

NEW CANDIDATE GUIDE

ANCIENT ORDER OF DRUIDS IN AMERICA

The AODA New Candidate Guide

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First Edition, 2016

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ISBN-13: ??????????????????????

ISBN-10: ??????????????????????

Colophon

Cover art by Dana O'Driscoll

Designed by Paul Angelini using Adobe® InDesign.®

The Ancient Order of Druids in America

New Candidate Guide

Version 1, 2016¹

Restricted to Members of the AODA².

1 Guide Prepared by Members of the AODA Grand Grove. Most of this guide was written by Dana O'Driscoll (Archdruid of Water). Additional contributions by Adam Robersmith (Archdruid of Fire), John Michael Greer (Grand Archdruid Emeritus), Gordon Cooper (Grand Archdruid), and other members of the Order as noted. Special thanks to Kelly Trumble, Grand Almoner, for copyediting, and Paul Angelini, Grand Pendragon, for the layout out this guide.

2 This New Candidate Guide is the Esoteric Property of the Ancient Order of Druids of America (AODA). It is issued with an understanding and agreement that it is to be surrendered to the AODA in the event that you cease membership for any reason.

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Welcome to the AODA!

Bright blessings and welcome to the Ancient Order of Druids in America! We welcome you on the nature path in friendship. You are now a lifetime member of the AODA, and we encourage you to take your next steps on the journey as a Druid. This guide helps acquaint you with the AODA and what we offer, and introduces you to the core practices of the study program for your Candidate year. With each degree you complete, you will receive a set of core lessons as well as “short courses” on various topics (which are under development in 2017 and beyond). The core lessons will complement and aid in your work through your first, second, and third degrees and draw on the fundamental practices of the AODA. Additionally, we have a number of groves, study groups, and home circles as well as a vibrant online community where you can connect with others on the druid path.

In keeping with the traditions of Revival Druidry, the AODA encourages its members to pursue their own spiritual directions within a broad common framework, and its approach to spirituality is personal and experiential rather than dogmatic. The initiation rituals and study program are prescribed, in that we offer a set of practices; however, beliefs are individualistic and diverse among our membership. In addition, AODA members are expected to keep four traditional Druid holy days, the solstices and equinoxes. Creativity and the quest for personal Awen—the inner light of inspiration—are among the AODA’s central values.

AODA welcomes adults of all national origins, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and affiliations with other Druidic and spiritual traditions. Ecological awareness and commitment to an Earth-honoring lifestyle, celebration of the cycles of nature through seasonal ritual, and personal development through meditation and other spiritual exercises form the core of our work, and involvement in the arts, healing practices, and traditional esoteric studies are among its applications and expressions. This guide was designed to help start (or continue) your path of druidry.

Chapter 1 offers insights on finding your own druid path and wildcrafting your own druidry. Chapter 2 offers information on the structure of the AODA. Chapter 3

is a complete listing of our candidate curriculum in its current form. Chapter 4 provides suggestions for the Earth Path, Chapter 5 on the sun path, and Chapter 6 on the moon path. Chapter 7 offers full instructions for the Sphere of Protection.

Chapter 8 offers insights on Druid, Ovate, and Bardic studies. Finally, a variety of appendices offer rituals, examples, and more.

The primary textbooks for AODA's study for the Candidate year are John Michael Greer's *The Druidry Handbook* and this guide. We recommend reading this guide first, and then reading the *Druidry Handbook*. Please note that the curriculum published in the *Druidry Handbook* is outdated, so use the curriculum in this guide and/or on the AODA's website instead. The rest of *The Druidry Handbook*, however, provides key information on AODA's practices and history and is a delightful introduction to this path!

Yours under the hazels,
The AODA Grand Grove

Chapter 1: Finding Your Druid Path

What does it mean to be a druid?

The AODA is a teaching order. That is, we do not tell you what to believe, how to believe it, or insist we have answers to life's greatest mysteries. Instead, we offer a core set of practices that will help you come to your own understandings, explore your creative gifts, learn more deeply about the natural world around you, connect more deeply to nature, and begin to tread more lightly upon the earth. Here are some of the different ways that our own AODA members express their understanding of druidry:

White Feather, Druid Apprentice: *"For me Druidry is the experiential study of where we inherently belong within the Cosmic biosphere. Then, through continued practice, reshaping our lives to be in harmony with Nature's cycles. I believe this is the path by which we connect to Nwyfre and that all druid wisdom and magic begin with this knowledge."*

Brenda Jenkins Kleager, Sapphire Storm: Druid Apprentice:
*"Druidry is a way of life that falls naturally into my daily activities.
Druidry keeps me in tune to the cycles of nature.
Druidry celebrates the interconnectedness of all things.
Druidry means constantly learning and seeking answers."*

Allison Jones-Lo, Druid Candidate: *"For me, Druidry is a life-long journey to connecting with nature, being a part of the world (all aspects of it) that has never been open to me before. My Druid Path has filled me with a spirituality that I never achieved with organized religion. My connection with nature has given me purpose that is evident in every aspect of my life and very fulfilling."*

Daniel Cureton, Druid Apprentice: *"Druidry means being connected to the Living Earth, being in tune with the currents of the Universe, and acting as a priest of*

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Nature. Cycles of the Moon, the path of the Sun, walking the shores of the sea, the trails of the mountains, the sands of the desert, and the forest of the Earth, druidry connects people to the land and sky, from what was once a disenchanted world, to a reenchanted way of living that hails from our ancestors.”

Dana O'Driscoll, Archdruid of Water and Druid Adept: “*To me, druidry is about reconnection and regeneration. It is about connecting deeply with nature and helping her heal, in walking through the winding paths in the forest with wisdom and joy. My druidry focuses on connecting inner understandings through meditation and ritual with the outer practices of permaculture design, homesteading, wild tending, and herbalism. I embrace the bardic arts through music, writing, and the visual arts and nature is my inspiration and collaborator. I am an ally to the land and her spirits. Each day, and each moment, I walk as a druid, and I work to teach others who are willing to learn.*”

Sometimes, people think if they commit to the path of druidry, it means they can't be something else or identify with any other spiritual or religious path. While we encourage you to dedicate yourself to your druid studies for a period of time, you are absolutely welcome to combine druidry with other spiritual, esoteric, or life practices. The key is that it is your druid path, and only you can determine its shape, course, and trajectory. To help you better understand this, Grand Archdruid Gordon Cooper offers his insights on “Wildcrafting” your own druidry.

Wildcrafting Your Own Druidry

By Gordon Cooper, Grand Archdruid

I have come by the green and winding road
That leads from the town to the gods' abode,-
To the ancient shadowy place apart,
Where spring is born in the woodland's heart,
And over and over the ages through
The spirit of joy is made anew.
O world of glory and toil and gleam,
Made out of passion and dust and dream!
On the gladsome quest by my student vow,
I am come to this threshold of beauty now,
Where Nature sits with inscrutable eyes
Guarding her temple of mysteries.
Who knows but the magical master key,
As Plotinus taught, may be ecstasy,
And led by the sheer elation of love
And the intuitions we cannot prove,-
We may pass in a moment fleet and fine
Into the realm of the divine! In such a grove when the world was young
Great hymns to the god of the wood were sung.
And worshippers in procession came
With garlands and



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pipes to praise his name, Before ever the world grew sad and cold, When beauty its eloquent story told In movement and rhythm and color and line, Where sense could interpret and heart divine The hidden purpose, the ceaseless power, Enhancing the fair world hour by hour. Is it so idle to believe That unfearing rapture may perceive, Where the wonder rests on river and tree, The form and features of deity? To the doubt-free soul even now and here What radiant presence might appear, Living and warm, in the very guise It wore in the glad young centuries! This old gray stone might almost be The altar of some divinity. Behold, I come with gifts in hand, As ancient usages demand, And wreath the stone and lift the prayer That shall the suppliant's faith declare. O Spirits of Earth, will ye not draw near, If the gift be clean and the heart sincere? Come forth in loveliness and power And touch with glory the present hour! - From --"Earth Deities, a Masque" by Bliss Carman

Welcome to this essay on Druid Crafts, which celebrates the traditional skills that are connected to the Druids in song, story, and reports from the classical authors. What is druidry? Is it a description of a druid from the writings of a single Greek or Roman author? Is it a recreation of religious practices (that may have never existed) following careful analysis of the tales, written down or created hundreds of years after the introduction of Christianity to Ireland? Is it the revivalist druidry of the middle ages, the antiquarians, the poets of the Eisteddfod, or is it limited to the modern descendants of the antiquarians, the Revivalist EuroPagan Druids? Is druidry merely the sum of the local folk customs and practices of Ireland, Scotland and Wales that relate to wind, wood and waters? Is it valid to call oneself a druid and ignore all of the traditions and ideas about druidry? Any answer to this question must be a personal one, based on the truths that an individual can apprehend and bring to fruition within the world.

That said, there are some ideas that run through most of these conceptions of druidry. Firstly, there is the notion that druids had something important to say about the natural world, could converse with it, and find its secrets by their arts. Secondly, that their grammar (poetry, geometry and the entire body of lore held by classical druids), both dark and fair, could change the world by calling forth the sacred fires of truth and creation. For the past three hundred years this has been the conception of druids most discussed and accepted in the west, while scholarship vacillates each decade over what can and cannot be known about pre-historic druidry. Taken on its own terms, druidry requires a visceral and studied participation in the world. It is not to be found on the Internet - on websites, in chat rooms or on e-mail lists. In net arguments, the

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endless recycling of half understood information, and the futile redaction of nature that is so distant from trees, mushrooms, sea, shore and sky can only convey a vague and distorted simulacrum of the truth of a sacred spring nourishing a thorn tree, let alone the rest of the greening fire of the world.

This article is a finger pointing at the forest, and not the forest itself. Druidry must be discovered and realized in tree planting parties, outdoor camps with other druids, songs in the forests or in the high, windy places of rock and lonely desert, within the speech of birds that gather at dusk, the beginning of the druidic “day”, and in the assembly of seer-singers around a fire at night. The above should not be construed as an argument in favour of a druidry that is anti-intellectual. Far from it, druidry depends on a keen awareness of Traditions, Song, Consciousness and Nature in all of its manifestations, beginning and remaining rooted in the place that the student lives, breathes and meditates. It does a potential druid no good to memorize endless and speculative lists of Ogham “trees” while ignoring the cactus or mountains in their own neighbourhood. Every land is sacred and has its own stories to tell. Not only in Ireland and Wales can the imbas, awen or grail be found, but in the whole of the greening and browning earth. It whispers in canyons in Colorado, teases one in the waving grains of the prairie, flashes in the evening light of the savannah and dances in tornados made by the gods of weather. Pounding waves have more to teach a druid than the glow of a thousand computer screens. Living with Nature, tracing and appreciating the sacred geometry of leaves unfolding in fractal patterns and weathered rocks, singing with a murder of crows at dusk is part of druidic practice, as is an appreciation of the land-naming tales of all places, not merely Ireland or Scotland.

Personal Cosmologies

The creation and realization of a personal cosmology is an element critical for the aspiring druid. For those in misty coastal and forested regions, the sea/earth/sky triad may be the most appropriate. For those living in the mountains of the desert, it may be more useful to adapt features from the Grail stories that involve the quest for Sarras, the sacred city in the desert, combined with astronomical alignments, should any exist. While it is possible to work within a cosmology and space that is disconnected from one’s environment, there is something profoundly unreal about trying to describe features or seasons that one doesn’t experience. The Pagan “Eightfold Wheel of the Year”, developed by Ross Nichols and Gerald Gardner, works well in Northern climes that have four seasons. The eight fold pattern is of little or no value in tropical,

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Mediterranean or desert climates. The best advice for many would-be druids is to throw out all references apart from the Farmer's Almanac (or a copy of *Sky and Telescope*), get a thermometer and barometric pressure gauge, buy an astrolabe, a basic drafting set with compass, graph paper and protractor, maps and a good compass, a box of 96 crayons and art pads to record the changing plants and seasons in sketches, and to try sleeping under the open sky for as many nights as possible.

A meditative musical instrument, such as the harp, zither or dulcimer may also serve the aspiring druid as a means of expression. Astronomical phenomena, such as meteor showers, can be used as ritual markers, and easily work into certain elements of the druid's personal cosmology, though this may require some flexibility and close observation. (There are hints that some traditional tales in the Irish materials may preserve cosmological features, and "*Hamlet's Mill*" is the classic work that covers this topic.) While in the earliest stages of their work, reference books on Ogham or similar topics may be of value, experience and meditation will ultimately prove to be the best guide to a cosmology. A cosmology is a framework against which the Greater and Lesser mysteries can be appreciated within the local expression of Sovereignty that the druid lives in, although these Mysteries can never be fully explained. Cosmologies are a way to make the Sacred more obvious within life as it is lived. Years of meditation, music and dreams may be needed in order to establish a mythic geography, a backdrop against which one's life can be more fully appreciated and explored.

This Universe is organic, filled with irrational numbers and paradoxes, as is any cosmology that usefully reflects it. While a laundry list may not have value in the quest for the Grail or druidry, there are traditional artistic and ritual methodologies that are appropriate to druidry. If one takes the view that polytheistic cosmologies need not conflict, the world then becomes large enough to have many sacred centers, places where Greater and Lesser mysteries dwell and bestow gifts on those who respectfully seek them out and honour them. The concept of the sacred pilgrimage is one shared by most cultures, where the seeker goes to a place of power in order to receive a blessing or insight. There are rock faces near the sacred Duwammish river, near Seattle, where the world was re-made and Spring was released into the world, Mount Meru is a cosmic axis for many Asians, the lost caves of the White Spring of Glastonbury is where the secrets of the Underworld live - these are three examples of places worthy of consideration for the aspiring druid. Why should a potential druid care about anything beyond Ireland, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Brittany or England? Because many potential druids do not

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live in these lands, nor are they necessarily related by recent ties of cultural heritage or ancestry to the peoples of these lands. If druidry is based on universal principles and is a philosophy of earth, stars and trees, then local features have immense power to shape the grammar and body of the druid. It may even benefit druids living in the British Isles to reexamine their own environments for clues towards making a better druidry.

Tools for Aspiring Druid-Poets

What better place to begin the druidic quest than with an appreciation of the Songs of Creation? Most cultures have an extant epic or collection of stories around the theme of sacred history, whether it is Genesis, the collection known as the Kalevala, the Eddas, the Book of Invasions, the Songs of Firdosi, etc. Note that it isn't always the Universe that is being created: some stories seem to assume that the World pre-exists the time of the Greater and Lesser Mysteries. These songs have many things in common--they are sung or chanted, not silently read in a printed book. Hebrew prophets intoned the sacred words of power, druids used the Dark Speech, the poems of the Kalevala were sung by two singer-musicians, and the Songs of Firdosi are chanted to this day in Iran. The close connection to music should be considered as well, particularly in light of the harp traditions of Scotland. Unlocking the word-hoards of poetry, being led "from a word to a word" requires more than simple memorization of single words or phrases. Oral poetry is constructed on themes that are expressed in phrases, known as "The Formula". An oral phrase would be of the form "whisperingly, in trance, she spoke Thus to the drum of the Spirits..." (this example is from the "Book of the Nisan Shamaness", a traditional Manchu tale.) The filidh must be sufficiently skilled to swiftly and succinctly choose and shape phrases for a briocht (blessing) or lorica (breastplate) at a moment's notice. As was true of the Japanese master storytellers, endless and powerfully chanted repetition of an epic oral poem or story is the best training here. The beginner develops an appreciation of the rhyme schemes, dynamics and story elements in a fashion not possible in simple reading. As Alfred Lord, author of "Singer of Tales" demonstrated some years ago, within oral poetry there is no Ur-poem or song, no single true example of any story from which all other variants spring. There is simply the poem being chanted at a particular moment, in front of a specific audience. Length, order, story detail are all variables to be played with by the ollamh, or ritual poetic specialist. The extant texts are a translation, a translation from the spoken to written word. (Even if the monks in the monasteries invented the stories, they were invented out of an Irish background, one that oddly enough corresponds to the sacred iconography from the rest of Northern Europe.) As is the case



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with all translations, something vitally important is lost in the process. Most of us are working in English, rather than Manx, Cornish or Breton as a native language, and have thereby lost the original meters and rhyme-schemes in the native tongue. Poetry, like prose, cannot be translated but only re-interpreted into a foreign language. It is to the benefit of every potential druid to spend some time struggling with the original language, if only to appreciate its power and graces.

