

Oakdale Grove's Druid Training Program



Indoctrination to the Order of Bradán Feasa (OBF)

*For those who seek structured guidance
in a few of the many ways to be a modern druid,
inspired in the spirit of the Reformed Druids of North America*

Developed by Oakdale Grove's Council of Dalon Ap Landu *et al.*

I, [insert real and/or craft name]

hereby embark on a druidic learning experience as a perpetual student,
in my unending quest for knowledge.

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The contents of this course are created for the Public Domain.

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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.

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.






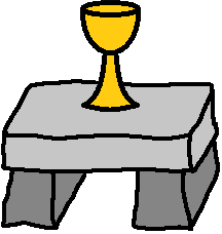

Table of Contents (clickable)




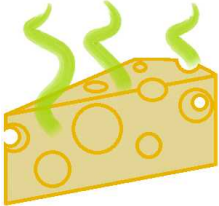

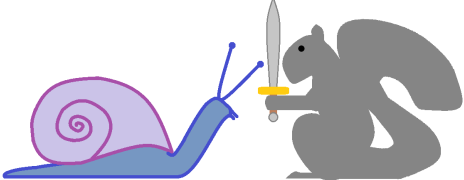
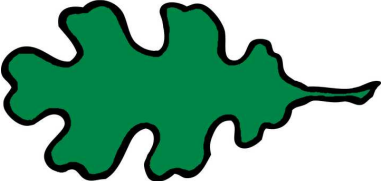

Publishing Information.....	2
Visual Cues.....	5
Disclaimers.....	8
Privacy Policy (NEEDS PEER REVIEW).....	10
Consent & Release Form.....	13
Syllabus.....	14
Introduction.....	16
About The Order of Bradán Feasa (OBF).....	18
Designated Daily Druid Daybook.....	20
Journal Entry: Journals, of Course!.....	21
Extra Credit: Your Blog URL.....	21
Essay: What Brought You to This Point?.....	22
Unrealistic Expectations When Delving Into Druidry.....	23
The Basics.....	27
The RDNA Belief System.....	31
Devotional: Applied Philosophy.....	34
Rites of Passage: The Order of the Acorn.....	35
Order of the Acorn Ritual — Original Version.....	36
Order of the Acorn Ritual: Oakdale Grove Version.....	37
Meditation (NEEDS PEER REVIEW).....	38
Meditation Tips and Tricks.....	40
Open Meditation: Practice Your Breathing.....	44
Essay: Tell Us About Your Meditation.....	44
A Druidic Meal Blessing.....	45
Extra Credit: Daily Druid Devotional.....	46
Activity: Sit Spots (TBA)WWWWWW.....	48
Essay: Describe Your Sit Spot.....	48
Devotional Meditation: Gratitude for Food.....	49
Essay (Short Answer): Your Gratitude for Food.....	50
Altars in Druidry (SOMEONE PLEASE REVIEW).....	51
Creative Topic: Construct an Altar (WORKING ON).....	55
What Altar Supplies Do You “Need?” (TBA).....	57
Journal Topic: Your Altar (TBA).....	58
Essay: Describe Your Altar.....	58
Devotional: Ritual cleansing bath or shower (TBA).....	59
Creative Topic: The Staff.....	60
The Ancient Druids: What We “Know”.....	62
Writings By Early Greeks and Romans.....	62
Writings By Early Christian Monks.....	67
Viewpoints on Theology.....	71
“Official” Deities of the Reformed Druids.....	75
Fire Meditation (WORKING ON).....	78

Devotional: Weekly Higher Order Deities (WORKING ON).....	79
Research Topic: Geomorphology of Your Region.....	80
Essay: Geologic History of Your Region.....	81
Nature Topic: Collect Tree Leaves and Identify Them (TBA).....	82
Research Topic: Who Called Your Region Home Before You? (TBA).....	83
Essay: Ancestors of Place.....	83
Activity Topic: Sacred Pilgrimage (TBA).....	84
Activity: Consecrate a Healing Tree.....	85
Essay: Tell Us About Your Healing Tree.....	86
Activity: Watch a Sunrise, and Watch a Sunset. (TBA).....	87
Extra Credit: Stake Out a Solar Alignment (TBA).....	88
Devotional: Perform one of the Four Salutations of The Day. (TBA).....	89
Meditation Topic: The Labyrinth (TBA).....	90
Layout of Labyrinth on Stewsie Island, Carleton College, Northfield, MN.....	91
Extra Credit: Make a Ritual Robe.....	92
Hoodless Robe Pattern.....	94
Devotional: Make Artwork or a Poem (TBA).....	95
Nature Topic: Nature Hike (TBA).....	96
Devotional/Nature Topic: Plant a Damn Tree (TBA).....	97
Aspects of a Ritual (TBA).....	98
Nature Topic: Find Liminal Places (TBA).....	99
Authenticity vs. Efficacy (TBA).....	100
Ramblings of a Misguided Celtic Reconstructionist.....	101
Basic Values of Druids (TBA).....	104
Essay: Values.....	106
RDNA-Centric Druid Values.....	107
Symbols in Druidry (TBA).....	108
Creative Topic: Pictish Painted Pebbles (TBA).....	109
Short Answer Essay: White Quartz Pebble.....	111
Impacts of Spiritual Practices.....	112
Essay: Societal & Environmental Impacts.....	112
Ancestor Veneration? (TBA).....	113
A Reformed Druid Anthology — Mike’s Comprehensive Curriculum (TBA).....	114
Glossary (TBA).....	115
References.....	116

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.

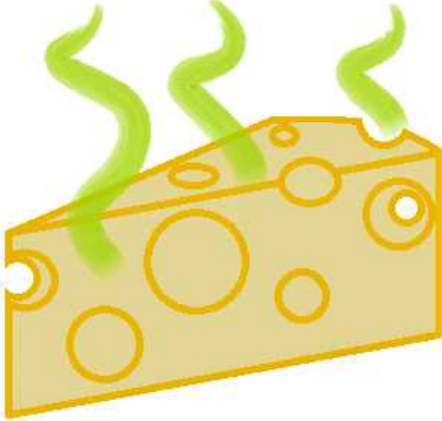
Pictogram	Indication of
	Journal topic (external to this workbook)
	Essay topic (internal to this workbook)
	Devotional topic
	Ritual topic
	Meditation topic

	<p>Research topic</p>
	<p>Creative topic</p>
	<p>Shadow work topic</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</p>
	<p>Activity topic</p>
	<p>Nature topic</p>
	<p>Extra Credit</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.

Disclaimers

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

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.

Article V

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: bonfire & burning ordinances, park rules and hours, alcohol statutes, blade length ordinances (for sickles and other ritual tools), apartment or housing association covenants, etc.

Article VI

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.

Article VII

Some topics within this training program mention the use of 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. We strongly advise consulting a physician prior to handling any unfamiliar substances. Always research proper handling, storage, and use of any substances mentioned.

Article VIII

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, wear personal protective equipment, tie back long hair, keep robe sleeves out of fires, etc. You are responsible for your own safety.

Article VIII

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 IX

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

Article X

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 XI

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 XII

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.

Privacy Policy (NEEDS PEER REVIEW)

Thank you for choosing to participate in Oakdale Grove's Druid Training Program! We are committed to protecting your personal information and your right to privacy. If you have any questions or concerns about our policy, or our practices with regards to your personal information, please contact us at MNdruids@gmail.com.

When you reach out to us and participate in this program, you trust us with your personal information. We take your privacy very seriously. In this privacy policy, we seek to explain to you in the clearest way possible what information we collect, how we use it and what rights you have in relation to it. We hope you take some time to read through it carefully, as it is important. If there are any terms in this privacy policy that you do not agree with, please refrain from sending us the completed workbook.

This privacy policy applies to all information you voluntarily enter into this PDF workbook and/or any related return correspondence, certificates of completion, etc. (collectively in this privacy policy as "Services") that the training program facilitators send to you.

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

1. 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, email address, or other personal information. 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, when participating in activities on the Services or otherwise contacting us.

The personal information that we collect depends on the context of your interactions with us and the Services, the choices you make and the products and features you use. The personal information we collect can include the following:

Publicly Available Personal Information. We collect first name, last name, nickname (AKA craft name), email addresses, and other similar data.

