



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

April 2024 | Issue 320

This Issue

- ✿ The final entries
in our Wand
Competition.
 - ✿ The Cat in
Celtic Culture.
 - ✿ Ideas for how to
reconnect with
nature from The
Five Minute Druid.
- And lots more!



COVER: "Green Man" by Cathy Johnson

Editorial

Welcome to April's burgeoning edition of *Touchstone* which is packed with treats. We have the final selection of stories and poems for our Wand Competition - thank you so much to everyone who has contributed to this wonderful thread. There is also the last part of Selkie's thought-provoking series of articles on getting the most from daily practice.

But it's not all about goodbyes (to paraphrase Shakespeare 'Thou met'st with things ending, I with things new born'). Anyone who knows me will tell you how much I love cats, so how could I resist the article on cats in Celtic culture on page 7?! And later in the edition there's some wonderful advice on reconnecting to nature in just five minutes. There's also bountiful bardic creations which flutter through the edition like falling blossom. In fact, this edition is so full of new ideas, I've had to rest the 'From the Archives' section for a little while, to fit everything in! Never fear - it will return shortly!

April sees growing abundance in the landscape and that is reflected by Cathy Johnson's wonderful *Green Man* who can be found peeking through the foliage on the front cover. Cathy is an astonishing artist. Keep an eye out for more of her work in this and forthcoming editions.

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Announcement

The Mount Haemus lectures will take place across three separate events in 2024.

Two will be online, the first on 14th May 2024 at 7pm UK time; the second will also be online on the 21st May 2024 at 7pm UK time. An email will go out inviting members to register nearer the event.

The third series of lectures will be an in-person event to be held in Glastonbury on the 5th October 2024 - more details to come.



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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. 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 go léir! Greetings everyone!
Beannachtaí Aibreáin daoibh! April blessings to
you all!

"April has put the spirit of youth in everything",
William Shakespeare

I am writing at the beginning of March and it is strange to be offering April blessings. Nonetheless, Spring is still on its way and its herald, the Blackthorn, is in flower, creating magical white clouds in the hedgerows and the sap is rising. For years I have wanted to harvest some Birch sap but always missed the window for it. This year I was determined to succeed. A forager friend gave me a less invasive, low-impact method for tapping the sap and the signs to look for in my landscape, indicating the best time to do this. In Ireland, the optimal time is when the female flowers with their tiny feathery deep red heads appear on hazel trees or when the celandines are in bloom. This is before the trees have come into leaf. Last week I went to the hazel trees in my garden. The male catkins were easily visible on the trees but I had to look carefully for the female flowers. They are much more subtle. But they were there and the early celandines were in bloom also. So gathering my tools - secateurs, bottles and some string - I approached the first Birch tree. Having received permission, I took a small branch and, with my secateurs, snipped off the tip at an angle. Immediately the sap emerged from the tip. I placed the branch with the magical sap drops into a bottle and tied the bottle to the branch. I left it there for about 24 hours and was rewarded with the gift of Birch sap. You can drink the sap straight from the tree – it has a subtle sweet taste - or you can heat it (not boil it) and reduce the liquid by about a half. That's what I did. It is possible to make a Birch syrup but that requires gallons of sap to make a small amount. In Eastern Europe March is called "the month of sap" or "the month of birches", but in more northern latitudes April is the best time to gather birch sap so you may have time to try this. Birch sap is known for its detoxifying, diuretic, cleansing and purifying properties. According to www.duchas.ie drinking Birch sap 'is good for poor blood'. In Northern Europe, up until the end of the 19th century, the deficiency of food in early spring was known as

the 'hunger gap' and Birch sap was most welcome after the long harsh winter. During the famine in Sweden in 1867, Birch sap was widely used and was referred to as 'poor man's cow'. There has been a long tradition of making wine, beer, mead, syrup and vinegar from Birch sap.

Here is some Irish folklore about April: the first three days of April are known as "Trí Lá na Riabhaighe" or "Laethanta na Bó Riabhaí" – the days of the Brindle Cow. They are also known as the "Borrowed Days". They reflect the unpredictability of Irish weather. According to folklore, the old brindle cow wasn't well and she was worried that she wouldn't survive the cold, harsh and hungry month of March. Anyway, she did survive and at the end of the last day of March, she lowed out boastfully to the rest of the herd that she was alive and well, that the cold was now gone out of the ground. March had failed to kill her and she could live happily for the rest of the year. March heard her boasting and was none too pleased, took umbrage and decided to teach her a lesson. So she borrowed three days from April and filled them with the severest, coldest howling winds and rain that she could summon. Unfortunately, the brindle cow who could not withstand such weather finally succumbed and died. It is said that if the first three days of April are bitterly cold they are referred to as the "Days of the Brindle Cow."

Wishing you be filled with warmth, sunshine, peace and hope for the coming month.

'Plunge into the deep without fear, with the gladness of April
in your heart.'

*Rabindranath
Tagore*

Eimear

Haiku for Ornamental Cherry Trees by Jessica McGee

Arms clustered in pink
Ecstatic in their release
Rising from the bleak



Bard's Page

Tum-sum-ne, Her Wisdom by Meg Babb-Hartman

Crouching upon the rim of the great crater,
My fingers sunk deep into her slope,
Gritty, dry, bits of glass and pumice, ancient ash.
The nearness of the sun and untamed winds
scoured my face.

I confided in her that the chambers of my heart
beat with rain and thunder.

"Know me then," she replied, and at invitation,
I settled my eyes against the outer panorama.