Having resolved to work in English (for the 97% of you reading this), it becomes important to recognize the tools of spoken, rather than written English and its use in ritual story-telling. Fortunately, Dr. Seuss books are widely available. (If a druid cannot tell children's stories to their pet rock, nephew or cousin, how can they hope to aspire to greater magics?) Initial training should consist of almost endless repetition, until these simple rhyme schemes become second nature. Moving past Dr. Seuss, many traditional stories preserve ritual features--most stories have a clear beginning and ending, with the initial piece of the story setting out a cosmology and world view. There generally is a hero, a task of some sort, and a resolution before the dissolution of the story-space by the teller. Astute modern story tellers have listeners hold a rope during the telling, lower lighting, use props, voice features (volume, speed, pitch, inflection, etc.) as devices to accentuate the power of the story. The most astute tellers will adjust the story to the tolerance of the audience, altering descriptions, locale and compressing or expanding the elements of the story as needed. For the advanced druid, a harpist, zither or dulcimer player accompanying the druid or story reciter can create an authentic atmosphere for trance induction and story-telling in a traditional Scottish and Irish context.

Creating a Local Druidic cosmology

As an example of how to create a local druidic cosmology, let's take the case of a would-be druid, a young lass with the magical name of Velociraptrix, who lives in Fabens, Texas. She is a 25 year old female Mexican-American with a B.S. in nursing from the University of Texas, and has taken a number of classes in astronomy and anthropology for her minor. As a member of a Mexican pagan dance group, she has a background in ritual and dance. The first step she takes in establishing her druidic cosmology is to note that "El Paso del Norte" has been the mountain pass that traders and travelers have used for thousands of years in transporting goods overland from the old Mexican cultures to the Pueblo tribes. Her second piece of information is that an important archaeological site is Hueco Tanks, where hundreds of rock paintings

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of ancient spirits are depicted. These rock figures seem to be artistically linked to the high civilizations of ancient Mexico and the Pueblos. And, the Rio Grande river runs (meanders would be a more accurate description this era) through the region, forming a natural barrier and the main source of water, aside from other minor streams and some springs. She notes the incursion of non-native plants into the desert and decides to donate time to a group that works to restore the Southwest desert to its natural state. The book “*Cultures of Habitat*” by Nabhan provides her with relevant information about desert plants and offers further clues for her cosmology. Living in a desert environment with less than nine inches per year of rain and a shortage of most of the Ogham trees (though there are forests in New Mexico a quick drive away), she decides to build her focus around ritual waters. A quick trip to the USGS office provides her with detailed maps of springs.

On a hunch, she calls David Eidelmann, a professor of archaeology at UTEP to see if ritual travelers carried some emblem of their office. She was right, they carried a ritual staff. Her next step is to try and map the route that the traders would have used (parrot feathers went North to Hopi territory, turquoise went South to Mexico.) She then checks with several folkloric experts (her aunts, a grandmother and several older cousins) to see if there are any ritual restrictions on traveling, and discovers a legend about a powerful spirit who cries at night, best avoided. As a student of history, she is fully aware of the linkage between human sacrifice on a mass scale and some of the high cultures of Mexico. Just as a modern Celtic or Roman pagan reconstructionist would eschew human sacrifice as a barbaric custom, she resolves to stay away from spirits and places associated with human sacrifice or bloodletting, while acknowledging the principle that symbolic sacrifice brings light into the world, as is the case in many religions. Velociraptrix has established that her cosmology is bounded by the Rio Grande, the Guadalupe mountains and the historically used paths running roughly on a NE/SW line from the middle of Mexico through the mountain pass and the Pueblos of New Mexico. Her focus is on sacred waters, and their emergence from the desert. Given the ideal observation conditions for astronomy, she decides to spend some time seeing if her relatives, the Pima Indians, have any star lore that might be useful to her. She makes a note to take an extension course or two in ethnobotany and an advanced camp in desert survival, which may come in handy once she begins walking the lands that are sacred to her. Other details will emerge as she meditates, walks, sings to the night sky and sleeps on the mountains.

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She will pull her lyrical inspiration from contemporary and classical Southwestern and Mexican poetry, making it her own over time. As she's bilingual in Spanish and English, she will write chants in either language, depending on her mood, and has enough of a ritual dance background to adopt some of the rhythms of the huehuetl (the drum of the ancestors) to the group rituals she's planning for her (eventual) Grove. She decides to draw from some of the structural richness of the Hermetic tradition for the grove, and buys a copy of "*Inside a Magical Lodge*" by John Michael Greer. Most Mesoamerican cosmologies have multiple creations of the world, and the Desert Southwest tribes have a myth of first emergence from a holy place as central to their religious practices. Prayers and dances for rain, good crops and health are important as well, so Velociraptrix decides to incorporate staff or stick dances, turquoise and parrot feathers into her practices. For her initial altar (a decorated box of local wood that is bolted to the wall and folds down to open as an altar) she chooses an arrangement of rocks, feathers and turquoise, with a white porcelain bowl with rain symbols on it to represent celestial waters. She makes a note to schedule some time for rain rituals late in the year, and will ultimately make a wall altar for each direction and element.

Velociraptrix's Resource List

Druidcraft, Philip Carr-Gomm; *Druid Mysteries*, Philip Carr-Gomm; *The Book of Druidry*, Ross Nichols, edited by Philip Carr-Gomm; *A Scattering of Jades: Stories, Poems and Prayers of the Aztecs*, Dr. T.J. Knab, translated by Thelma D. Sullivan; *Warrior for Gringostroika*, Guillermo Gomez-Pena; *Cultures of Habitat*, Gary Paul Nabhan; *Dreamtime*, Hans Peter Duerr, translated by Felicitas Goodman; *Storytelling: Process and Practice*, Norma J. Livo, Sandra A. Rietz; *The Singer of Tales*, Albert B. Lord; *Inside a Magical Lodge: Group Ritual in the Western Tradition*, John Michael Greer

Chapter 2: About the AODA

The AODA is an all-volunteer order—those who are serving in any leadership capacity have no financial compensation or financial stake in the AODA. AODA is registered as a Religious Non-Profit in the United States of America, and the Grand Grove Archdruids serve as its board of directors. AODA makes a number of regular contributions to non-profit organizations that help preserve and protect the earth: The United Plant Savers, The Xerces Society, The Audubon Society, and The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, among others.

This section provides an overview of the Ancient Order of Druids in America—how it is structured, the groups, and general organizational information.

Key AODA Groups and Information

The AODA offers interactive forums, including special areas for Candidates, Apprentices, Companions, and Adepts at: <http://forum.aoda.org>

The AODA has a website at: www.aoda.org

The AODA has a Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AODADruidry/>

The AODA also has a listing of public and private Home Circles, Study Groups, and Groves—these are groups of people who come together to study and practice druidry. You can view our current list here: http://aoda.org/Study_Groups_Groves.html

AODA Designations

The AODA has four kinds of members—these members represent how far a person has worked through the Order's curriculum. Note that it is not necessary to work through any of the AODA's curriculum (although we highly encourage it); once you are accepted for membership, you have a lifetime membership in the AODA and will receive benefits as such.

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Candidates: Candidates are those in their first year of study with the AODA or who have chosen not to pursue formal study in the AODA and simply remain as members. Most Candidates are people who are working on their first degree, the degree of Druid Ovate, or Bardic Apprentice. For some, the Candidate year takes a single year—but for others it might take much longer. We encourage you to take as much time as necessary to work through your candidate curriculum and gain the deep insights it provides. Those with prior experience in druidry or other earth-based paths may find themselves able to work through the curriculum at a different pace than those who are coming to druidry for the first time. Candidates wear white robes¹ with a yellow cord belt at official AODA grove events.

Apprentices: Individuals who have completed the first degree of study with the AODA and have earned the degree of Druid Ovate, or Bardic Apprentice. Some Druid Apprentices choose to continue working toward their second degree, the degree of Druid Companion. Druid apprentices wear white robes with a red cord belt at official AODA events.

Companions: Individuals who have completed at least two additional years of study in the AODA's curriculum and who have completed their second degree. This earns them the title of Druid, Ovate, or Bardic Companion within the order. Druid companions may hold a Study Group charter within the AODA and perform initiations of Candidates and Apprentices in the AODA. Companions wear white robes with a blue cord belt.

Adepts: Individuals who have completed all three degrees in the AODA are honored with the title “Adept.” These are individuals who have completed at least six years (often more) of dedicated study, have designed and completed an original third degree project in a bardic, ovate, or druid path (earning them the title Druid Adept, Ovate Adept, or Bard Adept), and have embraced the core of AODA’s practices as a substantial part of

1. White robes are traditional within druidry; one of the few surviving rituals from the Ancient Druids included druids in white robes harvesting mistletoe from an oak tree. However, given the connections of white robes with certain racist groups in the United States, we recognize that not all druids are comfortable wearing white. In AODA, members may opt to add additional colors (tabards, sashes, and so on) to their white robes or choose a robe of a different color. For us, the belt color is the key to identifying members of the AODA.



Chapter 2: About the AODA

their spiritual path. Adepts can initiate Candidates, Apprentices, and Companions and also can hold an AODA Grove Charter. Adepts wear white robes and a green cord belt.

Druid Ollaves: Those who have completed initiations into all three branches of study as an Adept (Druid, Bard, and Ovate) are given the additional title of Ollave. Ollaves wear a purple cord belt.

The Grand Grove

The AODA Grand Grove has four Archdruids and three Appointed Officers. The Grand Grove oversees the Order, charters Study Groups and Groves, manages the curriculum, and preserves the teachings and traditions of the order. New Archdruids are selected from among the Adepts in the order by the current Archdruids and are voted onto the Grand Grove by the other Archdruids. Appointed Officers can be of any rank, and they are those who have shown leadership and a capacity to serve the order and are voted upon by the Archdruids. Duties for each of the positions are determined by the Grand Archdruid, and so, the positions and duties may rotate as our leadership changes. We also have a number of other volunteers who contribute to the order in various ways.

The Grand Grove consists of the following officers:

- The Grand Archdruid (Archdruid of Earth): The Head of the Ancient Order of Druids in America
- The Archdruid of Water
- The Archdruid of Fire
- The Archdruid of Air
- The Grand Pendragon (Appointed Officer)
- The Grand Almoner (Appointed Officer)
- The Grand Herald (Appointed Officer)

Archdruids wear white robes and white cord belts at official AODA grove events.

Appointed Officers wear white robes and orange cord belts at AODA grove events. Additional positions and offices are created by the Grand Grove as needed.

AODA's Groves and Groups

Many AODA members prefer to work in a solitary form, while others prefer the companionship of other druids. The AODA offers three kinds of groups for its members:

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Home Circles: Home circles are informal groups where AODA members and friends come together to learn more about the bardic, ovate, and druid arts. We have a full guide for the Home Circle groups currently in development. Any member of the AODA, regardless of standing, can form and lead a home circle, and for those who feel called to offer space for community and mutual growth, we strongly encourage it.

Study Groups: Study Groups are an officially chartered group with the AODA, led by Companions in the AODA. As such, study groups can initiate Candidates and Apprentices into the order.

Groves: AODA Groves are officially chartered groups led by an Adept. As such, Groves can initiate Companions, Candidates, and Apprentices into the order and offer advanced mentoring and support for members.

Ordination and the Gnostic Celtic Church

The AODA also offers an ordination program through the Gnostic Celtic Church, which is a branch of the AODA. The GCC functions as the center of the religious dimension of the AODA tradition, and is responsible for the education and ordination of Druid clergy in AODA, through which it offers a separate curriculum. This program is available for those members who have completed the degree of Apprentice and higher. Visit the AODA website for more information.

A Brief History of the AODA

Founded in 1912 as the American branch of the Ancient and Archaeological Order of Druids, AODA is a traditional Druid order rooted in the Druid Revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, offering an opportunity for modern people to experience the teachings and practices of Druidry in today's world. We don't claim direct descent from the original Druids—the priestly caste of ancient Britain, Ireland, and Gaul, which went extinct around 1,200 years ago—and to be honest, we're skeptical of any group that does make that claim. Instead, like other modern Druid groups, the AODA evolved out of a 300-year-old movement, the Druid Revival, that found the fragmentary legacy of the ancient Druids a powerful source of inspiration and insight and drew on a wide range of sources in shaping a nature spirituality to meet the challenges of today. More on the AODA's history can be found here: http://aoda.org/AODA_History.html

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Trilithon

The official publication of the AODA is *Trilithon: The Journal of the Ancient Order of Druids in America*. We publish *Trilithon* once a year at the Summer Solstice. *Trilithon* features articles from AODA members and friends of the AODA as well as interviews and reproductions of hard-to-find druid revival material. We very much welcome new members to contribute articles and insights to *Trilithon*. Back issues of *Trilithon* are released as PDF after two years. You can download and/or order paper copies of issues at the following URL: <http://aoda.org/publications/issues.html>. Any AODA members and friends may submit articles to *Trilithon* at any time.

Newsletter

The AODA also offers a newsletter for all members via email. The newsletter is released on the Solstices and Equinoxes and offers news, updates, meditations, and more. You are automatically signed up for the newsletter when you join the AODA.

Chapter 3: The AODA First Degree Curriculum

This chapter offers a full description of the AODA's first degree curriculum, the curriculum that you can choose to pursue as a candidate in the AODA. The following chapters will provide additional discussion and insight on the curriculum as you begin to work through your candidate year.

The following requirements have been established by the Grand Grove for advancement to the First Degree of AODA, the Degree of Apprentice.

The Earth Path

1. At least once each week during your Candidate year, spend fifteen minutes or more in direct contact with the natural world. This may be in a wild place (such as a forest or a seashore), in a place recovered by nature (such as an overgrown vacant lot), or in a place created by humanity and nature together (such as a garden or a park). Part of your time in nature should be spent in the practice of stillness, which simply involves sitting, keeping your mind empty of thoughts and distractions, and being wordlessly aware of everything around you. Part should be spent in the practice of focus, which involves detailed attention to some specific thing – a tide pool, a wild plant, the living things in a six-inch-square patch of grass, or the like.

2. Read at least nine books on the natural history of the local ecological region in which you live, learning about the living things, the natural ecosystems and biotic communities, the patterns of weather and water, and the natural transformations of the land over time. Relate as much of this information as possible to your own experiences of nature. (Please note: the point of this requirement is to learn about your local ecological region itself, the land, its biomes, and the nonhuman living things that inhabit it. Books on general ecology or environmental science, without a

Chapter 3: The AODA First Degree Curriculum

specific focus on either the local ecological region in which you live or a slightly larger area which includes your local region, don't satisfy the requirement; neither do books about human peoples and cultures, or books about human impact on the environment.) For most people, your local ecological region will extend no more than 100 miles from your home, and may extend a shorter distance; any major ecological shift (woodland to prairie, mountains to plain, desert to grassland, hardwood forest to softwood forest, etc.) marks the end of your local region.

3. Make three changes in your lifestyle in order to take less from the Earth and give more back, and maintain those changes through your Candidate year. Different people lead different lives, and a change that would be easy for one might be difficult or impossible for another; Druidry also affirms the need of individuals to make their own choices, so the choice of changes to make is left up to each candidate. Whatever you choose should be something you're willing to keep doing for an entire year; a small change you can sustain is better than a larger one that proves unworkable.

Some things that would meet the requirements of the Earth Path include buying locally grown organic food, even when it costs more; using public transit, bicycling, or walking to work, every day or at regular intervals, instead of driving; decreasing your household energy use by, for instance, replacing an electric appliance with a hand-powered one; replacing toxic cleaning or yard products with ecologically safe ones; composting your kitchen scraps and yard waste; and so on. Donations and the like supporting political or environmental advocacy organizations do not qualify. The Earth Path requires you to change your own life, rather than trying to make other people change theirs.

4. Plant at least one tree during your Candidate year, and water and tend it until it is well established. Should you be unable to plant a tree outside, please contact the Grand Grove for permission to plant and tend an indoor tree of some kind, such as a bonsai.

The Sun Path

During your Candidate year, celebrate a cycle of Druid holy days. In the AODA the two solstices (approximately December 21 and June 21 each year) and the two equinoxes (approximately March 20 and September 23 each year) are traditionally celebrated and should be a part of your Druid calendar. Many members of the AODA



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also celebrate the “cross quarter days” of Imbolc (February 2), Belteinne (May 1), Lughnasadh (August 1), and Samhuinn (November 1), while others choose different days based on their own spiritual and cultural interests. You are free to do either of these, or to celebrate the solstices and equinoxes alone.

The holy days may be celebrated alone or with others, using a ritual you create yourself or one drawn from other sources. Participation in community celebrations qualifies, so long as your role in the celebration is not simply that of a spectator. Write a detailed account of each celebration in your Druid journal, and write at least nine pages on the place of seasonal celebrations in your own Druid path and in the Druid tradition in general.

The Moon Path

Practice some form of meditation regularly during your Candidate year. While any form of meditation that involves focusing and directing the attention will qualify, the particular method taught in *The Druidry Handbook*, which is called “discursive meditation,” is particularly recommended. While many people who are new to meditation need to work up to daily practice, daily meditation should be part of your life by the end of your Candidate year. In addition, the Sphere of Protection ritual should be learned and practiced daily during your Candidate year. See Chapter 7 for more information.

