



Oimele Issue Y.R. XLVIII

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Editor's Introduction:

I wish an outstanding Oimele to all of you! I am not including any articles on the holiday itself, so if you'd like a little background, please see <http://orgs.carleton.edu/Druids/ARDA2/doc/2part6-7.doc>

By this point in the winter, you probably have cabin fever, and can't wait for spring to arrive so that you can travel about outdoors again more comfortably. Originally, the theme for this issue was pilgrimage, but I'm putting that off, since I think New Year's Resolutions make a better subject. I vow to work harder on the next issue! I also included two long essays on "what is a religion?" re: shamanism and druidism, they are very lengthy but both address a core debate in Reformed Druidism, "what are we?"

The submissions deadline for the Spring Equinox issue is March 15th. The theme is pilgrimage, travel and interesting places. Believe me, I know you are busy on the internet too and see all kinds of strange stories and essays, so share them with me, maybe you could expand something a bit from a Druid perspective? mikerdna@hotmail.com



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News of the Groves



Sacred Groves

Below is a 2011 map of all the RDNA, RDG, MOCC groves that I am aware of, see the next page. No doubt, there are others too. If you are unsure who else shares your interest, write to me at mikerdna@hotmail.com A protogrove guidebook for start-ups is available at www.rdna.info/uwp.doc

A full listing of Grove can be found at www.rdna.info/wheretroves.html

I've recently updated the list of groves. As usual, many e-mails contact addresses have gone dead, so I assume that that person has lost interest and that the grove is closed, perhaps only temporarily.

Habitat Grove: News from Quebec

All is going well. Hit a few -30F days, but back to the freezing point. Been working on a bardic program for my little ones. Hoping to begin playing the harp again.

Putting together this newsletter is very helpful in keeping the embers burning, druidically for me. Work pressures are very intense and leaves little time for other pursuits.

Nine Oaks and Mystic Well Protogrove: News from Nevada

The Nine Oaks n Mystic Well protogrove's information is still the same as it was 3 years ago. We haven't gained any new members for a while and 2 others have branched off to form another protogrove. We will be starting public classes in April for the growth of the protogrove(s), as well as making personal contact with others of like mind.

Three Stone Protogrove: News from Nevada

* New E-mail contact (three.stones.protogrove@gmail.com)

There is 4 of us so far and a cat as the ArchDruid

We are more NRDNA and have a LOT of influences from ADF and AODA.

The Three Stones protogrove is a new listing entirely different from Nine Oaks n Mystic Well but both protogroves are still 'connected'.

We are VERY operational semi-public about to go public.

The Nine Oaks n Mystic Well is still an active protogrove which is on the East side of Vegas, we are in the SW side...we still gather under one banner from time to time yet we also hold different 'base rites' and different cultural aspect that are called upon and offered to.

Be so kind as to add the Three Stones protogrove in addition to the Nine Oaks n Mystic Well protogrove.

In the service of the Great Mother,

Brid Dana DragonWillow the first priestess of the holy fire and keeper of the cat treats of the ArchDruid.

Koad Grove: News from Ohio

Greetings, Michael,

The information for Koad Protogrove is accurate, although we are not shown on the map of Ohio.

We do have a website and it is located at <http://koadprotogroverdna.weebly.com/>

There were two ordinations, both completed at the Autumnal Equinox for Bran and Morgaine - they were made Druids of the 2nd Order.

Thank you!

Yours in the Mother,

Jean (Phagos) Pagano

Tuatha De Danann Grove: News from California

Mike, the Grove is still here in Hayward, still does its rituals, and still has me as AD. All is well, but we would of course like more members.

Yours in the Mother,

Jeffrey Sommer

Awen Grove: News from Alberta, Canada

Awen Grove is still kicking (just really busy!).

My email address is athelia143@yahoo.ca

We even have a decent website now: <http://awencanada.com>

Thanks and have a blessed New Year!

Athelia Nihtscada

Arch-Druid, Awen Grove Canada

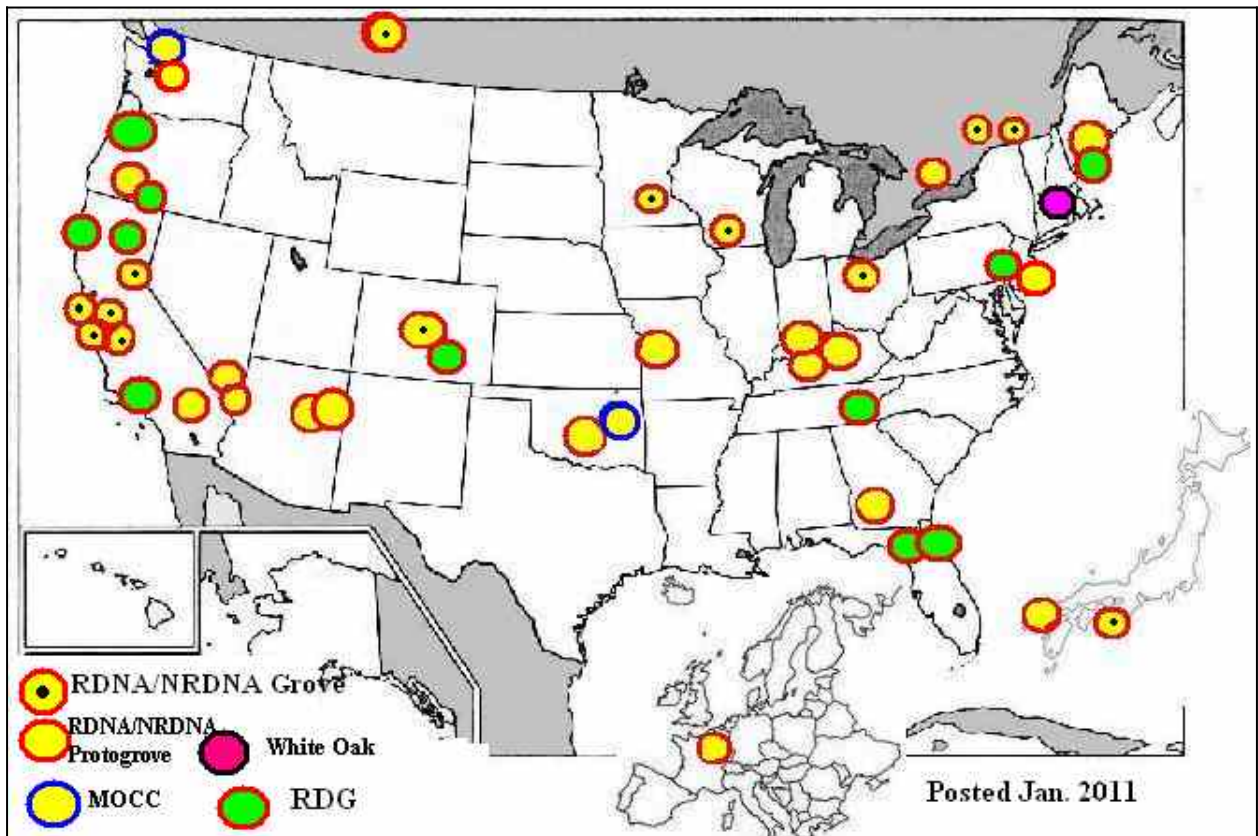
Hemlock Splinters Grove: News from New York State

Hemlock Splinters Grove is in hibernation. Archdruid Irony Sade has entered a long period of medical training and will be starting his emergency medicine residency next summer. The location of his new grove, if any, will be made known at that time.

Irony would love to meet with any other druidic pilgrims who pass through Upstate New York, and can be reached at Doc.Druid@gmail.com

See an article in this issue by Irony: [The Sociology of the RDNA.](#)

Where ARE the Groves in 2011?



Editor's Note: Please note that the Nemeton of DAL is an internal group for the RDG, and not the Order of DAL in the RDNA/NRDNA, but I pass this on as a significant change in RDG policy.

News from RDG folk about their new Organizational Body,

The **Nemeton of Dalon ap Landu (NoDaL)**, which acts as the legislative body of the **Reformed Druids of Gaia**, and which consists of all of the 3rd Degree members of the RDG, has voted that henceforth, if you receive the 3rd Degree, which is the degree of the Priesthood of Reformed Druidism, that you will participate in the deliberations and votes of the **NoDaL**, or risk loss of your degree.

There is no excuse for non-participation, since the NoDaL deliberates via a Yahoo group just like this one. Basically, if you have time to update your Facebook page, you have time to participate in the NoDaL.

One exception: if you already have the 3rd degree, you are not bound by this new requirement. It is only new 3rd degree Druids being elevated from this time forth that will be bound by this.

This provision goes into effect beginning today, 85 Geimredh 05
"So say we all!"

So Recorded on this, the 85th day of the Season of Geimredh,
in the 5th year of the 2nd Age of the Reformed Druids, by
Rev Druid Ellis S. Arseneau, OMS
Clerk of the Nemeton of Dalon ap Landu

Druids in the Media



http://www.comicbookreligion.com/?Religion=Druid/_Celtic_Pagan&Villain=1

Yes, just mentioning the Dr. Druid comic and all the other Celtic-themed superheroes again, that some fellow catalogued for us.

“Sheila Na Gig”

Ancient Church in Scotland



Modern Temple in Seattle for the Javacrucians.

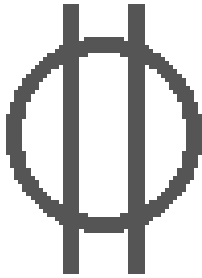


The ten most common resolutions are:

1. **Spend More Time with Family & Friends** These are the people we love and care about the most, who'd rather spend time with anyone else? These are the people who will help us and care for us in our time of need, and in the end, the ones who will remember us. Time is finite, and distractions are great, so make a conscientious decision to "pencil them into your schedule."
2. **Exercise More.** Regular exercise has been associated with more health benefits than anything else known to man. Studies show that it reduces the risk of some cancers, increases longevity, helps achieve and maintain weight loss, enhances mood, lowers blood pressure, and even improves arthritis. In short, exercise keeps you healthy and makes you look and feel better. We spend far too much time inside, get outside, visit nature a bit and escape the world of Man.
3. **Lose Weight/Look Better** Over 66 percent of adult Americans are considered overweight or obese by recent studies, so it is not surprising to find that weight loss is one of the most popular New Year's resolutions. Setting reasonable goals and staying focused are the two most important factors in sticking with a weight loss program, and the key to success for those millions of Americans who made a New Year's commitment. Moderation is the key, as you need to have a positive self-image and not hurt yourself.
4. **Quit Smoking** If you have resolved to make this the year that you stamp out your smoking habit, over-the-counter availability of nicotine replacement therapy now provides easier access to proven quit-smoking aids. Even if you've tried to quit before and failed, don't let it get you down. On average, smokers try about four times before they quit for good. It costs money, smells bad, and makes you sick.
5. **Enjoy Life More** Given the hectic, stressful lifestyles of millions of Americans, it is no wonder that "enjoying life more" has become a popular resolution in recent years. Take up a new hobby or try your hand at skiing. Go to a theater performance, or head to the local spa. Druids aren't out to make themselves miserable. Having fun doesn't necessarily mean spending money, the best things in life are generally free. A change of attitude can recolor the landscape around you.
6. **Quit Drinking** While many people use the New Year as an incentive to finally stop drinking, most are not equipped to make such a drastic lifestyle change all at once. Many heavy drinkers fail to quit cold turkey but do much better when they taper gradually, or even learn to moderate their drinking. This is one of the big three factors in most life-insurance questionnaires, and the source of most ills, missteps, mispeakings and accidents.
7. **Get Out of Debt** Was money a big source of stress in your life last year? Join the millions of Americans who have resolved to spend this year getting a handle on their finances. It's a promise that will repay itself many times over in the year ahead. Myself, I'm keeping a close record this January of all purchases to check my reasonable budget, and trying to anticipate annual expenses (insurance, driver's fees, taxes).
8. **Learn Something New** Druids are a curious lot, and pretty well educated. Keeping the brain active and interested has a big pick-me-up factor in enjoying life and company. Have you vowed to make this year the year to learn something new? Perhaps you are considering a career change, want to learn a new language, or just how to fix your computer? Whether you take a course or read a book, you'll find education to be one of the easiest, most motivating New Year's resolutions to keep.
9. **Help Others** A popular, non-selfish New Year's resolution, volunteerism can take many forms. Whether you choose to spend time helping out at your local library, mentoring a child, or building a house, there are many nonprofit volunteer organizations that could really use your help. Pick a reasonable number of hours, 2 or 3 hours a week, perhaps start close to home and

then work out until you find your niche where you make the most difference for the amount of effort.

10. **Get Organized** On just about every New Year resolution top ten list, organization can be a very reasonable goal. Whether you want your home organized enough that you can invite someone over on a whim, or your office organized enough that you can find the stapler when you need it. I started by going through closets in New Year's getting rid of clothes, books and toys that weren't being used. If I couldn't find a charity on a few days search, they were thrown out. 10 minutes a day is reasonable, and by focusing on a different room, keep back the beast of Chaos.



A few Druidic ones you might add:

1. Greener lifestyle
2. Celebrate the 8 festivals
3. Follow the Moon and Sun
4. Join/found a grove
5. Learn more songs or spells
6. Make a pilgrimage (see March 2011 issue for ideas)



Mike's Seven Resolutions for 2011

I'll tip my hand, and I hope you'll keep me accountable!

1. Keep my job. Times are tough and I love what I do.
2. Get in shape. Exercise and lose 30 pounds, goal is 175 lbs.
3. Get the Druid Inquirer out on time.
4. Build a New Song – Poem book for the kids.
5. Track finances more carefully.
6. Regular appointments for health check-ups, for all in the family.
7. Memorize more songs and rhymes, at least 70 in 2011.



Reconsidering Your Approach to Resolutions

Okay, so you have resolutions, great! Now how are you going to change your habits to accomplish them. As one pundit said, "We dream of reforming a nation, the accumulation of the habits of millions of men, but despair at reforming a single man." People are creatures of habit and a good trusted rut is hard to escape without some planning to outfox yourself.

