the Salutations is great. Performing the Salutations is really great. However, it's hard to read and do at the same time. If it helps, here are the step-by-step instructions concisely:

1. **Staff to sternum**
2. **Trilithon stance**
3. **Staff "eclipses" the sun or North Star**
4. **Open position (like Star Goddess pose) with staff in right hand**
5. **Grab staff with both hands overhead**
6. **Ground staff**
7. **Lean & bow**
8. **Staff to sternum**
9. **Plant staff, feet together**
10. **Ground down, complete**

The super short version:

1. **Sternum**
2. **Trilithon**
3. **Eclipse**
4. **Open**
5. **Grab**
6. **Ground**
7. **Bow**
8. **Sternum**
9. **Plant**
10. **Ground**



Meditation Topic: The Labyrinth

Labyrinths have been associated with myth and mystery for thousands of years. By the medieval period, they were well adapted as contemplative meditation tools in Christianity. The labyrinths we speak of are the single-path kind, not like mazes with dead-ends everywhere. A proper meditation labyrinth only has one route, usually winding its way to a point in the center (like the icon in the corner). It can symbolize our winding path through life, seeking oneness with the divine. Sometimes we feel like we're almost there, but then we get farther away. Are meditation labyrinths explicitly druidic? No, but they're common in many cultures, prominently in Bronze-Age Europe, Egypt, and also found in India. They've since been adapted into many contemporary religious traditions.

If you ever see a labyrinth and you have a few minutes to spare, try to take the time to stop what you are doing, focus on what might be spiritually important to you, and mindfully walk the labyrinth. When you get to the heart of the labyrinth, pause and reflect on the notion of accomplishing your goals. How close is that to becoming a reality? What additional steps must you take to do so? Imagine unity with the divine. If it isn't busy there, instead of leaving the labyrinth, go back on the path the way you came, retracing your steps until you're out again from the entrance.

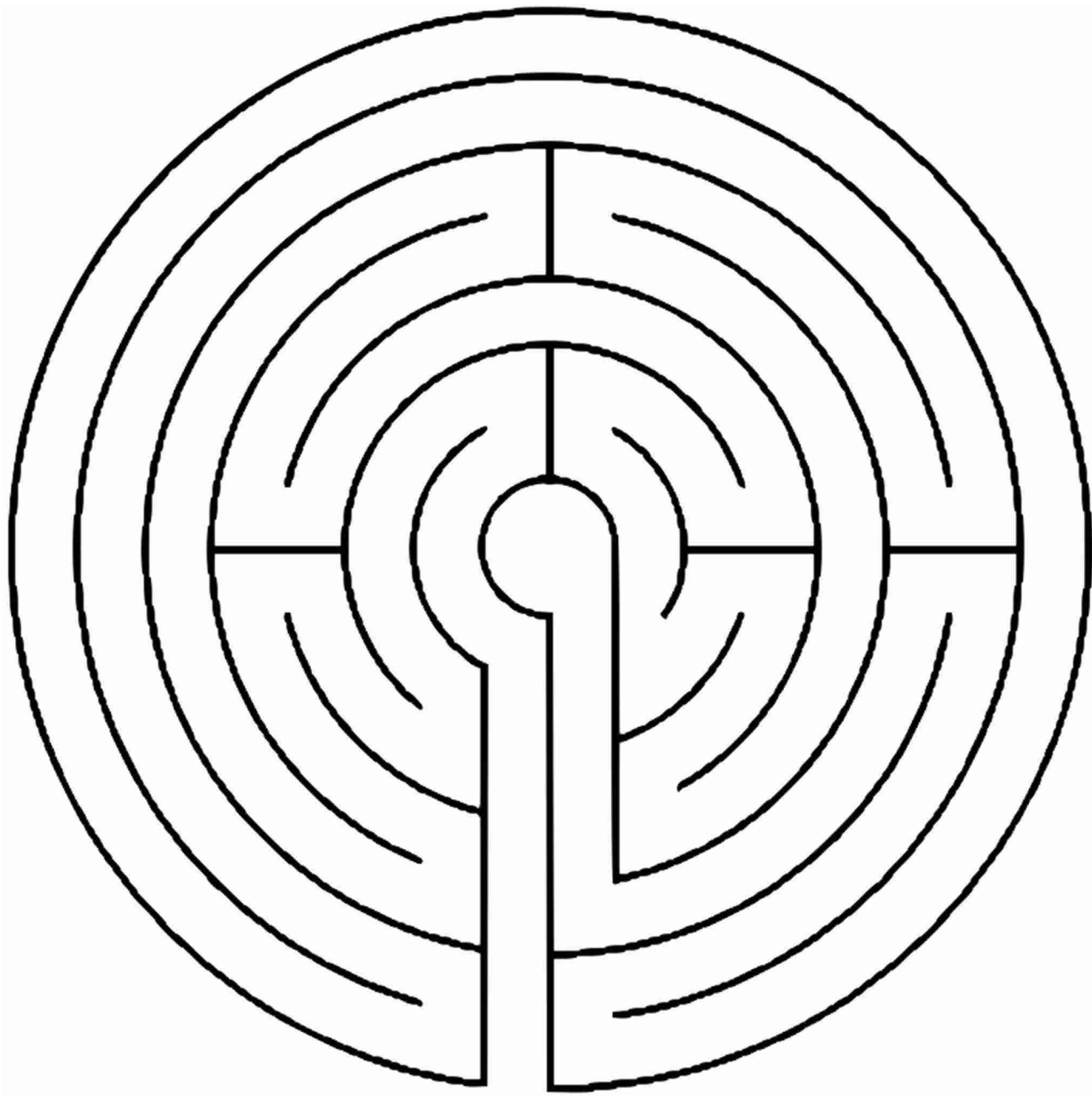


Depending on how populous your vicinity is, we're willing to bet there's a meditation labyrinth near you that is open to the general public. Sometimes there might be one in parks, sometimes on hospital or college campuses, and very often churches will have a labyrinth, sometimes inside, but often outside on the lawn. Wherever they may be, it may always be prudent to verify that they are open to the general public. Oftentimes there will be an interpretive sign in front of them that specifies who may use them. There are even a few on private property we've seen where respectful visitors are welcome between specified times. Personally, one might decline to use those labyrinths for both liability and safety risks, but if you feel safe and are following the rules, then go for it.

Sometimes the labyrinths aren't very accessible in other aspects, particularly for people with limitations in mobility. The path in a labyrinth tends to be very narrow, sometimes just wide enough for both feet. They could be flat on the ground, with painted or two-tone concrete. Other labyrinth paths can be set in between brick pavers, or outlined in rough stones, or mowed with a weed-whacker while prairie grasses form short walls around you. They can sometimes pose a bit of a tripping hazard, whatever their construction material, and might be impassable for anyone using a wheel chair or walking aid.

You don't need to be able to *walk* a labyrinth to appreciate it and meditate, however. Alternatives that are also just as effective would be to *look* at the labyrinth, following the path with your eyes, which can also foster a meditative state. You can also purchase one, or make a small plate-sized meditation labyrinth with polymer clay, with a path you press into the clay with with your finger or using hand tools. Bake it in the oven to cure it, and you have a miniature meditation labyrinth that could fit on your altar or bookshelf. Some people call them *mandalas*, but for the sake of not appropriating Buddhist spirituality (unless you are already a practicing Buddhist as well) then we would recommend sticking to just calling it a *finger labyrinth*. The following page has one that can be printed out and used as a finger labyrinth as well.

Layout of Labyrinth on Stewsie Island, Carleton College, Northfield, MN



Extra Credit: Make a Ritual Robe



“By putting on a robe, I’m not putting on a persona, what I’m doing is I’m sinking back and allowing myself to become my more authentic self, that deeper self that can connect to the deeper levels of the universe that allows an interaction to take place.”

—Penny Billington, *Druidcast* Episode 150 (Smith, 2019)

The secret to making a decent robe on a budget is to find a nice long *tablecloth*. Yup, I’m wearing a big tablecloth. This one happens to be a Better Homes & Gardens 60” x 102” tablecloth. It’s machine washable and 80% cotton, 20% polyester. See the pattern a couple pages ahead.

Please note that I only stand 5’7” in my shoes, so if you’re 5’10” or taller, take that into consideration, but for anyone who is my height or shorter, this is a great option! The packaging stated that this tablecloth is 60” across, but when I measured it at home, I found it’s really only 57” across, so the sleeves aren’t exactly full length for me, but hey it only cost me \$12. This one does not have a hood, but there may be enough leftover material to patch one together.



The option for taller people is to buy *two* table cloths and sew them together instead of folding one in half. You’d have to sew a seam across the shoulders, but the easy part would be that you might not need to cut a hole for the head. Furthermore, if you’re buying two to piece together, you can save a little by getting slightly shorter tablecloths.

Recommended Materials:

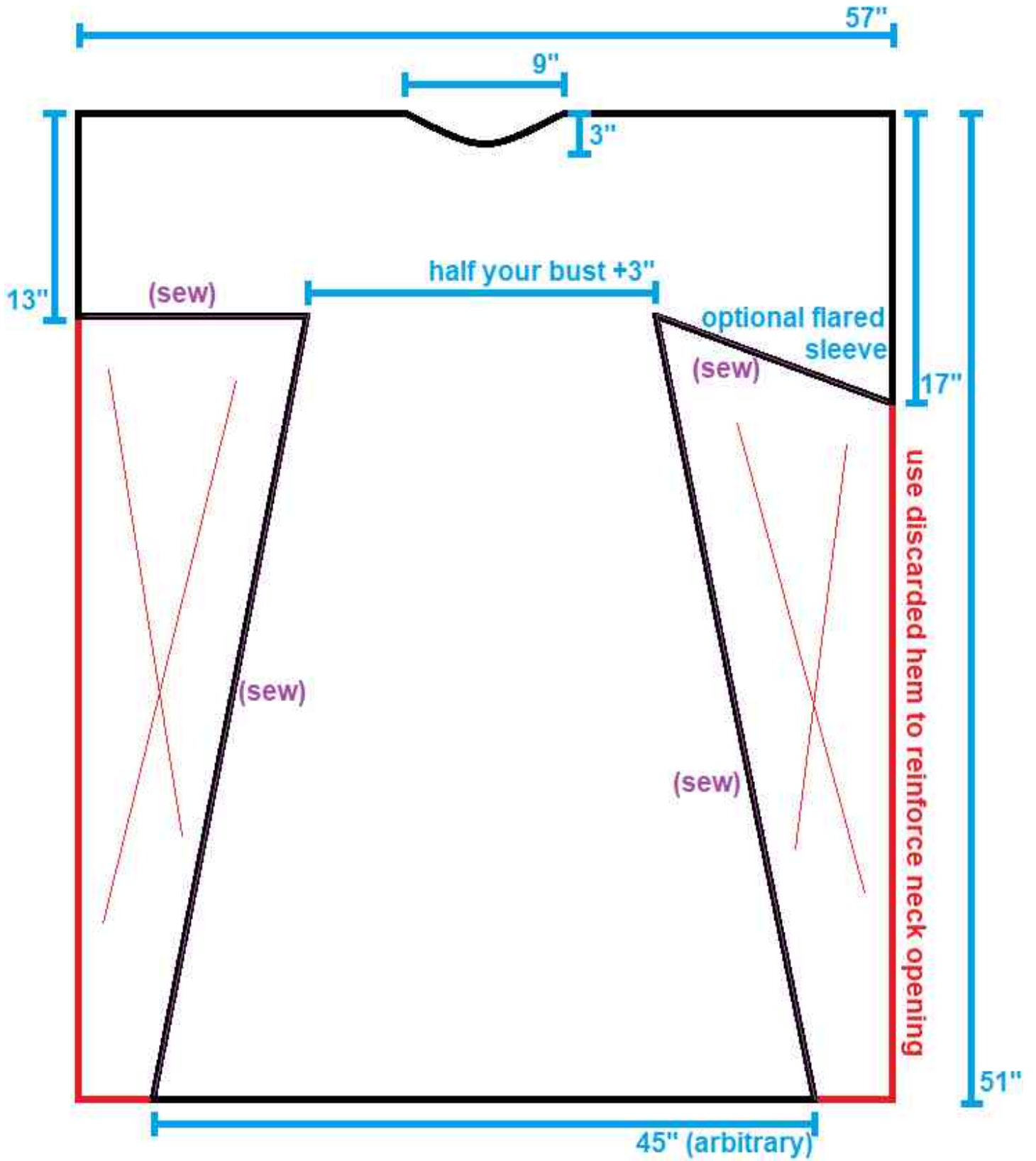
- Ample working surface
- Marking chalk or grease pencil
- Yard stick and soft tape measure
- A rotary fabric cutter (pizza cutter style)
 - scissors are okay but much less efficient
- Cutting mat
- Sewing machine (or needle & thread by hand the way your ancestors did it. Have fun!)
 - I *did* sew my first Druid robe by hand; took me six days, about 2 hours per day
- Maybe some *Fray Check* if that’s how you roll

Basic Steps:

1. Fold it in half – the fold becomes the shoulders
2. Think in terms of the garment being “inside out,” it will be inverted after we complete it
3. Mark the vertical midpoint line (throat to sternum)
4. Mark the sleeves and side-seams
5. Measure your bust, divide that in half and add 3” – that’s the measurement between the underarms as indicated on the robe pattern image. Use the vertical midpoint line to center the bust measurement.
6. Sew the sleeves & side seams with the longest stitch your machine will make (if it doesn’t fit, long stitches are easier to remove for starting over)

7. Cut the neck hole. Don't make it too big right away, it's easy to overestimate. You can always make the hole bigger.
8. Leave the robe inside out and put it on. Don't cut the excess cloth away yet, this is to make sure it fits you comfortably. If you cut the excess now, it will fray a lot, possibly to the seams you just made. If it's too tight, rip out the stitches, adjust the measurements, and start over.
9. If it fits, now cut a long strip up to 3" wide of the finished edge that will be cut away from the excess fabric (see red text in diagram below). This will be like a "bias tape" to prevent the neck from fraying. It needs to be slightly longer than the neck opening circumference.
 1. You could also just buy some bias tape to cover the neck and prevent it from fraying.
10. The cut edge of the makeshift bias tape will need to be tucked under itself so that it too does not fray. If you have actual bias tape, you might simply want to use that.
11. Once the neck opening is reinforced, put the robe on again to make sure it is still comfortable. You don't have to try it on again so soon, but you want to, so do it.
12. Cut away one side of the excess fabric up to a half inch from the stitches. You can cut both sides of the robe if you want to, but this fabric frays quickly and frays a lot.
13. Roll the freshly cut edge under itself so that it cannot fray, and sew it down. I think this is what is called a *Baby Seam*. We are basically sewing over the first stitch at the same time. Use a shorter stitch length because we're reinforcing the heck out of it. If you have a *serger*, use that instead... I'm jealous. If there is a different method of seam you prefer, by all means use it.
14. The corner of the underarms is hard to roll over itself. So in addition to trying anyway, sew back and forward in a three inch zone several times to really tell that seam who's the boss! The garment receives the most long-term stress at the underarms.
15. Once you're done sewing both sides of the robe, remember it's still inside-out, so tie off the threads, invert the robe, and try it on, because it's done!