I did not see relief. I did not see comfort.
Caught in a vortex of violence and destruction,
Immense pressure and retreat, entropy
and enthalpy,
Unified cataclysm of earth, fire, wind, and water.
The earth's face changed forever in a blink.
She swells, quakes, heaves, pitches, burns,
pours.

Land farther than you can see is scoured,
washed, blanketed like a new babe.
Did the sky and chthonic gods really
battle here?
Perhaps, but the unfathomable power was
all hers.

The bottom of the mountain became the peak,
As she exhaled strange elemental gasses,
Humbling her monument to the rest of the
landscape.

Surviving witnesses to her localized apocalypse
feared her power,
And averted their eyes for millennia,
But her furious heat cooled, winds scattered
seeds upon the raw precipices,
The rain and snow filled her cup the sapphiest
blue,

Tree roots grappled the rocks and ground
squirrels made happy homes there
The amnion of the pristine lake embraces a
nascent mountain.

Her placid rest was vaster than her labors.
She facilitates rather than constant meddling.
"Know that this is what it means to be what you
seek Child,

This is the legacy I have woven into your flesh."
My storm departed, and a new sun rose over the
wandering bear.



No Ordinary Magic by Bryan D Norman



When Awen is afoot,
curiosity and intrigue abound!
Transformation churns and charms
a way of seeing and being that
is decidedly different from the mundane.

A touch into the immanent sacred,
manifests a joie de vivre
that invites us to immerse
and imbibe the temporal embrace
of its mystery.

*"With love and appreciation for the Squirrel Seed
Group".*

Picture credit (left): Dutchman's Breeches
by Cathy Johnson

Walking the Tor by RoMa Johnson

Coming down the path and through the stile next to the old poet's house—past what was once a garden, now gone wild from tender loving non-care for ages and years—she decided she wouldn't tell them everything. They hadn't wanted to go up there with her, so ...

She wouldn't tell them about the man with a pet owl, for instance. They'd only go on about animal rights and shit for the rest of the afternoon.

She wouldn't tell them about coming down on the far side, down the Old Way [PERILOUS. DO NOT PASS!] that overlooked the apple orchards.



She probably shouldn't mention that a cluster of men stood down near the remains of the old barn, talking earnestly with their hands in their pockets against the cold. They would just speculate endlessly about whether the meeting was nefarious.

She couldn't exactly tell them about the door cut into the side of the hill behind that second bench. She'd only have to explain how she saw it in the first place and they wouldn't believe her about the red string tied on the handle just where it would catch her eye.

One of them had declined to come along, pleading a headache, the other pled exhaustion. Both claimed the only cure was a nap; they'd see her for tea after her walk.

Ok, they would tut-tut if she told them she pulled on the string and entered the door, that there were candles and matches handy, that she proceeded down a long kind of glow-y hallway for quite a while, until she knew she was well underneath the hill, that the hallway widened, and she came around a corner to a cavern hung with crystal stalactites glowing like lanterns, that in the center of the cavern stood a very tall figure of a Being, carved of clear sapphire-blue stone. No way could she describe it. She'd have to leave that part out.

At this point, they would be rolling their eyes and whispering behind their hands ("Strain, you know." "Ever since...")

so she would skip over the stairway down from the cavern, and the nook of rounded stones wherein the baby dragon stirred in its sleep as she crept past, and how she found the red string again, one end tied to a hook and the rest delineating the way forward, and how she followed it and how before long stepped through an opening into the afternoon light not far from the B&B and her waiting friends.

"Well, here you are! We'd almost given up on you. Come have tea and tell us all about your walk."

"Yes, how was it?"

"Brisk," she said.



W and C Competition

Lime Trees by Gabrielle Cavegn

See the old lime trees
that lead to the castle upon the hill.
Hear their stories
of days long gone.
Feel the mossy green on your skin -
heartbeats in line.
Look at the girl on the swing.
She's high in the sky,
her long blond hair a veil in the air.
Mistletoes low in the branches.
Ancient times - now and forever.



When submitting her poem, Gabrielle wrote: *I live in a small village near Zürich which is quite famous for its beautiful castle with its fantastic gardens. There is a footpath that leads to the castle. It meanders through a small forest and runs underneath some very old lime trees. In the forest there are some old graves. One is the grave of a countess and it's a magical place. I go there quite often with my dog and I always feel attracted to one tree especially. The energy of the place is very strong."*

Grandmother Oak by Erin Bell

Even before coming into Druidry, I have had many connections with trees. The first, memorable relationship was with a cottonwood my parents planted when I was 10 years old, with whom I grew up and who figured in many of my childhood stories and games. I rescued another cottonwood at my college campus when it called me to remove a broken branch hanging precipitously from its lower levels, which became the staff I still treasure and hold these 30 years later. Aspens speak to me in life and in my dreams, and when my husband and I moved into our first owned house together—where we still live—we met a new blue spruce sprout whom we have raised up into a strong young tree over the past 18 years. I love these friends dearly and miss the ones I no longer see.

Most recently, I met Grandmother Oak, who has shared some gentle wisdom with me over the past year of my Bard grade studies. I first got close to this tree in the spring of 2023—just after Beltaine—when I was out for a walk in my neighborhood, getting to know the nature in my urban area better. Arms reaching out, this mighty tree called to me in her way and I wandered over to sit under the still unfurling leaves. That was my first real connection with this broad-spreading ancestor.

