

TOUCHSTONE

The journal of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids
April 2022

Issue 296



Wasser from Druidtarot by Saga Greenwood

When I was Young
I envisioned the
Communion of Saints
As a long, noble line
Of virtuous Pilgrims
Guiding us to a New Jerusalem—
A gleaming City on a Hill.

Now, as I am Older
I imagine the
Communion of Saints
As ancient Oaks and Pines
in a Sacred Grove
Venerating the Tree of Life—
Not a Destination, but a Way.

Jack Uldrich

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EDITORIAL

Oh, I feel I've stepped back in time as the events page fills with real opportunities for Druids to meet each other: hurrah! And there are other riches within. Read about and then experiment with 'Celtic figures as ecstatic trance postures' p4: very exciting. If your rituals are still mainly online, learn how to deepen the experience for all the participants on p5, and if you feel less resilient than you need to be to stay balanced, compassionate and useful during these times of multiple global crises, turn to p 7.

The annual Druid Gorsedd have sent a glimpse into their mysteries: read it - and play 'spot the Druid' on p. 8. Also within are part 2 of Willpower training, a long Open Forum and a really cool numberplate pp 10-12, a Druid song for spring plus Druids and the metaverse. That's an interesting read and if the word is new to you, I prefixed the article with a definition. Also, we have a 600 year old poem - any translators out there? Read out loud and surprise yourself with how much you do understand. This is a Touchstone full of Druidic wonders, for sure!

Pen

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LISTENING

WOLF MOON

Listening is an act of radical disobedience to
the powers of oppression.

Listening calms, opens, builds bridges, cultivates
relationship, softens edges, embraces anOther
with a willingness to be changed.

Listening is the first step of leadership, of
partnership, of community, of health
Listening is how we re-wild
our rewired brain
to be held in body
to embody beholding

Withholding all that would clutter the listening

Like butter glistening and melting into the
cracked dry toast

Listening is the most moist love
savoring every morsel as she flavors the
bearer of truth with her tear-like salt and
sweet cream.

Listening lets us chew together
through that which we cannot stomach
alone.

Amy Walker

THE APRIL TRANSLATION CHALLENGE:

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote,
The droghte of March hath perced to the
roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertú engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye ...

Chaucer, The Prologue, Canterbury Tales

Wolf Moon slowly untangles itself
from the bare trees,
rising
free of clinging clouds
moment by moment
into a dappled sky.

Hiding, one moment dark as pitch
and then
silvershine on snow
doubled and redoubled
the light
and then—

Gone.

Cathy Johnson



five fingers wide
ready to take off
Mother tree whispers softly
Be happy on your journey

fly away

flight
on the wind's back
can hardly breathe from delight
so wonderful is the world
under the firmament
ah joy
destination
the journey is over
they are now more than two
the colorful leaf children
stay together in winter

Sleep well

Anna Thieman

Years before I became a member of the OBOD, my wife inspired me with a simple but very effective method of

entering altered states of waking consciousness: "Ritual Postures and Ecstatic Trance according to Dr. Felicitas Goodman". Meanwhile I am a seminar leader and trainer and look back on many impressive experiences with myself and others. During my Ovate studies I had the idea to build a bridge between the trance postures with Celtic roots OBOD's spiritual practice. I would like to share this treasure, because I have experienced it as very enriching.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN - In 1977, anthropologist Dr. Felicitas Goodman discovered that students entered deep trance states when she began combining a fast rattling rhythm with the postures of ancient statuettes. To distinguish this particular type of trance from others such as hypnosis, Goodman called it "ecstatic trance".

This means: to cross over from everyday consciousness into another reality through highly focussed concentration on the posture, the rhythm and the intention.

In the meantime, about 100 postures from many cultures worldwide have been researched, including the "Man of Hirschlanden" and "Cernunnos of Gundestrup". The Man of Hirschlanden is a sculpture on a burial mound in southern Germany. The Cernunnos is a figure on a metal cauldron found in Denmark. Embedded in a ritual, one stands, lies or sits in one of these postures for 15min, while a rhythm of 210-240bpm is drummed or rattled. It could not be found out whether this technique was actually practised in the past - but it works

Celtic figures as ecstatic trance postures **ULF LEONHARD**

today! Medical studies have shown a typical picture of brain waves during ecstatic trance. Felicitas Goodman has

defined 5 categories of postures: Divination, Metamorphosis, Healing, Initiation and Spiritual Journeys.