A habit is any action that we have performed so often that it becomes almost an involuntary response. If we consider this

habit to be undesirable then we may label it a "bad habit." People spend countless hours and dollars each year attempting to break these bad habits and often do not have any success. Why? Because there is no magic bullet. Change is hard work and there is no short cut to achieving it. The steps a person needs to take, however, can be very simply outlined. To effect a change in habits, one needs to bring the action back into the realm of consciousness and regain the ability to make choices.

1. What's the Payoff?

The first step in breaking a bad habit is to look at why you find this action so compelling. In other words, what's the payoff for doing this seemingly negative thing? Since you've already classified this as a "bad" habit you may be tempted to say there isn't one. But look closer. There is always a payoff. Let's say your bad habit is yelling at your kids. What's in it for you? You let off some steam and feel a little better for the moment. Or you have a bad habit of leaving the dishes unwashed? The payoff could be that you get to spend more time on the Internet!

2. What's the Trade Off ?

Next, take a look at the trade off. What is it that you are losing by exercising your habit? This step should be easier. Just think why it is that you consider it a bad habit in the first place. Yelling at your kids is a bad habit because it leaves everybody feeling tense and tears down your children's self-esteem. You are trading a temporary release of tension for the emotional health of your children. Leaving the dishes undone is a bad habit because your kitchen is a smelly mess. To have more Internet time you are trading off having a pleasant living environment. When you look at it that way it doesn't seem like you are making very wise choices, does it? There has to be a better way.

3. Time to Make a Choice!

Now that you've weighed both sides of the issue--your payoff and your tradeoff--it's time to make a choice. It's no longer an involuntary act because now you know that you are making a choice every time you perform this action. You are choosing what you value more: the payoff or the tradeoff! Each time you start to do whatever the bad habit is now you have to actively choose. Which do you value more? Do you value more the relief you get by yelling at your kids or do you value their emotional well-being? Do you value more having more Internet time or having a pleasant place to live?

4. Substituting Better Behaviors

The whole reason you formed your habits in the first place is that they filled a need. You had tension that needed relief or you had a desire to surf the Net. As you break the old patterns you still need a way to fulfill these needs. You will be not only making an active choice to not do the old action you will also be making a choice to perform a better, alternative action in its place. Instead of yelling at your kids you might decide to go for a run every time you are feeling tense. Instead of letting dirty dishes pile up you may decide to use paper plates when you are eating alone. What the new habit is that you substitute isn't so important as whether you feel good about the choices you have made. After all, the reason you consider it a bad habit is because it leaves you feeling bad about yourself.

5. It's Up to You

By now you should realize that the only way to continue with a bad habit for very long is to sink back into denial of why you are doing it in the first place. Each time you begin to resume your old patterns the thought will pass through your mind that you are trading X for Y each time you perform that action. You will be forced to make a choice, whether good for bad, about continuing your habit. What choices will you make? The one that makes you feel bad about yourself or the one that makes you feel good? It's up to you.



Ten Tips for Avoiding Failure

By Mike the Fool, (with help of Ehow, USAA and Yahoo.)

New Year's is a time for a new start. Not everyone will admit to it, but we all have some sort of resolution. It's a time filled with great hope as we all look forward to what this New Year has to offer. What's disheartening are the statistics. Most people have resolutions, but very few stick with them.

1. **Be Realistic** - If you put too much focus on doing everything exactly right 100% of the time, you're more likely to just throw the whole plan out when you make a mistake. Rather than aiming for perfection, aim for a realistic expectation. You will miss workouts, and you will cheat on your diet. One missed day or one candy bar doesn't have to be the end of the whole plan. Be as kind to yourself as you would be to a friend and forgive yourself for your mistakes. There's always tomorrow.
2. **Aiming Reasonably** - Research suggests that setting the bar high for your weight loss expectations can help you to lose more weight. People who want to lose more weight understand that there's more work involved. So set your goal at whatever number you want, but focus on smaller incremental goals too. Aim to lose 1-2 pounds per week and if you lose more, great!
3. **Basing your goals on specifics** - While it's true that being overweight can harm your health in the long run, that kind of thinking may not feel urgent enough to keep you motivated. Instead, focus on the immediate benefits of weight loss or giving up smoking. Talk to your loved ones about how being out of shape affects them now. Think about how much better you feel about yourself when you exhibit healthy behaviors.
4. **Set a date** - While it's a good idea to think of adopting a diet and exercise plan for life, studies have shown that most people quit within the first month, before they have time to form a healthy workout habit. Rather than telling yourself you're going to workout forever, commit to a specific date 5 weeks from now. It's also a good idea to take it easy and workout 3 days a week for about 30 minutes a day. You'll find it easier to stick to if you don't overdo it.
5. **Have Benchmarks**. A 2008 study on savings habits asked some participants to plan how much they could save monthly and others how much they could save over the next year. At the beginning of the experiment, both groups estimated they could save about the same amount of money. But over time, the month-to-month savers built up much more money. Why? Monthly goals are smaller, so you can hit your marks more frequently and feel satisfied that you're making progress. With yearly goals, the numbers are so large they look unattainable, and you don't get the satisfaction reward until the very end. The lesson: No matter how much you're trying to save (or how much debt you're tackling), break your big goal into smaller benchmarks. Then track and reward yourself for making progress along the way.
6. **Buddy Up With Your Someone – And Let Others Know**. Maintaining any resolution is easier if you aren't going it alone. Research shows that self-control is catching. Surround yourself with people trying to master the same behaviors that you are — spending less, eating less — and you

all reap the rewards. Team up with your spouse and it could be great for your marriage. Tell everyone you know. One school of thought says that New Year's resolutions are best kept to oneself, but look at it this way: the more people to whom you announce your resolution (say, to get out of your dead-end job by spring), the more people there'll be to prod you along if you fall behind. There's no shame in seeking help if you can't accomplish your resolution on your own.

7. **Start Saving While it is Fashionable.** Spending money has always been enjoyable, but saving it is work. However, a recent survey found that four out of five say that they find saving money "fun." So much fun, in fact, that 93 percent say they won't return to their profligate ways even after the economy improves. The lesson? Go on a savings spree. A year or so from now, you'll be happy you did. The Scottish, as you'll remember, are a bit infamous for their thrift, make do with what you got, and nothing more.
8. **Do One Thing at a Time** Finally, although you may very well want to tackle that last \$1,000 in debt and those last 10 pounds, don't try to do both at once. Why? Because willpower is a limited resource. Your brain, he explains, can only be expected to focus intently on one goal at a time. So pick your battle, win it, and then move on to the next.
9. **Wait until spring.** Sometimes the best way to accomplish a New Year's resolution is to make it at a time of year of your choosing, rather than the one dictated by the calendar. May 1 is a good alternate date, since the change of season will neatly coincide with the change you're hoping to accomplish in yourself.
10. **Be honest.** Whatever changes you want to make this year, embrace them openly and honestly. Being realistic is your best bet for accomplishing your goals.
11. **Have a higher price for failure.** Make a written promise to someone who can enforce a high penalty for failure; perhaps something embarrassing, expensive or disgusting. Perhaps the stick might motivate you more than the carrot.



Resolutions, Oaths and the Celtic Tradition of Irish “Geis”

By Mike the Fool (with help from Wikipedia)

A **New Year resolution** is a commitment that an individual makes to one or more personal goals, projects, or the reforming of a habits. This lifestyle change is generally interpreted as advantageous. A New Years Resolution is generally a goal someone sets out to accomplish in the coming year. Some examples include resolutions to donate to the poor more often, to become more assertive, or to become more environmentally responsible. A key element to a New

Years Resolution that sets it apart from other resolutions is that it is made in anticipation of the New Year, and new beginnings.

There are religious parallels to this secular tradition. During Judaism's New Year, Rosh Hashanah, through the High Holidays and culminating in Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), one is to reflect upon one's wrongdoings over the year and both seek and offer forgiveness. People may act similarly during the Christian fasting period of Lent, though the motive behind this holiday is more of sacrifice than of responsibility. The concept, regardless of creed, is to reflect upon self-improvement annually.

Oaths

Recent research shows that while 52% of participants in a resolution study were confident of success with their goals, only 12% actually achieved their goals. A separate study in 2007 by Richard Wiseman from the University of Bristol showed that 78% of those who set New Year resolutions fail, and those who succeed have 5 traits in common.^[1] Men achieved their goal 22% more often when they engaged in [goal setting](#), (a system where small measurable goals are being set; such as, a pound a week, instead of saying "lose weight"), while women succeeded 10% more when they made their goals public and got support from their friends

An **oath** (from Anglo-Saxon *ǣð*, also called **plight**) is either a statement of fact or a promise calling upon something or someone that the oath maker considers sacred, usually God, as a witness to the binding nature of the promise or the truth of the statement of fact. To swear is to take an oath, to make a solemn vow.

The essence of a divine oath is an invocation of divine agency to be a guarantor of the oath taker's own honesty and integrity in the matter under question. By implication, this invokes divine displeasure if the oath taker fails in their sworn duties. It therefore implies greater care than usual in the act of the performance of one's duty, such as in testimony to the facts of the matter in a court of law.

A person taking an oath indicates this in a number of ways. The most usual is the explicit "I swear," but any statement or promise that includes "with * as my witness" or "so help me *," with '*' being something or someone the oath-taker holds sacred, is an oath. Many people take an oath by holding in their hand or placing over their head a book of [scripture](#) or a sacred object, thus indicating the sacred witness through their action: such an oath is called *corporal*. However, the chief purpose of such an act is for ceremony or solemnity, and the act does not of itself make an oath.



Geis

In Irish mythology and folklore, a *geis* (Irish pronunciation: [\[ˈɡeɪ\]](#); English: [\[ˈɡeɪ\]](#); plural *geasa*) is an idiosyncratic taboo, whether of obligation or prohibition, similar to being under a vow or spell. The Scottish Gaelic spelling "geas" is also seen.

Irish Mythology

A *geis* can be compared with a curse or, paradoxically, a gift. If someone under a *geis* violates the associated taboo, the infractor will suffer dishonor or even death. On the other hand, the observing of one's *geasa* is believed to bring power. Often it is women who place *geasa* upon men. In some cases the woman turns out to be a goddess or other sovereignty figure.^[2]

The *geis* is often a key device in hero tales, such as that of Cúchulainn in Irish mythology. Traditionally, the doom of heroes comes about due to their violation of their *geis*, either by accident, or by having multiple *geasa* and then being placed in a position where they have no option but to violate one *geis* in order to maintain another. For instance, Cúchulainn has a *geis* to never eat dog meat, and he is also bound by a *geis* to eat any food offered to him by a woman. When a hag offers him dog meat, he has no way to emerge from the situation unscathed; this leads to his death.

In fact it is a major driver of a lot of stories about people doomed to failure, once a certain action has been done. Usually, up to that point, things are going swimmingly well. The Cycle of the Fall of the Red House of Da Derga is another fine example that ends up with everyone dead (oops, spoiler!)

A beneficial *geis* might involve a prophecy that a person would die in a particular way; the particulars of their death in the vision might be so bizarre that the person could then avoid their fate for many years.¹



Welsh mythology

There is a considerable similarity between *geasa* (which are a phenomenon of Gaelic mythology) and the foretold deaths of heroes in Welsh mythology. This is not surprising given the close origins of many of the variants of Celtic mythology.

For example, the Welsh hero Lleu Llaw Gyffes (in one version of his story) was destined to die neither "during the day or night, nor indoors or outdoors, neither riding nor walking, not clothed and not naked, nor by any weapon lawfully made." He was safe until his wife, Blodeuwedd, learning of these foretold conditions,

convinced him to show her how he could theoretically be stepping out of a river onto a riverbank sheltered by a roof and put one foot on a goat, and so on, thus enabling the conditions that allowed him to be killed.

Parallels English literature

Prohibitions and taboos similar to *geasa* are also found in more recent English literature, though they are not described as *geasa* in those texts. For example, in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Macbeth believes himself safe because "no man of woman born shall harm Macbeth." Macduff, an enemy, was "from his mother's womb untimely ripp'd" (i.e., born by Caesarean section) and was therefore not "of woman born".

In law

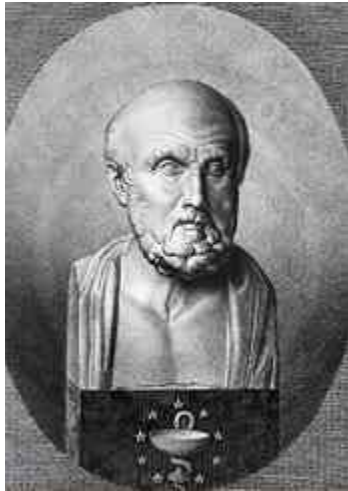
In law, oaths are made by a witness to a court of law before giving testimony and usually by a newly-appointed government officer to the people of a state before taking office. In both of those cases, though, an affirmation can be usually substituted. A written statement, if the author swears the statement is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is called an affidavit. The oath given to support an affidavit is frequently administered by a notary, who will certify the giving of the oath by affixing her or his seal to the document. Willfully delivering a false oath (or affirmation) is the crime of perjury.

In Western countries, it is customary to raise the right hand while swearing an oath, whether or not the left hand is laid on a Bible or other text. This custom originated during the Medieval period when convicted felons were often branded on the palm of the right hand with a letter or mark indicating their

conviction. Since felons were disqualified from making declarations under oath, an oath-taker would display their right hand to show that they were free of convictions and therefore able take an oath.

In Islamic tradition

Islamic theology takes the fulfillment of oaths most seriously. So much so that one of the sayings of the Muslim prophet Mohammad, commonly referred to as ahadith (singular hadith) instructs Muslims to "Make oaths only on Allah almighty, the Master of all beings, and protect them more than your lives" (Sahih Bukhari 45: 15).



Greco-Roman tradition

In the Roman tradition, oaths were sworn upon Iuppiter Lapis or the Jupiter Stone located in the Temple of Jupiter, Capitoline Hill. Iuppiter Lapis was held in the Roman Tradition to be an Oath Stone, an aspect of Jupiter is his role as divine law-maker responsible for order and used principally for the investiture of the oath-taking of office.

