

ISSUE 161 - BELTAIN 2023

MYDDLE EARTH

OFFICIAL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE
PAGAN FEDERATION MIDWEST AND WALES
DISTRICT

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Recipe for Jumbles - a 16th Century recipe

- 2 eggs
- 100g sugar
- 1 tbsp caraway seeds
- 175g plain flour

Beat the eggs in a large basin, add in the sugar and caraway seeds. Beat until mixed before adding in the flour. Mix to form a stiff dough. Knead the dough on a lightly floured board and form into rolls (1 cm diameter x 10 cm length). Tie each into a simple knot. Plunge 5-6 at a time into a pan of boiling water (they will sink). After a short time dislodge from the bottom of pan and allow to float for a minute or 2.

Lift out on a slotted spoon and allow to drain on a clean tea towel over a wire rack. Arrange knots on a greased baking sheet. Bake for 15 minutes (Gas mark 4, 180 oC). Turn over and bake for a further 10-15 minutes until golden

Calling all members

We are always looking for new articles, stories, recipes, reviews and new writers to create them. If you would like to have your work included in a future issue of Myddle Earth please email mwaw.editor@paganfederation.co.uk

As Editor I can help with all the spelling, grammar and punctuation business so don't worry about that. Your content makes this YOUR magazine and I'd love to see it go from strength to strength with more local content.

Beltaine Blessings

BELTAIN 2023





DISTRICT MANAGERS' REPORT - Beltaine 2023

BY AUDREY & RICHARD
DISTRICT MANAGERS, PF MID-WEST AND WALES

Hello,

Fresh green leaves, abundant flora, bees, birds and butterflies, warmer, sunnier and longer days: what's not to like about Beltaine?! Winter has been very cold and hung on rather longer than was necessary this time, but has now given way to the season many find the most delightful of all. Swap the winter woollens for lighter clothing, get the garden furniture out of the shed, enjoy the warm evenings and join with others in giving thanks to Mother Earth. There's been an upsurge in PF memberships around here too, now around 230 of you, so hip-hip-hooray and welcome to newcomers as well as those of you renewing. Your support keeps the PF going financially and increases the visibility of Paganism, which was too long in the shadows. We recently cleared out some very old paperwork (yes, it actually was paper!) from 25 years ago and found letters from people writing asking for information on Paganism, but stating 'please do not put "Pagan" on the envelope as I must hide it from my family'. Another expressed fear that their schoolteaching job would be at risk if PF membership was known, and instead used a pseudonym. This was once a common occurrence. It's so sad to think that anyone ever needed to do this, but such fears are rarely seen now. This is a testament to the persistence of the PF in demonstrating to wider society that Paganism is popular, valid and nothing scary. Wear your Paganism openly, you've earned it!

DISTRICT VOLUNTEERS

Regional Co-ordinators

Bristol: Alex <mwaw.bristol@paganfederation.co.uk>

Mid-west: (Staffs, Shrop) VACANT (contact <mwaw.dm@paganfederation.co.uk>)

North Wales: VACANT (contact <mwaw.dm@paganfederation.co.uk>)

Three Counties (Hfds, Worc, Glos) Audrey <mwaw.dm@paganfederation.co.uk>

South Wales: Catherine <mwaw.southwales@paganfederation.co.uk>

Facebook: Pagan Federation Midwest and Wales (Please note: there is a very old FB page called "Pagan Federation Midwest Region" which has not posted anything since 2015 and is nothing to do with us)

Website: Myddle Earth Mid-west and Wales District Pagan Federation

UPDATE!! Let's welcome the Local Co-ordinator for Bristol, the lovely Nicola, who runs a pub moot:
<mwaw.lc.nbristol@paganfederation.co.uk>

If you live in any of the Regions lacking a Regional Co-ordinator and you'd like to step into the role, get in touch with us for a no-obligation chat. We don't bite! <mwaw.dm@paganfederation.co.uk>

Wishing you all the fun and frolics of Beltaine,

Audrey & Richard District Managers, PF Mid-west and Wales



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Facebook: Pagan Federation Mid-west and Wales

Myddle Earth is distributed four times a year to local PF members (and a few others). Your contributions are essential to make this a great magazine. Don't be shy, get in touch. After all this is Your magazine.

COPY DEADLINES

- 31 December for Imbolc Issue
- 31 March for Beltaine Issue
- 30 June for Lammas issue
- 30 September for Samhain issue

ADVERTISING

This is free for non-profit making ventures. For commercial advertising, prices are available on request. Adverts can be emailed to the Editor or posted (see address opposite)

Submission Guidelines

Your submission should meet the following guidelines:

- the content must have a pagan-theme or be of interest to the Mid-West and Wales Pagan community;
- articles should be submitted as a MS Word document or OpenOffice document.
- use a friendly, casual tone as we want to make the content as accessible as possible.
- authors are responsible for the accuracy of references and reference citations;
- images need to be of high quality, minimum resolution 300dpi, preferably in .jpeg format. Please ensure you have copyright permission for their further publication.