Ovate, Bardic, or Druid Exploration

The work of our Order has three branches, reflecting the threefold division of the ancient Celtic Druids. Ovate work in the AODA engages with the natural and earth sciences, so that we better understand the world that we revere and the systems of the earth that we seek to strengthen. Bardic work in the AODA is about creative and skilled expression, rather than mass production or mindless making and consumption. Druid study in the AODA includes the knowledge and practices that engage with the more inward, esoteric, and transcendent aspects of our consciousness such as religious practice, spirituality, and mysticism. (See Chapter 8 for more detailed information about the three branches.)

In the First Degree, we require simply that you choose and carry out an activity that introduces you to some aspect of one of these three branches that you do not already know or practice.

Chapter 3: The AODA First Degree Curriculum

Examples of activities that qualify as Explorations for the First Degree include the following:

- Taking a series of classes on a relevant subject, such as painting or bird identification
- Doing volunteer work in a relevant field, such as habitat restoration or arts therapy
- Designing and carrying out a personal course of study in a relevant area
- Enrolling in a correspondence course that fits into one of the three branches and completing it satisfactorily

If you have any questions about the appropriateness of an activity as an Exploration, please contact the Grand Grove with the details. Your Exploration should involve at least 20 hours of work on your part in a single subject, and it must be in a subject that is new to you. If you are already a guitar player, for example, taking further classes in playing the guitar will not count as an Exploration, nor will taking up another stringed instrument. On the other hand, taking a class in a radically different musical instrument, such as the clarinet or the bagpipe, would qualify; equally, taking a class in painting or poetry would qualify. The point of this requirement is to encourage you to expand your horizons.

Your choice of an Exploration in the First Degree does not limit your choice of a direction in the Second—thus you can do a Bardic Exploration in the First Degree, for example, and go on to become an Ovate or Druid Companion in the Second. Your choice of an Exploration will, however, determine your title as an Apprentice, for you will be initiated as either an Ovate Apprentice, a Bard Apprentice, or a Druid Apprentice. You may, if you wish, do an Exploration in more than one branch of our Order, and receive more than one title at your Apprentice initiation.

Your Druid Notebook

During your Candidate year, you should keep a running account of the work you do in each of the three Paths and your Ovate, Bard, or Druid Exploration. The notebook may be kept in any form or medium from a three ring binder, through a handmade and handbound book, to a computer file. The notebook is entirely for your own use, and you will not be expected to show it in its entirety to anyone else, but you will need to copy down material from it in order to pass the examination at the end of your Candidate year, and you will find that the more complete you make your notebook, the more valuable of a resource it will be to you later in your Druid path.



Chapter 4: The Earth Path

Lifestyle Changes: The Metaphor of the Mountain

Many of our members find their way to druidry because they are looking for a deeper connection with nature and a way to begin to live a life that allows them to tread more lightly upon the living earth. Our curriculum is in line with this ideal, as it asks members to make and maintain three lifestyle changes.

One of the ways to consider lifestyle changes is like climbing a mountain. We are all starting from somewhere, and for many of us, that somewhere is the product of living in a culture that has disconnected itself from the living earth. Currently, culturally speaking in North America, many of the systems in place for everyday living actively or passively damage the earth's ecosystems. The amount of work that we need to do individually and culturally to mitigate this damage seems enormous—and it is, on a cultural level. This is, so to speak, the mountain itself.

Mountains are never climbed in a single day. Mountain climbing takes preparation, planning, and most of all, time. This is why we ask you to choose and *sustain* three changes—these are the paths up the mountain. Keep this in mind as you begin your earth path changes. It is also easier to climb a mountain with a group than on one's own. Your three changes are combined with the changes of the 1000+ other AODA members from the Americas and beyond.

Tree Planting

We ask that you plant at least one tree during your Candidate year and tend it until it is grown. Some members have difficulty with this requirement due to the lack of owning their own land and/or affording to purchase a tree to plant. We recommend the following suggestions:

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- Speak to friends and family who own their own land. See if they are willing to have you plant a tree and tend it until it is grown.
- Ask if a tree would be appropriate at a local business, community park, or other public space.
- Attend a tree planting day and continue to return to tend the tree after it is planted.
- The Arbor Day foundation offers free trees and also allows you to select very low cost trees. These are very suitable trees and many of our members have had success with them. Often, in the US, State Extension offices may also know where you can get local trees for free or at a reduced cost for planting or to request permission for an indoor tree.

Before planting your tree, we suggest reviewing the tree planting guidelines found at the Arbor Day foundation: <https://www.arborday.org/trees/planting/>. If you are still having difficulty, feel free to contact the Grand Grove at info@aoda.org for more assistance.

We also recommend that readers explore Appendix D for an AODA Tree Planting ritual to use when you plant your tree.

Finding Nine Books on Nature

You are asked to find and read nine books on the natural history or local ecology of your region. This requirement can sometimes present difficulty for candidates when they begin to seek out books on their local bioregion. We recommend the following sources to explore potential options:

- Your local library will often carry many books that are specific to your bioregion. If they do not have them, the library can use a process called “inter-library loan” to borrow a book from a different library for you. This is usually free to library patrons.
- Local used bookstores are good places to look for books on natural history and ecology.
- Google Books and Project Gutenberg offer many free books in digital format that are out of copyright. Older guides can be found on many topics, and this information is often still quite up to date.
- In the USA, your local State Extension office often has one or more experts who can tell you more about resources for learning your bioregion.

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- Local historical tourist attractions may seem a bit of an odd choice to find books, but these often carry a number of books relevant to the history in which they promote and often will include flora and fauna guides.

You can also search online retailers for appropriate books. Consider the search terms that you use when searching for books: you might need to broaden your terms (while Cambria County, PA local ecology does not return any results, specifying “Northern Appalachian Mountain Ecology” and “Laurel Highland Region” does).

We suggest that in order to make the most of your nine books, you read them and then directly apply them to your time spent in nature. That is, there is more value in connecting these two aspects of the earth path than in isolating gaining knowledge with direct experience.

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The Sun Path Symbolism

The following is an introduction to the core symbolism of the AODA; this will be helpful to you as you learn the Sphere of Protection (see Chapter 7) and work on your path as a druid working within the AODA tradition.

Awen

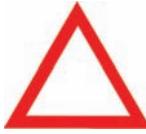
One of the central concepts in Revival Druidry is “Awen” (pronounced A-wen; chanted in our rituals as Ah-Oh-En). The Awen is the symbol of the AODA (represented in the three rays of light with the elements surrounding the circle.) In the ancient traditions, this Awen was the divine inspiration that bards or poets would draw upon in order to create and perform masterpieces of poetry and song. In modern Druidry, we work to embrace Awen and cultivate our creative gifts in many different areas of our lives. In this way, the most simple definition of Awen is that it is the inner light of inspiration. For an extended discussion of Awen and its role in the Druid Tradition, please see John Michael Greer’s *Druidry Handbook*.



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Directions, Colors, and Animals of the AODA

The AODA works with the following associations in our rituals and symbolism. Given their own paths, AODA members may find it appropriate to develop their own correspondences in addition to the ones given.

Symbol	Element	Direction	Time of Year	Moon Phase	Color	Sacred Animal
	Air	East	Spring (Equinox)	Waxing Moon	Yellow	The Hawk of May soaring in the heights of the morning air
	Fire	South	Summer (Solstice)	Full Moon	Red	The White Stag in the heat of the Summer Greenwood
	Water	West	Fall (Equinox)	Waining Moon	Blue	The Salmon of Wisdom who dwells in the sacred pool
	Earth	North	Winter (Solstice)	New/Dark Moon	Green	The Great Bear of the Starry Heavens

The Three Currents

Most of the world's spiritual traditions include the concept of a life force or subtle energy that is present in all things and gives them life and power. In the Welsh folk traditions from which the Druid Revival drew much of its lore, which is one of the currents upon which the AODA draws, the term for this force is nwyfre (pronounced NOO-iv-ruh). While nwyfre is everywhere, it may be accessed most readily by way of certain currents or flows that are related to familiar natural phenomena. The two primary currents of nwyfre in AODA grove work, and in the AODA system generally, are the solar and telluric currents.

The solar current has its source in the sun and descends from above. It flows wherever light from the sky can reach, and even penetrates a short distance down into

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the soil. The other planets of the solar system reflect the solar current to earth just as they reflect the sun's light, and their cycles shape the flow of the solar current in ways that can be tracked by astrology and other magical traditions of time. The solar current's traditional symbols in myth and legend are birds such as the eagle, the hawk, and the heron. Magical writings sometimes call it aud or od, and in alchemy it is the Sun. Its primary symbol in Druid lore is the circle, representing the sun's orb, and it relates to the ray of Spirit Above. It is symbolically masculine, and its color is gold.

The telluric current takes its name from Tellus, an old name for the earth, and rises from below. It takes its form and character from the landscape the way the solar current takes its character from the turning planets; it is thus defined by space rather than time. The serpent and the dragon are the most common symbols of the telluric current in myth and legend. Its names in occult lore include the secret fire, the dragon current, and aub or ob, and in alchemy it is Mercury. Its primary symbol in Druid lore is the triangle, representing its fiery and transforming nature, and it relates to the ray of Spirit Below. It is symbolically feminine, and its color is green.

In the AODA seasonal rituals and Sphere of Protection, the solar and telluric currents are imagined respectively as descending from a point far above the altar and ascending from a point far below the altar. When they are brought into contact in the right way, they fuse and form a third current, which becomes the core energy of the seasonal rituals, Sphere of Protection, and the ceremonies of initiation.

This third current is called the lunar current. Unlike the solar and telluric currents, the lunar current does not exist naturally; it has to be made, out of the balanced fusion of the solar and telluric currents. The lunar current is called aur and or in occult writings. Its primary symbol in magical lore is the crescent moon, and its mythic symbols include the egg, the jewel, the sacred cup, and the child. It mediates between solar and telluric currents in the same way that the moon mediates between sun and earth. Its color is white.

With the formation of the lunar current at the center of the grove, upon the top of the altar, the energies of the grove take on their full sevenfold pattern: the four material elements at the four quarters, the solar and telluric currents above and below, and the lunar current at the center. Regular individual practice of the Sphere of Protection is, therefore, critical to assisting you in developing your ability to work



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with these currents in a number of ways—and as you go through your studies, you will discover and be given new ways to work with these three currents!

The fusion of the solar and telluric currents that gives rise to the lunar current may only be performed in a place of balance. It is for this reason that the four elements and their powers are awakened first in the grove opening ceremony, and the three currents worked thereafter. This is also the reason why the grove closing ceremony includes a specific phase in which the powers of the elements are thanked and allowed to withdraw, but there is nothing equivalent for the three currents. The solar and telluric currents are always present, while the lunar current ceases to be present as soon as the stabilizing forces of the elements are withdrawn.

The Three Druid Elements

In addition to the four-fold elemental system, AODA also recognizes the three druid element system from the Druid Revival. These three terms use Welsh words and pronunciations (like many other things coming out of Revival Druidry). They do not cleanly map onto the four elements, rather, they are an alternative elemental system that emphasizes different properties of the world. They are three archetypes, three ways of representing the inner and outer worlds of our experience. For more information about the three elements, see *The Druidry Handbook*.

Nwyfre (NOOiv-ruh): This first druid element is represents the life force and consciousness within each living being. It is associated with the sky and the heavens; it represents the spirit of things; the mind. The term means “sky” or “heaven” in the Welsh language. When we chant “AWEN” we are invoking nwyfre, the spark of life.

Gwyar (GOO-yar) – This druid element represents the principle of flow, of movement, and of change. It is associated with the energy of the water (although is not limited to it); it represents the change that is inherent in all living things. The term means “flow” or “fluidity” in the Welsh language and we can refer to it as energy flows (in physical manifestation) of all kinds.

Calas (CAH-lass) – The final druid element is Calas, representing solidity or substance. Calas is that which is the physical manifestation of things within the world: their form, their substance, and their features that help distinguish them. This is the Welsh word for “hard” or “stability.”

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AODA's Seasonal Celebrations and Holy Days

AODA recognizes the solstices and equinoxes as druid holy days, and asks that AODA members celebrate them in some way. Please note that the only requirement is that you celebrate the ceremonies, not that you celebrate the ceremonies provided. Included in this guide are four seasonal celebrations that work specifically with the three currents of energy, primary foci of AODA's ritual work (see more on these currents in this chapter; see ceremonies in Appendix C). These ceremonies are particularly useful for healing and blessing our earth. A more neopagan-focused set of ceremonies, also appropriate for AODA work, can be found in the *Druidry Handbook*. For ceremonies in group format, see the *Druid Grove Handbook*.

The Druid Revival from its start had focused its seasonal cycle on the solstices and equinoxes—the Alban Gates, as these were called, borrowing the term from the old Welsh names for these festivals. People who come to AODA nowadays out of the current Pagan scene tend to ask why the four “cross quarter” days—Imbolc, Beltane, Lammas, and Samhain—are not included in the AODA’s calendar. The answer is simple: these were not celebrated at the time the AODA was formed in 1912. The eightfold year did not exist before the early 1950s, when Ross Nichols of the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids and Gerald Gardner, the founder of modern Wicca, assembled it out of two earlier calendars. Because AODA predates this assemblage, we officially recognize the solstices and equinoxes, although many of our members choose to celebrate the cross quarter days. However, Druids drawing upon other spiritual traditions in addition to their druid practice (Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Neopaganism, etc.) may choose to add holidays to their practice as they see fit. We encourage all members to choose additional celebration dates based on their own personal belief system.

According to an archaic astrology, still preserved in occult traditions as well as other traditions from around the globe, the solstices and equinoxes are gates through which celestial energies descend to Earth. Rituals performed at these times can draw on these currents of energy and then radiate them outward into the human community and the world as a whole as a blessing. The old belief that the fertility of fields and flocks depends on the proper performance of certain ceremonies at certain times of the year is a relic of this ancient tradition.

The solstices and equinoxes have their special role because they govern the relationship between Sun and Earth. At the equinoxes, the Sun is at the point in Earth’s



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skies where the ecliptic (the apparent path of the Sun against the background of stars) crosses the celestial equator (the projection of Earth's equator into the heavens). This conjunction allows a direct flow of nwyfre to descend from Sun to Earth. The solstices, for their part, are the points at which the Sun's movement along the ecliptic takes it furthest from the celestial equator; it represents the peak of polarity between Sun and Earth; the point in time at which these two powers—and the solar and telluric currents that unfold from them—balance and complement each other most completely.

The four Alban Gates of the Druid Revival, and hence, AODA Druidry, each correspond to one of the four Royal Stars of ancient astrology. The correspondence between gates and stars has changed with the precession of the equinoxes—the slow shift of the ecliptic relative to the celestial equator that takes their points of contact a degree back through the Zodiac every 72 years. The correspondences now used came into effect with the beginning of the Age of Aquarius in 1879, and will remain in effect for 4320 years, until the beginning of the Age of Sagittarius:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| • Alban Eiler (spring equinox) | Fomalhaut |
| • Alban Heruin (summer solstice) | Aldebaran |
| • Alban Elued (autumn equinox) | Regulus |
| • Alban Arthuan (winter solstice) | Antares |

The Druid Altar

The AODA, for its seasonal celebrations presented here and in the *Druid Grove Handbook*, uses a central altar for its workings. A druid's altar is highly personalized space, a space that you can see as a small space set aside in your home or outdoors as a focus for your spiritual life.

Minimally, for our celebrations you will need four bowls for earth (soil or salt), air (incense), fire (a candle), and water (a bowl of water); these are the four basic working elements we invoke in our rituals and in the Sphere of Protection. Symbolic for the AODA also is a sickle (look for one at secondhand or antique malls) and a sprig of mistletoe (the small packets sold for the holidays are perfectly suitable); this symbolism comes from one of the remaining fragments of Ancient Druid ritual discussed by Pliny the Elder in the 1st century AD in his *Natural History*. If you are unable to find mistletoe, or it does not grow in your bioregion, substitute a conifer, like cedar, pine, or juniper). If you can get one, a double-edged, straight sword with a

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sheath is useful (if not, a small knife or no sword at all will do). These are the primary working tools for the AODA Candidate grade. Our rituals will also suggest a color of altar cloth (which can be made from an old bedsheet, piece of fabric, drape, etc.) and other decorations befitting of the season.

The remaining items for your altar are highly personal and entirely dependent on your own path as a druid. Common items may include statuary of animals or deity; natural objects such as stones or wood, images, additional candles, and other small objects, and your colored cord belt.

Your altar can remain up in your home or outdoors permanently and you can use it as a site for your daily meditation and sphere of protection rituals. We recognize that not everyone is able to do this, so the other option is to stow things away in a safe place and set the altar up when you need it.

Druid Ritual

Those completely new to nature spirituality or coming from a non-religious background may question the use and purpose of “ritual” in our tradition. Ritual is as a religious or spiritual ceremony with a set of actions, symbolism, energetics and meaning that is performed. Ritual in some form is present in every human culture; it offers us a way to mark important events, to honor the passage of time, and set aside time from everyday life to focus on the sacred. In the AODA we use ritual to celebrate the passing of time through the solstices and equinoxes, for initiation purposes, and through the daily working of the Sphere of Protection. As you continue your studies in the AODA, you may feel led to develop your own set of druid rituals to supplement those that are offered.

