

TOUCHSTONE

The journal of
**THE ORDER OF BARDS,
OVATES & DRUIDS**

February 2026 | Issue 342

This Issue

- ✿ Putting the Delight
back in Druidry
by Liz Cruse.
- ✿ Awen and the
Power of Poetry
by Frank Oldings.
- ✿ Druid Counselling
by Steve Merritt.
- ✿ Plus lots more!



Cover: "February" by Josh Warren

Editorial

Welcome to February's edition of *Touchstone*! This really is a packed issue, with some gorgeous poetry, prose and visual art to celebrate Imbolc. For me, probably the most important piece is Liz Cruse's joyous article *Bringing Delight Back to Druidry*. It's a piece we all need to engage with right now. As such, I will be talking to Liz about her article on this month's *Touchstone Unbound*, on the Hearth at 7pm (UK time) on Friday 6th February. Don't miss it!

And don't forget to submit your pieces for our *Urban Druidry* edition in April. You still have a bit of time and we are in particular need of poetry and visual art. Why not sit with the theme and see where the Awen takes you?



Imbolc by Jessica McGee

At the dawn of Spring
we honor Brigit's fair grace
singing to the Light.



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On the Cover

by Josh Warren

"I love the first green shoots of spring, the snowdrops and crocuses with hazel catkins and cherry plum blossom. Some folklore-informed figures of 'Wren Boys' parading their captured Wren jaunt merrily through the waking woodland. In a burrow Pan begins to stir surrounded by hibernating animal companions. On a gleaming Solar Altar are some bright lit candles, a Brigit's Cross and Doll fashioned from reeds and straw as well as offering dishes of water, honey, salt and a loaf of bread. Blessings of the brightening sun to all!"

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Opinions/statements by contributors are not necessarily those of the editor, Order or publishers. Submissions from members are welcomed, but it is not always possible to use everything offered for publication. Contributions must focus on Druidry or contributor's experience of Druidry and may be edited without consultation unless a request is made to the contrary. Poetry no more than 40 lines. Articles of 1,400 words or fewer. No AI generated content. Deadline for events inclusion is 5th of the month before publication. Submissions may be printed on the OBOD website unless requested otherwise.

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Chosen Chief's Bit

Bandia daoibh a chairde, greetings everyone!
Beannachtaí Imbolc daoibh uilig! Imbolc blessings to you all!

Genealogy of Bríd

Every day and every night
That I say the genealogy of Bríd,
I shall not be killed, I shall not be harried,
I shall not be put in cell, I shall not be, wounded,
Neither shall Spirit leave me in forgetfulness.
I shall not be slain
I shall not be wounded
I shall not be prisoned
I shall not be gashed
I shall not be torn asunder
I shall not be plundered
I shall not be downtrodden
I shall not be stripped
I shall not be rent in two
Nor will Spirit let me be forgotten
No fire, no sun, no moon shall burn me,
No lake, no water, nor sea shall drown me,
No arrow of fairy nor dart of fay shall wound me,
And I under the protection of my mother Danú,
And my gentle foster-mother is my beloved Bríd.

Amended from Carmina Gadelica

This poem, although hundreds of years old, is very pertinent in today's world. Although the levels of violence, oppression, and human rights violations seem to be increasing, let us not give up hope or give in to fear. I hope this prayer of Protection can offer some peace of mind and heart.

As I'm writing this, Plúiríní Sneachta – Snowdrops - are beginning to peep up through the soil, and by the time you are reading this, they will be in full bloom. Snowdrops are the first flowers to bloom in Ireland and are associated with Brigid and the coming of Spring. Although they are naturalised in Ireland and Britain, they are not native to these islands, having been introduced around the 16th century by Italian monks. Such is the organic nature of folklore and spirituality that the Snowdrop has been adopted as the flower of Brigid. An Caisearbhan – Dandelion - is also associated with Brigid, though it doesn't bloom until March.

Members have asked me what they can do if Snowdrops do not grow in their landscape. My response is to be pragmatic and choose the first flower to bloom in Spring in your land to honour Brigid. One of the things I loved when studying the Gwers was the invitation to explore our own

landscape, and while using the Gwersi as a framework for our Druidry, to create a spiritual practice that was in keeping and in harmony with the land around us. The freedom to work with the trees, plants, and animals around us, to engage with the mythology and the stories of the land, was very empowering.

The Order is unusual in that although it is a teaching Order and a Mystery school, it does not offer a qualification on completing the Grades. This, I believe, is a strength. For each member, their journey through the grades is a personal one. It is self-paced, and each meditation and exercise is offered as an invitation to explore ideas and practices and to reflect upon them. It is understood that not all Gwersi will resonate with every member; however, there is, I think, a wide-enough range of topics and perspectives to study and consider for the course to be rich, informative, inspiring and enlightening. There is an invitation to make of the Gwersi what you will – that is, to come to an understanding that makes sense to you and that is relevant to where you are in your life stage, to your own worldview and landscape. Because of the individualised and personal nature of the course, it is not necessary to have study groups or to have workshops on how to progress through the grades. In fact, these are discouraged. If a member wishes to progress from one grade to another, they are invited to write a review of their journey. It is not an assessment of what knowledge has been attained. We do not have a Pass/Fail ethos. The review is an opportunity for the member to reflect on their experiences as they travelled through and explored the grade. We recognise the uniqueness of everyone's experience. If you have reservations or fears about writing and submitting your review (I certainly did until I got over myself) I encourage you to just do it. Remember it is about your journey and your ability to reflect on it. There are no right answers, therefore there are no wrong answers.

