

Green Book Of Meditations

Volume Eight

Order of the Mithril Star

2003 Introduction

As you probably know, the Order of the Mithril Star was a group that broke away from the Church of All Worlds. They wished to remain closer to the feeling of “Stranger in a Strange Land” as written by Robert Heinlein. Around 2000 they began to be drawn into the orbit of the Reformed Druids, which also shares waters amongst its members. Since then they have actively participated for about 3 years, adapting parts of our liturgy and sense of humor

When the author of this study course asked me to include these materials, I was at a loss of where to put them. The text was too large to go in Part Three, didn't seem right in Part 4 or 7, and wasn't quite a Part 9 text. As a result, it ended up here. This should be appropriate, especially if they see fit to continue to produce more materials, as I hope they will. As with all Orders and Groves, they speak only for themselves and not for other Reformed Druids.

Sincerely,

Mike Scharding
April 1st, 2003
Embassy of Japan

Printing History

1st Printing 2001? Online
2st Printing 2003 (ARDA 2)

Drynemetum Press



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Section One

Druidcraft 101:

A Course Study of the Mithril Star Tradition of the Reformed Druids of North America

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Lesson 1: Background of Modern Neo-Paganism

By Ellis "Sybok" Arseneau /\\,
AD - Cylch Cerddwyr Rhwng Y Bydoedd Grove,
OMS-RDNA

I'd like to be able to say that the Mithril Star is an ancient tradition handed down from generation to generation and practiced by the Druids of ancient Gaul. I'd love to be able to say that, but it's not true. The Mithril Star is based upon some person's experience and training (actually a collaboration of seven people, including myself) and with little historical background to support it. We also drew from a lot of other traditions, and reinterpreted a lot of data to make it all work. Gerald Gardner basically did the same thing, incorporating some ceremonial magick techniques with what he could glean from different family trads in Britain, as did the originators of the other famous traditions of Wicca.

The fact of the matter is, no one really knows what the ancient Druids did because there is no written record. The medieval ceremonial magicians left written records in the form of grimoires and tomes such as the "Lesser Key of Solomon," but the traditions of folk magick practitioners such as Witches and shamans were oral. The "Book of Shadows" is a modern invention. The Alexandrian, Gardnerian, Fairy, Blue Star, etc., are all someone's "best guess" at what the ancients did. Likewise, the Druidic orders like Ar nDraiocht Fein, OBOD and Henge of Keltria are someone's ideas of what Druidism should be, or might have been. Anyone telling you otherwise is either deluded or a liar or possibly both. Or they may have their own agenda. There are a lot of control freaks out there in Paganland (just like religion in general.)

Our mother organization (or really, "dis-organization") is the Reformed Druids of North America. Back in 1963 at Carleton College in Northfield, MN USA,

some students objected to a mandatory attendance of religious services, so they protested by making a bizarre group and attending it regularly. The requirement was thus mocked and was withdrawn. Members found it groovy and continued to participate in the group in order to explore world faiths and personal paths in an open and honest way. As they graduated, they started groups in other states. By the 1980s there were about 10 groves scattered across the country. Then Isaac Bonewits left to form Ar nDraiocht Fein (ADF) Druidism, which later splintered, and soon Henge of Keltria Druidism appeared. Nowadays, there are lots of sophisticated groups in America that can trace their roots to RDNA, which still putters about.

In a sense, OMS is a "protest" group that became its own institution, like RDNA. As a member of the Church of All Worlds, I began meeting with Adam Rostoker (who was the official "Bard" of CAW) back in the early 1990s. We both had strong misgivings about CAW and about how its "nests" weren't anything like the nests in Michael's CAW. We were both seeking community in our chosen paths, and the structure of CAW "should" have been conducive to the formation of strong intentional communities. But it wasn't there, and though we both strived to find it there, it was like seeking the proverbial needle in a haystack. In a series of meetings over a six-month period, OMS (then known as the "Covenant of The Mithril Star") was implanted in the womb of Gaia. It was later, after Adam's tragic and untimely death, that Gaia gave birth to the ever changing, ever evolving (as any living thing should be) Mithril Star tradition.

I have a friend down in Southern California named Jim Fox-Davis. He is the High Priest of the Ancient Keltic Church and more or less a scholar of Celtic religion. His maxim is "We're doing religion the old fashioned way, we're making it up as we go!" That's our maxim as well. Any one of you can start your own tradition - right now in fact. Whether the magick will work or not is a variable we will be discussing later on. But all of you are just as qualified as anyone else to start something completely different. The key is belief (again, we'll be discussing that later on.) Now, there are lots of folks out there who will differ with me on this. They'll say that you need years of training under the tutelage of such-and-such master so-and-so who trained under who's-it's from the whatever-tradition. It's mostly poppycock.

Some time ago in an edition of the now departed publication, Green Egg, Oberon Zell editorialized against Pagan clergy who are ordained under the auspices of the "Universal Life Church." He used the same argument I just outlined, but Oberon (named after the character in Shakespeare's "Midsummer Nights Dream," and formerly known as "Otter," and before that "Tim") fails to mention that he is self-taught and self-ordained and therefore no more qualified than anyone else. If it makes you feel better, you might want a teacher who was taught by a more formal tradition, and initiated and ordained with ornate credentials and such. But the reality is that religion is the stuff of fantasy in the first place. There is very little difference between Mythology, Fiction (or Science Fiction) or Fantasy. Someone made it all up. Then someone else (or lots of someone else's) believed in it. And presto! You have a new religion; (more on that to come.)

Let the discussion begin....

Lesson 2: Ethics

(Part 1 of 2 parts)

By Ellis "Sybok" Arseneau /\\,
and Frater Iopanus

The Rede

"And it harm none: do what thou wilt," goes the Wiccan ethic known as the "Rede," widely adapted by Pagans in general. It's a kind of cross between Aleister Crowley's "Law of Thelema" and the Hippocratic Oath. As Druids, we are healers as well as shamans so a link to the oath that doctors take seems very appropriate.

The Mithril Star position is that when at all possible we do whatever we wish so long as we hurt on one. The Rede is a voluntary ethic. There is no "Rede Police" to enforce compliance, nor do the Gods or Old Ones care. And although there is Karma to deal with it's still totally between you and yourself how you interpret and apply the Rede. We recognize that there are times when someone will be harmed in some way by our actions, that this is something that can't always be helped. So we've come up with some guidelines to help sort out this ethical dilemma:

- 1) If that action about to be taken will harm yourself or a member of your immediate family, don't do it. Find another way to accomplish the action without harm.
- 2) If the action about to be taken may harm someone outside of your family unit, decide how important the action is to your well-being. If you can live without it, then don't do it. If you can't, then you must.
- 3) The action about to be taken should never harm the environment in any way, nor may it violate a natural law. As Druids we are guardians of the Earth; environmentalists by default.

How do you interpret that though? That's where a lot of controversy and fighting comes in. An examination of the history of the Rede will shed some light on all this.

The Rede's history is somewhat fuzzy. Aleister Crowley's Law of Thelema states: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law." His buddy, Gerald Gardner, while reinventing Witchcraft, wanted to tone down Crowley's maxim, and at the same time put a positive spin on Wicca (there are only GOOD Witches, you know.) He thus came up with "An' it harm none." Later, Doreen Valiente is said to have given it some teeth by inventing the Threefold Law. Inventing? Weren't these ideas always part of Goddess/Earth worshiping religions? Didn't Gardner and Valiente just codify a universal principal? Weren't these traditions channeled to our ancestors by the Gods? Perhaps not.

Consider the ancient Celts. Here is a culture whose idea of tasteful decorating included displaying their enemies' heads on pikes. And let's not forget the infamous 'wicker man' tradition. The Saxons are widely acknowledged to have raped, pillaged and plundered their way into British society. Not exactly "harm none" ethics at work here. Yet these two cultures are the main "historical" context for modern, or "neo" Paganism.

As we have said, the Rede encapsulates a good idea. But how does it bear up under scrutiny? Crowley was no one's idea of a warm and fuzzy guy, but he does back up his "Do what thou wilt..." with its companion expression, "Love is the Law. Love under will." In this system there is no assurance that harm will

not be done, but at least the magician is operating from a foundation of love.

With or without conscious use of Magickal principles there always exists a distinct possibility that our actions may harm others. Our modern lifestyles impact ourselves and the environment in many subtle ways. Even a person living in a cabin with no utilities, growing her own vegan food, and using only a bicycle for transportation might often unwittingly violate the Rede.

The Rede, as interpreted by most traditions, is a blanket solution to an extremely complex ethical dilemma, which varies enormously from moment to moment for each thinking individual. A sincere attempt to live by a strict interpretation of the Rede would immobilize even the most powerful magick.

This is not to imply that we should go on a free-for-all of revenge against our enemies. On the contrary, if love is our touchstone in every moment, ethical questions will resolve themselves.

Some say that all 'true' Pagans follow the Rede absolutely. Poppycock! Every religion was made up by somebody (usually somebody with an agenda.) The discerning student is well advised to remember that being ordained in one tradition or another does not necessarily impart spiritual superiority or wisdom. The traditional interpretation of the Rede becomes a convenient rationale for non-action used by those who fear their own divinity and the power therein.

What about the "Three Fold Law"?

Among most Wiccans and many Pagans, the three-fold-law goes hand in hand with the "Wiccan Rede" as the basis for ethics in the magickal community. The law as stated is simple: whatever you put out comes back to you three fold. But what is the basis for the three fold law? Where did it come from? How does it operate? Is it live or is it Memorex?

You already know how we feel about the Rede: a nice sentiment usually over-interpreted to the point where magick is no longer an option. The three-fold-law gives the Rede some clout. It's no longer just a matter of being a nice guy and harming none. No, someone created a "law" that exacts an automatic penalty for breaking the Rede. Whatever you do, good or bad, will come back on you three fold, or three times. An example would be if you cause Jim Smith to lose his job, then you will lose your job and the next two as well. On the positive, if you give Jim a gift of \$100, the cosmos will give you back \$300. However, it rarely works that way, and apologists for the law of three will say that somehow material gain is exempted, or that your return on the gift to Jim may come in a form other than money. As you can see, this so called "law" is already rife with loopholes. I wonder if it has anything to do with one's status in the Pagan/Wiccan community?

I know of High Priest/esses who have worked magick to bring down the law of three on someone they feel has violated the Rede in some way. This proves that it's not really a law, since a law (like gravity) would operate without magickal invocation. It also suggests that the operator is immune, since drawing down a "three-fold" whatever on another would seem to trigger yet another "three-fold" event upon the operator, since this operation of "artificial karma" violates the very "an it harm none" ethic that is held so dear. But it doesn't seem to work that way.

The basis of the three-fold law seems to be karma. Karma is the spiritual equivalent of TANSTAAFL*. Like actions receive like rewards. But the actual doctrine is deeper than that. Karma originates in the ancient Hindu religion. It basically says that in this life you are paying for, or being rewarded for the mistakes or good deeds you did in your previous life, and that you are also learning how to live more perfectly with each new life (the

doctrine of karma being intimately linked with Hindu reincarnation/transmigration of souls.) Each life therefore is a cycle, and you ascend or descend upon the ladder of enlightenment in each life, until you reach a state where you no longer need to reincarnate. In practice, karma is a really handy way for the high Brahman caste to justify the state of the lowly Untouchable caste in India's caste system. This is just another religious tool the rich and powerful use to keep the masses in line. Western occultists borrowed Karma from Hinduism and reinterpreted it for their own purposes. This happened during the occult awakening in the early years of this century. Aleister Crowley, H. Spencer Lewis, and others are credited with the importation of Karma and Reincarnation from Hinduism into the modern western magickal thought. Both ideas proved popular, and were incorporated into a number of magickal systems, including Rosicrucianism and Wicca. To be sure, the evidence suggests that the ancient Celts believed in a form of Karma as did the ancient Egyptians. It was Doreen Valiente who was credited for the Wiccan version of Karma, the three-fold law.

Generally, the westernized version of karma is less nasty than its Hindu forebear. It takes the form of the Christian idea of "do unto others ..." or the American folklore idea of "what goes around comes around," or giving "tit for tat" ("What is 'tat'? And how do I trade it for the other thing?" -- George Carlin.) Karma therefore is something we can definitely count on as being a force to consider when contemplating action. But Doreen felt that Karma didn't offer enough clout as it stood, so she reinterpreted it as the three-fold-law, making it thrice as effective. Thus this so called "law" becomes an effective tool to keep the "little people" of Paganism in line with what the "Lords and Ladies" want. Yet another example of religion being used to control people. Ironic, since this is the reason many of us left the religions we were raised in.

The "Law of Three" works the way all magick works: it runs on belief. In other words, if you believe it works, if you do not it doesn't (we'll be discussing this principle later on in the lessons.) It may be that it works on the principal of mass belief; i.e., if enough people believe in something it becomes a law (or in the case of an entity a God,) and therefore may work on people who do not believe in or even know about it. In the later case what we have is a curse, not a law, since it would bring down misfortune on any hapless person who came into contact with it (rather like a landmine a child stumbles upon.)

My solution to the tyranny of the law of three is two fold: 1) stop believing in it. And believe that your active non-belief is stronger than the corporate belief of the community at large. 2) Stop teaching it.

So what about Karma by itself?

How does it affect me when I do magick?

First of all, magick is a gift from the universe to us. It is a gift in the same way that a cougar's hearing and speed are gifts. Gifts such as this are survival oriented; they are given to enable the recipient to have an advantage over others. Therefore, to NOT use it, for whatever reason, is the say to the universe, "we don't need this - take it away." NOT using magick may have the same karmic consequences as using it. Not taking action can be just as harmful as taking action, and I would suggest, an even higher karmic price may be exacted on you if you can use magick in a situation and choose not to. Magick is a gift given to you to use. Use it or lose it.

Lastly, because of our unique place in the universe, our gift of magick, and our acknowledgment of our own inner deity (as we'll discuss in lesson 4.) We are the agents of Karma. Our deeds and non-deeds do have an effect on others and on our selves. It is only through grokking ourselves in fullness that we

can act rightly when the time of cusp comes. And this, too, is our karmic responsibility.

*TANSTAAFL /tan'stah-fl/

[Acronym, from Robert Heinlein's classic SF novel "The Moon is a Harsh Mistress." Meaning: "There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch."]