EFFECT - Depending on personality type, inner attitude and experience, the experience in the trance can show itself on different levels: Physically as warmth, pulsation or vibration, visionary experience, sudden insights, deep calm and joy of life. The powers or spirits at work during the trance - no matter what you call them - are interested in our well-being, our further development, in having more knowledge about ourselves and life at our disposal. In the course of working with ecstatic trance, some positive effects have become clear: Increase in inner freedom, vitality, creativity and basic trust in life.



Ecstatic trance attitudes are not bound to any religion or ideology. They have their home in the deep connection with nature of shamanism. While one remains in full control throughout, one's own experience is in the foreground.

Felicitas always said: Trance is healthy!



In the current times, and in situations where distance makes it necessary to hold ritual online, there are ways to form multilevel connections by adding a few aspects to ritual. While online is different to in person ritual, from the connection of continued rituals we've performed I can't see this as an inferior option. Through online ritual we have been able to welcome OBOD members to participate in rituals for the first time.



work. Meeting up with time to allocate parts and run through anything that might need explaining helps to run a smooth ritual. Checking that all attendants know where the four directions are and deciding if you want to remain seated or will be moving about are also going to make a ritual run well. You can look at a map and choose people from the geographical areas to represent the directions.

Online ritual can be enhanced by adding elements to the ritual so that all participants have the same or similar tangible touchstones. We want to make a link within cyberspace, and your personal space. By setting up a small physical circle that reflects the Macrocosm, within a tangible Microcosm our conscious and subconscious mind can engage with the group mind quicker.

To do this we want to engage as many senses as possible to connect with this ritual, Source, and each other. By preparing our own personal spaces to reflect aspects of other participants and the group Grove or sacred space we are entering together, we can make our rituals more complex in layers, at the same time as making it easier on all individuals to focus on the ritual.

BASICS: *Make sure* you have good internet, especially for the major players in a ritual. Meet up before hand, on the platform you are planning to use. One memorable ritual, our Lady, the main reason for ritual, had a thunderstorm arrive at the same time her speech started. Needless to say not all things can be planned for but it helps to have everyone in the ritual familiar with how things

SMELL: *Agree* on a specific fragrance of incense, or perfume for the ritual. This could easily be adapted for those of us who may be sensitive to fragrance by having a picture of the fragrant plant to focus on. The essence of the season can be attuned to fit your environment and that of the participants.

TOUCH: *Have instructions* written into a ritual where you all do a ritual action. I believe I got the idea for this from the 'Morning Ritual' held by Jeremy Runnalls during SHOBODO 2020. All participants can trace an Awen ray symbol on our hand at the same time: Hold up your non-dominant hand,

- draw the rightmost ray first \
- then trace the leftmost ray /
- then trace the middle ray |

Lastly, using your three longest fingers, dot the top of the Awen. *The touch sensation on your hand* becomes a collective, point of connection to all the participants. We then hold up our hands to the screen before saluting the East.

When OBOD ritual indicates that you should pass things to people, ensure you all have these things on hand and virtually pass these things to each other. Also join hands by

holding your arms up, with hands out of sight so you are all holding hands. This is effective no matter what position people are on in a Zoom or Messenger camera view.

SOUND - For sound, again we can all contribute to this. During the cascading Awen you can do this a couple of ways. Carmel Vandermolen did this wonderfully in a ritual by muting everyone but playing a recording of several of us chanting Awen so we could chant along with the recording. Our group has chosen to chant together and we have either worked this out or magic happens, because it sounds lovely. We use Messenger at the moment, but have also used Zoom to good effect. There hasn't been a chant where I haven't heard everyone's voices coming through at different times.

SIGHT - I actually set up a small circle, a physical representation with my Land, Sea and Sky symbols that link me to our world: that is our Biosphere, made up of the Geosphere, the Hydrosphere and the Atmosphere. I have three cauldrons containing a rock for Land, water for Sea, and a feather or some incense for Sky. I then place these on a round plate so they form a triangle, representing the circle we are in for ritual and the triangle of the Three Realms within this. These can be fancy or make-do. You can cut a paper towel roll to make three small pots by wrapping them in foil to make them fire safe. I have bought three small cauldrons for this purpose, as they are central aspects of my path. You may also mark out the directions on your small circle, so that you may send your energy to the correct direction if you remain seated or get up and salute that quarter.



Having all the participants obtain a similar-coloured candle, and light it at an assigned point in the ritual, is a great focus. I buy packets of birthday candles to use for ritual. These small candles seem to be already imbued with good thoughts and energy, burn through quickly, and come in an array of colours. Ensuring before the ritual that you have a fire safe area is very important in setting up your space.