Personal Information Provided by You. We collect information you volunteer in the content that includes, but is not limited to, social affiliation to different groups; data collected from short answer questions, essays, surveys; and other similar data you send us which may include geographic data such as place names.

2. HOW DO WE USE YOUR INFORMATION?

In Short: We process your information for purposes of the fulfillment of our services with you, compliance with any applicable obligations, in accordance with your consent. We use the information we collect or receive:

- **To send administrative information to you.** We may use your personal information to send

you correspondence, training program files, new feature information and/or information about changes to our program terms, conditions, and policies.

- **To deliver services to the user.** We may use your information to provide you with the requested service.
- **To respond to user inquiries/offer support to participants.** We may use your information to respond to your inquiries and solve any potential issues you might have with the use of our Services.
- **For other Internal Purposes.** We may use your information for other Internal Purposes, such as data analysis, identifying trends, determining effectiveness of training program methodology, and to evaluate and improve our Services, products, and your experience. We will not use identifiable personal information without your consent. You reserve the right to rescind your consent for any reason or any time and we will remove any Personally Identifiable Information within seven calendar days of receiving the stop-request.

3. WILL YOUR INFORMATION BE SHARED WITH ANYONE?

In Short: We will never sell or share your information with third party marketing firms nor any other group outside of the training program. We only share information with your consent, to comply with laws, to provide you with any applicable tailored services, and to protect your rights. We may process or share data based on the following legal basis:

- **Consent:** We may process your data only if you have given us specific consent to use your personal information in a specific purpose related to this service.
- **Legal 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 well-being is at risk based on information you provide to us.
- **Vital Interests:** We may disclose your information where we believe it is necessary to investigate, prevent, or take action regarding potential violations of our policies, situations involving potential threats to the safety of any person and illegal activities, or as evidence in litigation in which we are involved.

4. HOW LONG DO WE KEEP YOUR INFORMATION?

In Short: Your personal information may be retained either indefinitely or until you request us to anonymize it. Anonymized information will be kept solely to track the number of program participants or conduct analysis on 3other non-identifying metadata.

5. DO WE COLLECT INFORMATION FROM MINORS?

In Short: 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 or that you are the parent or guardian of such a minor and consent to such minor dependent's use of the program. If we learn that personal information from participants less than 18 years of age has been collected without consent of a parent or guardian, we will cease correspondence and take reasonable measures to promptly delete such data from our records. If you become aware of any data we have collected from children under age 18, please contact us immediately.

6. WHAT ARE YOUR PRIVACY RIGHTS?

In Short: In some regions, such as the European Economic Area, you have rights that allow you greater access to and control over your personal information. You may review, change, or terminate any

extent of your participation at any time.

You have certain rights under applicable data protection laws. These may include the right:

1. to request access and obtain a copy of your submitted workbook information,
2. to request data rectification or erasure;
3. to restrict the processing of your personal information;
4. if applicable, to data portability. You also have the right to object to the processing of your personal information. We will act upon any request in accordance with applicable data protection laws.

If we are relying on your consent to process your personal information, you have the right to rescind your consent at any time. Please note however that this will not affect the lawfulness of the processing prior to its withdrawal.

If you are resident in the European Economic Area and you believe we are unlawfully processing your personal information, you also have the right to complain to your local data protection supervisory authority. You can find their contact details here:

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/data-protection/bodies/authorities/index_en.htm.

Requesting Change or Removal of Personal Information

If you would at any time like to review or change the information in your submitted workbook or terminate interaction, you can:

- Contact us using the contact information provided.
- Specify to what extent you wish to terminate, such as: removing names or 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 address which was used to submit the workbook, or (if for example your original email account is closed) by including a verbatim quotation from your original content of your copy of the workbook 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.

7. DO CALIFORNIA RESIDENTS HAVE SPECIFIC PRIVACY RIGHTS?

In Short: Yes, if you are a resident of California, you are granted specific rights regarding access to your personal information per California Civil Code Section 1798.83, also known as the “Shine The Light” law. **It is important to note that regardless of your geographic location, information you provide through this training program will never be shared with or sold to third-party marketing firms.**

8. DO WE MAKE UPDATES TO THIS POLICY?

In Short: Yes, we will update this policy as necessary to stay compliant with relevant laws and general good practices, etc. We may update this privacy policy from time to time. The updated version will be indicated by an updated “Revised” date and the updated version will be effective as soon as it is accessible. If we make material changes to this privacy policy, we may notify you either by prominently posting a notice of such changes or by directly sending you a notification. We encourage

you to review this privacy policy frequently to be informed of how we are protecting your information.

9. HOW CAN YOU CONTACT US ABOUT THIS POLICY?

If you have questions or comments about this policy, you may contact us by email or by post to:

Oakdale Grove
C/O OBF Program
PO Box 28821
Oakdale, MN 55128

PRIVACY POLICY AMENDMENT LOG

Version Number	Date	Amendment Summary
1.0	01/27/2020	Policy defined and inserted from null.

Should [↶] this [↷] be simplified, and if so, how?

Consent & Release Form

I have read 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)

Please select one of the following privacy options:

I consent to allowing program facilitators to process all information I volunteer in this workbook for analysis and/or for training program improvement.

I consent to allowing program facilitators to process ONLY non-Personally Identifiable Information I volunteer in this workbook for analysis and/or for training program improvement. Please anonymize my information after fulfillment of this training program.

I do NOT consent to program facilitators processing my information in this workbook. Please delete this workbook after fulfillment of this training program.

(Note to self) I am NOT submitting this workbook after I complete it, so the above need not apply and therefore I withhold my consent.

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: The Reformed Druids of North America: Oakdale Grove's Council of Dalon Ap Landu	

Required Materials and Texts

- Oakdale Grove's Druid Training Program digital workbook (this PDF)
- Device and software for viewing and entering text into PDF forms (Adobe Reader, Foxit, Javelin, Nitro, et cetera)
- A journal or blog designated for your druidry
- A functional, regularly maintained email address
- Access to nature
- [A Reformed Druid Anthology](#), 2nd Edition (ARDA 2)

Recommended Materials

- Camera
- Walking staff
- Chalice
- Sickle
- 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. 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 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
- Enhanced Awareness of the patterns of Nature and seasonality in your environment
- *Specifically among members of Oakdale Grove*, members shall successfully complete this course as prerequisite to ordination to the Third Order.

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. This workbook of lectures, activities, attestations, and essays – see Table of Contents for all topics in this unit
2. ARDA study course
 - a) Short-answer and numerous small essays to demonstrate ARDA comprehension
 - b) ARDA Exam

Grading

Your path to druidism is unique. This program asks for a significant amount of subjective content from you in both course units. There will be no traditional grading methodology employed in Unit 1. Instead, 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 2 Short Answers and Essays	Incomplete/Complete
Unit 2 ARDA Exam	Passing score of 80% or higher

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). If desired, a high-quality printed certificate can be purchased and mailed.

Academic Policy

For all sections that require short answers or essays, everything should be in your own words. Entries should be of sufficient length to demonstrate that you understood the content and the questions or essay prompts. You may work together in study groups, but your work should be written independently by you. To receive a *Complete* status you must provide answers (or check the Attestation box when applicable) for all questions and essays except Extra Credit items. Extra Credit items can be completed in groups if applicable. Some 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.

Introduction

Greetings seeker of druidism! If you've read this far you're off to a great start on what I 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.

Druidry vs Druidism

There are multiple takes on this topic, and I don't consider any other variants I've seen to be *wrong*, but this is also a subject of frequently asked questions pertaining to druids. Here I shall define both and cite examples that reinforce my interpretation, and I 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. Despite this distinction, there's still a degree of interchangeability and overlap between the two terms, so don't worry about getting hung up on the semantics.

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. There's also my own personal take on druidcraft that I use to describe things I create for my druidic practices. Whether I'm carving a staff, sewing a ritual robe, binding a book, engraving sigils on stone pendants, or crafting things in general, that's what I call my own druidcraft. I think I'm in the minority in using the term that way, so at the very least it's a fun pun for me to use.

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 I 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 my 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, I think books are very important, as they provide a more stable foundation for your inevitable experiences.

Furthermore, I’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. We recommend using these features to your advantage in tracking your own progress and/or submitting it for review when you reach that point.