Lesson 2-B: Ethics of the Druids (Part 2 of 2 Parts)

By Ellis "Sybok" Arseneau /\,
AD - Cylch Cerddwyr Rhwng Y Bydoedd Grove,
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If the Rede and the Three Fold law are mainly Wiccan, then how do Druids approach this problem of ethics? Of the few things written down by the ancient Bards, the most famous and oft quoted are the

Triads. There are Irish Triads, Scottish Triads and Welsh Triads. Most of these are concerned with history. The Triads were a method used by the Bards to remember things by associating them in groups of threes. A large body of the Triads concerns ethics. Following are some examples we found were the most pertinent:

The Triads

- Three rejoicings that are worse than sorrow: the joy of a man who has defrauded another, the joy of a man who has perjured himself, the joy of a man who has committed patricide
- Three things which justice demands: judgment, measure, conscience.
- Three things which judgment demands: wisdom, penetration, knowledge.
- Three things for which a friend is hated: trespassing,* keeping aloof,** fecklessness.
- Three rude ones of the world: a youngster mocking an old man, a healthy person mocking an invalid, a wise man mocking a fool.
- Three ungentlemanly things: interrupting stories, a mischievous game, jesting so as to raise a blush.
- Three deaths that are better than life: the death of a salmon, the death of a fat pig, the death of a robber.*
- Three laughing-stocks of the world: an angry man, a jealous man, a niggard.
- Three ruins of a tribe: a lying chief, a false judge, a lustful* priest.
- Three preparations of a good man's house: ale, a bath, a large fire
- Three preparations of a bad man's house: strife before you, complaining to you, his hound taking hold of you.*
- Three props of obstinacy*: pledging oneself, contending, wrangling.
- Three characteristics of obstinacy*: long visits, staring, constant questioning.
- Three maidens that bring hatred upon misfortune: talking, laziness, insincerity.
- Three maidens that bring love to good fortune: silence, diligence, sincerity.

- Three impossible demands: go! though you cannot go, bring what you have not got, do what you cannot do.
- Three things that constitute a harper: a tune to make you cry, a tune to make you laugh, a tune to put you to sleep.*
- Three oaths that do not require fulfillment*: the oath of a woman in birth-pangs, the oath of a dead man, the oath of a landless man.
- Three ranks that ruin tribes in their falsehood: the falsehood of a king, of a historian, of a judge.
- Three doors of falsehood: an angry pleading, a shifting foundation of knowledge, giving information without memory.
- Three doors through which truth is recognized: a patient answer, a firm pleading, appealing to witnesses.
- Three glories of speech: steadiness, wisdom, brevity.
- Three ornaments of wisdom: abundance of knowledge, a number of precedents, to employ a good counsel.
- Three signs of folly: contention, wrangling, attachment (to everybody.)
- Three things that make a fool wise: learning, steadiness, docility.
- Three things that make a wise man foolish: quarreling, anger, drunkenness.
- Three candles that illumine every darkness: truth, nature, knowledge.

(Above gleaned from
<http://www.lincolnu.edu/~focal/docs/triads/triads.html>)

HOMEWORK:

1. Make up three triads of your own, and discuss them in class.

Lesson 3: Magickal Theory

By Frater Iopanus

Belief

That is the key word to magick, prayer, religion, healing and metaphysics. What you believe and the degree to which you believe it determine the parameters of your universe. What you believe and the degree to which you believe it is also influenced by society at large, and what Jung called the "cosmic" or "universal" "consciousness." Some mystics also refer to this as the "Akashic Record."

In computer metaphor then, belief would be the "source code;" the 1's and 0's (the bits) of the universe. No matter what platform you are running, be it Mac, IBM, Unix, etc., the source code is still 1's and 0's. And so it is with metaphysics. No matter what religion or philosophy you subscribe to, the bottom line is still belief.

Since religion is all made up anyway it's possible to set up new parameters for belief and for magick anytime and in anyway you wish. We touched on this idea in Lesson One. The extent to which you believe a given idea, and the influence of "cosmic consciousness" and society are the only things that will limit you. It is possible to transcend even those things, but it takes years of mental discipline, and it's not something anyone can teach you. You are on your own here. You might decide to believe that you

can fly (without an airplane.) You may truly and with all your heart believe that, but unless you can cancel out the influence of "cosmic consciousness," that first step off the top of Sears Tower is going to be the longest one of your life (and possibly your last.) On the other hand, you can ask yourself this question: "Am I going to hell?" Unless you are a Christian, or someone heavily influenced by the popular paradigm, your answer will be an assured no. However, if you have any doubt, you might actually end up there. I don't believe that would happen to too many Pagans I know of though.

Belief creates your universe. Christians create a universe where they go to heaven and everyone else goes to hell. Moslems go to Paradise, Buddhists reincarnate. Atheists just cease to exist. And those Heaven's Gate people are probably on a UFO somewhere (assuming their belief was strong enough.) Can anyone prove otherwise? I think not. These beliefs about afterlife are part of the "software" running on each person's religious "operating system." Some programs will run on more than one operating system but most will not. For example, there are some Unix commands that will work under DOS. In general though, it's best not to try to mix things. So it is in religion. The idea of Karma will not run under Christianity. Generally, eastern ideas do not run well under western paradigms. I think that possibly this is the reason why so much is screwed up in the world today. The dominant religion in the western world is Christianity; an essentially eastern paradigm. Western folks would do well to start with the Gods of ancient Europe and leave the Eastern and Middle-Eastern deities alone at the beginning. Later on you can add other pantheons to your mix, depending upon your personal taste. After all, some Celtic and Norse deities evolved from Eastern and Middle Eastern pantheons.

In looking at the different religious belief systems, and the different Pagan traditions, you can see common denominators among them. The kind of magickal practice one uses in Gardnerian Wicca can be used in Alexandrian, but only some of it in Druidism. So too do all of the Pagan traditions have commonalities. Yet, there are some things that work in one and not others. For instance, some traditions permit mixing pantheons (for instance, Egyptian and Celtic) others do not. Some teach you can influence events or people from long distances, others that you cannot. It is all a matter of belief, and belief determines what will work and what will not, just like the operating system you are using determines which software will work on your computer.

Ideas that you think are universal are not necessarily. You may say "Oh no! The Law of Three is universal," and indeed, it operates in your life. But that is only because you believe in it. Stop believing in the Law of Three and it will no longer affect you. If you are a Druid this is easy – none of the Druids I have ever known have believed in the law of three or the rede. Period.

Now to "stop believing" in something is a lot like trying to stop smoking. It's best if you never began in the first place. Something you are convinced you no longer believe in can affect you, simply because you believed for so long that there is some residual "belief" left in you. It may be impossible for you to get rid of that. You may have to do a complete banishing ritual over and over again. It's totally dependant upon your will. Beliefs that are truly ingrained in us from the Cosmic Consciousness can only be removed by years of discipline. Since most of us have jobs, and some of us have families, it is not likely that many of us will be flying without an airplane really soon.

What do you believe? How does it affect your life? How would your life change if you dropped a belief? Can you?

Lesson 4:

The Nature of Deity

By Ellis "Sybok" Arseneau /\\, and Frater Iopanus

Thou art God/dess.
Keep that statement in mind.

Religion is a method those of us on this plain use to relate to the deities. It's like software for cosmic relationships, and there are many different versions (or religions) for relating with different pantheons.

According to the Mithril Star, there are three classes of deity: The Archetypes, The Old Ones, and Us.

Archetypes

The Archetypes comprise all of the famous Gods and Goddesses of old. They are the heroes and heroines of myth and legend, who represent human attributes, desires and ideals. You know many of them from school: Zeus, Isis, Thor, Yahweh, Kwan Yin etc. Newer deities from modern literature have joined them as well: Celeborn, Galadriel, Elrond, Gandalf, and others from the Tolkein books are called upon by different groves from time to time, and I've even heard of folks who invoke Klingon deities. For the most part, the archetypes are made up out of whole cloth. They are entirely fictional beings; inventions of the human psyche. They can have great power however, depending upon the number and intensity of belief of the people who believe in them. Belief in this case energizes these beings and makes them real and powerful. A really good example is Asphalta, the parking place Goddess. Someone somewhere just made her up. A lot of people started praying to her, and it works. This made up Goddess will reserve you a parking place. It even works for me, and I know what she is! It can work for any deity. Try it -- make up a deity and start praying to her or him. Tell others about it. Pretty soon you'll have a cult following. This is guaranteed.

Old Ones

The second class of deities, The Old Ones, consists of entities that have actually lived among humans. One thing I like about the Celtic pantheon is that for the most part, it is composed of this class. The ancient Celts recognized the principle of "Thou art God/dess," and as heroes and leaders of the Celts passed on to the Summer Lands, they took on the title of God or Goddess. Lugh and Cernunnos are noted among these. Your own relatives; grandfathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, who have passed away, belong to this class. When you pass away, you will become a part of this group. These are the folks who are recognized at Samhain, channeled via Ouija boards or via scrying.

You

The 3rd and highest class of deity is YOU. Thou art God/dess. You have the responsibility and you have the power. This is why it is solely in your discretion whether you'll cause harm or not. It's your life, your universe, your creation. You can't run from this responsibility. You can live in denial (most of the planet does,) but look around: the rape, pillage and plunder of this planet's ecosystem is the result of subservience to other deities. We are the caretakers of the universe. It is we who are ultimately responsible for the way resources are used or abused. But we are basically good. Humankind is basically good. People who learn and accept their inherent divinity will not do harm.

They will do good. It is only those who have been taught from day one that they are bad, that they need a big God standing over them with a club, who do harm, because they know no better path.

Guidelines

As awakening Gods then, we may need some guidelines. I suggest the following, written by Oberon Zell, former Primate and founder of the Church of All Worlds, which we consider to be our 'sister' organization:

"No matter how we formulate our philosophy, the true test of our strength lies in our behavior; our ability to embody the principles we hold dear, and apply them in our daily lives to the building of relationships and community, the integrity of our actions, and the strength of character that inspires others to grow and transform the world around them. To these ends we advocate the following principles of behavior:

1. Be Excellent to Each Other! Thou art God/dess. To truly honor the Divinity within each other is to treat each other with respect, kindness, courtesy, and conscious consideration. This involves honest and responsible communication, including the avoidance of gossip and rumor-mongering, and the willingness to reach for understanding rather than judgment. Learn how to communicate in a positive, life-affirming way. We prefer to avoid us/them and either/or thinking, and to instead take an inclusive systems approach that sees the Divinity in all living things. To this end we also deplore coercive behavior that does not respect the free will of others. We prefer to lead, not by guilt or coercion, but by inspiration and example; not only to be excellent to each other, but to strive for excellence in all our endeavors, no matter how seemingly insignificant. Tribal values we hold include Loyalty, Generosity, Fairness and Hospitality.

As Gods, we can no longer cling to outmoded, archaic identity labels. These would include racial labels (like black, white, yellow, red,) ethnic labels, (Asian, African, Chinese, American etc.) and even political labels (conservative, liberal, socialist, libertarian etc.) These labels may be useful to explain where we came from, but as Gods, we have transcended all these. We are Gods – a separate and unique race, culture and politic.

2. Be Excellent to Yourself! Again: Thou art God/dess. Divinity resides within as well as without, so how you treat yourself is how you treat that Divinity. Self-abuse, whether through irresponsible use of substances, overwork, self-denial, self-deception, or simply running those tapes that undermine self-esteem, are all insults to the Divinity within. Treat yourself kindly, with compassion rather than judgment, and it will be easier to treat others that way. Take care of your body, home and possessions, as a piece of Gaia that has been entrusted to you. Be a conscious guardian to the Temple and the God/dess within.

3. Honor Diversity! In Nature a diverse ecosystem has more stability. There are many styles of living and ways of living, each of which has something to offer to the overall puzzle of life. Be open-minded and receptive to new ideas because this usually manifests in growth of the spirit and the mind. Learn about differences rather than judge them. Be willing to explore others creative abilities to manifest a sense of well-being and confidence in their own Divinity. Sexism, racism, or rude remarks directed towards others sexual preferences; body type or personal habits (insofar as they do not harm others) have no place in this community. All life is sacred.

Once again, we can honor our BACKGROUNDS, but who we once were is not who we are now.

4. *Take Personal Responsibility!* ("With great power comes great responsibility!") The necessary counterpart to individual freedom is the willingness to be personally responsible for all of our actions, and for our effects upon the planet. Only through the practice of personal responsibility can we become responsible collectively and live a life of freedom and maturity. We are not a religion of gurus, Mommies or Daddies who can tell you what to do. As a religion that respects equality, we must take equal responsibility for making things happen, preventing harm, or cleaning up mistakes. To this end we also advocate one of the principles taught in kindergarten: Clean up your mess!

5. *Walk Your Talk!* (and, talk your walk!) Talk is cheap. It is fine and well to proclaim to be a feminist or environmentalist, to preach heady Pagan gospel, or to play holier than thou. It is only in practice that words become Truth, and change becomes manifest. But do not be afraid to fail, for in order to grow, our reach must exceed our grasp, and it is through failing that we learn."

Yet another way of saying all this, briefly and succinctly, is:

"Thou art God/dess.' It's not a message of cheer and hope. It's a defiance—and an unafraid unabashed assumption of personal responsibility." --Mike to Jubal, SIASL by Robert A. Heinlein

Midterm Exam

Lesson 5: Tools

By Ellis "Sybok" Arseneau /\\, AD –
Cylch Cerddwyr Rhwng Y Bydoedd Grove,
OMS-RDNA

We don't need tools per se, in order to do magick. For some of us, our best tool is our mind. However, we try to have fun in OMS, and tools are fun to own and use. They also make public and group rituals much more impressive.

The tools used in western magick are for the most part very old. They are depicted on the Tarot deck, and predate all of the modern magickal traditions by hundreds of years.

I have found that you acquire tools over a period of time. They "call to you," or draw you to them as you feel the need. My own gwialen is a good example. My partner and I were traveling in Northern California and visiting a redwood grove along the famous "Avenue of The Giants." It was about dusk when we were there, and I was walking the length of the fallen "Garberville Giant" (listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's tallest tree.) I felt drawn to the top of the tree, and near the top on the ground I spotted my gwialen. Or rather, it appeared at my feet. It was a branch from the giant itself. I picked it up and placed one end in the crook of my arm. The other end was at the tip of my middle finger (the traditional length of a gwialen.) Redwood groves are very magickal places inhabited by all kinds of fairy folk, so I can't say that I was at all surprised to be given this gift of the little people.

Tools can also be acquired as gifts, or you can buy or make your own. Let your intuition be your guide. You will find that tools will come to you as needed and sometimes in ways you do not expect.

Preparation

Once acquired, a tool needs to be prepared for use. On the New moon, at midnight, cast a circle. Light your favorite incense and have a vessel of salt water and your favorite essential oil (if it happens to be something you wear, so much the better.) Invoke your favorite Old Ones (as witnesses.)

Pass the tool through the smoke of the incense, saying:

"I purge this (name tool) by smoke and fire to bring to me my heart's desires." (Do this three times)

Sprinkle the tool with salt water, saying:

"I cleanse this (name tool) by water and earth to help me bring my desires to birth." (Do this three times)

Anoint the tool with the essential oil saying:

"I anoint this (name tool) to be my own, to help me bring my desires home." (Do this three times)

Sleep with the tool from the New moon until the Full Moon.

The Tools:

The following is by no means meant to be an exhaustive list. Many Druids come up with their own tools that no one has ever heard of. We are an inventive folk, if nothing else. The list following is meant to be suggestive, not written in stone. YMMV. Once again, tools are not 100% necessary, but they are fun to own.

The Cyllell

The Cyllell is better known in Wiccan circles as the "Athame." This is a ritual knife and can be used for casting a circle, invoking the quarters, "the Symbolic Great Rite," mixing materials, cutting materials, scribing materials, etc. Some traditions also employ another knife (known as a Boline) for cutting and scribing and such, keeping the Cyllell back for strictly ritual usage. We don't feel this is necessary at all, unless of course your Cyllell was made out of some material (such as pewter) that makes it unable to actually be used as a knife. Pagan supply houses generally have a variety of styles to choose from, or the craftier among you may choose to manufacture your own.