When a ritual calls for greenery, we can all go into our gardens - be that a pot plant or a tree - and bring in some nature from our environment, either making sure it features in our set-up or placing it in such a way that it is visible during the ritual.

Finally I would suggest that anyone wanting to form a group mind, be that for a temporary one-off ritual or a group that works together a lot, comes up with a small statement of purpose or energetically charged prose. For example: *"We come here today to lend energy to this ritual, we are the Seed Group of the Bilby, we accept the dark energy we carry within us and connect in light upon the land we are on and the space we are about to create."*

If you look at your online ritual and find as many ways of connection as possible, you can make it a more complete experience for all involved while honouring any attendant's boundaries. Preparation with people you are going to work with together beforehand helps with establishing what people might require to allow your ritual to flow smoothly. With a little preparation, you can connect on multiple levels and make online ritual a more complete experience for everyone.

The OBOD Building Resilience Circle will be held monthly on the first Wednesday of the month at 7pm UTC.

Building Resilience in Difficult Times- An OBOD Listening Circle.
FREE offering to members
HARRIET SAMS

If you have experienced difficult emotions of sadness and grief because of our current climate, ecological, social, a spiritual crises this new project that OBOD is offering might be of interest. It has become abundantly clear that we are in a global climate, ecological and social emergency. People are experiencing first-hand very challenging circumstances all over the world; forest fires, ocean depletion, flooding rivers, deforestation, COVID, and the devastating impact of war.

How can our druidic spirituality and community hold us as we navigate such difficult terrain? How can OBOD be present to your personal experience of these times? How can our shared Earth-based spirituality and divine love of place guide us and hold us when we are going through such complex emotions? How as a community can we listen to members around the world who need a safe place to tell their stories, sit with complex emotions, bear witness to one another, and share sacred space?

We invite you to attend via Zoom a monthly OBOD Climate Circle, run by OBOD member and ecotherapist Harriet Sams, <https://nwyfre-earth.co/> with compassionate facilitation assistance from experienced volunteers. To join please contact Harriet Sams: harrietlock@gmail.com

To take part in this Listening Circle you need to adhere these *Agreements*:

I am an OBOD member and agree

that we are in a climate, ecological and social emergency.

I wish to join a circle of people who have a similar, but unique outlook about these issues. I wish

to co-explore and navigate difficult feelings.

I agree that this is not a therapy or counselling circle, although strong emotions will come up from other participants as well as within me. This is a safe and confidential space to share.

I understand that this is a listening circle. I agree not to try to fix things, tell people my opinion, or try to advise.

I understand that Druidry holds the circle, and that our sharing, compassion and healing is rooted in our Earth-based spirituality.

We have successfully run this Circle for four months and have learned much about how to really listen to other's experiences, that are often quite different to our own and that reflect the global nature of our membership. We have also learned how rare it is to enter into safe space to allow ourselves to be really heard for what's in our hearts, without the risk of judgement or without anyone trying to offer advice. The Circle is compassionately held by wonderful, experienced volunteers and we are guided each month by a Quarter, whose presence supports us as we connect to the Earth. In April, the Quarter will be Earth.

If you would like to join the Circle and to connect to fellow members in mutual support, **please contact me, Harriet, on harrietlock@gmail.com**. It'd be a real joy to have

you come along. It's surprisingly uplifting, and there's something very cathartic and honest about holding one another in deep listening. Something like hope is found through the grief. If not hope, love.

With many blessings, Harriet



When an invite like this is given:

DRUID GORSEDD 2022

Join us for a weekend of

inspiration, fellowship, ritual and fun, at Noddfa Retreat Centre, which is situated between the mountains and the sea, at Penmaenmawr, North Wales. We will be exploring: The World As We Dream It... What is any druid grade OBODy, with the time available, expected to do? Join in of course. You know with Fiona Ware and Caryl Dailey running workshops you are in for a treat. The twentyfive Druids who managed to attend weren't disappointed.

Obviously what goes on at a druid grade gorsedd stays on a druid grade gorsedd but I am allowed to let you in on a few of the highlights.

Gently on the first evening we explored the realm of images and what they might mean within a dream. With the totem of geese we were encouraged to go to sleep with the vision of the geese flying. Yes we were given work to do in our sleep!! The next morning we explored our dreams in more detail and also allocated work on realms of dreaming to prepare for the afternoon ritual. In the afternoon we had time to explore the wonderful venue and environment - a beach only 15 mins walk away and moors to the back and a wonderful ancient stone circle above the village of Penmaenmawr. Some early birds actually climbed up to the stones before breakfast on the Sunday morning. The evening eisteddfod had some poignant moments but for me the highlights were the light relief of song and poems that made us laugh. Thank you to everyone who told stories, sang, played violin and drum. We also were shown how to say with sign language the druid peace prayer.

