

# a DRUID MISSAL-ARY

Volume 24, Issue 3, Beltane 2008



Beltaine, May Day, the beginning of Summer and the Season of Life in the Reformed Druid calendar, is one of the best known and widely celebrated High Days from old pagan times. Associations with growth and fecundity, and customs and celebrations marking them survived into modern times. In Scotland the cattle of the crofter townlands were taken to the *airidh* or sheiling of the moorlands on Beltaine day for summer grazing. In Ireland a common custom in each county was picking and bringing home fresh flowers. According to Kevin Danaher in his book *The Year in Ireland*, the flowers were nearly always yellow. This might have had some significance but also might be attributed to the type of flowers in bloom at this time of year:

primrose, buttercup, cowslips, marigolds, and furze blossoms.

The flowers were usually gathered before dusk on May Eve by children but in other places it was tradition to pick them before sunrise on May Day itself. The children would make small bouquets which were hung up in the house or laid on the doorsteps or windowsills or hung over the door. Garlands of "Summer," as the flowers were called, were hung on the doorposts and even tied to cows' tails. In *Irish Folkways* E. Estyn Evans writes that in Antrim Glens May flowers were crushed to make a juice with which the cows' udders were washed. These customs along with the practice of running the cattle between two fires before taking them up to the higher pastures on Beltaine shows the significant connection of cattle with Beltaine. Loose flowers were strewn over thresholds and floors of the homes and byres, on the roofs, in and around the well, or on the paths leading to the homes, outbuildings and wells. Even the horses were bedecked with small bunches of flowers tied to their bridles. Flowers were put around the well because it was supposed that a milk-thief could steal a family's summer milk and butter by skimming the water at Beltaine. Using flowers to wash a cow's udders and placing them around a well gives us insight that flowers played a more important role than being used for pretty decorations to celebrate a High Day; they were used as a form of magical protection. This brings into perspective the placement of flowers around the home, especially at entrances: windows and doors, to prevent malevolent spirits from entering.

Flowers also appear in Celtic mythology and play a singular role in the Welsh mythological cycle, the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi. Herein is the tale of Blodeuwedd, which is typical of the style of Celtic mythology with its complex and convoluted relationships. Blodeuwedd means "flower-face." She was created from the flowers of the oak, the broom, and meadowsweet as a magical wife for Llew Llaw Gyffes. He is the son of Arianrhod, daughter of the Dôn and the sister of Gwydion. Gwydion is also the protector of Llew. Arianrhod makes an oath that Llew will never have a human wife, so Math and Gwydion conjure up a wife for him out of flowers. Blodeuwedd is extremely beautiful but not being born of humans is without morals. She is faithless and takes on a lover Gronw Pebyr. They together plot to kill Llew. She tricks her husband into telling her how he able to be killed, even though he is nearly immortal. The lovers are unsuccessful. Llew is merely wounded and flies away in the form of an eagle. Gronw is slain by Gwydion who then restores Llew to human form and turns Blodeuwedd into an owl, considered to be an outcast among birds.

"I will not deal you an ordinary death," he said. "I will do to you which is much worse. For I shall send you forth in the shape of a bird. And for the sake of the shame you have wrought Llew Llaw Gyffes you shall never again show your face under the sun. It shall be the nature of all other birds to hate you and drive you from wherever they find you. And you shall not lose your name, but shall be called Blodeuwedd\* forever."...

So she became an owl, and flew away to hide in the dark. And she will hide there till the world ends.'\*\*

Banished to be a creature of the night, a time when flowers do not have the prominence they do during the day, Blodeuwedd continues to bear her name as punishment. It becomes a constant reminder of what she once was. And perhaps that infers that she lost the protection and beauty flowers afforded her. She is transformed from a beloved to a hated creature. Without that protection she is at the mercy of other birds, to always be chased off and shunned. She is doomed forever to live in the dark of night, away from the light of the sun which the flowers from whence she was created needed to grow and bloom.

A Druid Missal-Any will be going on hiatus. This iteration has been in publication since Samhain of 2000, almost nine years. Ironically that was the length of the term of publication by my mentor Emmon Bodfish, who I've mentioned in these pages quite often as well as republished some of his High Day essays. Some of the news contained in this issue is now quite old and outdated, but in the interest of preserving a snapshot of history I decided to leave it in.

Also ironically had it not been for Emmons death I would not have published new issues of the Missal-Any. I would not have returned to druidism, started a grove, taken my Third Order, and become AD. In the process of trying to figure out the dreams I started having about him after his death meant, I started on a journey that led me to shamanic practice. Little did I know I would be following in Emmon's footsteps in this regard as well. (He used to refer to himself as a shaman/cleric type rather than a warrior type. Little did I know what that meant at the time!) Becoming involved in a shamanic practice circle and earth medicine training deepened my druidism in ways I thought not possible and had only hoped for. This is where I need to put my energies now. So as I venture off into that part of the journey I bid you all adieu. I thank my contributors, the readers, and most of all Mike Scharding who has been my cohort and .web master for the past nine years.

\*The Mabinogi states that that owl has ever since been called Blodeuwedd, or the Flower-Like, in Wales.