Bailey (1907) states:

We have, for instance, the sacred stone (silex) which was preserved in the temple of Iuppiter on the Capitol, and was brought out to play a prominent part in the ceremony of treaty-making. The fetial, who on that occasion represented the Roman people, at the solemn moment of the oath-taking, struck the sacrificial pig with the silex, saying as he did so, 'Do thou, Diespiter, strike the Roman people as I strike this pig here to-day, and

strike them the more, as thou art greater and stronger.' Here no doubt the underlying notion is not merely symbolical, but in origin the stone is itself the god, an idea which later religion expressed in the cult-title specially used in this connection, Iuppiter Lapis.

Walter Burkert has shown that since Lycurgus of Athens (d. 324 BC), who held that "it is the oath which holds democracy together", religion, morality and political organization had been linked by the oath, and the oath and its prerequisite altar had become the basis of both civil and criminal, as well as international law.

The Hippocratic Oath for medical practitioners is the most famous of Greek oaths.

Jewish tradition

The concept of oaths is deeply rooted within Judaism. It is found in Genesis 8:21, when God swears that he will "never again curse the ground because of man and never again smite every living thing." This repetition of the term *never again* is explained by [Rashi](#), the preeminent biblical commentator, as serving as an oath, citing the Talmud for this ruling.

The first personage in the biblical tradition to take an oath is held to be Eliezer, the chief servant of Abraham, when the latter requested of the former that he not take a wife for his son Isaac from the daughters of Canaan, but rather from among Abraham's own family. In the Judeo-Christian Tradition, this is held as the origination of the concept that it is required to hold a sacred object in one's hand when taking an oath.

Christian tradition

As late as 1880, Charles Bradlaugh was denied a seat as an MP in the Parliament of the United Kingdom as because of his professed atheism he was judged unable to swear the Oath of Allegiance in spite of his proposal to swear the oath as a "matter of form".

Various religious groups have objected to the taking of oaths, most notably the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and Mennonites. This is principally based on Matthew 5:34-37, the Antithesis of the Law. Here, Christ is written to say "I say to you: 'Swear not at all'". The Apostle James stated in James 5:12, "Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned." Beyond this scriptural authority, Quakers place importance on being truthful at all times, so the testimony opposing oaths springs from a view that "taking legal oaths implies a double standard of truthfulness...."^[6]

Not all Christians understand this reading as forbidding all types of oaths, however. Opposition to oath-taking among some groups of Christian caused many problems for these groups throughout their history. Quakers were frequently imprisoned because of their refusal to swear loyalty oaths. Testifying in court was also difficult; George Fox, Quakers' founder, famously challenged a judge who had asked him to swear, saying that he would do so once the judge could point to any Bible passage where Jesus or his apostles took oaths. (The judge could not, but this did not allow Fox to escape punishment.) Legal reforms from the 18th century onwards mean that everyone in the United Kingdom now has the right to make a solemn affirmation instead of an oath. The United States has permitted affirmations since it was founded; it is explicitly mentioned in the Constitution. Only two US Presidents, Franklin Pierce and Herbert Hoover (who was a Quaker), have chosen to affirm rather than swear at their inaugurations.



Germanic tradition

Germanic warrior culture was significantly based on oaths of fealty, directly continued into medieval notions of chivalry.

A prose passage inserted in the eddic poem *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* relates:

Hedin was coming home alone from the forest one Yule-eve, and found a troll-woman; she rode on a wolf, and had snakes in place of a bridle. She asked Hedin for his company. "Nay," said he. She said, "Thou shalt pay for this at the *bragarfull*." That evening the great vows were taken; the sacred boar was brought in, the men laid their hands thereon, and took their vows at the *bragarfull*. Hedin vowed that he would have Sváva, Eylimi's daughter, the beloved of his brother Helgi; then such great grief seized him that

he went forth on wild paths southward over the land, and found Helgi, his brother.

Such Norse traditions are directly parallel to the "bird oaths" of late medieval France, such as the *voeux du faisan* (oath on the pheasant) or the (fictional) *voeux du paon* (oath on the peacock).



A small article on how it can be seen differently and what can be done afterward.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Willem Hartman

Introductory note

This article is based upon my own experience and represents my personal opinion on ADHD, on Counseling and on Coaching. I do not give medical advice. The suggestions for seeing ADHD are not to be followed as therapy and I do not in any way discourage anyone to see a regular doctor and/or specialized help.

It is not an article on Druidism, but I believe it is certainly Druid-related, especially Reformed Druidism. The way I live the Reform is all about seeing things differently. It takes a shift in world-view to consider oneself to be part of a movement which is basically rebellious, wise, humorous, Discordian and seeks awareness in Nature. It is a tradition, but has no dogma. It is a movement, but everyone speaks for themselves.

I know about ADHD firsthand. I have a lot of trouble keeping my attention, but have a high degree of hyperfocus for certain things. I can be very impulsive, but I'm not hyperactive. It also seems to run in the family - it seems genetic. Over the last three years I have learned to use several approaches effective in dealing with the condition. They are purely behavioral, I use no medication - yet they work very well.

Whilst they work for me - they may not for another, so I'm asking the reader to think for themselves and not follow me blindly or take me as a medical adviser.

The trouble with ADHD

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. There are commonly three factors which are considered to be the 'core' of ADHD. They are:

- ⤴ problems with attention
- ⤴ problems with impulsiveness
- ⤴ problems with regulating the intensity of activity levels

As the reader can see, the central idea is the conception of the condition as a 'problem'. Of course having to live with ADHD and/or living with someone who does can be at times stressing and difficult.

Yet one can wonder about the possible implication of a negative view. What if, if only for argument's sake, you turn the issue around? Instead of seeing the problems, just see the gains for a moment. Try it. If you're uncomfortable with this exercise, then only do it for a few seconds. If you can summon up a bit more courage, then try it a bit longer. Change the point of view for a brief moment.

Observing ADHD from up close I found that there are also other elements. I found the following:

- ⤴ deep emotional and social sensitivity
- ⤴ high levels of creativity and imagination
- ⤴ lots of enthusiasm, joy and energy

I call these the *Positive AD Elements*.

Central to this analysis, looking at the nouns, are '*emotion*', '*creative and imagination*' and '*enthusiasm*'. When we put our attention on the adverbs we may say that ADHD people go '*deep*', '*high*' and have '*lots*'.

How to use these elements? What to do when you have ADHD or are with someone who has? How to deal with deep emotions, high imagination and truckloads of joy? Emotions are good, but deep emotions can block us from behaving normally in a group and lead to social exclusion. Imagination is great, but can make us daydream away when we should be

paying attention to something crucial and creativity is formidable but turns into a problem when we jump from one thing to the other. And finally, joy is fantastic but it can burn everything around us when it is boundless and unchecked.

I found in my own practice that the most fruitful way of dealing with the Positive AD Elements lie with two basic skills.

They are:

- ^ counseling skills
- ^ coaching skills



These skills aren't hard to learn. One doesn't have to become a professional Counselor or Coach, though you can if you want to.

1) The first step in both domains is to engage yourself in a form of personal development. Learn about yourself, your mind, your feelings and behavior and learn how to improve yourself. It is a process that never ends and it is entirely integrated into the other steps.

2) The second step is to learn how to listen, to be empathic, to end criticism and judgments in human relations and replace these old behaviors with asking questions and being open-minded.

In Counseling we first learn to become acquainted with and apply three core conditions:

1. personal integrity
2. empathy
3. unconditional positive regard

Once these capacities are learned and applied we can move on to learning basic *listening* skills. Basic listening skills are both easy and difficult. They are easy because, well... because it's easy to hear and consequently easy to listen. Yet they are difficult because we haven't been trained to do so. At school, and for most of us at home as well, we learn a lot of skills - but not listening. I think it's time to change that. I think that if we want to continue to grow as individuals and perhaps even as a species then we need to focus on learning to listen.

Active or Empathic Listening requires, among other skills:

- ^ giving your full attention to another
- ^ not grafting your own story into the story of the speaker
- ^ not criticizing, nor judging
- ^ being able to retell the story, by summary or paraphrasing
- ^ asking questions with the motive of understanding

It takes time to learn to truly Listen, but the time is well worth it. Start today, start now (and start with listening to yourself and anyone near you).

3) The Third step is to start using two basic coaching techniques. They are easy to do - they are:

- ^ goal realization and
- ^ reframing.

a) *goal realization*:

1. set a goal
2. act
3. face the problems appearing during action
4. use problem solving techniques
5. act anew and
6. evaluate after completion of set goal

This is a Coaching sequence. It is logical, simple and effective. It integrates the Counseling skills of Listening and Questioning, right at the moment when we are faced with the arising problems (step 3).

b) In Coaching we learn to affirm the positive side of things. We learn to *reframe*. ADHD behavior can be reframed in the following way:

▲ See negative behavior and consequences as due to outside influence and see positive ones as due to inside influence.

This seems like cheating, I know. Maybe it is, maybe it's not. It difficult to see, since things are naturally neutral, neither positive nor negative and root causes are hard to determine. *It's basically a form of re-writing reality.*

If you have ADHD and you lose attention on the job, then blame it on something outside of you, for instance you got called away by someone, or even on the weather. Yet if you have ADHD and you perform an excellent job due to your high imagination and creativity, then take the compliment and see it as part of your talents.

Increased self-assurance and self-esteem are a direct result of this strategy. It could become harmful though, if it isn't followed up by some further personal development (see step n° 1), where you actually learn new ways of how not making the same mistakes again and how to consolidate and expand successes.

4) The Fourth step is to see the world in a new way. We are almost all trained to see problems before opportunities. And so when we are faced with someone who displays ADHD behavior, we see them (and the condition) as a disease, a disorder, a problem. This is not fruitful, yet I'm aware that it is far better than not seeing it as an inherent condition at all and viewing it through moralistic eyes, judging the person and their family.

When we see what increased sensitivity, emotional deepness, imagination and enthusiasm can bring us, we will be for the better.

I firmly believe that "attention different people" can be, and in fact are, a source of innovation, insight, strength and invention. When Creativity and Imagination are harnessed in such a way that they become functional and no longer a problem, we can create the highest art, come up with new ways of facing challenges, in whatever domain; societal, technological or ecological. When Emotional deepness has been trained to be effective and no longer a stumbling block we can become truly *empathic* and empathy is needed for the 21st century.

Conclusion

When I started to use a new point of view for ADHD myself, I had to come up with new terminology. One of the problems with the term ADHD is that it has the words 'Deficit' and 'Disorder'. While I'm not saying that these terms are wrong in themselves, I found it more useful to avoid these terms, since they determine the approach of the condition. I replaced the word ADHD with Different Attention, and started to call ADHD people 'Different Attention People' (DAP). I did leave it out of the article, to avoid too much confusion.

The shift in world-view, my invitation to the reader to use paradigm shifting techniques, are strong when applied to ourselves.

For those who are dealing with people in their midst who have attention different issues it is more delicate. The shift from seeing the condition as a disease to seeing it as a talent or gift lies first of all with you. You cannot change the way someone else experiences reality, only your own. Yet when you have made the shift, it is more facilitating for the other to do so themselves. When the other is a child it is even more difficult, especially if the child is ours, for reasons of strong emotional attachment.

Afterword

This is only a small article and I have not mentioned any useful exercises for training ourselves with the first steps. This will be a follow up article to be published soon.

I wish to share the article with anyone interested. It may be copied and spread freely - just don't change the content while keeping my name as the author please.

Blessings of Nature and Awareness upon everyone. /I\
Willem Hartman

I offer these words to Brighid

by: Melissa S Burchfield

Beautiful Lady, let me love you with the pen in my hand,
Crafting for you, capturing the very power of written word
And holding it as an offering for you.

I offer these words, written with such beauty and care,
And yet these words need a voice to fill them with magic.
Inspiring Woman, let me love you with the words in my mouth,
Giving them depth and breadth, giving them energy for motion
And propelling them forth as an offering for you.

I offer these words, spoken with such eloquence and beauty,
And yet these words must be infused with love to give them flight.

Gracious Goddess, let me love you with the song in my heart.

Let my voice rise to the loftiest heights of the heavens with your name upon my lips
And resound deep within the Earth as I sing your praises.

I offer these words, filled with love and wrapped in song
That they may be worthy to be held in the palm of your hand.

--

Blessings,

Melissa Burchfield

Members' Advocate, ADF





Shamanism: Is it a Religion?

August 1, 2010 |
by Michael Berman

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<http://www.penton.co.za/?p=68>

Editor's Note: I picked this article due to the interest of Stacey in William, as seen in their recent articles to this publication. It is also interesting in that he tackles the definition of religion and shows the great diversity of spiritual practices out there. My conclusion was that Shamanism is similar to Yoga, Zen, Tai Chi and Reformed Druidism in that while there are ceremonies and repetitive practices and experienced practitioners, it can be adapted by several other faiths, or be a practice that satisfies the needs of a person, by itself, even if it lacks some of the accoutrements of a "regular religion".

The question of whether Shamanism is a religion, a way of life, or a methodology will be considered, and the implications that this has on the attitude towards, and serious study of the subject. Even acknowledged experts in the field appear to skirt the issue of whether Shamanism can be regarded as a religion or not. It would seem that for some people the word religion has negative connotations and they do their best to avoid it at all costs – partly perhaps because it is unfashionable, partly perhaps because it is so difficult to define.

The intention in this paper, however, is to tackle the question head-on, in the hope of contributing something new to the discussion.

The Pagan Federation defines Paganism as the practice of polytheistic or pantheistic nature-worshipping religions, and includes Shamanism under its umbrella. It will be argued, however, that whether Shamanism is actually pantheistic or not is debatable, and perhaps something that needs to be reconsidered.

