

An Interview with Athelia Nihtscada

Scott Douglas Jacobsen



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An Interview with Athelia Nihtscada (Part One)^{1,2}

Please see the footnotes during and bibliography after the interview, respectively.

Abstract

An interview with Athelia Nihtscada. She discusses: geographic, cultural, and linguistic background; pivotal moments in personal life leading into druidism; other spiritual and religious traditions with differences in core beliefs about the structure and function of the universe, the inter-relationship with human beings at individual and collective levels, and the common and esoteric separations of druidism; and the lessons from 20+ years of druidism.

Keywords: Athelia Nihtscada, common, druidism, esoteric, human beings, religion, spiritual, universe.

1. In terms of geography, culture, and language, where does your family background reside?

My parents and older brother immigrated to Canada from London, England in 1974. I was born in Calgary, Alberta, Canada just over a year later. My father was born in Nottinghamshire, the son of a RAF fighter pilot and a socialite. Because of his father's military career, he and his family moved around often.

2. What seem like pivotal moments in personal life leading into Druidism?^{3,4}

¹ Founder and Arch Druid, Awen Grove; Member of the Third Order of the Reformed Druids of North America; Member, Order of Bards Ovates and Druids; Member, The British Druid Order; Member, Henge of Keltria; Member and Past Regional Coordinator, Druid Network; Member and Past Regional Druid of Western Canada, Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship (ADF).

² First publication on October 1, 2015 at www.in-sightjournal.com.

³ In *I am a Druid* (2010), Nihtscada stated:

“My name is Athelia Nihtscada and my journey along the Druid path started back in 1991. My husband and I live outside of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. When I started out, there were no Druids in my locale that I could find so I did much of my studying alone and under a few teachers (in other traditions) for the first 6 years. While most of my early years were spent in solitary practice, I did become involved in the local Pagan Community starting in 2000. In 2003, I decided to form Awen Grove...In 2005, I completed the Dedicant Path with ADF and was initiated as a Third Order Druid with the Reformed Druids of North America...I love the diversity of our global Druid community and find that I have learned a lot from every tradition and am grateful to be able to provide seeking Druids in my locale with information on each group so that they can find their best fit. Druidry is about Service to me and I am honoured to serve the Global Druid Community in any way I can.”

Please see Nihtscada, A. (2010, July 1). *I am a Druid*. Retrieved from <http://www.experienceproject.com/stories/Am-A-Druid/1091403>.

⁴ In addition to the previous statement, Nihtscada, in *Druid Writer – Athelia Nihtscada Voices on the Path*, said:

“I am 36 years old, married and living in Southern Alberta, Canada with our 3 cats. Currently, I am employed as a manager of volunteers at a non-profit organization and also work part time as a freelance IT consultant. My hobbies are: writing, drawing, singing, playing guitar and piano and making jewelry...I first began walking this

For the first 10 years of my education, I attended Catholic school. Although my parents were not fond of organized religion, they had heard that the Catholic education system was better than the public. I never quite fit in because I openly questioned my teachers about matters of the spirit. If the soul were immortal, why would it only have the span of one human life to prove its worth and then be consigned to either Heaven or Hell? A human life span is merely a drop in the bucket to an immortal being. When I was 8 years old, I asked my father what the soul was. He explained that the soul is like a driver and the body is like a car. The driver switches on the ignition and drives the car everywhere it needs to go. The car would break down, or end up in a collision, but could be fixed. Eventually, a time would come when the car could no longer be fixed because the damage was too great. That is death of the body. I asked what the driver did after that. Dad said that he supposed that the driver would just get a new car.

Later that same year, while on vacation at Mara Lake in British Columbia, I was playing in the lake and got in over my head. One moment, I was scared and could not swim to the surface. Suddenly, I was standing in a large field, with the sun beating down on me; a few people were standing around me. They were all very kind, but I did not know who they were. Turning around, I saw a large grove of trees and I asked the people if I could see it. They said it was not yet time. All of a sudden, I felt like something was grabbing me by the back of the neck. I then found myself on the beach at Mara Lake, sputter and cold. My brother had pulled me out of the water.

When I started high school at the age of 15, I befriended a girl who was very aware of her Scottish

path in 1991 when I learned about my Celtic heritage. Upon reading about the Celts, I found myself strongly drawn to the Druids and their spirituality. I asked around and soon found myself pointed in the right direction and beginning my studies.”

Please see Nihtscada, A. (2012, July 26). Druid Writer – Athelia Nihtscada Voices on the Path. Retrieved from <http://paganbookshelf.blogspot.ca/2012/07/druid-writer-athelia-nihtscada-voices.html>.