Please note the following before submitting your content:

- We reserve the right to abridge articles and to edit them for clarity, style, grammar and accuracy;
- All articles remain the copyright of the author;
- For Welsh language submissions, please accompany with the English translation;
- Although every effort will be made to accept your contributions for publication, we reserve the right to refuse submissions;
- We are sorry but we are unable to pay for submissions; and finally
- If you would like a copy of our GDPR statement, please email mwaw.editor@paganfederation.co.uk

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed by writers are not necessarily those of the Pagan Federation or its Officers.



OLD MAN OF THE ORCHARD BY SUE LYNES

I love my adopted county of Herefordshire and as I have become to know it, I am amazed by the wealth of history and folklore there is. I will be writing a regular piece in Myddle Earth as I find out more but for today I am focussing on the Apple Tree Man or as I call him, the Old Man of the Orchard.

Herefordshire is known for its apple cider and Perry and as such there are a lot of orchards. It is said that every orchard has its own Apple Tree Man because the role of this spirit is to ensure the blossoming and ripening of the fruit to ensure a good crop. That sounds very much like a genius loci, spirit of place. Encounters with the spirit seem to depend on your motivation. Come to scrimp the apples near harvest time? The Apple Tree Man will send you running. Another tale is of a man pouring his mug of mulled cider onto the tree roots one Christmas Eve, only to be rewarded by the Apple Tree Man with the location of a buried, golden hoard. The folklore is closely linked to the tradition of wassailing and placing toast and bread in amongst the tree branches.

The Apple Tree Man is to be found in the oldest tree in the orchard and farmers are advised to leave 3 apples on each tree - one for the fairy, one for the fae and one for the Apple Tree Man to keep harm away.



LITTLE QUIZ

1. Which flower is symbolic of scholarship, wealth, longevity, and is the national emblem of Japan?
2. In Graeco-Roman tradition, which flower is symbolic of Paradise, and is associated with Persephone and Dionysus?
3. In the far east, which flower represents masculinity, good fortune, and youth?
4. The God Mithra is associated with which flower, known for its habit of tracking the course of the sun?
5. The Chinese system of divination uses the stalks of which flower?

Answers on page 12

The Sky At Night for this Season

BY HANNAH

MAY

1st May – Beltane

5th May – Full Moon 18:34

19th May – New Moon 16:53

JUNE

4th June – Full Moon 04:41

18th June – New Moon 05:57

21st June – Summer Solstice 15:57

JULY

3rd July – Full Moon 12:38

17th July – New Moon 19:31

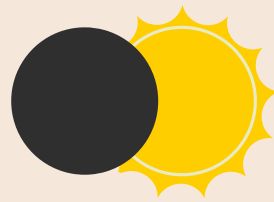
SPECIAL SKIES

6-7th May – peak of the Eta Aquarids meteor shower

19th May – Black Moon which is the third new moon in a season with four new moons

Just out of interest

In 590 BC King Cyaxares of the Medes (Iran) went to war with King Alyattes of Lydia (West Turkey.) The war raged for five years until 585 BC when they witnessed a solar eclipse. Horrified, they gave up the fight and opted for peace instead.



Children and Families Update

The families team hosted the Pagan Federation Imbolc festival online back in February and remain busy with monthly blogs to the communities website which you can check out here

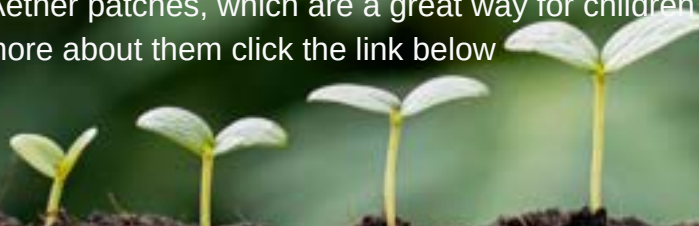
<https://www.pfcommunity.org.uk/category/children-families/>

Families are also in the process of creating videos all about deity for the PF YouTube channel. Check out the god Apollo here

<https://youtu.be/GekJD7wnXYs>

Plus we are constantly creating Aether patches, which are a great way for children to get to about Paganism. If you'd like to know more about them click the link below

<https://youtu.be/yUJtEnKkG88>



Flametending for Brighid: A Devotion and a Path

BY ERIN AURELIA - WRITER AND MOON BOOKS' AUTHOR

Flametending is the name given to a devotional practice during which a perpetual flame dedicated to the Irish goddess and/or saint Brighid is collectively kept alight by groups of 20 members, most often women, in 24-hour rotations. The flame symbolizes the Light of Brighid in the world, if not Brighid herself, as she is known a goddess of fire, both literally and metaphorically. Brighid is a triple goddess of three sisters known as Brighid the Blacksmith, whose fire is of the forge; Brighid the Healer, whose fire is of the hearth, where herbal brews are steeped in a cauldron; and Brighid the Poet, whose fire is that of imbas, or inspiration, poetically referred to as the fire in the head. As a saint, hers is known as the light of peace and vitality.

When did flametending begin?

The custom of flametending historically began in the 5th century CE when an Irish nun named Brighid founded a monastery in Kildare and lit the flame in a fire temple she built there. She and the 19 nuns who lived there each tended this fire, this earthly representation of the Light of God, in turns of 24 hours apiece, in which one nun sat silently with the fire through 24 hours of day and night, feeding the fire to ensure it never died out.