As we enter Imbolc, may An Breo Saighead – the Firy Arrow – another name for Bríd – fill you with the fire of courage, Imbas, inspiration and peace within your being. May whatever intentions you set for yourself this year be fruitful and remember to go at your own pace.

Go n-éirí libh – may you rise – may you succeed!
Beannachtaí 'is Síocháin (Blessings & Peace)

Eimear 



Imbolc by Susan Knox

In the hert o the clauchan, smooored in moul's, we
await the call.
Scantie, warmth reaches doon, through the cauld
glaur.
Then, stirrin, we imagine the gowden glister o Her
shawl
As She awakens the Spring, bright sparks reachin
faur
Intil the hert o us. Bonnie an blate, we rise tae the
new dawn.

Coming in from the Cold by Mark Newton

Like a brief death, a walk on a high moor brings
in January's indifference, a smear of blue across
the face
and ears.
My fingers, too, can barely grasp this staff.

The body, so it's said, likes this worldly stress
where the limits of the self meet
the edges of enchantment.
Like this cold day – when the sliding wind bites.

So if this is what the end is like, when chill winds
bring instead eternal night, a wave of black
washing across the mind's stars,
I'll finally feel alive.

Earth by Clodagh Connaughton

I know thee well
in all your guises -
shape-shifter supreme,

you who hold me
in all my states of being,
giving me life
and love.

I feel you intensely -
your breath on my face,
your fire in my belly.

I drink of your waters;
your elements flow
through my veins.

Your layers reflect
my levels
of consciousness;

your moods echo
my emotions,
in calm and turmoil.

Your soil sustains
my body's functions
and my aesthetic
sensitivities.

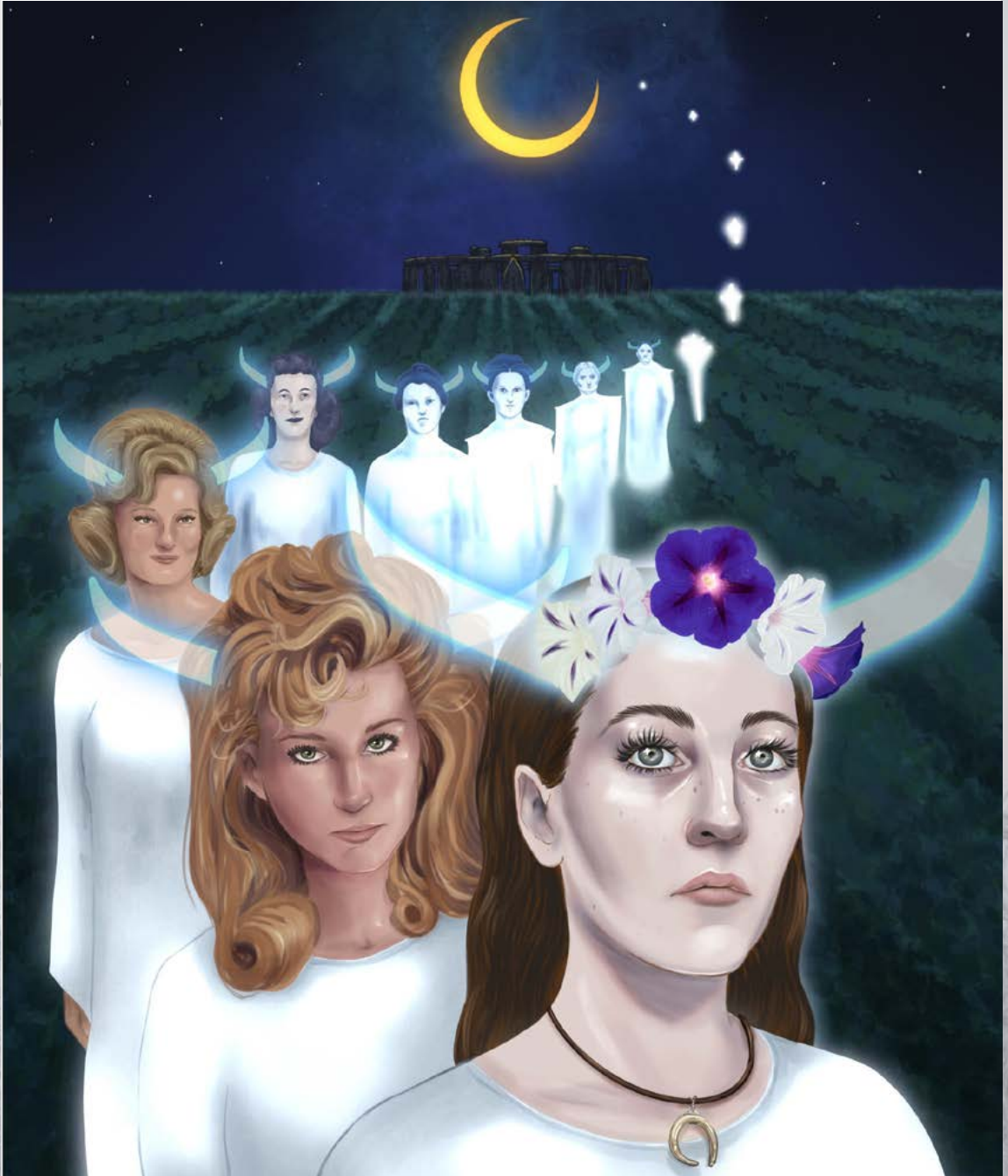
I am
of you -
Earth.