\*\*Walton, Evangeline. 2002. *The Mabinogion Tetralogy*. Overlook Press, Woodstock & New York.

## NEWS OF THE GROVES



### Mango Mission: News from Southeast Asia

Death, death and death. April has been unkind to me and instead of enjoying the spring flowers, I've been dealing with deaths of Americans on spring break. I'll likely be an expert in cremations within a few months at this rate. Such is this job. Other than that, doing quite well. I'm very happy to hear that the AD at Carleton is holding sway and having a good time down there. I always wish those folk the very best experiences they can eke out of their busy schedules. I'm dreaming of starting a little grove in Canada after Samhain in 2009, but we'll see how family and other matters weigh in on that.



### Awen Grove: News from Canada

Since November, we have been very busy, working with members from ADF and The Druid Network in organizing the first Annual "The Spirit of the West Druid Gathering", a Druid gathering held in Western Canada which welcomes Druids from all over North America.

**We invite you to join us as we celebrate Modern Druidry at the first annual Druid Gathering in Western Canada.**

The Spirit of the West Druid Gathering June 13 – 15, 2008

The Spirit of the West Druid Gathering is the first of its kind in Western Canada - a festival which has all the elements of a great weekend out for Druids of all ages:

- Great hospitality
- Meet other Druids from Canada and the United States
- Trees, a lake, beautiful scenery... did we mention trees?
- Stories and songs around the campfire

- Informative workshops
- Exhilarating hikes
- A ritual to celebrate the season and the spirit of Modern Druidry
- Mead tasting - come and taste the handiwork of our finest mazers
- The Spirit of the West Eisteddfod
- Live music by Raven's Call
- Loads of fun for all members of the family
- Camping options for all levels of campers - cabins, RV parking, or tenting available at the campsite in Central Alberta
- Let's not forget the excellent food prepared by a professionally trained and very experienced chef!

The costs are \$70.00 for adults (14 years old+) and \$30.00 for Children under the age 13 but over the age of 3. Children under 3 can attend for free. The cost covers lodging for the entire weekend, workshops and all meals. We accept payments with Pay Pal.

Please visit our website to learn more about the Spirit of the West Druid Gathering and how you can be involved:  
<http://www.freewebs.com/druidgathering/>

Blessings,

Athelia Nihtascada/\



## Moose Breechcloth Proto-Grove: News from Minnesota

Seasonal Salutations Siblings!

Already starting to frolic and it isn't even Beltaine yet! I've been given a clean bill of health from my physical therapist, the ankle is mostly better...nothing that a whole lot of hiking won't cure at this point. And that is what I intend to do.

Fired up the fire pit in the back yard for the first time this year last night. The smell of burning wood really put an itch in my camping bone.

Been a long road since last July when I had the proverbial "last straw" sprain on my right ankle. That was the sprain that finally severed the ATF ligament. Grounded me permanently until I could get it fixed. Surgery came in October to repair it and the neighboring peroneal tendons, which were equally hosed. Followed by PT ever since.

Kind of feel like I got jipped out of the last nine months with outdoor activities. The plan is to make up for it this year. Starting with camping/hiking this coming weekend (April 24 - 27). Lou and I are hitting bluff country in the southeastern part of Minnesota. We need to go find some mud.

Been a year since I've gone bluffing in southeastern Minnesota. This weekend is also our anniversary, so I found a double sleeping bag for Lou as a gift. Who needs a below zero sleeping bag when you've got a big hairy guy to warm the bag up for you?

Not a whole lot for this installment. Our beloved sister Stacey has been whipping me with a USB cable to get an article written for her for this Missal-any. So that's pretty much choked up all my time. Two years worth of writer's block went into that article. Talk about blood, sweat, and carpal tunnel. Just couldn't get it started. Once I can get it started, the rest usually flows; but this one has had me vexed for two years. Have you ever known me to be short on words? Yeah...it was bad.

So I guess the big news for this installment is I get a two year reprieve before Stacey pulls out the USB cable again on me. Hurray!

So if you need to know what's been happening here...that's it. Physical therapy, and beating my head on the keyboard trying to bludgeon the writer's block out of me.

Until next installment...

Gigawabamin nagutch,  
and yours in the Mother,

—Julie Ann and Lou—



### Clan of the Triple horses: News from Oregon

Two members of our group are serving as members of the City's Tree Committee. We are looking for specific information on how other cities have granted incentives to either save mature trees or encourage planting trees on new developments. If anyone has any information to share, please contact us!

Triplehorses@gmail.com

For upcoming event information and pictures of previous gatherings, please see our LiveJournal:  
<http://triplehorses.livejournal.com/>

And/or our website: <http://home.earthlink.net/~triplehorses/>



### Poison Oak Grove: News from California

Members of little Poison Oak Grove have been immersing themselves in the Earth Medicine Training workshop they have been taking. The April gathering was at Sunol Regional Wilderness and it was the AD's turn to co-lead the day. Of course she incorporated elements of druidism into the course of the day. I wanted to emphasize Nature and connecting with plants. After the leader of the workshop made the opening prayer we sang the Earth Mother chant. It was well received, which was very nice (it's a little nerve-wracking to "put yourself out there" and do druidic practice in front of others who are not druids if you're not used to doing that).