Ritual puts us in a different kind of space, a sacred space. Our grove opening transitions us into this sacred space and our grove closing ritual serves to transition us back. For those new to ritual, many of us aren’t used to awakening that kind of energy. Even after the ritual ends, you may find yourself in an altered state of consciousness, which might include feeling lightheaded, ungrounded, extremely energized or unbalanced after ritual. This is a common occurrence. We suggest eating a hearty meal, which is one of the best ways to “ground” and return to your normal state of consciousness.



Chapter 6: The Moon Path

This chapter covers material related to the moon path's meditation requirement as well as your druid journal. Regular practice of the Sphere of Protection is covered in Chapter seven of this guide.

A Druid Meditation Primer

By John Michael Greer, Grand Archdruid Emeritus, AODA

The approach to meditation that has been part of Druid traditions since early in the Revival echoes other meditation methods in many ways, but there's one significant difference. This lies in the attitudes toward the thinking mind. Most systems of meditation teach the student to stop thinking altogether, by using mantras (special patterns of spoken sound) or symbolic visualizations, or concentrating on thought-stopping paradoxes such as the koans of Zen. This is effective enough as a way to achieve meditative states of consciousness, but too often it has the awkward side effect of producing mystics who can reach profound spiritual states but can't think clearly.

In Druid meditation, by contrast, the more common path is to train and reorient the mind instead of shutting it down. Druidry, like other mystical traditions, has long recognized that reason divorced from reality and from other (and equally valid) forms of human experience is a form of madness. Ever since the time of Pythagoras, though, Western mystics and sages have also recognized that the mind need not be the enemy of the spirit, if it's brought into harmony with itself, with the larger human self of which it forms a part, and with the cosmos as a whole. The rational can be a vehicle for the spiritual: this is the premise (and the promise) of most Western mystical paths, and this approach was adopted into Druidry from the earliest days of the Druid Revival.

Central to this process is the ability to think in a meditative way. Like everything else, this takes practice, and you'll find that the more often you practice meditation,

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the more effectively you can do this; daily practice is essential if you plan on getting good at it.

In this form of meditation, which is called discursive meditation, the thinking process is not stopped but redirected and clarified; thoughts are not abolished but made into a vehicle for the deeper movement of consciousness. This is typically done by focusing the mind on a specific topic, and allowing it to follow out the implications of that topic through a chain of ideas, while at the same time keeping it focused on the topic without straying. By doing this, the meditator gradually transforms thinking from half-random mental chatter into a powerful and focused way of understanding; at the same time, the knowledge that comes out of meditation of this sort can have a good deal of value on its own terms.

The mind of the meditator thus focuses on a previously chosen image or idea, which is called the theme of the meditation. The meditator considers the theme and follows out its implications and consequences, restraining the mind whenever it tries to stray from the theme but giving it free rein to follow the theme as far as it can. Thus this form of meditation has two positive effects. Like every other form of meditation, it teaches mastery of attention and awareness. Unlike most other forms of meditation, it enables the meditator to understand the themes of meditation to a depth that ordinary thinking rarely reaches. Furthermore, many of the myths, symbols and teachings of the Druid tradition are specifically designed to yield up their meaning only to careful, focused attention. Discursive meditation thus becomes a key to the inner dimensions of the Druid path.

Certain preliminaries are valuable. The most important is the selection of a theme. Every aspect of Druid study and practice can provide themes; books worth studying are among the most common sources. Beginners often choose vast sprawling themes and either flounder about in them or skate over the surface, missing the potential depths of the practice. As a general rule, if your theme takes more than a fairly short sentence to describe, it's too large for a single meditation and should be broken up into smaller bits, then recombined later.

Start meditation practice by sitting down on a chair with a plain, cushionless seat. Sit far enough forward on it that your lower back isn't resting against the back of the chair. Your feet should be flat on the floor. Straighten your back without stiffening it, and hold your head upright, without letting it slump forward. Your



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hands rest palm down on your thighs, and your elbows are against your sides. This posture for meditation, unlike the cross-legged positions common in Eastern systems of meditation, doesn't seal your energies off from the rest of the cosmos. This is an important aspect of Druid spiritual practice; as Druids, we are always part of a larger world.

Most people find it useful to meditate in the same place each day, and at the same time of day (or the same point in the daily cycle for those who have variable schedules - right before breakfast, say). If possible, it's best to meditate facing east, to take advantage of currents in the subtle body of the Earth. A clock placed so that you can see it without moving your head completes the setting for meditation practice.

Once you've settled into your position, consciously relax each part of your body, starting with your feet and moving step by step up to the top of your head. Then spend a few minutes paying conscious attention to your breath, breathing in and out slowly, evenly and fully. A traditional breathing exercise called the Fourfold Breath is commonly used here. Breathe slowly in while counting mentally from one to four; hold your breath in, while counting from one to four; breathe out, counting from one to four; and hold the breath out, with the lungs empty, while counting from one to four, and repeat. The counts should all be at the same pace, and the breath should be held in or out with the muscles of the chest and diaphragm, not by closing the throat, which can lead to health problems.

After you've paid attention to your breathing for perhaps five minutes, turn to the theme of the meditation. State the theme silently to yourself in a few words, or visualize it before you in a single image. Keep your mind focused on it for a time, and then start thinking about it, turning it over and over in your mind, exploring its implications and connections. Choose one of these that appeals to you, and follow it out as far as you can. When your thoughts veer from it, as they almost certainly will in the early stages of training, don't simply bring them back to the theme; follow your straying thoughts back to the point where they left the train of thought you were following, and proceed from there. Over time, this will teach your mind to return to your theme as readily as it strays from it.

It's important to set a period of time for the meditation in advance, and stick to that, even if you don't think you're making any progress at all. Five minutes of

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breathing and ten minutes of actual meditation makes a good length of practice session for beginners. When you're done, pay attention to your breathing or practice the Fourfold Breath again for a minute or so to help yourself make the transition back to ordinary awareness.

There are other details of practice, expansions of technique, and additional methods that can be combined with discursive meditation to strengthen its effects and make it applicable to many different forms of spiritual practice, in and out of Druidry. Some of these, and a great deal more on discursive meditation itself, are covered in more detail in *The Druidry Handbook*.

Recommended Reading

Useful books with material on discursive meditation include these:

- John Michael Greer *The Druidry Handbook* (Weiser, 2006).
- Adelaide Gardner *Meditation: A Practical Study* (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1968).
- William G. Gray *Western Inner Workings* (York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1983).
- Manly Palmer Hall *Self-Unfoldment by Disciplines of Realization* (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1942).
- Gareth Knight *Occult Exercises and Practices* (Albuquerque, NM: Sun Chalice, 1998).
- Mouni Sadhu *Concentration: A Guide to Mental Mastery* (No. Hollywood, CA: Wilshire, 1959).
- *Meditation: An Outline for Practical Study* (No. Hollywood, CA: Wilshire, 1967).
- Ernest Wood *Concentration: An Approach to Meditation* (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1949).

On Keeping Your Druid Notebook

We ask that you keep a druid notebook during your candidate year. This notebook serves several purposes, including to document your growth as a druid, to identify key insights, to write your way to understanding, and to offer a method of reflective practice. Your druid notebook is private; we will never ask to see it. However, we will ask you to draw from it extensively during your candidate exam when you finish your candidate year, so please keep this in mind.

The act of keeping a notebook or journal as part of regular spiritual and meditative practice is a common one in the traditions that have influenced the AODA and in



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many spiritual and religious traditions globally. The overall goal of the druid notebook is to engage in reflective activity about your druid practice. Reflection is when you take time to think through, mull over, ruminate, ponder and/or consider the experiences you have had. Reflection is an extremely important part of your own development as a druid. Reflection creates the space where real meaning happens, where we slow down and think about what we just did (instead of going from thing to thing to thing and constantly “doing”). It is the space where we synthesize experience and understanding, and the space where real growth and learning happens. The druid notebook creates space for you to do this critically important work.

Because journaling as a regular activity may be new to you, we have a few suggestions that may help you journal more effectively:

- 1. Consider mixed medium notebooks.** You can write about your experiences, and take notes, but you can add photographs, images, paintings, sketches, and more. Sometimes, a picture helps capture the event or experience in ways that words cannot. Others find that speaking it aloud and recording their experiences, and later transcribing what they have said, is a useful practice for journaling experiences.
- 2. When you write is important to your progress.** If you are meditating, celebrating a druid holy day, engaging in your nature observations, and so forth, you want to write your experiences down as soon as you can (preferably, at the conclusion of the activity). The reason is simple: these practices have you in a different headspace than being in everyday mundane living. As you transition back to mundane living, you’ll find that you quickly lose insights or important details you had when you were immersed in that sacred activity. Keeping the notebook with you, and writing immediately after the experience helps you gain deeper insights.
- 3. Get in the habit of writing.** Try to write (in whatever form) at the end of each druid activity, even if you only journal for 5 or 10 minutes. Eventually, journaling will become a regular part of your practice, a natural part of who you are and how you process your experiences.

The question of what should be included in your druid notebook is also of importance. We require you to write a detailed account of your seasonal celebrations in your journal as part of our study program. Consider your notebook a way to document your journey through this first year. Other things you can include in your journal are:

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- Regular reflections on your understanding of Druidry, who you are as a developing Druid
- Regular reflections on spiritual insights: tracking divinations, energy work, prayer, connections with deity, etc.
- Regular discussions of the results of your discursive meditations (learning meditation, insights from meditations, and so on)
- Your experiences in learning and practicing the SOP, noting particularly how your practices change with time
- Your insights and observations from being in nature
- Your experiences in planting the tree during your Candidate year
- Insights from the nine books on nature
- Your experiences in studying the bardic, ovate, or druid arts

Chapter 7: Learning the Sphere of Protection

The Sphere of Protection (SOP) is one of the key daily practices of the AODA, and in many ways, forms not only the core of our work but also the connection to some of the AODA's deepest mysteries. The SOP is the oldest part of our tradition. Common in various esoteric circles and religious philosophy is the idea that a daily protective and energetic working is an important part of one's spiritual development. The SOP is also used in both the AODA's solitary grove opening and standard grove opening rituals.

The SOP was created in the 1970s by Archdruid Dr. John Gilbert, using material drawn from several older AODA rituals. The Sphere has three phases: an opening, a closing, and a middle section in which the core work is done. The opening is called the Elemental Cross, the middle section is the Calling of the Elements, and the closing is the Sphere of Light. The process of learning the Sphere of Protection involves a certain degree of complexity, because each person who learns and practices it is expected to enrich it with personally relevant symbolism.

There are many reasons to perform the SOP, and some you will discover for yourself as you go along, and some of which will be revealed to you in higher degrees. What this practice is, and what it does for you, can be framed in a number of ways (and as a non-dogmatic order, we encourage you to choose a theory of this practice that fits your own path):

- As an energetic practice for invoking and banishing energy
- As a practice aligning with the universal archetypes, energies, or deity
- As a daily balancing ritual
- An energizing practice
- As a focus and movement practice
- As a daily ritual
- A way to protect or empower ritual or creative working space

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In the most basic sense, as we go through life each day, we pick up a lot of etheric crud—think about when you've witnessed something you didn't want to see, when you have experienced a trauma, when you are really stressed about work, and so on—this crud gets on us and weighs us down. This obscures the light of our souls, our gifts to the world, our ability to create and engage in the bardic arts, and to be whole and actualized people. What the daily Sphere Of Protection helps do, each day, is clear us and protect us from the worst of the crud. Consider it like your energetic buffer for the day.

With all of this said, however, right now, how you conceive of this ritual isn't important at this stage in your path in Druidry. What is important is that you learn this ritual well and practice it daily.

Brief Overview of the SOP

In order to discuss the ritual and introduce it to you, the following is a very brief overview (before going into the detailed instructions and images). The SOP ritual has three main parts: the Elemental Cross, the Invocation of the Gates, and the Circulation of Light. The SOP also includes four kinds of actions: visualization, energetic work, verbal phrases, and physical movement. First, the Druid begins by invoking the elements or deity and physically and energetically forming an Elemental Cross. Second, the Druid invokes the four elemental gateways by invoking positive qualities of the four elemental energies (Air, Fire, Water, Earth) and banishing the negative qualities of those elements. The positive aspects are those which nourish and enrich the Druid and others while the negative aspects are those which are considered to be harmful to the Druid or others. For example, for the element of air, positive qualities include focus, clarity, justice, reason, learning, and clear articulation of ideas, while negative qualities might be pride, aloofness, anger, or detachment. The element of fire might include the positive qualities of passion, determination, inspiration, and creativity, while negative qualities might involve intensity, ego, or rashness. The element of water might include the positive qualities of intuition, compassion, empathy, and being in tune with one's own heart, while the negative qualities might involve emotional volatility, irritability, and oversensitivity. The positive qualities of earth might include steadfastness, never giving in, and staying the course, while the negative qualities might include stubbornness and not letting go. These examples are only some, of many, qualities of the elements that you can work with as you practice and learn the SOP.



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The Druid then invokes the remaining three gateways: the telluric current (Spirit Below), the solar current (Spirit Above), and the lunar current (Spirit Within) using language, action, and visualization. The final part of the SOP draws upon these seven energies and circulates light in a protective sphere. This protective sphere is most typically placed around a person or a sacred grove in order to do ritual work, but it can have many other uses, some of which will be revealed to you in later degrees.

While this seems like a lot, the SOP is a ritual of repeated patterns and can be performed with effect in less than five minutes once it is learned. The key is in learning it and making it a natural part of your path.

The SOP as a Template

The important thing to understand about how the AODA teaches the Sphere of Protection ritual is that we teach a template of the ritual that can then be adapted to each individual druid's circumstances and practices. In this guide, we present the full version of the ritual as well as the basic instructions for learning the ritual and symbolism. To learn the ritual, we suggest reading through the full sample and then the full set of learning instructions (see Appendix A for Full Sample Ritual). Then, begin by doing each step of the ritual (taking a week on each of the steps) until you put the full ritual together. We recommend that you start by learning the full version of the ritual presented here, in *The Druidry Handbook*, *The Druid Magic Handbook*, or the *AODA Grove Manual*, and then adapt it after you've learned it.

Learning the Sphere of Protection

Although the SOP can appear simple enough to perform once learned, it is a powerful practice that requires time and practice to master. Part of this is because the sphere of protection works with four distinct types of activities:

Movement: Movement of the physical body during the ritual.

Visualization: Visualization in your mind's eye aspects of this ritual, specifically, symbols, light, and the sphere of energy. Visualization is a skill that takes time and practice to perfect, like any other skill.

Auditory: Parts of the ritual spoken aloud, said in a firm voice.

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Energetic: Ultimately, you are working with the subtle flows of the energies of the earth (telluric) and heavens (solar) and elements (earth, air, fire, and water) when you perform this ritual. Sensing these, and working with them, are part of the long-term and benefit of the SOP.

Two Ways to Learn the SOP

There are two ways you can learn the SOP. One way, which has been covered extensively by Grand Archdruid Emeritus John Michael Greer in *The Druidry Handbook* and in *The Druid Magic Handbook*, is to learn the SOP piece by piece, spending time first learning the elemental cross, then adding in the invocation and banishing of the four elements and spirit above, below, and within, finally circulating the sphere of light. The pieces are learned together (with visualization, auditory elements, movement) one at a time before moving on. This method works for most people who learn it, and we would strongly suggest that you begin by reading the sections in *The Druidry Handbook* and *The Druid Magic Handbook* and using that to learn the SOP.

The second method of learning the SOP is not sequential but based on breaking it down by the four distinct activities that the SOP includes. It is this method that is presented here as an alternative to material presented in *The Druidry Handbook* and *The Druid Magic Handbook*.

Using this Guide

Learning the Sphere of Protection based on activity begins with the set of movements. Movements can eventually be part of our muscle memory.

To use this method of learning the SOP, we suggest the following order: Learn the movements first, until they flow with good effect. Once you have mastered the movements and have practiced them daily for a few weeks, add in the auditory elements for each of the movements. Again, practice them for a few weeks, and commit them to memory. Finally, once you feel confident in the movements and the auditory elements, add in the visualizations. Eventually, you will do all of the steps in a cohesive movement approach (typically tracing the symbol while saying the words, then adding visualizations). Note that some people have difficulty with visualizations; we provide alternatives to visualization later in this chapter.

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The SOP is used both as a daily practice and as part of our AODA grove opening. This guide is designed to help you learn the SOP as a daily practice (with some notes for how to slightly adapt it for grove practice).

The Sphere Of Protection Step by Step

Part I: The Elemental Cross, Step 1



Movement: First, the Druid begins by standing with her arms out at her sides, facing east (as a daily practice). In a grove ritual, the Druid would instead stand in the north facing south.