Image by Steve Harvey
Image behind text, pages 3-5 by Steve Harvey

Relationship with Mother Earth by Neridah Rogers

I have never had anyone look out for me the way you do.
I never had the safety net of parents to go to when in need.
I never imagined also that I would find this, though I have in you.
I had always wished it would be a love, a partner I could turn to instead I found it in you.
And to be the parent my children need, as it is supposed to be, as you have been to me.
Life did not turn out well so far, so I am blessed that I have you.
Some people may not understand but they also have not known you.
I hope to rise above and give you a whole person, so I too can take care of you.



My Mothers and I by Caitlin Lee

The Great Mother by Heidi Hanley

She dances by the fire in the forest grove.
Cloaked in starlight,
Shaking the bones,
Spiraling to the Goddess' drum,
Surrounded by Birch, Oak and Ash.
She is Earth
She is Sky
She is Water
She is Fire
She weaves the stories of the Old Ones,
The Keepers of the Mysteries,
The Guardians of Wisdom.
She is the voice of the web of life.

She has no name of her own, but is called knowingly by her kin,
Owl, Fox, Bear, Fern, Moss and Lichen stained stone.
She is the gurgle of the stream flowing through the sun-dappled glen in spring.
She is the melody of the wind speaking through the leaves in summer.
She is the howling of the pack beneath the full Wolf Moon in winter
She is the golden light of autumn through Beech trees.
She sees the chaos of the past and the promise of the future.
Her native tongue is magick.
Her purpose is healing.
The World sings in and through her bones and flesh.
The Cosmos prophesies from her Spirit Eye.
She is Maiden, Mother, Crone.
She is White Buffalo Calf Woman.
She is Kali and Kuan Yin.
She is 'Granny' in the vernacular.

Come, dance with me.
Kiss my vernal lips,
Lie with me upon a mossy bed,
Dream enchantment with me,
And make the dreams real.
Be transformed by my love.
Walk in my grace.
Dance with me by the fire in the forest grove.

Howl of the Hidden Grove by Scott Seivwright

I saw the best trees of my generation
standing alone in tidy suburban gardens
starved of their underground lovers.

O holy fungal telephone lines
singing carbon poetry in the dark.
O anarchist roots that refuse borders
sharing sugar like revolution.

We are not separate
we only pretend to be trunks
but beneath this polite bark
we rave together, writhing and alive
in the disco-dark soil.

We feed each other
unregulated
uncensored
no market price on mercy.

Listen.
The grove is a single body
and the Earth is its mind.
We are the dream-limbs of Gaia
stretching for light
while our feet drink moonmilk.

When one of us falls
it is only a change of posture.
Roots still speak to roots
saying
I remember you.
I remember you.
Grow on, brother.
Grow on, sister.

This is communion.
This is love with mud under its nails.
This is the forest refusing to die
even as we cut it into loneliness.

I want us to feed again
in the underground cathedral
where every root is a prayer
and every tree is a howl
answered.

FINAL CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS **URBAN DRUIDRY ISSUE - APRIL 2026**

Do you connect with nature in the heart of the concrete jungle?
Our next themed issue needs you!
The "Urban Druidry" edition of *Touchstone* is coming in April 2026 and we need your
articles, stories, poetry and art work

Send your contributions to touchstone@druidry.org

DEADLINE: 28th February 2026

Bardic Tales

Morfan (Great Crow) by John Wingrave

I lie awake in the deepest darkness, despairing the dawn,
crying bitter tears into my pillow.
Here in the room where my sister sleeps, breathing softly.
I picture her beauty, how she shines in the sun,
compare her to me; ugly, a thing, barely human.
I am Morfan, the black sun, the Great Crow.
My father despises, my mother pities, and my sister loves me,
which is worst of all.
I hate myself more than anyone else could,
curse myself more than any have words.
Not fair, it's not fair, it's not fair!
What did I do to deserve this?
I didn't ask to be born?

