

Mother Earth Ministries is pleased to make this brief introduction to Druidry (also called Druidism) available to interested inmates - and though it was written with help from practicing Druids, it is just an introduction.

Meet the Druids

Most of the stereotypical ideas about Druidry are wrong. Scholarship has shown, for instance, that Druids were never "all men." Today some groups do segregate the genders, but modern Druids have chosen not to let gender (or affectional preference) bar anyone from participating.

You don't have to be Irish to be a Druid, either. Although Druidry was developed in Celto-British cultures, anyone sincerely interested is welcome to participate in modern Druid groups.

Ancient Druids probably did practice human and other blood sacrifice; so did ancient Romans and Jews, and most other ancient cultures. Modern Druids don't.

Druidry isn't a cult, either. Cults revolve around individuals, with followers expected to give up the outside world. Druids were and are community leaders and networkers; there are solitary Druids, too, which is distinctly un-cultish.

Druidry is not cult, no fad, but a real religion, and generally very public. Let's find out more about it.

DRUIDS TODAY

The late A.D.F. Archdruid Emeritus Isaac Bonewits (more about him in a moment) told us that today's Druids "are designing and performing powerful magical and religious ceremonies, including regular public worship of the Old Gods and Goddesses.

"We're researching," he explained, "and expanding sound modern scholarship (instead of romantic fantasies) . . . in order to reconstruct as much as possible what the Old Religions of pre-Christian Europe really were."

DRUIDS LONG AGO

No Druid group can truly claim an unbroken link to ancient times. By 461 c.e., Druids had been brutally suppressed for centuries, and St. Patrick could claim he'd driven all the "snakes" out of Ireland. (He called Druids "snakes" because the Druids were the keepers of wisdom for the Celts, and in the ancient world, snakes were symbols of wisdom.)

By the 10th century, Druidry was history . . . but there were active Bardic colleges in Ireland till the 17th century, and Bards were (and are) a class of Druid.

ROMANTIC DRUIDRY

Stonehenge, the famous stone circle on England's Salisbury Plain, has been understood to be connected with Druids since the early 1600s, when John Aubrey suggested it may have been a Druid temple. It probably was, but it's actually Neolithic – pre-Druid.

But Aubrey's suggestion inspired the Romantic Period's interest in Druidry. The Universal Druid Bond was formed in 1717. In the 1720's, English and French "scholars" reinforced an image of Druids as more or less pre-Christian Christians!

Influenced by Masonry and mystic Christianity, the Ancient Order of Druids was founded in 1781. And in 1782, Iolo Morganwg (his religious name) held an Autumn Equinox ritual to initiate his quest to "revive Druidry." Unfortunately, in his zeal, Morganwg made up a lot of his "evidence," and his work led many astray.

Modern Druid Traditions study truer histories; no one knows, yet, the full history and purpose of Stonehenge. But no matter how ancient Druids used it, modern Druids consider Stonehenge a holy place of pilgrimage.

MODERN HISTORY

Modern American Druidry came to life at a small college in Northfield, Minnesota, in 1963. Carleton College required students to attend weekly religious services. A few students who objected to the rule did some research and organized some Druidic rites. These turned out

to be very popular, and even though Carleton's administration took the hint and dropped the chapel attendance requirement, the practice of Druidry not only continued, but expanded.

That's how the RDNA – the Reformed Druids of North America – was formed; chapters sprang up from coast to coast. Twenty years later, though, the RDNA still wasn't comfortable calling itself "Pagan," so the late Isaac Bonewits, the first initiate of the Berkeley Chapter of the RDNA, founded the Ar nDraiocht Fein: a Druid Fellowship. The ADF (fully pronounced *arn ree-ocht fain*) has become the largest Neo-Pagan Druid group in North America.

ETHICS AND MORALS

The ADF's material makes it clear that Druids have a strong and clear sense of ethics. "We believe that ethics and morality should be based upon joy, love, self-esteem, mutual respect, the avoidance of harm to ourselves and others, and the increase of public benefit.

"We try to balance people's needs for personal autonomy and growth with the necessity of paying attention to the impact of each individual's actions on the lives and welfare of others."

Of course, this means that you don't use any of your power – intellectual, social, magical, or psychological – to hurt other people . . . or the eco-system.

Consistent with that, Druids believe it's "necessary to have respect and love for Nature as divine in Her own right, and to accept ourselves as part of Nature and not Her 'rulers.'