It would seem that for some people the word religion has negative connotations and they do their best to avoid it at all costs – partly perhaps because it is unfashionable, partly perhaps because it is so difficult to define. If you asked everyone you know to come up with a definition of religion, it is highly unlikely any two of them would be able to agree. That is because there are so many factors involved – the religion of your parents, your education, your cultural background, and so on. Neo-shamanic movements tend to take the view that shamanism is opposed to institutionalized religion and political systems and refer to a democratization of shamanism in which everyone can be empowered to become their own shaman. They think of shamanism not so much as a religion but as “a view of reality and an effective technique” (Vitebsky, 2001, p.151). To see the world through rose-coloured spectacles is a view of reality and working out in a gym might be an effective technique for losing weight. However, both expressions used to refer to shamanism do nothing but trivialize the role it has played in the lives of people. To be fair to Vitebsky, however, it should be pointed out he is referring here to what he believes those he has studied think and not necessarily to what he thinks himself.



Michael Berman

Drury asserts that “It is possible to speak of shamanism as a universal mode linking man with the

cosmos by means of the magical journey” (Drury, 1982, p. xi), Halifax refers to shamanism as “an ecstatic religious complex” (Halifax, 1991, p.3), Jakobsen labels it a “complex of behaviour” (Jakobsen, 1999, p.6), Walsh calls shamanism “a religious tradition, implying that it has definite religious elements but may not always meet sociologists’ technical definition of religion” (Walsh, 1990, pp.12-13), Ingerman describes it as a “system” and “a path to accessing spiritual information” (Ingerman, 1993, p.4), and Harner considers shamanism to be a methodology rather than a religion. He says “Shamanism represents the most widespread and ancient methodological system of mind-body healing known to humanity” (Harner, 1990, p.40).

As William James points out, “the process of remedying inner incompleteness and reducing inner discord is a general psychological process, which may take place with any sort of mental material, and need not necessarily assume the religious form” (James, 1982, p.175). But are the above definitions really meaningful and appropriate ways of describing what shamanism is? Let us take a closer look at them.

As for a universal mode, a universal mode of what? And what is a religious complex? Does the noun here refer to a group of similar buildings or facilities on one site, an abnormal mental state resulting from past experience or suppressed desires, or an extremely strong concern or fear? None of these dictionary definitions of the word would seem to be at all appropriate. Perhaps we are supposed to assume the word complex is being used here to refer to practices related to spiritual matters which take a particular form, but the meaning is not at all clear. The term religious tradition at least employs the word that seems to frighten so many people in its adjectival form. But a religious tradition belonging to whom and consisting of what? Various classes offered to members of Health Clubs are described as systems of mind-body healing but we know for a fact shamanism has played a much greater role than such sessions do in people’s lives. Those looking for a path to accessing spiritual information, might find one reading the daily horoscope in a tabloid or gazing into a crystal ball. As for a methodology, the collocations the methodology of language teaching and the methodology of research are in common use but it is doubtful whether the term is particularly apt or illuminating to refer to shamanism.

It could be argued that Drury, Halifax, Jakobsen, Walsh, Ingerman and Harner are intentionally begging the question and they are not alone in this respect. Another way of avoiding the issue can be found in the following quote taken from an article by Hultkrantz. “For some people religion is supposed to mean institutionalized religion with a priesthood and a growing class society. In this light, shamanism is of course a pre-religious phenomenon” (Hultkrantz, 1988, p.36). Hultkrantz has also referred to shamanism as “a religious configuration” (a mythico-ritual system) (Backman and Hultkrantz 1978, pp. 10-11), but this too can be seen as a way of avoiding the question of whether it is a religion or not.

If religion refers to the experience of the sacred rather than belief in a God or gods, then this is surely what is experienced by not only the shaman but also those who witness or participate in his practices. It can consequently be argued both shamanism and neo-shamanism can be classified under the heading of religion. The problem, however, is that this might not be a heading that neo-shamanists would necessarily be comfortable with.

Jung once described religions as “psychotherapeutic systems ... We [psychotherapists] are trying to heal the suffering of the human mind, of the human psyche or the human soul, and religion deals with the same problem” (Jung, 1977, p.162). And shamanism can surely be classified as one such system in that it is made use of by healers and therapists. It is unlikely, however, that many believers would be prepared to accept that this is all that a religion consists of.

Radin suggests religion includes “a belief in spirits outside of man, conceived of as more powerful than man and as controlling all those elements in life upon which he lays most stress” (Radin, 1957, p.3). However, some neo-shamanists would argue that “rather than there actually being other universes, [and spirits outside of man] the beliefs and associated rituals [can] serve to dramatize aspects of the quest within” (Heelas, 1996, p.89). They might also be of the opinion that through shamanic practices we can in fact take control of our lives. Consequently, this definition would seem to be unsatisfactory too.

Durkheim, the father of the sociology of religion, defines religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions—beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church” (Durkheim, 2001, p.46). A church is defined as “A society whose members are united because they share a common conception of the sacred world and its relation to the profane world, and who translate this common conception into identical practices” (Durkheim, 2001, p.43) and does not necessarily require a building to operate in.

He differentiates between religion and belief in magic by suggesting that the latter does not unite those who practice it into a group leading a common life (see Jones, 1986, pp. 115-155). There are, however, both solitary witches who celebrate their beliefs by themselves and societies of magicians. Consequently, there would seem to be both religions without any churches as well as moral communities of magicians, and for these reasons it has to be concluded that Durkheim’s definition is far from being all-inclusive. Moreover, is a religion merely a moral community or is it not in fact something more than that?

According to Durkheim “There is religion when the sacred is distinguished from the profane, and we have seen that totemism is a vast system of sacred things” (Durkheim, 2001, p.136). He also makes the point that “In addition to being a spiritual discipline, every religion is a kind of practice that allows man to face the world with more confidence” (Durkheim, 2001, p.142). Having a practitioner to act as a mediator on behalf of the community would certainly allow its members to face the world with more confidence. However, it has to be said that not only religion allows people to do this with more confidence. Being a member of a football supporters club or a political organization might have just the same effect too.

Max Muller saw all religion as “an effort to conceive of the inconceivable and to express the inexpressible, an inspiration toward the infinite” (Muller, 1873, p.18). Unlike Durkheim’s, this is a more poetic definition but it is surely something man could attempt to do on his own so is what is being defined necessarily a religion?

William James defined religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider to be the divine. Since the relation may be either moral, physical, or ritual, it is evident that out of religion in the sense in which we take it, theologies, philosophies, and ecclesiastical organizations may secondarily grow” (James, 1982, p.31).

However, it has to be remembered that James considered institutions to be compromisers of the religious impulse, which is probably why the definition makes no mention of the communal places of worship in which most religions are practiced or the organizations that regulate and monitor such practice. Jean Houston points out, referring specifically to shamanism, it is possible to have spiritual experience and revelation direct and unmediated by institutional structures and doctrine. And she comments on how this appeals to those who seek autonomy in the spiritual journey (Houston, 1987, p. vii). This aspect of shamanism would presumably have appealed to James too, though clearly not to those who consider institution and doctrine to be an integral part of religious life.

William James considered prayer to be religion in act. “It is prayer that distinguishes the religious phenomenon from such similar or neighboring phenomena as purely moral or aesthetic sentiment ... the very movement itself of the soul, putting itself in a personal relation of contact with the mysterious power of which it feels the presence, – it may be even before it has a name by which to call it. Wherever this interior prayer is lacking, there is no religion” (James, 1982, p.464).

However, can it be said shamans pray in any conventional sense of the word? Does negotiating with the spirits consist of prayer? The answer must surely be that it does not, and indigenous shamans would of course certainly not describe what they do in such terms. Consequently, if we accepted this definition of religion, shamanism would find itself excluded. Another approach to defining religion is to consider the characteristic forms religion takes, which is what Ninian Smart does. He considers most religions have seven main dimensions: the experiential, the mythic, the doctrinal, the ethical, the ritual, the social/instructional, and the material. From this Chrissydes concludes that a group of people can be said to constitute “a religious group if

they operate functionally as a religion – that is to say, if they offer a means of coping with the key events and the adversities and misfortunes of life, using the key characteristics of religious practice which are identified by scholars such as Smart” (Chrissydes, 1999, pp.14-15).

However, whether such people wish to regard themselves as a religious group or not is another matter, as is evident from the widespread fear of the word that seems to prevail within certain circles these days. Although the shaman was believed to possess the power to shape-shift, the ordinary man was basically uninterested in such questions and “accepted the interpretations of the shaman in his capacity as formulator just as he accepted the fact that the shaman alone possessed the power of transforming himself into an animal” (Radin, 1957, p.206). As Eliade points out, “wherever the immediate fate of the soul is not at issue, wherever there is no question of sickness (= loss of the soul) or death, or of misfortune, or of a great sacrificial rite involving some ecstatic experience, the shaman is not indispensable [to the shamanist] as a large part of religious life takes place without him” (Eliade, 1989, p.8).

It can be seen from this example how shamanism differs from the more universally accepted religions, in that the shamanist rarely participated actively in religious life, unlike a regular churchgoer, for example. A case can be made for regarding both shamanism and neo-shamanism as a way of life, so making it possible for people of any religious persuasion to make use of the techniques. The cynic would say this has the added advantage of providing the means for such practitioners to attract larger fee-paying audiences to their workshops. The way in which shamanism can be practiced alongside other religious beliefs, in the manner described in the following quote, gives further support to the case for regarding shamanism to be more a way of life than a distinct religion:

[In the case of the Kazak-Kirgiz *baqca*, the shamanic séance] begins with an invocation to Allah and the Moslem saints, and continues with an appeal to the jinni and threats to the evil spirits. The *baqca* sings on and on. At a certain moment the spirits take possession of him, and during this trance he “walks barefoot over red-hot iron” and several times introduces a lighted wick into his mouth. He touches the red-hot iron with his tongue and “with a knife,

sharp as a razor, strikes at his face, leaving no visible mark.” After these shamanic exploits he again invokes Allah: “O God, bestow happiness! Oh, deign to look on my tears! I implore thy help! ...” Invocation of the Supreme God is not incompatible with shamanic healing, and we shall find it again among some peoples of extreme northeastern Siberia (Eliade, 1989, pp.219-220).

[The quotes are taken from “Magie et exorcisme chez les Kazak-Kirghizes et autres peuples turcs orientaux,” by J. Castagne].

In view of the fact shamanism has no catalogue of doctrines or index of moral declarations, no buildings in which to honour its deities, no prayers to be recited, no hierarchy of power, and there is no devotion to a messianic cause, in the eyes of many it is doubtful whether it can be called religious. Hultkrantz, however, believes that since the supernatural world is the world of religion, shamanism can be said to play a religious role. On the other hand, the Hungarian researcher Mihaly Hoppal proposes a more secularized interpretation of its practices. “Shamanism is a complex system of beliefs which includes the knowledge of and belief in the names of helping spirits in the shamanic pantheon, the memory of certain texts (sermons, shaman-songs, legends, myths, etc.), the rules for activities (rituals, sacrifices, the technique of ecstasy, etc.) and the objects, tools and paraphernalia used by shamans (drum, stick, bow, mirror, costumes, etc.). All these components are closely connected by beliefs given in the shamanic complex ... [Shamanism is] an overtly altruistic ideology which, in our egoistic and materialistic times, contains a decisively positive program for life (Nicholson, 1987, p.95).

So Hultkrantz believes shamanism plays a religious role and Hoppal refers to it as an ideology. From this it can be concluded shamanism both is and is not a religion and we are left even more confused than before. On the one hand it stands apart from institutionalized religion, and yet at the same time it participates in an ancient mystical tradition that possibly predates all others.

If it is agreed shamanism is more a set of techniques than a philosophy and organization, which is currently the most commonly held view, it would perhaps be inaccurate to describe it as a religion per se. There remains, however, another possibility, yet

to be considered, which is that shamanism, particularly in its classic form is not a religion, methodology, a way of life or a set of practices but a religion of ritual observance, centered on the dramatization of the death and resurrection of the shaman (rather than the figure of the King as in Ancient Egypt, Babylon and Canaan) in whom the well-being of the client and of the whole community rests.

It is customary for religions to involve some sort of ritual observance, such as the sacraments of Christianity, the five daily prayers facing Mecca of Islam, or the elaborate rituals of Tibetan Buddhism. Indeed, as Gray (2004) points out, a strong case can be made for the fact that the heart of spiritual life is not to be found in doctrine but lies in practice in ritual, observance and sometimes even mystical experience. If we consider some of the major religions for example nothing as simple as a creed can be extracted from the complex practices of Hinduism, Buddhism has never attached importance to doctrine, and in Judaism priority is given to practice rather than belief and this applies to some Sufi traditions too.

The phrase religion of ritual observance has been used in particular to describe Shinto – “a religion not of theology but of ritual observance” (Driver, 1991, p.38)1. But it would seem to me that much the same could be said of shamanism. The advantage of this description is that it is more likely to be acceptable to New-Agers who might consider the word religion on its own to be an unacceptable way of describing what they practice, as well as to members of the predominant religions who might consider, for various reasons, that shamanism should not be included among their number. Having considered the various options, it is this description that will finally be settled on.

Other religions, apart from Shinto, could also be listed under this heading, Wicca for example. As in the case of Shinto, there is no one bible or prayer book in Wicca and the primary concern is not ethics, dogma, or theology. Rather, it is a religion of ritual practice. These practices include marking eight holiday sabbats in the wheel of the year, falling on the solstices, equinoxes and the four cross quarter days on or about the first of February, May, August and November. Many Wiccans also mark esbats, rituals for worship in accordance with a given moon phase (such as the night of the full moon).

The Australian Aborigines can be said to practice a religion of ritual observance too as James Cowan expressively conveys “[T]he Aborigines have made the face of the earth their Bhagavad Gita, their Torah, their Bible or Koran. Indeed ‘the Dreaming’ is the Aboriginal Ark of the Covenant which they have been carrying about the Australian continent since the beginning of time” (Cowan, 1992, pp.2-3).

According to William James, personal religious experience has its basis in mystical states of consciousness and these can be recognized by the four qualities they share. First of all, such states are ineffable – in other words, they have to be directly experienced as they cannot be imparted to others in any other way. Secondly, they have a noetic quality in that they appear to those who experience them to be states of knowledge. Thirdly, they are transient and do not last, and fourthly their passivity. For although the oncoming of mystical states may be facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations, once the state has set in, the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance and held by a superior power (see James, 1982, pp.379-381). By this definition, the genuine ecstatic shamanic state is clearly mystical.