Visualization: Imagine the Sun standing at zenith high above your head, and an equivalent sphere of silver-green fire, which the heart of the Earth, far below your feet. Be aware of yourself standing between these two spheres.



The Elemental Cross, Step 2



Movement: Druid brings both arms up from the sides in an arc, palms join above the head before drawing them down together to touch the point between the eyebrows.

Auditory: “By the sky above me.”

Visualization: Druid imagines a ray of light descending from the Sun with the movement to form a sphere of golden light within his/her head.



The Elemental Cross, Step 3



Movement: Druid draws the joined palms down to touch the point of the solar plexus.

Auditory: “By the earth beneath me.”

Visualization: Imagine the ray of light descending from the head to forming a second sphere of golden light at the solar plexus, then continuing through and beyond him/her until it reaches the sphere of green-gold fire in the heart of the Earth.

The Elemental Cross, Step 4



Movement: Druid leaves left hand where it is and pivots right arm outwards at the elbow, so that the right arm ends up angling down and outwards in a straight line from the shoulder, turning the head and facing right.

Auditory: “By the fire at my right hand”

Visualization: Imagine a ray of light shooting out from the sphere of light at your solar plexus into infinite distance to the right.



The Elemental Cross, Step 5



Movement: Druid repeats the same gesture with the left hand, so that both arms now slope down and outward from the shoulders, turning the head and facing left.

Auditory: “By waters at my left hand”

Visualization: Imagine a ray of light shooting out from the sphere of light at the solar plexus into infinite distance to the left.

The Elemental Cross, Step 6



Movement: Druid crosses arms across chest, right over left, turning the head and facing forward.

Auditory: “May the powers of Nature bless and protect me/this grove, this day and always.”

Visualization: Imagine twin rays of light shooting out from the sphere of light at the solar plexus, in front and behind him/her, into infinite distance (for all of the rays, see graphic below).¹

¹ If the elemental cross is being performed without the rest of the SOP, the druid would circulate light around him/herself at this point. This is described in more detail in the Druidry Handbook and on page 71 of this guide.



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The Elemental Cross, Step 7



Movement: Druid lowers both arms while chanting.

Auditory: “Ah-Oh-En.”

Visualization: None.

Pause before beginning the calling of the elements



Part II: The Calling of the Elements

Please note, that each of these calls has multiple steps. You will notice, however, that the patterns replicate and are quite similar for each of the four elements. Once you have learned the first pattern, the remaining elements are more simple to enact.

We have provided visualizations, however, for calling of the elements, you may choose instead to simply observe the elements around you (which is particularly useful if you are near a window and/or in a natural setting). This is highly encouraged as part of your regular Druid practice.

In all of the symbols below, the symbol is typically traced with visualization and then the words are spoken.

Calling of Air



First Movement: Druid faces East or goes to the eastern quarter of the Grove. Druid traces the symbol of the element of Air in front of him/her.

First Visualization: Imagine the air symbol drawn in bright yellow light and the circle filled with a paler and transparent yellow.

First Auditory: “By the yellow gate of the rushing winds, the birch of new beginnings, and the hawk of May in the heights of morning, I call upon the Air. (Pause) May I receive the blessings of Air this day.”

Second Visualization: Imagine a scene beyond the symbol corresponding to the symbolism of the east—for example, a spring meadow at daybreak with the Sun rising, a fresh wind blowing toward you with the scent of grass and flowers, great billowing clouds in the distance with their edges turned golden by the Sun’s rays, etc.

Second Auditory: “I thank the Air for its gifts.”



Banishing of Air

Movement: Druid traces the air symbol again, but the circle now counterclockwise from the uppermost point, then draws the line upwards.

Auditory: “And with the help of the powers of Air, I banish from within and around me all harmful and disturbing influences and every imbalance of the nature of Air. I banish these things far from this place.”

Visualization: Druid imagines all unbalanced manifestations and influences blowing with the wind and dissolving like mist on the vastness of Air.



Calling of Fire



First Movement: Druid faces South or goes to the southern quarter of the Grove. Druid traces the symbol of the element of Fire in front of him/her.

First Visualization: Druid imagines the symbol drawn in bright red light and filled with a paler and transparent red.

First Auditory: By the red gate of the bright flames, the fire of the cedar, and the white stag of the summer greenwood, I call upon the fire. (Pause) May I receive the blessings of fire this day.”

responding to the symbolism of the south—for example, a desert like those in the American southwest at noon on a summer’s day, with red rock mesas in the middle distance and reddish sand close by, the sun blazing down overhead, the heat making the air shimmer and radiating toward you; a sweltering summer day, and so on.

Second Auditory: “I thank the Fire for its gifts”



Banishing of Fire

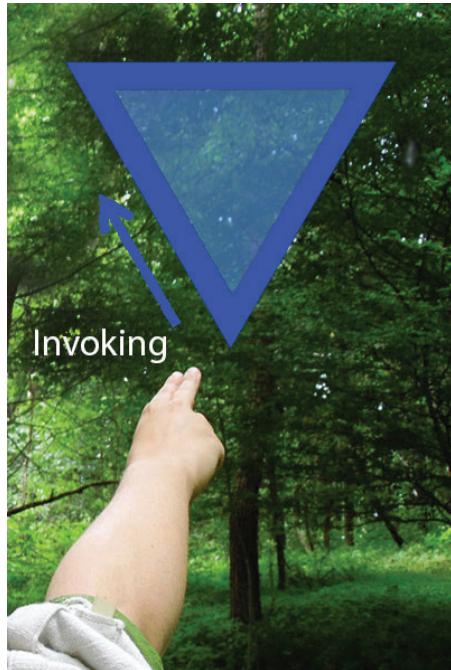
Movement: Druid traces the same symbol again, but the triangle now faces counterclockwise from the uppermost point.

Auditory: “And with the help of the powers of Fire, I banish from within and around me all harmful and disturbing influences and every imbalance of the nature of Fire. I banish these things far from this place.”

Visualization: Druid imagines all unbalanced manifestations and influences burning in the bonfire and turning into fine ash.



Calling of Water



First Movement: Druid faces West or goes to the western quarter of the Grove. Druid traces the symbol of the element of water in front of him/her.

First Visualization: Druid imagines the symbol drawn in blue light with a paler and transparent blue.

First Auditory: “By the blue gate of the mighty waters, the hawthorn that stands between the worlds, and the salmon of wisdom in the sacred pool, I call upon the Water.

(Pause) May I receive the blessings of Water this day.”

Second Visualization: Imagine a scene beyond the symbol corresponding to the symbolism of the west—for example, an ocean beach at sunset on an autumn day, with great waves rolling toward you from out of the distance, rain falling from clouds overhead, the setting sun just visible on the horizon through a gap in the clouds and its rays making the clouds and sea glow, and so on.

Second Auditory: “I thank the Water for its gifts.”

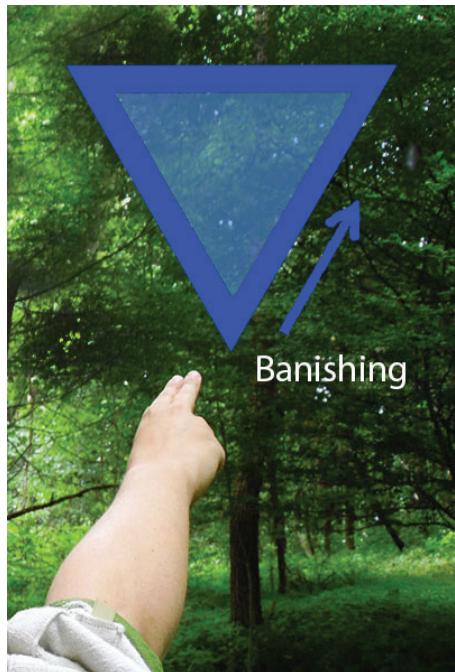


Banishing of Water

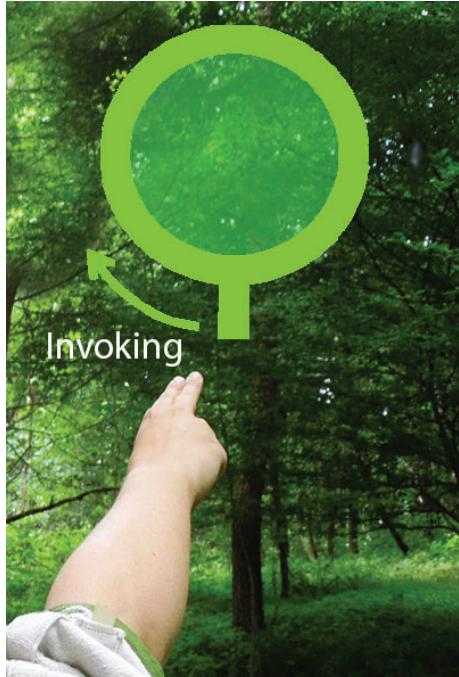
Movement: Druid traces the same symbol again, but the triangle now counterclockwise from the uppermost point.

Auditory: “And with the help of the powers of water, I banish from within and around me all harmful and disturbing influences and every imbalance of the nature of water. I banish these things far from this place.”

Visualization: While saying these words, Druid imagines all unbalanced manifestations being washed away by rain or waves of water.



Calling of Earth



First Movement: Druid faces North or goes to the northern quarter of the Grove. Druid traces the symbol of the element of earth in front of him/her.

First Visualization: Druid imagines the earth symbol drawn in green light and the circle filled with a paler and transparent green.

First Auditory: “By the green gate of the tall stones, the fruit of the apple tree, and the great bear of the starry heavens, I call upon the Earth. (Pause) May I receive the blessings of Earth this day.”

Second Visualization: Imagine a scene beyond the symbol corresponding to the symbolism of the north—for example, a forest scene at midnight in winter, with snow on the ground and the trees, the moon and stars shining brilliantly in a clear night sky, distant mountains beyond them with their peaks illuminated by the moonlight, and so on.

Second Auditory: “I thank the Earth for its gifts.”



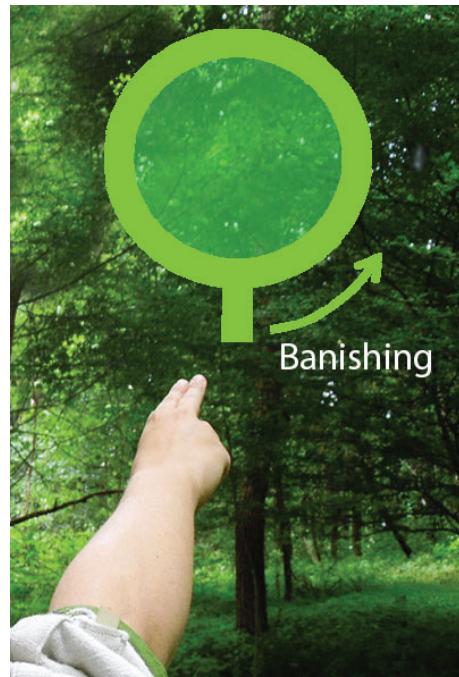
Banishing of Earth

Movement: Druid traces the same symbol again, but the circle now is traced counterclockwise from the lowest point.

Auditory: “And with the help of the powers of Earth, I banish from within and around me all harmful and disturbing influences and every imbalance of the nature of Earth. I banish these things far from this place.”

Visualization: While saying these words, Druid imagines all unbalanced manifestations dissolving and percolating down through the soil, absorbed by earth and stone.

Second Auditory: “I thank the Earth for its gifts.”



Calling the Telluric, Solar, and Lunar Currents

Calling the Telluric Current/Spirit Below



Movement: Druid faces East or goes to the north side of the altar facing South.

Druid traces the symbol of Spirit Below down and in front of him/her as if over an altar, a circle clockwise from the lowermost point.

First Visualization: Imagine the symbol drawn in bright orange light filled with a paler and transparent orange.

First Auditory: “By the orange gate of the land beneath this grove, the deep-rooted oak tree, and the great soil web of life, I call upon

Spirit Below.” (Pause). “May the telluric current rise and bless me/this grove with the blessing and power of the Earth.”

Second Visualization: Imagine the soil and stone beneath you, reaching down all the way to the green fire at the Earth’s heart. Feel its stability, its richness, its immense power, and so on.

Second Auditory: “I thank the Spirit Below for its gifts.”



Calling the Solar Current/Spirit Above

Movement: Druid traces the symbol of Spirit Above, a circle clockwise from the uppermost point.

First Visual: Imagine the symbol drawn in bright violet light and filled with a paler and transparent violet.

First Auditory: “By the purple gate of the skies above, the hemlock [or other tall, dominant tree], and the Sun in its glory, I call upon Spirit Above. (Pause). May the solar current descend and bless me/this grove with the blessing and power of the earth.”



Second Visual: Imagine the heavens above you, luminous with stars and galaxies, extending up beyond the reach of your mind's eye. The Sun shines in the midst of all, directly above your head. Feel the beauty, silence, and vastness of the cosmos, and so on.

Second Auditory: “I thank the Spirit Above for its gifts.



Invoking the Lunar Current



First visualization: Druid becomes aware of the six powers already invoked, in the six directions surrounding him/her.

Auditory: “By the six powers here invoked and here present, and by the grand word by which the worlds were made—

AWEN (chanting this word Ah-Oh-En, stretching out the vowels)

—I invoke Spirit Within. May a ray of the lunar current bless and protect this Grove, and further its work.

(If there is an altar, touch it with your right hand.)

May it establish a sphere of protection around this Grove and all within it.”

Creating the Sphere of Light

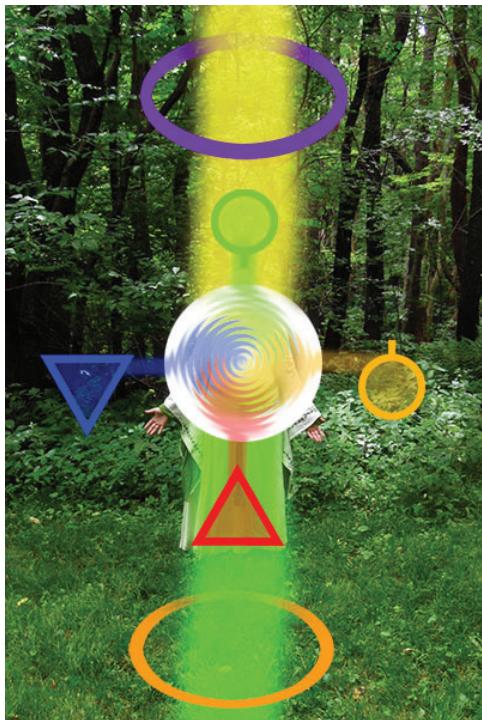
The final phase of the ritual uses words and gestures only at its conclusion. The rest of the work is done solely by the imagination (visualization). Please note that this visualization will take some practice for some to achieve.

First Visualization

First Visualization: Imagine the solar and telluric currents coming into contact in front of you (or on top of the grove altar) and forming a sphere of brilliant white light.



Second Visualization



Second Visualization: See the colored light from each of the six directions radiating into the larger sphere of white light, so that it shimmers with rainbow colors.

Third Visualization

Third Visualization: Next, imagine the sphere of light expanding outward until it surrounds you (or your sacred grove). Take your time at this visualization, and build up the image as strongly and solidly as you are able. Concentrate on the idea that the sphere forms a barrier impenetrable to any hostile or harmful influence, a protective wall.

Movement: When you have established the sphere as firmly as you can, cross your arms across your chest.

Auditory: “I thank the powers for their blessings.”

Then proceed to the ceremony, or if the Sphere of Protection is being practiced by itself, pause for a few minutes, feeling the energies you have invoked, and then release the imagery from your mind.



Adapting the SOP

We encourage each AODA Candidate to adapt the Sphere of Protection to his or her own personal cosmology and druid practice. The above Sphere of Protection, with its emphasis on the animals traditional to the Druid revival and the trees of North America, offers only one of countless possibilities. Members of our order have used the SOP in ways befitting of their own diverse practices—once you've learned the basic pattern, feel free to experiment and adapt as you grow as a Druid.

While it is possible for an individual Druid to changing the directions of the SOP to align with another directional system, please note that changing these directions may also require changes to other aspects of AODA ritual and ceremony, so this decision should be made purposefully and carefully. The invocation of the telluric, solar, and lunar currents should not be changed. The three currents are the main sources of power in AODA grove ritual, and the Sphere of Protection ritual is the way these powers are called into the grove and linked to its symbolism and core practices.

You may find that certain parts of this ritual may not work for you due to a disability or different way of working or seeing the world. We encourage you to adapt this ritual as needed, given your unique circumstances. For example, if you are not able to stand or move arms easily, remove or modify the movements of the ritual. If you are not able to easily visualize, go perform the ritual outside and observe the air, fire, water, and earth as you perform it (this is an excellent practice for all Druids). If you have dyslexia and /or find difficulty in keeping the directions straight, create small signs to place where you do the ritual so that you will remember the directions.