Over the months that followed, I continued to visit on walks, leaning against the solid trunk and looking up to see the progress of the leaves, meditating and offering stones and gifts and silence and energy exchanges through the soil. I talked to squirrels as they ran up Grandmother's trunk with her acorns in their mouths, shoring up sustenance for the coming autumn. My husband even included her in my birthday celebration, sending me to meditate with her as part of a spiritual scavenger hunt.

Late in summer, I took a stone from a broken necklace and left it as an offering. As I walked away, I saw some leaves and acorns that had fallen together and asked if I could take them home, to honor Grandmother on my altar. Receiving a yes, I placed them on my altar, to the east, where they stayed until Samhuinn.

Then, just a few days ago, before Imbolc, I went to see her in her sleep. In the crisp, freezing weather,



Grandmother still spread out before me, quiet and, I like to think, dreaming. I hugged her close and then noticed the way the beautiful light from the east was casting our shadows together on the ground. I felt the beat of my own heart and took a photo as I felt the life in Grandmother's trunk. Not for the first time, I marveled at the connection this tree has invited me into. I look forward to spring, when Grandmother awakens and we can converse together again.



Tree Wisdom by Niklas Salmi

“...as silk cotton trees erupt in red across India's forests, they signify neither flags of territory nor salutes to freedom. They celebrate a togetherness of beings who know how to live as citizens of the earth.” – T.R. SHANKAR RAMAN

Trees don't believe in borders, isolation or illegal immigration. They are wise that way. An Indian silk cotton tree would never say, 'My flowers shan't ever be fertilised by a Pakistani starling', or, 'Pack your pollen basket and never come back, you Bangladeshi bee!'

When a *Bombax ceiba* bursts into bloom in Attari or Petrapole, its crimson corollas brimming with nectar like chalices of infinite depth, simple men braggingly call the poor tree a flag of territory, or a salute to freedom –

when all the tree wanted was to work together, perk up his friends and say: 'Thanks for helping, here's a drink for the way.'

Reflections on the OBOD Deep Listening Circle

A band of OBOD members have regularly gathered online since late 2020, to participate in a Deep Listening Circle, called Building Resilience in Difficult Times. Within this Circle we undertake a seemingly simple task: to deeply listen to one another as we tell of our own experiences of challenges, sorrows, grief, confusion and joys. Every subject has been welcome, as they describe how people honestly encounter life. Over the last three years we have learned so much from one another, from our different places on the globe and different walks of life. In that rich diversity we have found so much to share, such as our common grief around global injustices and inequalities, our shared sorrows around pain and loss of those we love and cherish, and a shared pain around ecological challenges. Our common ability to laugh and giggle together, despite (and perhaps because of) bearing witness to descriptions of difficult times, compassionately unifies us within our shared love of Druidry.

In September last year our beloved co-facilitator and meditation guide Liv Statler died suddenly at home in Canada. Liv was a gifted facilitator and wonderful meditation guide. Participants and hosts alike met the following month to collectively mourn her passing, and to give immense thanks for her life. This Circle, much akin to a grief ritual, was a way to share amongst one another of how death, dying and bereavement has shown up for us in our lives in many ways.

Since then, the group has continued to meet, and we have learned to listen to Liv's guidance, though not in meetings or via email anymore, but in the words on the wind, in the dancing of the dedication candle's flame, and in passing moments of insight.

If you have thought about joining but haven't yet done so, you are most welcome to come along. Please email oboddeeplisteningcircle@gmail.com to let us know and we'll send out the Zoom link.

Thank you for reading, and may you all receive the blessing of resilience in difficult times.

From all of the facilitation team for the Deep Listening Circle.



The Wand Competition is now closed. Thank you to everyone who sent a contribution and to Cally Palmer for setting the competition and donating the wands.

The Cat in Celtic Culture by Andrea Romanazzi

The cat, as a fascinating and mysterious creature, occupied an important role in Celtic culture, where its presence was associated with profound meanings and intrinsic symbolism. In ancient Celtic mythology and beliefs, the cat was not just a domestic animal, but a sacred figure steeped in magic and mysticism. The relationship between humanity and felines was permeated by a mystical connection, in which the cat embodied a bridge between the material and spiritual worlds. Their elusive nature and enigmatic gaze were often interpreted as manifestations of divine and arcane forces. Cats were revered for their ability to move nimbly between the boundaries of the visible and the invisible, of day and night. Symbol of wisdom and intuition, the cat was considered a keeper of secret knowledge and a confidant of divinities hidden in the depths of nature.

According to Philip Carr-Gomm in his book “The Druid Animal Oracle”, the cat was associated with the Mother Goddess of the Druids and seen as a creature of the Goddess herself. This connection highlights the symbolic and sacred role of the cat in Celtic spirituality.

An example can be found in the myths linked to the goddess Ceridwen, who liked to transform into a black cat, while the goddess Brigid, known in Irish tradition as “the bear’s daughter”, had a cat as a companion. The cat, however, is also associated with the male figure. In the history of evolution and transformation in Taielsin, after three boiling drops from the cauldron fell on Gwion’s hand, he began to transform into a series of animals including a small white cat, to escape Ceridwen’s wrath. Following him, Ceridwen became a black cat.

An important legendary figure of Celtic culture linked to the feline is that of Cairpre or Carbar, better known as “Cat’s Head”. This Irish king was famous for his warrior exploits, and his name evokes the image of a brave and ferocious man, associated with the strength and wisdom of the cat. Legends say that there was an island inhabited by fearsome warriors with cat heads, who frightened their enemies thanks to helmets adorned with wild cat fur. These warriors embodied the mysterious connection between

humans and felines, strengthening the bond between nature and human culture.