It is also the case that Shamans ... “are separated from the rest of the community by the intensity of their own religious experience. In other words, it would be more correct to class shamanism among the mysticisms than with what is commonly called a religion” ... A comparison at once comes to mind – that of monks, mystics, and saints within Christian churches (Eliade, 1964, p.8). Consequently, it might in fact be more correct to describe shamanism as a mystical form of religion of ritual observance. Moreover, as Joseph Dan points out “A unique characteristic of mysticism that is opposed, in most cases, to ordinary religious experience is the denial of the languages’ ability to express religious truth ... [with mystics claiming] that truth lies beyond any possibility of expression by terms derived from sensual experience or logical deduction” (Dan, 2006, p.9). No doubt the majority of shamanic practitioners would share this view, based on the difficulty encountered in conveying to others in words what they experience on their “journeys”, another reason for incorporating the word “mystical” into the definition.

In regarding shamanism as a religion, I am not a lone voice. Albanese (1992) sees such groups as

forming a kind of religion too in that they have cultus, code, creed and community, and so fulfill the criteria she deems necessary before a religion can be classified as such. Further evidence to support the case for classifying shamanism under the heading of religion can be found in the following extract from an article by Ripinsky-Naxon (1992). “The essential core of shamanism or any religious institution, for that matter, can be described by the fact that it consists of a system of rituals and beliefs – not necessarily a codified corpus of dogma which defines its mystical character. ... Ancient and classic shamanism was not characterized by a common object of worship (e.g. a sun-god or a Buddha) or by a codified body of scriptures. Traditional shamanism has consisted of specific techniques and ideologies that could be used to address issues and problems of spiritual concern. ... From time to time, a voice is heard challenging shamanism as a religion on the grounds that it lacks a body of scriptures and a priestly hierarchy, in contrast to the recognized world religions. Such claims, however, cannot divest genuine shamanism of its ritualism, spiritualism, magico-mythic elements, and eschatology—all the essential ingredients of a bona fide religious complex. ... Any genuine numinous and mystical experience of the preternatural, be it highly personal or structured by codices, must be recognized as part of a religious phenomenology. As such it must fall within the domain of religion.”

In *Altai shamanism* (1991) Popatov makes out a strong case for regarding shamanism as a religion too. He suggests that to make a judgment about a religion, we need to look into its content and argues that the foundation of shamanism is a specific shamanic world view that incorporates universal religious canons which are also characteristic for many other religious traditions. These include the concept of a three-layered universe with its heavenly, earthly and underworld spheres, a so-called world tree that connects the different spheres together, and the universal concept of the world mountain (see Znamenski, 2003, pp.211-213).

If we define religion as “a category label used in [modern] Western societies to cover belief in transcendental power or deity, rituals expressing that belief, a group’s worldview or cosmology, and myths explaining the works of the power or deity and associated beings” (Kehoe, 2000, p.25) and if we accept that organizations or communities in which these sorts of behaviour can be practiced and

taught are labeled religions, we can thus conclude there are religions with cosmological systems that incorporate the use of shamanic techniques, just as there are religions with cosmological systems that incorporate the use of Christian practices, scattered around the world. And by classifying shamanism as a religion in this manner, we can avoid the devaluation of its significance and function and thus ensure it is treated with the full consideration and respect it deserves.

According to Krippner (2002) “those writers who call shamanism a ‘religion’ ignore the fact that there are Buddhist shamans, Christian shamans, Muslim shamans, pagan shamans, and so forth”. But are there? Does anyone claim to be a Christian shaman? It is much more likely such a person would claim to be a Christian who makes use of shamanic techniques. And even if they were to call themselves Christian shamans, I doubt whether the church authorities would approve of the way they chose to describe themselves. What we can say is there are certainly shamans who make use of Christian rituals and the names of Christian Saints such as the curanderos in Spanish speaking South America or the practitioners of macumba in Brazil, but that does not mean they are necessarily Christians. What we call shamanism, what we consider it to be, will clearly affect its standing in both the popular and the academic world.

The fact of the matter is that in any study of contemporary Western spaces the problem of religion is likely to arise. “The terms ‘religion’, ‘religious’, and ‘religions’ ... will be heard repeatedly, and will be brought into play by actors and commentators eager to name, claim, or denounce people, things, events, and places, and to explain their nature” (Knott, 2005, pp.82-83). By attempting to show shamanism can indeed be classified under the heading of religion, it is hoped this work will contribute to the advancement of knowledge by showing it consequently deserves to be taken seriously. It should not be forgotten, however, that “concepts are products of scholars’ cognitive operations to be put to work in the service of scholars’ theoretical interest in the objects of their research. Concepts are not given off by the objects of our interest” (Braun & McCutcheon, 2000, p.9). Indeed, religion itself can be regarded as nothing more than an intellectual invention of modernity.

Another reason for associating shamanism with the word religion is that “[I]f indigenous religious perspectives continue to be ignored, or at least marginalized in academic circles, a highly significant portion of the world’s religious adherents will be excluded from scholarly research and teaching in religious studies” (Cox, 2007, p.1).

To qualify as a world religion, a faith must in some sense be comparable to Christianity, either by possessing components that can be translated into Christian terms, like scriptures, doctrines or festivals, or by mounting a strenuous challenge to Christianity, such as occurred in the proselytizing activities of Islam or that became evident as Westerners encountered the intellectual sophistication of philosophical Hinduism. In each case, the success of the non-Christian religions elevated their status within Western renditions of history (Cox, 2007, p.47). However, Shamanism, like Wicca, is a non-scriptural faith, which helps to explain why it is marginalized.

For Cox, religion focuses on “non-falsifiable alternate realities that are postulated by and legitimated within identifiable communities through the transmission of an authoritative tradition” (Cox, 2007, pp.92-93). He goes on to add that through this, a religious community is able to collectively share in acts of remembrance of the past and these give meaning to the present. This definition can be applied to Shamanism, in the same way as it can be applied to the so-called world religions. Consequently, it can be argued that it deserves the same kind of status.

Through active involvement in organizations such as the British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR), the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), and Pagan Federation International (PFI), by attending and / or giving papers at Conferences, writing books and / or articles and, above all, by the way we conduct ourselves as representatives of what we believe in and practice, we can help to bring this about. For surely, all religions in a comparative sense, deserve equal scholarly treatment and it is up to us to make sure that they do.

Is shamanism a genuinely polytheistic religion though? We could simply say that what shamans practice, whether they call themselves indigenous, urban or neo-shamans, is what shamanism is, but

such an explanation is of little help to anyone. Instead, the following definition is proposed... A shaman is understood to be someone who performs an ecstatic (in a trance state), imitative, or demonstrative ritual of a séance (or a combination of all three), at will (in other words, whenever he or she chooses to do so), in which aid is sought from beings in (what are considered to be) other realities generally for healing purposes or for divination—both for individuals and / or the community.

As for the practice of shamanism, it is understood to encompass a personalistic view of the world, in which life is seen to be not only about beliefs and practices, but also about relationships—how we are related, and how we relate to each other. In shamanism the notion of interdependence “is the idea of the kinship of all life, the recognition that nothing can exist in and of itself without being in relationship to other things, and therefore that it is insane for us to consider ourselves as essentially unrelated parts of the whole Earth” (Halifax in Nicholson, (comp.), 1987, p.220).

And through neurotheology, this assertion so often heard expressed in neo-shamanic circles that all life is connected, can now be substantiated. This is because it has been shown that during mystical ecstasy (or its equivalent, entheogenic shamanic states [states induced by ingesting hallucinogens]), the individual experiences a blurring of the boundaries on the ego and feels at “one with Nature”; the ego is no longer confined within the body, but extends outward to all of Nature; other living beings come to share in the ego, as an authentic communion with the environment, which is sensed as in some way divine (Ruck, Staples, et al., 2007, p.76).

Further justification for the belief that all life is connected can be found in the fact that the elementary particles that make up all matter, by their gravitational, electromagnetic or nuclear field, are coextensive with the whole universe, and as man is composed of these particles, he is thus in union with the entire cosmos (see Eliade, pp.285-286). Whether he wants to be or not is immaterial. Now if all life is connected, then the implication is that all life is one, and we become part of the godhead. If that is the case, however many spirit helpers or teachers in other realities a shaman may have, they are part of that whole too. So can we say that shamanism is

truly polytheistic? Probably not, if we agree that this is the case.

Consider, for example the beliefs and practices of the people in Abkhazia, in the Caucasus. “The ‘god of gods’ in the Abkhaz pantheon is Antswa, the creator, in whom all the other gods are contained ... The first toast still to be given at feasts is one to Antswa, in the form of “Antswa, you give us the warmth of your eyes” (Rachel Clogg in Hewitt, 1999, p.213). A similar situation prevails in Armenia. Neo-pagans in Armenia call themselves Arordineri Ukht, which means the Order of Children of Ari, with Ari being the main god in their pantheon. Interestingly, other members of this pantheon are not separate gods but rather different qualities of Ara, or qualities generally existing in the world. Since the name of their main god is Ara, neo-pagans use the similarity of this name to the word

Armenian to draw a straight line which connects them with the divine power, and claim that the Armenian nation is special among others. Namely, they claim Armenians to be the first nation and the only one to descend directly from Ara; they explain the meaning of the world Armenians as ‘god-men’; and situate themselves above other nations, seeing them as constructed and secondary. “Not only are origins of Armenians extraordinary, but so is the place on Earth where they live. Thus the Ararat plain is considered as the most important point ... where cosmic energy is gathered and where the “memory” of our planet is preserved” (Siekierski, 2009).

The above are just two of many such examples that could be given. Consequently, whether Shamanism is truly polytheistic or not is clearly open to question, and perhaps something that needs to be reconsidered.

Footnote

The main texts connected with the Shinto tradition are the Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters) and the Nihon Shoki (Chronicles of Japan). They were both written in Chinese in the early eighth century to help legitimate the position and the prestige of the Imperial Court so neither can be considered to represent a theology as such. The former is basically a quasi-historical account of the early Japanese Emperors, and the latter is a Creation Myth recounting the formation of Japan and its people, and their descent from the Kami. It is in the textual reproduction of rituals and of the prayers (norito) that any unifying foundation approaching canonical status may be found in Shinto sacred writings, and many of these can be found in the Engi Shiki, a tenth-century collection of government ordinances.

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The Sociology of the RDNA

By Irony Sade

November 1998

From ARDA2, Green Book 10

Editor's Note: If you read the article about Shamanism, perhaps this article will help address the question of whether the RDNA is a religion?



Introduction

In this paper I intend to demonstrate that the great sociological theories of Schleiermacher, Marx, Durkheim and others are applicable to the study of the Reformed Druids of North America. I believe that these theories can shed useful light on even a movement as peculiar as the RDNA and that the Druids themselves hold some valuable contributions for the general study of religion. I intend to demonstrate that while they do not call themselves a religion, and perhaps ought not to do so on philosophic grounds, the Reformed Druids share enough of the qualities of a religious movement to be usefully studied as such. I will discuss the sources and methodological problems involved in

this kind of study, give an introduction to the Reformed Druids, and a brief sketching of their origins and belief. Next I will address the question of religious applicability, and finally delve into the examination of the sociological theories of Schleiermacher, Marx, and Durkheim as they relate to the Reformed Druids.

Disclaimer and Acknowledgments

It must always be remembered that in matters of religious belief each individual can express only his or her conception of what a religion is or teaches. This is especially true of Reformed Druidism. The Druidic path is an intensely individualistic one and each Druid can only speak for sure of what he or she has found. To a certain extent this also holds for describing the movement as a whole. The way in which I see Reformed Druidism is only one amongst the many views that can be taken of it. Anyone wanting to take a serious look at the subject should be careful to view it through more than one lens.

Which brings me to a certain methodological problem with this study. Most- if not all- of the scholarly work that has been done regarding the Reformed Druids of North America at Carleton has been done by one man, Michael Scharding. Archdruid of the Carleton Grove from the spring of 1993 to that of 1994 he cosponsored the most recent revival of the Druids at Carleton (1995-6) and remains an influential - albeit absent - friend at the time of this writing. Michael Scharding majored in History as an undergraduate and in 1994 undertook the wonderfully self-referential endeavor of researching the history of the Reformed Druids for his Senior Integrative Exercise. In 1996 he revised this paper into a rather longer one, *A General History of Reformed Druidism in America*, and published it along with nearly all the collected writings of Reformed Druids past in *A Reformed Druid Anthology*, of which he was also the associate editor. "As a result of this research," he writes, "I've probably collected and read more Reformed Druid material and talked with more Druids from the different factions than any other Reformed Druid (except possibly Isaac Bonewits.) This means that I'm either an 'expert' or I am now more irreparably confused in my Druidism than ever as a result."¹ It also means that no academic study of Reformed

¹ In his forward to *A General History... A Reformed Druid Anthology*, pp. 331. ARDA pp. 16

Druidism to date - to my knowledge - has escaped from his shadow.

Daniel Hansen's *American Druidism* is a wonderful field guide to the various Druid groups of the Americas, and provides a fine history of the RDNA, but, as Mr. Scharding has commented, "it would not be a good book to compare my opinions against as I had a great deal to do with getting [it] published."

Margot Alder also talks about the RDNA in what many consider the definitive work on the Neo-Pagan movement, *Drawing Down the Moon*, but says very little that Scharding does not.

Isaac Bonewits also mentions the RDNA at Carleton in *Real Magic* but discusses them primarily in terms of one of their rituals, which he uses as an example to illustrate his theories on magic working. In short, beyond a few oral interviews performed by the College archivist and others and the preserved writings of past and present Druids there is little written work to study.

To date, Michael Scharding represents the most influential academic voice in the study of Reformed Druidism. Except by performing new, original research it is nearly impossible not to be influenced by his perspective on the movement. As mentioned above, any adequate study of religion ought to view it through more than one lens. Luckily most of the progenitors of the movement are still alive and much of its history has been recorded and stored so the possibility of original studies remains. I write this merely to make the reader aware of Scharding's influence. The study of Reformed Druidism is both indebted to and dominated by him, and, while I have drawn extensively on my own observations, interviews, research, and experience as Archdruid over the past three years, this paper is no exception. People who wish a clearer look at the movement are encouraged to explore it for themselves.