I 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. Nothing except the *Two Basic Tenets* of belief are set in stone... actually those aren’t set in stone either, but I digress. We’ll cover those details in *The Basics* segment.

Throughout this program I 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. The 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 I am perpetually learning more about druidry.

This training program will have a lot of reading to slog through, but I 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. With this program still being at or near version 1.0, mentorships are not a feasible training avenue at this time.

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 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. 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 my lazy American accent just wants to say *ah* instead. It's acceptable and just plain easier.



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! My followup question (more of a rhetorical one) would be: *when was the last time you wrote in it?* I 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. I'm one of those people, so I know the feeling. Nevertheless I've acquired a few leather journals with off-white 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 Twitter or other microblogging platforms. Even a *vlog* on YouTube would 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 I 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
- 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 on occasion. 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: Journals, of Course!

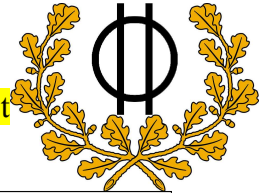
Journal About Journaling

As part of this training program, we ask that you designate a druid journal. Simply put, the topic of this specific journal entry is journaling. Just to get it started, you're declaring your intentions to keep and maintain a blog or journal about druidry. It is a first good step, especially for those who feel they may have difficulty getting into the habit.

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

Extra Credit: Your Blog URL

If you choose to go with digital media, and you're willing to share your blog link, paste it in below:





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:

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

Unrealistic Expectations When Delving Into Druidry

What Are Your Motives?

By my observation, I have noticed attrition among individuals 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, but they are simply 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. One person I met claimed to be in an “unbroken line of druids,” all the way back to the Iron Age. When I asked them questions about their druidic initiation (and after I got them to stop evading the question) they said they were never actually initiated. When I asked them what they learned about druidism from their parents, or what their parents said or believed about druidism, there was nothing. That is the *opposite* of an unbroken line.

Another individual once told me 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. By their claim anyone with the last name MacMillan are all somehow automatically druids. That's waxing toward the *faulty generalization* fallacy. I 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 neo-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, not even proper academics will change their minds.

There was another individual who, in 2019, told me he was from a long line of druids going back “hundreds of years.” **Now this is actually plausible**, because the *Ancient Druid Order* or ADO was founded 302 years prior in 1717. Granted those *mesodruids* 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 *neo-druids*. However at that point, druidry might be so popular that statements like that won't matter anymore.

One claim that bothered me was when someone said their parents took DNA tests, and the results said they *are* druids. I'm sure this individual was oversimplifying and misinterpreting the summary of their genetic makeup because **druids aren't an ethnic group**. In the classical era 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, and in general, Greek historians seemed to write in a more favorable tone regarding druids compared to Roman historians, but I digress. It is fair to say there may have been a number of non-Celtic druids across the classical ages.

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, I've observed that individuals like this start exploring druidry solely on the basis of *heritage* perhaps not knowing what to expect out of it. They might take a cursory look at some resources, then I don't hear from them again. They come out of the woodwork, and disappear just as quickly. I don't call them out on their claims, but I do hope that as they research, they see something in the written history that helps them better understand themselves. I'd want them to grow to see value in druidry beyond just the ancestral associations.

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 some of the original sources of partial inspiration used 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, I suddenly thought I was 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 ram-horned god. Then to my embarrassment when the page loaded I saw that Cenarius is nothing more than a fictional (albeit antlered) druidic god and "Lord of the Groves" in the game *World of Warcraft*. I 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 I eventually played the game. Their depiction of druids is very elaborately thought out, yet still very different from what I knew of our historical druids. And it wasn't long before I met or heard of individuals who come to neopagan druidry because of games like *World of Warcraft* 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 neopagan druidry thinking they will be able to cast fireballs (one person seemed convinced it was a possibility, and I don't think they were joking) or perform other Hollywood style magic spells

right off the bat. Trusting any type of media (movies, TV, games, *et cetera*) to properly depict a realistic range of pagans is good hopeful thinking, but maybe at least a bit naive.

Feeling Like You Have to Connect With Deities

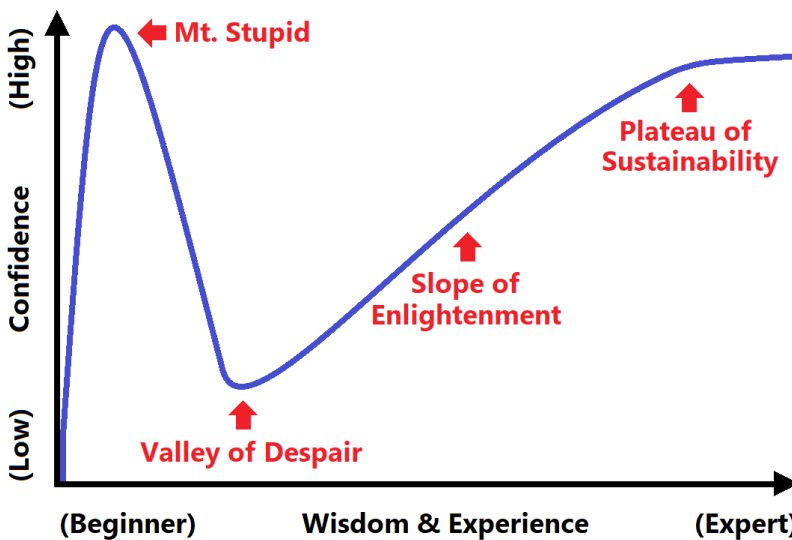
As a Reformed Druid, **I recommend trying to get in touch with the Earth-Mother**, a personification of Nature. The Earth-Mother is not only divine, but we can prove she exists. We depend on the Living Earth, the ever-changing All-Mother for our survival. From her we withdraw sustenance. From her, we 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 I 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. I 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*. To be perfectly honest, I felt like a bit of a know-it-all in high school, arrogant and incognizant of my naivety. I was a veritable *king* of Mt. Stupid with my head in the clouds. I'm exaggerating but trying to illustrate the Dunning-Kruger Effect. 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. 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. (Kruger & Dunning, 1999)

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 Basics

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

Back in early 1963 when the Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA) were in the earliest formative stages of organizational development, even before they called themselves or their practices *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 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 Micheal 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.

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.

What is 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 Celtic priesthood caste of the same name.*** For the proper *long answer* we should differentiate between three distinct categories 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.

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 ancestral heritage.

“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, did make a claim at one point that he was already a “Third Order Druid Priest.” That is regarded as highly unlikely considering how much initial research he and the other founders conducted in the college library.

Fisher previously tried to create a fraternity, but Carleton prohibits them. Has 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 very secular, in its early days, Carleton College was affiliated with the Congregational Baptist Church, and 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 formal name of *Reformed Druids of America (RDA)*, but Cherniak is 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 human 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 was to appeal to those who were more pagan leaning, and the SDNA was to appeal 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 WhiteOak* (OWO, no space between White & Oak) 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. 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 I would 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 I'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 I'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 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 Objectively

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.

Loaded Words

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

...Religion

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, 1963-2004, 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, 1963-2004, p. 528)

I 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 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, but I digress). **Marta Peck (at right in photo) became Arch-Druid in 1968, making her the first 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 founding Grove at Carleton College between 1963 and 2020, about 47% 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.

Conclusion

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 well over 700 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.*, 1963-2004, 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. Much further on in 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 an honorary member of the Order of the Acorn. Next up in this training program is a rite of passage you can use as a self initiation or self dedication ritual.

As we had mentioned, 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. Then in a rite of passage you would be consecrated as a First Order Druid. If that sounds a little confusing, don’t worry, we will cover that in depth. Customs Chapter One, among other early writings can be a delightfully opaque reading, though they start to make sense if you stare at them long enough.

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. Soon, 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 I 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.

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)

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

The object of the search for religious 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.

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].



Meditation (NEEDS PEER REVIEW)

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. I'm 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 me because I don't have the same lung capacity as the instructor. The distracting matter arose of needing to breathe more frequently and not holding my breath that long. Matching my breathing with the instructor's felt too unnatural to me. I later found out that **matching their cadence doesn't matter**. With practicing on my own and just taking deep breaths at my own comfortable pace, I could easily reach that *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 *clean*. Avoid recreational or ceremonial 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 don't 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 tea.