Eventually Brighid passed away, but her nuns continued the practice, and never stopped including Brighid in it. On the 20th night (in Celtic reckoning, days began at sunset), the nun leaving the 19th shift walked to the door, turned and said, "Brighid, it's your night, tend your fire." And when the nun who tended the next night arrived for her shift, it is said that she found the fire still bright, and none of the wood burned.

Only nuns were permitted to do this work, not laywomen, and never men, whether of the cloth or not. Men were not even permitted inside the fire temple, and were said to go mad if they crossed this sacred boundary. When King Henry the 8th closed the monasteries, Brighid's perpetual fire in Kildare, which had been kept alight for half a millennium, was extinguished. Her fire temple then sat cold and dark for over 450 years.

When was the practice of flametending revived?

Brighid's flame was relit in the 20th century on Imbolc in the year 1993, in both Kildare, by a Brighidine order of nuns in Ireland, and by a burgeoning Goddess circle in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. Neither party knew of the other or that they were both relighting Brighid's flame, but since then, Brighid's popularity as both goddess and saint has grown, and the overlap in characteristics between them has been embraced by nearly everyone, Christian and Pagan, who has come to know of and love Brighid. For example, in the individual lore of each, they are both connected with farm animals and pastoralism, healing, fire, water, sun, and learning. The cross of reeds St. Brighid is credited to have woven for the first time to teach a dying man about Jesus that is now a pan-Irish talisman that protects a home or other space from lightning and is a sign of welcome is a pre-Christian solar symbol. Saint Brighid's mythic cloak that magically/miraculously grew to cover the acres of land she build her monastery on is often today imagined as the land itself.

Flametending for Brighid: A Devotion and a Path

CONTINUED....

How is flametending practiced today?

The veneration of Brighid as saint is centred in Ireland in Kildare and hosted by the sisters of Solas Bríde, The Light of Brighid, in a recently built visitor centre near the older cathedral and temple ruins, and two healing wells dedicated to the saint. Brighid's Perpetual Fire is maintained in 7-day candles from which small tapers and tealights of Brighid's Flame are lit and given out, said to carry the energy and blessing of Brighid in the lit and extinguished wick, so the carrier might reconnect with and receive the blessing of Brighid whenever they light a candle from it.

The veneration of Brighid as goddess was reignited in Canada by Casey June Wolf on that Imbolc of 1993. She and her small group of fellow pagan women decided they'd like to practice the flametending tradition, but with a twist: as they all lived individually rather than collectively, they'd each tend the flame in their own spaces during their 24-hour-long shifts for as much time as they were able to, and at the end of their shift, know that as they put out the flames on their shrines, a sister was lighting the flame on hers, and so keeping Brighid's Perpetual Fire through a chain of flames over time and space. This group became known as the Daughters of the Flame and Casey became known as Mael Brigde, Servant of Brighid, and the flametending order grew to include over 200 members today from all over the world who connect with each other in a shared online space as they perform their devotions in their personal spaces.

The flametending tradition grew again in 1996 when a member of the Daughters of the Flame decided to create her own flametending order. Where the Daughters of the Flame expressly welcomed only women, and only pagan women who venerated Brighid as goddess, this new order welcomed both women and men, and both Pagans and Christians venerating the goddess or saint, as they felt called. This new order was named Ord Brighideach (Order of Brighid), and also boasts worldwide membership today. In 2008, I created the Nigheanan Brìghde (Daughters of Brighid) Order of Brighidine Flametenders and Well Tenders to create an order of Celtic polytheist women devoted to tending Brighid's Perpetual Fire and Sacred Well. In 2015, the Clann Bhride (Children of Brighid) opened a flametending order, whose organization focuses on social justice and inclusion for people of all genders, and Brighid's role in that, whom they venerate as both goddess and saint at once.

How can I practice flametending?

Look up these flametending orders online and contact those that most resonate with you by applying to join as directed. When you are accepted, you will be assigned to a subgroup of twenty flametenders called cells, from cills in Irish (cill meaning, church), usually named after a tree in honour of Cill Dara/Kildare, and assigned to a numbered shift within that subgroup. New members sometimes receive a tealight candle in the mail that had been lit from a Flame of Brighid, a candle that came from Kildare, Ireland, and this candle is used to light the candles that are lit for flametending, as they then carry the Perpetual Fire of Brighid.

Flametending for Brighid: A Devotion and a Path

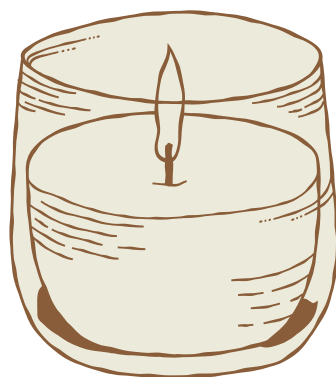
CONTINUED..2

Although flametenders are organized within groups and are sometimes able to access each other and share community online, each 24-hour shift of devotional flametending is kept alone by each flametender. Other than an oft-proffered ritual to perform when beginning the devotional practice for the first time, flametending orders don't generally require any other specific prayers or acts to be done during shifts, leaving the use of time open to how the flametender feels called, or is able to spend it.