Chapter 8: Bardic, Ovate, and Druid Studies

As noted in chapter 3, the work of our Order has three branches, reflecting the threefold division of the ancient Celtic Druids. Our work is not the same as that of the ancient Druids, though; we are of a different time and place, with other challenges and needs that are of our time. Therefore, the work of Ovates, Bards, and Druids in the AODA is designed to meet the needs and challenges of our world.

Ovates were once those who saw beyond the surface of things: seers, diviners, healers. In our time, we also need those who see and understand beyond our human needs to appreciate and understand the natural world. Ovate work in the AODA engages with the natural and earth sciences, so that we better understand the world that we revere and the systems of the earth that we seek to strengthen. An ovate study or exploration could include the study and understanding of plants (botany), animals (zoology), insects (entomology), or fungi (mycology). It could be the study of the stones and their origins (geology and vulcanology), the waters (hydrology, oceanography, and so on), or the air and atmosphere (meteorology or climatology). Each of these studies is a part of the great study of ecology: the study of whole systems in the living world, including the ways in which living things relate to one another and their environment.

Some have asked why practices like permaculture, medical herbalism, composting, and green construction are not eligible as ovate explorations. While they are certainly worthwhile pursuits, they place human experience, activity, or need at the center of their work. Ovate study is meant to help take us beyond ourselves, to no longer place us at the center of our learning. Ovate study is a corrective for the humanocentric world in which we are embedded. Practices that look at how humans engage with the natural world are certainly appropriate for Earth Path changes, but in the 1st and 2nd Degrees they are not appropriate for ovate exploration. There are opportunities later in the AODA's curriculum for such human-nature connected explorations.

Chapter 8: Bardic, Ovate, and Druid Studies

Bards were once those who created the words and sounds that carried meaning to those who would listen: poets, musicians, storytellers. These skills and talents are still necessary in this world, as are so many others in the realm of arts and crafts. Bardic work in the AODA is about creative and skilled expression, rather than mass production. Work in the fine arts (painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, and so on), the performing arts (music, dance, theatre, storytelling, and so on), and the literary arts (poetry, prose, songwriting, and so on) are all appropriate avenues of bardic exploration. Work in craft and artisan practices are also appropriate explorations, including fiber arts, metalwork and smithing, glasswork, pottery, landscape and garden design, woodworking, bookbinding, and the culinary arts.

Essential to the bardic path is the work of creative expression: making basic iron tools as an experienced blacksmith does not meet the criterion, but making a set of fireplace irons with decorative finials that hold symbolic meaning does. Writing a technical manual for one's work is unlikely to satisfy the bardic exploration, but writing a memoir or poetic exploration of the experience of working, including what it felt like and what it meant to do that work, likely will. The practice of a martial art is not inherently bardic, but were the practice to become a performance that included a creative component that communicated something about the experience or the practice to an audience, it might suffice. That said, learning a new art or craft (regardless of the "artistic merit" of the end product or your degree of skill at the end of the study) is an appropriate 1st Degree exploration.

Druids were once those who worked with the skills of the mind: philosophy, scholarship, and teaching. These skills are taught in many places in our world, but have often come to exclude the more inward, mystic, and transcendent aspects of our consciousness such as religious practice, spirituality, and esotericism. Druid study in the AODA includes the knowledge and practices that engage with these experiences. Druid explorations may focus on religious practice or spiritual disciplines, including prayer, acts of devotion, maintaining an altar or sacred space, and rites of worship or spiritual well-being. Druid explorations may focus on knowledge and wisdom, such as the study of Druid philosophy and cosmology, mythological understanding, Ogham knowledge, Druid triads, and practices of thinking, memory, and meditation. Finally, Druid explorations may focus on the esoteric arts and sciences, including energy work, divination, and magic.

Chapter 8: Bardic, Ovate, and Druid Studies

Simply attending a worship service or watching others perform a ritual is insufficient to meet the needs of Druid exploration. You are meant to be a participant, not an observer, in this work. Learning and committing to a spiritual discipline or practice is one possibility. Study that increases your knowledge in the areas of the Druid branch and then applies it to your Druidry and whole life is appropriate; study that addresses other forms of knowledge without clear connection to this branch will not work. The Druid study is intended to help shift your awareness to include the inward, mystic, and transcendent; only study that addresses those aspects of our beings will be eligible for this exploration.

At times, it can be tricky to figure out where a particular exploration might fit into the branches. A topic or program might fit into multiple branches. The key is to determine which branch is most predominant in the study you will undertake. It might be as simple as making a choice about emphasis, or it might require more consideration to find the core nature of the project. For example:

- Creating liturgy/ritual scripts could be either a Druid or a Bardic study. If the emphasis were to be placed on understanding the ritual process and the connections of the practitioner to the object/subject of the ritual, that would be a Druid study. If the emphasis were placed on the crafting of the words, the tools, and the performance techniques that would be included in the rite, it would be appropriate as a Bardic study.
- Studying climate and weather patterns in your area is easily seen as an Ovate study; however, if one were to do this in the context of connections to sky or weather deities and weather magic this would fit as a Druid study.
- Observing and describing systems of ecology could again easily be understood as an Ovate study. It could also become a Bardic study if the descriptions were to be written as a series of poems, played as pieces of music, created as visual art like paintings or photographs, spoken in storytelling performance, or represented through other arts and crafts.
- Some fields of study, like landscape design, could engage with all three branches. As an Ovate study, one might examine the water, wind, and animal movement patterns in an area before planning changes to the land in order to make best use of what natural patterns exist. As a Druid study, one might examine the energetics and sense of sacredness in the land before planning changes in order to create or preserve sacred spaces in the landscape. As a Bardic study, one might look at the aesthetics of the area, choosing plants, pathways, and methods of design to heighten its beauty, express an emotion, or tell a story.

Chapter 8: Bardic, Ovate, and Druid Studies

As you consider what explorations, studies, and projects you might undertake, use this framework of the branches of study to understand where your interests might fall within our Druidry. Is what you are considering scientific and ecological, creative and skillful, or spiritual and scholarly? Do you need to have an emphasis on a particular aspect of a study in order to place it well within the three branches? When you inform the Grand Grove of your study plans, the Archdruids will approve or discuss your explorations with you should they not quite fit into our framework. The better you understand these three branches of work in our AODA Druidry, the more likely you are to find your explorations easy to create and satisfying to complete!



Appendices

Appendix A: Sphere of Protection: Sample Ritual

Preparation

As one of the core rituals of AODA's curriculum, the Sphere of Protection is a good example of the inherent flexibility of Druidical practice, since it requires inner search and personal input before it can even be performed for the first time. This version differs from others found in the Order's materials, and it should be considered a starting point for the long process of learning and adjusting it to your own path, not as something to be taken to the letter.

This means that the names of spiritual powers and the symbolism corresponding to the directions and elements that are given here are traditional but can, and should, be adapted to your own experiences, beliefs, and values.

Note that italics are directions (something to do), while words in normal text are spoken.

The Elemental Cross

(When performing the ritual as a daily practice, Druid starts facing East, but if it's part of a Grove Ritual, starts at the north side of the altar facing South.)

(Druid imagines the Sun standing at zenith high above his/her head, and an equivalent sphere of silver-green fire, the heart of the Earth, far away below his/her feet.)

(Druid brings both arms up from the sides in an arc, palms join above the head before drawing them down together to touch the point between the eyebrows, while imagining a

Appendix A: Sphere of Protection: Sample Ritual

(ray of light descending from the Sun with the movement to form a sphere of golden light within his/her head.)

(Druid pauses and says) Hu the Mighty, Great Druid God.

(Druid draws the joined palms down to touch the point of the solar plexus, while imagining the ray of light descending as well and forming a second sphere of golden light at the solar plexus, then continuing through and beyond him/her until it reaches the sphere of fire at the heart of the Earth.)

Hesus of the Oaks, Chief of Tree-Spirits.

(Druid leaves left hand where it is and pivots right arm outwards at the elbow, so that the right arm ends up angling down and outwards in a straight line from the shoulder, turning the head and facing right, while imagining a ray of light shooting out from the sphere of light at your solar plexus into infinite distance to the right)

Ceridwen the Wise, Keeper of the Cauldron.

(Druid repeats the same gesture with the left hand, so that both arms now slope down and outward from the shoulders, turning the head and facing left, while imagining a ray of light shooting out from the sphere of light at the solar plexus into infinite distance to the left.)

Niwalen of the Flowers, Child of Spring.

(Druid crosses arms across chest, right over left, turning the head and facing forward, while imagining twin rays of light shooting out from the sphere of light at the solar plexus, in front and behind him/her, into infinite distance.)

May the powers of Nature bless and protect me/this grove, this day and always.

(Druid lowers both arms while chanting with the syllables drawn out, Ah-Oh-En)

AWEN.

Appendix A: Sphere of Protection: Sample Ritual

The Circulation of Light

(Druid faces East or goes to the north side of the altar facing South.)

(Druid brings awareness to the sphere of golden light at the solar plexus, imagining it expanding and surrounding him/her or the whole grove completely with the solar plexus at its center, concentrating firmly for a few moments on the idea that no unwanted or harmful influences can pass through the light.)

(Druid focuses on the sphere's right/left axis, imagining it spinning over the head and down in front, under the feet and up the back, slowly at first, but faster with each passing breath until it's a blur of speed.)

(Druid focuses on the sphere's up/down axis, adding a second spinning to the first, from left to right in front, and from right to left behind, slowly at first, but faster with each passing breath until it's a blur of speed.)

(Druid focuses on the sphere's front/back axis, adding a third spinning to the others, from up down to the right, under the feet and up the left, slowly at first, but faster with each passing breath until it's a blur of speed.)

(Druid imagines the sphere spinning in all three directions at the same time, faster and faster until it reaches infinite speed and remains perfectly still, concentrating on this stillness for a few moments.)

(Druid crosses arms across chest, right over left) I thank the powers of Nature for their blessings and protection.

(Druid lowers arms and pauses for a few minutes feeling the energies invoked, then releasing the imagery from his/her mind.)

The Calling of the Elements

Air

(Druid faces East or goes to the eastern quarter of the Grove.)

(Druid traces the symbol of the element of Air in front of him/her, a circle clockwise from the uppermost point, then adding a line straight upwards from this same point, imagining

Appendix A: Sphere of Protection: Sample Ritual

(it drawn in bright yellow light and the circle filled with a paler and transparent yellow.)

By the yellow gate of the rushing winds and the hawk of May in the heights of morning, I invoke the Air, its gods, spirits, and powers.

(If Druid is in daily practice, says) May I receive the blessings of Air this day.

(If Druid is in a Grove, says) May the powers of Air bless and protect this Grove and all within it, and grant their aid to its work.

(While saying these words, Druid imagines the sun rising in the horizon of the land where he/she lives, how the morning air feels and smells, the sounds of the day as it awakens.)

(Druid concentrates firmly on this for a few moments, then says) I thank the Air for its gifts.

(Druid traces the same symbol again, but the circle now counterclockwise from the uppermost point, then draws the line upwards.)

(If Druid is in daily practice, says) And with the help of the powers of Air, I banish from within and around me all unbalanced manifestations of Air. I banish them far away from me.

(If Druid is in a Grove, says) And with the help of the powers of Air, I banish from within and around this Grove every influence that might hinder its work. I banish all such influences far away.

(While saying these words, Druid imagines all unbalanced manifestations and influences blowing with the wind and dissolving like mist on the vastness of Air.)

(Druid concentrates firmly on this for a few moments.)

Fire

(Druid faces South or goes to the southern quarter of the Grove.)

(Druid traces the symbol of the element of Fire in front of him/her, an equilateral triangle, point up, clockwise from the uppermost point, imagining it drawn in bright red light and filled with a paler and transparent red.)

Appendix A: Sphere of Protection: Sample Ritual

By the red gate of the bright flames and the white stag of the summer greenwood,
I invoke the Fire, its gods, spirits, and powers.

(If Druid is in daily practice, says) May I receive the blessings of Fire this day.

(If Druid is in a Grove, says) May the powers of Fire bless and protect this Grove
and all within it, and grant their aid to its work.

*(While saying these words, Druid imagines a bonfire in front of him/her, the brightness
of its flames and the smell of its smoke, on the hottest day in his/her memory.)*

(Druid concentrates firmly on this for a few moments, then says) I thank the Fire for its gifts.

*(Druid traces the same symbol again, but the triangle now counterclockwise from the
uppermost point.)*

(If Druid is in daily practice, says) And with the help of the powers of Fire, I banish
from within and around me all unbalanced manifestations of Fire. I banish them far
away from me.

(If Druid is in a Grove, says) And with the help of the powers of Fire, I banish from
within and around this Grove every influence that might hinder its work. I banish all
such influences far away.

*(While saying these words, Druid imagines all unbalanced manifestations and influences
burning in the bonfire and turning into fine ash.)*

(Druid concentrates firmly on this for a few moments.)

Water

(Druid faces West or goes to the western quarter of the Grove.)

*(Druid traces the symbol of the element of Water in front of him/her, an equilateral triangle,
point down, clockwise from the lowermost point, imagining it drawn in bright blue light
and filled with a paler and transparent blue.)*

Appendix A: Sphere of Protection: Sample Ritual

By the blue gate of the mighty waters and the salmon of wisdom in the sacred pool,
I invoke the Water, its gods, spirits, and powers.

(If Druid is in daily practice, says) May I receive the blessings of Water this day.

*(If Druid is in a Grove, says) May the powers of Water bless and protect this Grove
and all within it, and grant their aid to its work.*

*(While saying these words, Druid imagines the largest body of water on the land where
he/she lives, how it smells and how it feels to be near it.)*

(Druid concentrates firmly on this for a few moments, then says) I thank the Water for its gifts.

*(Druid traces the same symbol again, but the triangle now counterclockwise from the
lowermost point.)*

*(If Druid is in daily practice, says) And with the help of the powers of Water, I banish
from within and around me all unbalanced manifestations of Water. I banish them
far away from me.*

*(If Druid is in a Grove, says) And with the help of the powers of Water, I banish from
within and around this Grove every influence that might hinder its work. I banish all
such influences far away.*

*(While saying these words, Druid imagines all unbalanced manifestations and influences
dragged away and drowned in the depths of Water.)*

(Druid concentrates firmly on this for a few moments.)

Earth

(Druid faces North or goes to the northern quarter of the Grove.)

*(Druid traces the symbol of the element of Earth in front of him/her, a circle clockwise
from the lowermost point, then adding a line straight downwards from this same point,
imagining it drawn in bright green light and the circle filled with a paler and transparent
green.)*

Appendix A: Sphere of Protection: Sample Ritual

By the green gate of the tall stones and the great bear of the starry heavens, I invoke the Earth, its gods, spirits, and powers.

(If Druid is in daily practice, says) May I receive the blessings of Earth this day.

(If Druid is in a Grove, says) May the powers of Earth bless and protect this Grove and all within it, and grant their aid to its work.

(While saying these words, Druid imagines the land itself in which he/she lives, with whatever vegetation thrives there growing on it.)

(Druid concentrates firmly on this for a few moments, then says) I thank the Earth for its gifts.

(Druid traces the same symbol again, but the circle now counterclockwise from the lower-most point, then draws the line downwards.)

(If Druid is in daily practice, says) And with the help of the powers of Earth, I banish from within and around me all unbalanced manifestations of Earth. I banish them far away from me.

(If Druid is in a Grove, says) And with the help of the powers of Earth, I banish from within and around this Grove every influence that might hinder its work. I banish all such influences far away.

(While saying these words, Druid imagines all unbalanced manifestations and influences dissolving and percolating down through the soil, absorbed by earth and stone.)

(Druid concentrates firmly on this for a few moments.)

Spirit Below

(Druid faces East or goes to the north side of the altar facing South.)

(Druid traces the symbol of Spirit Below down and in front of him/her as if over an altar, a circle clockwise from the lowermost point, imagining it drawn in bright orange light filled with a paler and transparent orange.)

Appendix A: Sphere of Protection: Sample Ritual

By the orange gate of the land beneath and the bright heart of the Earth Mother, I invoke the Spirit Below, its gods, spirits, and powers.

(If Druid is in daily practice, says) May I receive the blessings of Spirit Below this day.

(If Druid is in a Grove, says) May the powers of Spirit Below bless and protect this Grove and all within it, and grant their aid to its work.

(While saying these words, Druid imagines a realm deeper than earth and stone, where dwells the immense power that drives earthquakes and volcanoes, that moves continents across the face of the planet, a power that also flows through every living thing.)

(Druid concentrates firmly on this for a few moments, then says) I thank Spirit Below for its gifts.

Spirit Above

(Druid traces the symbol of Spirit Above up and in front of him/her, a circle clockwise from the uppermost point, imagining it drawn in bright violet light and filled with a paler and transparent violet.)

By the purple gate of the skies above and the Sun in its glory, the father of light, I invoke the Spirit Above, its gods, spirits, and powers.

(If Druid is in daily practice, says) May I receive the blessings of Spirit Above this day.