In fact, wild cats have inspired many Celtic tribes, who built camps and sanctuaries near the places frequented by these animals. Following ancestral intuition, the Celts perceived the sacredness of these magical animals. The cat was therefore seen as a powerful totem for several tribes. However, there are no written sources or archaeological objects that allow us to confirm an “ancestration” of the cat.

Likewise the feline played an important role as a totem animal for various Scottish clans. Many clans, such as MacIntosh, MacNeishe, and MacNicol, have the domestic cat as their symbol, while the MacBrains are represented by the wild cat. In the Caithness and Sutherland region, references to cats are found in place names, such as “cat headland” or “cat country”.

Another myth steeped in symbolism concerns the adventures of Maeldune, son of an Irish queen and a cat guardian of immense riches. This legend expresses

the concept of the right acquisition of riches, underlining the difference between receiving a lawful gift and stealing. During a sea voyage, Maeldune and his companions arrive on an island that hosts a castle full of fabulous treasures, apparently abandoned, with the only presence a kitten that seems harmless. By politely asking the cat’s permission to eat, Maeldune demonstrated respect and humility towards the feline. Having obtained the cat’s silent consent, they feasted. However, when one of the companions, seduced by temptation, decided to steal a necklace from the treasure, the cat suddenly transformed into a flaming creature, incinerating the thief with a fiery gaze.

From this last story emerges the ambivalence of the figure of the cat: on the one hand a mystical being and companion of divinities, on the other linked to the darkest world and those violent and destructive forces without which there would be no life. An example is the Cat Sith, also known as Cait Sidhe, a creature from Celtic mythology, particularly present in Scottish and



Irish folklore. Taking the appearance of a large black cat with magical-demonic powers, the Cat Sith is often considered evil and a bringer of misfortune. Another widespread belief concerns the Cat Sith taking possession of the souls of the recently deceased. To protect the bodies before burial, various methods were adopted, such as a prolonged funeral wake (*feille fadalach*) or extinguishing all the fires in the house.

Recently, it has been suggested that the myth of the Cat Sith may derive from the mythologizing of feline species found in Scotland, such as the Scottish wildcat and the Kellas cat. These species, with a similar appearance to their legendary counterpart, are characterized by a ferocious nature and marked territoriality.

Another monster cat is Cath Palug, legendary creature from Welsh mythology. The exact meaning of the name Cath Palug is uncertain, but it may derive from “scratching cat”. According to legend, this monstrous feline was sired by the sow Henwen, also known as “White and Old”. Abandoned by his mother and saved by Palug’s children, the cat was raised on the island of Anglesey, where he revealed himself to be a terrible monster, bringer of destruction and ruin to the inhabitants of the island.

We also find Cath Palug in Welsh Arthurian poetry. According to the poem *PA GUR*, Kay traveled to Anglesey with the intention of killing lions and was particularly prepared for an encounter with Cath Palug. Unfortunately, the poem is incomplete, but it is believed the poem told how Kay defeated the beast.

In the Breton area, there was the Capalu. In the medieval novel *Romanzes de Franceses*, it is King Arthur himself who fights against the cat Capalu in a swamp. In other continental traditions, we find stories in which Arthur defeats a giant cat near Lake Bourget in the French Alps. This battle is commemorated in local toponyms such as Col du Chat (Cat’s Neck), Dent du Chat (Cat’s Tooth) and Mont du Chat (Cat’s Mountain). Geoffrey Ashe suggests that the story may have been inspired by a leopard held in captivity.

A similar narrative is also present in Switzerland, near Lake Lausanne. The story tells of a fisherman who lived on the lake and, during a harsh winter, made a vow asking for a good catch to feed his hungry children. After several attempts, he

managed to catch a large pike and a giant trout, but promised to donate the next fish he caught. The third time he cast the net, he caught a small, half-drowned kitten. The cat grew quickly and, once it arrived at the fisherman’s house, devoured him, along with his family and all the prey he had caught. The cat became a terrible and frightening creature, which attacked and devoured anyone who dared approach the fisherman’s hut. The young King Arthur decided to face him and defeated the cat in a fierce fight, stabbing him in the heart. Thick black blood gushed from the cat, which transformed into a beautiful, naked giant, the victim of a spell. The giant swore to defend King Arthur and from that moment on became a precious ally of the young sovereign.

In conclusion, the Celtic mythological universe and the legends associated with the cat offer a fascinating mix of symbolism and mystery. From the Cat Sith, a fairy creature of exceptional size, to the legends of Cath Palug, the monstrous cat born from the pig, Henwen, felines occupy a distinctive role in Celtic stories. Whether considered bringers of good or bad luck, guardians of hidden wisdom, or linked to mysterious rituals, cats in Celtic culture reflect the complexity of the beliefs and perceptions of these ancient societies.



Artwork by Günter Nal

Daily Practice: Thoughts for new Bards by Selkie

Part 3: It's all about Devotion.

Having learned about my discoveries about the *what* and the *why* meditation and journeying can be a challenge, in this final part, the *how* to 'inhabit the Otherworld' is shared. Put simply, it is through devoting oneself to Daily Practice, the regularity of 'come what may, I do one specific aspect of my Practice, every single day'.