The solo practice of flametending lends itself well to quiet, inner work like prayer and meditation. Many flametenders recite regular prayers during their vigils, whether prayers found in books or online by others, or those they've written themselves. Some flametenders also leave offerings on their shrines for Brighid, such as milk, butter, cheese, or bread. In addition to offering devotion through inner work, devotion is also offered through work that is dedicated to the goddess in one of her aspects, such as making herbal medicines, crafting, or writing.

In my own practice, I offer butter and prayer to open my way to Brighid, then sit in meditation to open her way to me. I breathe her energy from her flame into my heart, let it fill me, then surround me and hold me, feeling and taking in her guidance, healing, and wisdom. I close my meditation with thanks and with prayers for my loved ones in need and my sisters in Brighid. I have also developed an inspired perpetual flametending practice of 20-day flametending cycles in which I connect with various faces of Brighid in order to engage in a process of spiritual transformation with Brighid's guidance and support. I write about this practice I developed in my forthcoming book, *The Torch of Brighid: Flametending for Transformation*, due out this June by Moon Books, and currently available online for preorder at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Powell's. I also meditate with Brighid's many faces throughout the solar cycle of Irish fire festivals and seasons to deepen my connection with her and further my spiritual development.

Flametending can be a wonderfully enriching practice for devotees of Brighid, providing the support of both spiritual guidance and shared community. If Brighid is calling to you, consider including flametending for her to your spiritual practice.



Tilly Treehugger - All or Nothing?

Like me, you may have noticed there's a certain amount of finger-wagging, tut-tutting and cancelling going on in the environmental movement (and in society generally). Some government initiative "doesn't go far enough", celebrities bragging about lightweight changes to lifestyle, someone calls out another for false information or living the high life while preaching the opposite. One of the most destructive and unhelpful ideas is, "If you're not doing everything, you're not doing anything", what I call the "all-or-nothing" concept. In other words, we are expected to be perfect. Ecologically and ethically unblemished.

It reminds me of the radical feminism of the 1970's: breaking conventions with mismatched socks and earrings, Doc Martens, short spiky hair and shabby dungarees or you weren't a genuine rebel. "What, you associate with men? You work in the private sector? Wear dresses? Horrors!" Standards shift to the point where nobody knows what is best but they push an agenda regardless. It's enough to make one faint, or simply give up.

Living in harmony with the Earth shouldn't be a competition. Hands up who is totally vegan, lives in a shack in the woods with no plumbing or electricity, wears only discarded clothing, eats only by foraging, walks everywhere, etc. Look, no hands! That's because we're all just doing our best, or at least trying to. Yes, we could all probably be making adjustments to our lifestyles and habits to be less damaging to the environment. However, quarrelling amongst ourselves is doing our detractors' work for them and there is nothing more insufferable than virtue-signalling. Making do with less is generally a good thing, but most people resist the notion. It smacks of rationing, self-denial, poverty, and not likely to inspire many to change their ways. Make it funky. Environmentalism needs a shorter name, a face-lift and some saucy, butt-kicking FUN!! Think the 'baby balloon' caricature flown in response to Trump's state visit to Britain, or the Boris Johnson loo brush (I nearly bought one!) Everyone loves to laugh and public figures deserve to be mocked, especially when they're cheating.

Keep a beady eye on developments, as these can change. We need to be informed and aware in order to respond to questions. Look for positives too, such as the news that renewable electricity-generating technologies are dropping in price to the point where they cost less than fossil fuels-based methods. Highlighting the success stories is as important as shouting about the bad news. We need some light relief to keep our spirits up and counter the doom-and-gloom accusations, so laugh a little – and often!



Tilly's Top Tip

Mix equal parts white vinegar and water, shave the zest off a lemon and put this mixture in a wide-mouth jar to ferment for a fortnight. Discard the lemon zest, then put in a spray bottle or soak a rag with it to clean surfaces in the home.



A Bard's Tale

By Andy Harrop-Smith

Hi, my name's Andy Harrop-Smith, Druid, storyteller, folklorist and a bit of a historian, all at an amateur level of course. I enjoy researching folklore and history to inform my stories, and I'd love to share some of my findings with you.

In the Imbolc edition of Myddle Earth, I began sharing some of my research into the noble trade of the Blacksmith. I ended 'Part 1' by briefly discussing how the creation of iron from stone, and the fashioning of weapons and tools using the 4 elements had earned the Blacksmith a magical and mysterious reputation. He was often thought to be a sorcerer or alchemist. Other tales recount how the Blacksmith's arts and secrets were gifts from the Gods or even the Devil.

The Blacksmith: God, Cunning-man and doctor

The sword is arguably the masterpiece of the Blacksmith's art, and throughout history it has gained a magical reputation all of its own. Caliburn or Excalibur could only have been crafted by a Blacksmith. In some stories it was Wayland the Smith, Blacksmith to the Gods of the Anglo Saxons, and in others made by Mountain Dwarves deep underground. But there is no doubt that the wondrous weapon was created from stone/earth by fire, air, water and plenty of hammering and sweat. Other heroes have also wielded marvellous swords with supernatural qualities, from Siegfried the Dragonslayer with 'Balmung', to Uhtred (Son of Uhtred) with 'Serpent Breath'.