Alone and abandoned in this poisoned land,
the most ill-favoured man on earth.
All is smoke and ruins, I can taste the ashes,
and with my forefinger on my forehead,
I make the sign of a cross,
where they say inspiration flows in.
So angry, jealous, bitter, consumed by regret;
what should have been my future is his.
Awen came so easy to him,
three drops sucked from his thumb,
like a baby, who now knows it all.
But his wisdom is simple, caught in the air,
given by magic, stolen from me.

My crow medicine will be different;
darker and stronger, dragged from the earth
and wrought in the fire.
Every thought will be learnt, every feeling earned,
from pain, from death and letting go.
Nothing is free, but one day I will be.
Watch as I shape shift and spread my black wings,
out through the window and into the night.

By the faintest light of the darkest moon.
I fly to the shore
and sift through the shingle to find a hagstone.
Smooth and cold in my hand, my finger finds the hole.
I hold it to my eye to watch my future flow.

All the battles I'll fight, within and without,
on countless bloody battlefields.
Where I'll let loose my fury and go berserk;
rage into raven, wolf and stag, horned with wild hair.
Leading the Wild Hunt through the darkest nights;
hearing I'm hideous, mishappen, a demon, a devil,
the father of Merlin.
I've not chosen the best disguise.
Perhaps, Bright Taliesin has hidden a portrait
somewhere, showing his shadow.
Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words
have ceased to hurt me.
I have become the Slaughter Block,
taking blow after blow after blow.
To the last battle I'll hold my ground,
and be standing still when it reaches the end.

Come with me now into the cave,
along lightless tunnels,
touching the rock, smelling the soil,
spiralling down, deeper and deeper,
into the dark belly of the earth.
Away from the daylight,
where time past and future meld.
To where the King sleeps with his splendid knights
and their horses,
and I am one with my night black mare.
One of the wonders that the darkness brings,
dreaming, waiting to be woken one day,
when it's time and not before.
Let me rest there, in peace, until.



Awen and the Power of Poetry by Frank Oldings

In Wales and Ireland in the medieval period, the spoken utterances of poets still possessed magic power. The words of the poet could validate the standing and authority of a chieftain or a king; equally, their invective and satire could destroy it. Satire could even kill those against whom it was directed. Those who wielded such words were held in awe by the entire society.

In early Irish society, the poet was still a member of a priestly or sacred class. In Wales, it could be argued that the bards retained the vestiges of a similar sacral or even druidic authority. The poet was also a prophet and a seer, and it was their profound esoteric knowledge that could shape the words of power. Poetry could create reality and give birth to things. The poet possessed this power by virtue of some external force that blew through him. That external force was known in Ireland as *imbas* and in Wales as *awen*. To gain *awen*, the poet was required to go through authentic initiation and ritual transformation.

In early sources in both Irish and Welsh, poetry is seen as originating in and being contained in a cauldron. It is brewed from various herbs and elements and the cauldron is thought of as a womb which boils up poetic knowledge. In the Irish sources, there are three cauldrons involved in the process. The first, the cauldron of sustenance or warming, pours forth the oral language of poetry; the second, the cauldron of motion, boils the basis of all poetic knowledge and activates it, and the third, the cauldron of knowledge or wisdom, imparts knowledge or wisdom to the poetry. In the story of Taliesin and Ceridwen (*Ystoria Taliesin*), the triple nature of the cauldrons is reflected in the three droplets that give Gwion Bach the three gifts of bardic knowledge, prophecy and shape-shifting. Taliesin is also seen to emerge from three vessels – the cauldron that transforms Gwion into a prophet and a bard, the physical womb of Ceridwen as Gwion is reborn, and the symbolic womb of the leather bag, from which

Taliesin emerges physically as well as spiritually transformed.

By the power given to him by the three droplets, Gwion transforms himself into creatures of land, air and water. Finally, he becomes a seed and is ultimately reborn to the world in a salmon weir. In effect, Gwion becomes the seed or kernel of wisdom and is then transformed into a metaphorical salmon in the weir. This calls to mind the Irish story of Finn mac Cumhaill's acquisition of poetic art by burning his thumb whilst cooking and then eating the salmon of wisdom. In this way, he

learned "the three things that constitute a poet", namely *teinm láida* ("illumination of song"), *imbas forosna* ("knowledge which illumines") and *dichetul dichennaib* ("extempore incantation"). The wisdom embodied in the salmon originates, in turn, in the hazelnuts of knowledge swallowed by the fish in the well of Segais.

In both traditions, the acquisition of poetic power also produces a physical transformation. In the Irish tale of Senchán Torpeist, an ugly youth is transformed into the spirit of poetry

with the "most noble shape and whitest skin." The name Finn also means "white" or "radiant" and, of course, the name Taliesin is interpreted as meaning "lovely or radiant brow". In their subtle symbolism, these tales express the liminal character of the poet in medieval Irish and Welsh society.