Hoodless Robe Pattern



Devotional: Make Artwork or a Poem



The bardic arts are considered by many to be an integral aspect of modern Druidism. Several modern Druid orders have an introductory *Bardic* level in their ranking system. The RDNA does not have a level of a bard. Frankly in *A Reformed Druid Anthology*, bards get a passing reference at best. Ceremonially, in the original RDNA liturgies, a Grove's elected Arch-Druid would be the one to carry a majority of the spoken parts of a ritual, followed by the Preceptor who helps with a call-and-response segment. Arch-Druid and Preceptor are two of the main elected offices in an RDNA Grove, the third officer being the Server. Individual Groves in the RDNA have the autonomy to arrange any additional elected offices. For those that do have additional officers, the Bard is sometimes a common one that the Grove will opt-in to use. Regardless of whether or not there's an elected Bard in a Grove, we still do acknowledge that the role of a bard exists within us all.

Bards in Druidry need not exclusively be poets or minstrels. The bardic arts encompass all that *art* encompasses. A bard doesn't have to be good at all of the arts (though a devotee of Lugh may strive to be good at everything, to emulate Lugh from the Irish mythological cycle), but it helps if they're willing to try a diverse range of artistic expression. In ancient Druid custom, no knowledge was committed to books or written word, but rather all to memory. The ancient Druids knew that the use of song and rhyme was a very good tool for memorization; thus they required that their students first learn the bardic arts. Of course in modern times, we've mended our ways, and learned it's really much better to write things down after all. That's part of what makes us *Reformed* Druids.

Poetry, writing, singing, musical instruments, theatre, dance, photography, crafts, high arts, and all other forms of creativity are still important to us in our modern culture. The desire to foster those skills in ourselves and others is still omnipresent in the global Druidic community. **Therefore, the next assignment here is to create a poem, or really *any* kind of artistic, bardic expression.** The goal is to create it within a Druidic or nature-based context. It can be a devotional item to a matron, patron, or *atron* deity, or dedicated to the Earth-Mother, or to the human experience.

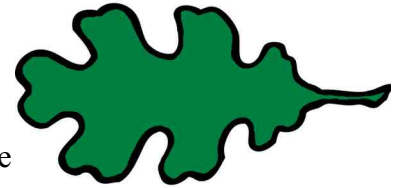
Another *encouraged* challenge would be that if your creation is flammable, to sacrifice it to flames (if it does not pose a safety hazard, of course). Someone once created a poem, shared a portion of it with the Druids present at a ritual, then placed the only copy of that poem in the flames, saying "...and the rest is for the gods." In letting something go, letting it be destroyed or cease to exist, it mirrors the reality of the impermanence of all things. It reminds us that the time we have in our lives could run out abruptly, urging us to make the most of it while we can. In our materialistic sentimentality, humility also emerges. If you prefer to save your creation for posterity and to be appreciated into the future, that is fine too.



Essay: Your Bardic Expression

1. What form of artistic expression did you decide to create?
2. Did you then destroy the artwork? (Destruction is optional, not required!)
3. How did creating it (and destroying it, if applicable) make you feel?

Nature Topic: Nature Hike



If you have access to natural spaces, especially close to where you live, we urge you to go there as often as possible, especially when it is safe. Observe birds, animals, landforms, winds, soil types and the plants that like them, water features, and human impact. Observe how everything relates to each other, and watch for patterns to see what you can learn from them. Bring your walking staff if you feel inclined, and maybe a satchel.

Inside the satchel, have one or two trash bags; you'll probably come across some litter from time to time. Leave any dangerous litter on the ground, and inform someone in charge of that space if it merits further caution. You might also want to carry a plant, tree, or bird identification book if you want to learn more about anything you see. There are also smartphone apps that are made exactly for that purpose as well. The satchel can also contain little offerings.

Every now and then on my own hikes, I come across a small shrine along a trail. Once it was a cut tree stump with painted rocks sitting on them, to which I added a small heap of bird seeds. Another time I found a miniature table with tiny teacups set up among the fallen leaves. The teacups were smaller than thimbles. A meditation labyrinth had a small shrine tucked into the hollow base of a tree. The satchel is also useful for wildcrafting, foraging, and for any shiny pebbles or fallen sticks that might end up coming with on subsequent adventures. A notebook and pen are always in my satchel for when I suddenly need to write something down.

We're expected to be on the trails: a place that is safe for us, but trails also protect young plants from getting trampled, too. The main goal is to connect with nature. Sometimes that feels difficult when we're restricted to a trail or a manicured area, when the rest of nature is doing its own thing, just out of reach. Even with that in mind, it's possible to find that connection. A walk along a busy road, so close to traffic zipping by, might feel like an additional hindrance. Maybe the *nature* next to you is a cornfield, or a farm with grazing livestock. Even that has value because there are living things. You might see cows, goats, and chickens in such number that you just don't get along a wooded trail through a park. How often do you see food in the forest, flourishing in such vast numbers?

Think about that outdoor space and how it relates to us. Those plants take in carbon dioxide and give us back oxygen. The food from the farms provides us with nourishment to sustain us. Everything goes through a continual flow and renewal of life, which is acknowledged in Reformed Druid rituals. Sometimes life has its struggles. That too is acknowledged in Reformed Druidism, in the Second Tenet. Sometimes the struggle (in ourselves or in nature) is because of human impact, other times, it's simply nature being nature, because life is hard. Does that deepen your empathy in some way? Does it hurt when we see an old tree has struggled as best as it could, but ultimately died? Sometimes it looks like it is perfectly healthy and has another hundred years left in it, but its struggle becomes too great a burden. Don't be afraid to make some new tree friends on your nature hikes, and remember from time to time, to set down the books and **go talk to a tree**. Some Druids say you'll learn more that way. Does it help you deepen your connection with nature?

Attestation:

I talked to the tree.



Extra Credit: Plant a Damn Tree

By far, one of the most Druidic things we can do as modern Druids is to plant a tree. In recent decades, wildfires and arson have destroyed hundreds of millions of trees around the world. Satellite tracking has shown that wildfires are getting worse. Planting a single tree might seem like an insignificant effort, but remember that there are also hundreds of organizations that are planting new trees. At the same time, forestry practices are improving to include firebreaks and to diversify local endemic species to mitigate the overall fire hazard.

This is only an extra credit project. We know that not everyone participating in this training program has the means to go buy trees and plant them. We know that lots of people don't have private property that would even allow them to plant trees, and it can sometimes be tricky to get a single tree planted on public property, as there are extra administrative hoops to jump through, unless your jurisdiction is fine with people planting trees any old place. That gets into the realm of *guerrilla gardening* which has its own ethics questions, so we don't officially endorse *that*, though the concept is delightfully compatible with the spirit of Reformed Druidism.

If you have plenty of spare funds to drop a hundred dollars on an oak sapling, and the means to plant it, then by all means, please plant a tree! Trees like oaks are known for their longevity and drought-resistance. Yes you can find trees that are much cheaper like maples and pines, but they aren't quite as much of a carbon sink compared to oaks.

Well now that we happened to mention *guerrilla gardening* being compatible with Reformed Druidism, perhaps it merits further ideas and suggestions. Just about any trees will help make the world a better place. Well, some trees might be considered invasive or noxious, so maybe avoid some of those. You could take some seed pods from a maple or other types, and plant them on road embankments up next to fences. Maybe they'll sprout into a tree, maybe they won't. Cottonwoods, aspens, and other poplars tend to grow in precarious places, like cracks in sidewalks. They will surely be weeded out before they have a chance to thrive, but if you can carefully extract it from the urban environment, then you could relocate it to a place where it might have a better shot at life.

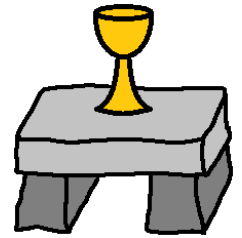
There are also companies that will plant trees if you give them money. The prices will vary, so it's good to take a look around. As of the first publication of this training program, there's a company called [One Tree Planted](#), which currently plants one tree for every dollar you donate. There are *so* many other companies out there to consider, perhaps even some nonprofits that are close to where you live, and you could even volunteer your time with them. If you find that this activity is something that is within your means, please consider helping the Earth-Mother become a greener place!



Essay: Optional Tree Planting

Since tree planting is optional, it's understandable if you don't or can't. If you aren't planting trees, indicate such in question 1, but also still answer questions 2-3 as to what your answer would be if you *could* plant something.

1. Did you plant a tree, or arrange to have one planted?
2. What kind(s) did you select (if applicable)?
3. Did you try a "guerrilla gardening" approach to tree planting?



Aspects of a Reformed Druid Ritual

We've probably mentioned this before, but it's good to state it again, just to let things sink in. The Reformed Druid movement has no set ritual. We have dozens of different scripts, many of which resemble each other closely, and some not so closely. Those are not considered official scripts by any means, they're just the ones that ended up in the book because they were found in the International Druid Archives or were shared with the editor of *A Reformed Druid Anthology (ARDA)*. When we mention *ritual*, this word is synonymous with *ceremony*, as well as the RDNA preferred term, *service*. Ritual is sometimes too heavy of a word for some people, so feel free to use the other two aforementioned terms. *Celebration* and *observance* are also suitable alternatives.

The RDNA tries to appeal to a wide demographic. Nothing in ritual is literal; everything is a metaphor that allows for a wide range of interpretations. They are compatible with monotheists, pantheists, polytheists, and atheists, and everyone in between. Originally the rituals were carried start to finish almost entirely by the Arch-Druid with help from the Preceptor. Over the decades, a variety of versions have emerged that are more participatory. By analyzing the extant ritual scripts, there are some hallmarks among the common traits between them.

Hallmarks of an RDNA Ritual

What makes a Reformed Druid ceremony stand out among others is how much it focuses on the **Earth-Mother**. Whether the Earth-Mother is Nature *deified* or just a physical place where we *experience* our spirituality, she's what we all have in common. No Earth-Mother = no life. Therefore she is regarded as important to us: for many, also on a spiritual level. **Meditation** is also significant, so much so that some of the founders state that it's an integral part of a Reformed Druid Service. Incorporating **philosophy**, according to David Frangquist, is considered to be so important that without it, the ritual is just a farce.

"For without the philosophy the ritual is but playacting; and without the ritual the philosophy lacks the warmth and vitality"

— *Epistle of David the Chronicler 3:2* (Scharding, *et al.*, 2004, p. 34)

Another unique hallmark of a Reformed Druid ritual is the consecration of the chalice to **Dalon Ap Landu** (or to the *Lord of the Groves* for anyone who takes issue with the dubious historicity of Dalon). It is a fair assumption that no other Druid orders outside of the Reform incorporate him in any way. We sometimes wonder why the founders of the RDNA didn't consecrate the Waters-of-Life to *Nemetona*, the Gaulish goddess of actual sacred groves. Since there's no mandate on any particular ritual script, it could still be Reformed if someone preferred to reinterpret Dalon Ap Landu as Nemetona instead. We're sure she'd be fine with the sevenfold powers, and the three ways of day and the one of night. However, this might be seen as a more acceptable alternative to Protogrove rituals, as Third Order Druids (in the Order of Dalon Ap Landu) would probably want to stick with Dalon, or at least Lord of the Groves.