The Cryman

The Cryman, or "sickle," is the tool most associated with Druidism. It is believed to have been used by the Druids of old to harvest the sacred Mistletoe from Oak trees. It is believed to have been made of gold or some other precious metal. Today you can find them in some craft stores in various sizes made of various materials, at terribly inflated prices. If you really want one, go to a garden or farm store and find a small hand version. Use it the same way as you would a Cyllell.

The Cleddyf

Related to the Cyllell, the cleddyf, "or sword," is used for many of the same things (except for preparing materials.) Generally, the cleddyf is an item the Grove owns rather than individuals, due to the expense. Stay away from cleddyfs derived from American history (they have a strange vibration not conducive to ritual.) I recommend the Claymore, the large two-edged cleddyf used by the Scotts. They are heavy and expensive, but very impressive in ritual. Renn Faires are great places to find and purchase cleddyfs that are suitable for ritual use.

The Gwialen

The Gwialen, or "wand," is used for power transfer, weather magick, spell casting and the like. Some folks also use it for circle casting. Traditionally, the Gwialen is a personal object the length from the crook of your elbow to the end of your

middle finger. Wood is the preferred material, especially ash, oak, and my favorite, redwood. Generally, a trip to the woods is all you need to secure your gwialen. You may want to place a crystal at one end of it, or decorate it with knot work, runes or whatever you like.

The Ffon

The Ffon or “staff,” is simply a large Gwialen, and used for the same purposes as a gwialen. It is said that Ffons are less conspicuous than gwialens (they can be used as walking sticks) and so were more in favor during the Burning Times for that reason. It would be hard to picture Mithrandir or Merlin without their fffons. Traditionally, the ffon is one foot longer than its owner's height, and a lot stouter than a gwialen would be. Also quite serviceable as a ffon is the Irish shallagh, which also makes a fine gwialen.

The Caregl

The Caregl, or “Caregl,” is used to hold ritual drink or sometimes the water for cleansing. It can be made of a variety of materials. Glass or ceramic are acceptable, but one must take care in transporting them. Other materials are more durable, such as a metal, like pewter, or wood. Wooden Caregls must be treated inside so that the liquid does not stain or leech into the wood. Again, these things tend to “call” to you. I found mine when I was 13, at Carson, Pirie, Scott & Co. in Champaign IL. Traditional RDNA Groves tend to use red glass Caregls.

The Thuser

Essentially an incense holder, it needs to be durable enough to withstand the heat from a charcoal block. The brass ones found in import shops seem to be the best for this purpose. I found mine at the same place I found my Caregl.

Another type of thuser is used for ritually purging of a circle or its attendees. Abalone shells are great for this purpose, as a sage stick or whatever can be lit up and passed around the circle. Shells also seem to be durable enough for general incense usage as well.

The Crochan

Magick (or Craft) shops sell crochans (or “cauldrons”) of various sizes for a lot of money (usually) but many hardware stores have a cheaper version in the welding section of the store. These heavy cast iron versions are small (holding about two cups of liquid) and are perfect for ritual burnings.

The Seren Saith Pigfain (Seren Mithril)

Unique to the Mithril Star tradition, the Seren Saith Pigfain is a seven pointed star with a circle around it, usually the world snake (AKA Ourobores.) See our website at <http://www.mithrilstar.org> and feel free to download the one there. Usually inscribed or drawn on a plate or platter, it is used mainly for passing the cakes around during “cakes and wine.” We’ll get into the significance of this symbol in lesson 12.

Canhwyllbrens (or “Candlesticks”)

Brass or any non-burnable materials are best. I buy them up at garage sales and flea markets. Mithril Star rituals usually utilize nine of them, but I've found that one can never have too many. Wooden ones can be used too, but only if you are using tapers that snuff themselves before the last half inch is burned. Trader Joe's is an excellent source of cheap candles like this, and they sell a variety of colors (including black.)

An alternative to canhwyllbrens, which we use for large outdoor rituals, is tiki torches. We usually place four of them in the cardinal directions. Tiki oil with a citronella base will help keep the mosquitoes at bay. Another option is large votive

candles (usually found in the Mexican food section of grocery stores.) These last forever (almost) and provide their own shelter as the wax burns down. You can buy them in colors to match the quarters.

An even cheaper alternative is the small votives, dropped into clear glass jars (that you collect over time from sauces, condiments, jellies, etc..) I was at a ritual once where 33 of these were used to light the circle. Very impressive.

The Brethyn Allor

The Brethyn Allor, or “altar cloth,” is something you need to either make yourself or have someone make, as it needs to be custom made to fit your altar. It should cover the top surface of your altar, plus hang down the front to the ground. That front section may have a Mithril Star or other adornment. Plain cloths will work just as well. Emerald or Kelly Green, or Black, or Tartan (plaid) are acceptable colors.

You do magick in virtual space, or astral space, without “real” tools. You simply use the virtual or astral equivalent. In this case your imagination is your only limitation. Possession of “real tools” can make this process a lot simpler for you, but it is not necessary. I have heard of cases where magicians doing astral work with astral tools have later on come into possession of a “real” tool that they had used in astral space.

Ysbrid Cynefin

Ysbrid Cynefin or “familiars,” are not tools per se, but pets used in magickal work. Probably the most common is a cat, but I have known magicians who have used dogs or even reptiles. Typically your familiar is already with you, an animal pet whom you have already bonded with and with whom you have a psychic rapport. Sometimes they will come to you as you embark on new magickal projects, or under special circumstances. Our cat Aleister (he passed on this past October) is a case in point. About seven years ago when my ex and I first began our relationship, we were driving around in a rainstorm in downtown Santa Cruz. We were speculating about getting another animal (we already had Sydney) and were musing along the lines of: “If we ever get a black male kitten, we should name it Aleister, after Aleister Crowley.” The next day these kids came to the door. There was another storm in progress, and they had this tiny black kitten with them, wrapped in a towel. They were going door to door looking for a home for him. We sent them away, but they came back. Three times. The last time they told us that their mom was going to kill the kitten if they didn't find a home for him. Well, the third time is the charm they say, and we felt sorry for the kids and the kitten, so we agreed to keep him overnight. It's been a long night. We named him Aleister of course, and it was expected that he would become my familiar. But that didn't happen. Aleister, like his namesake, is a bit too aloof to bond very closely with, and he has become even more so as he has grown older. Sydney (AKA, Syd Vicious Australia,) who lived with my ex before I came on the scene, was more than willing to take on the job. We bonded very well and he has been a great help in my magickal endeavors, even allowing me to project my consciousness into him so that I could share his nocturnal travels.

Next week we'll look at ritual construction.

Homework:

On list, discuss which tools you already have and how you acquired them. Suggest other tools not mentioned in the text. Throw each other a virtual “kiss” for having passed the midterm test and survived.

Lesson 6:

Ritual Construction

For the Order of Mithril Star
By Iopanus, Sybok, Ceridwen, and the Mother Grove
(Cylch Cerddwyr Rhwng Y Bydoedd)

Explanation

Finding a place is in itself a ritual sometimes. Usually a grove of trees is the best place, but anywhere that is a natural setting with plenty of privacy will do. Indoor spaces are all right also, but weather permitting; I feel that the best rites take place outdoors.

If the Grove can afford it, it's nice to own ten or more acres of woods, within which is a natural circular space. Within that space it's nice to have permanent altars set up in each of the horizontal quarters, with items appropriate to their correspondences on each (see the "Table of Correspondences" at the end of this lesson.) For large outdoor rites I favor those "Tiki torches" for illumination at those locations as well. Make sure the fuel used has a high flash-point (needs high heat to ignite.) White gas is too dangerous, but a fuel that will only burn with a floating wick should be safe. There are also propane fueled torches that burn for several hours and give off plenty of light. They also feature safety switches that shut off if toppled. They just don't have that natural flame ambiance.

Just south of the center of the circle space should be your fire ring (if it's a night time rite) and a small blaze should be well under way as people arrive for the rite. Fire safety is a major concern, or should be, for Druids. Keep fire fighting equipment handy whenever there is any bare flame (meaning non-bulb/electric lighting,) even lanterns and lamps, being used. The US Forest Service has a class on safe camping that is a valuable resource.

Just north of the center of the circle should be the main altar upon which should be everything needed for the rite, as well as any decorative items appropriate to the work planned. One of those portable canopies is really nice for daytime rites. This is again, a general format. You wouldn't have any altars for a Beltaine rite involving a May pole, since the pole would be the central thing.

You can do the same type of thing on property you do not own, but the altars and such must then be portable.

Depending upon the weather and climate, the Grove may wish to either be Robbed (Clothed) for the rites, or "Skyclad" (unclothed - naked - nude, except for ritual jewelry and accoutrements such as the HP's antlers or the HPS's crescent and moon headpiece, and each Druid's Mithril Star pendant.) If weather and climate are agreeable, then "Skyclad" is best, since it illustrates the "perfect love and perfect trust" that should be present among waterkin.

If using Robes, the hooded type is best, usually in earth tones or black or green. (Some Druid groups insist on White - we feel this is a) impractical - white is hard to clean once it gets dirty, b) a stupid attempt to emulate our ancestors (In Caesar's notes about the Druids, he says they all wore white robes. He also says they were barbarians who practiced human sacrifice. Who wants to believe the enemy anyway?)

The Grove would be robbed in the procession, and would disrobe once in circle (weather, other circumstances, permitting.) Either robbed or skyclad, you are usually skyclad (an exception

would be a physical condition that would make it impractical) under the robe.

Shoes: This business of ALWAYS being barefoot which some traditions practice is I believe, impractical and dangerous. Wear sandals, or wear dark colored sneakers. Being barefoot out of doors in the woods (especially at night) is just asking for trouble.

THE SACRIFICE: Any small cutting from any vegetation will do. When harvesting the sacrifice, take a moment thank the plant for it's offering, and pray for the plant to heal over.

ROLES: It the ritual format to follow, the Grove must pick those who will fulfill the following rolls:

Preceptor:

Server: Serves the Water of Life

HP: High Priest - Co-Officiate with the HPs (Usually the Arch-Druid (if a male)

HPs: High Priestess - Co-Officiate with the HP (Usually the Arch-Druid (if a female)

All rituals follow a formula or script. The Mithril Star, for the most part, follows the following Order of Common Worship:

Preparatory Details

The caregl is filled with the Waters-of-Life.

The service starts with all participants standing some distance away from the area where the ritual is to take place. If both safe and legal, a fire should be started in or near the altar. The Druid/ess (HP/HPs) who is presiding (usually, though not always, the Grove's Arch-Druid/ess) should already have cut the sacrifice and have it tucked into his or her robe (or it may be held in one hand.) The HP may choose to speak the opening Invocation to Be'al alone, or may ask the Preceptor and/or the people (depending on Local grove custom) to join in speaking the bold words of the Invocation.

(Note: This invocation is "suggested" - you can substitute your own if you like. Also, though Be'al and Dalon Ap Landu are traditional to RDNA groups, you may wish to pick from deities from your own favorite pantheon, whether Celtic, Greek, Hindi, Egyptian, Buddhist, Shintoist, Daoist, etc., ALL are acceptable in the big family of OMS)

The Invocation

- O Lord, forgive these three errors that are due to our human limitations:
Thou art everywhere, but we worship thee here;
Thou art without form, but we worship thee in these forms;
Thou hast no need of prayers and sacrifices, yet we offer thee these prayers and sacrifices;
- O Lord, forgive us these three errors that are due to our human limitations.
- O Mother, cleanse our minds and hearts and prepare us for meditations.

The Procession

Here occurs the Procession, often with the Grove singing the hymn, Sequoia Sempervivens. Upon arrival near the altar, the Preceptor and the Server or any two others designated by the Grove use their fions to mark the Mithril Star upon the ground in front of the altar (usually on the South side,) leaving the bottom of the circle incomplete. The HP & HPs step into this Sigil, which is then closed by the two fions.

The Pledge

Led by the Preceptor, the group recites the OMS Pledge:

"In dedication to the celebration of Life in its many forms, I hereby declare my commitment to a way of life that is ethical, benevolent, humanistic, life-affirming, ecstatic and ecologically sane. I subscribe to means and methods that are creative rather than destructive, tolerant rather than authoritarian, gentle rather than violent, inclusive rather than exclusive, egalitarian rather than hierarchal. I pledge myself to harmonious eco-psychic awareness with the total biosphere of holy Mother Earth."

"Like an ancient Redwood, I would have my roots deep in the Earth and my branches reaching for the stars, the stars not only above but around me, my fellow humans, for "every man and woman is a star," and "the good of the many outweighs the good of the few," "from each according to his/her abilities, to each according to his/her needs."

"I acknowledge my personal responsibility for myself, to my fellow humans, and to the whole of Nature; and I recognize this total responsibility, in each of us, as the source of our infinite freedom to become who we are and do what we will. I dedicate myself to my own inner growth and development that I may be of greater service to myself and the world around me. For these reasons I recognize Divinity both within and without, and I say to myself and to all those gathered with me here: THOU ART GOD/DESS."

The Sacrifice

The HPs holds up the sacrifice to the sky, while saying:

HPs: Our praise has mounted up to thee on the wings of eagles, our voices have been carried up to thee on the shoulders of the winds.

Hear now, we pray thee, our Mother, as we offer up this sacrifice of life. Accept it, we pray thee, and cleanse our hearts, granting us thy peace and life.

*The "quarters" are guardian spirits who bring the energy or quality of the elements into the magick of the circle. The Mithril Star is different than most traditions in this regard because we recognize seven elements rather than the usual four. This is a melding of Celtic tradition (which has three) and the Western ceremonial magickal tradition. Here is a table of the elements which shows how they correspond with the directions and the Celtic tradition:

Direction	Color	Element	Day	Planet	Celtic
East	Gold	Air	Fri	Venus	Sky
South	Red	Fire	Tues	Mars	Sky/Sea Earth
West	Blue	Water	Mon	Moon	Sea
North	Green	Earth	Wed	Mercury	Earth
Above	Royal Blue	Ether	Thur	Jupiter	Sky
Below	Red	Darkness	Sat	Saturn	Sea
Within	Silver	Light	Sun	Sol	Sky

You may also note that some of these correspondences differ from other traditions. They are unique to the Mithril Star. Note: It's ok for us to do that, because "we're making it up as we go," just like the other traditions did.

*In the southern hemisphere, invoke widdershins, devoke deosil.

(Here the Priest places the plant offering upon the 'altar' or the ground if there is no altar. As each of the quarters is questioned, the members may turn to face that direction.)

HP: Hast thou accepted our sacrifice, O our Mother? I call upon the spirit of the East to give answer... of the South...of the West... of the North.... of the Above....of the Below.....and of the Within.

The Reply

(If the sacrifice is accepted, and it almost always is accepted, then continue. If bad omen, the service ends at this point.)

HPs: Praise be, our sacrifice, dedicated to the fertility and renewal of life, and to the cleansing of our minds and hearts, has been accepted!