Later medieval Welsh poets often debated the source and definition of *awen*. In the early 15th century, the preacher-poet from south-east Wales, Siôn Cent, argued that there were two kinds of *awen* – that which came from Christ and the Holy Spirit, and which should be used for the glory of God, and the lying *awen* possessed by the professional praise-poets. The primary bone of contention in these debates was whether *awen* should be used only for overtly Christian purposes as opposed to the praise poetry of the native bardic tradition. Was *awen* the gift of the Holy Spirit or a



gift from the cauldron of Ceridwen? The Taliesin figure consistently represents the old native tradition, insisting on the magical origins of awen and its role as the source of traditional bardic knowledge. These debates are the ultimate reflection of the rivalry between clerics and bards that we see in much of the poetry in the 13th century Book of Taliesin.

In *Ystoria Taliesin*, Taliesin's confrontation with the court poets of Maelgwn Gwynedd at his fortress

of Degannwy also centres on the nature of awen and the proper function of poets and poetry. Taliesin again champions the esoteric and magical nature of awen as opposed to the sycophantic and insincere praise-poetry of Maelgwn's bards. To Taliesin, they have lost touch with the true nature of poetry, with authentic awen. Unless they too undergo a true initiation and transformation, they are merely empty vessels singing their "Blerwm, blerwm"!



Phenology Wheel: February by Alison Kirkham

Druid Counselling by Steve Merritt

In a recent meeting of the online OBOD Mental Health Professionals group someone asked “How do you integrate Druidry into your counselling practice? Shouldn’t we set up druid counselling as a new mode of counselling?”

My first thought was that my training as a counsellor was not all that different from my learnings as a druid. We start to look at and understand ourselves. Each level builds upon the previous one and takes us deeper and deeper within. How would druid counselling be any different from person centred, psycho-dynamic, gestalt or any of the other modalities of counselling? And how would people not on a druid pathway find it?

My answer to the question was that I don’t integrate Druidry into my counselling practice, I use my counselling practice within a druid framework. What do I mean by that? Clients come to me because they want something to change within their lives. There is something they are not happy or comfortable with. So the first part of the framework is:

Past, Present and Future

The client’s problem stems from something in the past, so we have to examine the past to find out what happened and how it affected them. The client is here with me in the present. How is their problem affecting them in the here and now? The client wants things to change. What do they want their future to look like? This last question is a very big one, and can be difficult for a client to answer, so I try to break it down for them:

Physical, Emotional, Mental or Spiritual

We all have needs in these four elemental areas: *Physical* – a roof over our heads, security, a job, money, possessions. *Emotional* – love from a partner, parents, siblings, children; friendships; support from colleagues or managers. *Mental* – stimulation, challenging work, puzzles, hobbies and interests. *Spiritual* – religion, belief, spirituality, a sense of morals or ethics. Which areas are these needs not being met in? Do they

all have to be fulfilled by one person? Which areas are OK?

Once we have a sense of the client’s situation and needs we can start to examine them in more detail using tools, such as:

Visualisation. I use this for relaxation, to build energy/chi/Nwyfre, and to look at, or alleviate, the needs of the client. For example I will guide a client with emotional worries to the element that helps with that, and get them to visualise sitting by or in a stream and allowing the water to wash away their worries leaving them feeling more relaxed and refreshed.



Nature. Why do most counsellors sit in a little room with two chairs? It works even better outdoors (weather permitting). As long as there is no one within earshot, the meeting is confidential. It can be seated on a bench, in a wood, on a beach, by a firepit. Why not arrange the session in an area that corresponds to the need being examined? We all know that being outdoors in nature is good for us, so why not incorporate and encourage it? They may wish to hug a tree, or try to connect with or draw its energy. Instead of visualising the element that affects them they can be with it.

Cards. If the client is happy to do so we can offer them a tarot or oracle deck to select images they are drawn to, or do not like. They can then describe the feelings that the image/colours/an object on the card bring up for them. They could look for a card that represents where/how they are now, and one that represents where/how they want to be, and examine ways in which they can move from one to another (more counselling focused decks are available).

So far, what I have described is more or less what I was taught on my counselling training, and also via the gwersi. Hardly surprising considering that the OBOD course was written by a psychotherapist! So what can Druidry add

to counselling?

As a student counsellor I was told that everyone thinks, feels and behaves. Our reaction to events is driven primarily by one of these, which one will depend on the individual and the circumstances. I learned an integrative approach. This gave me three different modalities which allow me to work with whichever reaction the client is displaying at any given moment. I find that this works well, but there is still something missing. Thinking, feeling and behaving relate to air, water and earth. Where is the fire? For me, it is in spirituality and faith.

Spirituality was only touched on in my training (it is included more in some modalities). Most students had no belief, or just one that they had been brought up with. This led to the subject rarely arising in the counselling room as the counsellors had little knowledge of beliefs other than their own (if they had one). Druidry is a nature based spiritual path, not a religion in itself. I have met druids who are Pagan, Christian, Muslim, Baha'i, and Humanist to name a few. We all accept each other within the druid family. Talking to other druids has given me a better understanding of other religions, and made me feel comfortable talking about them. I am also a member of a local interfaith group which gives me further insights.