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

To be absolutely clear, I 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. We don't force 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 an alcohol 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.

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 my rituals led by Reformed Druid elders, the final silent meditations never went much longer than one minute. Mine 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 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.*, 1963-2004, 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, but I digress. 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 too 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. 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 want 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 problem solving 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 it 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. 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, or 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 those 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 wanted. 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 clouds. 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

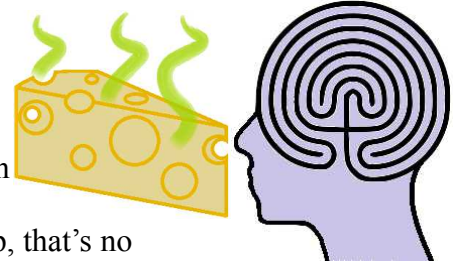
Not being prepared to address that part of my psyche, in my mind I stopped my canoe and gently removed the visual elements. This brought me back into an Alpha State and I started to become aware of my surroundings. I knew full well how jarring and disorienting it can be to *snap out* of a meditation.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

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.

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 the laborers who have worked hard so that we may bring provisions to our table.

We give thanks to the plants and 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, 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.

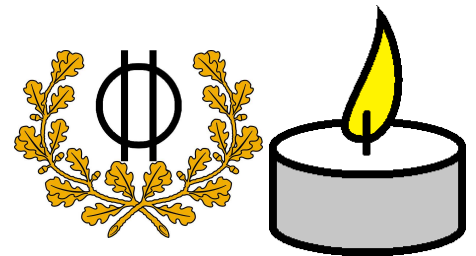
And we give thanks to present company for sharing this feast in pleasant fellowship.

So be it.

Extra Credit: 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

For extra credit 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 always 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 Note

What idea or concept did you reexamine? Has your perspective shifted? 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 Note

Did you find a parallel? If so, what was it? What was an urge you resisted or indulged in? 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 Note

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

The Zeroes

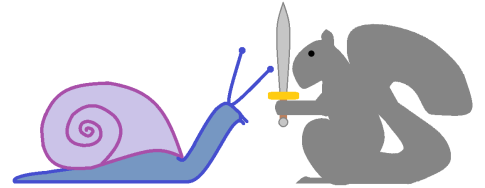
- Listen to someone without a preconception of them.
- Do nothing for a moment in the midst of your busiest time.
- Purposely skip one of the previous activities.

Editor's Note

How did you feel about your impromptu momentary break? 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 (TBA)WWWWWW

Find a place that's sacred to you, preferably outdoors. Photograph it from the same spot on every high day.



Essay: Describe Your Sit Spot

What do you see? Which direction do you typically face? Can you describe something about it for each of the five senses? (Don't lick it. It's okay if it doesn't have a taste.)



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 me 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, I 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, I 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

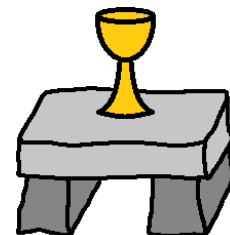
For these questions there are generally no wrong answers.



Where did you source your food of choice?

What did you select as your food of choice?

To what extent has this exercise shifted your perceptions? How do you feel when doing this?



Altars in Druidry (SOMEONE PLEASE REVIEW)

“...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 plopp 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.*, 1963-2004, p. 6)

WWWWWWWWWWWW

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 the Reformed Druids decided to never practice ritual animal sacrifice. 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.

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, into which they carved the Druid Sigil. They called that place *Hill of the Three Oaks* (eventually dropping *the* from 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, Hill of Three Oaks. The Sigil is roughly three inches wide.

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 you like the pomp and theatrics of altars (and a nice chalice), then you are also like me; and I say go for it! I almost always hold rituals in public, so I’m not able to build a fancy altar on public property, so I use travel altars.

My first travel altar kit fit entirely in a small messenger bag, one that was a little too small to hold a laptop. It held my chalice, my 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 I acquired a larger messenger bag. Then I found a larger portable altar stone that held both chalices.

For about \$8, Kaytee makes a 10x6 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 me 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 I found a long black marble cutting board for \$4.99, which was a nice find because the original Pottery Barn price tag on the bottom indicated it was worth \$49.

At Samhain of 2014 I finally 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 Arch-Druid of Carleton Grove at the time) and gave me a small luggage cart so that I wouldn't have to lug everything around in a messenger bag. The cart presented a bit of a dichotomy and struggle between my inner minimalist and my outer aestheticist. However, my creativity and love for aesthetics won out.

I outfitted the cart with two wooden boxes that could be stacked and attached clasps to the boxes so they could be attached to each other both right side up, or with the top box upside down. It gave me 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.



Altars, Working Tables, & Shrines

It is possible to nitpick that my wooden box on wheels where I set a granite slab and chalices upon technically isn't an altar, but rather a *working table*. It 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 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. It can be a focus point of prayers and devotionals to specific deities or ancestors; that would technically also make it a shrine. 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: an altar to offer libations and sacrifices, a working table to make sacred sundry items like incense or herb sachets, and a shrine for prayers and veneration.



Creative Topic: Construct an Altar (WORKING ON)

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 my *opinion* you should have some sort of stone (or a living potted plant) on the surface of the altar. It is a piece of the Earth-Mother and therefore is a literal representation of divinity.

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 a photo 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. Mine at left features a great great grandfather's coin purse containing old coins and my great grandfather's wedding ring, a photo of my 5x great grandparents where my European ancestry merged with my

Cherokee ancestry. There's an egg shaped stromatolite (fossilized cyanobacteria colonies, the first known life forms on Earth) which to me represents the deep ancestors that we don't know by name. My great grandfather's 1905 Ansonia clock is the centerpiece and is a literal representation of the passage of time. Two unakite stone turtles face each other (my great aunt loved turtle figurines) and one is a memento of her and the other is a memento of one of her granddaughters (my second cousin) who both passed away in 2018. I have my great-great grandmother's glasses and a great grandmother's German bible.

What Altar Supplies Do You “Need?” (TBA)

example: “open flame reminder” ring or heavy/gaudy bling



Journal Topic: Your Altar (TBA)

Do you have an altar? What is on it? What does each item mean to you? Is your altar dusty? Rearrange the items on it – how does the new placement make you feel?



Essay: Describe Your Altar

If you don't have an altar, that is perfectly fine and there's no obligation to have 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 bath or shower
(TBA)**

(support your local co-op in the process?)



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* 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.



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. 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*.

“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 Gymnosophistae, **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 evolution in customs or 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....

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.” (Siculus, trans. Oldfather 1939 p. 179, 181)

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 Marseilles (present day Massalia) 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 has 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. 24-79CE) (And the Only Mention of White Robes)

“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 the priest ascends the tree, and cuts the mistletoe with a golden sickle, which is received by others in a white cloak. 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 my own speculation I 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. There is no way to know for certain if this was a custom of druids across *all* Celtic nations, or just Gaul, or just that particular 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 *fili* (seers) 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 envelopes 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.

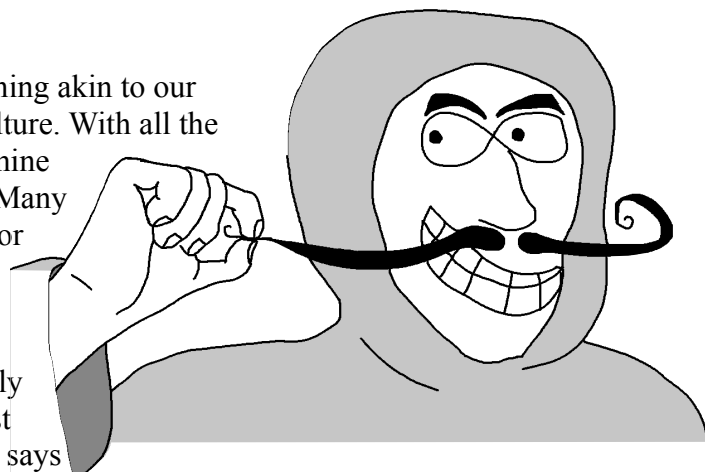
Iona: The Once-Sacred Island of the Druids

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 me of a certain *Monty Python* sketch (the funniest joke), but I digress.