I am privileged it's true; I have a dedicated space for my spiritual practice and the time to do it. But life throws curve balls frequently – illness, visitors, others' needs as a priority; Daily Practice can become somewhat intermittent. But I have discovered that one particular practice alone appears to mitigate this and it is possible to employ it in a regular way. I'm referring devotional work with Deity.

I will not go into the details of my personal practice but in a nutshell, I have found that since I made the priority of my Daily Practice a devotional aspect focusing on a specific deity, one which resonates most with me and has had most influence on my Druid life, I have received a deepening of what I experience, a connection that I have never felt so vividly. I now know what it is to inhabit the Otherworld more fully and I would like to credit Kristoffer Hughes for being a key factor in my revelations¹

It is enough to chant, light a candle, say a prayer, devote the cooking of a meal, the doing of housework, as a fully conscious offering – the key being not to see it as an act of reciprocity, but fully without expectation of reward. When heartfelt, in the moment, I believe that we are able to inhabit this Otherworld if only briefly. But how do we 'record' this to gain perspective and learning?

As Bards, we learn the skill of 'reflection', of being able to see the self, understand and analyse so that we may benefit from the experience and learn something. In research, when ongoing, this can be referred to as 'reflexive research or practice' – the idea of developing what you do and how you do it as you proceed to adapt and experience some sort of learning. Is a reflection an exact copy? Do you see it in real time? I find it helpful to see past the analogies of a mirror and think more along the lines of 'looking back', remembering,

revisiting or even becoming 'nostalgic'. Just like trying to recall a dream on waking, it can be elusive, you may not always retain everything, but the important thing is that you are recovering something that you 'inhabited'. Some meditations and journeys are more like 'lucid dreaming', when we may begin with our imaginations, moving on to a 'dream-like' state helping us to reach our individual potential in this practice.



To help reach your potential, I'd like to share some simple points that may assist with this aim.

- Practice, practice, practice – regularly, whatever that means to you.
- Offer a devotional moment within your framework of regular Practice – it could be work focused or helping another or even lighting that candle but do it from the heart with 'your' deity or Spirit/Goddess/God in mind.
- Find a practice that you can enjoy without expectation of effectiveness – it could be walking, drumming, singing, chanting, producing art within ritual, anything that you can do simply for the fun of it – it is not a 'chore'.
- Have that journal and pen (or phone/tablet) ready to write or record your reflecting back on the moment afterwards – but... and this is crucial – do not expect to write something down or have any comment to make every single time. Like dreams, sometimes we need to let the moment go – be okay with this. With practice and patience, like recalling dreams, it is a learned skill.

That last is the most important point, I think. It is only through not being afraid of capturing the whole experience 'on paper', of being content to let the Goddess or Universe keep something from me, for now, that I have found I can truly inhabit the Otherworld reliably.

I hope this 3-Part article has been useful and my

wish is that everyone finds a way to be in the Otherworld when they wish to do so. Blessings on your journeys.

For further information about PAPPs, email Lynn: l.genevieve.1@research.gla.ac.uk

If you are interested in John's Druid Practice see: <https://muddyfeet.blog>

Footnotes

¹ I attended his 'Into the Cauldron: A voyage of discovery and devotion with Cerridwen – The Mother of Awen' course, where I was able to witness how Kristoffer's deeply powerful relationship and regular devotions to his Goddess was instrumental in achieving a successful and meaningful Practice.

² For my husband John this involves his morning 'douk' in the river – his daily devotion in service to the Goddess of the waters, a sacred practice where he sacrifices himself to the elements whilst offering songs and chants.

Cup of Moonlight, Staff of Sky

by Joshua Ramey Renk

A cup of moonlight
In branches held aloft
A staff full of brightest sky
Calm silver orb atop

Draw down the moon and
Channel leafless earth
Spring's Herald shines above
With joyous news of great rebirth

Hold your beaming moonlight cup
And raise your staff up high
Call forth the links in moonlight's chain

Connecting you,
the World and we and I

-Redwood City, 2/23/2024



Ceridwen and Taliesin by Vohl



The Five Minute Druid *by Sarah Watkins*

During my bardic grade, I wrote a book on easy ways to connect or reconnect with the druid path that was published by Moon Books in January. Here, I'd like to share an excerpt from the first chapter with you.

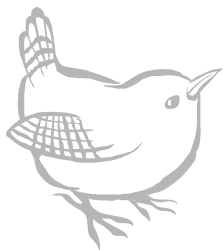
Just Notice

One of the best ways to be with nature is, of course, to get outside. But not everyone has the time to take a long walk in the countryside, to ramble through a forest or kick sand along a beach. Not everyone is able to go for a walk full stop, so this article focuses on noticing.

For those of us who can get out for a walk, the tips that follow can help, but if you've got time for a leisurely stroll, then you probably aren't struggling with reconnecting. However, if you are dashing around from place to place – work, school, shops, wherever in an ongoing, never-ending loop – then this is about stopping for five minutes. It could be while you are waiting for a bus, standing in the queue to collect the kids or on the commute. Many of us don't stop to notice and observe the outside world during our daily routines. We are so caught up in our own thoughts that we don't look at what is around us, not enough to really notice it.

If you are housebound or can't get out, this is about finding a window from which you can at least see some plants, trees, the sky, and even a bird table or feeder – a view of nature, however small it may be. You might think that your daily routine is boring or you are so sick of being indoors you're not going to see anything new from your window, but nature will surprise you, and in that surprise, in that heightened awareness of the world around you, you will regain connection.