Some clients feel that they are lacking in particular personal qualities. They may feel like this because of parental teachings/example or perhaps through spiritual teachings. Understanding the impact of their religion on their lives is important. If a client has a religion, that often means that they have a like-minded community that can support them. It also opens up the possibility of incorporating an appropriate ritual as part of their healing process. It can lead to the client getting counselling support from their pastoral leader if that is appropriate or desired.

But what if the client has no religious beliefs? Faith and belief can be defined as an acceptance that something exists or is true, especially one without proof. So we can extend this to clients

with no religious beliefs.

Everyone has a favourite book or film. They have favourite characters. What attributes draw them to their favourite character? Is this that different to having a favourite deity? We can use characters in the same way as deities to work with clients. For example, Julian Vayne, a chaos magician who lectures extensively, tells of a Samhain ritual he was involved in based around *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Each participant took a role based on a character, they blew up a balloon and drew the face of their personal demons on the balloon. They then swapped balloons and hid them all in a graveyard. Finally they had to hunt down their personal demons and vanquish them with a pointy stick. This is just another way of letting go of something but using modern mythology. I'm not suggesting we send all of our clients to the nearest graveyard, but finding significant role models, either real or believed, and finding an appropriate way for a client to work with that model, can work well.

Do I have to use my druid learnings when I am counselling others? No, of course I don't. I can use traditional modalities without introducing my clients to these concepts. I can however still use them on myself. Before a session I can do the light body exercise to centre and balance myself. I can discreetly arrange my therapy room to perhaps contain elemental or directional symbols. At the end of the day I can do a cleansing ritual to ensure that neither I nor the room hold on to any of my clients' negativity.

Whatever I do in the therapy room should be focused around the client and his/her needs. If they have not expressed any pagan/druid beliefs then I don't do anything that is obviously pagan/druid. Even if they have expressed any particular beliefs, they may not want to bring them in to the counselling room. It is always their choice. But whatever the client's belief I still have mine, and I use it to support me in my work.



Putting the Delight back into Druidry by Liz Cruse

*"Round and round we go,
We hold each other's hands.
Weave our lives in a circle
Our Love is strong and the dance goes on ..."*

Near Bristol, there is a relatively unknown stone circle called Stanton Drew. Enclosed to the south by an arm of the River Chew, the land rises up around it in low hills and a gently falling escarpment. There, on each of the festivals, Druids of the Dobunni Grove organise a ritual open to anyone. A much-loved part of these rituals comes at the end, when the circle has been unwound and we have returned to the Apparent World.

At that point, drummers step into the centre. Everyone in the circle, sometimes hundreds of people, joins hands and stagger, lumber, dance a spiral dance, singing the words that open this piece, gasping for breath as faster dancers pull on their hands. Just when you think you can't last much longer you find yourself in a human bee swarm at the centre and a massive group hug ensues with much whooping, cheering and clapping. Some of you may have been there and will know that it is impossible not to end up laughing and exultant, delighted at the sheer silliness of it.

I'm quite a serious person. The world is a difficult, troubled place at the moment: the unending violence throughout the world not least the genocide in Gaza; increasing authoritarianism here in Britain and elsewhere; the environmental polycrisis. I bring this seriousness to my Druidry, praying

earnestly for protection, strength, understanding, knowledge, justice. Sometimes I embody deities and other beings come to warn and remind people of the situation we find ourselves in.

But lately, I've been made aware that this is not the only way. Indeed, it is imperative that we don't concentrate on despair to the detriment of all else. Despair is immobilising. We can easily become overwhelmed with sadness and hopelessness. Joy brings strength and unity. Delight can defeat depression. So it is with the Stanton Drew silliness described above. So it was with a magical solstice event I attended recently.



Wildways-on-the-Borle, a sanctuary for Druids and others, set in a wooded valley in Shropshire was host to Heart of Yew's Solstice Feast on the weekend of the shortest day and longest night.

Heart of Yew is the successor to White Horse Camps. Several of us arrived for the weekend, having booked for "A Winter Solstice Ceremony and Holly King Feast." I'd just fancied doing something different for the Solstice. Honestly, when I arrived, I was rather disappointed since nothing looked very different. However, I was glad to be back at Wildways, a place I often went when White Horse Camps held their events there. Those who'd arrived early hung out, went for walks, enjoyed a light lunch. Everything was normal except that, as in Bluebeard's Castle, there was one room where we were forbidden to go.



Image by Elaine Gregory

At 4pm, near sunset, clothed, as requested, in our best dresses, we assembled and, lol, we were ushered into Fairyland. Behind the scenes the dining room had been transformed into the land beneath the Hollow Hills. The Sidhe could have had no more splendid setting. Huge candelabra in the shape of leaves and flowers cast golden light that was enlivened with gleams of emerald. Holly and mistletoe glowed green along the length of a fine table. A very magical disco glitterball added the final touch. The apparent world had vanished.