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 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!

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. My only question is: did Lugne ever get the damn cobble, or did they just rescue him and call it a day?

Viewpoints on Theology

Theological Diversity in Contemporary Druidry

One of the most common questions I 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 it can be a symbol of what you *do* believe.

On Judeo-Christian Druids

One of my 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 my 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, referring to *multiple* gods.

Some members of the Druidry Revival movement several centuries ago also 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 went on to explain that the ancient druids practiced human sacrifice because they missed the memo of the 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, despite the extra 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 in the early-mid 19th century:

“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)

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. I 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*, 1963-2004, p. 845)

Hard vs. Soft Polytheists and Viewpoints Beyond

Among Reformed Druids there are Hard Polytheists who believe all the gods are real and individual or separate from each other. There are Soft Polytheists who believe the gods are different aspects of one deity. There are those who see the gods as metaphors or maybe Jungian archetypes. There are pantheists who believe the divine is everything, or is in everything. Roughly half of my grovemates in Oakdale Grove are also Christian: one stated that Jesus shows up in a way that is needed for the individual. Some of us worship Nature, and some worship who they believe is the Creator in a nature setting (worshipping the Creator, not the Creation – so to speak). We’ve gotten along just fine as a Grove since 2013 so far.

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

See also the section *Writings By Early Christian Monks*.

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 Francis of Assisi

Saint Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of animals and of ecology. He is probably the most compatible saint for druidry. One of my Grove members handed me a pocket devotional and had me read a song by Saint Francis called *The Canticle of the Sun*, which was so pagan-leaning it made my 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 I read on Saint Francis of Assisi and the writings associated with him, the more I 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*, 1963-2004, p. 58)

While I appreciate that a lot of Reformed Druids disagree with that claim entirely, I’ve found my own reason to have a similar interpretation to Isaac’s. I simplify it as: 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 my 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, Michael, *et al*, 1963-2004, 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.

“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 “Lord” and perhaps “Shining One,” 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 the sun, 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, 1894/1912, p.429)
- “*Be'al* was the source of all being,” (Bonwick, 1895, p. 129)

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*. Incidentally 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 is simply a title meaning *Lord*. It’s a placeholder for whomever you need it to refer to.

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*, 1963-2004, 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 for black. In researching Scots Gaelic I was able to determine that *coille* is the modern Scottish word for *forest*. Forlong translates *Duw Keli* as [*Him of the*] *Dark Grove*. (Forlong, 1883) I felt one step closer to finding Dalon

Ap Landu, or at least to finding a historical reference to a Grove god. Despite this I still had doubts about the validity of his writings.

Then I 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 me 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 I found 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, but I think I’d be more inclined to trust them than some of the fishy Victorian writings. The Roman historian Lucan wrote that even the druids feared to disturb the Lord of the Grove. I think he was exaggerating, but there it was: Lord of the Grove, a deity of place, in the historic record. (Lucan, & Duff, 1977)

I started to think Dalon Ap Landu is just 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 I had the opportunity to speak to Kristoffer Hughes, one of the guests of honor whose first language is Welsh. I told him about my struggle to find the origin of Dalon. Kristoffer broke down each syllable of the name, telling me how each part can be tweaked and interpreted in several ways, but none single of them aligned with *Lord of the Groves*. Perhaps I’ve reached an impasse until I discover whatever book it was that Norm Nelson found that name in.

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 forest god 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 (WORKING ON)

Gaze into the sacred fire. This fire has the will to be something greater than it is. Let the flames of this blaze represent the fire within ourselves. This is our vitality. This is what drives us to extend our limitations. This is the force behind our will. What you see before you are real flames, now see their greater likeness within your minds.

You are there. This is your inner fire. Feel the intensity of the heat of this inner fire. 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. 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. You may feel apprehension or fear of the pain. Do not doubt yourself, and do not let the sense of foreboding overcome you. Place your dominant hand into the very flames, but do not let them burn you. Recognize this power within yourself, acknowledge your authority over it, embrace it as a gift.

Raise your other hand, your energetically receptive hand, toward the moon. Take in the power and the light through your your fingertips and palm.

Now, with your hand in this inner fire, you can use the center of the flames as a focus point to channel your will and intent.

INSERT MAGICAL WORKINGS HERE

Now withdraw your hand from the flames. Let the fire in your mind recede and merge into the fire that blazes before us. With your receptive hand, continue to draw from the moon as long as you need in order to balance and revitalize yourself.



Devotional: Weekly Higher Order Deities (WORKING ON)

Just now I hashed out a tentative daily devotional "schedule" for the seven deities of the higher orders of the RDNA, which is open to rearrangement:

Sunday: Belenos

Monday: Sirona

Tuesday: Grannos

Wednesday: Llyr

Thursday: Taranis

Friday: Braciaca (Or Dagda for those who don't drink or don't eat gluten. Dagda loved oat porridge)

Saturday: Danu

That just leaves out the Earth-Mother, Be'al, and Dalon Ap Landu, but they can have devotionals whenever, I suppose. Whenever there's an oak tree and a spare moment we can ponder the mysteries of Dalon Ap Landu, or whenever we see the ground in a spare moment then the Earth-Mother. Maybe the mysteries of Be'al can be pondered while gazing across the vastness of the galaxy at night.



Research Topic: Geomorphology of Your

Region

By Johayan Sycamore Bear

Of the Enlightenment Given by the Earth Mother

As you explore druidry, I would strongly recommend learning about how the Earth-Mother expresses Herself in your area.

- Learn about local landforms and geology
- Learn about how the landforms and geology affected your area
- Talk to local elders to learn about what may have changed in your area
- How did the Indigenous people (our spiritual Ancestors in the Eyes of the Earth-Mother) view the land and how has it affected the current views of the land today?

Once you have researched your local area, submit a brief essay (1-5 paragraphs recommended) with the results of what you have found. Some example questions to think about and possibly include in your essay:

- Did mining dramatically alter the landscape?
- Did a massive flood cause your town to be relocated?
- How have views of the Earth-Mother (the land) changed from time of settlement until today?

Go In Peace and In Service of the Earth-Mother

Johayan Sycamore Bear

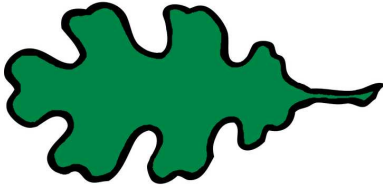
2nd Order – Oakdale Grove (RDNA)



Essay: Geologic History of Your Region

Editor's Note

In *addition* to the above questions, what other local geological processes happened throughout ancient history? If applicable, when in geologic time was your area underwater? Under lava? Under ice? Underground?



**Nature Topic: Collect Tree Leaves and
Identify Them (TBA)**

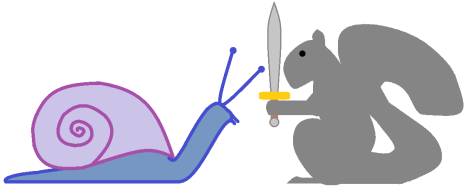


Research Topic: Who Called Your Region Home Before You? (TBA)

Who was there before *them*? Research your area history. Can you find ancient place names? How many historic periods are there in your area?



Essay: Ancestors of Place

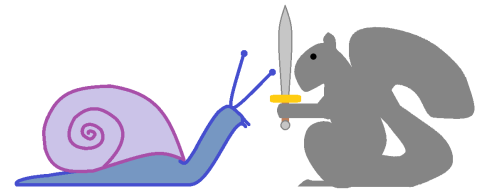


Activity Topic: Sacred Pilgrimage

(TBA)

Insert Knowledge Here
Go outside or something.

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 are almost always near sacred water.

After making offerings and sacrifices, 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 ancient shamanic practices. Well at the very least, the Wishing Trees atop Gora Sampo have stood testimony to the living tradition of Eurasian Shamanism. 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.**



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

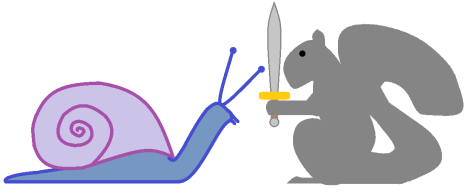


keep polyester, satin, nylon, rayon and the rest off of our sacred trees. Tie your ribbons in a single knot. When the healing energies have done the best they can, the elements of nature will sweep the ribbons away. This includes birds pecking them away and building nests from the fibers.