"Many [Druids] accept what has come to be known as 'the Gaia hypothesis,' that the biosphere of our planet is a living being Who is due all the love and support that we, Her children, can give Her."

DEITY I

The Gods and Goddesses are worshipped as the Shining Ones; Ancestors are revered as the Mighty Ones or the Ancient Ones; and Nature Spirits are beloved as the Noble Ones. Druidry acknowledges a number of individual Goddesses and Gods with distinct

personalities, but not “the Lady and the Lord” that Wiccans recognize.

ANCESTORS? NATURE SPIRITS?

The Ancestors include our forebears, our “families of affection and blood,” as one Tucson Druid puts it; Old Country ancestors and New Country ancestors. Nature Spirits are the Sidhe (pronounced *shee*); some evolved from the Old Gods’ retreat under barrows and mounds; they are “the spirits of feather, fin, insect, and leaf, as well as the mountains, stones, and soil,” a Sonoran Sunrise Grove member explains.

WHAT DOES A DRUID ALTAR LOOK LIKE?

A Druid’s altar can be set up anywhere – formally or casually, indoors or out. The altar must hold a Well: a vessel of water, symbolizing the Waters of Potential from deep below the surface of the Earth. It must hold Fire: incense or a candle or another symbol to symbolize the Sky and its power. And it must hold a Bile (pronounced *bee-lay*): usually a staff or a wand and symbolizes the sacred World Tree.

WHAT DO DRUIDS WEAR FOR RITUAL?

Many Celtic Druids wear robes, usually white or off-white; and some wear colored tabards over their robes. People practicing other cultural forms of Druidism dress differently, to honor their own culture’s heritage.

DO DRUID CIRCLES LOOK LIKE WICCAN CIRCLES?

No, not exactly. Druids don’t generally cast the Circle or call Quarters. People can enter or leave the Circle at any time, as long as they don’t disturb anyone else.

“We believe that space is made sacred by its use, and no hostile forces would dare enter it.” But, as one Sonoran Sunrise Grove member adds, “we do make an offering to the ‘outsiders’ just to be sure.”

WHAT LITURGICAL CALENDAR DO DRUIDS USE?

Most Druids celebrate the Wheel of the Year. Some groups’ calendars use older dates than those the Wiccan Wheel marks, though, so some Druids celebrate the Fire Festivals – Bride, Beltane, Lammas, and Samhain – a few days later than most Wiccans.

Most Druids celebrate the Solstices and Equinoxes – Yule and Litha, Ostara and Mabon – at the same time Wiccans do. (Of course, the exact dates of the Solstices and Equinoxes vary from year to year.)

Many Druids use the Wiccan names for Sabbats, “bearing in mind,” our sources remind us, “that ‘Yule’ is the *Norse* name for the Winter Solstice.”

Some Druid groups (usually called Groves) also celebrate the phases of the Moon.

Oct. 31st: the New Year, Feast of the Dead; Last Harvest
Dec. 21st: Winter Solstice; Yule; Longest Night
Feb. 1st: Feast of Brigid; First Springtime
Mar. 21st: Spring Equinox; Feast of Planting
May 1st: Hinge of Summer; Feast of the Sidhe
June 21st: Summer Solstice; Feast of Labor
Aug. 1st: Lughnassadh; Feast of Lugh; First Harvest
Sept. 21st: Fall Equinox; Feast of Reaping

DRUIDRY AND WICCA

In the “old days,” it was the Druids’ responsibility to conduct public ceremonies of worship and magic, all designed to keep order in the world. According to the ADF, “Many Druids have been or still are followers of Wicca. There is no serious contradiction between the two paths, especially since, as polytheists, [Druids] are free to worship in many ways.

“The primary difference between [ADF] Druidry and Wicca are these: Druidism is polytheistic, large-group oriented, and public. Wicca is duotheistic, small-group oriented, and private. Nevertheless, the two religions have far more in common than they have separating them.”

ADF’s literature goes on to say that “Wiccan covens can (and do) function as special interest groups within larger Druid groves, along

with bardic, healing, ecological, divinatory, and other groups. It is not unusual for small gatherings of . . . Druids to use Wiccan liturgical techniques, nor for large public Wiccan rites to borrow Druidic methods.

DEITY II

“Druid” or “Celtic” lore includes stories and legends – and Goddess and God names – from Wales, Ireland, Scotland, England, the Isle of Mann, Gaul, etc. No “Celtic” creation myths survive to tell us how the worlds were formed, but we do know that the goddess Danu was – and is – worshipped as the Mother of the Celts.