We talked about a three-part process of learning about plants and connecting with them. The process consisted of: 1) direct knowing. For example, plant has sticky green leaves, the flowers are kind of tangerine colored, and you can pick off the flowers and suck the nectar out of the back of them, etc.; 2) intellectual/scientific knowledge. Plant's scientific name is Scrophulariaceae, it has a square stem like members of the mint family, but is itself of the figwort family, its common name is Sticky Monkey Flower, and it's native to California; and 3) symbolic lore/medicine. The flower is said to have reminded early taxonomists of a monkey's face. When the flower is pinched, it grins. The juice squeezed from the plant's foliage was used as a soothing poultice for minor burns and skin irritations). Each of us then connected with a wild flower to put what we learned into practice. We collected part of our plants and carried them to the Alameda Creek where we made an offering of the flowers to the spirit of the creek.

The next day on Sunday the AD was a panelist at the People of the Earth Event at the Interfaith Center at the Presidio in San Francisco that was announced in the Spring Equinox issue of A Druid Missal-Any. It was amazing! It wasn't the same old "look at me" stuff you see sometimes at Neo-Pagan events. These were elder and experienced people from the pagan and indigenous community and truly believe in what they are doing and their work toward Interfaith dialog. Each panelist had about ten minutes to talk about what challenges we face as a "minority" religion in the dominant American society and/or how do we build and strengthen community and/or preserve our culture in this environment. The Center invited us to come learn about each other and share our "best practices" for thriving as minority religions in a day-long conference including representatives from indigenous, Neo-pagan, and immigrant spiritual communities. The day included lunch and a joint ceremony for blessing the plans for the redesigned Center. I saw people nod their heads when I gave my speech. Several people came up to me afterwards to comment on what I said. And the priestess I co-called the four directions with, M. Macha Nightmare (a rather big mover and shaker in the neo-pagan community!), said what we did was sweet.

It was an incredibly inspiring weekend! Following is the prepared text of the speech I gave at the Interfaith Center.



## People of the Earth in America Event

By Stacey J. Weinberger, Poison Oak Grove

This comes from my observations and experience from being in the Neo-Pagan community for almost 25 years

Back in the day when a person wanted to become a member of the Neo-Pagan community it was either by word of mouth or by checking the bulletin board of your local “occult store” for notices of groups taking on new members. The Neo-Pagan community was much smaller then, and everyone knew just about everyone else, and often there were cross-over membership and attendance between circles, covens, and druid groves.

Now, in the late 20<sup>th</sup>, early 21<sup>st</sup> century there is a myriad of pagan groups in the Bay Area. And as the community has gotten larger that intimacy has also gotten a greater potential to get lost. A lot of people are eclectic and don't belong to an established tradition with a membership. With the advent of the internet one can learn about paganism, join a group, study, and connect with other pagans all over the world. That in a sense is community, an online community from the safety of your living room. Still...

One of the challenges I find that we face as being members of a minority religion is isolation. It's not like there is a church or synagogue or temple we can go to meet and practice as easily as there are in the mainstream religions. This leads directly into the next question of how does one build and strengthen community in this day and age and emerge from that isolation. Of course there is the aforementioned virtual connection but barring having no other outlets, there is no substitute for in-person “live” connection.

I don't mean to paint the virtual community in a negative light. Virtual can be a springboard or a bulletin board for live connection, and in an area as rich in alternative religion and practice as the Bay Area, there are many opportunities to connect with community. However, there is nothing so grounding as seeing the faces of the people you are with and connecting on a personal level with them.

There are of course different levels of participation and that's going to be flavored by the person's experience. For the new person becoming and wanting to be part of a community doesn't mean you have to already know everything about it or become so involved that you're an initiate or an active mover and shaker the first year (although that's great, we always need people who want to be more involved!) Just showing up is being part of community. Attending a ritual or ceremony or event is supporting the event because it supports the people who put it on.

There might come the time when the member does want to become more involved. This means commitment to the community, by attending on a regular basis, deciding to pursue study and initiation, taking on a more active role, or becoming an officer or leader. Commitment to community deepens the involvement to the community and ultimately strengthens the community itself.

What if the community you belong to is a sparse one though your commitment is strong? Being a member of the Reformed Druids of North America, there just aren't a lot of us around and those that are are few and far between or our groves are very small.

If we want to be more of a part of community we can for example find other druid groups in the area or another group entirely that feels comfortable and compatible. In addition to running my own grove I am an active participant in a local shamanic practice circle and taking part in a year-long Earth Medicine Training workshop being given by the leader of the circle. In essence a community was started there and because of continued interest these circles have been going on for four years other workshops have evolved from it, with membership overlap. Essentially a new community has been born.

On a personal level, taking away the trappings of labels, these particular workshops are the closest thing I have found to the instruction given by my druid mentor who passed away some time ago. I think that is one of the



biggest challenges to becoming part of and building community: finding a compatible community, be it in your tradition or the tradition you are interested in becoming a part of.

And ultimately for a community to survive it has to be about service. This means service to its members, service to the focal point of the community such as honor or worship of deities or spirits or High Days, or service to the wider community of the Earth, the land, Nature, people, other organizations such as the Interfaith Center. Again community can't exist in a vacuum. Service is what gives the community its strength.