Essay: Tell Us About Your Healing Tree

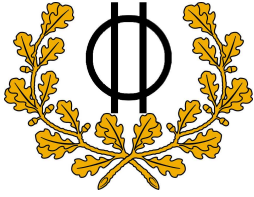
What species did you select for your healing tree? Did you choose it for any of its metaphysical correspondences? What did you offer the tree in exchange for its consecration unto healing? Is it on your property or off in a wooded park somewhere? By chance is one of these healing trees already established in your vicinity?





Activity: Watch a Sunrise, and Watch a Sunset. (TBA)

Probably with eye protection.



Extra Credit: Stake Out a Solar Alignment

(TBA)

in a sacred space to observe solstices and equinoxes. There are numerous solar position calculators so you can do this any time of year.

Devotional: Perform one of the Four Salutations of The Day. (TBA)

Perform them all if you feel so inclined.

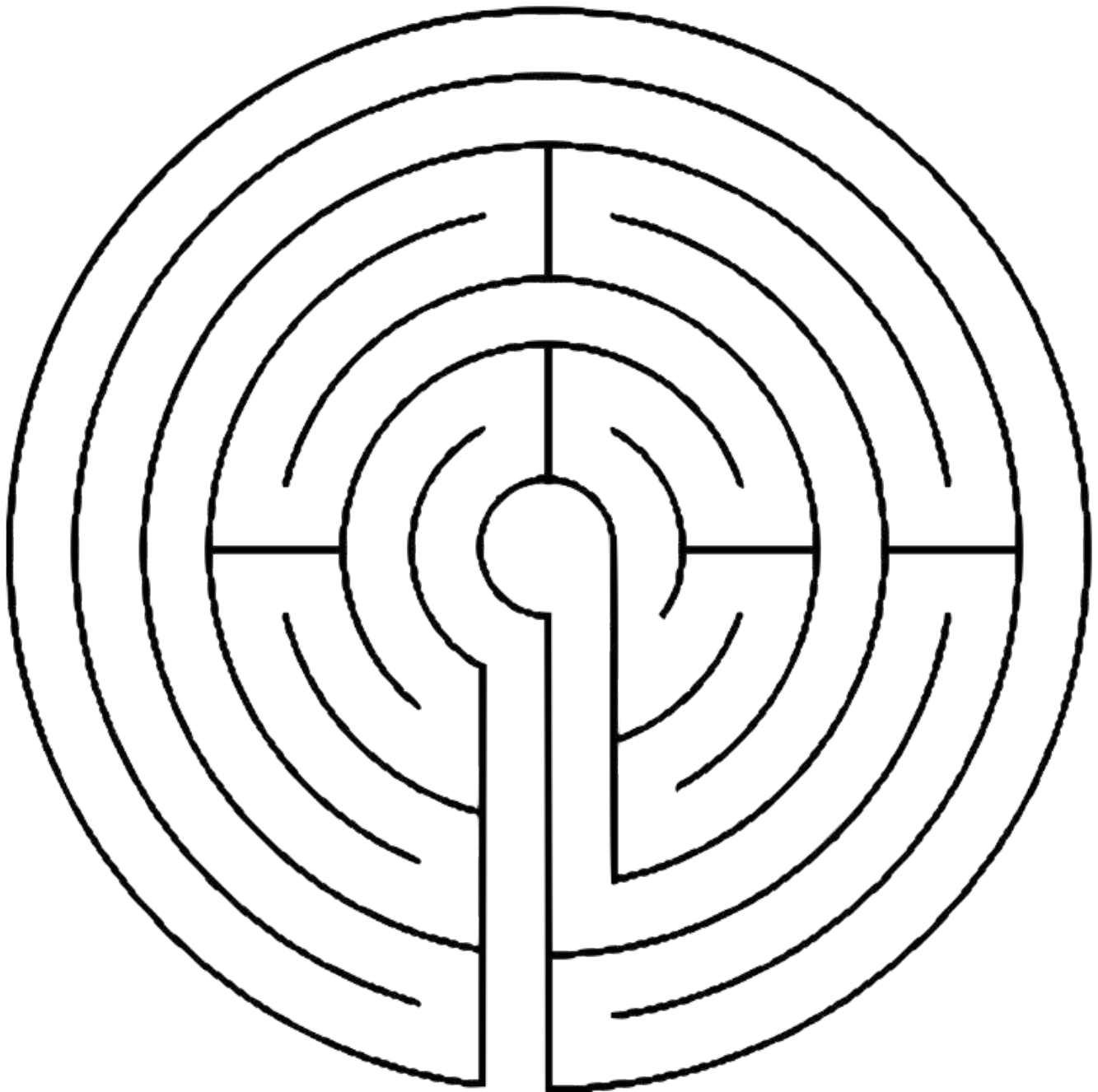


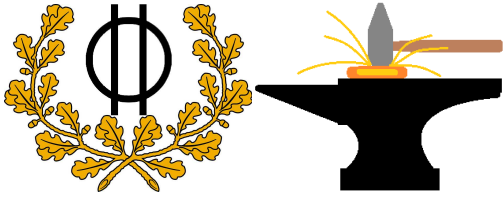


Meditation Topic: The Labyrinth (TBA)

or make one in your yard if you can, or print one off as a finger labyrinth, or make one in polymer clay and bake it for long-term use.

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

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.

Please note that I only stand 5’7” in my shoes, so if you’re 5’10” or taller, this might be too short as a robe, but for anyone who is my height or shorter, this is a great option! Now 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 folk 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 shorter tablecloths.

Recommended Materials:

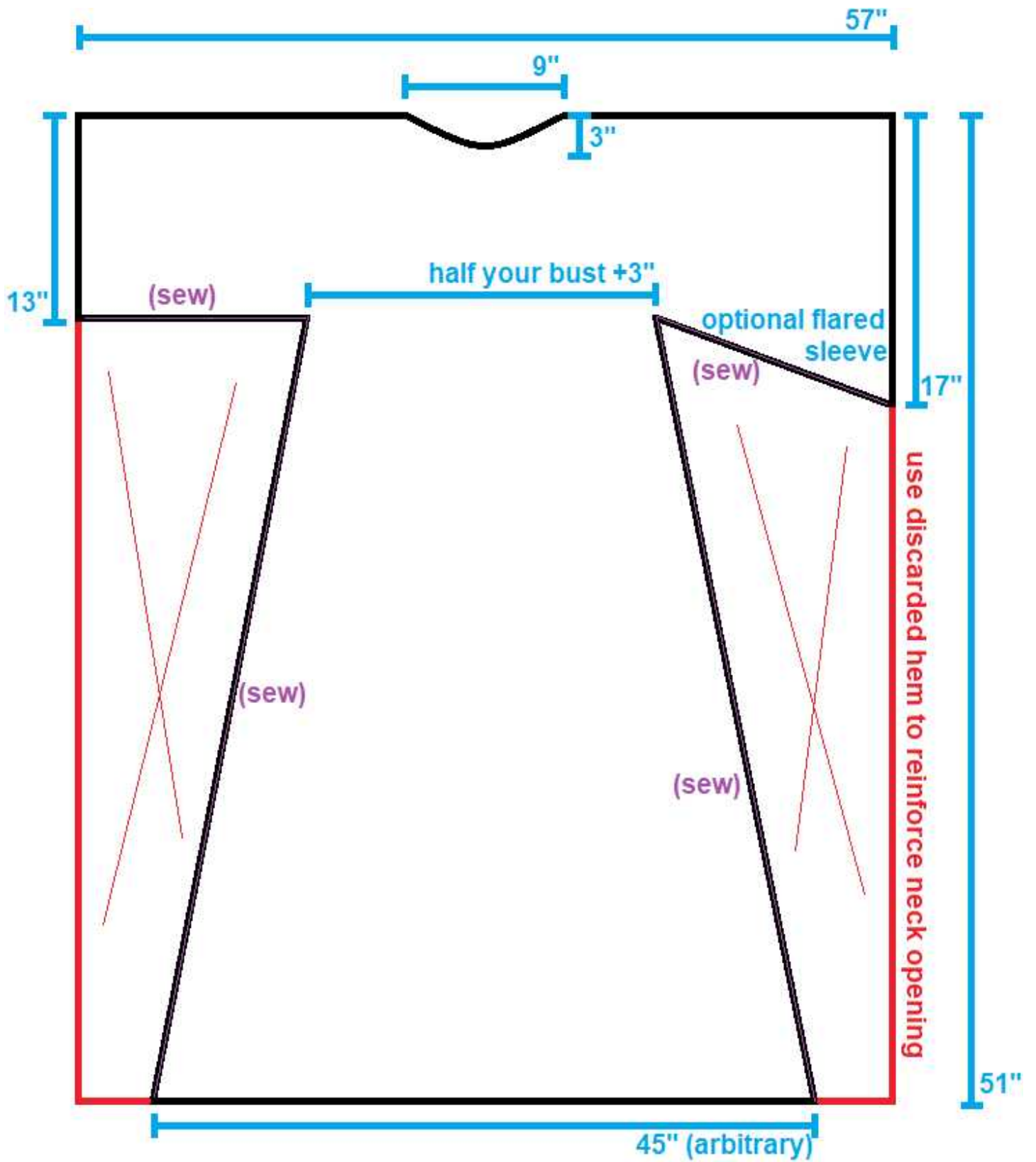
- Ample working surface
- Marking chalk or grease pencil
- Yard stick and soft tape measure
- A rotary fabric cutter (pizza cutter style) (and I recommend a cutting mat!) (scissors are okay but much less efficient)
- Sewing machine (or needle & thread by hand the way your ancestors did it. Have fun!)
- 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 once complete
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. 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 and needs to be slightly longer than the neck opening circumference.
10. The cut edge of this 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