From that point on, delight reigned supreme. A slight figure in silver played a sweet pipe to us. The Elf of Safety, clad in gold, sang us a warning, "Please, please, don't eat the décor/ Don't eat the berries ..." There were, as promised riddles galore (no-one really understood what they were trying to tell us but thoroughly destabilised as one is in Fairyland, everyone put their heart and soul into trying to find clues) liberally scattered around the room, hiding in plain sight. Intermittently, uncanny figures came in to weave the spell tighter. Like a non-sequitur in a dream, there was a French waiter in full black and white rig who bustled in to serve the five courses of excellent food. In a non-fairytale way, he was full of French double entendres, which only served to increase the hilarity. Finally, the Holly King was discovered by means of a random sign on a plate, nothing to do with the riddles which apparently were supposed to lead us through the story of the Holly King. The fact that this had in no way been obvious to any of us only fuelled the pleasure. The dying Oak King came in, pale and wan. The leaves on his crown fluttered to the ground and the Holly King was crowned. Then the sixteen of us gathered for warmth and hilarity around the fire in the next room.

Next day, after a night somewhat disturbed by the copious amounts of food we had eaten, we had the sweetness of the ceremony of Alban Arthan, when the youngest member of the party, a girl of ten representing the reborn Mabon, passed around our circle kindling our candles which, marvellous to relate, did not go out in the still air of that Solstice morning. I rejoined the apparent world via the M5 and Gloucester Services, ready to face again the problems of our world. I felt more resilient though. Such is the power of Druidic delight.

I'm hoping that this story of my rediscovery of delight might inspire you, dear readers, to reflect

on where you find true, even if fleeting, joy in your Druidic life and practice. My friend JJ Middleway often talks of the importance of reverence and mirth as if they were the ying and yang of our spiritual path. Where is the ecstatic mirth in your reverence? Are you open to discovering it? I expect many of you have delightful adventures on your Druid Way that far outstrip the ones I have described here. If you haven't, how can you find them? Perhaps you could go off on your own to do something you've always wanted to do, like lying under a blossoming tree in Spring. Or you could look at familiar rituals in a new way. Maybe you could go to an event or group that you've never been to before. Follow those "I like the sound of that" impulses. It might turn out to be a disappointment, but it might also hold surprises that light up your being, as was my experience with the Heart of Yew Solstice Feast. If you don't want to go alone, find a friend to go with (though travelling alone can bring surprising rewards).

There's a drink called Druid's Delight – a mixture of champagne and mead. Imagine your life is a bottle. Fill it to the brim with metaphorical champagne and mead, shake well, then let it explode out of the bottle and rain down on druids and non-druids alike.

Share your experiences – with friends, with your grove, your Pagan Moot, on the Hearth. Share them anywhere you feel safe to do so. Turn them into a poem or a painting or an embroidery. Druids can bring to the world a gravitas and a respect for the sacred, the power of ritual and the comfort of celebrancy. But let's share delight as well. The world is full of wonderful things but it can also be a problematic place. We need all the joy we can get and give to strengthen us for a future which will need calm, equanimity and courage. Throughout everything let's make sure the dance of delight goes on.

Notes:

1. Heart of Yew can be found at <https://www.hear-tofyew.com> and on Facebook – Heart of Yew
2. The tale of the Holly King and the Oak King is, to say the least, a confused and confusing tale. Their struggle is represented in different ways at different times of the year. An interesting website on this is <https://irishmyths.com/2024/12/18/holly-king-oak-king/>

A Simple Tea Ceremony of Sweetness and Presence

by Katja Bouwens (ShadowCat)

On a table, tray or the floor, arrange a tablecloth or tea towel. Place a small rock on it, a candle, a bowl of cool water and some fresh herbs, as well as a hot steamy pot of water for tea as well as the tea of your choice. Also add a small dish of honey, a bowl of cream, and a plate with tasty cake, biscuits or similar.

Sit and exhale deeply three times. On the third time envision your breath going down into the earth and creating a little bubble of sacred space around you.

"Here, in this circle, I am whole. Here, all beings are kin."

Chant softly three times: *Awen... Awen... Awen...*

Let the sound rise and fall like steam from a cup. Pause in silence to feel the listening of the world around you.

Pour hot water over the tea leaves or herbs, or add the tea to your pot of hot water. As the tea steeps, speak slowly:

"I bring water to leaf, fire to earth, spirit to body. May this cup remind us of the weaving of all things."

Hold the honey:

"Golden gift of the wise bee, sweetness of sun, I honor you."

Hold the cream:

"Gift of the wise cow, richness of the land, I honor you."

Hold the cake:

"Gift of grain and fire, hands and hearth, I honor you."

Pour the first cup of tea and place it aside as an offering, to the land, the spirits, the ancestors, or simply to the mystery. Offer also a crumb of cake, a drop of honey, and a trickle of cream. Then pour

tea for yourself and companions if present. Stir in honey or cream if you wish.

Break the cake. Take the first bite slowly, as if tasting the whole earth within it.

Say: *"May my life know sweetness and simple joys"*.

Drink the tea in silence.

Hold your cup at heart level and whisper a question in your mind, or to the tea in the cup.

"What does the world need from me right now?"

"What does my heart need right now?"