In Sunday's session we were led on guided

Druid Gorsedd 2022 CHRISSIE KIMBER

dream meditation with goose song and drumming before a final closing circle. We left the

weekend with much to process in our lives and dreams. My drive was spent in contemplation of the good company that is found with fellow members of the OBOD tribe.

Who would have thought that when we said goodbye at the last Druid Grade gorsedd in Ireland in February 2020 that it would be two years before we met up again? As in 2020 we said "see you at the summer gathering". My dream is that this year it comes true. I'm sure Caryl will tell us to TRUST that it will

When I arrived home after a seven hour drive others had already posted pictures and summaries on Facebook: here are two:

"It was brilliant being on mountains and beaches and spending quality time in quality company. New friends were made and old friends were reacquainted with. There was crochet en masse, cordage, conversation and a brilliant eisteddfod. Druids are great people. Now I'm back in parent mode, but I have a dream of the North Wales coastline held strongly.."

"Noddfa: back from a fabulous OBOD Druid Gorsedd in Wales. So nurtured by the time there."



Will Power Training

Part 2

KEITH MILLER

From part 1:

There are many wonderful examples of how people have used will power to face challenge in life. For example, those cast adrift in a boat in the ocean for months and yet somehow survived. Without strong will power they would never have survived. Then there are those that have physical impairments in life, who manage to cope and get on somehow, quite often with a smile, in the face of immense adversity. How is this possible?

...Because they are able to manipulate their mental perceptions, which in turn shapes their mental well-being which can give them hope and determination. And this is only possible through will power. Because will power is the means by which we can choose one mental perception over another, and this case a positive mental perception over a negative one. And that is where will power training comes in, and why it's so valuable.

TRAINING

In order to develop my will power I carry out simple daily exercises. A bit like learning a musical instrument, improving will power takes time and practice. The exercises may seem daft, but they work. They involve two elements; a conscious action and a conscious intension. Here are some examples:

Stage 1: Conscious Action

Place a sign in a convenient place which says, touch your cheek 5x. Once a day carry out the action. It's just as important to consciously not do the action as it is to do it, so it should only be done once a day. Alternatives are jump on one foot, clap your hands, rub your head etc. The type of action is irrelevant.

Stage 2: Conscious Attention

Place a sign in a convenient place which says,

look for the colour red. This means look, from where you are standing, for anything that has that colour within view. Once

a day carry out the action. Again, it's just as important to consciously not do the action as it is to do it, so it should only be done once a day. Alternatives are different colours, numbers, shapes, objects, birds in the sky etc.

The key thing to these tasks is that they should be easy to do, to the point where success is guaranteed. The idea is to build up the concept of success, both in your conscious and sub-conscious mind, i.e. my will power is strong, and I can choose actions at will. Over time, I have found my confidence has built up.

Stage 3: Daily Review

In addition, to these exercises, on the third week I introduced a daily review of how conscious I was in making actions or attentions through the day. The idea is to be factual and not criticise yourself for having a bad day. Remember you are trying to become more conscious of your will power and build up success, not drag yourself down.

Stage 4: Change the Actions

At the beginning of each week I alter the actions/attentions to something different. As there is an endless choice of tasks this is not a problem, but if you run out of options, you can always repeat the old ones in sequence.

Stage 5: Tackling the Anxiety

It took me 4 weeks to get to this stage! So how did I actually influence my negative habits of will. As anxiety is a mental thought or perception, rather than try and not think it, which let's face it always results in failure,

the solution was to replace the negative thought with a positive alternative. In my case I have used positive 'affirmations', which are positive statements that I repeat inside my head. When I initially started the training I would repeat the statements throughout the day, but now I just state them every morning as part of my morning ritual to greet the day, and then repeat them only when I find myself creating negative mental perceptions. The Statement I repeat is as follows: *"My will power is strong, I choose my own positive perceptions, and I choose perceptions of confidence, happiness and calmness."* This is rather a long statement! I could just delete the words after perceptions, but hey, it works for me.

THE RESULTS

I write this after 7 months of practice. I have found the process to be extremely helpful in reducing my anxiety. Does it stop it? No, but it puts me in charge. I tend to notice the negative mental perceptions very quickly, and very often immediately. Then I can start to repeat the affirmation straight away. This has the effect of conceptualising the matter, and helping to bring it to a halt. It can still take a fair bit of effort to manufacture a positive perception of say confidence e.g. putting a brave face on it, to remove a negative one, but the exercises are a useful reminder at all times that you can willingly choose to do something, and therefore it is possible to shift your mental focus at choice. Although I have made good progress I have no intention of stopping the practice, having strong will power is a gift, and a gift worth having. And so I want to share this gift with others!