By just taking five minutes a day or even as little as once a week, we can start to reconnect to the land, our surroundings and to our path. We can sense our place and our space allowing us to once more feel a part of the earth.



Whether you are out and about or looking from a window, consciously tell yourself you are taking your five minutes and breathe deeply for three long, slow breaths. If you

can, close your eyes while you concentrate on your breathing and centre yourself.

Open your eyes and then really notice your view, however big or small it is. Pick one thing to notice in that day's five minutes of observation which could include:

- What way are you facing? Orient yourself by noticing whether you are facing north, south, east or west. What element is associated with that direction? Think about what that element means to you.
- What season is it? The wheel of the year acknowledges the solstices and the equinoxes. Look to see what signs there are of that time of the year. Are there any signs of the next season to come?
- What trees can you see? Can you identify them all? How old do you think they are?
- What plants or flowers grow in your local environment? Take notice of even the smallest weeds. Even in the most built-up of places, nature will have found a way to survive.
- Is there any wildlife? Any birds? Do you know what they are? Do you know anything about them – what they eat, where they sleep, the tracks they leave?
- What can you hear? Is it all just background noise or if you can block that out, can you hear birds singing, the wind in the trees, a distant trickle of water?
- What is the weather doing? Relate it back to the wheel of the year – is it usual for that season?
- What does the sky look like? Are there clear indications of a sunny or stormy day ahead? Can you see anything in the clouds?
- Do you know what the time the sun is currently setting and rising? It may not be practical but you could time your five minutes to purposely see something that we take for granted every day.

Pick one thing to focus on and the next time you have five minutes pick another. Build up a picture of what is happening in your local environment. If you can, try this at different times of the day and see what differences there are. Even if you are treading the same path or looking from the same old window, the wheel of the year keeps turning

and there will be fresh things to notice.

One technique is to find a sit spot – a place where you go to whenever you can – to sit and just observe the world around you. By going to that same place in different seasons, at different times, you will start to notice the changes around you. Build on your observations by noting what you see at different times of the year. Jotting it all down in a notebook or journal will probably take more than five minutes and if you've really been feeling disconnected then writing it all down can seem a chore. I use the note function on my phone – it literally takes a minute – to remind myself of things I want to look up later. Or take a picture of something you can't identify and look into that at another time.

I'm lucky enough to live close to several beaches and I have walked my dog in the same spot too many times to count, as well as his predecessors before him, over and over again. Until I began doing this exercise, I was in walk mode but not notice mode. I would stride along for an hour or more just trying to get the daily walk done so I could rush back to work, but then I learned to stop. I have found species of plants I never realised grew there, nooks and crevices to explore that I didn't know existed before and animal tracks that I could have easily walked over. I've been lucky to see foxes eating fish on the banks of the estuary, hawks wheeling in the sky, fish jumping from the water with water glistening from their scales – truly magnificent sights - but I have also taken great joy from noticing bee holes, sloes growing, spider webs coated with dew in the morning, new buds on the trees, caterpillars on the march and butterflies dancing in the sunshine. The small things are important, the details bring the natural world to life.

And what noticing does is link you to nature and to your Druidry path. The more you notice, the more you are connecting. By stilling your mind and opening yourself up to the natural world, even for just five minutes, you are taking in so much. You are learning what is around you and how it all fits together, yourself included. Nature's wonders can be found in the smallest details – you just need to notice them.

The Five Minute Druid is published by Moon Books and is available in the OBOD shop: <https://store.druidry.org/products/the-five-minute-druid>



Breathe with Nature by Troy Parsons

When you breathe, you are not alone.
Every time you take a breath,
you are with nature.

Your breath brings you into harmony with a
breathing planet.

The oceans breathe with you,
with each ebb and flow,
producing half of Earth's oxygen.

The trees breathe with you, day and night,
exchanging carbon dioxide for oxygen.

Bears and foxes in the woods
breathe with you.

Whales and fish in the depths
breathe with you.

Frogs and turtles in the ponds
breathe with you.

Deer and hares in the fields
breathe with you.

Flowers and grass in the meadows
breathe with you.

Hawks and swallows in the sky
breathe with you.

The vast sky with its clouds
breathes with you.

All of Nature is breathing with you.

Open Forum

I am currently studying for a PhD around the application of Druid environmental ethics. My first chapter is a chronological look at the history of Druidry in England. I have reached a point where I would love to add some real OBOD colour to the scene! I'm looking to have conversations with members who were at Stonehenge and/or Avebury at Summer Solstice from 1974 to 1985, the free festival years and the Battle of the Beanfield. If anyone has a desire to share personal memories, however insignificant or outrageously huge, either orally or photographically I would be both most grateful and delighted to include them in my study.

I can be contacted at: Clair.James@winchester.ac.uk or, on: 07498722842.

Reviews

The Gift of the Night

by Philip Carr-Gomm

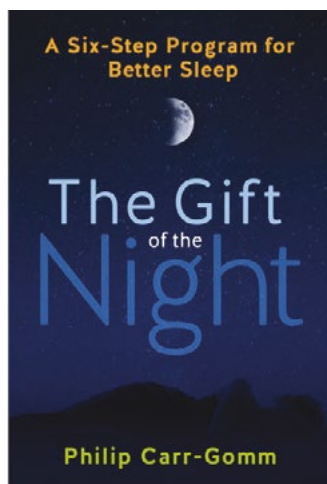
With insomnia at epidemic levels, we are offered apps, memory mattresses and high-tech checking systems to 'beat' it. So this fluent, accessible book, coming from a totally different place, is both timely and valuable. The author has identified sleep and, importantly, the time in between sleep and waking, as a spiritual experience; a change in consciousness with a value that should be cherished. We are invited to reframe it as a treasure store of opportunity. Part of the gift of this book is telling us what is unhelpful – including those apps. Fretting, logging, counting and evaluating our hours of insomnia may all increase performance anxiety and drive sleep away. Instead, we are invited to embrace the possibilities of the mysterious, expansive state of 'in between-ness' and to learn how to interact creatively with it.