General Outline and Explanation of RDNA Ritual Segments

- I. **Opening Blessing** (Usually an invocation to a deity, usually just “Lord” or “Be’al”)
- II. **Procession** (Ritual usually starts away from altar and fire, moves like a mini parade)
 - A. Earth-Mother Chant (*Hymn to the Earth-Mother* by Kathie Courtice & Peter Basquin. ADF modified the tune, cut out some of the lyrics, and called it *O Earth Mother*)
 - B. Drawing of the Sigil (The Druid Sigil, drawn on the ground with staves where priest stands)
- III. **Hymns or Chants of Praise**

- A. Sometimes the *Hymn to the Earth-Mother* gets sung here
- IV. **The Sacrifice**
 - A. Sacrifice can only be plant matter
 - B. Bardic offerings are also suitable
 - C. Use augury or aeromancy (divination based on activity of birds *or* responses on the wind)
 - D. The sacrifice is usually accepted. If not, give another offering, or consecrate spring water instead of whiskey, or end the rite
- V. **The Answer** (The Arch-Druid and Preceptor recite a call-and-response segment)
- VI. **The Consecration** (A deity is asked to descend into the Waters-of-Life – diluted whiskey (summer) or Waters-of-Sleep – spring water (winter) and hallow them)
 - A. **Dalon Ap Landu Invocation** (A bad Welsh back-translation of “Lord of the Groves.” Some RDNA Druids don’t like the fact that Dalon has a poorly translated name, in which case it’s fine to just call him “Lord of the Groves.” *Lord of the Groves* is also the translation of the ancient Roman account of a Celtic god or nature spirit. (From *The Pharsalia of Lucan*: “*Even the Druids feared to disturb the Lord of the Grove.*”) Though Lucan was probably exaggerating in that verse to make the Druids look timid.)
- VII. **The Sermon or Meditation** (Later called “The Forum” and was for any druidic conversation, specific activities of the occasion, rites of passage, etc)
 - A. Meditation is paramount (Silent open meditation for about a minute, experiencing Nature with all senses, though maybe not *taste*)
- VIII. **Closing Blessing**

The various Reformed Druid rituals, despite their sometimes stark differences, are all referred to as the *Common Order of Worship*. Actually the word ordering in ARDA is *Order of Common Worship*, but being a spiritual path that's not afraid of mirth, we really do like the one that is abbreviated *COW*, because if it is a holy ceremony to us, we can call it our Holy COW. We really don't refer to it that way very often, though. We're not worshipping cows (though individually you really can if you want to), and we don't want to send mixed signals to prospective or new attendees. We do love a good in-joke, especially for those of us with the knowledge that Reformed Druidism was founded in Northfield, Minnesota, whose city slogan is "Cows, Colleges, & Contentment." There's even a beloved basement bar on Division Street called "The Contented Cow." That and the tie-in of the ancient Druids living in a mostly agrarian society, from time to time you'll hear us Druids talking about having our next Holy COW.

The fact that they're all called the Order of Common Worship isn't very helpful. Because of the fact that they ended up in ARDA at all gives readers the perception of officiality, no matter how many times we say there's no official script. Even the oldest known version is referred to as a *version*; we don't even say it's the original version, but it probably is the original. Purists in the RDNA feel like it should be regarded as the preferred script when two or more Groves come together in collaboration. That script in a small group can easily be completed in less than 15 minutes. That feels a bit cringeworthy to some ceremonialists. When Oakdale Grove sometimes has visitors who drive or fly in from far away, for the sake of the time and cost investment they've made to get there, we really do like the more elaborate forms of the ritual. There are also a number of Druids who will advise *against* using scripts at all; wing it! Though some people do not excel at ceremonial improvisation, so that is when it would be good to have rituals thought out and pre-planned.

In the various rituals, the **opening blessing** serves as a **statement of purpose** announcing (to some

extent) what it is we're about to do in ceremony. That can be really helpful for first time attendees or anyone not familiar with any RDNA customs. It also serves the dual purpose of helping people get into the right mindset, and the blessing is a good introductory sensation to have bestowed upon you. It is also the segment where we express our humility, to shed the ego while we're together in common bond.

The **procession** is something that we unfortunately do not do with any regularity in Oakdale Grove. In the first year of running a formal Grove, we always met right at the location of the ritual, usually around a fire pit or at least a picnic grill. It really does simplify the instructions for people who have never been to that park before, or to an RDNA ritual. It felt really awkward with everyone starting *at* the ritual site, then moving away from it for the sole purpose of processing in a parade right back in to start the service. Luckily when coordinating large reunions, we've somehow managed to meet at a very specific rally point, and then march to the site. In public parks where grills and fire pits are first-come-first-serve, it really is better to just rally right at the location of the ritual. Having a flamekeeper who is willing to guard the ritual site while everyone starts from elsewhere is helpful. They can make sure that everything is aesthetically prepared for everyone to arrive at once.

The **hymns** (forgive the loaded word) or **chants of praise** also make for an excellent segment for attendees to make any bardic offerings. Sometimes people come with poetry, sing a devotional song, or play a portable musical instrument. It is also where some scripts might have a seasonal chant reflecting on the forces of nature. The *Hymn to the Earth-Mother* is also sung in this section. Composer Peter Basquin wrote the music to the Earth-Mother chant, based on lyrics written by Kathie Courtice. They are both Reformed Druids from the original Carleton College Grove, and were RDNA members pretty much since the foundation. They're married, by the way. The *Hymn to the Earth-Mother* does sound vaguely reminiscent of a melismatic style of Gregorian chant, though the lyrics "O Earth-Mother we praise thee..." feel almost undeniably pagan. Add in a voice that just sings "O..." in harmony, alternating down one note and back up a few times over the course of the song, and it starts to sound a bit Scottish!

The **sacrifice** is when the Arch-Druid offers the plant-based offering to the ritual fire, or to the altar, ground, or body of water if there is no fire. Any bardic offerings have already been made. Originally, only the Arch-Druid offered the one sacrifice on behalf of all attendees. Some attendees will come to the ritual bringing plant-based offerings of their own, so we would highly recommend determining if they have something to offer prior to the start of the ceremony. Some of the extant scripts are written to allow for attendees to make their individual offerings. It is wise to state (in no uncertain terms) when the time is right for them to offer their sacrifices. If you're presiding, then you could also have the attendees bring their offerings to a bowl on your working table (or altar, depending on your setup), and you could then offer them all at once. Like we say on repeat, there's no set way to do things. Just try to be aware and accommodating.

The Arch-Druid's next task is to determine if the sacrifice has been accepted or not. This is accomplished usually by aeromancy or augury. More on that in another section of this training program. The omen is followed by the **answer**, a call-and-response between the Arch-Druid and Preceptor. This segment is fairly traditional, but also exists in plenty of variation, talking about the Waters that are about to be consecrated. The pitcher is then **consecrated**, usually in the name of Dalon Ap Landu. After all, the Third Order is also nicknamed the Order of Dalon Ap Landu. Some people are of the interpretation that Dalon Ap Landu was never intended to be a deity or spirit, but rather the collective consciousness of all Third Order Druids. When we consecrate the Waters in Dalon's name,

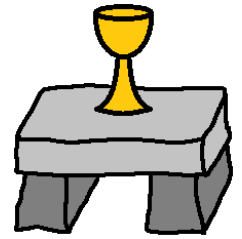
we're connecting with *all* members of the Order of Dalon Ap Landu, perhaps on a psychic level, that we're all consecrating the Waters, regardless of where we all are or what we are doing. Others might also say that with so many of us having believed in Dalon Ap Landu for so long, that we *believed* him into existence, and now persists as a *thoughtform* entity. After all, humanity has a long history of creating deities via myth and oral tradition.

One section not listed in the outline is the **libation**. Granted, it is only one spoken sentence and one action: "To thee, O Earth-Mother, we return this portion of thy bounty, even as we too must one day return to thee," and the remainder of the waters in our chalices are poured into the fire in libation, with that humble reminder that our existence is fragile, and nothing is forever. After this low-tone line of script, the solemnity continues into the **meditation** segment. Meditation in its diverse forms is generally considered integral to Reformed Druidism. It doesn't make a difference if it is a guided meditation, transcendental, mindfulness, a walking meditation, contemplative introspection, or other kinds.

In the RDNA services, the meditation is usually at the end of the rite with no additional description or instruction. The length has varied and it depends on the preference of the presiding Arch-Druid, who would also gauge the attendees' attentiveness to determine a good length of time. One minute is sufficient, especially if there's no instruction provided. The Arch-Druid might simply state "And now for the meditation," followed by awkward silence. We've heard rumors of an hourlong meditation conducted by some Third Order Druids. That's a bit too long. Mindfulness Meditations for example, should not be longer than 45 minutes. In an RDNA service, we wouldn't recommend going longer than 15 minutes for the group. With zero instruction, any type of meditation is fine. Treat it as an *open meditation*, where you're just experiencing *existence* for a moment.

Some Arch-Druids will preface this segment with some basic instructions, such as taking in all your senses. You don't need to close your eyes for it. I tend to be more thorough in my preface. I will state that considering the hustle and bustle of our modern lives, it is hard for us to sit and deliberately do what feels like *nothing* for any amount of time, that it feels counterproductive, and thus awkward. I make sure to set up that acknowledgement that what we're about to do might *seem* unusual, but then I explain the point and the benefit. We are stopping what we are doing for the duration of one minute, breathing deeply and comfortably, and using all our senses to *appreciate* this moment in Nature. Even if there are distractions, or discomfort, or screaming kids on the playground and police sirens in the distance; this is all a very real and *honest* part of our existence in this moment. **We're not using meditation as escapism, but to experience life as it presents itself to us.** The Arch-Druid should be meditating for their own benefit as well, but they are also expected to generally monitor the time. Try to do at least one minute. If the attendees appear to become restless or bored, end it after that minute is up.

The **closing blessing** is simply a statement that declares that the service has ended, and that the attendees can venture back out into the world with the knowledge we have the Earth-Mother's blessing. After this time, there has historically been a lot of open conversation among attendees, question and answer sessions if there are people who are relatively new to this, and other conversation or feedback. Always take any constructive criticism, feedback, or suggestions under consideration, if you're the one leading the services. Your expectation *is* after all to provide that service to meet the spiritual needs of those in attendance, at least within a Reformed Druid context.



Aeromancy, Augury, Omens, and Other Forms of Divination

In some of the other Druid orders, there is a role, rank, or grade for those in the position of the *Ovate*, *Vate*, or *Seer* as prerequisite to attaining the Druid rank. In the RDNA, there is no separate rank or training regimen for a person who seeks omens. It is generally considered the responsibility of the Third Order priest or elected Arch-Druid to be able to seek an omen and divine the answer. How very unscientific when we say this but: *confirmation bias is your friend*. There, we said it. At least we're forthright about it.

Aeromancy

The form of divination primarily used in Reformed Druidism is *aeromancy*, a very broad form of *air divination* that can be based on anything from the wind, to the state of the atmosphere, to sights and sounds that come across the air, and to incorporate the minutiae of whatever it is doing when you experience it. In the RDNA, aeromancy is highly subjective in accordance with the individual's intuition, or how you feel about it.

The presiding priest will call on the four winds to answer whether or not the plant-based sacrifice has been accepted by the Earth-Mother. Whether or not you are familiar with the metaphysical associations of the four directions (Air of the East, Fire of the South, Waters of the West, and Earth of the North), it makes no difference in the RDNA. Many of the scripts list the directions in the order of North, South, East, and West to match up with the modern traditional order that they commonly tend to be listed in common parlance. Those who are familiar with the classical elemental correspondences might start in the east, asking for the omen clockwise.

The winds don't always pick up all at once. You don't need them to rise up from every direction upon command, though it is really nice when they just *do*, which is a real time-saver. The speed at which we call upon the four directions doesn't matter either, though it is customary to pause and wait about 15 seconds between directions. In the winter if it's really, really cold outside we might speed it up. The winds are usually pretty blustery then anyway.

Sometimes it's not just the winds that answer your call. We stated anything on the element of air is a sufficient omen. That includes sound. As if on command, sometimes dogs start barking from the direction called, squirrels and chipmunks chatter in the trees, and on a few occasions, a train horn sounds. Granted the train horn isn't the most natural of signs, but it is operated by a person who is of the Earth-Mother. Rain is a good omen, so much so that it is even considered a blessing.

Lightning and thunder is a traditional *bad omen*. It is also dangerous. If you are close enough to hear the thunder, you are close enough to already be in danger. Reformed Druids really do have their rituals outside. Do not endanger yourself or other attendees. We had a thunderstorm arrive during the 60th anniversary ceremony at Carleton College, but we also started an hour late. We knew we had time to get through it *before* the storm would come, but a quick tour of the Arboretum turned into an *extended* tour, courtesy of enthusiastic alumni. So the storm was the Earth-Mother's "I told you so," plus several attendees had traveled thousands or at least hundreds of miles to experience the anniversary together, so it's not like we could reschedule for the next weekend. Our sacrifices burned away in the fire, despite the pouring rain and thunder, thus we determined that our offerings had been accepted.

Augury (Ornithomancy)

Always pay attention to the birds. Augury has shifted meaning to become much more broad, to encompass *any* method of seeking omens. However in Roman times, augury specifically regarded observing the behavior of birds. These days, bird divination specifically is also called ornithomancy. Watch any birds in flight, the patterns of their movement, their songs or squawks, and use your intuition to get a feel for what they are trying to do. Sometimes they're really just trying to be a bird. That's *fine*, that's *expected* of them, that's *good* (*hint, hint, hint*). Also if a bird is doing anything *unusual*... and you're using an *unusual* technique to find a yes or no answer... as long as that bird isn't dying or suffering, we'd say that's a pretty good sign too.