I only came across the Druidcast in late October of 2021, episode 163 'Walking the Talk' on the Isle of Anglesey. Thus far, I have binge listened backwards to episode 80 and still counting down. I enrolled in the Bardic course on the 7th Dec. 2021. Upon starting the coursework, I was prompted to ponder what Druidry means to me. The thoughts below outline what has been swirling around my head over the past few months.

Is modern Druidry a feeble reconstruction practiced by susceptible spaced out moldering hippies? A wistful peace-loving rendition denuded of blood sacrifice? Is the surviving Druidic belief system viable? Can the good be carried forward, and the disconcerting left in the past? I celebrate the continuance of other traditions surviving without their perspective historical baggage. When visiting the Mayan pyramids of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, I was pleased with the absence of the ceremonial extraction of still beating human hearts. There was no potential of myself becoming a sacrifice to the gods, which provided peace of mind. Prior to swimming through an underworld cenote, a Mayan elder shared the region's living tradition by blessing my family with a smudging prayer. The experience was magical.

As an American my family tree has roots in the revolution that founded the nation and settlement of the "wild" west. Born to the gray skies of America's north Pacific coast, my placenta was likely disposed of as bio-hazard in a Puget Sound landfill. In modernity, distanced by space and time, the tradi-

tions of my ancients cast a dying light on my existence. Even for those who never left the homelands, indigenous Atlantic islander culture was nearly erased from consciousness. However, these islands still hold memory in the earth, stone, and ecology. If I pick up an arrowhead in America, I hold it in sacred reverence for the shared human experience. If I pick up an arrowhead in Scotland, I likely hold the sacred Pictish fairy shot of my ancestor spirits. Performing a DNA test, if I had found myself to be 10% Native American and 90% European I would have dove head first into learning the commensurate North American tribes' lore and labored to uphold their nature wisdom tradition. Admittedly, I would have ignored the dominant percentage of my heritage. Shying away from identification with the vapid "western" consumer culture that has colonized the globe. But that's the culture that is, not the culture that was.

With Druidry, genetics are of course irrelevant, everyone is invited to the party. With that said, the results were in, I was 100% European and predominantly from the isles. No intriguing intermingling had happened prior to or following branches of my family tree settling what would become Pipe Springs National Monument in Arizona. Pleasantly, native genetics were not forced into my family line through domination. However, the lack of a direct tie to the North American tribes did not mean that I was stranded adrift. Circumscribed to ecological spiritual disconnect, I came from an indigenous tradition which held reverence for and lived in harmony with the natural world. A people whose biocentric traditions were imperialized, colonized, subjugated, denigrated, and nearly destroyed long before the wave engulfed the Americas. The knowledge of my spirit ancestors was not all lost.

The vibrations reverberated through time. Shards of luminous Awen had penetrated the cracks of history. Waning threads to the past were grasped, held tight, and woven forward rebuilding a tapestry of tradition. Modern druids fanned the flames. A bio-symbiotic spiritualism was alive and awaited those who wished to find it. The Order of Bards Ovates and Druids had been sustaining a bubbling cauldron of Awen. As a skeptic and non-joiner, would I honor my ancestors and immerse myself in Druidry? I would.

Druidry provides a connection to the Awen of humanity's collective perennial wisdom traditions. It is the rekindling of an ancestral pagan heritage. The reclaiming of a natural birthright. An awakened truth; too powerful to be erased by empire, invasions, displacement, deranged ideologies, dominionist extractionists, anthropocentric speciesists, or misguided cultural appropriation segregationists myopic in history and foresight.

Druidry is a cosmic, terrestrial deep ecology unity consciousness. Incubated over millennia on North Atlantic islands in a temperate deciduous forest biome. Emanating an uplifting spirituality in symbiosis with all bioregions, biotic and abiotic forces, and shared ecological traditions. A harmonious healing path, nurturing a sustainable malleable permaculture.

Brendan Park, Winchester, California



OPEN FORUM

When I first got this license plate last year, I was unsure how the people I would encounter might react to it.