The book is presented in two sections and full of advice to help us relax and make friends with our sleep processes. Section 1 introduces the integrative approach and six-stage programme, an embodied approach to optimise biorhythms and experiment with thirteen approaches and five scripts. It also encourages us to create rituals - for the end and also the beginning of each day. Section two, titled 'Almost everything you've ever wanted to know about sleep' has troubleshooting, FAQs, development of the programme, notes and resources.

That's a lot of help in a little book and reframing our sleepless hours into opportunities for a joyful exploration of an extraordinary state of consciousness is perhaps its chief gift. It is an invitation to adventure. Highly recommended.

*Reviewed by Penny
Billington*

Available in the
OBOD Shop: [https://
store.druidry.org/
products/the-gift-of-
the-night](https://store.druidry.org/products/the-gift-of-the-night)



The Common by Phil Smith

It simply wouldn't be possible to do justice to Phil Smith's epic "assemblage of poems" in such a short review. Running at 330 pages, this is an ambitious collection. This is no quick read. To get the most out of it you need time to fully immerse yourself in Smith's words. It's not an easy read either – but that is not necessarily to its detriment. Spending time with this text brings huge rewards.

The collection addresses two types of 'Common'. Firstly, there is the link to Common land which we find in several pieces, but most notably, Smith is working with experiences we have in common with each other. As such, there are poems addressing the isolation of Covid lockdowns, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the day that "The old queen would die." Echoes of other poets, such as WB Yeats, Simon Armitage and, most notably TS Eliot spark throughout the collection. Smith's titular poem, "The Common" is his very own "Wasteland," divided into stanzas of numbered Mistakes, Anti-Quests and Great Moments. Just like Eliot's work, the poem, and the whole collection, is shot through with intertextual references which foster a nostalgia for our shared culture. Influences as wide as the Daleks, John Carpenter's "The Thing", "Crown Court" and Adam Adamant all play a part.

In Smith's own words "Form and technique are not much honoured here". Instead, the entire collection is in free verse. However, it is the imagery and wordplay which make this collection pop. There are also some interesting experiments, such as "It is fantastic to be here at all", which is entirely made up of words rearranged from a speech by Boris Johnson, and "Derambled", which is a collage of words lifted from guidebooks for walkers! However, if I had to pick a favourite, it would be a small poem called "The Fifth", where Smith explores conspicuous poverty simply by watching fireworks in November.

This really is an astonishing collection of poems and perfect if you fancy something to get your literary teeth into.

*The Common is printed by Diagrammatical Press. Copies can be ordered from [mytho.smith@
btoopenworld.com](mailto:mytho.smith@btoopenworld.com)*



Regular Group Meetings

ANDION FELLOWSHIP: Small Seed Group based in Northern New Jersey offering regular face-to-face and online meetings. Visit us at <https://www.andionfellowship.org>

APPLESEED GROVE, GLASTONBURY: Meeting (and sometimes hosting) OBODies and other Druids since 2002. theappleseedgrove@googlemail.com

ARTIO SEEDGROUP, Zurich area. Open rituals for Beltane and Samhain, occasional meetings. New members welcome. Contact: britta.holden@sunrise.ch, +41 76 326 6963 or lily@wildwood.ch

ARTURIAN GROVE Seasonal rituals near Otley. optimistichannah@outlook.com

ASH GROVE, GLASTONBURY meeting OBOD visitors for druidic chat.

FFI jacki.woolmington@btinternet.com

BIG SKY GROVE, NORFOLK OBOD/BDO 8 festivals, walks, discussion/social. FFI: rebniikc@btinternet.com

BADGER & TOAD S.G., Folkstone area. Seasonal/meet ups.

FFI: Sian and Hazel obodbadgerandtoad@yahoo.com

CRANN NA CAILLI GROVE, seasonal & monthly peace ceremonies, moots and nature-based teachings. www.archwayadventures.org, archwayadventures123@gmail.com . 720-203- 6781. 24489 cr 54 Greeley Co. 80631 **USA CIRCLE OF COLL** Seattle Seedgroup public rituals, workshops, tree walks monthly. circleofcoll@circleofcoll.org

CORNOVII GROVE. Seasonal rituals, Worcs. www.cornovii.org

Email keith.southall@creativelandscapes.co.uk

DÓITEAN AGUS UISCE (Flame & Well Druid Grove). Seasonal rituals, moots and other gatherings.

Colorado, Front Range, USA. FFI: flameandwellgrove@gmail.com | <https://www.flameandwellgrove.org/>

DRACAENA GROVE: Saltburn/Cleveland: N Yorks Celebrations/informal meetings.

dracaenagrove@hotmail.com

DRUID PILGRIM GROVE: Pilgrimages, gatherings and rituals. Encouragement for pilgrims. Australia and NZ. Contact: danuta@adruid.com; FB: Druid Pilgrim group.