Druids Do It Outdoors

We look to the winds, birds, animals, the element of air because they are Nature. For the *two* indoor rituals we've had, they were regrettable decisions. We sacrificed lettuce to a potted plant and got no omens. There were no winds, no birds, no other *Nature* in the house. The other time was during the 2014 polar vortex, when the *high* temperature outside was -7°F (-21°C). We held an indoor ritual but when it came time for the aeromancy, we decided to go outside and finish up the short form of the ritual. Normally our Grove's guideline is to reschedule if the high temperature is below 20°F (-7°C).

Other Forms of Divination

There are dozens of other divination techniques that you can choose from to seek the omens. Whenever possible, try to use aeromancy or augury. We don't force you to stick with it exclusively, that would be unreformed. Yes you may use other forms of divination, just about anything you like as long as you aren't scrying into entrails or otherwise violating the *no animal or blood sacrifice* policy. To get a feel for options that are out there, look up "words that end in *mancy*" and maybe you'll find a new technique you want to try.

We're not going to list them all, but *common* options for seeking omens would include:

- Astragalomancy (dice)
- Astromancy (stars, astrology)
- Bibliomancy (turning to a page in a book and pointing to a word or sentence)
- Cartomancy (card reading such as tarot)
- Chiromancy (palmistry)
- Crystallomancy (scrying into a crystal ball)
- Enoptromancy (mirror scrying)
- Geomancy (sometimes erroneously called *Druid sticks* and drawing geomantic figures)
- Numeromancy (numerology)
- Numismatomancy (flip a coin)
- Ogham (late Iron Age Irish alphabet)
- Oneiromancy (dreams)
- Pallomancy (pendulums)
- Pyromancy (fire scrying)
- Norse Runes (usually the Futhark alphabet)
- Tasseomancy (tea leaves)

Acorn Divination (AKA "Acorn Hand," a Method For the RDNA)

Perhaps you've heard of the super simple three acorns (or pebbles, or shells, or any small objects) divination where one acorn represents you, the other two represent yes and no, and an optional fourth one represents a maybe. When you cast them, the closest one that lands to "your" acorn gives you the answer. There's not a heck of a lot more to it than that, but you can do that if you like. However, we're not here to talk about that method, but rather a different one.

We recommend acorns because we're Druids, but you can **use any two pointed objects** you find on the ground such as small shells, angular gravel, other large seeds, even small screws or roofing nails (though we don't recommend screws and nails; we're just trying to illustrate the point that you can be resourceful). The objects should have an obvious pointed end and an obvious blunt end. The acorns don't particularly *need* their caps, but it might be helpful to bake them dry to preserve them, then glue the caps back on. It involves reading the acorns based on where they sit in one hand. **This method does not incorporate chiromancy (palmistry)**, but you can choose whether or not you want to incorporate those interpretations if you are familiar with that practice.

Instructions

1. Shake two acorns (or similarly shaped objects) in your hands like dice
2. Let them settle on one level hand parallel with the ground (left or right; it doesn't matter)
3. Lift away your other hand and see where the acorns rest in your hand
4. If your intuition gives you an immediate clear answer, you're done
5. Otherwise, divine the answer based on our guide

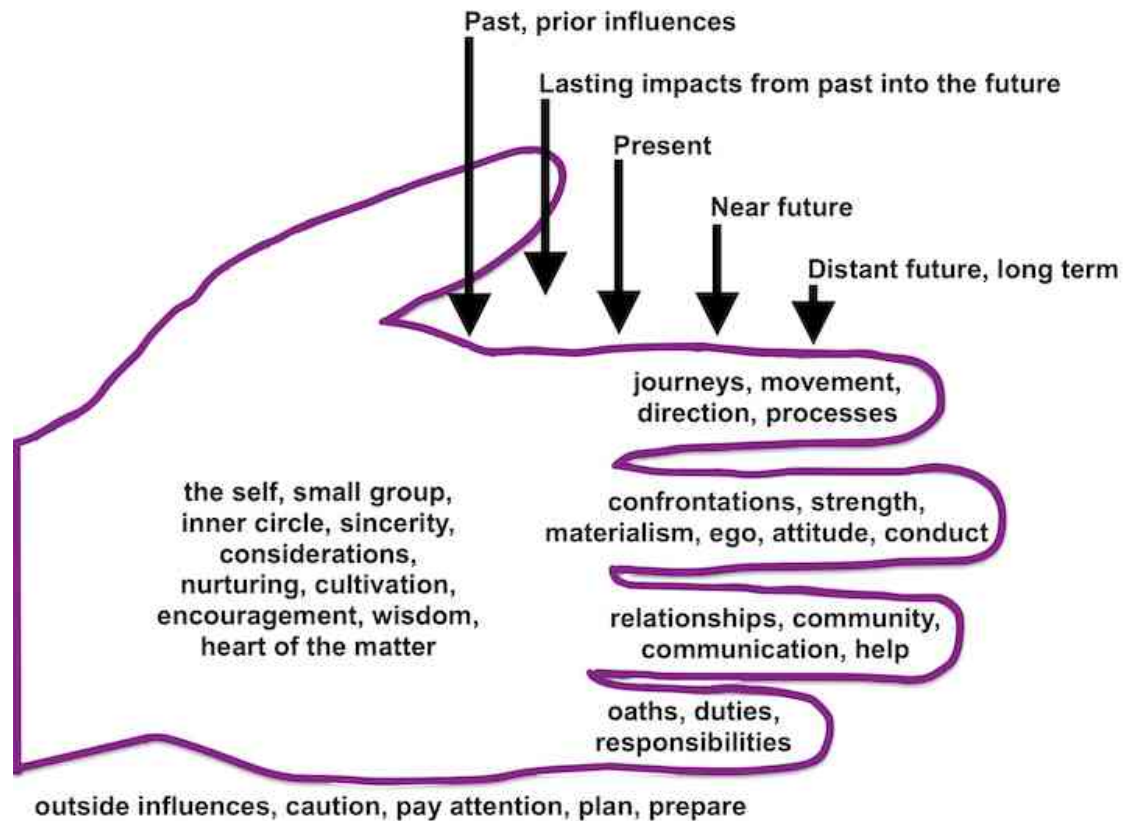
Overview of the *Acorn Hand* Divination Method





Your acorns might be nestled in the palm of your hand, or they could be perched upon a finger, or resting between two fingers. You might have to brace your thumb against them, or hold your hand to your stomach to keep them from falling. If you catch one against your thumb, the reading is pointing to influences in the past. If it's barely held by the tip of the thumb, the issue is intertwined between past and future. If one lands in the joint at the base of any finger, there is something relevant in the present. If it rests in a middle joint of any finger, it pertains to the near future. If it lands in one of the farthest joints of any finger, it is a long-term or issue or will remain or become relevant in the more distant future.









The palm has its own broad associations, and almost always has the simplest interpretations where you should try your best to feel what your intuition says about the issue. Each finger has its own range of meanings. If an acorn is resting between two fingers, that adds to the complexity, where the associations of both, and its relationship to *time* should be considered. Your intuition may tell you whether one aspect has more relevance than another, and it is good to follow your heart when that happens. Sometimes if your acorns want to roll, you might even suddenly brace an acorn between your pointer and ring finger, with your middle finger out of the way underneath. Take those details into consideration for the divination as well. If an acorn falls out of your hand, or you have to brace your hand against your stomach to stop one from falling, then that indicates there's more going on than meets the eye. Outside influences are at play. You need to exercise caution, pay close attention, heighten your awareness, and make careful preparations and plan things out. Always consider contingencies.

Hand Map & Acorn Patterns

In addition to where in your hand the acorns land, you will notice common orientations in how they are juxtaposed in relation to each other. There are 12 relatively distinct orientations, but there's also the chance that some of them will be angled to look like patterns that are somewhere in between others. If anything, situations like that should remind us to consider all the possibilities, including combined interpretations and gray areas in between.



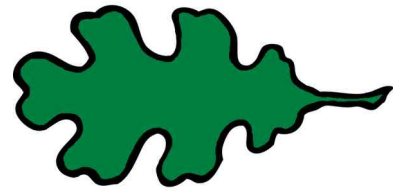
Acorn Pattern	Meaning	Connotation
	Stability: There is bonding through a shared experience that provides a sense of interpersonal stability, trust, and understanding. If an acorn is touching the ring finger, this enhances the overall reading.	Positive
	Tandem: Working together with others will propel you to gains, whether you are receiving or taking. If taking, it should be entirely altruistic and unselfish; keep your ego in check. If an acorn touches the middle finger, this enhances the overall reading.	Positive
	Perfect Conjunction: Things are coming together like clockwork. There is unity and a common goal in that all involved are focusing on together during this process. If an acorn is touching the index finger, this enhances the overall reading.	Positive
	Lesser Conjunction: Things are coming together, but chaotically. The deadline might be too close for comfort, and you may have to bend over backwards in terms of creativity, or resolve your commitments with many ideas or a multi-pronged approach. If an acorn touches the little finger, this enhances the overall reading.	Positive

	<p>Stagnation: Things might be staying at the status quo. Perhaps you feel like you aren't getting anywhere or are running in circles. Did you pass that same rock next to the tree stump you sat on an hour ago?</p>	<p>Neutral</p>
	<p>Ambivalence: The situation feels disconnected, not really even pointed in a common direction, and nothing seems to relate to anything else. It is hard to get a feel for the heart of the issue. If only it was known, then the next steps could be taken.</p>	<p>Neutral</p>
	<p>Missed Opportunity of the <i>Secular</i>: One acorn on its side, and the other points down to your hand (<i>you, matters of the secular, and material realm</i>). Your path has gone in a direction where you don't realize you may have missed an opportunity. You're fine where you are now. Don't get caught up on what could have been.</p>	<p>Neutral</p>
	<p>Missed Opportunity of the <i>Spiritual</i>: One acorn on its side, and the other points up to a higher plane (<i>the Divine, or matters of the spiritual</i>). Your path has gone in a direction where you don't realize you may have missed an opportunity. You're fine where you are now. Don't get caught up on what could have been.</p>	<p>Neutral</p>
	<p>Perfect Opposition: There is a situation which has you in total disagreement. This may be the result of (or necessitate) a loss, or for you to give something up or make additional sacrifices before anything can move forward. If an acorn is touching the middle finger, this enhances the overall reading.</p>	<p>Negative</p>
	<p>Lesser Opposition: There is a minor conflict affecting your ability to see to your responsibilities. The issues might not be exactly opposed to your commitments or tasks, but they're causing a bit of disruption and certainly aren't helping. If an acorn touches the little finger, this enhances the overall reading.</p>	<p>Negative</p>
	<p>Antagonism: There is an interpersonal issue that is either one sided or has a distinct impression of being one sided. The hostility could be rooted in inequity or bias. Step back; are <i>you</i> the antagonist? Just asking. If an acorn touches the ring finger, this enhances the overall reading.</p>	<p>Negative</p>
	<p>Complications: The way things are headed, there could be some underlying dissonance or deceptions that could be sending you in the wrong direction. Key details are being omitted, but you will need the facts before going much further. If an acorn touches the index finger, this enhances the overall reading.</p>	<p>Negative</p>

Notes and Commentary on this Divination Method

You may have noticed that there are no castings that are overtly associated with **change**. Change is always an inevitable expectation. You might have also noticed that the neutral acorn combinations aren't enhanced by any position in the hand. Let's try out a little bit of a thought experiment to sort through this: **NEUTRALITY INTENSIFIES** ah, right, *neutral*. It is also understandable to think that the neutral combinations lean more negative, but most people tend to be pessimists, too.

As a reminder, you could see some acorn patterns and combinations that aren't represented among the 12. There's plenty of room for nuance, blended meanings, and additional layers of complexity where the situation isn't black and white. Everything can have shades of gray. Also take into consideration that sometimes a *negative* reading is desired, in particular if you're looking to cease certain things, or intend to bring about some changes for the better. Hopefully you're not willfully *seeking* conflict though.



Nature Topic: Find Liminal Places

Someone once scoffed that pagans [and we can attest that also Druids] have such an obsession with *liminality*. Even among individuals who might not know the meaning of liminality or liminal spaces, we all tend to be drawn to them regardless. Liminality is simply physical spaces in between two distinct things, places we might also call margins, and places that are separated or isolated by something. Liminality can also have intangible counterparts: a conceptualization, a state of being, or state of mind, that is on the cusp of two different conditions. Liminality may also have some otherworldly qualities that can play tricks on our perceptions. In Druidry we might seek some of these kinds of places or states of mind as part of fulfilling our spiritual goals and intentions.