## To Be A Parent

By Irony Sade, Hemlock Splinters Grove

Attached is a new piece of writing which you may wish to save for the Beltaine issue, just before Mother's Day. It is a letter I wrote to my mother in 2001 after reflecting on parenting and wondering how to raise a good druid. Raising druids, I realized could not be the goal, but now that more and more druids are becoming parents themselves, I

thought it might be useful.

June 24, 2001

Dear Mother,

The more people I meet the more unique I realize my upbringing was. The fact that I came from a sane, happy, unconditionally loving family is something I tend to take for granted. It is only in seeing the effects of its absence in others' lives that I realize how special it was. There is a threshold of emotional self-sufficiency, which people pass or fail to. Once a person has crossed that threshold the world can go to hell, and they will be fine. It could be argued that the whole purpose of parenting is to bring a child to that point and help it across. My brother and I passed that threshold years ago. You raised us superbly. I wanted to thank you for that.

Realizing this, and with an interest in raising my own children I want to know how you did it. I have not yet read all your child psychology books, nor had more than one mother, nor any children of my own, but I have given the matter much thought, and come up with this.



**Three things you must never stint: Food, Education, Love**  
**Three things you must teach: Imagination, Ethics, Practicality**  
**Three things you must always encourage: Questions, Choices, Dreams**

### **Three things you must never stint:**

*Food:* Whatever else we had or didn't there was always food, lots of it, and only good stuff. I don't recall there ever being junk in the fridge. You wasted no money on it then, and today I have no taste for the stuff. However high the grocery bill was, you never stinted. Cloths, toys, entertainment might be neglected, but food never was. This kept us all strong, healthy, and growing, giving us well-nourished minds and bodies. It laid the groundwork for everything else.

*Education:* Besides food, there were always books, museums, telescopes, libraries, and classes in whatever we were interested in. On top of this you shared your own extensive knowledge, and, when nothing else would serve, pointed out the ways and places to study things beyond your ken. School was always a given. I doubt either of us ever imagined not going to college. As food nourished our bodies, education fed our minds, leaving only the soul to be dealt with.

*Love:* I remember no words to this effect. As with everything, actions are more meaningful. Reading us stories, talking, spending time, caring what we thought and did, the entire fact of raising us- all of that was rooted in love, but it will take a greater poet than I to say what that is. It was always there. It is essential.

These three things you must never keep from a child. You never did. Thank you.

### **Three things you must teach:**

*Imagination:* They say you cannot teach this. Nonsense. You hardly ever bought us toys, yet you made many, and so did we. Newsprint became paper-mache, loom rubble became swords, string became castles and spider webs, cloth and cardboard became fishes and dragons. We learned that reality could be rearranged. What else is imagination?

*Ethics:* The knowledge of good and evil. I still don't know how this is taught. When situations arose you discussed them with us. When we lied, you made us think it through and see the instability of it. You made us think, choose, and take responsibility. Mostly though, I believe it is through example and experience that we learn about good and evil. Where there was pain, you healed; where there was wrong, you righted. You encouraged us to do the same—and you never glorified the bad.

*Practicalities:* There is a hidden premise in all of this: Life is to be lived for dreams, charted by ethics, and managed through practicalities. Without dreams even a good, functional life will be aimless. Without ethics a successful dreamer may be a monster. Without practical skills your dreams may be unreachable. The third thing a parent must teach is as much practical knowledge as possible. How to cook, clean, take care of yourself, doctor cuts, manage finances, arrange trips, read maps, plant gardens, repair clothes, fix houses, milk cows, use computers... It is an endless list. The more practical skills you can teach a child the smoother his life will be, the less help he will need; the more attention he can give to more important matters.

### **Three things a parent must always encourage**

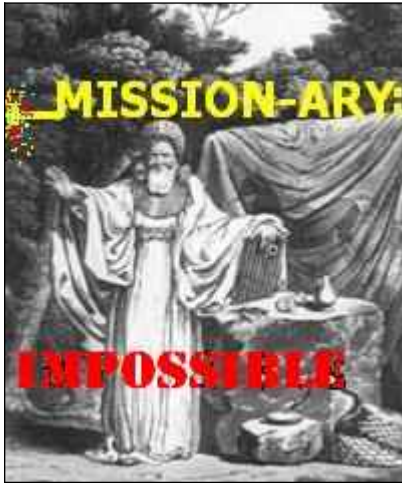
If people were plants, the first triad of qualities describes the soil one should plant a child in. The second set involves parental guidance of the young shoots. The third contains those things that must be encouraged so that the new plant, upon attaining awareness, can guide its own growth for the rest of its life.

*Questions:* You encouraged these admirably, to the eternal consternation of everyone I encounter. More than providing information this taught me to expect answers, and to answer honestly when I myself am questioned. Now we see the overlap in the triads. Education, ethics, practicalities and dreams are all fueled by and give rise to questions. They are the dialectic that informs the act of living.

*Choices:* Be it as simple as corn—vs.—succotash, by offering choices and honoring our answers you taught us that our decisions make a difference, and gave us experience making them. We also learned that choice entails both freedom and consequence, a thing too many never seem to understand. With questions and choices we steer our lives, to dreams we plot our voyages.