The Rite of The Waters-of-Life

(The preceptor holds the Waters-of-life while the HPs asks the interrogatories. The local custom may or may not replace the Preceptor's response with a chorus of the members.)

HPs: Of what does the Earth-Mother give that we may know the continual flow and renewal of life?

DRUIDS: THE WATERS-OF-LIFE.

HPs: From whence do these Waters flow?

DRUIDS: FROM THE BOSOM OF THE EARTH-MOTHER, THE NEVER CHANGING ALL-MOTHER.

HPs: And how do we honor this gift that causes life in us?

DRUIDS: BY PARTAKING OF THE WATERS-OF-LIFE.

HPs: Has the Earth-Mother given forth of her bounty?

DRUIDS: SHE HAS!

HPs: Then give me the Waters!

The Consecration

(The HPs takes the caregl from the Server, who fills it if it is not already full. The HPs then consecrates its contents with the following:)

O Dalon Ap Landu, Hallow these waters by thy seven-fold powers and by the three ways of day and one of night, Cleanse our hearts and join us together as we take and drink of they secret essence!

(The HPs then holds the caregl in both hands, while the HP holds the Cyllell above the caregl, and intones the words:)

HP: "As the Cyllell is to the God...."

(To which the HPs replies:)

HPs: "...so the cup is to the Goddess."

(Here the HP dips the Cyllell into the caregl three times, and then both reply:)

BOTH: "...and so the two are made one."

Optional Ordinations

First Degree consecrations can be done at this time, but it's not necessary to enter into the first degree for a person to drink Waters. If a member of the Grove is to be ordained to the Second Degree (in which case the HPs will have consecrated an additional caregl, filled with the Waters-of-Life) the ceremony is inserted here, before the Communion.

The Communion

(The HP holds up the caregl so that all can see it and intones the words:)

HP: This is the Water of Life! Happy are those who are called to Drink Deep of it. May those who do so never thirst."

The HP & HPs drink from the caregl and blesses the Preceptor with the words, "Thou art God/dess," and the marking of the Druid Sigil in the air.

The Preceptor returns the blessing and receives the caregl from the HP. The Preceptor drinks, blesses the Server, is blessed in return, and gives the Server the caregl. The Server drinks, then goes around the circle of the Grove (usually clockwise) blessing each person, handing them the caregl, letting them drink, being blessed in and exchanging the words "Thou art God/dess," "Drink Deep," or "May you never thirst," return and taking the caregl to the next person. The Server does not drink more than once.

In some Groves, the HP may merely turn to the left and exchange blessings with the person to that side, letting the caregl be handed around the circle by the members of the Grove. In either method, the last person in the circle should not finish the contents of the caregl. This is returned to the HP with a last ex-change of blessings. Then the HPs takes the last sip returning the remainder on the altar or fire, saying:

HPs: To thee we return this portion of thy bounty, O our Mother, even as we must return to thee. May we perform this rite next year in Imladris.

The Meditation

(Here follows an appropriate reading, from any Nature-oriented scripture that the HP OR HPs may choose, read by the HP OR HPs or by someone appointed for that purpose. After this comes a few BRIEF words of meditation from the HPs and a period of silence and private meditation (usually 2 or 3 minutes in length—though longer with some Groves) by all.

Eventually, the HP signals the end of the Service with:)

The Benediction

"Go forth into the world, secure in the knowledge that our sacrifice has found acceptance in the Earth-Mother's sight, that she has answered our prayer, and that we go forth with her blessing."

Drawing the Sigil in the Air

The HP blesses the Grove with three Mithril Stars in the air, left to right, saying:

Peace! Peace! Peace

Then the Grove joins hands, and say:

"Thou art God/dess and I am God and all that Groks is God.
Keep coming back it works!"

Group hug.

Pot Luck

Lastly, there is the traditional "Pot Luck." (If the rite was held "sky-clad" you may want to decide whether or not the grove should get dressed before the "pot luck.") This actually can mean anything, but usually it means that each person attending has brought along a food item to share with the whole group. It's really very, very, impolite to attend a ritual / pot luck without bringing along anything. People who do this habitually need to "get a clue."

WATERS OF LIFE

Traditionally, the "Waters of Life" is Whisky (which in the Scots-Gaelic, means "Waters of life.") However, most OMS Groves use bottled spring water instead.

ETIQUETTE

Politeness and ritual protocol are extremely important elements. Good manners seem to be almost passé amongst Pagans in general, but we in the Mithril Star are interested in promoting the highest behavioral standards. This is only befitting those of us who are "Gods." The following are some general guidelines for behavior in ritual (applicable for both Mithril Star events and events sponsored by other traditions):

1.) Always RSVP. This means that you let your host know whether or not you are coming to an event you are invited to. This rule applies whether the invitation is formal or not. If you are not coming, it is usually customary to apologize for your absence.

2.) Always show up on time. Lots of folks follow what is jokingly referred to as "Pagan Standard Time." Those who follow PST in Mithril Star circles may find the door locked when they arrive late. If you really can't be on time, let your host know in advance that you'll be late.

3.) Once the ritual begins, you must not leave. This dissipates the energy of the rite. If you absolutely must leave, find the designated person (called the Gatekeeper) to cut open a door for you. When you return you must seek admission of the Gatekeeper again. This rule has two exceptions: Children and small animals can enter and leave at will without disturbing the energies.

4.) Never touch or handle someone else's tools unless invited to do so.

5.) Refrain from small talk during the ritual. Keep your attention focused on what is going on in the rite.

6.) Bring whatever is asked of you. This applies to the ritual itself and to the potluck portion.

7.) Make it a point to greet everyone in attendance either before or after the rite. At the end of the evening be sure to say good-bye to everyone, and to thank your hosts.

8.) Always volunteer to help clean up. Again, we try to follow the simple rule of leaving things as they were found, or (in the case of someone's home) leaving things better than they were before.

Lesson 7:

Raising Energy

By Ellis "Sybok" Arseneau / \, AD –
Cylch Cerddwyr Rhwng Y Bydoedd Grove,
OMS-RDNA

Magick

Most rites are concerned with the changing of the seasons, or with mundane events like handfastings, funerals, etc. These kinds of rites do not require a lot of energy, since they are mainly celebratory in nature. But when we want to change things, we need to raise energy to do that. This is where real magick begins.

Magick happens when we apply our Will to alter the circumstances around our lives. Magick happens when we raise energy to change things. Of course this is where the big debate in ethics takes place. What things are you allowed to do? How far can you go? What are your boundaries? In the Mithril Star, each individual sets his own boundaries, decides how far he/she will go. We are, after all, Gods.

There is nothing really you are not allowed to do -- so long as you do it via magick. This is because there are laws against certain things, but not against magick (at least not in this century.) Frater Iopanus (he was one of the original Mithril Star co-founders) once said that this means that love would keep one from harming one's water-sibling, but anyone else was fair game. You would most certainly go to jail if you got on a plane, flew to Washington DC, purchased a revolver and shot Newt Gingrich (even though the world would be a better place for it.) However, if you stay in your home in Anchorage Alaska and cast a spell designed to cause the man a heart attack, well, you've done the world a service and broken no laws.*

Chakras

How do you raise energy? Lots of ways. Some people can do it from force of Will alone, going into deep meditation, grokking what they want to happen, and so it is. Most of us need a little more help than that, at least at the beginning, and this is where ritual comes in. Dancing, drumming, singing, chanting, sex, all these things are aides to raising what we call a cone of power. It's much like writing a program to accomplish a certain task. One of my favorite methods involves chakra meditation. This is especially effective with smaller groups working indoors. Everyone sits down, and takes a deep breath, and lets it out. The leader of the group begins a low Om, and that is picked up by each of the members. As they Om, they think about that which is to be accomplished, as well as the color associated with the chakra they are Om-ing in resonance with. Beginning with the base of the spine, the leader takes the Om up a pitch, and then another, and then another, and the energy builds from the bottom up, until finally everyone is Om-ing at a very high pitch. The leader then focuses the energy into a green ball at the center of the circle. Everyone follows suit and visualizes the ball floating between them and growing as the energy builds. Finally, as the energy reaches its peak, the leader says in a loud voice something like "By Earth and wind and fire and sea, by that above and below we, launch this ball of energy (here he raises his hands forward and out and then ends it with a loud clap) and by our wills so mote it be!" Then everyone brings their hands to the ground before them, grounding the energy. While doing this, everyone visualizes the ball of energy flying up out of the atmosphere and then back down to its intended target.

The focus of this can be almost anything. Healing is an especially good focus for this, but I've had good results for everything I've used it for.

Other Skills

Developing good visualization skills is primary in doing magick. You have to be able to see your target, and see the end result. The simpler the intention the better, but even the most complex intentions can be accomplished this way, if you break it down into steps. The book "Creative Visualization," by Shakti Gawain, has a number of techniques to help you with this.

Other teachers have other methods of raising energy they like. Starhawk, for instance, loves doing spiral dances. Other folks like drumming and chanting. Some groups like to use sex. It's totally up to you. What is your style? What are you most comfortable with? What will work best for you?

You might wish to explore the popular books of spells you can find in any new age bookstore. Some of these offer very effective techniques for getting what you want and can help you pin down your own personal style of magick.

*I personally have not done this type of political work. I feel like I need to get my own personal life in order before I can start trying to change the world. I also haven't figured out how to grok time in such a way that I have as much as I need. However, if one old growth redwood falls in Headwaters Forest from one of Hurwitz's loggers, Hurwitz is toast. I've read that the man already has some heart disease, so it shouldn't be too hard to take him out.**

** It's moot now. Headwaters is a national forest, with the main grove shortly to become a national monument.

Homework:

Practice the chakra meditation described above, and the visualization of the green ball. Write down your experiences. Share with the group, if you feel comfortable to do so. (This being an intensely personal experience, simply letting the group know you did it will suffice as response for this week.)

Lesson 8:

The Wheel of The Year (Part 1 of 2 Parts)

By Frater Iopanus & Sybok

In the beginning of the Reform, the Druids celebrated only four holy days: Samhain, Yule, Bridgid, and Beltaine (the last being the birthday of the Reform.) It is assumed that this was because the Reform began at a College, and that College only operated from September until June, and was closed during the Spring Equinox.

Since we are not limited by this, the Mithril Star celebrates eight Sabbats or seasonal holidays. In Breton magickal tradition, these celebrations take place on the New or Full moon following the date. The Mithril Star (being a practical tradition) for the most part, celebrates them on the weekend closest to either the moon or the day itself. You may also choose to celebrate them on the

astrological date, or the date derived from the Coligny Calendar. These days are:

Traditional Name	Druidic Name	Trad. Date	Celebrates
Samhain	Calan Gaeaf	*Oct 31	The Celtic New Year
Yule	Alban Arthuan	Dec 21	The Winter Solstice
Bridgid	Imbolq	*Feb 2	1 st Day of Spring
Oestara	Alban Eiler	March 21	The Vernal Equinox
Beltane	Calan Mai	*May 1	1 st Day of Summer
Midsummer	Alban Heruin	June 21	The Summer Solstice
Lammas	Lughnasadh	*Aug 1	1 st Day of Autumn
Mabon	Alban Elued	Sept. 21	The Autumnal Equinox

Note the difference in seasons.

*Although the Equinoxes and Solstices are celebrated on the exact day they occur, the “cross quarters” (which represent the lunar, or feminine polarity) are moveable (even though there are “traditional days” assigned to them.) This is because the ancient Celts primarily used a lunar calendar, and these celebrations were reckoned accordingly.

You may experiment with the cross quarter days to find the timing that is right for you or your Grove. Some try to ascertain the day according to the Coligny Calendar. Others use the “astrological date (the date of the halfway point between the equinox and solstice)” and others use the traditional date. Whatever you want to do is fine with us. ☺

The Druid year is divided into four seasons, marked by the four Major High Days of Samhain, Oimelc, Beltane and Lughnasadh.

Samhain begins the season of Geimredh (gee-ru,) in Modern Irish an Geimhreadh (uN gee-ru); which is Winter, running from roughly the beginning of November till the end of January.

Oimelc begins the season of Earrach (u-RoCH,) now an tEarrach (uN tu-RoCH); which is Spring, running roughly from the beginning of February till the end of April. Together, these two seasons constitute “the Winter Half of the Year,” otherwise known as “the Season of Sleep.”

Beltane begins the season of Samradh (S,u-Ru,) now an Samhradh (un S,u-Ru); which is Summer, running from roughly the beginning of May till the end of July.

Lughnasadh begins the season of Foghamhar (FÜR,) now an Fomhar (uN FÜR); which is fall or autumn, running from roughly the beginning of August till the end of October. Together, these two seasons constitute “the Summer Half of the Year” or “the Season of Life.”

There are four Major High Days (Samhain, Oimelc, Beltane; Lughnasadh) and four Minor High Days (Winter Solstice or “Mid-winter,” Spring Equinox, Summer Solstice or “Midsummer,” and Fall Equinox) in the Druid year. While the Minor High Days are easy to obtain from any good astrological ephemeris or almanac, the methods for calculation of the Major High Days will vary from Grove to Grove. The most common practice for the calculation of Samhain, Oimelc, Beltane and Lughnasadh is to use the civil calendar days or eves of November 1st, February 1st, May 1st, and August 1st, respectively.

Another way is to use the weekend closest to these dates. Still others use the sixth day after the new or full moon closest to each of these dates. Astrologically oriented Druids use the days upon which the Sun enters 15 degrees of each of the “Fixed Signs” of the Zodiac to wit: Eagle Point- 15 deg Scorpio, Man or Angel Point - 15 deg Aquarius, Ox Point - 15 deg Taurus and Lion Point - 15 deg Leo.

The calendar used by the Berkeley Grove of the NRDNA, as well as the SDNA and the HDNA, is that designed by ADR. Robert Larson. In this calendar the Major High Days are calculated as those days upon which the Sun hits 16 deg 18 min. inclination North or South of the Celestial Equator. This makes them come exactly half way between the Solstices and Equinoxes.

Most of these holidays have been co-opted by Christianity, which preserve many of the Pagan rites and symbols associated with them. When Christianity first came into Europe to evangelize the people, they discovered that they couldn't take these celebrations away, so they Christianized them and allowed their new converts to continue to celebrate them, albeit in an altered fashion. As we discuss each holiday, we'll examine these alterations, as well as provide a rough outline for designing your own rites and celebrations to mark them.

Samhain / Calan Gaeaf

October 31

“Ye shall observe always the festival of Samhain, for it is the beginning of the period of Gelmredh, and also of the year. This day shall ye celebrate by the lighting of great fires, for soon is the land to become cold in the time of apparent death.” – DC(R) The Book of the Law, 4:2

Samhain (SÛ-un,) known in Modern Irish as L· Samhna (Laa SÛu-Nu,) in Welsh as Nos Galan Gaeaf (that is the night of the Winter Calends,) in Manx as Laa Houney (Hollantide Day,) Sauin or Souney; is, of course, the eve of “All Saint's Day,” All Hallow's Evening or Halloween. Among other things, it is the beginning of the Winter Half of the Year (the seasons of Geimredh & Earrach) and is known as “the Day Between Years.” The day before Samhain is the last day of the old year and the day after Samhain is the first day of the new year (though for clarity's sake, most New Reformed Druids assign each Samhain to the year following it. Being a day “between years,” it is considered a very magical night, when the dead walk among the living and the veils between past, present and future may be lifted in prophecy and divination.