'Destiny is all'...what will we do without the Last Kingdom?

Some village Blacksmiths also doubled as the local 'Cunning-man' for two reasons. Firstly, they had the magical reputation and arcane knowledge required for the job, and secondly the extra income came in handy! Tradespeople in the past were by no means as well paid as their modern counterparts. Stories of Blacksmiths banishing changelings, thwarting fairies and the Devil, and lifting and laying curses are not uncommon.

In the horse-worshipping, war-like, Celtic/Iron Age cultures, the Blacksmith was held in the highest regard. He often knew the secrets of the 'Horse Whisperer' and so had power over the sacred beast. So too, before the vet, the Blacksmith would have been the local specialist in horse physiology and surgery. And it wasn't just horses that he would be required to heal, for he'd often be called on to set limbs, cauterise wounds or pull teeth! And if the Blacksmith couldn't cure you, a drink from the water in the 'slack-tub', used to cool the hot iron, might do the trick. It was said to have been blessed by St Brigit herself (or the Virgin Mary). The water was rusty brown in colour due to the dissolved oxides and salts in it that may have given the liquid some medicinal qualities.

It was believed to prevent pregnancy, cure warts and rickets, and settle flatulence. Not only was the Blacksmith master of many trades, he was also fart-free!



A Bard's Tale

By Andy Harrop-Smith

Iron: Strong and sacred

The Smithy itself was literally full of items thought to have magical qualities, none more so than iron itself. The discovery of iron and how to forge it was a massive technological leap forwards, and it must have seemed like a gift from the Gods. Iron weapons and tools were much stronger and kept a sharp edge for longer than bronze blades. Iron was considered to be a sacred metal with supernatural qualities, and universally the metal was considered to be a magical material, able to ward off anything evil including the Devil and his demons, black witches and naughty fairies. It was regularly carried as a talisman to ward off the evil eye, placed under a churn to prevent witches turning the milk sour, or nailed to a coffin lid to prevent the dead returning as 'revenants' (former-day zombies). Graveyards were surrounded with iron railings for the same reason and a host of sharp, iron implements...knives, scissors, shears etc, were hung over baby's cradles to prevent them from being stolen by fairies...I wonder what Social Services would have made of that?

Iron horseshoes have been thought of as 'lucky' for centuries...which way do you hang yours, horns up or down? The horns were thought to represent the horns of a New Moon or perhaps a sacred bull or other animal. I won't say anything more about the wonderful horseshoe now as it's a whole article's worth in itself.

Other links to the Smithy...

Forge/fire: Discovery of the means to make fire was the most important discovery made by humankind. It provided warmth, light, safety and security, cooking, and of course the means to make war. Forge fire was considered sacred, once owned exclusively by the gods and it could cleanse or destroy evil items.

Anvil: The anvil sat on a solid stump of Oak or Ash, which ensured it had 'a good ring to it'. It was often used to swear oaths, with the Blacksmith as witness, a well-respected and trusted man. Ringing the anvil three times kept the Devil away. 'Turning the Anvil' was used in the process of lifting or laying a curse, often employed in rural Ireland in the 18th and 19th centuries against wicked landlords and bailiffs.

Marriage: The fire and hearth were at the heart of the family and have been associated with wedding rites for 1000s of years. Marriage was often undertaken in the Blacksmith's shop called an 'Anvil Wedding', made famous by ceremonies at Gretna Green.

And that concludes a whistle-stop journey through just some of the many and varied aspects of the world of the Blacksmith. The mythology is marvellous and the folk tales are fabulous, and I honour the trade of my ancestors.

If you have any comments, anecdotes or stories regarding any of the topics that I write about please feel free to Email me on: andy.harrop121@btinternet.com. I'd love to hear from you.

Thanks for listening



IN THE BOOK NOOK WITH WREN



In this issue's Book Nook, I have a couple of books to share with you.

Following on from the Imbolc Issue in which **Coz Catlin** shared with us tips for incorporating your witchy path into your business endeavours. I decided to read and review her new book.

Witch Business - Bringing Practical Magic to Your Work

Author: Coz Catlin

(Available from Amazon, ISBN 979 8 36604 318 2)

This is a smashing book laid out in a series of practical exercises, hints, tips and inspirational ideas. It really is jam-packed with ideas. It covers the whole range of business practicalities as you might expect but looks at them from a very different perspective. These range from goal setting, your working environment and energy flows to working with the seasons, working with the moon phases and setting up some magical self-care routines.

The Magic of Cats

Author Andrew Anderson

(Available from Moon Books, all good book retailers, ISBN: 978 1 80341 066 1)

In Ancient Egypt, we worshipped them as the physical embodiment of a goddess. In Medieval Europe, we tortured and punished them for being the familiars of witches. In the twenty-first century, we are obsessed with filming and posting their antics on social media. I love my two cats Cosmo (a tabby) and Amber (a black beauty) so this book really resonated with me from the outset. Andrew shares with us some personal anecdotes of his feline companions whilst explaining his view of cats as The Cat of the Day and the Cat of the Night. He also includes his famous children's story on the duo.

It is a gentle book to read but also one where we, the readers, learn a great deal through the powerful medium of story.