*Dreams:* This may be the most exasperating part of being a loving parent- encouraging all our disparate dreams. Gymnastics, weaving, archery, ice-skating chemistry, astronomy, sailing, filmmaking, acting, soccer... Each time our interests led us somewhere else you encouraged that dream, giving us the opportunity to explore each new thing. You bought us tools, but never toys, and let us move elsewhere when the impulse took us. Because of this we believe that anything is possible, and have the mental tools to make it so.





## Missionary Impossible: File 8: The Individual and the World

By Michael Scharding

Usually, around Beltane, we like to think of life, newness, and fresh starts. However, any conversation about such matters also provides a good chance to think of the opposite side of the same coin: death, oldness and completions. Samhain much the same the other way around. Any seasonal marker on the circle of the year reminds us of beginning and ends.

In my current job, I have to occasionally assist with Americans who have run into hard times, become ill or die in LaOs. One case, Mr. X, is particularly poignant, in that he seemed to have spent 25 plus years without ever having a roommate, girlfriend, close friend, or even a relative in the same country. What a lonely life, I thought originally. We were finally able to locate a cousin in Eastern Europe as his next of kin. But several thoughts came up during the process that I'd like to share with you. Where I am not witty enough, I'll throw in a few quotes and stories on the subject (many of them extracted out of laziness from the *Green Books of A Reformed Druid Anthology*). I certainly cannot hope to exhaust this one subject, such is the finitude of my ability.

Nothing so motivates the consciousness as its own eventual end of consciousness. For many of us, this is something we wish to avoid by almost any means possible. We wish to live well and live long, the well-er and longer the better in most cases. Millions and billions of people have wrestled with why we die and how we live, and what to do about both. I am not much different.

Even if you only live for this life, and lived a million years, you are never fully the same person you were yesterday, much less after centuries or millennia. Your body is constantly tearing and rebuilding itself, things entering and leaving you daily in many ways.

### Who Are You Now?

The king asked: 'When someone is reborn, is he the same as the one who has just died, or is he another?'

The Elder replied: 'He is neither the same nor another.'

- 'Give me an illustration.'

'What do you think, great king, when you were a tiny infant, newly born and quite soft, were you then the same as the one who is now grown up?'

- 'No, that infant was one, I now grown up am another.'

- 'If that is so then, great king, you have had no mother, no father, no teaching, and no schooling!... We must understand it as the collocation of a series of successive conditions. At rebirth one condition arises, while another stops.'

- Milanda's Questions, 40



### The Caravansary

Once Khidr went to the King's palace and made his way right up to the throne. Such was the strangeness of his appearance that none dared to stop him.

The king, who was Ibrahim ben Adam, asked him what he was looking for.

The visitor said: 'I am looking for a sleeping-place in this caravansary.'



Ibrahim answered: 'This is no caravansary, this is my palace.'

The stranger said: 'Whose was it before you?'

'My father's', said Ibrahim.

'And before that?'

'My grandfather's.'

'And this place, where people come and go, staying and moving on, you call other than a caravansary?'

Why do we chase immortality for ourselves as individuals? Are we so dissatisfied with what we have, that we can think of asking for more time without limit? Time stretches behind and before us incomprehensibly far in either direction.

- Our hope of immortality does not come from any religions, but nearly all religions come from that hope”  
- Robert Green Ingersoll
- A man's dying is more the survivors' affair than his own. -Thomas Mann
- The idea wants changelessness and eternity. Whoever lives under the supremacy of the idea strives for permanence; hence, everything that pushes toward change must be against it. -Carl Jung
- Though a tree grow ever so high, the falling leaves return to the ground. -Malay
- You can not step twice into the same river, for other waters are continually flowing on. -Heraclitus

If not in our mortal bodies, do we seek immortality through our communal ties, things we do, and the people we touch? Many strive through biological offspring to leave their mark, or become teachers, artists, writers, priests, etc. to pass on something of themselves, to “pass the torch” to a next generation.

- “What we do for ourselves dies with us. What we do for others and the world remains and is immortal.” Albert Pine
- “We all die. The goal isn't to live forever, the goal is to create something that will.” --Chuck Palahniuk
- Millions long for immortality who do not know what to do with themselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon.”  
--Susan Ertz
- Our repugnance to death increases in proportion to our consciousness of having lived in vain. --William Hazlitt
- “Immortality is the genius to move others long after you yourself have stopped moving” --Frank Rooney
- When a blacksmith dies, his hand hangs in the world. --Idoma, Nigeria
- For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: “It might have been!” --John Greenleaf Whittier
- The hardest thing we are asked to do in this world is to remain aware of suffering, suffering about which we can do nothing. —Mary Sarton
- I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.  
—Henry David Thoreau

If I am a recluse and have only two friends and you have a thriving public career, a family of five and ten friends, do I seem lonely to you? Is my life so much less significant than yours in the big picture? Must I be dissatisfied relative to you? May I be content, regardless of the relative difference between us?



Nothing seems  
So transient as  
Human life:  
The dew on the petal  
Of the morning glory. 64

How regrettable!  
Never  
To return:  
Days and months, flowing water,

And Human lives! 120.

