

THE DRUID NETWORK

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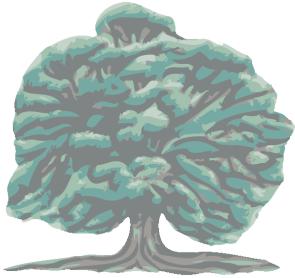
Connections with Spirits of Place

By Jo van der Hoeven

Finding and establishing a connection to the spirits of place is integral to Druidry, for nature, both the physical world and human nature are an essential part of the practice. The Druid seeks to find an honourable relationship with the natural world, with the stones and trees, the waterways, the hedgehogs under the bushes in the backyard, the blackbird that sings at dusk, the next door neighbour. The spirits of place are just that – the energy, the life force, the song of every living thing in a time and place. For most, Druidry is an animistic tradition, seeing this spirit in all things, from the drying, decaying leaf to the mountain rising out of the plain, the lake at dawn to the spider living in the eaves of the house. Respect and connection to these spirits is what makes for an honourable relationship, which is what the Druid longs and craves for in an ever increasing society that seems intent on separating itself from the natural world.

To find, establish, or even re-establish that connection with the spirits of place, here are a few helpful hints:-

- Find a spot outside, near to where you live, where you feel safe. This should be a spot where you can sit undisturbed. It could be in your backyard, in a local park, in a nearby wood, by a river, or even in a quiet room of your house. Go to that spot daily, as many times as you can, and listen. Hear the songs around you – the yipping of small children, the pigeons on the chimney, the ambulance sirens, the wind through the



trees. Really pay attention to these sounds, hearing everything in your world around you. This is sometimes easier to do with eyes closed, to really focus the concentration. Don't judge or think about what you hear – just listen. As soon as thoughts start to interfere, you aren't paying attention to other sounds. Really try to hear the spirits of place.

- Next, feel the space around you. Are you sitting on the ground, on a bench, standing on a large stone? Reach out with your fingertips and feel those things around you. You can also feel with your feet the surface you stand on, or your backside the ground you sit upon. Feel the wind on your face, the sunshine on your shoulders, the rain falling upon your head. Again, try not to let thoughts distract you from feeling.
- Continuing with the senses, now open up your awareness of scent, and really smell the air that surrounds you, the grass beneath your feet, the honeysuckle, the woodsmoke. Continue working with scent much like the previous senses.
- Finally, look around you at everything that surrounds you. Pay attention to the minute detail in a changing leaf, the bee exploring the hibiscus, the cat lounging in the sunshine. You'll be surprised at what you have missed previously if you really pay attention. Your backyard could become a whole new world!
- Now that the senses have been opened to your surroundings, it is time to open your heart, your soul, your song to the spirits of place. After paying

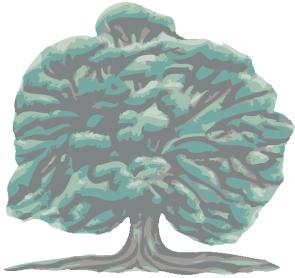


attention to the other spirits of place, find that spot within yourself which craves for relationship with the natural world. Open it up and let it sing along with the other spirits that you have explored. Don't drown out the other sounds – the key thing to remember is to work with respect. Let your soul open like a flower towards the morning sun, and in an open and friendly manner, become part of your surroundings. Remembering that you are a part of your natural world, and not separate from it, is critical.

Doing these exercises at least once a day can really help to establish that connection that we crave with our natural world. Whatever the weather, whatever the season, keep going back to that place, preferably outside.

Within the home, establishing a connection with the spirits of place is just as important, however. The same exercises can be performed indoors, listening to the central heating or the crackle of the hearthfire, feeling the carpet or the rug beneath our feet, smelling the laundry drying on the rack and looking at the shadows playing upon the wall. Getting to know your house, and its spirit, is a very important part of connecting with the spirits of place, for your house is your sanctuary – it keeps you safe and warm and protected from the elements. Here are a few other ideas for finding a connection with the spirits of place within the home:-

- Build an altar in your home. Place upon it things that reflect for you the connection that you wish to establish, or things that you find beautiful and inspiring. It could be as simple as a bowl of earth with bits from the garden



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that you have gathered, with a candle set in the middle. It could be pictures of loved ones, ancestors, or even pets. Feathers, stones gathered from long walks, anything that makes you want to come back to it is suitable. Spend time at your altar, doing the above exercises, finding the spirits of place in the home.

- Leave offerings to the spirits of place, whether inside or outside the home. A bit from every meal, a piece of music that you have written and played, a beverage or even burning a special incense can all be offerings to help and establish that relationship. Giving and receiving are an essential part of any relationship, and you can show your appreciation and your gratitude for what you have through the process of leaving offerings.

The spirits of place consist of the community as well, so try to help out with your community. Aiding at a local shelter, picking up litter, building bat boxes, donating to charities – all of these can help further that relationship with your world around you.

May you be blessed in your new relationship!

Joanna van der Hoeven (Autumn Song)