BOREALIS CIRCLE SEED GROUP 3rd Saturday of the Month: Winnipeg, Manitoba. Public rituals in local parks. FFI: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/lakeagassizdruids/> email: borealiscircle@gmail.com

LIGHT OF AWEN SEED GROUP in Bristol. Celebrating the wheel of the year, and healing.

Email: Lightofawen8@gmail.com

MACADAMIA GROVE Seasonal/events, Brisbane Australia. Sandra macademiagroove@hotmail.com

THE MELBOURNE GROVE Seasonal, Melbourne, Aus: Trudy Richards moondancer@outlook.com.au

NOS CORYN GROVE, Hindley, Wigan. Meeting on the night before the full moon closest to the festivals, Borsdane Woods. All welcome. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/240230606313005/>

OAKHEART: 8 Rituals, Druid Drinks, Gatherings. Portland OR USA. <https://www.oakheartdruids.com/>

PENDLE GROVE. Clitheroe/around Lancs. Sionnach on 0161 3432705 or email drvernon@hotmail.co.uk

THE PARISI SEED GROUP, Based in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, indoor rituals for the wheel of the year, with tree walks & meditations in between each ritual. Contact: Sue - thegingerbaker@icloud.com

RAVEN'S MOUNTAIN SEED GROUP, Berne & Thun area, Switzerland, open rituals, occasional meetings - New members welcome. Contact: guenternal@hotmail.com

SHINING MOUNTAINS GROVE W. Montana, USA, 8 rituals, community, hikes, zoom.

FFI: Heather: roanrob-bins@aol.com

SETANTII GROVE Seasonal Rituals in Manchester / S. Lancs. Always outdoors. groveofsetantii@yahoo.com

SILVER BEAR GROVE Middlesbrough, County Durham. TS3 9DD. Contact Paul 07923575364

Email: silverbear-grove@hotmail.com

SLIABH ANAM GROVE Rituals and monthly moots Durango, Colorado, USA.

FFI: contact: sliabhanam@gmail.com

TAMESIS (LONDON SG) festivals/moots/workshops Contact Ferdiad tamesisgrove@gmail.com | www.tamesisgrove.com



Events



OBOD members and friends are welcome to submit events they have organised for inclusion here.

This section may also be posted on our website at <https://druidry.org>

Please tell us if you don't want your event posted on the www.

OBOD Wheel Of The Year Online Rituals

On FB and YouTube. Hosted by CC Eimear Burke. Check: <https://www.facebook.com/druidry>

DATES FOR 2024:

Bealtaine: May 4th | Alban Hefin: June 22nd | Lúghnasadh: August 3rd | Alban Elfed:
September 21st | Samhain: November 2nd | Alban Arthan: December 21st

Regular OBOD Meetings

Fireside chat with Eimear: Join CC every Thursday, 8pm. Google YouTube + [Fireside chat](#)

Tea with a Druid: With Philip Carr Gomm/guests every Monday 8pm

Monthly OBOD Peace meditation: with your Grove or by yourself every full moon: 7pm local time

Building Resilience in Difficult Times: A monthly OBOD Listening Circle. Online zoom gathering, 1st Wednesday of the month 7pm UTC. Contact oboddeeplistingcircle@gmail.com



Upcoming Events

5 to 7 April, Yorkshire Druid Gorsedd to be held at Parcevall Hall. Fully Booked.

18 & 19 May, Power animal shamanic journey weekend with Georgien Wybenga, The Barnes Institute, Whitburn. Contact Samantha 07482672580.

1 & 2 June, OBOD 60th Anniversary Summer Gathering, at Strode College, Church Road, Street, BA16 0AB nr Glastonbury. Fringe events on 3&4 June, to be announced.

14-16 June, OBOD Druid Gathering di Mezza Estate: "Intrecci e connessioni" a Cerro al Volturno, Molise (Italy). Contact: info@druidry.it o 0039 3286621163

15 - 16 June, Inner Journeying and ritual level 1 with Penny Billington, Matt McCabe & Gary Llewellyn in Glastonbury, non-residential. Cost £75.00. Email druidevents@yahoo.com for a flyer.

28 June-2 July, Bioróg Retreat - Discovering Mythic Landscape in Donegal, Ireland. Venue: Song House, Falcarragh. <https://thesonghouseireland.com/> Facilitators: Eimear Burke and Seán O'Gaoithin. FFI/bookings email seanogaoithin7@gmail.com

23 - 25 August, OBOD Bardic Gorsedd, "The Heart of Ritual" with guest speaker Matthew McCabe. Noddffa, Penmaenmawr, Wales, LL34 6YF. Single room accommodation, Vegetarian or vegan catering. A deposit of £90 is required,. Please email bardicgorsedds@obod.org

15 - 18 August, Druid Camp in South-West Germany, in Waldhambach. The website is www.druidencamp.de

30, 31 August, 1 September, Mercian Gatherings Pagan camp's 19th year. Held near Nuneaton, Warks. Talks, workshops and ritual, music and entertainment in honour of the Old Gods. Stalls, showers, café, free-trading Sunday market. ALL profits donated to charity To date, we have raised over £120,000. Ticket enquiries Sue on merciangatheringtickets@hotmail.com

28th September, Meeting for OBOD members in Houthulst, Belgium. A get together to meet members and exchange stories, ending with an Autumn Equinox Ceremony. contact and/or information: contact Danny Dewulf/ Jol Props via FriendsofArduina@gmail.com

14 December, OBOD Winter Gathering at Strode College, Church Road, Street, BA16 0AB nr Glastonbury