I thoroughly recommend Andrew's book for anyone but, if like me, you have a couple of furry overlords in your home, you won't ever look at them in quite the same way again.



Quiz Answers

1. Chrysanthemum
2. Asphodel
3. Peony
4. Sunflower
5. Yarrow

(Source: Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols by JC Cooper)



Connecting to Kindness Even in a Crisis

Being a Pagan is, by its nature, a way of adopting an essence of otherness. Paganism is not a mainstream religion, in fact it's not even a single religion at all! Many faiths hang out under the vast umbrella of Paganism, and of course, some Pagans wouldn't even consider themselves religious at all. However, all Pagans and, indeed, most folks of a spiritual persuasion tend to view the world in slightly different ways to those outside the reach of the umbrella.

I like this.

I like that winter holds as much magic as spring, when you appreciate the cycles of death and rebirth. I like that pausing in the forest and just breathing for a moment can reveal mysteries as mundane as the skittering of a squirrel up a tree, or the cacophonous shriek of a jay. But most of all, I like that nearly every Pagan I talk to has a passion for their planet, nature, or the environment. Some love animals, and I've spoken to many who work in rescue centres or other animal-centric roles. Some revere our forests and woodlands so much they end up working in conservation or as educators, raising awareness about deforestation and other major ecological issues. Others simply embrace that passion in their own homes and lives, perhaps growing food, or simply connecting to nature in small ways: watching the bees through the window in spring, jumping out of bed to run to the window in the night because they heard the yip of a fox, or moving snails off the path so they don't get crushed.



To me, these are all examples of active kindness. By this I mean kindness that we practice as actions, transforming "kind" from an adjective into a verb. Being kind is wonderful but doing kind is so much more. Okay, I'm abusing grammar now, but I think it's important to understand how much impact kind, mindful actions can have, especially for the world we live in.

Cost of Living Versus Environmental Kindness

Environmental concerns were, until recently, a key issue for many people in the United Kingdom and beyond. 74% of UK adults stated they were somewhat or very concerned about climate change up to 2022[i]. Recently, the cost-of-living crisis has taken over as the overriding stressor for many people, with 89% reporting increases in day-to-day costs like utilities and food[ii]. It's hard, sometimes, to align financial hardship with remaining eco-friendly. How can you carry on buying the expensive, eco-options of cleaning products and groceries when cheaper, more mass-produced options are available and lighter on the wallet? How do Pagans stay connected to an ecologically ethical practice while trying to feed their families for as little as possible with escalating energy bills looming over every payday horizon?

I think the first response to this concern is to say that health and wellbeing, including financial wellbeing, comes first. The simple fact is that we live in a capitalist society and, until that changes, when prices rise and times are tough, it's okay to save money where you can. On an aeroplane, the advice is that in an emergency, you always put your own mask on first, even if you have children. This is because it puts you in a better position to help others. The same logic applies here. If you want to work towards a healthier planet, you are much more well equipped to do so with a full belly and all your bills paid, where possible. I don't think anyone should put themselves in debt or make themselves miserable trying to buy eco-friendly products or reduce food miles.



My next response would be to suggest having a look at what food waste initiatives are available in your area. I'm lucky enough to live near Rethink Food^[iii], an initiative aimed at increasing food security by intercepting perfectly good food destined for the bin. Many major supermarkets now donate to Rethink rather than throwing away their "waste" food. We get a box of mixed groceries every week, and it saves us a small fortune. Plus, I get the peace of mind that I've saved this food from going to landfill. It's only a small change, but it effectively combines my desire to be kinder to the planet with my need to look out for my family's immediate wellbeing, too.

Small Change Matters

Making little changes like this is often the best way to start or expand upon your planet-friendly way of life. Within your Pagan practice, you might find that there are other ways you can save money and actually end up being kinder to the environment. You could have a go at:

- Making your own incense with household ingredients
- Foraging (with an expert! Don't ever eat anything you're unsure of)
- Growing your own altar flowers
- Making your own altar decorations
- Upcycling unwanted clothes into altar cloths, tarot wraps, rune bags etc.
- Making your own candles – which can also help with the energy crisis!
- Creating a swap shop with other people in your community to trade unwanted or pre-loved items



There are so many more ideas, and the opportunity to get creative can be very cathartic when life is stressful or overwhelming.

Connecting Your Commitment

Of course, not everyone has time to be a crafty witch or Pagan and not everyone handles changes to their habits in the same way. I have ADHD and find sticking to any routine extremely difficult. This means that I find it hard to form habits, even ones as simple as putting odds and ends in the compost bin. Sometimes there are so many things rattling in my head that the ones I need to do get lost down the back of the metaphorical sofa. I've found that one way to get around this is to commit my actions to my chosen deities.

An Mórrígan was gifted my latest book^[ii], and my composting efforts. I knew that I wanted to make the compost bin work, and I knew I was struggling with it. So, I made every trip up the garden part of my daily devotions to Her, reflecting on how decay can be positive, transformative, and nourishing; sloughing away the old to grow something new and wonderful.