In the year 2108, when you and I are likely to be gone, most close friends gone, and most relatives a bit fuzzy about our existence, what about the situation then? How about a thousand years of time flowing by? Do you seek eternity through relation with a tradition to bridge the centuries?

### Tradition

Rabbi Steinsaltz was teaching a class. He was only 25 years old at the time, and he realized that some in the class were great thinkers, the best in the nation. Some were three times his age. As he thought about it, he became embarrassed at the thought that he should teach them. Suddenly he realized that there was only one way he could justify his teaching. He decided to tell himself that these great minds, his elders, were listening to Adin Steinsaltz not as an individual, but as a representative of a tradition. In that sense, he was 5,000 years old and teaching 75 year-old babies.

—Adin Steinsaltz 1937-, Rabbi and Talmudic scholar

Things rise and fall, nations and civilizations too, sometimes not to be replaced. DNA lines of humanity will likely eventually mutate, evolve, falter and end someday. All our works will eventually crumble, the figures on Mt. Rushmore, will one day be forgotten, fall off and return to rumble.

Do you seek immortality through constant rebirth? Many religions offer this as an alternative to eternal forever-ever life in a heavenly realm (itself a concept of absoluteness). There is some evidence that ancient Druidry subscribed in part to this. Even Hollywood in a more-or-less Western complex, loves this as a basis of hundreds of popular movies and stories, e.g. lovers ever being reborn to find each other again. The movie “Luke” about a husband reborn as a dog, seeking to unite with his previous life’s family was quite touching for me and my wife. How about eternity through identifying oneself with Nature as a whole?

What shall I leave as  
A keepsake after I die?  
In spring, flowers;  
Summer, cuckoos;  
Fall, red maple leaves;  
Winter, snow.

—Ryokan’s deathbed poem, 1831

A million years, perhaps humanity is gone. A few billion years, perhaps the Earth is lifeless and swallowed by an expanding dying sun. True immortality of the individual or their record of existence, forever, is impossible, even in the sense of being reconstituted after we die by decomposition and re-use into new creatures. While good things can come from pursuing the impossible, rational limits should be acknowledged.



### **The Serenity Prayer**

God grant me  
the serenity to accept the things I cannot change  
the courage to change the things I can and  
the wisdom to know the difference.

—Reinhold Niebuhr 1892-1971, Protestant theologian

True immortality and eternity are possess-able by no-one and no-thing. Perhaps only the ideal archetypal concepts can be eternal, like numbers or Plato's idea of the imaginary mostly "chair-ly chair" concept. Such concepts however, do little for me, myself. In most mythologies, even the gods are born and die, how much more foolish for us to try?

Does that mean that our existence is pointless because of the finite-ness of us and everything we can do or comprehend?

I hope not. I grasp for some other finite reason to exist.

In a Descartean manner, I am here, I believe, right now. The world is here. Others are here for a while. There is an unclear short-term future that I can attempt to comprehend and work with. There is a fading past that is being forgotten. My life is influenced by natural forces, Fate and wills that I must contend with, in ways similar and different with everyone else. I feel things must be done, I wish to make plans and see how they turn out, short-term though they be. I anticipate pleasures and pains that part of this existence that I am aware of. I don't wish to die, not yet, now.

As with all big and small decisions, you give varying weight to the past, present and future. Life decisions aren't easy. How have things like this been done before, were they done acceptably well before, are circumstances or possibilities different now? Can or should it be done now. Am I using short term or long term to consider whether it is in my best interest? How will this affect the community, family and groups I belong to, are their ramifications for future generations and my imprint on the planet? Lastly, will any of this really matter hundreds or thousands of years in the future? Let's not make a mountain out of a molehill, although when it is about us, everything seems urgent and important. Varying the perspective by telescoping in and out is important to break out of the closed-pressure-box of the current emergency. Ask for advice from a more independent viewpoint and think about it two or three times afterwards. You'll usually make a better decision for the effort.

That's where I am. Still struggling to make sense of it all, and muddling along, while yet working on this problem.

I started this essay in uncertainty and end there about the same spot. Thoughts have risen and fallen away. Many of the words you have read are even no longer with you, some will remain for a while, and a few may persist in ways you don't realize.

I don't have any easy answers for you. We must all wrestle with our own mortality and what to do in the varying time-interval between birth and death. Some others will feel quite strongly that they have a clear answer for you on this subject, and I hope you will learn from them, and also from those who are not so sure.

Yours in the Mother,

Mike the FoOl





## Native American Prayer Or Why Cleaning Cat Boxes = Once 'Round On the Rosary

By Julie Ann  
Moose Breechcloth Proto-Grove

Hello, once again Siblings. Yeah...Stacey is being a bully again. You should've heard the terrible things she said she'd do if I didn't write this article for her.

Actually, I never had a problem writing this article, it was more or less how to start it. Or even WHERE to start it. In all seriousness, the only reason Stacey got away with it, is because she really had no idea what it was that she was asking me to do.

If she really knew how utterly impossible it was to define Native American prayer, she never would have asked. (It's ok Stacey...I still love you! And only because it's you, I gave a valiant effort with this article.)