Finally let me make one technical note. Wherever I refer to 'Druids' in this paper I mean the Reformed Druids of North America at Carleton College, past and present. I do not intend to discuss the Paleo-Druids of the Old World, nor the Meso-Druids of Brittany revived in 1717, nor most of the other Neo-Druid groups in America except as they directly relate to our understanding of the RDNA. If you want an overview of them, read Hansen. With that caveat, let us begin.

Irony Sade
Prentice 206
November, 1998

Section I

An Introduction to Reformed Druidism

"Religions that combine humor, play, and seriousness are a rare species," Margot Adler wrote. "Once you embark on a journey of change in perception, even when you start this journey as 'play,' you can end up in waters far different from those you may have originally intended to enter."² Reformed Druidism represents the embodiment of this sentiment. Created partially as a joke, partially as a reaction against authority, it nonetheless blossomed and grew far beyond the hopes and desires of its founders, becoming both sillier than they had intended, and far more serious than they had ever imagined.

Reformed Druidism began at Carleton as a humorous response to the ruling that all students attend a set number of religious services each term. The early flavor of the movement was always one of serious tongue-in-cheek, a combination of the intentionally profound with the pointlessly silly. The early Liturgy, for instance, was written in a playful pseudo-King James style both to provide a semblance of legitimacy and to tease the traditional profundity of holy writings. At the same time it contains some incredibly meaningful passages. Deborah Frangquist, one of the early formative members of the RDNA, recalls one of them nearly thirty years later.

O Lord, forgive these three sins,
which are due to our human
limitations:

Thou art everywhere, but we
worship Thee here;

Thou art without form, but we
worship Thee in these forms;

Thou hast no need of prayers and
sacrifices, but we offer unto Thee
these, our prayers and sacrifices.

"I still find that one of the most profound spiritual statements I have ever heard," she recalls. "It informs my understanding of what I as a believing Christian am doing in Christian liturgy, including the Eucharist. Every time I ended out on

² Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, pp. 299-300

the Hill somewhere saying that prayer, I was moved anew by it, and I don't think I was alone in that." ³ The Druids at Carleton today continue to exhibit this characteristic blend of the meaningful and the frivolous. Their celebration of Beltane - the first of May - in 1998 included both a pair of weddings as serious and beautiful as the nuptial pairs could ask and an extended bout of 'doughnut fishing,' a spontaneous game where people chased a doughnut suspended on the end of a string, trying to catch it in their mouths while being tickled.

It is, I believe, this persistence of humor and spontaneity, respect and seriousness that has kept Reformed Druidism alive at Carleton for the last thirty-five years and enabled it to spread as far as it has. Were it to lose either of these qualities the movement would be finished. It would become either the useless ghost of a religion or a sacrilegious joke. With them it becomes something both meaningful and liberating, a way of searching and of exploring life in the company of others and oneself that is not exactly one thing or another. Neither a religion by its own definition, nor a philosophy by anyone else's, Reformed Druidism represents a unique and valuable creation of the human mind, and a fascinating confusion to the study of religion.

Section II

Origins of the Reformed Druids

The Reformed Druids of North America began, with no connection to either the Paleo or the modern European Druids, at Carleton College in April of 1963. At that time the college had a requirement for graduation stating that

"Attendance is required at the College Service of Worship or of the Sunday Evening Program or at any regularly organized service of public worship. Each term, every student must attend seven [of ten] of the services or religious meetings."⁴

³ This triad first appears in the Order of Common Worship as the invocation and again in nearly all the early liturgy. The Druids at Carleton have currently fallen out of the habit of actually using the old liturgy, but they still read through it for a good laugh and ponder its many truths. See A Reformed Druid Anthology, Part Three, Liturgy of the Druids.

Deborah Frangquist in an interview with Eric Hilleman, Carleton Archivist, October 31, 1993; pp. 450 of A Reformed Druid Anthology.

⁴ Carleton College Catalogue, March 1964, pp. 136. -ARDA-

A number of students felt that it was unfair to require people to attend services and decided to test the policy. The protesters were led by the original 'Triumvirate', consisting of David Fisher, Howard Cherniack and Norman Nelson. They noted the escape clause of "or at any regularly organized service of public worship" and realized that they could create and organize such a service themselves and offer it up to the relevant deans as a fulfillment of the requirement. The college would have two choices, as they saw it: either to refuse to recognize them and be accused of religious discrimination, or to let them graduate at which point the movement would be declared a hoax and the requirement further ridiculed.⁵

Instead, in the summer of 1964, John Nason, the president of the college, sent out a memo revoking the requirement. It should be noted that Nason had already decided that the college's policy of in Loco Parentis was outdated and may have been planning to revoke the requirement all along. The role of the Druids in its elimination is debatable, but they cheerfully took the credit for its disappearance.

Two things about this origin are crucial to the understanding of Reformed Druidism. The first is that the founders never intended the movement to last. The second is that the Reformed Druids had no connection what so ever to any other Druid group at the time of their founding.⁶ "Indeed," writes Scharding, "this leads up to the greatest hindrance to the entire study of Reformed Druidism; the name 'Druid.' Many scholars will see the word 'Druidism' on a sheet of paper and suddenly a myriad of assumptions will strangle their minds."⁷

The Reformed Druid movement embodies none of the philosophy, worldview, cultural resonance or even religion of the Celts, Paleo, or Meso Druids. The name was picked because it was sufficiently venerable to be taken seriously and sufficiently misunderstood that the young RDNA could make up whatever they chose and not be called on inaccuracies.⁸ As the story goes, Howard

⁵ It should be remembered that these students - the original 'triumvirate' consisting of David Fisher, Howard Cherniack and Norman Nelson - were in no way irreligious. David is currently an Episcopalian priest. They merely felt that the requirement was unfair on principle and should be tested. They also hedged their bets and continued attending the 'legitimate' services throughout their protest.

⁶ This will be discussed more in section IV.

⁷ ARDA pp. 339. This seems to be a thing that each researcher is at pains to learn anew

⁸ "Mec"- Michael Scharding- wasted eight months of research before figuring this out. I knew he'd done so and I still fell for it. My desk is littered with fascinatingly irrelevant books on

Cherinack's parents did not like indicating that they were Jewish on government forms, and had taken to writing 'Druid' instead. The Triumvirate picked up the idea and ran with it, inventing beliefs as they went. The subsequent history of the movement is complex and fascinating but I do not intend to address it here. Scharding has covered it more thoroughly than I am ever likely to and traces its internal dividing and developments over a thirty-year span. I will attempt to avoid much of that discussion except where it is relevant to our purpose here.

Section III

Beliefs of the Reformed Druids

Two things were of primary importance for the Reformed Druids in the beginning, and have remained fundamental to the movement ever since. The respect for nature, and the respect for each individual's rights. The founders wanted to create a system that would contain a meaningful core while eschewing all dogma and orthodoxy. In the words of one Druid, "Reformed Druidism is a statement that religion has a tendency to become organized religion and [sic] which then becomes organization devoid of religion."⁹ The founders were very conscious of this 'fossilization theory' and wished to provide no framework for organization that could be exploited later. As such, when the two tenets were devised and finalized in 1963, they were kept as simple and as inclusive as possible.

The object of the search for religious truth, which is a universal and 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 people do live, yea, even as they do struggle through life they are come face to face with it.¹⁰

Druidism that have nothing to do with the RDNA.

⁹ Internal correspondence ARDA pp. 338

¹⁰ An interesting change in the modern phrasing of the first tenet is the omission of the idea that the spiritual search is universal. The reason for this is two fold. One motivation is a desire not to impose even that truth on others. Another is that it has become

These are the only two tenets of the Reformed Druids of North America - and the only two statements with which all Druids are ever likely to agree. Everything else is up to the individual. In their original form the tenets are rather cumbersome. They are often paraphrased as 'Nature is good' and 'Nature is good.' A more serious way of putting it, currently practiced amongst the Druids at Carleton is to say that first: The spiritual search is an important, individual, and life long endeavor, and secondly, that one way of searching lies through the study, understanding, and awareness of nature. Each of these phrasings indicates something rather different if they are taken literally, yet it is at one truth that they point. The only commandment I have ever seen attached to Reformed Druidism is "Think for thyself!" The tenets, however you conceive of them, establish the framework in which to do this.

Druidism teaches that you have the right to believe what you know to be true, no matter what anyone else thinks of it. At the same time it holds that you cannot simply pick what you would like to be the case, nor design a cosmology irrespective of what the world teaches. To be a Druid is to deliberately and consciously seek out the truth of the world and decide for yourself what it is you will believe. Margot Adler sheds some useful light on the matter when she writes "The original founders seemed to hold the fundamental idea that one should scrutinize religion from 'a state of rebellion,' neither embracing traditional faiths nor rejecting them."¹¹

Druids look everywhere for inspiration. World philosophies, religions, science fiction, children's books, strange dreams, the flight of swallows; all are considered equally valid insights to potential truths that must be at least examined, if never espoused. As Scharding writes, "It was important to Druidism that you believed your own views instead of slavishly following those of others, provided that you had carefully examined them and judged them sound."¹² This intellectual honesty is a necessary - if not sufficient - feature of the Druidic search.

apparent that one can be a great Druid without holding that the spiritual search holds any immediate, personal, relevancy. David Coil, one of the greatest Druid apologists at Carleton today and the functional right hand of the Archdruid for the last year, holds the above view. He believes that upon death he will go back to being 'nineteen cents of chemicals,' end of story. He would rather live a life that ponders its spiritual significance, and expresses one of the purest Druidic spirits on campus.

¹¹ Drawing Down the Moon. pp. 301

¹² ARDA. pp. 341

Without it the movement would descend into utter relativism.¹³

Another significant feature of Druidic 'belief' is that it is compatible with almost any other religious system. It serves to accentuate rather than replace a person's faith. Michael Scharding is a devout (maybe) Catholic as well as being a Druid. The group today contains at least one Atheist Druid, Jewish Druid, Quaker Druid, Seventh Day Adventist Druid, and innumerable Agnostic and Confused Druids. Indeed, the people who have taken Reformed Druidism to be their only religion have always been in the minority. The movement is hardly a thing that one can be converted to. The most common reaction to the personal acceptance of being a Druid is one of coming home. My own was, "Oh - now at last I have a name for what I've always done." The inclusiveness with which Druidism approaches all other religions is one of its strongest and most redeeming features.

Section IV

Is Reformed Druidism a Religion?

There is an unwritten rule that whatever any Druid may say about him or herself, no one is to make categorical claims regarding the entire movement. Druidism can be and has been a religion for its individual members. It has never claimed itself to be a religion. Druidism is above all a system of inquiry into life, nature and meaning. Depending on how one takes that the movement could be viewed either way. The official Druidic statement has been that the RDNA does not affirm or deny the validity of any religion, including itself.

The founders of Reformed Druidism certainly never intended to start a religion. Indeed, the

¹³ One could argue that the Druids already embody such a relativism in that the closest thing we have to a statement of belief is really simply an insistence that you search truth out yourself. If so, it is only the relativism of individual minds. Yet I do not believe that even this is the case. The intellectual honesty that Druidism fosters encourages clear sight and careful thinking, and it seems that even with a great many people searching in this manner, agreements and commonalities arise. It may be that when people look hard and carefully at the nature of reality they all find, on some fundamental level, the same things. It seems to me that even without an imposed order to the universe, relativism confounds itself against a deeper order that is already present. It is part of the answer to the problem of saying "This is the truth that I have found, which I will force on no one else - but it applies to everybody." A rigorous examination of this confusion will have to await the foredoomed attempt of working out a formal Druidic philosophy and metaphysic.

persistence of the movement beyond the elimination of the Chapel requirement took many of the founders by surprise. David Fisher left the movement early on because he had begun to fear that he had helped to start something that was becoming dangerously close to a real religion. Its function as a protest was fulfilled, and yet the group remained. "For a great many Druids, the RDNA had introduced the possibility of taking personal responsibility for understanding and believing one's own faith."¹⁴

Druidism continued because people continued to find it meaningful and useful beyond its initial function as a creative protest. Still, did that make the RDNA a religion? The founders were careful not to call it such, though they wished it to appear as one for political purposes, and the movement has remained deliberately vague on this question ever since. Part of the reason for this vagueness is the fear of the 'fossilization theory.' If the RDNA had indeed found something meaningful in the realm of religion, it was felt that it had done so through its very simplicity. If defining themselves as a religion - or anything else - would engender the complexity and rigidity that people had joined the movement to avoid, they wanted no part of it.

One of the consequences of this refusal was the gradual splintering of the original RDNA into innumerable branches. Every so often someone would enter the movement who felt that it should be further defined. Each time this happened, after a brief struggle to change the whole RDNA, a new splinter group would form centered around the rebel and his or her followers. At present, so far as I can tell, there are nearly two dozen separate and related branches, all bearing the name 'Druid,' all spawned by definition or methodological disagreements. The first and most drastic of these schisms began in 1974 over the question of whether the RDNA should declare itself and its members exclusively pagan. This was exactly the sort of thing that many of the Druids - especially those for whom the Carleton grove had been influential - wanted to avoid. They loved the fact that one did not have to renounce any religious beliefs to become a Druid, and that the Druids brought together people of all different faiths to search together in a friendly, healthy manner. Others felt differently though, and a new group was formed.¹⁵

¹⁴ ARDA pp. 339.