Samhain basically means “summer's end” and many important mythological events occurred on that day. It was on a Samhain that the Nemedians captured the terrible Tower of Glass built by the evil Formorians; that the Tuatha De Danann later defeated the Formors once and for all; that Pwyll won his wife Rhiannon from Gwawl; and that many other events of a dramatic or prophetic nature occurred (see ARDA, Later Chronicles, Chapter 5, Verses 11-14.) Many of these events had to do with the temporary victory of the forces of the darkness over those of light, signaling the beginning of the cold and dark half of the year.

Christianity calls this holiday Halloween, but other than the change in name, this holiday as it is celebrated by most Americans pretty much has remained unchanged from its Pagan past. This is why it is now being targeted by Fundamentalist Christians who want to eradicate it from our schools.

As the Celtic New Year, it is the time when the veil separating the worlds of men and of the Tuatha de Dannan is at its thinnest, allowing the spirits of the dead, the faery folk, devas, etc., to pass back and forth with little effort.

On Samhain we remember our dead, especially those who have passed on in the past year. We invite them to partake of our

circles and of water. An especially appropriate rite is the Dumb Supper, wherein the participants take a meal together in silence, leaving an empty seat at the table for a departed loved one or ones. It's a good time to reflect on the past and on the future, and for planning the year to come.

The usual Halloween trappings are appropriate, and a traditional jack-o-lantern is a must! We usually encourage Druids to show up in costume. It is both a somber and a fun occasion. Have you ever been to an Irish wake? This is the tone of Samhain.

Yule / Alban Arthuan

December 21

"Ye shall celebrate on the day of Midwinter, for on that day doth the sun begin to rise in the south; so shall ye celebrate it with the burning of logs and making merry....." – DC(R) The Book of the Law, 4:3

The Winter Solstice is a Minor High Day, usually occurring around December 21st or so of the civil calendar. Also known as Yule and Midwinter, this is a day sacred to Sun Gods, Thunder Gods and Fire Gods. Large fires were built up outdoors and a Yule Log lit indoors, in order to rekindle the dying Sun and help it to return brightly to the Northern skies. Burnt logs and ashes from Midwinter fires were kept as a talisman against lightning and house fires. It was also a custom in many parts of Paleopagan Europe to decorate live evergreen trees in honor of the Gods (cutting down a tree to bring indoors is a blasphemous desecration of the original concept.) This is considered, along with Midsummer, the best day of the year to cut mistletoe.

Among some Paleopagans, a date on or near this (such as December 25th) was celebrated as the Birthday of the Sun God, frequently from the womb of a virgin or unmarried girl (who was sometimes also the Mother Goddess.)

This is the shortest day and the longest night of the year. It was believed by the ancients that the Sun had died and then was reborn on this day, as indeed it seems to do, since the days begin to get longer and the nights shorter until the Summer Solstice, when the process reverses itself. It was easy for Christians to come along and co-opt this. Since it was the birthday of the Sun God, it was easy to turn it into a birthday celebration for the "Son of God," and then move it a few days to December 25. Even in Christian mythology, much of the Christmas story is taken from myths of the Sun Gods from other mid-eastern pantheons, right down his being born of a virgin.

The trappings of Yule are predominantly Pagan. The evergreen tree decorated with lights, the wreath, the holly and mistletoe, even some of the carols, all have origins in European Paganism, as do the parties and the general sexual license that dominates the holiday.

Among Pagans there are a lot of options for designing ritual around this. There is the Celtic story about the Holly King and the Oak King for example, which makes for a good mystery play. But there are lots of other variations and, in the Mithril Star, we don't have a set tradition for this. Creativity is the key. This is a holiday for fun, so make your rituals as fun as possible.

Brigid / Imbolq

February 2

"...So also shall ye make merry on the day of Oimelc, which is the first day of the period of Earrach;" – DC(R) The Book of the Law, 4:3

Oimelc (imelc,) is known in Modern Irish as La na Feile Bride (Laa Nu fĒ-li bree-di,) in Manx as Laa'n Arragh (Day of Spring,) and as Imbolc, Candlemas and Lady Day in English. La

na Feile Bride means the day of the festival of "Saint Bridget." Brigid, Bride or Bridget is yet another Pagan deity turned by the Christians into a "saint," in order to co-opt Her worship. This goddess was a triple-aspected deity of Poetry/Divination (considered the same thing,) Healing and Smithcraft, whose followers kept an eternal flame burning in Her honor.

By analogy with the Gaelic names of the other High Days, we may assume that the holiday was originally called La hOimelc (Laa Hi-melc.) It is the festival of the lactation of the ewes. In Paleopagan days (and, indeed, until the recent past) the sheep was a very important animal, providing both food and clothing. The occasion of the birth of lambs (not to mention kids and calves) was a cause for rejoicing and a sign of life in the "dead" world of a Northern winter.

The name "Candlemas" is a Christian term for a holiday occurring February 1st or 2nd. This supposedly is in honor of a "Saint Blaise" and has no official connection with "Saint" Bridget and Her cult of fire, nor with the fact that this day was one of the four major fire festivals of Paleopagan cultures throughout Western and Northern Europe. Of course they don't mention a certain Slavic god named Vlais, Who was the Patron of cattle, wealth and war, and Who was worshipped with fire. Catholics go to church on this day to have their throats blessed to keep them from getting infected with colds and flues.

La hOimelc begins the spring season of Earrach. It is also the day before St. Groundhog's Day. The lore has it that the ground hog comes out of his whole on this day, and if he sees his shadow, he gets scared and retreats back in, and we therefore will have six more weeks of winter. If, however, he does not see his shadow, he stays out, and it'll only be six weeks before spring begins. Now it happens that the Vernal Equinox is about six weeks away, so it becomes a matter of "is the glass half empty or half full?" I've been trying to research how the Ground Hog became a player in this scenario, what he has to do with Bridgid, or Candlemas, but so far I haven't found anything.

Mithril Star groves usually have done various things, drawing on different mythologies but one thing they all do is screen the Bill Murray movie, "Ground Hog Day" after the pot luck.

Oestara / Alban Eiler

March 21

This is the Vernal Equinox or the first day of spring. Oestara is the name of the Goddess of Spring (also spelled Easter.) The Spring Equinox is also sometimes known as the Festival of the Trees. It is a celebration of the returning of life to the Earth. Rabbits, eggs and children are sacred at this feast and Pagans in need of fertility talismans now color hollow eggs and pass them through the ceremonial fires (quickly) to take home and hang over their beds and in their barns. A fascinating source of almost forgotten Paleopagan symbols can be found by examining carefully the fantastically decorated eggs produced by folk artists from Europe (especially Eastern Europe and Russia,) Mexico and South America.

A Minor High Day, in usually takes place around March 21st or so. On the night before, some Hasidic Druids stayed up until dawn, reading meditations about trees, eating the fruits of various trees and singing hymns about trees. Among many Paleopagan cultures in Southern Europe, the Spring Equinox was the date of the New Year (instead of Samhain, as it is among the Celts) and indeed, many Druids refer to this holiday as "the New Year for Trees." Adding a bit to the confusion is the fact that some Neopagan groups call this holiday "Lady Day."

It is interesting that when the church co-opted the holiday, they kept the name. It is also interesting the way the church

derives when they will celebrate it. Easter Sunday is always the first Sunday after the first Full Moon after the Vernal Equinox. Its timing has nothing to do with the Jewish Passover (though one would think it would.) This comes down to the church using astrology to choose a date for the most important holiday in their calendar: the celebration of the resurrection of their God.

Separate the Christian stuff though, and you have a nice Pagan holiday. The bunnies, the chicks, the eggs (did you know that you can stand an egg on its small end at the moment of the Equinox?) and all the other trappings are all symbols of the fertility cult that Oestara represents. It's usual and customary for the Great Rite (not the symbolic version either) to be a central part of a grove's rites on this day. Even the Catholic Church does the Great Rite on Easter. It happens at midnight on the Saturday before Easter. During the mass, part of which takes place in a totally darkened church, the priest lights the Easter Candle, then dips it three times into the chalice.

So, Oestara is a sexual celebration, a time for grove members to share and grow closer. It's the time to celebrate the re-greening of the Earth, for planting crops and flowers, and for lots and lots of sex. It's not quite time for an orgy however. We save that kind of activity for.....

What's up with that Ground Hog

Business Anyway? Some answers:

(Supplement to Lesson 8A –

by Ellis “Sybok” Arseneau /\, AD –

Cylch Cerddwyr Rhwng Y Bydoedd Grove, OMS-RDNA)

I read in a collection of Irish folklore online, Conrad Bladey's website (<http://www.ncf.carleton.ca/~bj333/folklore.html>) that a tradition related to Imbolc is weather forecasting via hedgehog-watching. There are no hedgehogs in the US, so I suspect the tradition was moved to groundhogs when the folks who practiced this came over.

There's another piece of lore I found on the Encyclopedia Mythica's (<http://pantheon.org/mythica/articles/b/brigid.html>) page on Brigid: "As the foundation for the American Groundhog Day, Brigid's snake comes out of its mound in which it hibernates and its behavior is said to determine the length of the remaining Winter."

Lastly, someone sent me this article (if you know who the author is, let me know):

Imbolc: A Groundhog Awakes!

Editorial by Andy

Snow (or endless rain, in the case of the Pacific Northwest) blankets the land. People gather in warm houses and wait for the sun to return. The question of when the sun will actually come back is of great interest. On Imbolc, people turn to oracles to figure out the answer.

Traditionally, if it was sunny out on Imbolc, the people believed that the winter would last for another 6 weeks. If it was cloudy, the spring would start early. It is from this belief that we get Groundhog Day. If the day is sunny then everything will throw sharp shadows. The groundhog will see his or her shadow and hide in his or her burrow, and winter will drag on. On a cloudy day, there are hardly any shadows since the light is so

diffuse. No shadows, no groundhog scared by his or her shadow, spring comes early.

"Why a groundhog?" you might ask. Well, what is 6 weeks after Imbolc? Eostar! Like the bunny from which we get the Eostar/Easter bunny, the groundhog is a symbol of the goddess Eostara. If the groundhog stays out, Eostara stays out. Since She is the spring, spring comes early. If the groundhog and Eostara go away so does any hope of early spring.

Lesson 8:

The Wheel of The Year

(Part 2 of 2 parts)

By Ellis “Sybok” Arseneau /\, AD –
Cylch Cerddwyr Rhwng Y Bydoedd Grove,
OMS-RDNA

Beltane / Calan Mai May 1

“Of great importance is the festival of Beltane, which is at the beginning of Samradh. Then shall ye observe great ceremony; and with the kindling of large fires on the hilltops, and the glorification of the renewed tree shall ye celebrate the renewed life.” – DC(R) The Book of the Law, 4:5

"Sing hey for the month of May! Outdoor fucking begins today!" Beltane celebrates the midpoint between the Vernal Equinox and the Summer Solstice. Beltane (bauL-Ti-Ni, or bauL-Hi-Ni,) known in Modern Irish as L Bealtaine (Laa bauL-Hi-ni, or Laa baul-Ti-ni,) in Welsh as Calan-Mai (calends of May,) in Scottish Gaelic as Baltiunn, and in Manx as Shenn da Boaddyn, La Boaldyn, or Laa'nTourey (Day of Summer; is, of course, the day we know in English as May Day. It is also called by a variety of other names, such as Roodmas, Summer Day, Walpurgistag, St. Pierre's Day, Red Square Day, etc. It is the beginning of the Summer Half of the Year (the seasons of Samradh; Foghamhar) and is a festival of unalloyed joy.

A very large number of important mythological events are connected with this day. It was on a Beltane that Partholan and his followers, the first inhabitants and partial creators of Ireland, landed on that isle. Three hundred years later, on the same day, they returned to the Other World. It was on a Beltane that the Tuatha De Danann and their people invaded Ireland. It was on a May Eve that Pryderi, the missing son of Rhiannon and Pwyll (Rulers of the Welsh Otherworld) was lost by them and later (on another May Eve) was found by Teirnyon Twryf Vliant (and eventually restored to Them.)

On every first day of May “till the day of doom,” Gwyn-son-of-Nudd fights with Gwyrthur-son-of Greidawl, for the hand of Lludd's (Lugh's) fair daughter, Creudylad. Most of these events, again, as all over Europe, have to do with stories of the forces of light defeating the forces of darkness. Why did you think the Marxists chose May Day as their international Holiday? And can you guess why Adam Weishaupt chose Walpurgistag as the day to announce the founding of the Bavarian Illuminati, and why the date at which the forces of evil later tired to Imannetze the Eschaton?

The focus is on fertility and the planting of crops. This is a more intense holiday, magickally speaking, than Oestara. The rites include as many people as are available making love in the fields, in the gardens, on hilltops etc. Traditionally, marriage

vows are suspended. Everyone is encouraged to share and grow closer with as many different partners as possible. The "Balefire" is lit on the hilltops and in ceremonial groves, and couples jump the bale fire in order to insure their own fertility. During the day, the May pole is erected, and the traditional dance is performed around it. The May pole is a symbolic penis decorated with multicolored ribbons and topped with a wreath. I found it amusing (living as I did in Santa Cruz, CA) that some of the local Dianic Wiccans always hold public rites involving the May Pole. These are folks who believe that men are inherently evil, that there is only a Goddess, and that real magick and spirituality are the sole dominion of women (or wyemen as some like to put it) yet here they are on the front cover of the local paper dancing around a symbolic penis!

May Day is also sacred to the Goddess. The Catholic Church makes it the day for the crowning of the May Queen, Mary, and her statue is decorated and paraded around by school children, who also usually build home "May altars" in her honor. More explicitly Pagan rites involving Mary can be found in many Latin American countries as well.

May Day is also "International Workers Day." This socialist holiday is celebrated everywhere in the world except in the United States (we do the first Monday of September and call it Labor Day -- this was to divorce it from its socialist origins.) Is there a connection between Labor and Beltane? Perhaps blue collar people are more into fertility (and therefore production) than the bourgeois. It's something else I am researching.

In Ireland up to fifty years ago, the very devout Catholics there still were lighting the bale fires, and making love in the fields (marriage vows suspended for the day.) Children born of such unions were referred to as "fairy children," and treated as special gifts from the fairy folk. The prefix "Fitz" was once given to children born of Beltane unions, hence the proliferation in Ireland of "Fitzgeralds," "Fitzsimmons," etc. For every "sinful" tradition, there has to be a cover up, so today some Irish say the "Fitz" prefix actually refers to those of Norman origin who immigrated to Ireland. In fact, it is the "O" prefix (as in "O'Connor, O'Flaherty, "O'Hara," etc.) that refers to Norman heritage, not the "Fitz."