Practically Pagan: An Alternative Guide to Planet Friendly Living continued.2

Sometimes doing something for a higher purpose or even just for someone we care about can help us to get past the barriers that hold us back. These may include feeling like small changes are pointless in the face of larger, more global ecological issues. They may also include fatigue, or simply being bogged down by other commitments, such as work. As long as you are well and able, consider committing your environmentally-kind daily actions to an appropriate deity within your practice. If you don't follow a deity-based path, you could offer up your actions to the universe, or to the essence of nature—whatever makes most sense and impact in your life.

Embracing That Connection

Once you start noticing the small changes you make in your practice, you may find that you naturally become more connected to the world around you. This is not to say that flowers will suddenly start blooming with every step or that songbirds will alight on your shoulders as you step outside! However, you may notice that you're a little more aware of the turning of the seasons. You might notice the first leaves turning gold or ember-orange in the early autumn. You may spot the first green buds a little earlier than you used to.

There's a real cause and effect to this. For example, if you start feeding the birds regularly, you'll naturally notice what feathered visitors you're getting. You might even start learning a little more about them, or keeping a log and noting patterns in their arrival. This past Winter Solstice, I was delighted to see a visiting flock of redwings resting in the trees at the end of our housing estate. I read up on them and discovered that they often come here from Scandinavia, sometimes flying hundreds of miles in a single night. Amazing! I sat and watched them for about half an hour, and took many terrible, blurry photos. Such a simple moment, really, but one I'll remember forever and I truly felt like it was a gift in return for the food and water I'd consistently left out for the redwings' cousins.

Finding opportunities for these small, planet-friendly changes is true magic; the type of magic I believe every reader can perform in their daily lives.

Practically Pagan: An Alternative Guide to Planet Friendly Living by Mabh Savage explores simple ways to shift your Pagan or spiritual practice so that you effortlessly adopt more environmentally kind habits. Available through most major book shops.

[1] <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/worriesaboutclimatechangegreatbritain/septembertoctober2022>

[2] <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/expenditure/articles/whatactionsarepeopletakingbecauseoftherisingcostofliving/2022-08-05>

[3] <https://www.rethinkfood.co.uk/>

[4] https://www.amazon.co.uk/Practically-Alternative-Planet-Friendly-Living/dp/1789044456/ref=sr_1_2?qid=1677604850&refinements=p_27%3AMabh+Savage&s=books&sr=1-2

The Wildwood

by ROSELLE ANGWIN - Writer and Moon Books' Author

‘To enter a wood is to pass into a different world in which we ourselves are transformed... [the Wildwood] is where you travel to find yourself, often, paradoxically, by getting lost.’

- Roger Deakin

In my waking dream I am leaning my back against the lower trunk of a great tree, an ash, perhaps. In my dream it is truly huge, and I am tiny: I could slip through the crack in just one of the deep fissures of its bark and walk between the worlds.

Above me, two buzzards flip and mewl and wheel in play. Around me is the forest's oceanic green; over my head the wind made audible by the leafy canopy is the forest's breaking waves. My bare feet are sunk in the moss at its feet, and if I let them they could sink right down through moss and leaf-mould, stone and bone, soil and root into the mycorrhizal networks of the tree which, if laid end to end, would embrace the globe.

My whole weight is supported by the massive girth of the trunk: it is utterly secure, stable, sustained and sustaining. My arms and hands are spread out to each side of me and I can't now tell where skin ends and bark begins. I am utterly held, utterly safe.

In my dream I know this is the World Tree, the Tree of Life, and that I might step through to the tree-behind-the-tree and travel simultaneously to past and future, to the Underworld and the Otherworld, and to the place where nothing and everything are the same, where there is no tree, no me, only the pure light of consciousness. In time, I stand up. I am me and not-me.

I spend part of my year in a hamlet in an ancient largely broadleaf forest in Brittany. In addition to animals, birds, insects, trees, plants and humans, the forest is populated by huge granite boulders like great sleeping mammals, rock and tree cohabiting, adapting to and frequently fusing with each other.

I tread paths trodden since at least the Iron Age. The area is dotted with menhirs, dolmens, tumuli, great long-barrows dating from the late Neolithic or the early Bronze Age, some standing for more than 5000 years.

When I walk into the forest, I walk into a deep, receptive and attentive humming silence, a benign presence. This is where I come for stillness, to write, to feel the expansive spaciousness that is ours when we stop cramming every minute full. In the forest I step into a different kind of time.

This is also where I learn from trees, though to start with I thought I was coming to learn about trees, not from them. This is where, too, I find green healing, remember the way a tree joins heaven and earth – arguably our task, also, psychologically, metaphorically, in our inner lives. I walk the forest, listen for the birds, the rivers, the cascades, the stories of the wildwood that rustle in the leaves above me and the growth on every side, try and stay aware of the great interlocking network beneath my feet, the mycorrhizal web that keeps each tree in connection with the all, the forest, and carries its own stories of carbon, sugars, water, messages from tree to tree.



The Wildwood

continued..