Natural Liminal Spaces

- Shorelines between any land and water
 - Lakes, rivers, streams, oceans, wetlands, etc are also liminal
- High ground, hills, mountain tops
- Caves
- Islands
- Cliffs
- Forest's edge, groves, copses, glades, thickets

Artificial Liminal Spaces

- Bridges, causeways, piers
- Crossroads
- Doorways, windows, gates, stiles
- Wells
- Fences, hedgerows, and openings in them
- Boundaries, borders, especially with buffer zones in between
- Standing stones
- Cemeteries
- Ruins
- Basements, attics, stairwells

Liminal Natural Things

- Trees (existing under the earth, on the earth, and above the earth all at once)
- Springs
- Fire
- Mistletoe (never grows on the ground like other plants)
- Spirits, deities, psychopomps
- Birds

Liminal Times

- Sunrises & Sunsets
- Wheel-of-the-Year high days (solstices, equinoxes, Samhain, etc)
- Full moon & dark moon
- Eclipses
- Celestial alignments

- New Year's Eve/Day
- Winter freeze, spring thaw, warming summer, autumn leaves

Liminal Events

- Storms, rain, snowfall, meteor showers
- Fog
- Graduations, marriages, funerals
- Pregnancy
- Gender transition
- Metamorphosis
- Birth, aging, death
- Showers, baths, and ritual cleansing
- Travel, journeys, exploration
- Coming of age, elderhood

Conceptual Liminality

- Mixed emotions (being happy and sad, *et cetera*) about something at the same time)
- Hypnagogia (transition from awake to sleep) & hypnopompia (transition from sleep to awake)
- Dreams
- Meditation, pathworking
- Imagination, creativity
- Intuition

Why We Seek Liminality

Liminal spaces have a quality of *otherness* to them that holds a natural allure. If we're on a beach with one foot in the ocean, one foot on land, and a hand reaching for the heavens, then at that moment we are symbolically one with the sea, land, and sky, the *triple realms* that held great significance to the ancient Druids. Each realm has its own powers and own associations. By being in those three places at once, we are embodying the characteristics of each one. If the sun is setting and the full moon is rising, we're stacking additional liminal forces of nature into what we are trying to achieve.

With liminality, we can reach deeper into our psyche, or communicate and interact with the divine, or spirits and beings that we do not normally perceive. We speak of the veil between the worlds being thinnest on Samhain, where spirits are said to be able to cross over the boundaries effortlessly. It is also thin on the other high days, but Samhain most of all. Some Druids will communicate or honor their ancestors in annual memorials when the veil is thin.

In Reformed Druidism, the ritual fire is considered an ancient portal to other realms. We make our offerings and sacrifices to the fire, which transforms it from how we see it into a bright shining fire, gases, smoke, and ash. Fire is very transformational, and that transformation is the perfect example of liminality. In the Druid order Ár nDraíocht Féin (ADF), they call upon a gatekeeper deity to open gates between our world and the world of the Triple Kindreds. In the Henge of Keltria (HoK), an Irish-focus offshoot of ADF, they call upon Manannan Mac Lir to part the mist between the worlds in order to invite the Triple Kindreds into ceremonies.

As Druids we might come together, or if solo, venture out to have rites on hilltops, islands, secluded

groves, or stone circles. These liminal places also have the perceived habit of accumulating and focusing Earth energy or power. This energy is said to connect multiple places of power as a vast global network, via *ley lines*. Ley lines are still relegated to the realm of pseudoscience, however, even psychologists and anthropologists may point out that what we call places of power *become* powerful to us psychologically, because of our perceptions and how we regard these places as special to us. Furthermore, by visiting these liminal places, our own repeated visits to them will allegedly *form* new ley lines over time. Whether individual Druids prescribe to the belief of ley lines, be it in the literal or figurative sense, is up to the individual. (Graves, 1980)

In many types of rituals, liminality is important. It might even be built in without us being overtly aware of it. In Druidry there are also various rites of passage that individuals can undergo. The simplest being initiations and self-dedications. In an earlier section we had covered the three main aspects of a rite of passage: those of being separated from what was before, then the transitional ordeal, followed by incorporation of that experience into your new life going forward. The moment you remove yourself from *what was before*, you're crossing a limen, heading into the ordeal. In terms of Druidic initiation or self-dedication, you are now leaving the *old you* behind. Entering into the ordeal, the time of transition is the most liminal moment. You are experiencing newness, perhaps making vows that you must understand and uphold, and perhaps facing a test, or demonstrating your worth. You're in a state of flux, already separated from the old way, but things haven't been fulfilled yet. Then comes the third aspect: the moment of incorporation. Your initiation is completed, and you venture forth to begin applying what you've been through into your new worldview. The liminality helps mark that occasion and lets your experience sink in. (Ayot, 2015)

Essay: Do You Have a Liminal Space?

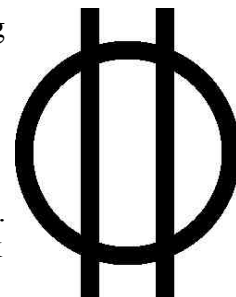
1. Which liminal space(s) do you have where you could cultivate your spiritual practice?
2. Can you think of another form of liminality that wasn't mentioned in our lists?
(Optional)



Symbols in Druidry

The Druid Sigil

First and foremost, and because we're biased, is the Druid Sigil of the Reformed Druid movement. It is a circle with two parallel vertical lines through the middle, emerging from the top and bottom of the circle, and spaced apart to divide the circle into three sections of equal width. The Druid Sigil was created in 1963 at the beginning of the movement. It has no historical basis. It has no particular meaning. It has no particular powers. It is a placeholder symbol, into which each individual Druid imparts their own meaning or powers. It was created to be unique but simple, and thus easily drawn freehand. Some Druids interpret it as a symbol for the Earth-Mother, or the Circle of Life, or the disk of the sun, or the Wheel-of-the-Year, or a wreath. The two vertical bars, to some, can represent the solstices or equinoxes, staves that Druids walk with, the Two Basic Tenets of Belief, or anything else.



The False Origin Myth

Some people might state that the Druid Sigil has existed architecturally since the time of the ancient Druids. They even claim that the Reformed Druids adopted the symbol from a photo of an ancient Celtic temple. Unfortunately, that's simply not the case. What they are referring to is a photo in Stuart Piggott's book The Druids which was originally published in 1968, five years after the Reformed Druids had already been using the symbol. What is actually pictured is a late Iron Age Romano-Celtic temple in Leicestershire, UK.



(Piggott, 2003, p. 60)

Mind you, Romano-Celtic *anything* means it was well *after* the Roman conquest of Britain, and the local Celtic populations had been Romanized by then, and the ancient Druids were long gone. What is pictured above is the below-ground foundation of a Roman style *round* temple that had been modified to be a larger *square* Roman temple. So it's merely wishful thinking to try to connect the Druid Sigil to the ancient Druids. This is an archaeological fluke.

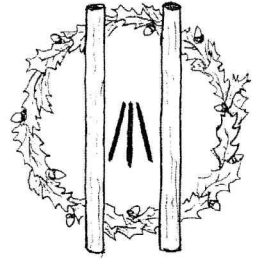
The Awen Symbol

The Awen is probably the most common symbol in Druidry as a whole. It represents the three divine rays of poetic inspiration. It was originally developed by Iolo Morganwg in the late 1700s. Later variants may include three dots above the rays, symbolizing the three drops of knowledge that splashed out of Ceridwen's magic cauldron. Gwion Bach was tasked with stirring the cauldron for Ceridwen to eventually take the potion, but the three drops landed on his finger, burning him. He drew his hand to his mouth to soothe the heat, but in doing so he took in all of the magical knowledge that had been in the cauldron, imparting him with all the world's wisdom. This Welsh myth is relatively analogous to the Irish myth of Bradán Feasa, the Salmon of Knowledge. The salmon ate the three *hazelnuts* of knowledge, Fionn burned his hand on the fish while roasting it for Finegas the Druid. Fionn then put his fingers in his mouth to soothe the pain, and gained all the world's knowledge. The official symbol of the Druid order OBOD is the Awen with three dots above the rays, all encompassed by three concentric circles.



Keltrian Druid Sigil

The Henge of Keltria, an offshoot Druid order from ADF, also uses the Druid Sigil, stylized as an oak wreath with two staves in front, and the three rays of Awen at the heart of the Sigil. The oak is of course the most sacred tree among the Druids, and the staves each represent a Druid's staff. The Henge of Keltria tends to focus on the Irish mythological cycle, thus it is perceived to lean more toward being Celtic Reconstructionist, however it is still considered a denomination of Neo-Druidism, especially considering its use of two modern druidic symbols.



Tree of Life

The Celtic Tree of Life symbol is one of the most innocuous symbols that some Druids prefer wearing this to represent their spirituality. It can represent the dualities in life, or the concept of our world being intertwined with the Otherworld. The roots are interwoven with the branches to express the esoteric notion of *as above, so below*. Trees, of course, are sacred to the Druids, many of which are regarded as holding different powers such as protection and healing, among others. Trees also symbolize the unending cycles of life and rebirth, as observed in the way trees transform over the year, shed their leaves, and begin again.



Triskelion

The triskelion, or triskele, is the only truly ancient symbol on this list. It is a triple spiral (spirals by themselves are even more ancient). Triskelia are present in the archaeological record from the British Isles to the Mediterranean and beyond. They featured heavily in Bronze Age Mycenaean art, often in a motif that suggests churning waters of the sea. It can also symbolize swirling mist, triple deities, or any other triplicities in life. The symbol for the Isle of Man (between Ireland and Britain) is a stylized triskelion of three legs instead of spirals. Since this symbol is featured in Celtic art and metalwork from the Iron Age (and pre-Celtic Bronze Age), it is popular among Celtic Reconstructionists. It is also popular among Christian Druids for whom it may symbolize the Holy Trinity.



Essay: Symbols That Resonate With You

1. Is there a symbol (whether listed above or not) that represents *Druidry* to you?
 - A. Some people don't feel the need for symbols, and that is valid too.

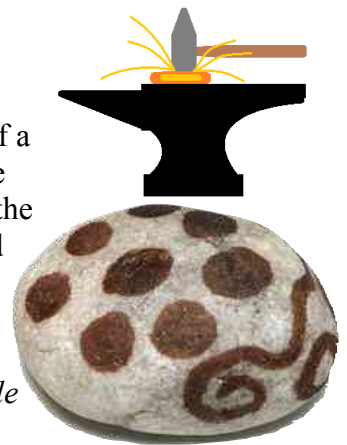


Creative Topic: Pictish Painted Pebbles

An Early Celtic Christian Tradition With Pagan Roots

“Concerning Broichan, the Druid, his sickness on account of the detention of a maidservant and his cure upon her liberation: At the same time the venerable man [Saint Columba] requested of Broichan, the Druid, the setting free, for the sake of humanity, of a certain Irish bond-maid: and when with very hard and doltish obstinacy he retained her, the Saint, addressing him, thus speaks: ‘Know, Broichan, know if thou refuse to deliver to me this captive stranger before I return from this province, thou wilt quickly die.’”

Right: a replica Pictish Painted Pebble



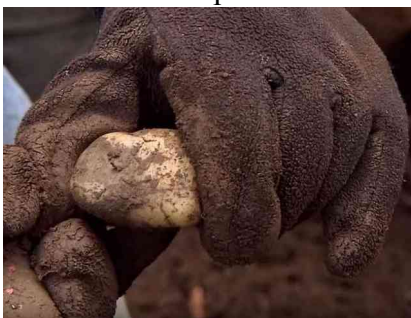
“And saying this in the presence of Brude, the king, and going forth from the royal dwelling, he comes to the River Ness, from which river taking a white pebble, he says to his companions: “Note well this white stone, by which the Lord will effect many cures among this heathen people.” ...and in the same hour the girl is set free and delivered to the messengers of the holy man; the pebble is dipped in water, and in a wonderful manner, contrary to its nature, the stone floats on the water like an apple or a nut; nor could the object blessed by the holy man be sunk. And Broichan, drinking from this floating stone, returned at once from imminent death and recovered perfect health of body.” (Adamnán, trans. 1945, pp. 146-147)

Editor’s note: *Druid’s Eggs* allegedly floated on water, too.

So we’d like to state for the record that Saint Columba healed an ailing Druid with a piece of river-tumbled quartz crystal. Every now and then you might hear cynics saying that crystal magic is just *New-Age mumbo jumbo*. Well we can’t speak to it being mumbo jumbo or not, but it’s definitely not New-Age. Our pagan ancestors sought the magical properties of all manner of semiprecious stones. Some historians and theologians speculate that Saint Columba was a Druid who converted to Christianity, and some say his father was a Druid. What is safe to say is that he was likely born into a pagan family and eventually converted to Christianity. He certainly seemed to know the ways of the Druids, a whole century after the death of Saint Patrick.

Pictured below at left (Taylor, 2010) is a quartz pebble excavated at Baliscate Chapel on the Isle of Mull. The chapel was likely a small monastery founded in the 6th century. It was built in two phases, the first probably being of wooden structures, upgraded to stone in the 7th century. It may be associated with Adamnán, Columba’s biographer.

Numerous pebbles like this one were buried amid the rubble of a *leacht* or a rectangular outdoor shrine that was dated to the 7th or 8th centuries CE. The pebbles appear to have been placed as votive offerings, possibly as memorials to the dead or to offer healing in one’s journey to the afterlife.



“A number of quartz pebbles could relate to the connection of white pebbles with the healing of the sick.... The deposition of white pebbles is known from prehistoric contexts although they are also intrinsically linked with St. Columba” (Wessex Archaeology, 2010, pp. 11, 15-16)

Long Before Columba

White quartz pebbles have also been found in numerous pre-Christian contexts in the British Isles. From the Neolithic (New Stone Age) to the Bronze and Iron Age, quartz pebbles have been found in the archaeological context of ancient funerary rites. The Neolithic tomb at Newgrange in Ireland dating back 5,200 years has its entire front facade covered with white quartz stones. Sunlight would gleam off of them, and it most likely played a part in the Stone Age cosmology, possibly representing life force or healing energy for rebirth. Inside Achnacree Chambered Tomb in Argyll, rows of white quartz pebbles were discovered in the tomb on a ledge. In Bronze and Iron Age graves, some skeletal remains were found grasping white pebbles, while others were found inside urns among the remains.