(If Druid is in a Grove, says) May the powers of Spirit Above bless and protect this Grove and all within it, and grant their aid to its work.

(While saying these words, Druid imagines the Sun in midheaven shinning upon the planets on their orbits, surrounded by the vastness of space with its numberless stars, all of it guided by the perfect order that sets the worlds in their courses.)

(Druid concentrates firmly on this for a few moments, then says) I thank the Spirit Above for its gifts.

Appendix A: Sphere of Protection: Sample Ritual

Spirit Within

(Druid becomes aware of the six powers already invoked, feels that he/she is standing in a place of perfect balance among them.)

By the six powers here invoked and here present, and by the grand word by which the worlds were made —

(Druid chants this word as before, Ah-Oh-En) AWEN

—I invoke the Spirit Within.

(If Druid is in daily practice, says) May the universe within me and the universe around me be in harmony.

(If Druid is in a Grove, says) May the powers of Spirit Within bless and protect this Grove and all within it, and grant their aid to its work.

(While saying these words, Druid imagines him/herself, exactly as he/she is, every aspect as a vessel of infinite powers, a pattern in the great flow of the universe.)

(Druid concentrates firmly on this for a few moments, then says) I thank the powers for their gifts).

Appendix B: Solitary Grove Opening and Closing

Altar Setup: Before beginning a ceremony, put the altar cloth and any decorations on the altar that you wish, and arrange the four cauldrons representing the four elements. Earth will be in the north (sand, salt, or soil); Air in the east (incense, or if that's not possible, a bowl with a feather); Fire in the south (a candle); and Water in the west (a bowl of water).

To Begin the Ceremony: *Light the incense and the candle, and then go to the edge of the area where you'll be performing the ceremony. Take a few moments to clear your mind of unrelated thoughts and feelings.*

Grove Opening

Entering the Grove: *Then, when you are ready to begin, enter the circle through the eastern gate (or whichever your degree entitles you to use), then go around to the north side of the altar, where you face south. Raise your right hand palm forward to salute the Spiritual Sun, which is always symbolically at high noon in the southern sky, and say:)*

Let the powers be attentive as I am about to open a Grove of Druids in this place.

Declaring Peace:

The first duty of Druids assembled in the Sacred Grove is to proclaim peace to the four quarters of the world, for without peace our work cannot proceed.¹

1 The most traditional version of this ceremony uses a grove sword as follows: When Proclaiming Peace at the start of the solitary grove opening, take the sword from its place, still sheathed, and circle around to the east. Face outward and raise the sword in its sheath, holding it horizontally at head level, right hand on hilt, left on sheath. Draw the sword partway from the sheath so that half the blade is visible, then push the sword back into the sheath at each of the quarters and say, "I proclaim peace in the east/west/south/north" and then sheath the sword. Move to the next quarter,



Appendix B: Solitary Grove Opening and Closing

*(Raise your hand in the east, facing outward toward the east and say):
I proclaim peace in the east.*

*(Pause, feeling peace radiating within and without. Lower your hand and proceed to the south, where you repeat the same process, saying:)
I proclaim peace in the south.*

*(Proceed to the west, and do the same thing, saying:)
I proclaim peace in the west.*

*(Proceed to the north and do the same thing, saying:)
I proclaim peace in the north.*

*(Advance to the north side of the altar, facing south across it. Say:)
The four quarters are at peace and the work of the grove may proceed.*

Purifying the Grove with the Elements

Let this grove and all within it be purified with air.

(Go to the eastern side of the altar, pick up the cauldron with the incense, and carry it to the eastern edge of the space. Pause there, holding the cauldron out as though offering the incense, and then walk in a clockwise circle once around the outer edge of the space, tracing a circle around the grove with the cauldron. When you've come back around to the east, return the cauldron to the altar.)

(While you do this, visualize the following. When you hold the cauldron as though offering the incense, imagine a current of yellow light streaming in from the east and forming a sphere of yellow light around the cauldron. As you carry the cauldron around the grove, imagine the cauldron tracing a line of yellow light in a circle around the outside of the grove. When you carry the cauldron back to the altar, see it trace a line of yellow light in from the edge to the altar, and see the sphere of yellow light remaining with the cauldron on the altar.

(When you have finished, say:)

unsheath the partway, speak the words, and sheath again.

Appendix B: Solitary Grove Opening and Closing

Let this Grove and all within it be purified with fire.

(Go to the southern side of the altar, pick up the cauldron with the flame, and carry it to the southern edge of the space. Pause there, holding the cauldron out as though offering the flame, and then walk in a clockwise circle once around the outer edge of the space, tracing a circle around the grove with the cauldron. When you've come back around to the south, return the cauldron to the altar.)

(While you do this, visualize the following. When you hold the cauldron as though offering the fire, imagine a current of red light streaming in from the south and forming a sphere of red light around the cauldron. As you carry the cauldron around the grove, imagine the cauldron tracing a line of red light in a circle around the outside of the grove. When you carry the cauldron back to the altar, see it trace a line of red light in from the edge to the altar, and see the sphere of red light remaining with the cauldron on the altar.)

(When you have finished, say:)

Let this Grove and all within it be purified with water.

(Go to the western side of the altar, pick up the cauldron with the water, and carry it to the western edge of the space. Pause there, holding the cauldron out as though offering the water, and then walk in a clockwise circle once around the outer edge of the space, tracing a circle around the grove with the cauldron. When you've come back around to the west, return the cauldron to the altar.)

(While you do this, visualize the following. When you hold the cauldron as though offering the water, imagine a current of blue light streaming in from the west and forming a sphere of blue light around the cauldron. As you carry the cauldron around the grove, imagine the cauldron tracing a line of blue light in a circle around the outside of the grove. When you carry the cauldron back to the altar, see it trace a line of blue light in from the edge to the altar, and see the sphere of blue light remaining with the cauldron on the altar.)

(When you have finished, say:)

Let this Grove and all within it be purified with earth.

(Go to the northern side of the altar, pick up the cauldron with the salt, and carry it to the northern edge of the space. Pause there, holding the cauldron out as though offering the salt,

Appendix B: Solitary Grove Opening and Closing

(and then walk in a clockwise circle once around the outer edge of the space, tracing a circle around the grove with the cauldron from north to north. When you've come back around to the north, return the cauldron to the altar.)

(While you do this, visualize the following. When you hold the cauldron as though offering the salt, imagine a current of green light streaming in from the north and forming a sphere of green light around the cauldron. As you carry the cauldron around the grove, imagine the cauldron tracing a line of green light in a circle around the outside of the grove. When you carry the cauldron back to the altar, see it trace a line of green light in from the edge to the altar, and see the sphere of green light remaining with the cauldron on the altar.)

(When you have finished, say:)

Invoking the Holy Powers

I invoke the blessing of the holy powers with the words that have been the bond among all Druids:

Grant, O holy ones, thy protection;
And in protection, strength;
And in strength, understanding;
And in understanding, knowledge;
And in knowledge, the knowledge of justice;
And in the knowledge of justice, the love of it;
And in that love, the love of all existences;
And in the love of all existences, the love of Earth our mother and all goodness.

(When you've finished the prayer, chant the word Awen three times; with each chant intone it. Draw the word out into its three syllables – Ah-Oh-En – and let it resonate throughout your body and the Grove.

AWEN, AWEN, AWEN

Then perform the complete Sphere of Protection ceremony to complete the opening of the grove. When this is finished go to the chair in the north and take your seat. This completes the opening ceremony.

Appendix B: Solitary Grove Opening and Closing

Solitary Grove Closing

(When the work of the Grove is completed, sit down in the chair in the north and let your mind return to stillness. When you're ready, rise and go to the north side of the altar, facing south across it.) Say:

Let the powers be attentive as I am about to close a grove of Druids in this place.

(Go to the eastern side of the altar. Take the cauldron with the incense to the east, and hold it outward as though offering the incense, as in the opening. Say:)

Releasing the Elements

With thanks I release the powers of air to their rightful places. May peace prevail in the east.

(As you say this, imagine the yellow light that surrounds the cauldron flowing back to its sources in the east. When this is finished, return the cauldron to its place on the altar, and go to the southern side of the altar. Take the cauldron with the flame to the south, and hold it outward as though offering the flame, as in the opening. Say:)

With thanks I release the powers of fire to their rightful places. May peace prevail in the south.

(As you say this, imagine the red light that surrounds the cauldron flowing back to its sources in the south. When this is finished, return the cauldron to its place on the altar, and go to the western side of the altar. Take the cauldron with the water to the west, and hold it outward as though offering the water, as in the opening. Say:)

With thanks I release the powers of water to their rightful places. May peace prevail in the west.

(As you say this, imagine the blue light that surrounds the cauldron flowing back to its sources in the west. When this is finished, return the cauldron to its place on the altar, and go to the northern side of the altar. Take the cauldron with the salt to the north, and hold it outward as though offering the salt, as in the opening. Say:)

With thanks I release the powers of earth to their rightful places. May peace prevail in the north.



Appendix B: Solitary Grove Opening and Closing

(As you say this, imagine the green light that surrounds the cauldron flowing back to its sources in the north. When this is finished, return the cauldron to its place on the altar, and remain at the northern side of the altar, facing south. Say:)

Peace prevails in the four quarters and throughout the grove.

Returning Power to the Land

Let any power remaining from this working be returned to the Earth for her blessing.

(Any grove working leaves some energy behind it, and this can usually be sensed as a mood, a feeling, or a subtle sense of presence in the space. Imagine this flowing inward toward the altar, down through it to the earth, and then down to the earth's center. Keep concentrating on this until the grove space feels clear of any leftover energy and you feel that this work is done. Then say:)

Invoking the Sword of Swords

I now invoke the Sword of Swords.

(If you have a sword, draw it and hold it high with the hilt up and the point down. If you don't have one, visualize a great medieval sword in that position, hovering in the air before you, and raise your hand in salute. Say the following incantation:)

From the rising Sun, three rays of light;
From the living Earth, three stones of witness;
From the eye and the mind and the hand of wisdom, three rowan
staves of all knowledge.
From the fire of the Sun, the forge;
From the bones of the Earth, the steel;
From the hand of the wise, the making;
From these, Excalibur.
By the Sword of Swords, I pledge my faithful service to the living Earth, our home
and mother.

(Chant the word Awen once:)

AWEN.

(As you chant the word, imagine the sword—whether physical or imagined—dissolving into pure light, which draws together into the image of the Sun, standing at the zenith in

Appendix B: Solitary Grove Opening and Closing

the south. Lower the sword, sheath it, and put it back in its place, or lower your hand, and leave the altar; walk in a clockwise circle around the grove to whichever gate your degree entitles you to use, and exit the grove. This concludes the closing ceremony.)

Appendix C: Seasonal Ceremonies

The seasonal ceremonies form the core of our holy day work. These are the standard seasonal ceremonies given to AODA members for their use during the Candidate year; however, when you are comfortable (or as they are working on the Second Degree, whichever comes first) we encourage you to adapt and write your own seasonal ceremonies befitting their individual druid paths. However, these rituals represent our common liturgical format.

The seasonal ceremonies of the AODA are, primarily, ceremonies of blessing and healing both to the celebrants and to the broader earth. By invoking the three currents, and by channeling the solar current down into the telluric current (which is what these three ceremonies essentially do), we are working powerful blessings upon our lands each time these ceremonies take place.

These ceremonies are written for one person, but can easily be adapted for several people. If you have a larger group, you will want to instead use the ceremonies in *The Druid Grove Handbook* which are designed for seven positions.

Please note that we have included both the traditional and modern Welsh names for the ceremonies in the druid tradition.



Spring Equinox Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Eilir/Eliler

Altar Materials: Usual AODA materials (white altar cloth, four cauldrons representing the four elements and appropriately arranged on the altar). Additionally include three tall, unlit candles, blue (in the west), green (in the east), and white (in the south), these candles represent the three rays of light.

Altar Decorations: Spring flowers, buds, or any other seasonally appropriate decorations.
Begin by performing the full AODA Solitary grove opening (this includes the grove opening and the full Sphere of Protection). After these are complete, begin the main ceremony:

Say: “In the world of nature the winter has ended and the Sun has completed half his long journey toward the north. The streams are full of water from the melting snow and the spring rains; sap rises in the trees and flowers begin to bloom. Birds return from their winter dwellings far to the south as life wakes from its time of sleep.”

Say: “The ancients knew this season as the seedtime of the year, not only for the husbandman and the herdsman but also for those who stand at the gates between the Seen and the Unseen. They recognized at this time the power of the thought held in the mind’s clarity and the word spoken upon the wind’s breath; they called down wisdom from the Sun and called up power from the Earth to illuminate their minds.”

Say: “The Spring Equinox has arrived, and the Sun and Earth renew the bonds that unite them. In this time of balanced powers, let me invoke the blessings of all the holy ones upon the grove, the Order, and the Earth. Let us radiate outward a blessing to the living earth!”

Spring Equinox Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Eilir/Eliler

Say: "Therefore our work begins from the quarter of Air."

(Move to the Eastern side of the altar, facing inward.)

Say: "East; west.¹ Air; water. The realm of the Mind; the realm of the Heart. May they enter into the great harmony."

(Light the green candle and pause)

Say: "North; south. Fire; water. The realm of the Spirit; The realm of the Body. May they enter into the great harmony."

(Light the white candle and pause).

Say: "The realm of the Winds. The Realm of the Flames. The Realm of the Waves. The realm of the Stones. May they enter into the great harmony."

(Light the blue candle and pause).

(Take the cauldron of incense, face eastwards, and hold up the cauldron, as though in offering.)

Say: "By the Hawk of May in the heights of morning, I invoke the air and the spirits of the air! May their blessings be with the grove, the order and the Earth during the season to come!"

(Imagine a blazing star at the zenith, almost infinitely far above the grove; this is Fomalhaut, the Royal Star governing the ceremony. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of air on the altar.)

(Take the cauldron of fire, face southwards and hold up the cauldron, as though in offering.)

1 If you are adapting this ceremony for two or more participants for this ceremony, instead have the participants say it this way:

Participant 1: East

Participant 2: West

Participant 1: The realm of the Mind

Participant 2: The realm of the Heart (And so forth)

Please note that the *Druid Grove Manual* includes ceremonies for larger groups.

Spring Equinox Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Eilir/Eliler

Say: “By the white stag of the summer greenwood, I invoke the fire and the spirits of the fire! May their blessings be with the grove, the order and the Earth during the season to come!”

(Imagine a ray of light descending from the star at infinite height to the golden sphere of the Sun, blazing at zenith above the grove, high above but much closer than the star. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of fire on the altar.)

(Take the cauldron of water, face westwards and hold up the cauldron, as though in offering.)

Say: “By the salmon of wisdom who dwells in the sacred pool, I invoke the water and the spirits of the water! May their blessings be with the grove, the order and the Earth during the season to come!”

(Imagine the ray of light descending further from the blazing Sun to the sphere of the full Moon standing at zenith above the grove, high above but much closer than the Sun. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of water on the altar.)

(Take the cauldron of earth, face northwards and hold up the cauldron, as though in offering.)

Say: “By the great bear who guards the starry heavens, I invoke the earth and the spirits of the earth! May their blessings be with us and with all the world during the season to come!”

(Imagine the ray of light descending from the shining Moon all the way to the Sphere of Protection you established around the grove. Visualize the Sphere is filled with rainbow-colored light. Once this is well established, visualize the light radiating outward in all directions. Take the time to establish this image firmly. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of earth on the altar.)

Chant: *(Intone with the syllables drawn out Ah-Oh-En:)* “AWEN, AWEN, AWEN.”

Say: “In this season of spring may the Sun send forth his rays of blessing; may the Earth receive that blessing and bring forth her abundance. In this sacred time of balanced powers, in this sacred space in the midst of the elements, we invoke the union of Sun and Earth, that the land may be made fruitful and that all who desire the light shall find it.”

Spring Equinox Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Eilir/Eliler

Meditation

Say: “I(we) will now meditate and reflect upon the turning of the year and the gifts the coming season brings to all.”¹

(A brief period of meditation follows.)

Additional Work

(At this point, it is appropriate to engage in any additional work you would like for this ceremony, including playing music, simply staying in the sacred space for a time in quiet, starting seeds, observing nature, blessing tools, journeying work, etc. When your work is finished, close out the ceremony using the solitary grove closing.)

1 Alternatively, a specific poem, paragraph, passage, etc. can be read at this point as a focus for the ceremony prior to meditation.



Summer Solstice Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Hefin/Heruin

Altar Materials: Usual AODA materials (white altar cloth, four cauldrons representing the four elements and appropriately arranged on the altar). Additionally include three tall, unlit candles, blue (in the west), green (in the east), and white (in the south) (these candles represent the three rays of light).

Altar Decorations: Summer herbs, flowers, or other greenery appropriate to the season.