How much we can learn from such an underground ecosystem – invisible, utterly interconnected, vital. Trees somehow mediate between ourselves and a different reality, a different order of consciousness. There are liminal places, thresholds into an experience of the meeting of the physical and the metaphysical, and times in which this sense is heightened and we're on the cusp of another reality hovering, waiting to be revealed – just a blink away, rather like walking in the forest, in and out of sunlight and treeshadow. There are days here when I somewhat fancifully sense that I'm 'breathing in' myth, fable, poetry through my skin and the soles of my feet. And there are always two forests. One is the physical woods and forests we encounter – or don't, but know they exist – 'out there'. The other is the abiding forest of our imagination: a pristine (because unaltered – and unalterable – by humans) wildwood; the one we encounter in myths, legends, fairy stories. Of course, there is little 'wildwood' left on our planet now; but it lives on in our interior life, even if we weren't fed fairy stories as children. This Forest is magical, otherworldly, immense, scary, seductive and enticing. This is the Wildwood, the Enchanted Forest.

Bringing the two, outer and inner, together is a source of richness, nourishment, wholeness.

The wildwood is unfamiliar and uncharted, where anything may happen; where people go astray and might arrive somewhere distinctly other from everyday consciousness, and where the wild is what guides. It's not just the planet and other, wilder, species that need wild places, need the Wildwood; we do too. We need these places, and we need to be able to visit them, or their representatives, in the physical world as a way of restoring balance and harmony in the heart of our species. We need to restore and familiarise ourselves with the Wildwood's correspondence in our inner lives; in making this living relationship we might have a chance of healing the wasteland, inner and outer, we've created in our deracinated industrialised world.

It's not an accident that so many of our fairy tales, legends, myths and other ancient stories and poems in Europe and the West in general, incorporate entry into and a period in the dark forest. In the older tales, so often there is an intimate relationship between human and other-than-human concerns and cycles in which the forest leaves the human changed.

The wildwood is also the domain of those mythical beings who seem part human, part forest: dryads, tree-sprites or nymphs, elves, faeries, goblins, dwarves, Oak King, Holly King, Green Man, Green Knight, Wild Man; Robin Hood (Robin du Bois, Robin of the Wood), Maid Marian. It's also where individuals have retreated for silence, peace, ritual and contemplation forever. (Think of the early pagan seers and sorcerers, the Druids, the later contemplatives and hermit saints.) And for healing. In story, figures such as Merlin/Myrddin after the battle of Arfderydd in the Scottish borders in CE 573, and Suibhne Geilt in what is now Ireland after the battle of Magh Rátha in CE 637, both fled, mad with grief, to the forest to live in or among trees in their need for healing. The forest is a place of transformation, facilitating altered states such as shapeshifting (Suibhne supposedly flew through the treetops like a bird; Merlin in the forest of Celyddon, later known as the Caledonian Forest, rode a stag – or maybe shapeshifted into a stag). Entering the Wildwood is a step towards home.

The Wildwood

continued..2

The Wildwood

Finally you open your eyes. The meadow's tall grasses curtain you; beyond, the blue hills rise. Emergent sun hazes their summits. You sit up. There ahead of you is the little path, and in the stone wall a small wooden gate. You stand. Below in the valley swallows and martins skim the mist from the morning river.

You stretch. The conversations of birds; the song of the water. Your hand lifts the old wooden latch. You step through. You slip into the green of the woods as into a silk dress. The path rises gently, sprinkled with light. It is May and the land is alight with white blossom. The wood swims with the scent of bluebells; the air is lilac with it. A thousand wild bees drone. You're alone and it's the first day.

In the green glade pass the ruins of the hermit's chapel with its green dreams, the low walls grassed and blackbird-capped; the spring bubbling and chattering.

Follow the path in and out of sunlight. Oaks and ashes season the woodland; first bursts of honeysuckle; and look! – in the shade of this larch a host of goldcrests, a corona around your head. Your feet firm on the good earth. Here there's no need for shoes, you can shake out the creases in which you hide; the truth is as it is, all around you, spread out.

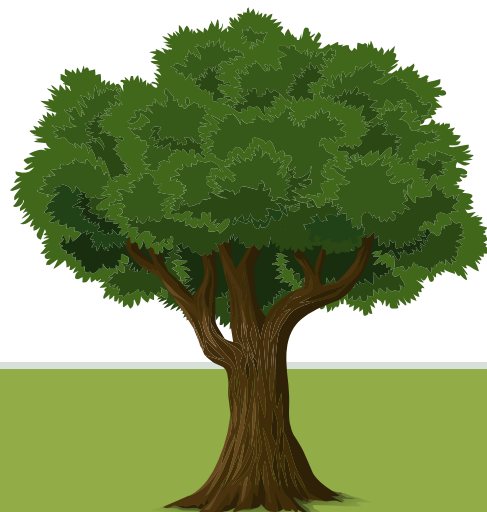
The trees thin out, a little. In the undergrowth of campion, stitchwort and bramble are the rustles of lives going about their daily cycles. A wren skitters out; a bluetit. A very young vole, the length of your top finger joint, scurries across the path, over your feet, unafraid. In the distance a woodpecker knocks.

Soon, you will arrive. The green glade in the green day; summer still to come; and you are young, you are now, you are always. The threshold waits; and its guardian; and question and response will spring and be answered simultaneously, with no words. You pass through.

And there it is – waiting all your life for you, there before questions, before answers. You knew, and forgot that you knew.

Edited excerpts from **A Spell in the Forest – tongues in trees** by Roselle Angwin (Moon Books 2021)

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