So, About These Pictish Painted Pebbles...

For the most part in the archaeological record these white quartz pebbles are undecorated. However, 55 *decorated* examples have been found in the northeast of Scotland, 33 of which were in Shetland alone. The style of decoration is predominantly limited to dark brown dots, circles, S-curves and line art such as saltires. On all archaeological examples the paint medium has long since decayed away, leaving behind only a dark brown stain leached into the stone. Spectroscopic analysis of the stain suggests the pigment may have simply been soot and tar collected from peat fires. Experimental archaeology demonstrated that the reheated pitch can be applied to quartz pebbles, and near-identical markings can be made with simple natural materials such as a piece of thatch straw, a large feather shaft, or virtually any other plant material. (Arthur, 2014)

Make Your Own Pictish Painted Pebble (Painting is Optional)

For this assignment, you must find a nice quartz pebble that fits comfortably in the palm of your hand. The best places to look are streams or riverbeds, or where applicable: seashores or glacial till. In a pinch you can purchase netted bags of decorative rock at craft stores or find quartz pebbles in decorative beds of landscaping rock. Perhaps there's some along the exterior of your dwelling. The geological definition of a *pebble* is any stone between 4mm and 64mm, so we would recommend something about the diameter of a golf ball, but it doesn't have to be spherical. Anything smaller than a chicken egg will do nicely. Anything the size of a red potato or a bit larger would technically be a *cobble*. We suppose you could make a *Celtic Colorful Cobble*, though those aren't in the archaeological record.



When the Pictish people were painting their pebbles, *they used what they had available* in terms of materials. Paints weren't commonplace two millennia ago. You can use traditional soot and pitch to decorate your stones, or use modern colorful acrylic paints. You can use whatever you have available to you, even if it's just a permanent marker. Designate it or even consecrate it as a healing stone. If you don't care to keep it, give it to someone who might appreciate it, or leave it someplace public so that someone who might appreciate it may find it.



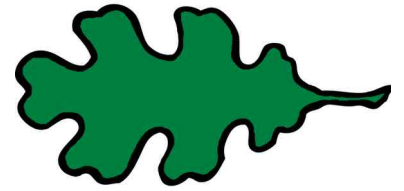
Essay: White Quartz Pebble

Standard Disclaimer: Ask your doctor if quartz is right for you. Don't eat rocks.

1. Where did you find your quartz pebble?
2. Did you chose to paint your pebble?

Impacts of Spiritual Practices

By S.C.

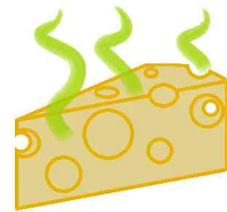


Many of our practices both in our spiritual and mundane every day lives has an effect on both the Earth and our fellow humans who inhabit it. For example, the New Age practice of using bundles of dried herbs, usually white sage, and often mislabeled as the native practice of *smudging* when in reality it's only a commercialized trend totally divorced from some of the most important aspects of the practice. Unsustainable harvesting, as advised by elders, has led to a massive decline in populations of the wild white sage plant in its native lands. This has caused many tribes to struggle to find living plants from which they can harvest from in the traditional way, adding insult to injury to their already dying cultures.

Essay: Societal & Environmental Impacts

Analyze one such practice, either mundane or spiritual, such as overharvesting, precious metals or gem mining, disposal of waste, diets, and so forth. The practice can be either one of your own or of another, for which you can find at least one possible negative impact to others and/or the environment. This can be either in the *practice* or in the means of *supplying* it. Then, discuss how this negative impact or impacts can be reduced or eliminated, either by harm reduction or abandonment of the practice altogether.





Ancestor Veneration?

Do Druids worship the ancestors? Short answer: Some do, some don't, and some that *do* might not call it *worship*. Ancestor worship, veneration, honoring, or memorializing is totally discretionary, and not a requirement to be a Druid.

Personally, I say that I *venerate* the ancestors. Sometimes it's the ancestors I knew in life, sometimes they are ancestors I know only by a picture or a name, having committed to memory stories passed down about their lives up to 8 generations back. I have few details beyond that, where it's just a list of names on a piece of paper. Sometimes the ones that I feel deserve some honoring are the archetypal "Deep Ancestors." They are the ones we have no way of knowing: further back than anyone written into family trees... unknown ancestors thousands of years back.

What if our ancestors wouldn't approve of us venerating them?

What if they would never want anyone worshipping them? Also, what if they were bad, cruel, or abusive, and don't *deserve* being honored? Good point, some people are just assholes. Would you let *them* wreck things for all the *good* folk in your lineage? Maybe at best, the good ones just wanted to be remembered, maybe to be only remembered by their immediate family. For perspective, maybe we wouldn't mind if someone in the future wondered what life was like back in the early 21st century. They could be pondering what our culture was like, the things that were important to us, the things that were hard for us. That would be an introspective way to abstractly memorialize ancestors.

We are the culmination of millions of choices that our *Deep Ancestors* made. That *all* our ancestors made. We are also the culmination of everything they chose *not* to do. They were the ones who survived the odds to be progenitors of our lineage. If one of them made any *one* decision differently, you might not exist at all. They survived plagues, warfare, famines, and every number of tragedy. They survived everything that made life immeasurably miserable before modern conveniences and support networks. No doubt some of our maternal ancestors died giving birth. Paternal ancestors left for war and were never seen again. Some children were left orphaned, too young to *know* their family. And yes, some left to escape their family, and perhaps for good reason. But among the great lineage, without a doubt, there was love, there were aspirations, and there was joy.

Perhaps one might feel like they owe the ancestors some sort of acknowledgment, but that doesn't mean everyone has to do the same. You do not have to venerate or memorialize anyone in order to be a Druid. However, do keep in mind that it is considered a common aspect of Druid experientialism. It doesn't matter whether or not the ancestors were from a Celtic culture at all. They can be from anywhere in the world.

Consider the Second Tenet of Reformed Druidism (paraphrased), *...and great is the importance of Nature, even as we struggle through life, do we come face to face with it*. In our modern society of electricity, plastics, and our digital lifestyle, we are *so* disconnected from nature compared to our ancestors, even within the last century. Our ancestors confronted Nature on a visceral level, usually regarding it as something that they needed to conquer in order to survive, but they were all the more *face to face* with it in their struggles than we are today.

We're reconnecting with Nature on a spiritual level, trying to achieve a symbiosis with it despite of (and thanks to) our modern conveniences that make *encountering* Nature less hazardous. Like our ancestors,

we still come face to face with Nature. We have that much in common. Many of their traditions, many festivals they knew and loved, were at some point in history possibly rooted in some aspect of survival. They celebrated harvest festivals across the fall when it was time to reap certain crops, or cull certain animals. Festivals would mark occasions for eating the perishable food while it's still good, and preserving other foods to help them last longer. In some cases, as winter food storage underwent attrition, fasting sometimes became necessary. The fall and early winter feasts were the last chance at putting on a couple extra pounds before the winter vegetables emerged at spring.

By acknowledging that those who have gone before us had it rough, and that they too were face to face with Nature in their struggle through life, for some Druids that might be all they need to do for remembering the ancestors. For anyone who wants to do more, there is no set practice for veneration. You are free to decide how you choose to honor them, whether it is simply lighting a candle on a designated date, writing or reciting a poem, visiting a grave, revisiting a place that a lost parent or grandparent cherished or took you to, or conducting any manner of simple or elaborate ritual. Samhain is perhaps the most appropriate time of year to do this, but it can be done on any occasion.

I wrote this section on one of the dates that I venerate my ancestors. I have an informal ceremony in front of my ancestor shrine on my bookcase. I light a candle, dedicating it to them: to remember their joys, to remember their love, to share their sorrow and suffering, to consider my unknowable ancestors, and to meditate on the sheer luck that I exist. I consecrate a small chalice of whiskey to them, partaking of some, and leaving the rest of the spirits in the chalice to evaporate. How you choose to incorporate a memorialization of the ancestors is up to you, if you do elect to incorporate it.

Essay: Regarding Ancestors as Part of Spiritual Path

1. How to you regard the notion of incorporating some sort of acknowledgement of the ancestors as part of a spiritual practice? (No wrong answer.)



Regarding Culturally Appropriative Practices



Topics that are controversial and considered Cultural Appropriation (such as, but not limited to Spirit Animals, Smudging, Totems, et cetera) should NOT be utilized as they originate in closed New World Indigenous traditions. Those traditions require proper initiation, or already have a prescribed approach that cannot be undertaken without an elder of those traditions. They can also come from closed traditions outside of the New World. We've been committing acts of cultural appropriation for millennia, but that doesn't make it permissible. Cultural Appropriation removes a concept or practice from its original ethnic context and applies it to something else outside of that tradition.

About Cultural Appropriation

Above all, Cultural Appropriation increases the marginalization of minorities who have already been marginalized. Dominant cultures take aspects from minority cultures, and those aspects are enhanced or represented without giving credit to the source culture. Sometimes partial credit is given but even then it almost always lacks the full context of the tradition. The imbalance between the dominant culture and the minority is then intensified, and oftentimes when the minority culture tries to learn more about something that had been appropriated, they are more likely to find the modified version of their own cultural practice, and are thereby contaminated with incorrect information.

What's worse is when the dominant culture inevitably lampoons a custom that they have appropriated. An example would be creating a totem pole intended to look silly or absurd whereas the original purpose of totem poles is to commemorate ancestry, tribal identity, and history, among other meanings for the community.

Appreciation Versus Appropriation

People who get defensive when being told they are appropriating something from another culture often respond that they are only *appreciating* other cultures, not intending any appropriation. Appreciation can certainly be about respecting a cultural practice, but it is also a gray area that is often weaponized as an excuse to take aspects of those cultures, either by removing them from their context or by stealing them without first being initiated into that practice by living members of those cultures. True cultural *appreciation* would be better described as learning about the cultures directly from those people who are part of them, but *not* incorporating it into your personal practices. (Wells, 2021)

On Smudging

Smudge Stick came into English from the Crow Indians in the early 20th century. Smudging has a prescribed methodology to it. Some tribes are fine with teaching people how to smudge properly. If you're going to smudge, learn directly from those tribes, and do it right. Otherwise don't call it smudging. What do we call it then? How about *smoke cleansing*? There's a Scottish smoke cleansing method called *saining* that uses juniper, so maybe learn that instead (from an elder who knows how to do it). The Scandinavians have a smoke cleansing method called *recaning* so maybe learn the right way to do that from someone who knows how. The Greeks and Romans also burned sacred herbs as a method of cleansing, such as using thyme. Those religious practices were continued and brought into the Christian church and today in English it's called *censing* and often utilizes Frankincense. In some neopagan circles they simply call it *fumigation*, and yes it even has spiritual connotations.

There's an additional problem when it comes to selecting your herbs for smoke cleansing: ethical

sourcing. The sustainability of white sage has recently gone through some misinformation problems. While it's not actually an endangered species, there have been instances of overharvesting in the wild where it hasn't been replanted and hasn't grown back. Some people have also taken sage from tribal lands without permission. Frankincense is facing its own problems. Demand has gone up in recent times. It is a resin produced from the sap of mature boswellia trees. Because demand has increased, the trees are being tapped excessively and are dying because the younger trees aren't mature enough yet. Then the younger trees get tapped and they suffer and end up dying because the tree can't handle it yet. The boswellia trees also need about three years to recuperate after being tapped for their resin. If you get frankincense, please verify that it was collected sustainably first.

The best practice would be to cultivate your own smoke cleansing herbs in a garden if you have one, or in a window pot if you have windows with adequate sunlight. Learn about what aromatic herbs grow in abundance in your region. Support local farmers if you can. Learn how to do saining or recaning or censing and call it that. Just don't call your smoke cleansing *smudging* if you aren't doing a full smudging ritual. *Just call it smoke cleansing!* It's that simple.

On Spirit Animals

Another common example are spirit animals where people call something they *like* their spirit animal whether it's an animal they think is neat or even an inanimate object. See prior reference to lampooning with an example such as "Starbucks lattes are my spirit animal." A proper spirit animal is a supernatural guide that you often have to be bestowed by an elder. It's not a matter of liking wolves because they're cool and then deciding they're gonna be your guide.

The exact phrase "spirit animal" in the sense of a guiding supernatural being wasn't even used in the English language until George Frazer, a discredited Victorian hack of an anthropologist, wrote The Golden Bough published in 1890, in which he defines spirit animals as tutelary spirits of indigenous tribes. Anthropologists were still citing Frazer in the 1970s and used his phrase to apply it to Native American family ancestry and clan identities. By the 1980s Spirit Animals had been appropriated and corrupted by the New Age movement because they *liked* it. And the marginalization and erasure of the real traditions began.

But Didn't European Cultures Have Spirit Animals? The Problem is in the Phrase Itself.

The Celts never had what they call "spirit animals." They certainly never called them "totems" as that's an Ojibwe word. "But my spirit animal is in the Celtic Animal Zodiac!" Well the Celtic Zodiac is a 20th century invention with no prior historic mention. The Celts had animals who were sacred to them and who are prominently featured in folklore and mythology, but nobody ever called these creatures "spirit animals" until the New Age movement smeared the phrase around.