Danu – Her name means “divine waters” – fell from the Sky, created the river Danuvius (now known as the Danube), and watered the sacred Oak, Bile [pronounced *bee-lay*].

Bile is called the Father of the Gods. His principal symbol is the Oak, the Tree of Life. A solar deity, He is a healer as well as the Lord of Death. We honor Him today at Beltane: the Sabbat’s name literally means “the Fires of Bel.”

The first generation of Celtic gods – we’re using their Irish names here, by the way – include Cernunnos, the Lord of the Animals.

Lir was the Sea God, who fathered several children, including Mannanan, the principal Sea God in the next generation, the Tuatha de Daanan.

THE TUATHA DE DAANAN

The second generation of Irish gods are called the Tuatha de Daanan (pronounced *too-ah day-duh-nuh*, and often shortened to just *too-ah*), or the Children of Danu. This group includes the Dagda, whose name means “the good god.” He’s known as the All-Father, and may be the Irish version of Cernunnos.

Ogma is the son of the Dagda, and He’s the god of eloquence, literature, and knowledge. The Ogham, the Druids’ alphabet (*og-am* or *oh-un*), is His invention.

Lugh is the grandson of Balor, a much older god, and when Balor killed King Nuada, Lugh killed Balor to avenge his king. Lugh is

known as “Lugh of the Long Arm,” both for his astonishingly wide range of skills and because “he stretched forth his hand to shelter his people.” The Irish hero Cu Cuhulain is Lugh’s son.

The Morrigan is a triple goddess of war, death, and slaughter, under the names of Macha, Badb, and Nemain. She tests warriors’ strength and courage, decides who will die in battle, and collects the souls of the fallen. One of Her symbols is the raven, a carrion bird.

Epona’s name means “divine horse,” and Her image is still carved into the chalk hills of England. She was the only Celtic deity to be worshipped in Rome!




Brigid is another triple goddess: of healing, smithing (iron work), and poetry. A daughter of the Dagda, she’s a fire and fertility goddess. She’s honored today at the Sabbat named after her, Bride (pronounced *breed*; and also called Imbolc).

Today’s Druid groups encourage research, and each has its own recovered knowledge and patron Goddesses and Gods.

TRIADS

Because Celtic religious Traditions were oral for thousands of years, Druidry can still involve huge amounts of memorization. To short-hand a great deal of lore while making memorization easier, many religious lessons were condensed in triads, or groups of three. Modern Druids have preserved the form and custom. The triads vary from group to group; the examples given are from the ADF.

The Three Realms

Gwynvyd – the Heavens  of Wisdom
 Abred – the Midworld  of Bounty
 Annwn – the Underworld  of Rebirth

The Three Worlds

The Sky - the Unchanging Order; home of the Shining Ones
 The Land - the green Earth; the dwelling of many Kins
 The Sea - the Wild Waste; the Road to the Blessed Isles

These triads describe the world. Associated with each Realm is a Cauldron. This tells us that each Realm nourishes us.

In Abred, our Realm, there are three worlds: the Sky, the Land, and the Sea. Three Kindreds are recognized: the Dead (Ancestors), the Sidhe (pronounced *shee*; Nature Spirits and Otherkins), and the Deities. All worlds and kin are understood as helpful to us.

The Three Gates

The Well – the Deep Gate; the Sustainer
 The Fire – the Bright Gate; the Transformer
 The Tree: the All-Boundary; the Connector



The Three Tools

The Cauldron – Wisdom, Love, and Power
 The Wand – Poet’s skill, Wizard’s will
 The Cloak – Mantle of Magic, Spirit

These “Triads of Ritual” suggest we can be both sustained and transformed; held secure, but encouraged to grow. We grow through love, wisdom, and power-with. We grow by our own skills and determination. We grow through awareness of other lives and our relationship to them.

In these and other triads we learn that Druidry sees the Worlds, Realms, and Kindreds as both challenging and nurturing. Druids take responsibility for themselves and their relationships with life, the universe, and everything.

SYMBOLS OF DRUIDRY

Druids use many of the same symbols that Wiccans do – for instance, the pentagram, the triple moon, and the cauldron:



Druids also use the same symbols for the Directions that most Neo-Pagans are familiar with:



But Druids use other symbols, too. Three of the most common are the Awen (three bars of light), the Henge (also called an Arch or a Dolmen), and the triskele (pronounced tris-kay-lay).