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Heritage. She told me about her family's tartan, crest, customs, etc. I knew our family was not directly from Scotland, but what was our heritage? I asked my mother and she said we were descended from the Celts. Over the Summer, she brought me a book from the library called "The Celts" by Frank Delaney. I felt a certain 'tug' in my chest when I read about the history and religion of the ancient Celts. Something was there, but I did not know what.

After that first year, I switched to a very unique public school, which focused on self-directed learning, accountability and democratic process. For the first time in my life, I was happy at school and excelled academically. The year was 1991. I fit right in with the culture of the school and it was there that I found my spiritual path.

Some of my schoolmates had discovered Wicca and were reading up on it at the library. I kept myself occupied with reading books about the Celts. That tug in my heart had become stronger and I knew that it had something to do with the Druids. For some reason, I really wanted to be one, despite knowing that the original Druids had died out a long time ago. Why would I be pining so much for something unattainable? It made no logical sense!

I attended a Wiccan teaching circle with a few of my schoolmates and found that it was close to what I was looking for, but did not feel 100% right. Later that evening, I was approached by an older woman who offered to "teach me the Wiccan Way". I politely declined, but did ask if there was such a thing as Druids in the modern world. Instead of looking at me like I had three heads, she said yes and that more information about modern Druid practice could be found in the bookstores. I spent the next six years amassing quite a collection of books about modern Druid practises and books about the history of the Celts. Above all, I was thrilled to know that my desire to become a

modern Druid was actually quite attainable.

3. Other spiritual and religious traditions differ markedly in the core beliefs about the structure and function of the universe, and the interrelationship with human beings at individual and collective levels.⁵ What sets druidism apart in theory and practice, in common and esoteric contents?⁶

At the most basic level, Druidism is based on what we know of Celtic spirituality from myths, written accounts and lore. Druids were a large part of society in Celtic countries such as Ireland and Wales.

I can only speak from my own perspective as the main tenet of Druidism is “seeking truth against the world”. There is a joke that if you ask a group of Druids one question, you will receive many different answers. Seeking truth against the world can be simply interpreted as finding one’s own truth through study, experience and belief. It is not a matter of simply accepting the truth as dictated by others, but using that knowledge to find one’s own answers. It is also important to know that some modern Druids view their path as their religion, while others see it as a philosophy that can work with any spiritual practise. In my case, Druidism is my religion, so I approach it from the angle of worshipping the Gods, serving my community and striving to better myself as a person through spiritual practice and practical study. I call it the Path of Service: Service to the Gods, Service to the Community and Service to the Self. (“Self” being used in the Jungian context of the higher self or complete self that comes with the practise of individuation.)

⁵ Major groups including the Christianity (Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Oriental Orthodoxy, and Anglicanism), Islam (Shia, Sunni, Sufi, and Kharijite), Hinduism, Chinese Traditional Religions, Buddhism, various Ethnic Religions, African Traditional religions, Sikhism, and so on. Inor groups including Christianity (Restorianism, Chinese Originated Churches, Church of the East, and Unitarian Universalism), Juche, Spiritism, Judaism, Bahá’í, Jainism, Shinto, Cao Dai, Zoroastrianism, Tenrikyo, Neo-Paganism, Rastafarianism, Scientology, Pastafarianism, Mormonism, Arceusology, Discordianism, Paganism, Crowleyites, and so on.

⁶ Please see Nihtscada, A. (2007). The Once and Future Druid: A Continuum of Druid Belief and Practice from Ancient Times to Today. Retrieved from <http://awencanada.com/Druidpath1.html>.

I believe in the Source; what some might call God. However, I do not believe it is a person, but rather a universal force. It is the energy that makes molecules vibrate and form matter. It is the spark that is life. We are all made of it, and we are all connected to it. The Gods are people who have reached a higher spiritual level. This not detract from their power or status for they are the ones who guide us toward our spiritual destiny, whatever that might be. Will our souls eventually progress to a similar state? I believe so. I believe the spirit is on a path of learning and growth. Our bodies are merely the vessel in which the soul fulfills certain aspects of its development. This is how I can explain the span of a human life-time versus the immortality of the soul. Like a grade in school, the soul learns and grows through its experience, gets its review and rest after the body's death and then moves on.

Looking at what we know of the ancient Druids, the writings of the Revivalist Druids, and what is considered Druidism today, there are a few common threads that appear: truth, service, connection, reverence of nature, ancestor worship and the belief that the soul is immortal and can transmigrate from life to life.