I had just certified as a naturalist and was enamored with the idea that getting one would benefit our state program and I was tickled that this name was free! I must say that, since I got it, I have had some of the most delightful conversations with people I would never have guessed had such positive thoughts on Druids! It has been an incredible ice breaker and has insured I get to discuss one of my favorite topics regularly! Today, an old man stopped in front of my van and loudly said, "Druid!?!?! Now THERE is an idea I can REALLY get behind!" He went on to tell me about his love of nature, his study of the Celts, and to recommend a podcast (The British History Podcast). We had a lovely visit. A few months ago, a local forager approached me, with a wink and a smirk, to tell me how the hackberry might be more deserving than the oak of reverence and I got to share with him that all trees are pretty special to me!!! I tend to be rather private and the whole experience has had a warming and opening effect I didn't expect! If I've thrown up an invitation to every stranger to tell me about their favorite tree or podcast, color me delighted!

Peyton Belunek

Spring Comes Once More (JHD Mar 2022)

Noel Nouvelet



Now the sun is rising, higher in the sky;
Soon will come the time to let our spirits fly.
From deep within our shelter from the cold,
New life emerges reaching out so bold.

Look at trees and bushes breaking into bud;
Full of hope and promise, wouldn't it be good
If for a change, their example we might share.

Dedicate our effort to showing that we care.

Geese are heading northwards, their age-old call is sung;

Hoping for a place where they can raise their young.

What will we leave to those who follow here?

Will it be fulfilment, or a life of fear?

What shall we do then in the days to come?
Look beyond our difference, know that we are one.

Embrace the challenge, seek to show that we...

We will work together, peace and blessed be.

John Davis

Tune – Noel Nouvelet

A metaverse is a network of 3D virtual worlds focussed on social connection. In futurism and science fiction, it is often described as a hypothetical iteration of the Internet as a single, universal virtual world that is facilitated by the use of virtual and augmented reality headsets.

Druidry in the Metaverse

RYAN MCLAUGHLIN

Metaverse actually presents some profound opportunities for those of us gathered around the Grove.

The Metaverse has been all over the news recently. As practitioners of Druidry and followers of an Earth-centred spiritual path, many of us may find it natural to want to resist and reject it outright. After all, from the onset of the Druid Revival some three centuries ago, Druidry has sought to restore the broken connections between modern humans and the natural world, and all too often, advances in technology have led to further disconnection. Our spiritual history is rooted in resistance to the devastating consequences of the Industrial Revolution, and many of us are at the forefront of drawing attention to degradation of the Environment brought about by much modern technology. How could the latest in Virtual Reality (VR) technologies (on which this concept of the Metaverse relies) represent anything other than more separation, a deepening of the modern wound we wish to help heal? How can the Metaverse be a good thing for those of us who want a better relationship with Mother Earth? When one puts on a VR headset, isn't one placing a further barrier between oneself and the World?

For several years now, I've found myself drawn to VR both personally and professionally. As an educator, I've been blessed with some unique opportunities to teach in the Metaverse and to develop curriculum for use in Virtual Reality. After using the tech and meditating on this topic for close to five years, I've come to believe that the rise of the

At the onset, we can appreciate some of the environmental benefits that could arise from a wider adoption of VR in the coming years. For instance, we can dearly hope that the ability to hold meetings in the Metaverse will cut down on commercial air travel and thus reduce many businesses' carbon footprints. Or to give another example, the ability to hold biology classes in the Metaverse and thus do animal dissections in Virtual Reality will hopefully cut down on animals such as sharks being taken from the wild for students to use in physical classrooms. But I believe that beyond general environmental benefits like that, there are specific opportunities that lie in the nature of our callings as Bards, Ovates, and Druids.

The Bard will have new opportunities and new ways to create, to sing and play music, and to tell stories. For instance, in recent years, I have had the pleasure of seeing creators test out the potential of VR for storytelling—one can be put into a story in a way that has power and meaning beyond what we've seen with older media technologies. Derek Hamm's VR story "I Am a Man," for instance, puts the viewer into the role of a Black sanitation worker in Memphis, TN, who is present at the assassination of Martin Luther King, JR. I've seen this VR story used by a fellow educator with White students in the American South who now understand and empathize with that historical narrative in ways they simply couldn't before.

I can't see VR replacing our old ways of storytelling any more than movies and televi-

sion have replaced novels. But I also can't wait to experience the Mabinogion through the eyes of its protagonists, or to attend one of Damh the Bard's concerts from over here on the other side of the Pond!