The Druids’ Sigil may be the best-known symbol of Druidry. It can be drawn very simply, as a circle with two vertical lines through it, but the circle is often drawn as a wreath or garland, and the lines as staves, branches, or spears. No matter how they’re drawn, the lines represent a Gate.



MORE MODERN DRUIDRY

The information in this brochure is based on the ADF Tradition. (Contact the ADF in care of the Sonoran Sunrise Grove at Post Office Box 17874, Tucson, Arizona, 85731-7874.) The Sonoran Sunrise Grove is an ADF group in Tucson, and often participates in TAWN events.

To help keep things in perspective, we’ll list a few other groups, but **we can’t guarantee your experience with any of them, or even that they’ll write back.** (If you write for information, *do* send a self-addressed, stamped #10 envelope.)

The RDNA (Reformed Druids of North America) combines Paganism, Zen, and Christianity, and is active as the NRDNA – the New Reformed Druids of North America

The Henge of Keltria is a direct descendant of the ADF. Their ceremonies are private, and they focus on a Celtic pantheon. As of June, 2010, you can write to them at 2350 Spring Road, PMB-140, Smyrna, Georgia, 30080-2630.

The OBOD (Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids) is one of the offshoots of the Universal Druid Bond established in 1717, and

now claims over 7,000 members in 20 countries. Contact them at Post Office Box 1333, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1DX, England.

Recommended Reading

There are at least as many bogus books about Druidry as there are good ones. If you want to read about Druidry, start with . . . anything by Phillip Carr-Gomm, Miranda Green, or Anne Ross. Local sources also recommend:

* *The Druids*, by Peter Beresford Ellis

* *Celtic Myth and Legend*, by Charles Squire

* *American Druidism: a Guide to American Druid Groups*, by Daniel Hansen

* *The Druid Sourcebook*, by John Matthews

About Mother Earth Ministries-ATC

Mother Earth Ministries' mission is to provide accurate information about Wicca and other Neo-Pagan and Heathen religions to interested inmates and prison staff, and to facilitate Pagan and Heathen prisoners' study and practice of their religions.

MEM was founded in the year 2000 by Lady Carol Garr and several other Tucson Neo-Pagans. Lady Garr is the President of MEM, and visits Tucson units of Arizona state prisons as requested. Lady O'Gaea (pronounce it oh-jee-uh) is our Board Secretary and our Writing Priestess. Lord Campion is our Treasurer.

All of our Board members are fully ordained Wiccan clergy, and all have been active in Tucson's Neo-Pagan history for many years. Lady O'Gaea is the author of several books about Wicca; she and Lady Garr wrote *Enchantment Encumbered*. (Enchantment is available online at www.CreateSpace.com and by snail mail from The Blue Eyed Witch, a metaphysical store at Post Office Box 475, Tombstone, AZ, 85638.)



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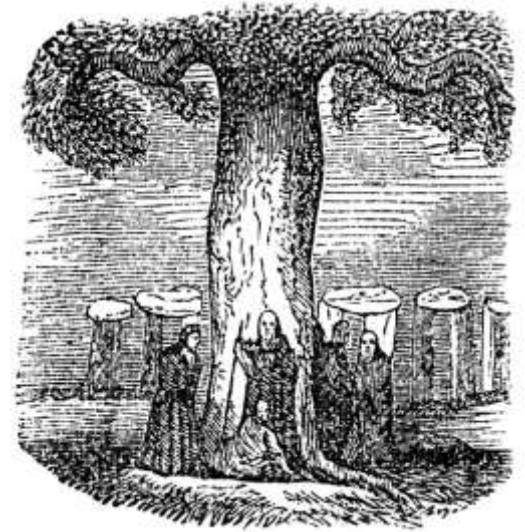
Mother Earth Ministries-ATC
Post Office Box 35906
Tucson, Arizona 85740-5906

www.MotherEarthMinistries.org

Scribe@MotherEarthMinistries.org

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MEM introduces you to DRUIDRY



We've seen Hollywood images of the Druids – they're those white-robed old men with golden knives, cutting magical mistletoe from sacred oaks, or the hearts out of virgins, right?

WRONG!

Those images are 18th century (and continuing) *fantasies*. They're not about the historical practice of Druidry, and they're not about today's practice. To find out what Druidry is really like, here and now, read on!