You would be hard pressed to find something more difficult to define than Native American prayer. Reason for that is, it's going to have a different definition for anyone you ask. Truly, it's trying to nail Jell-O to a tree...but for Stacey, I will try. I could probably get solidly one third of the Native folk out there to agree with me (on some level) and my definition. But that leaves one third who think I take things WAY too seriously, and another one third who would think that I'm little more than one of the "Christmas and Easter only" crowd. Not to mention beliefs are going to vary from tribe to tribe (and even rez to rez) and you've got a crazy mess.

And I'm supposed to define this. Hmmmm...

It's not that I've blown off writing this article, or been blowing off Stacey's requests for it. I've been brain-farting and writers'-blocking this article for about two years now. It wasn't for lack of trying.

It's not like defining other faiths and practices (ex: here's Catholicism, more or less, in a couple of statements...Father, Son, Holy Ghost, virgin birth, died on the cross, 10 commandments, be a good person and do good things and you'll pretty much get to Heaven...aside from a lot of low-impact aerobics in their services (sit-stand-kneel-sit-stand-kneel). It's a gross oversimplification, but that's pretty much it).

If I attempted that with Native American beliefs, we'd be here for weeks. All I can attempt is defining prayer; I'm not even going to touch Native American spirituality (forget it Stacey, not going there). All I'm doing is defining prayer.

Also keep in mind, that as the reservations were being formed, various churches would actually "bid" on the reservations for the rights to plunk their missions on them. No...seriously. One rez would get a Lutheran missionary, another would get a Catholic missionary, yet another would get an Episcopalian missionary. I'm deadly serious. It was little more than an auction. Spiritual EBay of the 19th century betwixt the US government and various churches. Anyhooooo...many of the folk on the reservations would then convert, and there you go. On a lot of reservations today, for a lot of folk, their spirituality will be a blend of Native American beliefs and that of whatever lucky bidder got to plunk a mission on their rez. So now you've got Native American beliefs splintered not only by varying levels of devotion, not only regional, tribal, and even differences from rez to rez, but now add in saturation of foreign religions.

Still think you're going to get a decent definition?



The best nugget I can offer up is what it means to me...and perhaps 1/3 of other Native folks. Keep in mind, there will be another 2/3 out there who will tell you this is utter hogwash (either it's too much, or it's not nearly enough).

(Deep cleansing breath) Here goes nothing....

First of all, for a good chunk of us, the idea of "church" as a building or a specific place is just sheer rubbish. You're trying to tell me that your creator only listens to you in one place?! In one-hour increments on one day of the week?!

You're getting ripped off!!!

For a good chunk of society at large, religion is something they go "do" for one hour once a week, and on holy days of obligations. Toss in using the creator's name in vain a couple of times, and that's about it.

For a lot of Native folks, spirituality is something that we never really unplug from. It's not something that we set out to go "do" because we've been "doing it" non-stop since conception. It's who we are, and it's where we are 24/7. We believe the creator listens to us all the time. Doesn't matter where we are. Doesn't matter what we're doing. We have a constant live feed to the creator 24/7. And because the creator is always listening to us, everything that comes out of our mouths is a prayer. Everything that we do is an offering (also a prayer) to the creator. From the most sacred of rituals, to the most mundane of tasks...all are prayers to the creator.

Sitting in a sweat lodge is a prayer. Talking to your sister on the phone is a prayer. Fixing a flat tire along the side of the road is a prayer. Going on a vision quest is a prayer. Cleaning the cat boxes is a prayer. Offering tobacco to the creator is a prayer. Ordering a pizza is a prayer. Going to a pow wow is a prayer. A child's laughter is a prayer.

So you see..."church" is where ever we happen to be at that precise moment. We don't punch a religious time clock. We are perpetually "in church." Hence why the idea of church being a single building or place is foreign to us. We know the creator will (and does) hear us wherever we are.

Many people of other faiths pray to be heard by their creator, as if they don't believe the creator is actually listening. They seem to believe so because the creator doesn't "answer" their prayers in the way that they want. In my discussions with Stacey she said that it was her impression that prayer was largely just asking for something. Not true. Very little prayer is asking for something. It's primarily conversation. Conversation and giving praise for what the creator has given us, and enabled us to do...yes, even cleaning cat boxes. After all, it was the creator that gave us hands, enabling us to scoop the poop. Using the hands the creator gave us gives thanks to the creator...ergo, a prayer. It doesn't have to be asking for something. It can be a comment. An observation. Even a complaint. And the creator always answers. The answer may be "No." It could be "Not now." It could be "Got that scheduled for next week." It could be "Crimony! I put a brain in that melon of yours...YOU FIGURE IT OUT!" And, it may be "Yes." But for most of it, our comments, observations, and complaints, it's usually just "Duly noted." May not be the winning lottery numbers, but you DID get an answer.

In the case of the cat boxes, it may be "Missed a spot."