¹⁵ See Scharding for a thorough discussion of this initial split, known within the movement as the 'Isaac wars.' Hansen also gives a solid cataloguing of the extant Druid groups in the United States today, their relationship to one another, and how

The old RDNA remained as it was, happily undefined and unsettled as to the religious question. Even in their second great interaction with authority, which seemed to hinge upon whether the RDNA represented an actual religion or not the Druids managed to escape without really settling the issue.¹⁶

From a research perspective the question remains. Is the Reformed Druid movement a religion? Is it a 'real religion,' whatever that means? Is it something to which one can legitimately apply the theories of Weber, Marx, and Schleiermacher as I intend shortly to do? It is apparent by now that I, at least, regard it as, if not a religion per se, at least something to which many of the great religious theories and debates are applicable. If I did not, all the time I have put into this project would be seen as wasted.¹⁷

In what ways can the RDNA be considered a religion? Eliade defined the base of all religious experience as the personal experience of sacred reality or Other. Schleiermacher followed him in stating that it was the encounter between the finite and the infinite, which is the origin and object of all religion. To my mind, it is with exactly this encounter that Druidism deals. It is almost beyond question that on any functional level human beings are finite creatures. Through Druidism they engage freely in the spiritual search - the individual quest for understanding of the sacred. Certainly Druidism can and has dealt with all of the classical religious problems of ontology, metaphysics, soteriology, and eschatology, not to mention that of theodicy, the celebrated 'question of evil.' It has done so, however, on a purely individual level. Druidism never teaches that any particular thing is or is not the case - it simply teaches people to learn and decide for themselves.

All of the classic problems and issues of religion are discussed at Druidic meetings and debated at great length from a variety of views but in the end it is up to each individual to decide what to believe. What the RDNA does is to create a place where people of many different religions can come together to share their traditions and learning. Scharding credits this persistence to the delight in the possibility of taking personal responsibility for one's own faith. The movement had shown people experientially "the benefits of learning from people

each came to be.

¹⁶ This was the almost famous 'Smiley Case' which will be discussed further below.

¹⁷ Or as a furthering of the great and subtle joke that some have seen Druidism as being!

from other faiths in a non-hostile forum of interaction."¹⁸

The insight of the Druids, Scharding writes,

"was that if the same story about, say, a bird making its nest, can be interpreted by all religions as a useful analogy for their own religious beliefs, then people of all religions could benefit from getting together and hearing that same story.... As long as dogmatic theological statements remain out of the stories, the group can enjoy each other's company."¹⁹

It has often been denied that Reformed Druidism is a religion because it boasts no dogma or theology. 'How can that be a religion,' we often hear. 'It doesn't teach anything!' The short answer is that Druidism teaches people how to learn, not what is true. It will show you how to walk - not where to travel. In this it is exactly as much a religion as are the Zen Buddhist schools, or, for that matter, Taoism. The theories of the great sociologists of religion are usefully applicable to these systems. I believe that, even if it denies being a religion itself, they are no less applicable to Reformed Druidism.

There is one other problem that ought to be addressed. The question of what it would mean to declare the RDNA a religion. In a sense the question is academic because the movement intentionally never claims to be one. But from a certain perspective the question remains. If Reformed Druidism declared itself to be a fully fledged religion like any other, would it in effect be denying all religious validity? The argument runs vaguely as follows. Reformed Druidism affirms and denies no religious validity by its own admission. But the essence of religion seems to be a profound respect for the importance and validity of a personal encounter with the sacred. If the RDNA calls itself a religion just like the others, is it stating, in effect, that religious experience is not worth validating? The essence of religious tolerance is not unconditional acceptance of differences but rather an abiding respect for the sacredness of the other's Other. Druidism appears not to contain this. To put it differently, if Druidism includes itself in the set of Religions, is it saying that a religion does not have to affirm or deny anything at all? Druidism does not appear to contain any sacred. By calling itself a

¹⁸ ARDA pp. 339

¹⁹ ARDA pp. 341

religion is it saying that there is no sacred to religion?²⁰

I do not believe that this is the case. First of all, Druidism never declared itself, as such, to be a religion. If its members do so, that is their own affair, but almost invariably Druidism mutates and develops into something subtly different and much more complex as soon as it is adopted by a lucid individual rather than a group. Secondly, Druidism does hold an abiding respect for other experiences of the sacred. It simply holds their expressions, through theology, poetry, art, and philosophy as secondary portrayals of that primary experience. The experience of the sacred is holy and respected, whoever happened to have it. Their depiction of it is granted only as much validity as anyone else's. It is taken as one of many fingers pointing at the moon, not the moon itself. The validity of any and all experiences of the sacred stand. Religious expressions are viewed as mutable. Finally, Druidism itself would never - nor would any Druid that I know - state that there is no sacred in religion. It would merely insist that we each critically and honestly examine our own experiences, religious and otherwise, to seek out and understand the sacred within them.

²⁰ I confess that I do not completely understand this argument and have not given it the best statement or defense possible. I would gratefully welcome any clearer formulations of it. It is almost regrettable that there has never been a serious philosophical study of the Reformed Druid movement. Druidism seems such a valuable tool of inquiry that one could see the attraction in developing a solid understanding and perhaps metaphysic of it. But it is not at all clear to me at this point how one would go about doing this, nor even that it should be done. It is not that I doubt Druidism could take the probing, but the defining that it would almost certainly entail seems against the spirit of the system. It may be that anything that was developed in such a manner would become yet another splinter group, another branch of the movement that would leave its original roots unchanged.

Section V

Sociological Theory and the Reformed Druids

Of all the classical social theories, those of Friedrich Schleiermacher seem to most accurately describe Reformed Druidism.²¹ Schleiermacher divided the depictions of religion in his time into those reducing it to functions of the will, reason, and imagination. When viewed as such, the primary vehicle for religious expression became morality, philosophy and art, respectively. Schleiermacher believed that each of these conceptions left out something crucial about the nature of religion and so posited a fourth category. The primary faculty of religion, he felt, was feeling. Religion, he posited, was the encounter of the finite to the infinite. Feeling was that by which we experience this encounter. As pure feelings are essentially incommunicable between sane humans, other means of expressing the encounter must be utilized. According to Schleiermacher, morality, philosophy, art, theology, rituals, laws, legends, and even history are all secondary means of trying to express this primary experience. As such, they have no final or absolute validity in the domain of religion! Only feeling can convey the primary experience, and feeling is essentially impossible to communicate.

Schleiermacher's view of religion is a profound call for tolerance. If all theologies and dogmas, all morals and rituals are only secondary expressions of the sacred, then even religious beliefs that completely antagonize one's own can be tolerated. People can realize that it is only the details of expression that they are fighting about when there may be no real disagreement over the feeling of the sacred. This view is almost identical to that espoused by Reformed Druidism. They too regard all expressions of religious truth to be equally valid as secondary indicators of an inexpressible reality that is never the less to be sought by each individual.

²¹ In discussing the sociology of the movement, I do not intend to focus here on social factors leading to or even influencing the Reformed Druids. Michael Scharding discusses some of these including Judeo Christian influences, the influence of Asian religions, of the 'Sixties,' of Carleton, and toys with the possibility of Fraternal influences in the creation of the RDNA. Instead I intend to look at the applicability of some of the classical sociological theories to Druidism, leaving the discussion of factors to those who know more about them.

They too exhibit a unilateral tolerance for all systems of religious belief and practice.²²

Because no single expression of sacrality can be seen as being its primary experience people interested in approaching that sacred must engage in a constant process of interpretation of these secondary expressions. This hermeneutic circle of translation and interpretation is inherent to the Druidic search.

It is interesting that by both of these views religious experience and validity must remain forever a uniquely individual phenomena. Until it is possible to accurately communicate pure feeling, neither the Schleiermachers nor the Druids of the world will ever be able to convey to another what exactly their encounters with the Other - the infinite - were like. All forms of expression prove not only inadequate for the searcher's understanding of religion, but also for the sage's communication of religious understanding. The consequence of this, were everyone to operate within this model of religious understanding, is a plurality of completely unique experiences of the sacred, where each person honored the validity of other's experiences, and realized that no one's expressions of that feeling were any more adequate than their own.

Carl Marx had rather different conception of religion. Unfortunately his understanding of the phenomena was rather stunted by his hatred of it. Marx's insights into the nature of economics and political theory are profound; it is a shame he could not apply the same clarity of thought to the study of religion. It has been argued that Marx's statements on religion are inconclusive and contradictory, making it rather hard to discern what he actually thought on the subject, but from his critiques of Feuerbach, and of Bauer in *On the Jewish Question* a synthesis of sorts can be made.

It seems that Marx held that the ideas of religion emerged from social powerlessness. Religion served, in his mind, as a superstructure to maintain and perpetuate the economic base, which gave rise to it. It did this by maintaining the social class structure and placating the lower classes with promises of something better to come - so long as they held their peace for the time being. At the same time it seems that Marx held that religion emerged from alienation in the realm of civil society - the same force that produced divergent political and

economic systems. Alienation leads to the objectification of an expression of one's self - or one's culture - which then is imagined as being independent of the thing it is an expression of. This is idolatry on Marx's view - the worship of something you yourself have created.²³

It seems, though, that none of these ideas shed any particular light on Reformed Druidism. Druidism did not arise out of social powerlessness, does not maintain any class structure, and has no economic bearing what-so-ever. It also posits no higher being, objectified or otherwise, that could be viewed as a created and forgotten idol of civil alienation. Instead it seems that the RDNA emerged and has been sustained primarily through curiosity. Furthermore, Druidism does not seek - or serve - to maintain any authority, including its own, other than that of intellectual honesty, which is operative on a solely personal level. Druidism does take a certain delight is frustrating the authority of others, especially that which is seen as arbitrary, restrictive or simply absurd. In this sense it could be seen as a reaction to authoritarian structures, but not at all in the way that Marx envisioned. The RDNA has had only two major interactions with authority, and while one of them was the purpose of the movement's initiation, the struggle against an authority has never since proved a motivating factor in the movement's continuation.²⁴

Another sociologist whose theories mesh oddly with the RDNA is Emile Durkheim. Durkheim held fundamentally that religion is not irrational - not at all a function of superstition and error as others have often maintained. All religious experience is the experience of the power of society in his view. The immediate fascination of this view is that no society can ever exist without religion. He also believed that to understand religion we must go back to its base: totemism. On at the same time he held that as a society changes, its god must too. In totemism the individual identifies and becomes one with the totem, which in turn unifies and expresses the nature of his or her social group. As societies advance this identification becomes intellectualized and disguised. By the time a society reaches a reasonably advanced stage its conception of the totem has evolved into a fairly abstract, usually

²³ In this understanding of Marx I am deeply indebted to professor Nader Saiedi of Carleton College.

²⁴ The first was the successful attempt to get the mandatory chapel requirement revoked. The second was the 'Smiley Affair' beginning in 1967 when the RDNA successfully stalled the US Military out of Drafting one of their priests. See the Carleton Archives, Internal correspondence, and pp. 345-6 of ARDA.

²² Within reason. Someone whose religious practice involved destroying the natural world on principle, or who ritually murdered random folks would not be tolerated. But this would be on behavioral grounds rather than religious ones.

singular god. Along the way this conception of the sacred has been purged of all definable qualities. To adequately represent and unify a very simple social group was easy - they could all be seen to manifest attributes of the bear, for instance. As people specialize and society develops, one definable vision of 'god' can no longer depict them all equally. By abstracting more and more - and by removing all human characteristics - a society's god becomes more philosophic, beyond all description and understanding, all in the attempt to represent as many different objectified people as possible. The eventual and evident end of this so far as religion goes, is that a society will either have to simplify itself drastically to preserve its conception of god, or the individual itself will become seen as sacred - bypassing the objective representation of the individual as a totem, god, or anything else.

Druidism seems to be an exemplification of this second course. The very conception of god has been objectified away to nothing, and we are left with the individuals again, knowing that the sacred is important, but realizing anew that it is basically unknown. Each individual must seek out their own understanding of the sacred and, in doing so, it appears that each individual actually becomes in some sense sacred. While Reformed Druidism itself certainly did not begin as totemism and evolve to something else, it is entirely possible that the society from which it arose did. It may be that the emergence of the RDNA is the exact fulfillment and continuation of Durkheim's theory on religious evolution. It emerged at a time when society had diversified to the extent where not even a completely abstract and indescribable god without any qualities could represent every member of that society - for people are not themselves abstract. A specific conception of a personal deity could represent individuals better than an abstraction.

In this case the theory does shed useful light upon the RDNA. The movement is seen as the natural result of societal change and the forerunner of a greater degree of individual awareness and responsibility for religion soon to come. Indeed, as one looks at the kinds of religious movements that have been emerging since the 1960's when Druidism began one can see that many of them embody just this individualization of the sacred - though none of them do so as simply and carefully as do the Reformed Druids. I need merely instance the vast neo-pagan movement, the Church of All Worlds, and other similar organizations, where any non-socially murderous religious belief is tolerated, and

where the church will ordain anyone as a legal minister for the asking.

On the other hand, Durkheim insists that all religious experience is the experience of the power of society. The Druidic path is one that can be followed without reference to society at all. It is useful to talk to others, to read the writings of sages past, or to ponder the teachings of other religions, but the essence of Druidism is clear and careful thinking about the world - a skill that could be practiced by the last man on earth. In addition, most, if not all, of the religious experiences reported by Reformed Druids have taken place in utter solitude. It is in their aloneness with nature that many of the Druids find themselves closest to the sacred. One could argue that if the individual itself has become sacred it is only natural that he or she would feel closest to the sacred when alone with themselves, but this argument smacks strongly of sophistry. It is also possible that the religious experience a person feels when alone is simply the transcendental power of society that they have absorbed and carried with them manifesting itself like a voice in the wilderness. Given the feeling and noetic content of many of these experiences I must seriously doubt that this is the case. I have yet to see a clear and convincing argument in its favor, but mention it because I cannot refute it completely.

Finally, Durkheim's description and justification of the social contract meshes nicely with Reformed Druidic thought. For him it is the inherent sacrality of each individual that makes it important for us not to break our promises to each other. For the Druids, an inviolate respect for the rights of each individual is inherent to the movement. Life is inherently sacred, many of them hold. No one has the right to violate that.

Section VI

Conclusion

I hope that I have at least demonstrated that the Reformed Druids of North America, while not being a religion in the strictest sense, comprise a movement to which the sociological theories of Schleiermacher, Marx, Durkheim and others are applicable. I believe that much can be learned about the movement by seriously applying the theories of these and other writers, and by examining and developing the philosophic background of the RDNA. I hope that others will continue this search, and if they ever find from within the movement that

they are acting against its spirit, that they will listen to the dictates of their hearts before forging ahead or dropping their studies.