Midsummer /

Alban Heruin -- June 21

"Ye shall take note of the decline of the Sun in the sky, which doth begin on the day of Midsummer. Ye shall light your fires and let them die in token of the great fire which doth roll down in the sky even as a ball doth roll down a hill." – DC(R) The Book of the Law, 4:6

The Summer Solstice is a Minor High Day, usually occurring around June 21st or so. Also known as St. John's Day and Midsummer (and, confusingly enough, by at least one NeoPagan group, as Beltane!), it shares mythical elements with both Beltane and Lughnasadh. Like both, it is a feast celebrating the glory of summer and the peak of the Sun God's power. But in many systems of belief, it is the day of the biggest battle of the year between the Dark Sun God and the Lugh Sun God (or between the evil one and the good one.) Who are usually brothers or otherwise intimately related. Midsummer is a peak from which the Sun can only fall, for it is the day on which the hours of light slowly begin to shorten. In those areas where it is safe to do so, Neopagans frequently will light cartwheels of kindling and roll them down from the tops of high hills, in order to symbolize the falling of the Sun God.

Just as the Pagan mid-winter celebration of Yule was adopted by Christians as Christmas (December 25th.) so too the Pagan mid-summer celebration was adopted by them as the feast

of John the Baptist (June 24th.) Occurring 180 degrees apart on the wheel of the year, the mid-winter celebration commemorates the birth of Jesus, while the mid-summer celebration commemorates the birth of John, the prophet who was born six months before Jesus in order to announce his arrival.

Although modern Druids often refer to the holiday by the rather generic name of Midsummer's Eve, it is more probable that our Pagan ancestors of a few hundred years ago actually used the Christian name for the holiday, St. John's Eve. This is evident from the wealth of folklore that surrounds the summer solstice (i.e. that it is a night especially sacred to the faerie folk) but which is inevitably ascribed to 'St. John's Eve,' with no mention of the Sun's position. It could also be argued that a Grove's claim to antiquity might be judged by what name it gives the holidays. (Incidentally, the name 'Litha' for the holiday is a modern usage, possibly based on a Saxon word that means the opposite of Yule. Still, there is little historical justification for its use in this context.) But weren't our Pagan ancestors offended by the use of the name of a Christian saint for a pre-Christian holiday?

Well, to begin with, their theological sensibilities may not have been as finely honed as our own. But secondly and more importantly, St. John himself was often seen as a rather Pagan figure. He was, after all, called 'the Oak King.' His connection to the wilderness (from whence 'the voice cried out') was often emphasized by the rustic nature of his shrines. Many statues show him as a horned figure (as is also the case with Moses.) Christian iconographers mumble embarrassed explanations about 'horns of light,' while modern Pagans giggle and happily refer to such statues as 'Pan the Baptist.' And to clinch matters, many depictions of John actually show him with the lower torso of a satyr, cloven hooves and all! Obviously, this kind of John the Baptist is more properly a Jack in the Green! Also obvious is that behind the medieval conception of St. John lies a distant, shadowy Pagan deity, perhaps the archetypal Wild Man of the Wood, whose face stares down at us through the foliate masks that adorn so much church architecture. Thus medieval Pagans may have had fewer problems adapting than we might suppose.

In England, it was the ancient custom on St. John's Eve to light large bonfires after sundown, which served the double purpose of providing light to the revelers and warding off evil spirits. This was known as 'setting the watch.' People often jumped through the fires for good luck. In addition to these fires, the streets were lined with lanterns, and people carried cressets (pivoted lanterns atop poles) as they gwalenened from one bonfire to another. These gwalenening, garland-bedecked bands were called a 'marching watch.' Often they were attended by Morris dancers, and traditional players dressed as a unicorn, a dragon, and six hobby-horse riders. Just as May Day was a time to renew the boundary on one's own property, so Midsummer's Eve was a time to ward the boundary of the city. Customs surrounding St. John's Eve are many and varied. At the very least, most young folk plan to stay up throughout the whole of this shortest night. Certain courageous souls might spend the night keeping watch in the center of a circle of standing stones. To do so would certainly result in either death, madness, or (hopefully) the power of inspiration to become a great poet or bard. (This is, by the way, identical to certain incidents in the first branch of the 'Mabinogion.') This was also the night when the serpents of the island would roll themselves into a hissing, writhing ball in order to engender the 'glain,' also called the 'serpent's egg,' 'snake stone,' or 'Druid's egg.' Anyone in possession of this hard glass bubble would wield incredible magical powers. Even Merlin himself (accompanied by his black dog) went in search of it, according to one ancient Welsh story.

Snakes were not the only creatures active on Midsummer's Eve. According to British faery lore, this night was second only to Halloween for its importance to the wee folk, who especially

enjoyed a riddling on such a fine summer's night. In order to see them, you had only to gather fern seed at the stroke of midnight and rub it onto your eyelids. But be sure to carry a little bit of rue in your pocket, or you might well be 'pixie-led.' Or, failing the rue, you might simply turn your jacket inside-out, which should keep you from harm's way. But if even this fails, you must seek out one of the 'ley lines,' the old straight tracks, and stay upon it to your destination. This will keep you safe from any malevolent power, as will crossing a stream of 'living' (running) water.

Other customs included decking the house (especially over the front door) with birch, fennel, St. John's wort, orpin, and white lilies. Five plants were thought to have special magical properties on this night: rue, roses, St. John's wort, vervain and trefoil. Indeed, Midsummer's Eve in Spain is called the 'Night of the Verbena (Vervain.)' St. John's wort was especially honored by young maidens who picked it in the hopes of divining a future lover.

There are also many mythical associations with the summer solstice, not the least of which concerns the seasonal life of the God of the sun. In Irish mythology, Midsummer is the occasion of the first battle between the Fir Bolgs and the Tuatha De Danaan.

Altogether, Midsummer is a favorite holiday for many Druids in that it is so hospitable to outdoor celebrations. The warm summer night seems to invite it. And if the celebrants are not in fact sky clad, then you may be fairly certain that the long ritual robes of winter have yielded place to short, tunic-style apparel. As with the longer gowns, tradition dictates that one should wear nothing underneath -- the next best thing to sky clad, to be sure. (Incidentally, now you know the REAL answer to the old Scottish joke, 'What is worn underneath the kilt?')

The two chief icons of the holiday are the spear (symbol of the Sun-God in his glory) and the summer crochan (symbol of the Goddess in her bounty.) The precise meaning of these two symbols will be explored in the essay on the death of Llew. But it is interesting to note here that modern Druids often use these same symbols in the Midsummer rituals. And one occasionally hears the alternative consecration formula, 'As the spear is to the male, so the crochan is to the female...' With these mythic associations, it is no wonder that Midsummer is such a joyous and magical occasion!

Lammas / Lughnassadh -- August 1

"Lughnassadh, which is the beginning of the period of Foghamhar, shall ye mark in the coming together in groups in order that ye may feast upon the fruits of the Earth-Mother; and then shall ye offer up a sacrifice unto your prosperity." -- DC(R) The Book of the Law, 4:7

Lughnassadh (Loo-Nu-Su) is known in Modern Irish as L. L.nasa (Laa Loo-Nu-Su,) in Welsh as Gwyl Awst (August Feast,) as Lla Lluanyys or Laa'n Ouyr (Day of the Harvest Season) in Manx and as Lammas, Apple Day and Harvest Home in English. It is the anniversary of the funeral games given by Lugh, the God of All Crafts, in honor of his Father. Essentially a harvest festival, this signals the beginning of the harvest season and the ripening of the apples (as well as other fruits and vegetables.) Enormous quantities of applejack, hard cider, mead and other alcoholic beverages are consumed at this time (it's almost a duty!) by all enthusiastic Neopagans. Hasidic Druids may prefer to drink ten-day-old slivovitz (plum brandy) at this time, but it's their stomach lining! This holiday is a day of mixed joy and woe (Irish wakes are an old tradition,) for it is by now obvious that the days are getting shorter. Stories of the battles between Lugh and Balor

(the good Sun-Fire God and the bad one) are retold, as the autumn quarter of Foghamhar begins.

Although in the heat of summer it might be difficult to discern, the festival of Lammas (Aug 1st) marks the end of summer and the beginning of fall. The days now grow visibly shorter and by the time we've reached autumn 's end (Oct 31st,) we will have run the gamut of temperature from the heat of August to the cold and (sometimes) snow of November.

The celebration proper would begin on sundown of the previous evening, our July 31st, since the Celts reckon their days from sundown to sundown.

British Druids often refer to the astrological date of Aug 6th as Old Lammas. This date has long been considered a 'power point' of the Zodiac, and is symbolized by the Lion, one of the 'tetramorph' figures found on the Tarot cards, the World and the Wheel of Fortune (the other three figures being the Bull, the Eagle, and the Spirit.) Astrologers know these four figures as the symbols of the four 'fixed' signs of the Zodiac, and these naturally align with the four Great Sabbats of Druidry. Christians have adopted the same iconography to represent the four gospel-writers.

'Lammas' was the medieval Christian name for the holiday and it means 'loaf-mass,' for this was the day on which loaves of bread were baked from the first grain harvest and laid on the church altars as offerings. It was a day representative of 'first fruits' and early harvest.

In, Ireland the feast was referred to as 'Lughnassadh,' a feast to commemorate the funeral games of the Irish sun-god Lugh. However, there is some confusion on this point. Although at first glance, it may seem that we are celebrating the death of the Lugh, the god of light does not really die (mythically) until the autumnal equinox. And indeed, if we read the Irish myths closer, we discover that it is not Lugh's death that is being celebrated, but the funeral games which Lugh hosted to commemorate the death of his foster-mother, Tailte. That is why the Lughnassadh celebrations in Ireland are often called the 'Tailtean Games.'

One common feature of the Games were the 'Tailtean marriages,' a rather informal marriage that lasted for only 'a year and a day' or until next Lammas. At that time, the couple could decide to continue the arrangement if it pleased them, or to stand back to back and walk away from one another, thus bringing the Tailtean marriage to a formal close. Such trial marriages (obviously related to the Pagan 'Handfasting') were quite common even into the 1500's, although it was something one 'didn't bother the parish priest about.' Indeed, such ceremonies were usually solemnized by a poet, bard, or shanachie (or, it may be guessed, by a priest or priestess of the Old Religion.)

Lammastide was also the traditional time of year for craft festivals. The medieval guilds would create elaborate displays of their wares, decorating their shops and themselves in bright colors and ribbons, marching in parades, and performing strange, ceremonial plays and dances for the entranced onlookers. The atmosphere must have been quite similar to our modern-day Renaissance Festivals.

Traditional Gardnerian and Alexandrian Books of Shadows say very little about the holiday of Lammas, stating only that poles should be ridden and a circle dance performed. This seems strange, for Lammas is a holiday of rich mythic and cultural associations, providing endless resources for liturgical celebration.

Mabon / Alban Elued --

September 21

The last big holiday of the year, the Fall Equinox (sometimes called Michaelmas and the Feast of the Hunters) is a Minor High Day occurring somewhere around September 21st or so. This is a Thanksgiving feast and signals the beginning of the Hunting Season (for deer and other large game) in many parts of Europe and North America. Thus, it is dedicated to the Hunting and Fishing Gods and the Gods of Plenty, in thankfulness for benefits received and hoped for. Outdoor picnics in the woods are a popular Druid tradition in those areas where the weather is still good at this time of year. Hunting magic may be minimized by those Groves living in areas where game is a little dear.

Mythically, this is the day of the year when the god of light is defeated by his twin and alter-ego, the god of darkness. It is the time of the year when night conquers day. The Autumnal Equinox is the only day of the whole year, when Llew (light) is vulnerable and it is possible to defeat him. Llew now stands on the balance (Libra/autumnal equinox,) with one foot on the crochan (Cancer/summer solstice) and his other foot on the goat (Capricorn/winter solstice.) Thus he is betrayed by Blodeuwedd, the Virgin (Virgo) and transformed into an Eagle (Scorpio.)

Two things are now likely to occur mythically, in rapid succession. Having defeated Llew, Goronwy (darkness) now takes over Llew's functions, both as lover to Blodeuwedd, the Goddess, and as King of our own world. Although Goronwy, the Horned King, now sits on Llew's throne and begins his rule immediately, his formal coronation will not be for another six weeks, occurring at Samhain (Halloween) or the beginning of Winter, when he becomes the Winter Lord, the Dark King, Lord of Misrule. Goronwy's other function has more immediate results, however. He mates with the virgin goddess, and Blodeuwedd conceives, and will give birth -- nine months later (at the Summer Solstice) -- to Goronwy's son, who is really another incarnation of himself, the Dark Child.

Llew's sacrificial death at Mabon also identifies him with John Barleycorn, spirit of the fields. Thus, Llew represents not only the sun's power, but also the sun's life trapped and crystallized in the corn. Often this corn spirit was believed to reside most especially in the last sheaf or shock harvested, which was dressed in fine clothes, or woven into a wicker-like man-shaped form. This effigy was then cut and carried from the field, and usually burned, amidst much rejoicing. So one may see Blodeuwedd and Goronwy in a new guise, not as conspirators who murder their king, but as kindly farmers who harvest the crop which they had planted and so lovingly cared for. And yet, anyone who knows the old ballad of John Barleycorn knows that we have not heard the last of him.

In the rhythm of the year, Mabon marks a time of rest after hard work. The crops are gathered in, and winter is still a month and a half away! Although the nights are getting cooler, the days are still warm, and there is something magical in the sunlight, for it seems silvery and indirect. As we pursue our gentle hobbies of making corn dollies (those tiny vegetation spirits) and wheat weaving, our attention is suddenly arrested by the sound of baying from the skies (the 'Hounds of Annwn' passing?) as lines of geese cut silhouettes across a harvest moon. And we move closer to the hearth, the longer evening hours giving us time to catch up on our reading, munching on popcorn balls and caramel apples and sipping home-brewed mead or ale.

Mithril Star groves traditionally go camping for Mabon, picking a place both beautiful and remote (but not too remote.) Our Santa Cruz grove has been meeting at Pinnacles National Monument for the last few years (1993 – 1996 exactly, before

the Grove moved to Oregon,) spending the weekend closest to the Equinox sharing and growing closer.

Discussion:

What holiday do you most closely identify with? Discuss in class.

Lesson 9: Protection

By Ellis "Sybok" Arseneau / \, AD –
Cylch Cerddwyr Rhwng Y Bydoedd Grove,
OMS-RDNA

It's a dangerous world out there and all kinds of energy is wafting about in the ether. How do you protect yourself from energy you don't want influencing you? How do you protect yourself from psychic attack? It happens that there are lots of different ways, and you can adapt any of them or personalize them as you see fit. You may even find new ways of your own. Like every other form of Magick, protection is a matter of belief. The stronger your belief in the technique you are using, the stronger will be your defense.

How does one shield? My way is simple, and you can do this anywhere at anytime. It helps to have a good background in Star Trek, but it's not necessary:

Ground and center.

From your heart chakra, visualize a green energy, (like you did in the circle casting exercise) emanating from you. See it surround you. I usually visualize the computer display on the Enterprise showing the "shields" going up. Know and believe that you are in a protected space. In fact, you can walk or drive and the space stays protected around you. For an additional protection, invoke the "cloaking device." This effectively makes you invisible, or at least not noticed. I don't recommend the latter for driving, since accidents have been known to happen -- people really don't see you.