Ubiquitously, ancient cultures around the world had animals that were important to them, and animals symbolized a myriad different things, but those cultures had their own phrases or words to describe that concept. That's how *heraldry* was developed. Creatures that appear on heraldry are called *Charge Beasts* or *Charge Animals*. If you want to have a good English phrase for a *symbolic neat animal*, call it your *Charge Beast!* The point is that the phrase *Spirit Animal* itself really needs to be left to the indigenous peoples that anthropologists stole it from. Especially when the methods of receiving an animal have a culturally prescribed methodology. So call it anything else, just don't call it a spirit animal.

There are claims that Norse cultures had spirit animals called a *fylgja*, but there are some key differences that make them fundamentally distinct from spirit animals. A *fylgja* was a shapeshifting spirit who could take on animal or human form, and represents *what you need at that time*, meaning they don't look the same every time you work with them. Websites about Celtic Spirit Animals are on the decline because people are finally realizing that using the appropriate term is harmful. Of all the people that claim the Celts had spirit animals, *nobody* has been able to identify what these beings were definitively called in ancient times. Again, the phrase *spirit animal* was dragged into English in the late 19th century and snowballed in the late 20th century. Stop equating nature spirits to spirit animals and just call them what they were called in ancient times.

On Totems

Ojibwa word *totem* technically means *a sign of one's ancestry*. Sadly the meaning of the word has also since been reappropriated to mean "neat animal" which tends to erase its true meaning. If you're going to refer to a non-native representation of a significant symbol, please just don't call it a totem.

On Kabbalah and its Offshoots

Kabbalah is, at its core, a branch of highly advanced Jewish mysticism developed in the medieval period. Among practitioners of Judaism, Kabbalah is really for those who already have an expert understanding of their *ancestral* faith. Therefore, one does not simply *start learning* Kabbalah.

In the late medieval period, Kabbalah was bastardized and corrupted into a Christianized reinterpretation by Ramon Llull, a Christian theologian. His goal was not only to take something he thought was neat and overwrite its context into a 'correct' interpretation, but he wanted to deliberately weaponize it for the sake of converting Jews to Christianity. Today **Christian Kabbalah**, often spelled **Cabala**, is still popular despite its intentionally anti-Jewish origins, and that is unfortunate. And now in the modern era, if there are people of the Jewish faith who decide they want to start looking into their mysticism and they come across a resource that is actually Cabala, they may be unknowingly reading into something long-stripped of its true meaning. We call that *cultural erasure*.

Then along came Athanasius Kircher, a Jesuit in the late renaissance, who corrupted Cabala further and went so far as to assert that the Jews had already corrupted it after stealing it from the Egyptians. Christian Cabala is rooted in antisemitism. Regardless of who tries to apologize for it these days, it doesn't excuse or remove the hateful stains.

Yet another corruption of Kabbalah is **Qabalah**. This was also a bastardization that popped up in the renaissance that dragged in Greek and Egyptian paganism among other theological controversies of the time. Hermeticism was incorporated into Qabalah by philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola to further muddy the origins of the original Kabbalah. Everything unoriginal that gets added in becomes corrupted in and of itself, like gluing different colors of construction paper together then trying to take everything back apart, you can't without bits and pieces being left behind in the other parts.

If you're going to learn any of these practices or derived practices, please reconsider the shameful legacy of appropriation, antisemitism, and erasure that you're contributing to. If you want to learn true Kabbalah, first: are you Jewish? Were you at least *invited* to learn by someone who is Jewish? Are you converting to Judaism yet? If so, then learn Hebrew. Then study Jewish theology. Then excel at it. *Then* you can consider learning Kabbalah. From a rabbi. (Jewitches, 2023)

How Do We Let Go of What We've Stolen?

One of the greatest hurdles we might face in the druidic or wider pagan communities, is that some of us have an inability to *let go* of some of the cultural practices that we've stolen and warped. If someone has latched on to having a "spirit animal" just because they have an affinity for its symbolism, and especially when they've been incorporating it for a very long time, they're not going to want to let it go. Sometimes our friends and allies who are *Social Justice Warriors* will notice cultural appropriation, and get upset or react very negatively when they point out that someone is stealing an aspect of another culture, especially that of a *closed* culture. Getting angry or having a knee-jerk reaction to cultural appropriation will often have the opposite effect. The person who wants to hold on so dearly to their "spirit animal" will get defensive and thus more resistant to considering the problem of their actions. Always approach the topic with compassion and diplomacy. Do not make a big scene about it, especially if other people are present. It's better to have a one-on-one discussion about it, so that they don't feel any group pressure or mass judgement. Offer empathy, such as recalling a time when we realized we were appropriating something that we shouldn't have. Express to them how it made us feel, and indicate that it was even difficult for ourselves to overcome the desire to hold on.

What Can We Do Instead of Appropriating Other Cultural Practices and Terminology?

First of all, if you claim or heard a claim that some part of your spirituality has always had a tradition like one that is considered to be appropriated, research it. Look to the sources that were on hand when the tradition was original and thriving, and find out what it was called thousands of years ago. You say ancient Celts had spirit animals, totems, smudging, and druidic Kabbalistic practices? Show us a scholarly source where it says that. We'll wait. If they used a different word for concepts similar to that (like heraldic charge animals, saining, or some actual mystical practice written in a dependable historic record), then use those words instead. Just nix the nicked New-Age neologisms.

Another important thing is to go meet with representatives of those cultural practices. Go to an indigenous cultural center and ask them what you can do to help reduce cultural appropriation in your spiritual community. Hear directly from their representatives. They might even give you information or tell you about authors from their own community who may offer guidance on how to experience those aspects of their culture correctly and ethically. They might tell you everything that is listed above. If you approach them with all sincerity and a willingness to accept what they tell you, who knows... they might just invite you in, but that doesn't mean your experiences are to be shared, and certainly not reframed into another religious or cultural context.

Attestation:

I will strive to avoid culturally appropriative practices in my Druidry.

Learning Beyond the RDNA



Recalling the First Tenet of Reformed Druidism: *the object of the search for spiritual truth, which is a universal and a never-ending search...* actually let's stop right there: *a never-ending search*. For many people, Reformed Druidism might serve as a temporary waypoint in their lifetime of spiritual inquiry. That was how founder David Fisher intended it:

"If someone stayed a Druid all his or her life that would be unfortunate from my point of view."
(Scharding, *et al.*, 2004, p. 914)

Fisher opined in his 2004 interview that *the RDNA isn't an institutional religion*, and thus would be insufficient to fulfill the long term needs of any one person. The *first half* of that notion is completely true. The RDNA is still undeveloped, despite being a major foundational part of modern Druidry. Despite that, we've really been put in the "back seat" among the major Druid orders. However, the RDNA has really transformed and evolved over the decades, and for many people, it *is* fulfilling their long-term spiritual needs. It is a living tradition that adapts to changing times, and continues to address different aspects of our experience that may seem lacking.

We will always say that this is not the only way to explore Druidry. Even *Reformed Druidism* is not limited to what this program offers. You only need the Two Basic Tenets. That means that you will always be willing to learn. Not just willing, but actively *seeking out* that knowledge that other philosophies have to offer. That, and always cherishing Nature as something important to our existence.

One Way Among Many

The *Book of Meditations* emphasizes caution about ever claiming that we've found "the only way." It also cautions us about listening to others who say *theirs* is the only way. Upcoming are two essay questions about researching another Druid order, and about researching a religion that you are not already familiar with. These activities help foster that sense of exploration espoused in the First Tenet. Although we only ask you to write essays about two other systems, that type of activity of researching and learning should be something that you *strive* to do willfully with an innate curiosity as life goes forward.

Considering that this OBF program is intended to fulfill Oakdale Grove's prerequisites for Second Order Druid candidates, such candidate should be able to compare and contrast Reformed Druidism against at least one other Druid order. Being able to compare the RDNA against two or three other orders would be even better, but we're starting with just one other. A Third Order Druid candidate might have a higher expectation for such comparisons, but we don't have to worry about that at this time. Sometimes a common scenario that we hear from prospective Druids who are unsure of which order might be their best fit (or if they even *want* to join an Order), is that they don't understand the differences between each order, or that they might not know there *are* orders, or more than one. They find it really helpful and informative if we can give a quick high-level overview of some of the big groups.

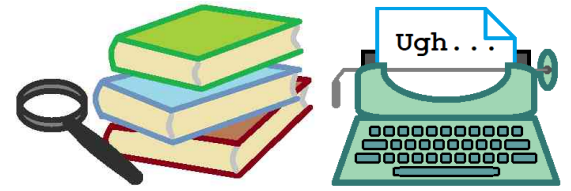
Essay: Research a Different Druid Order

1. Learn about a modern Druid Order other than the Reformed Druids (one within the past 300 years or so). Which Order did you research?
2. When was it founded?
3. Where was it founded?
4. Does it still exist today?
5. What are the main goals for the members of that order?
6. How does that order interpret divinity? What kind of theology is it compatible with, especially if it is compatible with multiple theologies (i.e., polytheism, monotheism, animism, etc)?
7. It may have numerous similarities to Reformed Druidism, but in what ways is it different?
8. Are members expected to contribute financially to the order (aside from cost of training)?



Essay: Research an Unfamiliar Religion

1. Study any world religion that you are unfamiliar with. Which one did you choose to study?
2. How does that religion interpret divinity? What kind of theology does it incorporate (i.e., polytheism, monotheism, etc)?
3. What are one or two important holidays observed by this religion?
4. Can anyone practice this religion on their own, or is it considered a *closed practice*?
5. As objectively as possible, list *positive* impacts this religion has (if applicable)
6. As objectively as possible, list *negative* impacts this religion has (if applicable)
7. *If you've heard of this religion before this research*, has studying it now changed your perspectives? Did it clear any misconceptions? (if applicable)
8. What surprised you the most when learning about this religion? (if applicable)



Journal Entry: Your Expectations, Revisited



What are your expectations in delving deeper into Druidism?

In your journal (external to this workbook), you originally titled your first entry "My Expectations of Druidism." Re-read that entry in your journal. Then create a new entry titled "My Expectations, Revisited" and address the following: Did you fulfill any of those expectations over the course of Unit 1 of this OBF program? Make note of any fulfillments, and make note of things you still want to learn, or learn more about.

Looking at any aspects where your expectations *weren't* met, think of those items in the context of Reformed Druidism. By now, you're developing a working understanding of Druidism in general and Reformed Druidism specifically. If there are any missed expectations, do you think they would fit in with the spirit of Reformed Druidism? This question is very subjective, so your honest opinion will suffice.

Just keep in mind that there's a possibility that what you seek still may lie ahead in the OBF program, perhaps in Unit 2, but slightly more likely in the optional Unit 3. Furthermore, feel free to explore the resources listed in the References section at the end of this workbook. We don't have all the answers, but other authors will certainly have plenty of additional things to learn. Remember, as Druids, we are eternal students.

Attestation:

I have made a journal entry on this topic.

Unit 2: A Reformed Druid Anthology — Mike's Comprehensive Curriculum

You have reached the end of Unit 1. This workbook should have served to give you a basic understanding of the history of the ancient Druids, that is to say, the little we "know" about them from the ancient Greeks, Romans, and early Irish monks. It should have given you a basic understanding of the Druidry Revival movement, with the context of their values, perceptions, and motivations. Above all, you should have a basic but well-rounded understanding of the history of modern Druidism, and in particular Reformed Druidism in terms of general customs, philosophy, and practice.

All text fields and any attestation checkboxes should have content or a checkmark before you submit it. The email address you provide in this workbook should identically match the email address you send this from. **Email the completed workbook to MNdruids@gmail.com**. Remember to have the name, email, start date, and completion date fields on the cover page filled in as well.

After your workbook is reviewed for completion, we will send you the workbook for Unit 2.

Sections in Unit 1 often cited verses and quotations from the written works of Reformed Druidism: a collection titled [A Reformed Druid Anthology](#) or just [ARDA](#) for short. Up next is Unit 2, reading selected works of [ARDA](#) to get the detailed picture of RDNA history, law, customs, meditations, debates, and ritual styles.

Unit 2 is broken down into two sections, 2A, and 2B. Unit 2A not only includes the reading assignments, but also the short answer workbook. In addition to completing the readings and the workbook, Unit 2B is the exam. The exam requires a 90% or higher score to pass. It is an open book test, hence the requirement of a high score. The exam questions do not inquire about anything subjective such as your beliefs, nor does it seek to determine if anyone is "Druid enough." The exam questions are only based on the facts as presented in ARDA in order to demonstrate that you read it or are able to look up the answers.

When the exam is passed, and Units 1 and 2A have a "Complete" status (as opposed to "Incomplete" if there are blank text fields or check boxes) we will email a certificate of completion and you will be inducted into the Order of Bradán Feasa (OBF), a non-priestly order of the Reformed Druids of North America. Local members or mentees of Oakdale Grove who complete OBF certification will be invited to be consecrated as a Second Order Druid in the RDNA.

In the Meantime

In the time it may take for us to review your Unit 1 workbook, you may begin reading ARDA before we send you the Unit 2 workbook. ARDA is free as a PDF book. For people who prefer print media, a hard copy can be purchased from Lulu Press. It's a big book, and the physical version is broken down into 3 books so that it fits in their bookbinding machinery. Each book ranges between \$23-\$28 each, sold at the exact cost of printing. Shipping would be extra.

Lulu Press physical copies of ARDA

[Book 1, volumes 0, 1, 2](#)

[Book 2, volume 3](#)

[Book 3, volumes 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10](#) (Volume 6 is not public domain and therefore not in print)

But Wait, There's an Optional Unit 3!