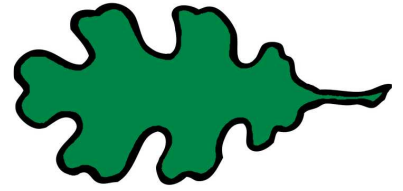
Devotional: Make Artwork or a Poem (TBA)

and safely burn it as an offering to the Earth-Mother

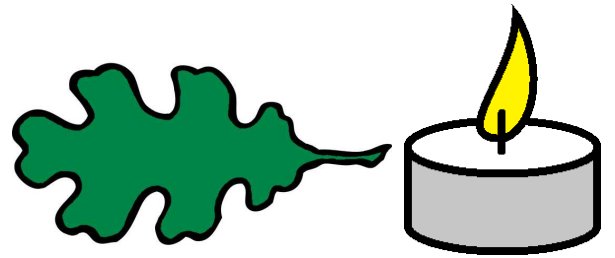


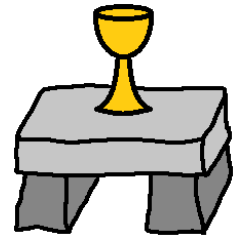
Nature Topic: Nature Hike (TBA)

Observe birds, animals, landforms, winds, soil types and the plants that like them, water features, and human impact. How does everything relate to each other? See patterns?



**Devotional/Nature Topic: Plant a
Damn Tree (TBA)**





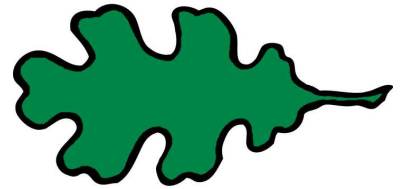
Aspects of a Ritual (TBA)

Beginning

Middle

End

Nature Topic: Find Liminal Places (TBA)



Shorelines

Wetlands

High ground

Caves

Tree branches

Sunrises & Sunsets

Islands

Cliffs

Wells & Springs

Fire

Bridges, Causeways, & Piers

Groves, Forest's edge, Copses, Glades, Hedges, Thickets

Fog, Storms,

Crossroads & Holloways

Doorways, Windows, Gates, Stiles, Fence breaks, Unusual architectural vertices (complex corners)

Authenticity vs. Efficacy (TBA)



Has anyone in the RDNA ever received criticism from other druid orders? I have not experienced this personally but it could potentially be experienced by others. In terms of druid orders, we're mostly in the same "courtroom" so to speak, where we are judged by outside groups. In my experience, Celtic Reconstructionists offer the most condescending remarks on authenticity, though they usually don't describe themselves as druids.

John Michael Greer, the Grand Archdruid emeritus of the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA) addresses the topic of authenticity in *The Druid Magic Handbook*: "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 the authenticity concept 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.

Once a Celtic Reconstructionist griped at me whining 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 historical authenticity. The statement implied that CRs want to be historically accurate, which leads me to think that unless CRs are hypocrites, they're also in favor of classism, slavery, human sacrifice, trials by combat, Brehon Law, and other injustices that modern druid orders have eschewed.

Ramblings of a Misguided Celtic Reconstructionist

Editor's Note

I'm not saying Celtic Reconstructionists are misguided. In fact most of them are very intelligent and well-read. However sometimes the louder people within a group are disruptive and don't have the best knowledge.

How do you feel about Tribal Socialism and Tribal Monarchy? As a priest, surely you must have a position on political ideologies. As a druid, it makes sense you'd be inclined to study the forms of government I ask your opinion on.

—MCR

Response from John the Verbose

As a Reformed Druid priest, I strive to keep the RDNA (Reformed Druids of North America) — or at least my Grove — apolitical. Officially adopting political ideas can lead to increased dogmatism, which leads to fanaticism and extremism. This has happened many times in the past with other world religions, even ones that espouse peace and nonviolence — perhaps with the exception of Jainists.

The founders of the RDNA in the 1960s didn't intend on creating an actual religion, but for some that is what it has become. They had also intended it to be relatively non-dogmatic to allow people of many differing religious paths (or lack thereof) come together to share spiritual and philosophical ideologies, potentially learning and benefiting from this multicultural exchange.

Even though the Reformed Druid movement began as a protest, the movement as a whole was largely apolitical. They were only protesting mandatory chapel attendance on a college campus by creating the RDNA and using an 'alternative religious service' loophole to vie for attendance credit.

The RDNA actually predated a lot of the sociopolitical movements of the 1960s and later. None of the founders considered themselves environmentalists, neither did they consider themselves pagan. After about four years, neopagans started joining the RDNA starting with Isaac Bonewits. Furthermore, the RDNA was created without any knowledge of Wicca, and OBOD (the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids) did not exist yet.

The RDNA was created before the hippie movement, before the introduction of New-Age spirituality, and before the other major protests and countercultures of the time. Nowadays it does draw in environmental activists, left leaning pagans, liberal Christians, New Agers, and others, but the intensity of any perceived activism is relatively low.

When our founder David Fisher was being interviewed in 2004, he mentioned the basic concepts of the RDNA: how it was philosophically panentheistic, pacifistic, and with a benign concern for nature. It has a legacy of being multicultural and pluralistic, and that's where I view that it comes into conflict with concepts such as tribal socialism and neo-tribalism. I see this tribalism as potentially harmful to certain individuals in homogeneous social communities — individuals who may have dissenting viewpoints on cultural norms. In fact, my family has experienced this firsthand.

I grew up somewhat Mennonite. Mennonites are much like the Amish but with fewer rules; the use of technology is allowed, but one must otherwise live a life of simplicity, modesty, and absolute pacifism. My Mennonite ancestors lived in close-knit single-minded communities. Then in the 1950s, my grandfather signed up for the Air Force. He signed on as a conscientious objector and objected when he was issued a sidearm; he just wanted to fly the Lockheed P-38s, which he eventually did — but I digress.

Nevertheless, the mere act of participating in the military was enough to get him, his family, including his parents shunned from the Mennonite community. They were all cast out and ostracized from their tribe because *one* person did something that was socially unacceptable. Because Mennonites are pacifist, ostracization is a relatively small punishment. In a tribally social community, the well-being of oppressed subsets of a community might go unseen by the larger society. Depending on group beliefs: systemic exploitation, neglect, abuse, or honor-killings could be implemented to control portions of a population.

Certainly, the same thing can happen within close-knit family units even in a multicultural society, such as when we hear of people locked in basements for years at a time. If people were to move toward various tribal societies on a large scale, the nightmare scenarios could go off the charts. It evokes memories of the Branch Davidians, of Jonestown, of Ruby Ridge, of Heaven's Gate, and other religious or paramilitary cults.