As you practice this technique, you'll gradually get so good at it that just the thought "Shields UP" will raise your shields. When you get really good, your astral self will do this automatically (say when you are walking in a downtown area near an unsavory individual.)

Permanent shields can be erected around your home and property in this same manner. There was one night not long ago when a group of teenagers (well, they think they were) went on a windshield smashing spree in our neighborhood. Our neighbors' cars on both sides and across the street from us were vandalized. Ours were not. Another time I was driving around and my license plates were expired (I had trouble getting the pre-requisite smog appointment on time,) and I saw a CHP coming up behind me about three car lengths. I invoked the "cloaking device." Pretty soon he pulled up alongside of me, and was looking very confused. He then sped off ahead, and when he was out of sight, I "decloaked."

Other methods of shielding take the form of ritual rather than meditation, but remember that ritual is an aid to visualization. It is in the visualization, and in your belief, that the magick lies.

The Witch's Jar

The "Witch's Jar" method is one such rite. You'll need seven glass jars, seven iron nails, seven small mirrors (broken pieces of a mirror will do) seven small pieces of black onyx (size does not matter -- find the cheapest.) Gather these items, and set up your ritual space in the usual way. The elementals are protective spirits, so be sure to invoke them. Cernunnos and Ceridwen are especially good deities to invoke for this. You want to extend your circle to include all of the property you wish to protect, so be sure to smudge and sprinkle every room of the house, and your yards as well (if you can do so without attracting attention.) This will banish any energies that are not welcome, and once the jars are in place, they will not return.

Pick up each jar, and place a nail in it saying: "Iron protects, iron deflects, so in this jar I place its effects." Then place a piece of mirror in each saying, "Mirror reflects, mirror protects, so in this jar I place its effects." Now place a piece of black onyx in the jar saying "Onyx absorbs, negativity stores, so in this jar I place its core."

Write each of the seven directions on a piece of paper, and place one of them in each jar (where you can read it from outside.) Dedicate the jar to the corresponding spirit saying: "I charge thee, oh vessel of protection, to keep vigil in the (name the quarter it will be placed in.) I charge and consecrate thee, so mote it be."

Take the jar dedicated to the East to the farthest point on your property in the east, and bury it in the ground there. Then take the jar dedicated to the South and do the same. Then the West and then the North. The jar dedicated to "Above" is trickier. It needs to hang in your attic as high up as you can get it (you may need to suspend it from wires.) Likewise, the one for "Below" needs to be buried in the basement. The one for "Within" is the hardest one. It needs to go to the spot closest to the center of your home both horizontally and vertically.) You may have to open up a wall to conceal it.

Once this is done, stand in the center of your ritual space and say: "By earth and air and fire and sea, by what's above and below me, and by my own inherent deity, my shields are installed, so mote it be!" Visualize a sphere of green energy surrounding you and your property, and know that you are in total control of it.

Take down your ritual space in the usual manner.

As a personal shield, you can simply wear a pentacle, charged similarly to the jars. Even more effective is the "Seren saith pigfain" (a seven pointed star) but these are really hard to come by. The seven pointed star is the symbol of the Mithril Star tradition. You can see one at our website: <http://www.mithrilstar.org/>

Homework:

Practice the "shields up" visualization. You may adapt it to your personal preferences.

Practice the "cloaking device" visualization.

Report on your experiences.

Lesson 10: Divination

By Ellis "Sybok" Arsenau / \, AD –
Cylch Cerddwyr Rhwng Y Bydoedd Grove,
OMS-RDNA

Druids have traditionally had ways of finding things out that were hidden, or in the future or in the past. This chapter will familiarize you with some of the more popular ones. If you get good at this, you can always make a living from it. It is one of the few areas in Paganism where it is considered ethical to charge money (though in the MITHRIL STAR we have no restrictions of any kind in that regard,) and lots of Pagans do this sort of thing.

I like to think of these as methods for "surfing the psychic web," also called the Akashic Record. Therein is all of the data of everything past, present and future. If you get really good at this, you could, for example, look a week or so into the future and find out the winning lotto numbers for your state's lottery. Then play these numbers and, voila! You're a millionaire. Again, you are limited only by the principle of belief.

Astrology

Astrology is the grandmother of Astronomy. The theory of Astrology is that the planets and other bodies of our solar system have a direct effect on our behavior. In the case of the Moon, we have scientific evidence that the moon's gravitational pull has an effect on the tides, and on our moods. None of the other planets have this kind of scientific evidence, but astrology is a collection of thousands of years of correlations that seem to indicate specific effects on people, countries, the stock market, the weather, and pretty much anything at all that happens or will happen on the planet.

Of the divinatory sciences, Astrology is the most difficult to learn, but it also seems to be the most popular. Professional Astrologers make big bucks and are in demand from everyone from the guy who reads his horoscope everyday in the newspaper to executives at IBM and in the government (remember the big flap over Nancy Reagan's personal astrologer?)

There are courses you can take, and there are computer programs that make the difficult task of casting a chart very easy. During the first year we taught this class I used "Expert Astrologer" to cast charts for all of you when you enrolled in the class (we now only use that kind of screening for candidates for membership in the MG.) That program is very inexpensive and can be purchased at most computer software stores.

Numerology

This is the science of numbers, the theory being that the numbers in your life affect your behavior (or your company's or what have you.) Like astrology, it is a collection of correlations from over a thousand years. It is relatively easy to learn, and there are many good books out there. There is also a share-ware program available.

Tarot

The Tarot is probably the most popular divinatory method among Pagans today. This makes use of a deck of cards with traditional symbols on them, arranged in a pattern. Interpreting that pattern in relation to the cards that fall into it is the art of Tarot. It is not difficult to learn, but does take some time. There are hundreds of books out there that teach it, with as many

different interpretations for the same patterns as there are teachers teaching it.

Tarot is a matter of the heart. It is a psychic catalyst, and I think it is one of the most personalized of the divinatory arts. My advice to someone who wishes to learn it is to go out and purchase a deck. You'll have hundreds to choose from. Look at them all and find the one that calls to you (this is just like choosing any other magickal tool.) Take it home and sleep with it. Spend some time each day meditating on each card in the deck. What does it say to you? What images does it bring to mind? I've been thinking of teaching a tarot course, but as yet haven't sat down and organized it. Maybe some day....

Scrying

This method involves looking into a crystal or water or whatever and discerning shapes or symbols. It is more a catalyst for the psychic than anything else and can be learned with a little knowledge and a load of practice.

This is a popular method among Druids, and there are a number of different ways to go about it. There is crystal scrying, where you use a glass ball (the Silmarils of the Tolkein stories are of this sort.) Crystal balls of the type used for scrying are really expensive, and come in a variety of colors. If you are so inclined use the same methods you would use for any other magickal tool in finding one.

A bowl of water, or a lake, stream or pool is another method, this one popular with the Druids of old. Galadriel is known for her "mirror," actually a crochan of water. Ceridwen uses a similar device.

It is especially effective to do this on the full moon, with the moon's light reflected in the water. My favorite is fire scrying, looking into the fireplace, campfire or circle fire, and communicating with the flames. You can also do this with a candle, though I've not had as good of luck with it as with fires. It's best to choose a long-burning wood, and get it stoked up really well. You want to avoid fast-burning woods such as pine, since by the time you start seeing something the fire is almost out, and then you have to start over again. Never use redwood. It is forbidden in the MITHRIL STAR to use redwood for anything except ritual tools, and then you may only use dead branches or limbs for the fashioning of tools. You may never cut a living redwood tree, or carve on it or anything else. The Redwood is sacred.

The Pendulum

This is a method of getting "yes - no" kinds of answers to questions. It involves a weight of some kind at the end of a string or chain. Holding it perfectly still, you ask your question, and its movement will determine a yes or no answer. There are different methods for doing this, some of which require the drawing of an elaborate design for the pendulum to hang over.

A similar device is the diving rod, usually fashioned from wood or metal, it is used to find treasures, particularly water, buried in the earth.

Runes

Casting the runes is fast becoming a popular parlor game. The runes are those Scandinavian characters inscribed on stones. The stones are "cast" or thrown, and the patterns they make up determine the interpretation.

I Ching

Similar to casting the runes, this Chinese method involves casting a number of sticks and then finding the pattern in the

Book of I Ching. The pattern will correspond to a poem in the book (similar to quatrain) and then you must interpret the poem. I found a shareware program a few years back that would allow you to do this on your computer, complete with the interpretations. There is another method of this, involving coins.

These are just a few of the myriad methods of divination that are out there. You can explore any New Age bookstore and find books on any of these methods, hundreds of tarot cards, different card based systems and methods I've never heard of.

The basis for all of these is psychic. They are to be used as catalysts for invoking that part of you that has become dormant. Eventually, with training and practice, you can get beyond these catalysts, and just use your own pure psychic abilities, just as with enough years of magickal practice you can get to a place where you no longer need rituals or tools, you can just think a thing and make it so.

Homework:

Tell me about your favorite method of divination, how long you've been doing it and what kinds of results (give examples) you have had.

Lesson 11: Water Sharing

By Sybok and Iopanus

The principle "sacrament" of the MITHRIL STAR is Water Sharing. You are already familiar with this from the "virtual Great Rite" in Lesson 6, but you may be wondering: Where did it come from? What does it mean? In this lesson we will try to answer that.

If you've read the late Robert A. Heinlein's novel, "Stranger In A Strange Land," you already grok the answer to this question (and you probably grok "grok.") If not, you should have by now. It is probably the most important spiritual work of our time. The novel involves Valentine Michael Smith, whose parents were on a mission to Mars, and left him an orphan there. He was raised and educated by Martians within the wildly different (from our own) Martian culture. Water (at least in the novel) is at a premium there and so water is sacred. To share water with someone is to share something precious and vital. You don't do this with just anyone. You only offer water to someone you would cherish. This is more than friendship; more than marriage; more than love. When you share water you are entering into a lifetime covenant. This is the very essence of perfect love and perfect trust. From this point on everything you are and own belongs to your new "water sibling," and vice versa. This is the ultimate in Communism, since you are sharing not just possessions but mind and body as well.

Once you have shared water with one or more persons, you have created a covenant with them, and (via "catanative assemblage") to anyone they have shared water with, and so on, and so on. So far I have been able to trust my waterkin (those I have shared water with directly, and those who have shared water with others I have shared with) to do the right thing. To be there when I have needed them, and to have helped when I needed help. In cases where waterkin have made mistakes, and those mistakes have cost me money, I am thankful that they were able to reimburse me in full, even if it took some time. I hope that I have been the same way to them.

We are trying to build a community of trust and love. A community where when one person feels hurt, the others will try to help in what ever way they can to heal that hurt, whatever it may be. We want our

Groves to be places of refuge from the mundane. The home of a Grove leader should be a place where any member can drop in at any time, and be welcomed, fed, and of course offered water. Since we have become an international group now (we have members throughout the US, Canada,

Australia, England and even Portugal,) those of us traveling should be able to find hospitality among the waterkin wherever they go, and help when they need it.

Sex? Well, I hope we can be that close, I really do. Although I love all my waterkin, there are definitely a few I would simply never ask, and if they asked I would politely say "no." In any large group, there are going to some you are attracted to, and some you aren't. That's just human nature. No one should feel compelled have to have sex with a water brother.

In any group it takes time to build trust and love. If there is a frequent turnover of members, that process will take longer. OTOH, some people will just "click." It's all good. Waiting is.

I guess what I am getting down to is this: if you decide to share water with someone, do not do it with the expectation of sex (either at the time or in the future.) It just might not happen, and anyway, it's totally the wrong motivation. The same goes for being offered water. If you choose to accept, do not do so with the expectation that either now or in the future you will have sex with that person.

Grok? Share water because you want to add someone to your Grove; to your family. Accept water because you want to be part of that person's family. That's right: a Grove should, first and foremost, be a "family" functioning out of perfect love and perfect trust. All the other stuff we do; ritual, divination, magick; that's the icing on the cake. The substance is "family," and "community." These are the things we strive to create in OMS.

Sharing Water can be done as part of a complex ritual, or as a simple rite by itself. The solemnity and seriousness of the rite should be preserved in either case.

Homework:

Write your thoughts or experiences concerning water sharing.

ADDENDUM:

Since we have touched herein on the subject of sex, I offer you some guidelines developed by our "sister" organization, the Church of All Worlds:

Sexual Etiquette

Unity through Diversity is a founding tenet of the Church Of All Worlds; because of this, not everyone's idea of acceptable behavior is the same. So to avoid undue stress, confusion, and bad vibes, here are some reminders:

1. *Sexuality and the Sacred Freedom thereof is one of our prime values, so respect it. ("All acts of love and pleasure are My rituals.") Sexual activities that are engaged in by informed and mutually-consenting adults are no one else's business, and are not to be condemned or censured. By the same token, it is absolutely unacceptable to attempt to pressure, cajole or coerce another into any sexual activity that they do not wish freely and wholeheartedly to participate in.*

2. *Minor issues. While the respect due sacred sexuality applies in principle to Pagans of all ages, the emotional as well as legal pitfalls involved make it imperative that adults avoid sexually-charged interaction with youths below the legal age of consent. There are specific laws concerning age, and elders are mandated reporters.*

3. *Be sure you interpret signals correctly. A loving touch, hug or a massage is not an invitation to coitus, so if your attempts at intimacy or caring make someone uncomfortable, stop! And if someone touches you in an uncomfortable fashion, tell them! If that doesn't work, get a elder, or Festival ffon member to help you. Please be sensitive as to how your affections are perceived / received.*

4. *Practice safe sex! Use condoms with all outside your Nest; and if you have an STD (Sexually Transmitted Disease,) tell your consort.*

Sound advice; all of it. As Gods we should have no trouble following it. May you never thirst.

Section Two

Organizational Materials

The Dis-Order of the MITHRIL STAR

by Ellis "Sybok" Arseneau /\\,
AD - Cylch Cerddwyr Rhwng Y Bydoedd Grove,
OMS-RDNA

"A non-prophet, ir-religious, dis-organization."

"Non-prophet."

We don't have a central head, or Guru whom we all linger near to pine over his every word. We do have a spokesperson, who is known by the title, "Arch-Druid of the Mother Grove," who is basically the mouthpiece, or figure head of the Order. Mostly he is to be ignored.

"Ir-religious."

We are the antithesis of most religions. We have very few rules, most of which are not spiritual, and we expect nothing more or less than that our members behave like Gods. Who do the Gods worship? What religion do the Gods practice?

"Dis-organization."

We have no hierarchy and few leaders (those we do have are there for practical purposes, not spiritual.) We have no subordinate bodies. You might say we are a "dis-Order."

The **Mother Grove** is the central authority for the teaching of the OMS tradition. They own the written materials you have just studied. They own the Druidcraft101 Yahoo list, the MithrilStar list, and Imladris. The first two are bodies that exist in cyberspace; the latter is an as yet non-physical piece of real property, where we hope someday to establish our worldwide headquarters.