After your Unit 1 and Unit 2 courses and exam are complete, you will receive your OBF Certification. Then you will be given the option to start Unit 3, the RDNA Clergy Prep Course & Grove Governance Guide (GGG). As a reminder, most people who affiliate with the Reformed Druids of North America feel satisfied to be initiated to the First Order. The Second Order is for those who already feel a higher calling to serve their community and wish to train as clergy. OBF certification meets the standards Oakdale Grove has in place for candidates to enter the Second Order if they do feel like committing to an oath of ministerial service. For those who do not feel a particular call to serve, we might advise against entering the Second Order.

That is why Unit 3 is optional. The RDNA Clergy Prep Course is for Third Order candidates as a sort of "nutshell seminary." It is by no means a proper seminary course, but more of quick advice to help candidates prepare to adapt to a ministerial role in Reformed Druidism. It should really only be taken by those who are certain they wish to become Third Order Druids in the RDNA, who will carry on the tradition, and who will make themselves available to their community, and answer when called upon for help. There have been plenty of times where someone enters the Third Order and we don't hear from them again: seemingly abandoning their oath in exchange for a title. Unit 3 will also contain the Grove Governance Guide (GGG), a primer for operating and running an RDNA Grove in an effective manner that caters to the needs of the members.

Glossary

Who doesn't like knowing what words mean?

Term & Pronunciation	Definition
Aeromancy	Divination or seeking an omen on the element of air: winds, leaves rustling, grasses waving, sounds such as that of animals, especially birds (see also augury).
Altar	Any sacred surface where offerings, sacrifices, or special ritual tools are set.
Ancestor	Usually refers to the people we are descended from in our genetic lineage, but can also refer to people who came before us in a less literal sense: <i>ancestors of place</i> would refer to indigenous people who lived in a specific spot, <i>ancestors of spirit</i> refers to people who lived before us and held the same or compatible spiritual beliefs, and <i>ancestors of blood</i> would refer to non-adoptive ancestors if one is of a mixed family.
Ancient Druid Order (ADO)	The first neo-druidic Order that was established in 1717 as a mutual benefit society much like the Freemasons who were founded the same year.
Ar nDraiocht Fein (ADF)	The first druidic neopagan church established in 1983 after the Schismatic Druids of North America (a similar group) had disbanded. Pronounced "arn dree-oct fane."
Arch-Druid	A title in the RDNA that is bestowed only by election from Grove membership, indicating the lead person who presides over services. The Arch-Druid is responsible for matters of the spirit, though often they will also end up taking on all other Grove duties, too.
ARDA <i>ar-duh</i>	Abbreviation for <i>A Reformed Druid Anthology</i> : a compilation of the written works of the RDNA, first compiled from loose papers in the Carleton College Archive in 1993 by Michael "Mike the Fool" Scharding (30 th Arch-Druid of Carleton Grove) for his Senior Comps Project.
Augury	Divination or seeking an omen by observing the behavior of birds.
Bard	In the loosest term, an artist and or entertainer, usually by means of music, poetry, or pageantry. The bardic arts can also extend to encompass any other fine or performing arts and creative skills.
Bradán Feasa	Means the "Salmon of Knowledge" in Irish Gaelic, from the Fenian Cycle of Irish Mythology. It was the salmon who ate three hazelnuts that contained all the world's knowledge. Pronounced "bra-DON FOSS-a" in the Connaught dialect.
Celtic	Refers to an Indo-European language family and material culture that has been found in many countries, from the British Isles, down through Western and Central Europe, and into Anatolia (modern day Turkey). Celtic is not an ethnicity or genetic group, as it spans many ethnicities.
Consecration	The solemn act of making something sacred or acknowledging that it is

	special to us.
Council of Dalon Ap Landu (CODAL)	The governing body of Reformed Druidism, comprised of all Third Order Druids in the Order of Dalon Ap Landu.
Culdee	An early Irish Christian sect which means "Servants of God." They practice a form of Celtic Christianity that the Catholic Church looked down upon.
Devotional	A session of personal dedication between an individual and their interpretation of the divine. Devotionals are usually brief or simple rituals with only one person involved during which they take the time to hone their practice, or spend time cultivating a relationship with the divine.
Divination	Seeking an omen, an answer, or requesting a message from the divine to determine knowledge of things that we can't yet know for certain. From a scientific perspective, divination often uses random chance to indicate generic information that helps us consider our questions more in depth. Through the combination of confirmation bias and thinking about our issues at hand, we're helping ourselves think through the circumstances rather than just dwelling on them mindlessly.
Dogma	A range of <i>beliefs</i> in religion that must be adhered to. See also Orthodoxy.
Druidcraft	The magical craft conducted by practitioners of Druidry.
Druidism	The <i>beliefs</i> or philosophy of Druids.
Druidry	The <i>practices</i> or customs of Druids.
Druidry Revival	A period of renewed interest in the practices and beliefs of Druids, beginning in the early 1700s with some precursor enthusiasm in the 1600s, and continued into the early 1900s. Many practices were newly invented entirely from scratch since so little is known of the ancient Druids. Also referred to as Neo-Druidism by some time in the 1800s, many of these Druidry Revival groups were mutual benefit societies and charitable organizations similar to Freemasonry. Modern Neo-Druid orders from the 20th and 21st century are less likely to be fraternal societies and operate much more like a special interest club.
First Order	The formal entry-level rank within Reformed Druidism. People interested in joining the RDNA attend a formal Grove ritual in the summer half of the year and can be initiated into this rank with no prerequisite study and no additional duties or responsibilities. Most Reformed Druids prefer to stay at this rank. See also Order of the Acorn, Second Order, and Third Order.
Grove	With a lowercase G, usually refers to a cluster of trees, especially if they are in a place sacred to the Druids. With an uppercase G, it is a druidic designation for a group of Druids equivalent to a congregation or coven. Groves are formal groups in the RDNA that should have at least three members, one of which should be an ordained Third Order Reformed Druid priest. See also Protogrove.
Keltoi	One small Gaulish tribe mentioned by ancient Greek and Roman historians

	that existed in what is today France. At some point, regardless of tribal affiliation, many Iron Age tribes were given the blanket designation of <i>Celts</i> based on the name and characteristics of this one tribe.
Libation	An offering that is given to the divine or to the Earth-Mother in ceremony. In the RDNA, attendees should leave a small portion of the Waters in their ceremonial cup after drinking some. After everyone has drank their portion, the remainder in our cups are cast out to return the Waters to the Earth-Mother with a reminder that we will also one day return to her.
Liminal	A state of being in between to places, to states of being or states of mind. By being in two places at once, literally or figuratively, our circumstances are symbolically or magically enhanced.
Meditation	The act of achieving a state of deep relaxation and or introspective contemplation.
Nemeton	A Gaulish Celtic word referring to sacred places, especially when they are in a grove of trees. Comparable to temples or churches, but often in open-air spaces rather than buildings.
Neopagan	Modern practitioners or practices in Earth-based spirituality that may contrast with actual historic pagan practices, often different from the old ways for pragmatic or legal purposes.
Offering	Something that we can easily give to the divine without much impact or hindrance to ourselves. See also sacrifice.
Omen	Signs or occurrences that can either take place when asked for, or at random unplanned times that would symbolically foretell of an event that has yet to transpire. Omens can occur with or without any divination session.
Ordeal	A test of resolve, knowledge, or skill in order to assess readiness as part of a rite of passage; examples in the RDNA include drinking a full glass of undiluted whiskey (or strong-tasting, non-alcoholic alternative – see “Waters-of-Life”) for Second Order, or the All-Night Vigil for Third Order.
Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (OBOD)	The largest modern Druid organization with a very reputable but rather expensive study program. OBOD is based in the UK and has notably different customs than Reformed Druidism
Order of the Acorn	A self-dedication entry level for people who wish to affiliate with the Reformed Druids but can't (or don't want to) enter the First Order in a formal Grove setting. See also First Order.
Ordination	A gray term that can refer to the process of initiating members into the numbered orders within Reformed Druidism, but would properly refer to a Reformed Druid who is being initiated as RDNA clergy to the Third Order.
Orthodoxy	The "correct" theological <i>opinion</i> , or strictly following established <i>doctrine</i> of a religion. Beyond the Two Basic Tenets, See also Dogma.
Orthopraxy	The "correct" religious <i>practices</i> or adherence to customs of a religion. For Druids interested in entering the Third Order, there are some prescribed

	practices of the tradition that must be followed. Reformed Druidism doesn't have much orthopraxy for members who aren't Third Order, except when semiseriously referring to someone to closely follows all customs of Reformed Druidism.
Pagan	Originally a Latin word that urbanized Romans used to describe any country dweller, regardless of their belief system. Now commonly refers to people who practice any nature-based spirituality.
Pantheon	Any set of deities that is specific to one religion, culture, or spirituality. Pantheon means "All the Gods" in Latin. Monotheist religions would have a pantheon of one, though some may personally interpret the Trinity as a pantheon of three-in-one.
Pilgrimage	An introspective journey, usually of a spiritual or deeply personal nature, to a place that has special meaning for the individual, or their religious group. Typically refers to religious or historic sites, but can also be as simple as returning to a childhood home, visiting a grave, or returning to an important place for a short time.
Pluralism	An inclusionary system of fostering openness to people of differing beliefs or principles in a manner that promotes coexistence and mutual respect.
Polytheism	The belief in multiple deities. Polytheism also encompasses many nuanced subcategories where some believe in many deities but focus on a few or just one, while acknowledging the existence of others, or interpreting the deities as different aspects of a common divine source, etc.
Preceptor	An elected position within a Reformed Druid Grove. The Preceptor must be a Second Order Druid or higher, and assists the Arch-Druid in ritual, and is knowledgeable enough to offer mentorship to newer members. They are also responsible for matters of the secular in Groves, functioning much like a secretary: event planning, training or community education, and media spokespersonship.
Protogrove	An informal Grove within the Reformed Druid movement. The term has also been adopted in a few other Druid orders as well, but not all.
Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA)	A modern neo-druidic order founded in 1963. It was the first major Druid order of the late Druidry Revival movement not to be a fraternal or masonic style mutual benefit society, but a purely philosophical or spiritual Druid order, and first to ordain its own clergy.
Ritual/rite	A ceremony with a goal or a customary observance consisting of a series of actions, gestures, words, and reverence for sacred objects or concepts.
Sacrifice	An act of surrendering a possession as an offering to the divine; traditionally includes the slaughter of animals or people and blood, but which is restricted to offerings of plant life in Reformed Druidry.
Salutations	Refers to the Four Salutations of the Day created by Emmon Bodfish; a series of meditative movements using a staff to observe the "Three Ways of Day and One of Night," or dawn, noon, sunset, and "stars" (or midnight).

Season of Life	The light half of the year, or the six summer months from Beltane up to Samhain (not between the Equinoxes). During this time, Third Order Druids will wear their red ribbons of office and consecrate the Waters-of-Life.
Season of Sleep	The dark half of the year, or the six winter months from Samhain up to Beltane (not between the Equinoxes). During this time, Third Order Druids will wear their white ribbons of office and consecrate the Waters-of-Sleep. This is also the time when Second Order Druids could practice leading rituals under the guidance of the Arch-Druid.
Second Order	The formal second rank within Reformed Druidism. This rank is for First Order Druids who feel the call to serve their spiritual community <i>as clergy</i> , or who may wish to seek nomination for the elected position as a Grove's Preceptor. Second Order Druids already take their clerical oath, and will undergo training for the priesthood.
Server	An elected position within a Reformed Druid Grove. The Server must be a First Order Druid or higher, and assists the Preceptor in ritual. They primarily function as a cup bearer or treasurer.
Shrine	A physical construction or natural feature regarded as sacred because of its associations with a divinity, including a deity or a sacred relic or person.
Sit spot	A place, usually in nature, where a person goes either to be alone, appreciate nature, people watch, to "just exist," meditate, or any combination of the above. They may incorporate additional purposes into this practice as well.
Theology	From the Latin for "knowledge of the gods," referring to our individual interpretations and or academic understandings of the divine. Theology can refer to the understanding of deities from any religion.
Third Order	The formal third rank within Reformed Druidism. This rank is the first level of the RDNA priesthood as ordained clergy, and grants the authority to consecrate the Waters-of-Life in the name of Dalon Ap Landu, the ordination of others, and the founding of formal Groves.
Vigil	A period of time spent observing hours usually reserved for sleep, especially to keep watch, tend fires, or pray, including during the process of joining one or more of the Higher Orders in the RDNA. See also Ordeal.
Waters-of-Life	Typically diluted whiskey, consecrated by a Third Order Druid during the Season of Life and taken in communion at a ritual or during an ordination; symbolize the continual flow and renewal of life, as well as a Reformed Druid's connection to the Earth-Mother; those who partake in the Waters of Life are considered to belong to the spiritual body of Reformed Druidry.
Waters-of-Sleep	Typically spring water or otherwise typically non-alcoholic beverage, consecrated by a Third Order Druid during the Season of Sleep; the non-alcoholic nature of the Waters-of-Sleep is meant to symbolize the Earth-Mother's rest during winter, but affirm a Druid's connection to the Earth-Mother in the natural cycle of seasons.

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‡ indicates a questionable source from the Druidry Revival movement, cited only to provide an understanding of the mindset of those times.

Fun fact: 60 sources are cited in this workbook.