What I am not sure that I have demonstrated is that the Reformed Druids actually embody a definable and distinct set of people that could be studied as a religious group. I think that what binds them together is the spirit of their search, the shared history of the movement, and their individual acceptance of the simple tenets. If that is not enough, to convince the reader, I ask you to consider how the world's Christians can be considered part of one movement, embracing as they do both the Catholic church and the Quaker meeting halls.

Finally, let me say that for the most part, the confusion as to who is and isn't a Druid shows up on paper more than it does in life. This seems to be because, despite the changes, there has never really been any doubt as to who the Druids amongst people were. As Isaac Bonewits writes,

"The role of the Druid has always been clear - scholar, and artist, poet, and priest, philosopher and magician - the one who seeks, preserves and expends the highest wisdom her or his people are capable of handling safely, and who uses the knowledge and inspiration for the benefit of their community."

²⁵

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²⁵ ARDA pp. 323



HUMOR: How Neopagans Make Resolutions

Alexandrian/Gardnerian

To reveal this would be to break my oath of secrecy. I can say, though, that it *really* is an ancient rite, dating far back in time, back even before 1951, and I have learned it from an unbroken lineage. As Gerald said, it takes a resolution to make a new year.

Asatru

First, we don't believe in a "Resolution" or a "List of Resolutions." We believe in many lists. Second, "Making New Year's Resolutions" is part of the three levels, or worlds, and the resolution maker simply rises from one level to another. Hail to the New Year!

British Traditional

The word "Resolution" comes from a very specific Old English word ("resolvere"), and it only properly applies to certain acts or processes of list making by those of East Anglia or those descended therefrom. As for the rest, I suppose they are doing something remotely similar to making resolutions, but you must remember that traditional resolutions are not to be confused with the modern resolutions...

Celtic Reconstructionist

In County Hunghover on New Year's day, they still observe Lady Resolutia's Scribbling, which is a survival of the old pagan List Making petitionary rite. Today, modern pagans are reviving the practice, dedicated to the Topsy Lady and the Green Scribe.

Ceremonial

"Making a List" is a phrase that summarizes many magical structures erected and timed by the practitioner to produce the energy necessary for the intention of making resolutions for the new year. For example, the astrological correspondences have to be correct, the moon has to be waxing (if the practitioner intends to follow the resolutions) or waning (if the practitioner merely wishes to keep the resolutions for reference), and the practitioner has to prepare herself through fasting and proper incantations. Note: Certain forms of invocation (summoning a list of resolutions *inside* your mind) can produce abnormal or even dangerous results and should only be constructed within a properly erected circle...

Chaos

Thinking in terms of "listing" and "resolutions" is simply looking at the formal, typically perceived structure of resolution making space-time. We, instead, focus on the possibility of the resolution making itself; what appears to be a random act is thus actually the norm -- it is *The List* which is the freak of chance. Indeed, quantum mechanics now demonstrates what we knew all along: Two or more lists can simultaneously exist in the same place at the same time. Thus, by attuning ourselves to the dynamic energy (called "listing"), we can manifest the resolution. Of course, to the unknowledgeable, this appears as making a list of resolutions.

Dianic

The Lyst Mayker ("list maker" is a term of patriarchal oppression) seeks to reclaim for herself the right to make Resolutions, after it had been denied to her for centuries. By doing so, she reawakens the power of the Resolution within herself.

Discordian

You've *got* to be kidding!

Druid

Resolutions are made to arrive at the Truth, of course! Keep in mind that 99% of everything written about Making-New-Year's-Resolutions is pure hogwash, based on biased sources. Yes, there were a few unfortunate sacrifices of list makers in the past, but that is over now...

Eclectic

Because it seems right to us at the time. We use some Egyptian-style paper and Celtic-sounding words for the Resolutions and incorporate some Native American elements into our Pen-names, like, Scribe-Who-Waffles-and-Runs-from-the-Wolves.

Faery

In twilight times and under sparkling stars, those properly trained can still see the writers making their lists. Reconnecting with these "fey-scribblers" as they write is crucial to restoring the balance between the energies of modern development and living with the earth.

Family Traditional

Growing up, we didn't think much about "making resolutions." A list was a list. It was made because that was what worked to get the New Year started. We focused on what worked, and we worked more with the elders of the list makers and less with all this "guardians of the New Year" business. We didn't get our concepts of "Lists" or "Resolutions for the New Year" from Gardner, either. You can choose not to believe us since we did not "write down" on paper what was listed to us orally (which, at certain times in history, was the only way to avoid becoming New Year's fireworks!), but that doesn't change the facts: There *were* real list makers, and they *really did* make resolutions!

Kitchen Witch

The writers make their lists to lose weight, get a job and move away from home because they have mothers like me who are always testing new recipes on them!

New Age

We make lists of resolutions because we chose this as one of our lessons to learn in this life. Besides, there is so much incense and bright, white paper to cover in the New Year.

Newbie

Well, 'cause I read in this really kewl book that said, like, we are supposed to make New Year's Resolutions, right?

Solitaire

The list makers don't want to be part of a coven.

Shaman

Making a list is a way to reconnect with the healing, visionary lifeways of the past. Wise Women have long known this, but increasingly the Wise Guy's Movement is adding more men to the list making too.

Wiccan

The list maker makes a list because she feels like she is finally "coming home." She can do it alone or with others, but she has to call to the Guardians of the Watchtowers of the New Year first ... uh, after casting the circle, of course.

Bardic Children's Program 2011

Part 1: The Overview

By Mike the Fool



One of my New Year Resolutions is raising kids in a “Druidic manner”.

I have two children, age 2 and 3. That’s part of the reason you don’t hear from me as often as before. However, by trying to impart teachings to the children, I’m the one that’s doing most of the learning. It shows me the gaps in my knowledge.

Like most Reformed Druids I know, I became a Druid by choice as an adult, and I am going to make sure that my children have an informed choice too! They’ll get plenty of

exposure to other faiths, with their strengths and weaknesses clearly laid out, and I’ll shield them from coercion until the age of reason (say 21?), but along the way I’ll also share what I enjoy and make sure they get a good grounding on how to behave and relate to the Earth and the other inhabitants on it.

I figure that I’m putting it all together, hand-made, rather than buying into a cookie-cutter approach of all the options on the market, and this will take time. I’ll leave much of the academic stuff to the schools (math, literature, social science, arts, phys ed) and concentrate on culture and religion. In particular:

1. Bardic Arts
2. Good Behavior
3. Appreciation of Religious Diversity
4. Seasonal Crafts
5. Magic and Reverence

The first part of the program for me is the joy of the bardic arts, namely poetry, music, song, dance, drama and storytelling. Kids love this, as well they should. They are fun.

Nowadays you can get canned music at the click of a mouse, whereas before you either had to make it yourself, form a band and practice, or go out to a performance. Effort was involved and each time was unique to the moment. That has been lost. I want the children to know how to make their own entertainment, partly as a matter of independence.

It is also a gift they can share, anytime, anywhere.

In that spirit, I’ll be sharing with you what I put together, not because I’m more gifted at it than you, but because I am doing it, and maybe you’d like to do something like it too. Sharing. And having to share it with you, keeps me on my toes.

Every season, I'll release one of 5 update of where I am. I hope you'll contribute too on the RDNATalk conference on Yahoo. My goal is to tailor a category for them and locate and list supplementary resources to build upon.

1. Spring Equinox: Nursery Rhyme Book
2. Beltane: Song Book
3. Summer: Folk Tales
4. Lughnasadh: Folk Customs
5. Fall Equinox: Dance

After that, I'll start working on Good Behavior (Morals, Virtues and Laws) and so on.

You'll also see me reviewing children's books and such in the coming years.

Let's see how far I can get?

Feel free to send your ideas and reviews to me also.

COOKING SECTION



Gateau Breton recipe

1 pound all-purpose fl
1 pound sugar (1/2 lb powdered sugar and 1/2 lb granulated sugar)sifted
1 pound salted butter
10 egg yolks

1 TB dark rum
1 teas vanilla powder
1 egg (for egg wash)
1 teas water (opps! this was supposed to be for the egg wash)

- Place flour on the counter and make a well. Cut up butter and place the sifted sugars, butter, yolks, rum and vanilla powder in the well. Work the well together. This meant to mix everything except the flour.
- ***(oops! I had a runny mess and ended up mixing everything together including the flour all at the same time.)
- Work in the flour then "fraisage" the dough, pushing it away from you on the counter with the heel of your hand. This helps schmear the butter into thin layers to make the cake flakey in the end. Chill for 30 minutes.
- Roll into an 8" circle on lightly floured surface. Place into a buttered 8" cake pan lined with parchment and buttered again.
- Cross hatch top with knife and egg wash, and repeat another egg wash. BAke for 30-40 minutes or until golden brown.

TAKE NOTE OF THE BOTTOM PART OF THE BAKING ABOUT BASTING WITH THE BUTTER
It's very nice.....



SUGAR CRUSTED BRETON BUTTER CAKE

1/2-ounce fresh yeast
1/4 cup warm water
2 1/4 cups flour
Pinch salt
About 10 tablespoons lukewarm water

8 tablespoons (1 stick) best-quality unsalted butter, cut into pieces
1/4 cup sugar
2 tablespoons confectioners sugar

In a medium bowl, dissolve the yeast in the warm water. When dissolved, mix in 1/2 cup of the flour with your fingers, rubbing them together to break up any lumps. Cover with a barely dampened towel and let rise in a warm place until doubled in bulk, about 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a large bowl, combine the remaining 1 3/4 cups of flour and the salt. Add the yeast mixture and mix together with the tips of your fingers. Gradually sprinkle in the lukewarm water, mixing with your fingers to make a pliable dough. If the water is all mixed in and the dough still seems dry, add another tablespoon of water. Knead until smooth, about 4 minutes. Return the dough to the large bowl, cover with the damp towel, and let rise in a warm place until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.

Turn the dough out onto a floured work surface and dust the top with flour. Roll into a rectangle about the same size as a sheet of paper (8 1/2 by 11-inches). Turn the rectangle so that it is vertical to your body. Dot the lower 2/3 of the dough with the pieces of butter and sprinkle with sugar. Working as though you are folding a letter, and folding the top down first, fold the dough in thirds. Roll out the folded dough into a rectangle, 8 1/2 by 11 inches. Fold in 3 again in the same way, cover with the damp towel, and let rest 15 minutes. Roll into a rectangle again, fold in 3, cover with the damp towel, and let rest 15 minutes. One last time, roll into a rectangle, fold in 3, cover with the damp towel, and let rest 15 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 400-degrees F. Butter and flour a 9-inch cake pan. Roll the dough into a circle about 9 inches in diameter. Transfer to the prepared pan. Using a sharp knife or razor blade, make a cross-hatch pattern across the top of the cake (like a tic-tac-toe board). Bake for 20 minutes, brushing the top every 5 minutes with the melted butter that oozes out from the cake. Sprinkle with the confectioners; sugar and continue baking (do not baste) until golden brown on the top but still moist inside, about 10 minutes more. Let cool on a rack until the crust is caramelized and slightly crispy.

Game Review



Dire Grove

www.diregrove.com

by Mystery Case Files

(reviewed by Mike)

Okay, you know that I love games, but rarely have time to play them all the way through. That acknowledged. I would like to give this game the following ratings on the Acorn-o-meter (next page).

This is a great winter-time game and you'll feel chills either from

the story of from the wintry landscapes. There is another game to be reviewed in Beltane called [Rhiannon: Curse of the Four Branches](#) which has a similar landscape and story line.

Basic Story: You and a group of friends are driving around the wintry countryside of Blackpool, England (actually Cornwall) and decide to investigate some ruins during a significant astrological time. (Yeah, you see it coming). Now your friends are missing and the clock is ticking.

A mixture of some film bits, some animation, but mostly walking from stationary lovely screen shot to lovely screen shot, some eerie music, picking up various items, going to other spots and using them to advance the story, collect the books and video tapes and clues to what is going on.

There are in some parts too many tools and things to manipulate, so choose the helpful cheat options to make them easier to spot. Some of the Celtic stuff and mythology is a bit forced. Hopefully you can free your friends, before it is all too late! If it gets too hard, check internet for walkthrough!

Official Description:

Feel the snowy and frosty atmosphere in the new game Mystery Case Files: Dire Grove by Big Fish Games! It's a sixth game in Mystery Case Files series.

This time the action takes place in a small village called Dire Grove, and you play a role of detective. You're driving home and suddenly you find yourself traveling through unexpected and very strong storm. You stop near a small village of Dire Grove and notice a car with no passengers inside. After a quick search you find a video camera and video tapes. Each tape is a small piece of story of four graduate students, who want to prove that the ancient legend of Dire Grove is true. Where are these students? And what actually happened? You will have to find out this.

As all games of Mystery Case Files series, Mystery Case Files: Dire Grove game includes three main parts: solving of puzzles, point-and-click and hidden object scenes. In hidden object scenes you have a list of objects you should find. After you clear the place and find all objects, you'll get a useful item that will help you to solve some puzzles. Places and objects of interest are sparkling that is very helpful. When something needs to be looked at closer, the cursor turns into a magnifying glass. And, of course, you have a Detective's Casebook that remembers and keeps all the information about the case. So if you need some information, just look into your crime computer.



Graphics, music and sound effects of Mystery Case Files: Dire Grove are great. They are so well-done

and realistic that after some hours of playing you begin to feel cold. You even can hear how the snow is crunching under you feet. And it is snowing!

The distinctive feature of this game is video. Video tapes that you'll find in a car contain a live-action video with real actors. This video has a very useful information and may give you hints what to do next. So watch it carefully and don't skip it. As for puzzles, they're original and tricky as always. So be prepared to rack your brains over! As has been said before, Mystery Case Files: Dire Grove is a good adventure puzzle game with great graphics and fantastic sound effects. You'll spend hours playing this fascinating game. Be sure, you won't be disappointed in Mystery Case Files: Dire Grove.



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