"What small kindness may I embody today?"

Sip. Allow thoughts, images, or feelings to come gently.

If alone, jot down a line in a journal.

If with others, share in turn, listening with attention but without replying or feedback, even after the ceremony.

When the tea is finished, sit and exhale deeply three times. On the third time envision your breath going out to the little bubble and either pull it back in or let it sink into the earth, dissolving.

Blow out the candle, saying:

"May sweetness, abundance, and kindness flow through me into the world. So may it be."

Vegan options:

Honey: maple syrup.

"Golden gift of the trees, sweetness of the sun, I honor you"

Cream: vegan cream of choice

"Gift of the wise plants, richness of the land, I honor you".



Andrew's Bit At The Back

At the end of 2025, I received the following poem from a member of the Order:

*Surrounded by crowds, but completely alone
Calm in a tumult of laughter and light
Surrounded by love, but none for me
Tides of passion and joy pass me by
Surrounded by friends, if only they knew
Each teasing barb finds its mark in my heart
Surrounded by joy, but none for me ...*

The first thing I did was to check in with the person who sent it to me and make sure that they were doing ok. They told me that they had thought long and hard before sending the poem to me but finally decided to do so. This poem is not the first I have received from someone who has felt like they are alone in the middle of a group of people and it got me thinking about whether there was anything I, or we, could do to help not just this poet but other members of the order who may be feeling the same way.

I think there are a couple of contextual points here. Firstly, I think we need to remove any sense of 'blame' from this discussion. The individual who wrote the poem is not blaming anyone for how they are feeling. If we feel we are being blamed for letting someone down or leaving someone out, we may become defensive and not see the issue at hand. We do not need to find reasons or excuses – we just need to empathise with how this person is feeling. Secondly, we need to see this poem in the context of the world around us. While we are trying to deal with the day to day, and sometimes extraordinary, issues in our own lives, we are surrounded by a world seemingly full of chaos and danger. In such circumstances, everything becomes overwhelming. We live in extraordinary times where everything is unprecedented. In such a world, we need to act in unprecedented ways too.

I personally think that we, as Druids, are good at opening our arms to people and welcoming

them to the path, but how often do we do the same for the people we have known for a long time? I am not talking about our close friends but those we have been acquainted with for a while or those we are on nodding terms with but have never sat down with and had a full conversation. How often do we check in with them, or stop for a quick chat? There may even be people that we once met at a gorsedd or gathering, who we now sort of ignore out of embarrassment, not knowing if they will remember us or whether the whole situation could become socially awkward if we approached them again. We may hold back and not extend our circle of light around them.

Now, I must admit, *mea culpa*, that I am not always great at checking in with people myself. I am often busy, lost in my own thoughts about things which seem important and so I don't stop to make time for people around me. Once I leave my 'head space' and find myself in my 'heart space', then there is nothing I love more than sitting down and catching up with someone I have not seen in a while. But my head often leads my heart and that is something this poem made me reflect upon and want to change in myself.



I was also inspired by Liz Cruse's wonderful article on pages 11-12 of this edition, that we need to find ways of bringing delight back into our Druidry. Living in this unprecedented world, we need delight more than ever. And, when we have found it, I think we need to share it as widely as possible! As we light our candles for Imbolc, let us all try spend more time in our heart spaces and expand our circle of light a bit further, to those people we have known for years but not checked in with for a while. It does not have to be much, just a simple smile, a hello and a "how are you?" After all, as Shakespeare wrote in *The Merchant of Venice*, "How far that little candle throws its beams! So shines a good deed in a naughty world."

Until
next time,

Andrew iii



To find Events from OBOD members and friends throughout the year, check the events page on the Druid Hearth: <https://hearth.druidry.org/events>

Upcoming Events

Bardic Gorsedd: 24-26 July 2026, Noddfa Retreat Centre, Penmaenmawr. For more Information, email bardicgorsedds@obod.org

Druid Gorsedd: 10-12 April 2026, Malvern, Worcestershire. For more Information, email druidgorsedds@obod.org

Summer Gathering: 6-7 June 2026, Strode Theatre, Street (some introductory activities on 5 June)

Winter Gathering: 12 December 2026, Strode Theatre, Street (some introductory activities on 11 December)

*Huntcliff stands firm repelling the sea
Though, from time to time, a rock breaks free;
A sacrifice offered to placate the seas' waves,
That roil and crash and echo in caves.
Each time there's a fall, it takes part of me;
The genes of my ancestors are from here, you see.*

*My homeland is the North, the Brigantes my
tribe;
When I sit in silence, I can still sense their vibe.
These people were proud, just like the cliff land;
Over the hundreds of years, we stand hand in
hand.
If we could speak now, what would we say?
Were the issues they faced the same as today?*

*The Brigantes feared Rome with their customs
and power,
Of its hold getting stronger with each passing
hour.
I guess we're no different when all's said and done,
We hang on to those freedoms that have been
hard won.
But as you look out towards Huntcliff confronting
the sea,
It repels life's storms...and so might we!*



Poem and Photo by
John Davis