The Druids who are members of the Mother Grove decide how and in what form the teaching materials of the Order will be disseminated. They also take care of the mundane business of the Order and they judiciously keep records (there's an overdose of Virgo energy in the MG.) Decisions of the MG are made by consensus, excluding the Arch-Druid, who has no vote. The CEO of the MG (and therefore the Order) is the "Clerk of the Mother Grove."

Groves are the main manifestation of the Order. A Grove consists of a minimum of three OMS Druids, at least one of which holds the 3rd Degree. Each Grove has an Arch-Druid and a Clerk. Both of these are elected by consensus from Druids in each Grove. The A-D serves as public spokesperson for the Grove. The Clerk functions as "CEO" of the Grove. Other officers may be elected as required, or not. All decisions are made by consensus.

Proto-Groves are fledgling Groves. They consist of a minimum of three human beings, at least one of which is a Druid of the 1st Degree. Usually the founding Druid takes on the title of Arch-Druid and the functions of the Clerk. A proto-grove becomes a full-fledged Grove once at least one member has attained the 3rd Degree and two others have attained 1st.

Groves and Proto-Groves are wholly autonomous and owned by their own members. The Groves look to the Mother Grove only on matters concerning the teaching of the basic

tradition. Well, ideally they do. The fact is, many Groves haven't contacted the MG in so many years that we've lost track of them. The MG is not responsible for the behavior of the OMS Groves. Although we like the Groves to stay in touch with us, that is strictly voluntary. We also accept monetary donations from the Groves (and these too are voluntary.)

In both Groves and Proto-Groves, voting is done by consensus. The entire grove must be unanimous before any business can be transacted. Since the grove operates as a family unit, in perfect love and perfect trust, this system works quite well. If an agreement cannot be reached by consensus, then that item is tabled until the grove meets for business reasons again (usually about once a month, near the full moon.) Note: business is never conducted when the moon is "void of course."

A very special, unique body within OMS is the [MithrilStar List](#). This email list is a virtual 'Grove' that emulates the functions of a real time grove. It is a sacred space where new members, initiates, and friends of the Order may gather to grow closer, discuss the Order (or any topic of interest to Pagans in general,) and network. It serves as a sounding board for new ideas and changes within the Order. It therefore takes on a special importance, as the Mother Grove takes seriously the matters discussed thereon. The Arch-Druid of the Mother Grove is an active member and moderator of the MithrilStar List. The MithrilStar list is owned and controlled by the Mother Grove. It is the ONLY subordinate body in the Order. Due to its uniqueness in cyberspace, the MG has developed special rules governing behaviour on the list.

Degrees of Druids.

Once you take the Pledge, which affirms that you agree with our three tenets, you are a Druid of the 1st Degree, and a member of the Order. You are also a member of the [Reformed Druids of North America](#), and in that body, a Druid of the 1st Order. Non-members may participate in the ritual and social functions of Groves, but only members have a vote or may hold office. In the Mithril Star, there are seven degrees (or in RDNA terminology, 'orders'):

§ The **first** Degree Druid is a person who has subscribed to the members pledge (also called "pledged,") affirming their agreement to our three tenets: "Nature is Good," "Nature is Good," and "Thou art God." They should also have partaken of the waters of life (see "Water sharing.") This person is a '1st Degree' or '1st Order Druid.'

§ The **second** level is "Initiate," one who has finished the basic course, affirms his/her dedication to the Order has been initiated into the tradition. This person is a '2nd Degree' or '2nd Order Druid.'

§ The **third** degree (or Order) is given to those Druids undergo a vigil, and who further demonstrate their commitment to the OMS by paying dues (3 hours pay per year.) This is the degree of Priest/esshood, dedicated to Dalon ap Landou. The Third degree supplies the Order with clergy, and with officiating (High) Priest/esses. Those who have attained the Third degree may wear a red ribbon on their robe or cloak. This person is a "3rd Degree" or "3rd Order Druid."

§ The **fourth** Degree is granted those who have founded, or participated in the founding, of an OMS 'proto-grove.' The 4th degree is dedicated to Grannos, the patron of Springs. Those who have attained the 4th Degree may wear a green ribbon. This person is a "4th Degree" or "4th Order Druid."

§ **Fifth** Degree Druids are those who teach the D101 course (either online or in real time.) Moderating the D101 class for 6

sessions, or the MithrilStar List for three years also counts toward 5th.) The 5th degree is dedicated to Braciaca, patron of Malt. Those who have attained the 5th degree may wear a yellow wrist maniple. This person is a "4th Degree" or "4th Order Druid."

§ Those Druids who wish to obtain the **sixth** Order (or degree) have taught the D101 course at least three times and their 'proto-grove' is now fully sanctioned. Participation in the development of a Proto-Grove counts equally. The 6th degree is dedicated to Belenos, patron of the Sun. Those who have attained the Sixth degree may wear a yellow ribbon around their neck.

§ Lastly, the **seventh** is given to those who make a pilgrimage every three years to the redwood forests in California, or a visit to the Mother Grove (for international members, a trip once in their lifetime to the MG AND the redwoods will suffice.) The 7th degree is dedicated to Sirona, patron of rivers. Those who have attained the 7th degree may wear a sky-blue ribbon.

With the exception of the 1st Degree (obtained by pledging to the Order) all other degrees can be acquired randomly. This means that a 1st degree Druid can teach D101 once, and get him's 2nd. Likewise, hirm could then visit the Redwoods and obtain hirm's 3rd. However, hirm can do everything listed above, and if hirm has not pledged hirmself, hirm is not a Druid.

All OMS degrees are exactly equivalent to their corresponding RDNA Orders. This is to say that if you are an OMS Druid of the 3rd degree, you are also an RDNA Druid of the 3rd order.

The Pledge

Some of you taking this class have already become members by executing the pledge

(see <http://www.mithrilstar.org/PLEDGE.HTM>): "

"In dedication to the celebration of Life in its many forms, I hereby declare my commitment to a way of life that is ethical, benevolent, humanistic, life-affirming, ecstatic and ecologically sane. I subscribe to means and methods that are creative rather than destructive, tolerant rather than authoritarian, gentle rather than violent, inclusive rather than exclusive, egalitarian rather than hierarchal. I pledge myself to harmonious eco-psychic awareness with the total biosphere of holy Mother Earth."

"Like an ancient Redwood, I would have my roots deep in the Earth and my branches reaching for the stars, the stars not only above but around me, my fellow humans, for "every man and woman is a star," and "the good of the many outweighs the good of the few," 'from each according to his/her abilities, to each according to his/her needs.' "

"I acknowledge my personal responsibility for myself, to my fellow humans, and to the whole of Nature; and I recognize this total responsibility, in each of us, as the source of our infinite freedom to become who we are and do what we will. I dedicate myself to my own inner growth and development that I may be of greater service to myself and the world around me. For these reasons I recognize Divinity both within and without, and I say to myself and others: THOU ART GOD."

"I wish to unite with others upon a spiritual path that encompasses the whole of the universe, and hereby make application to join the pantheon of The Order of The Mithril Star, RDNA, in order that we may learn together and teach each other ways to bring about these ends."

"So mote it be!"

By signing that pledge, and mailing it to the Order, you enter the Order and the RDNA in the 1st Degree (order.)

We also ask, but do not compel, our members to pay [dues](#). Solitary members send their dues to the Mother Grove. Funds received by the Mother Grove go into three accounts. The first is for payment of administrative expenses. The second is a slush fund for members who need help, and last is a savings account for the purchase of land to be used as a Pagan clothing optional retreat/conference center, Order headquarters and an intentional community (which will run the thing) (aka "[Imladris](#)."") Dues are equivalent to three hours wages and are paid once per year on the anniversary of your joining the Order.

Druids belonging to a local Grove pay their dues to their own Grove. Funds collected by local Groves are dispersed at their own discretion.

Once again, let me stress that dues are completely voluntary.

Symbolism

The Mithril Star

Most revered of our symbols is the Mithril Star, named for the elvish metal of the Tolkein mythology. It consists of the 'septagram' (seven pointed star) with an 'Ouroborus' wrapped around it, making it a 'Seren saith pigfain.' The snake swallowing it's own tale is an ancient symbol of the World and of the continuity of time ' infinity. The seven-pointed star is also known as the 'elven' or 'faery' star. It is considered to be the gateway into the Elven realms. The seven points symbolize various things including: 1) The seven visible planets, 2) the seven days of the week, 3) the seven 'quarters' (directions, elements, spirits,) the seven chakras, 4) the seven 'rays' (see D201,) 5) the seven musical notes, 6) the seven 'planes' or dimensions (see D201,) and 7) the seven OMS degrees (RDNA Orders.)

The Druid Sigil

The circle bisected by two vertical parallel lines is known as the Druid sigil in modern Druid groups. It is one of the many symbols now widely used by Reformed Druids of North America, it's offshoot called Ar nDraocht Fein (ADF) which started in 1983, which also had an offshoot The Henge of Keltria. Therefore, it is a prominent symbol of Druidism in America. There is a well-publicized myth that it came from a photograph of a Celtic-Romano temple's foundation which had a square Roman foundation over laying an older Celtic circular structure. It looks remarkably like the Druid sigil with two of the rectangular lines parallely intersecting the circle. However, this shot published in Stuart Piggot's seminal work "The Druids" was first published in 1966, three years after the RDNA was already documented as heavily using the symbol. So that can't be it. None of the founders probably had the background knowledge in 1963 of obscure archeological digs, so they couldn't have come across it anywhere else in the first two weeks of the founding of the RDNA. David Fisher, the founder of the RDNA, was eating Lunch at Goodhue Dorm Cafeteria on Carleton College Campus in Northfield, Minnesota, USA in early April 1963 (perhaps April 1st) and talking to Norman Nelson and a few of his other friends. There were complaining about a mandatory requirement to attend weekly religious services by the college. They decided to start THEIR OWN religion to see if that was satisfactory, and they decided on the name "Reformed Druids of North America" So they traipsed up to the hill of three oaks soon thereafter (April 17th, 1963) and had the first ceremony. David Fisher claimed to have been initiated into a Fraternal Druid order in Missouri, but they didn't believe him, because he had also tried to set up 3 other

semi-secret farcical organizations on the campus with a similar story. But the others recognized the power of continuing an older tradition. The sigil was apparently used during that ceremony. So from whence did it come? Probably from David Fisher's fevered imagination (divine inspiration, definitely inspired by spirits of whiskey.) 11 hours of research through various books of symbols and magical runes, has been conducted but without any trace of the circle with two vertical lines. The closest thing is a Greek letter of a circle with one vertical line (and David was possibly interested in starting a Greek fraternity style group, which were banned at Carleton.) The alchemical symbol for oil is similar to that Greek letter. What does it mean? Good question. There is no definitive answer on this subject. It both means what you think it means, and it means something you don't think it means. (Above from the RDNA homepage.)

(Note: There is talk in the Mother Grove of combining the two symbols by placing two upright redwood trees, one behind and one in front of the Mithril Star.)

The 'AWEN' /\: 'Awen (Welsh) or 'Imbas (Gaelic) means 'inspiration' and in Celtic spirituality refers to inspiration from the three realms (or kingdoms,) 'sky,' 'earth,' and 'sea.' Or, in other words 'nature.'

Customs:

Throughout our 10-year history, the OMS has developed various inter-Order customs, most for no particular or good reason:

'Thou art God/dess,' is the standard greeting from one to another. We also begin our written correspondence thusly, or with the abbreviation: 'TAG.' Likewise, we generally end our written correspondence with 'May you never thirst,' or with the abbreviation, 'MYNT.' We sign off our correspondence with 'In the Mother,' and sign our names with 'First name' Druid 'Surname' /\ (the 'Awen' is made by typing 'forward slash', 'pipe', 'back slash').

Some OMS Druids have taken to putting a number, 1-7 after the word 'Druid' to indicate their order (or degree.) This practice is discouraged as it takes away from the egalitarianism of the Order. Many OMS Druids wear black or hunter (dark) green on a daily basis, and/or choose those colors for ritual wear. We're not sure where this began, except that the two founders were fond of those colors. Another apparel custom is the wearing of black or dark green 'touring caps' backwards (they then look like a beret, at least from the front.) This began as a way of recognizing each other at gatherings in public places. Some OMS Druids are fond of tie dye and even choose it for ritual wear as well (assuming they choose to wear anything for ritual.) OMS campouts, weekend retreats, and conventions are generally 'clothing optional.'

Some Groves get together weekly to watch Star Trek (any derivation) and eat hot buttered popcorn with Parmesan or cheddar cheese sprinkled on it. Usually, these meetings adjourn in the nearest hot tub, where water sharing (sometimes followed by growing closer) usually occurs. The water may be a Chardonnay. :)

The Coastal Redwood (Sequoia Sempervirons):

Just as the Oak was sacred to our Druid ancestors of old, so now the Coastal Redwood is sacred to the Druids of the Mithril Star. It was in such a redwood grove near Boulder Creek CA that the two founders first conceived of the Order, after drinking of much Guinness Stout and smoking much Humboldt Gold. One of the many myths of the Order is that Adam was tripping on LSD and walked through a redwood tree, stumbling over Pendderwydd, but this has never been confirmed (or denied.) It is said that one of them exclaimed 'We are the Redwood Druids!' but this too has never been confirmed.

The Official Hymn of the OMS:

Recently, the Mother Grove has declared 'Sequoia Sempervirons' a 'filk' by Leslie Fish, to be our 'official hymn.' Found as the 16th track of the CD, 'Smoked Fish and Friends' (available from Random Factors) the words are as follows:

If the oak is king of trees'
What then can our redwood be'
Lord above all greenery
Everlasting tree

Named for him who first could see
The letters of the Cherokee
Still you sigh remember me
Everlasting tree

Tall beyond the reach of eye
Spearing silent to the sky
Watch the ages rolling by
Everlasting tree

Sprouted long before the Sphinx
Where the mountain's lion slinks
Shading time in wooden links
Everlasting tree

Pledges made upon thy bark
Hold the memory in the mark
A million turns of light and dark
Everlasting tree

Triad's castle, Titan's spear
Living book of year on year
Spread thy welcome seedlings here
Everlasting tree

The song is written in the key of Dm ('Dorian' mode.)
An mp3 is available in the files of both the D101 class and the MithrilStar List.

Section Three

Conclusion

Conclusion

Thus ends the Druidcraft 101 course of the Order of the Mithril Star. You are expected to complete any homework you have left, and submit it to the course moderator directly. You are also expected to complete and turn in the Final Exam:

The final consists of two essay questions, each worth 50 points.

1: Write a Holiday ritual. You may pick any one of the eight Holidays discussed in Lesson 8. Be as detailed as possible. Write out the invocations, quarter calls and dismissals. Draw on everything you've learned in this course. (you may review the lessons.) It does not have to be 100% original. You may take a rite from a book, the web, wherever, and adapt it to the MITHRIL STAR tradition.

2: In 23 words or more answer the question: Why do I (or do I not) want to be initiated into the Order of the Mithril Star?

3: If your essay is positive (that is, you want to be a member,) go to see <http://www.mithrilstar.org/FORM.HTM>, read and follow the directions there.

OK? So do a good job, and may the forest be with you.

So ends Volume Eight
of the Green Books.