The Ovate will be needed as a healer and pathfinder in this brave new virtual world that's being created. My wife recently attended a memorial in the Metaverse. The deceased's parent brought attendees to a Virtual recreation of a favourite family memory: making snow angels on a wintry day at the family home. By all accounts it was a powerful and moving experience that brought a moment of healing in the midst of profound sadness. I have visited historic places that have been recreated in the Metaverse, such as ancient Rome, and know that it would not be difficult to make a recreated ancient Gaul, wherein we might honour the memory of those on the other side of De Bello Gallico and connect with their history. One can easily imagine attending a conference of modern Druids held at an ancient Anglesey or Iona in the Metaverse, or meditating by oneself along a path through the ancient forests of Brittany. I don't see VR displacing older forms of healing, pathworking, reconnecting with the past and honouring those who have gone on ahead of us to the Otherworld. Rather, I see it contributing new ways to do the work of the Ovate. I find myself asking, what possibilities for new ritual forms might exist in the Metaverse?

The Druid will be needed to teach and make meaning of the current world situation we live in. I have personally taken students into a VR experience that allowed them to "scuba dive" to see coral reefs at the bottom of the sea—and to watch a sped-up progression of how the reefs have been damaged by climate change and pollution. What followed was a

very thoughtful conversation back in "Real Reality" about the Environment with students who now had a much richer, more tangible, more visceral understanding of the tragic devastation of the Natural World that will shape their lives and the lives of future generations. I have also had the privilege of meeting educators from a college in Canada who are using Virtual Reality to preserve their language and culture: they have created a traditional Ojibwe village in the Metaverse, where elders can now meet with students far and wide and teach them how to perform sacred ceremonies and how to speak their dialect, known as Abishinaabemowin. As I spoke with these wonderful teachers, my mind raced as I imagined OBOD Mentors meeting with new members among virtual stone circles and passing on rediscovered wisdom... I don't see VR replacing traditional teaching and mentoring. But what other new possibilities for teaching will we create that help shape the next generation and prepare them for a World that desperately needs them to not only know the truth of what's happening, but to also be moved to action?

The ancient Druids were no strangers to liminal places, and I feel that the Metaverse may come to represent such liminality in our postmodern lives—a space between the real and the imaginary. We also live in a liminal time—an age in which we have a greater awareness than ever that our actions will have consequences for generations we may never meet. As such, I think we might do well to consider planting a virtual grove and considering what work there might be there for us to do. We are right to be sceptical of technological advances—it's in our spiritual DNA! But I believe we must also look for the opportunities, and I do see numerous opportunities to serve this Reality while thoughtfully participating in the Virtual one.

REGULAR OBOD MEETINGS

MONTHLY:

OBOD PEACE MEDITATION: *with your Grove or by yourself every full moon: 7pm local time*

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN DIFFICULT TIMES-

An OBOD Listening Circle. FREE monthly online ZOOM gathering, 1st Wednesday of THE month 7pm UTC. Contact harrietlock@gmail.com for the link.

REGULAR GROUP MEETINGS:

ANDERIDA MOOT: 2ND MON The Ship, Southwick, nr Brighton. 8pm FFI: info@anderidagorsedd.org

ARTIO SEEDGROUP, Switzerland (Zurich)
Meet/rituals/Gatherings/walks. Lily or Britta at Info@druidry.ch (+41 76 326 6963)

ARTURIAN GROVE Seasonal rituals near Otley/York. Optimistichannah@outlook.com

ASH GROVE, GLASTONBURY Seasonal rituals/meetings: OBOD visitors welcome. FFI jacki.woolmington@btinternet.com

BRIGANTES SEED GROUP. YORK, England. Gatherings on the full moon. brigantes.group@gmail.com

BIG SKY GROVE, NORFOLK Our name reflects the vista and big skies of our Norfolk landscape. Open to members/ former OBOD members. Meetings (zoom) for the 8 festivals & meetings, walks, discussion. FFI: rebnick@btinternet.com

CORNOVII GROVE. Seasonal rituals in Worcs. www.cornovii.org or email via 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://flameandwellgrove.org>

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

FAVERSHAM PAGAN MOOT 2nd Mon The Sun, West St Faversham Kent & events FFI www.favershampagans.org.uk

GOLDEN WATTLE SEED GROUP, ADELAIDE S. AUS. Regular meetings, rituals FFI: golden.wattle.seed.group@gmail.com

LAKE AGASSIZ SEEDGROUP 3rd Saturday of the Month: Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada. Public rituals in local parks. FFI: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/lakeagassizdruids/> email agassizseedgroup@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 QLD, Aus macademiagrove@hotmail.com FB "OBOD Macadamia Grove"

THE MELBOURNE GROVE Seasonal celebrations, Melbourne, Aus: TrudyRichards.moondancer@outlook.com.au

MOUNTAINS OF BRAN-BEITHE SEED GROUP western Montana, USA, Eight festivals, for OBOD members roanrob-bins@aol.com

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

SOLAS AN IARTHAIR GROVE: public ceremonies for the eight festivals, full moon meetings. info@lukeeastwood.com

SETANTII SEASONAL RITUALS IN MANCHESTER / S. LANCs. Always outdoors. GROVEOFSETANTII@YAHOO.COM.