I guess I keep using the cat boxes as an example because I'm really trying to drive home that it doesn't matter what you're doing. The creator gave you those hands; and the cats, if no one else, are grateful that you are using this tremendous gift that you were given. Even cleaning a cat box gives praise to the creator. In other words...a prayer. Cleaning cat boxes gives thanks for those little furry critters the creator gave us to share our homes and our hearts with. It gives thanks for the food the creator provided to feed aforementioned little furry critters, which inevitably wound up in said cat box. And that gives praise because that means all parts on the cats are working okey-dokey. It gives praise that the creator gave us clay with which to make the kitty litter that the cats just dumped in. And it gives praise to the creator for giving us this tremendous gift of hands that we use to scoop the poop. Who knew so much prayer could come from just shoveling s\*\*\*.

Hands are a tremendous gift from the creator, and when we use them, we give thanks to the creator. Those without hands, have feet. Those without feet, have a voice. Those without a voice, have a heart with which to love. Those without a heart...are pretty much screwed. But you get the point of what I'm saying.

Now apply that to every little thing you do all day, every day. You are in a constant state of prayer.

If you're wondering where your church is (tapping my chest), it's in here. You carry it with you no matter where you are, or what you're doing. This is your church. It's not a building, it's not a specific location, it's here (tapping my chest again). And this is where you go to pray (tap tap tap).

It's not limited to humans, either. All things are part of the web. All things are connected...the plants, the animals, the seas, the skies, the rocks, the trees, humans. We are all connected, and we are all a part of the creator. And likewise, these things add their prayers to ours.

The wind blowing is a prayer. The leaves rustling answer the wind's prayer with their own prayer. The wind carries some of the most sacred of prayers there are. Remember, the wind that gave our grandfathers their first breath also receives their final sigh. That final sigh is in turn taken by the grandchild receiving their first breath. All carried by the wind. Top that as a prayer. That's huge!

Rocks in time break down to gravel, which in time break down to sand, which with time and compression become rock again, are all prayers. They are prayers of change and rebirth. The great circle.

If you look around there are hundreds, if not thousands, of prayers going on around you right now. Just depends on your definition. All things serve the creator, and the creator serves all things.

Have I lost any of you yet? Stacey and I spent a couple of hours one night IM'ing each other back and forth as I tried to explain this to her (the catalyst for her now mercilessly bullying me into writing this article). I don't think I did a very good job back then, and I really don't have a good sounding board for how I'm doing now. I had Lou read this; however he's so immersed in my culture that it's as natural to him as his own. Made perfect sense to him; but at this point...if he hasn't figured it out by now.... He was more useful correcting grammatical faux pas, and expressing joy over how his cleaning the cat boxes equates to the red-eye to heaven. Really, it's not the red-eye to heaven, so much as the red phone to creator...but what do I know? If it keeps him cleaning the cat boxes, I'm good with it.

I can find other ways to pray.

Gigawabamin nagutch,  
And yours in the Mother,

—Julie Ann—

## EVENTS



### Conference Announcement and Call for Papers

The 2008 Conference of the North American Association for Celtic Language Teachers will be held June 12-14, 2008 at the Madog Center for Welsh Studies, at the University of Rio Grande in Rio Grande, Ohio. Please visit our website ([www.naaclt.org](http://www.naaclt.org)) for more information and to register. Registration closes 16 May 2008.

Abstracts are invited for twenty-minute talks, each followed by a ten-minute discussion period. Appropriate topics include, but are not limited to, issues dealing with the teaching, learning, promotion or appreciation of any of the Celtic languages or cultures. Abstracts may be submitted by April 18, 2008 to Kevin Rottet ([krottet@indiana.edu](mailto:krottet@indiana.edu)).

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freagrai as Gaeilge le do thoil, oiread agus is féidir



## Southwestern Druid Equinox Gathering-early announcement

A pre-announcement so that all those that might like to attend can plan far enough in advance.

Another member of the AODA and I are hosting a Druid Gathering over the weekend of the Fall Equinox at White Tank Mountains Park in Phoenix Arizona. We have the Group Campground reserved, which has Ramadas, showers, barbecues, and fire pits (although there may be fire restrictions due to the time of year). Gordon Cooper, of the AODA Grand Grove, will be in attendance and giving a talk on Victorian Era Spirituality.

As I said, this is a bit of an early announcement, as we do not have the schedule of events finalized yet other than Gordon's talk and an Alban Elved Ritual. A hike along the Petroglyph Trail has been discussed and will probably be included in the itinerary.

This is open to all Druids, not just those of the AODA, so if anyone wishes to attend they are certainly welcome. For those in the Metro Phoenix area, camping will be available or you may just come for the day.

As the schedule of events is ironed out, I will post more and will place a reminder in the calendar here. We will have an RSVP phone number available to confirm that you are coming, either for the day or camping.

Tully

## CALENDAR

Beltaine, when the Sun is half-way between the Spring Equinox and the Summer Solstice, will occur this year astronomically on Sunday, May 4th, as 15 degrees of Leo at 8:05 p.m. Pacific Daylight Time, or alternatively as 16 degrees 18 minutes decl at 4:57 p.m. Pacific Daylight Time.

A Druid Missal-Any is published eight times a year. Post mail subscriptions are \$9.00 and email subscriptions are free. Or write an article or send us a cartoon and receive a year's post mail subscription free. Write A Druid Missal-Any, P.O. Box 406, Canyon, CA 94516.