On paper, Tribal Socialism sounds very utopian, and I'm sure that many tribes can be safe and fulfilling communities. There are times that I would love being in an enclave of Reformed Druids. However, that type of homogeneous safe-space would be detrimental to a more holistic and diverse life experience. The primary goal of a Reformed Druid is to gain in Awareness (a Western analog of Enlightenment) which can best be sought immersed in the wider pluralistic society.

Thank you for replying. I was just curious because the Celts of the past had those forms of government in place before Roman idealists implemented their own forms of governing. I personally believe the most ideal form of government would be something similar to the American honor society we once had (i.e. insult my honor, and you get shot in the face), as well as the laws accompanying them, of course. However, there were laws in those times we could have done without, you can guess which ones.

—MCR

Response from John the Verbose

There is something to be said about the nostalgia for the Celtic tribal governments, in being able to decide legislation for what is best for the values of a given tribe. However, therein lies the heart of the reason why any tribal society falls or becomes subjugated. There was more intertribal conflict than there was cooperation, which is seen time and again throughout history.

The prospect of uniting tribes against a common enemy has always proven to be one of the most difficult tasks. Attempts to unite the tribes didn't work out so well for Vercingetorix. Arminius who barely united the Germanic tribes was later betrayed by his own people. The Saxons lost their old religion when the tribes failed to band together against Charlemagne. It took all of Brian Boru's lifetime to unite enough tribes to repel the Vikings, but even after that, the Irish, Cymry, and Scots did not band together so well against the Anglo-Normans.

In the Information Age, I think there are two sides of the coin that represent the threat of a lost culture. There is an abundance of academic documentation of history, religion, and culture here in the 21st century. Older antiquarian writings such as Frazer's "Golden Bough" have been largely discredited as we have since been able to put history into a much more accurate context. It is because of our desire to preserve our history that we should not have to fear our cultures being forgotten.

However, your point is still very valid, because we tend to write things down in order to preserve them. To that effect, oral traditions are indeed being lost for many cultures who have lived by those traditions. For example, Jussi Huovinen, the last man to have memorized the Finnish epic "The Kalevala" passed away this year [2017]. We may have been fortunate that his song was recorded so it will not be lost entirely, but at the same time, that oral tradition has effectively died now as well. At least now that it has been documented, if there's someone to take interest they could revive the tradition.

I think it's perfectly fine to be a purist in a tradition, granted that it isn't causing problems. Even in the RDNA I have been described as an orthodox Reformed Druid. Not Orthodox in the Christian sense, but by merit of the definition. Even then I would say a better word to use is orthoprax. Orthodoxy is the right way to believe, which is rather antithetical to the relatively non-dogmatic nature of the RDNA, whereas Orthopraxy is the right way to practice.

Solo Reformed Druids tend to be highly eclectic, but by and large, their individual customs go unnoticed by other Reformed Druids. One could argue that Eclectic RDNA is ephemeral. The bastion of adherence to tradition lies in the Third Order of the RDNA, the order of the priesthood and the governing body of the movement, also known as the Council of Dalon Ap Landu. Entering the priesthood and joining the council requires a rather strict adherence to the esoteric rite of passage. This is where orthopraxy and a pinch of orthodoxy intersect, and it typically only draws in the 'RDNA purists' so to speak.

Granted, this tradition is little more than half a century old, and like the other rituals and writings the founders produced, they openly acknowledge that it was all made up, citing that even the ancient druids were once young in their traditions (Book of Meditations 7:11). Their whole reason for being Reformed was to further acknowledge the discontinuity between the ancient druids and the neo-druids. In addition, they were Reformed because many of the old ways were deemed unacceptable to our modern sensibilities.

Even with the concept of Celtic Reconstructionism there is so much that we simply cannot know, which is also in part why the RDNA founders decided to make everything from scratch. If anything, some of the founders may have considered the RDNA as one possible viewpoint of how the ancient druids may have evolved over time had they not been eradicated.

Ultimately, I think you are correct in saying that many practices are going to be diluted by eclecticism. Aspects of cultures will continue to become lost. However, I still see the possibility of cultural attrition even in a tribal society. If eclecticism becomes the norm, I think we will always have those to champion the underdogs of dwindling traditions. Or, at the very least, there will be those who revive the lost traditions that had been documented.

Basic Values of Druids (TBA)

Druidry has no universally defined set of values, which makes it tricky to pin down. In terms of basic values, I can start with what druids might have in common.

Reverence for Nature: I 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: I often meet up with people who have an interest in druidry around the Minneapolis area, and one thing that almost all of us 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 druid 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 other druids see that the world is already saturated in darkness and try 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 I go out on a limb (oh the pun!) and cover additional values that I 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 [here] with their choice of verse. 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: I'm 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: I personally interpret this 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 and a balance of 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.

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 I mentioned balance. To avoid contradictions, I should mention that balance is good in most situations. 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, but I digress.) 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.

Healing: OMG HEALING!

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

Essay: Values

Are there any values not mentioned above that you think are important to many druids?
If so, will you please elaborate?



RDNA-Centric Druid Values

Based on the Chronicles of the Foundation, the Books of the Apocrypha, and the Liturgy of the Druids, what core values can be deduced for the RDNA?

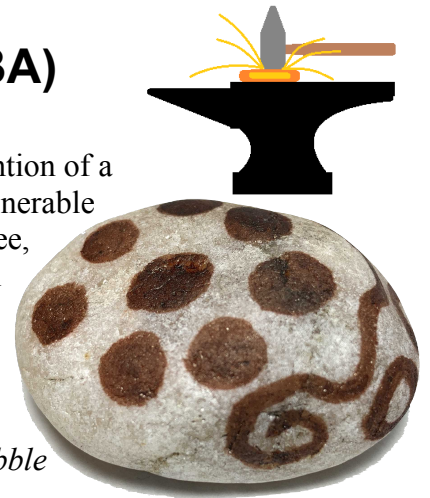
Symbols in Druidry (TBA)

Creative Topic: Pictish Painted Pebbles (TBA)

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 1945, pp. 146-147)

Editor’s note: *Druid’s Eggs* allegedly floated on water, too.

So I’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 I 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 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 I 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*. I suppose you could make a *Celtic Colorful Cobble*, though those aren't in the archaeological record, but I digress.



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.



Short Answer Essay: White Quartz Pebble

Standard Disclaimer

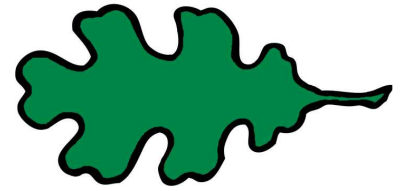
Ask your doctor if quartz is right for you. Don't eat rocks.

Where did you find your quartz pebble? [No wrong answer]

Did you chose to paint your pebble? [No wrong answer]

Impacts of Spiritual Practices

By S.C.

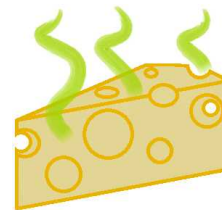


Many of our practices both in our spiritual and mundane every day lives has an effect on both the Earth and our fellow humans who inhabit it. For example, the New Age practice of using bundles of dried herbs, usually white sage, and often mislabeled as the native practice of *smudging* when in reality 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? (TBA)

One Druid's Treatise on 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 it's 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, until 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" who I have no way of knowing, further than our list of names or written family trees... ancestors thousands of years back.

What if our ancestors wouldn't approve of us venerating them?

Also, what if they were bad 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?

I am the culmination of millions of choices that my Deep Ancestors made. I'm also the culmination of everything they chose *not* to do. They were the ones who survived the odds to be progenitors of my lineage. If one of them made any one decision differently, I might not exist at all. They survived plagues, warfare, famines, and every number of tragedy. They survived everything that made life miserable before modern conveniences and support networks. No doubt some maternal ancestors died giving birth. Paternal ancestors left for war and never made it home. I feel like I owe them some sort of acknowledgment, but that doesn't mean everyone has to do the same.

A Reformed Druid Anthology — Mike's Comprehensive Curriculum (TBA)

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TBA this is gonna take up so much space I'm adding it last

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TBA cause if we split it into two different workbooks, one's gonna inevitably get ignored

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