SEATTLE SEEDGROUP CIRCLE OF COLL - public rituals, workshops, tree walks &... every month. circleofcoll@circleofcoll.org

SLIABH ANAM GROVE Rituals and monthly moots Durango, Colorado, USA. FFI: contact.sliabhanam@gmail.com.

SONG OF THE EASTERN SEA SEEDGROUP Central Coast of NSW Aus, FFI: contact Chris at chris@druidryaustralia.org

TAMESIS (London Seedgroup) seasonal festivals/ moots/ workshops Contact Ricky: gelli3@me.com



Artwork; Elaine Gregory

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 www.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
Bealtaine April 30, 7pm UK time.; **Check** druidry.org/facebook
Alban Hefin June 18th; Lughnasadh July 30th; Alban Elfed September 17th; Samhain November 5th;
Alban Arthan December 17th

23 & 24 April OBOD Inner Journeying and Ritual Workshop Level 1 email mattmccabe.1@outlook.com

25-28 April Thresholds of power and healing (Somerset) This residential course teaches a full range of shamanic healing ways: plant-spirit healing, extraction of intrusions, and the shamanic embodiment ceremony of The Mare Mother's Dream-Dance. Students must have fluent journey skills. With Caitlín Matthews & Margot Harrison. (01865 407680) janedmay@btinternet.com www.hallowquest.org.uk

14-15 May and 1-2 Oct Walkers between the worlds 32nd Foundation Course in Celtic & Ancestral Shamanism (Oxon) with John Matthews and Margot Harrison. This two-part non-residential course is for shamanic beginners, teaching students to journey, heal, and quest along the ancient paths of wisdom, gathering spirit allies. Contact Jane May: janedmay@btinternet.com 01865 407680.

25th May Whisper of the Stones Brighton Spiegeltent Old Steine Gardens, BN1 1NH 8.30pm-midnight Ronald Hutton (Stone Henge), David Bramwell (Children of the Stones), Fiona Robertson (How to read a stone) Dr Matt Pope (Brighton's Sacred Stones), Lally Macbeth & Matthew Shaw (Living Stones) plus DJ Melanie Xulu £15 Celebrate the rich neolithic history and stories around our henges and monoliths, ending with a disco of stoned love! <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/dr-bramwell/t-egmnp>

2 June Sing-alonga-Wickerman! Glastonbury Assembly Rooms. Tickets for OBOD members: a special start to our few midsummer days together. A classic interactive film showing curated by OBOD speaker David Bramwell (Pagan hymn books, prizes & goody bags supplied. Tickets and information: <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/whats-on/glastonbury/assembly-rooms/singalong-a-wickerman/e-aygdoy>

4 & 5 June OBOD Special Summer Gathering, Glastonbury. <https://druidry.org/events/special-summer-gathering-4th-5th-june-2022>

7th to 10th July International OBOD-Camp 4 days of gathering, workshops, talks, groves, initiations with lovely like-minded-people in the triangle near Belgium/Netherlands/Germany. For more info and registration see www.oakwisdom.org

7-10 July The Path Leading Home. Healing Resources for Challenging Times, (Glos) With Cáit Branigan and Caitlín Matthews. This course helps us find the path that leads us back to our true nature, our true home so we can be supported in challenging times. With shamanic journey, song, and movement, we will find the ancestral paths laid down by our wise ancestors. Some experience of shamanic journeying is needed. Contact: Hawkwood College, Painswick Old Rd., Stroud, Glos GL6 7QW (01453 759034)

25 - 29 July Wild Women Retreats "Healing Heart" Summer Retreat Come feed your soul Springhead Trust | Fontmell Magna | Dorset Tickets: info@wildwomenretreats.co.uk www.wildwomenretreats.co.uk or find our group on Facebook.

8 - 11 September BAM Druid Gather: Air - Breathing Awen. Join us for our third year in beautiful Ashby, MA! Adults \$175, children (12 and under) \$50, includes meals and cabin space. We will continue to weave deep relationships with each other and the land, and focus on inspiring each other in our methods of self-care, community-care, and Earth-care. Workshops, meditations, market, Fairy Feast, children's activities, Bardic & Ovate initiations, fire circle, Eisteddfod & more. FFI: <https://bamdruidgather.org>