Begin by performing the full AODA Solitary grove opening (this includes the grove opening and the full Sphere of Protection). After these are complete, begin the main ceremony:

Say: “In the world of nature, spring’s promise has given way to summer’s fulfillment, and the Sun now stands at his highest point in the sky, preparing for his long journey into darkness. The land is mantled in green as every growing thing bends its strength toward the harvest. Life rejoices in the golden afternoon of the year even as it makes its preparations for the cold months to come.”

Say: “The ancients knew this season as the year’s bright summit, and waited in their stone circles for the fiery sign of midsummer sunrise, the seal of harmony that unites the turning worlds. They recognized at this time the power of destiny born from the innermost self and the kindling flame of the awakening spirit; they turned their faces to the Sun and set their feet upon the Earth to accomplish the work of their wills.”

Summer Solstice Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Hefin/Heruin

Say: "The Summer Solstice has arrived, and the Sun and Earth manifest the polarities of being. In this time of balanced powers, let us invoke the blessings of all the holy ones upon the grove, the order and the Earth. Let us radiate outward a blessing to the living earth!"

Say: "Therefore, our work begins in the quarter of fire."

(Move to the Southern side of the altar, facing inward.)

Say: "South; north. Fire; earth. The realm of the Spirit; the realm of the Body. May they enter into the great harmony."

(Light the green candle and pause)

Say: "East; West. Air; Water. The realm of the Mind; The realm of the Heart. May they enter into the great harmony."

(Light the white candle and pause).

Say: "The Realm of the Flames. The Realm of the Waves. The realm of the Stones. The realm of the Winds. May they enter into the great harmony."

(Light the blue candle and pause).

(Take the cauldron of incense, face eastwards, and holds up the cauldron, as though in offering.)

Say: "By the Hawk of May in the heights of morning, I invoke the air and the spirits of the air! May their blessings be with the grove, the order and the Earth during the season to come!"

(Imagine a blazing star at the zenith, almost infinitely far above the grove; this is Fomalhaut, the Royal Star governing the ceremony. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of air on the altar.)

(Take the cauldron of fire, face southwards and hold up the cauldron, as though in offering.)

Summer Solstice Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Hefin/Heruin

Say: “By the white stag of the summer greenwood, I invoke the fire and the spirits of the fire! May their blessings be with the grove, the order and the Earth during the season to come!”

(Imagine a ray of light descending from the star at infinite height to the golden sphere of the Sun, blazing at zenith above the grove, high above but much closer than the star. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of fire on the altar.)

(Take the cauldron of water, face westwards and hold up the cauldron, as though in offering.)

Say: “By the salmon of wisdom who dwells in the sacred pool, I invoke the water and the spirits of the water! May their blessings be with the grove, the order and the Earth during the season to come!”

(Imagine the ray of light descending further from the blazing Sun to the sphere of the full Moon standing at zenith above the grove, high above but much closer than the Sun. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of water on the altar.)

(Take the cauldron of earth, face northwards and hold up the cauldron, as though in offering.)

Say: “By the great bear who guards the starry heavens, I invoke the earth and the spirits of the earth! May their blessings be with us and with all the world during the season to come!”

(Imagine the ray of light descending from the shining Moon all the way to the Sphere of Protection you established around the grove. Visualize the Sphere is filled with rainbow-colored light. Once this is well established, visualize the light radiating outward in all directions. Take the time to establish this image firmly. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of earth on the altar.)

Chant: *(Intone with the syllables drawn out Ah-Oh-En:)* “AWEN, AWEN, AWEN.”

Say: “In this season of summer may the Sun make manifest the mystery of Light. May the Earth reflect that manifestation in the mystery of Life. In this sacred time of balanced powers, in this sacred space in the midst of the elements, we invoke the

Summer Solstice Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Hefin/Heruin

Sun in his glory, the Earth in her richness, and the harmony that unites them, that the unity of all being may be made manifest. Let us meditate on the turning of the year and the gifts the coming season brings to all.”

Meditation

Say: “I(we) will now meditate and reflect upon the turning of the year and the gifts the coming season brings to all.”¹

(A brief period of meditation follows.)

Additional Work

(At this point, it is appropriate to engage in any additional work you would like for this ceremony, including playing music, sitting in the sun for a time and having its rays warm you, writing in your druid journal, blessing tools, journeying work, etc. When your work is finished, close out the ceremony using the solitary grove closing.)

1 Alternatively, a specific poem, paragraph, passage, etc. can be read at this point as a focus for the ceremony prior to meditation.



Autumn Equinox Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Elfed/Elued

Altar Materials: Usual AODA materials (white altar cloth, four cauldrons representing the four elements and appropriately arranged on the altar). Additionally include three tall, unlit candles, blue (in the west), green (in the east), and white (in the south) (these candles represent the three rays of light).

Altar Decorations: Fall leaves, nuts, squash, corn, and any other fruits of the fall season.

Begin by performing the full AODA Solitary grove opening (this includes the grove opening and the full Sphere of Protection). After these are complete, begin the main ceremony:

Say: “In the world of nature summer has given way and the Sun has descended from the heights of heaven into the south. The leaves of the trees blaze with orange and red as the fields turn harvest gold. The cries of the geese sound overhead as they begin their long journey toward their winter homes. Squirrels leap from branch to branch as they prepare for the long cold months to come; the sound of clashing antlers rings through the woods as stags test their strength before the watchful eyes of does.”

Say: “The ancients knew this season as the harvest time of the year, not only for those who gathered in the sheaves and led the cattle down from summer pastures but also for the wise whose harvest is the lore of past ages and the whispers of the Unseen. They recognized at this time the power of the desire cherished in the heart’s silence and the bonds that reach from person to person like the sea uniting shore with

Autumn Equinox Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Elfed/Elued

shore; they called down power from the Sun and called up wisdom from the Earth to illuminate their hearts.”

Say: “The Autumn Equinox has arrived, and the Sun and Earth renew the bonds that unite them. In this time of balanced powers, let us invoke the blessings of all the holy ones upon the grove, the Order, and the Earth. Let us radiate outward a blessing to the living earth!”

Say, “Therefore, our work begins in the quarter of Water.”

(Move to the Western side of the altar, facing inward.)

Say: “West; East. Water; Air. The realm of the Heart; the realm of the Mind. May they enter into the great harmony.”

(Light the green candle and pause)

Say: “North; South. The realm of the Body; The realm of the Spirit. May they enter into the great harmony.”

(Light the white candle and pause).

Say: “The Realm of the Waves. The realm of the Stones. The realm of the Winds. The Realm of the Flames. May they enter into the great harmony.”

(Light the blue candle and pause).

(Take the cauldron of incense, face eastwards, and hold up the cauldron, as though in offering.)

Say: “By the Hawk of May in the heights of morning, I invoke the air and the spirits of the air! May their blessings be with the grove, the order and the Earth during the season to come!”

(Imagine a blazing star at the zenith, almost infinitely far above the grove; this is Fomal-haut, the Royal Star governing the ceremony. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of air on the altar.)

Autumn Equinox Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Elfed/Elued

of balanced powers, in this sacred space in the midst of the elements, we invoke the union of Sun and Earth, that the land may be made fruitful and that all who desire the light shall find it.”

Meditation

Say: “I(we) will now meditate and reflect upon the turning of the year and the gifts the coming season brings to all.”¹

(A brief period of meditation follows.)

Additional Work

(At this point, it is appropriate to engage in any additional work you would like for this ceremony, including enjoying a ritual harvest meal (previously prepared), observing nature, playing music, sitting and watching the sunset, engaging in other bardic arts, journeying work, taking time to write in your druid journal, etc. When your work is finished, close out the ceremony using the solitary grove closing.)

1 Alternatively, a specific poem, paragraph, passage, etc. can be read at this point as a focus for the ceremony prior to meditation.

Winter Solstice Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Arthan/Arthur

Altar Materials: Usual AODA materials (white altar cloth, four cauldrons representing the four elements and appropriately arranged on the altar). Additionally include three tall, unlit candles, blue (in the west), green (in the east), and white (in the south) (these candles represent the three rays of light).

Altar Decorations: Conifer branches, pine cones, wintergreen, holly, mistletoe, oak leaves (or other decorations befitting of the season)

Begin by performing the full AODA Solitary grove opening (this includes the grove opening and the full Sphere of Protection). After these are complete, begin the main ceremony:

Say: “In the world of nature the harvest is over and the Sun has descended to the place of his death and rebirth. Cold blows the wind, and colder still lie the snow and the bare earth and the bare black branches of the trees beneath the bright stars; ice rims the edges of the streams and breath bursts white from the lips. Only those creatures that cannot sleep the winter away experience the silence and quietude of the winter days and wait for the coming of spring.”

Say: “The ancients knew this season as the end and beginning of the year, and waited in their stone circles for the first light of the newborn sun, the promise of the new year yet to come. They recognized at this time the power of patience and the wisdom of the world beneath the turning stars, the lessons woven by countless seasons into bone and sinew and sense; they gazed with renewed wonder on the pale Sun and the cold Earth as they awaited the common destiny of all material things.”

Winter Solstice Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Arthan/Arthur

Say: “The Winter Solstice has arrived, and the Sun and Earth manifest the polarities of being. In this time of balanced powers, let us invoke the blessings of all the holy ones upon the grove, the Order, and the Earth. Let us give blessing to all of the land!”

Say: “Therefore, our work begins in the quarter of Earth.”

(Move to the Western side of the altar, facing inward.)

Say: “North, South, Earth, Fire. The realm of the Body; the realm of the Spirit. May they enter into the great harmony.”

(Light the green candle and pause)

Say: “West; East. Water; Air. The realm of the Heart; The realm of the Mind. May they enter into the great harmony.”

(Light the white candle and pause).

Say: “The realm of the Stones. The realm of the Winds. The Realm of the Flames. The Realm of the Waves. May they enter into the great harmony.”

(Light the blue candle and pause).

(Take the cauldron of incense, face eastwards, and hold up the cauldron, as though in offering.)

Say: “By the Hawk of May in the heights of morning, I invoke the air and the spirits of the air! May their blessings be with the grove, the order and the Earth during the season to come!”

(Imagine a blazing star at the zenith, almost infinitely far above the grove; this is Fomalhaut, the Royal Star governing the ceremony. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of air on the altar.)

(Take the cauldron of fire, face southwards and hold up the cauldron, as though in offering.)



Winter Solstice Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Arthan/Arthur

Say: “By the white stag of the summer greenwood, I invoke the fire and the spirits of the fire! May their blessings be with the grove, the order and the Earth during the season to come!”

(Imagine a ray of light descending from the star at infinite height to the golden sphere of the Sun, blazing at zenith above the grove, high above but much closer than the star. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of fire on the altar.)

(Take the cauldron of water, face westwards and hold up the cauldron, as though in offering.)

Say: “By the salmon of wisdom who dwells in the sacred pool, I invoke the water and the spirits of the water! May their blessings be with the grove, the order and the Earth during the season to come!”

(Imagine the ray of light descending further from the blazing Sun to the sphere of the full Moon standing at zenith above the grove, high above but much closer than the Sun. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of water on the altar.)

(Take the cauldron of earth, face northwards and hold up the cauldron, as though in offering.)

Say: “By the great bear who guards the starry heavens, I invoke the earth and the spirits of the earth! May their blessings be with us and with all the world during the season to come!”

(Imagine the ray of light descending from the shining Moon all the way to the Sphere of Protection you established around the grove. Visualize the Sphere is filled with rainbow-colored light. Once this is well established, visualize the light radiating outward in all directions. Take the time to establish this image firmly. When this image is well established, replace the cauldron of earth on the altar.)

Chant: *(Intone with the syllables drawn out Ah-Oh-En:) “AWEN, AWEN, AWEN.”*

Say: “In this season of (summer/winter) may the Sun make manifest the mystery of Light. May the Earth reflect that manifestation in the mystery of Life. In this sacred time of balanced powers, in this sacred space in the midst of the elements, we invoke

Winter Solstice Ceremony (Solitary): The Ritual of Alban Arthan/Arthur

the Sun in his glory, the Earth in her richness, and the harmony that unites them, that the unity of all being may be made manifest. Let us meditate on the turning of the year and the gifts the coming season brings to all.”

Meditation

Say: “I(we) will now meditate and reflect upon the turning of the year and the gifts the coming season brings to all¹.

(A brief period of meditation follows.)

Additional Work

(At this point, it is appropriate to engage in any additional work you would like for this ceremony, including sitting in a candlelit room, watching a fire, playing music, staying in the sacred space for a time in quietude and reflection, writing in your druid journal, blessing tools, journeying work, etc. When your work is finished, close out the ceremony using the solitary grove closing.)

¹ Alternatively, a specific poem, paragraph, passage, etc. can be read at this point as a focus for the ceremony prior to meditation.

Appendix D: Tree Planting Ritual (Solo/Group)

By Dana O'Driscoll, Archdruid of Water¹

This simple planting ritual can be used to bless a single tree or a whole grove of trees². If you've already planted your trees but still want to bless them, you can still use the bulk of the ritual below—just sprinkle the ash near the tree's roots (for fire) and put some high quality soil, compost, or composted manure for the “earth” part around the trunk.

Ritual Supplies

The following supplies are needed for this ritual:

- A feather, fan, or incense (representing air)
- A small bowl of hardwood ash or charcoal (non-chemically treated) (representing fire)
- A watering can filled with water (it can be special water from a local spring, etc.) (representing water).

1 This ritual was originally developed by Dana O'Driscoll, Archdruid of Water, for Star and Thorn Grove, AODA, to plant a new grove of trees in our sacred outdoor grove. It has been adapted for the *New Candidate Guide*. Please feel free to adapt it for your purposes.

2 If you are performing this ritual by yourself, you can perform this ritual as written. This ritual can adapted to a group for planting a whole grove of trees or a single tree. Begin by having the group dig all of the holes for the trees (the hardest part). Assign members of the group to the four elements and have the group work around the grove of trees. Each elemental group can make their way around the circle of the trees in a clockwise manner. When this work is done, one or three people can perform spirit above, below, and within. If you have an uneven number of people, assign more planters than the other parts.



Appendix D: Tree Planting Ritual (Solo/Group)

- A small bowl of compost (representing earth)
- A shovel
- The tree you wish to plant

Ritual Preparation

Dig the hole for your tree prior to planting. The hole for your tree should be substantially deeper and wider than the tree's roots. See these instructions for more information: <https://www.arborday.org/trees/planting/containerized.cfm>. Place your tree next to the hole you have prepared before the ritual begins. Do not take the tree out of the pot or bag it is in until just before you plant it; exposing the roots of the tree to air too long can damage them.

Place your ritual supplies on the ground or on a small altar near the tree.

The Ritual

Open the space with the AODA's Solitary Grove opening or Group Grove Opening (see AODA Grove Manual for the Group Opening).

Say: "Trees are a vital part of all life on this planet—nourishing the soil and preventing erosion, creating oxygen, absorbing carbon dioxide, providing habitat and food, and creating shade. It is not hard to see why the ancient druids celebrated in groves of trees. With each tree we plant and tend as it grows, we provide a blessing to the land and all its inhabitants. I welcome this tree to this land!"

(Place a pinch of ash into the hole prior to the tree planting.)

Say: "May this tree be nourished by this sacred ash, by the energy of the sun, the white stag in the summer greenwood, and the powers of the south. We thank this tree for the shade she will provide from the summer sun."

(Place each tree in the hole, filling the hole with earth.)

As you are planting the tree, say: "May this tree be blessed by the tall stones and great bear of the starry heavens and the powers of the north. We thank this tree for the bounty and stability she will provide."



Appendix D: Tree Planting Ritual (Solo/Group)

(Water the tree thoroughly.)

As you are watering, say: “May this tree be blessed by the salmon of wisdom sacred pool and the powers of the west. We thank this tree for the wisdom she will provide.”

(Lightly fan each tree with a feather/fan/or circle it with incense.)

As you do so, say: “May this tree be blessed by the powers of the hawk of May soaring in the heights of the morning and the power of the air. We thank and honor her for the oxygen that she will provide.”

(Trace your finger on the ground around the tree in a circle and point downward. Visualize a ray of the telluric current, green/gold light, coming up from the earth and filling the tree's roots and trunk with light.)

Say: “May the telluric current rise and bless this tree with the spark of nywfre.”

(Trace your finger in the air above the tree in a circle and point upward. Visualize a ray of the solar current, coming directly from the sun in a golden light, down to the tree and filling its upper branches and trunk with light.)

Say: “May the solar current descend and bless this tree with the blessing and light of the sun.”

(Visualize a white glow from where the two currents meet, surrounding the tree.)

Chant: “Awen, Awen, Awen.”

Say: “May the lunar current be invoked as a blessing for this tree. I welcome you to the fellowship of these lands. In this sacred earth will you grow strong. In the warm rains, will you be nourished. In the wind in the air, will your leaves speak to us as we listen. In fire of the sun, will you grow and shelter me. You embody the core value of peace—for though you are strong, you harm none. And though you are mighty, you protect all beneath your branches. As the earth and moon turn, may you grow and thrive.”

Spend a few minutes in quiet meditation with the tree. Then close the ceremony in the usual way (grove closing).