The ancient Druids were considered the learned class. They served and advised the leaders and people alike in their capacity as philosophers, judges, physicians, teachers, keepers of history, and priests. Many ancient writings about the Druids tell us that they believed in the immortality and transmigration of the soul, as well as being drawn to sacred groves of trees. The Druids themselves wrote nothing down, so we do not have the benefit of getting that information from the source. Julius Caesar had an agenda to vilify the Celts and make it worth the while of Senators to approve expenses for continuing wars. However, writers who were not as invested in making the Celts look

like savages also made similar observances with regard to the Druids' role in society, their belief in the soul's immortality, the importance of keeping the history of the people, their tendency toward worship in wooded groves, and their knowledge overall.

The Revivalist movements of the 18th and 19th centuries, in the form of Masonic-like "orders" of Druids, also followed the common threads in their own manner. Many of them were well-educated and sought to revere nature. Some even recreated stone circles on their properties. Many believed in the immortality of the Soul and sought to revive the stories of old. They were quite prolific in their writings and wrote about the pursuit of truth, etc. (While many of those writings are simple "forgeries" of supposed ancient documents, they do seem to adhere to the common factors.) Their orders were also "service clubs" of a sort. They raised money for charities, built hospitals and connected people to social services.

The Modern Druid movement arose in the 60s and is still going strong today. There are a number of large Druid groups and Orders that one can join; as well as sources of learning online for solitary practitioners. Many of today's Druids appear to be well-educated and pursue truth through study. They strive to honour nature through environmentalism or "getting back to nature"; serve their communities in various capacities, believe in the transmigration of the immortal soul, and are connected to the world in a way that neither the revivalists or ancients could even imagine through the internet.

Each Druid's practice is unique to the Druid, but the common threads are there: truth, service, connection, reverence for nature, honouring of the ancestors, and the belief in the immortality of the soul. Throughout each "age", Druids have lived and served in their time, according to what is

needed and what is happening.

4. In the article *Hello World! (2011)* from *The Once and Future Druid* website, you said:

“I’ve been on the Druid path since 1991 and I have been fortunate to meet a lot of wonderful people, gain insight into many different views on Druid spirituality and philosophy, and grow as a result. Some might find some value in these posts...”⁷

Furthermore, in *Druid Writer - Athelia Nihtscada Voices on the Path (2012)*, you said:

“I follow a tri-fold path of service: Service to the Gods (through meditation, ritual, etc.), Service to the Community (through volunteer work, teaching, being an active part in the global community) and Service to the Self (through learning and growing, taking care of my health, etc.).”⁸

With respect to druidism, and some of the previous personal commentary in mind, what have the previous 20+ decades taught you?

I have learned about the common threads that connect each “age” of Druidism, as well as how to incorporate my spirituality into everyday life. I’ve learned that there is truth in every belief system and that no one path corners the market on access to the Divine and the workings of the universe. Everyone can learn about these things from each other and from experiencing the world with an open mind. Some of the greatest lessons I have learned have been through ordinary experiences and interactions with people and the world around me.

⁷ Please see Nihtscada, A. (2011, July 28). Hello World!. Retrieved from <https://athelia143.wordpress.com/2011/07/28/hello-world/>.

⁸ In full, Nihtscada stated:

“I would describe myself as a very down to earth modern Druid who incorporates spirituality into my everyday life. I follow a tri-fold path of service: Service to the Gods (through meditation, ritual, etc.), Service to the Community (through volunteer work, teaching, being an active part in the global community) and Service to the Self (through learning and growing, taking care of my health, etc.). Ethics and scholarship in my practice is very important to me as well.”

Please see Nihtscada, A. (2012, July 26). Druid Writer – Athelia Nihtscada Voices on the Path. Retrieved from <http://paganbookshelf.blogspot.ca/2012/07/druid-writer-athelia-nihtscada-voices.html>.

I've come to know the Gods and Goddesses who have called me into their service, and have learned from them.

The last 20+ years have also taught me to question what I learn, to approach things like a scholar as well as a spiritual being. I have learned to look at things from a number of viewpoints and see the value of them.

Above all, I have learned the importance of balance; whether it be balance of the spiritual and mundane, the balance of responsibilities, or the balance of body, mind and spirit. For things to work in harmony, there must be some sort of balance.

An Interview with Athelia Nihtscada (Part Two)^{9,10}

Please see the footnotes during and bibliography after the interview, respectively.

Abstract

An interview with Athelia Nihtscada. She discusses: druidism and its interrelationship with existentialism, psychology, psychotherapy; personal meaning of druidism in the search for the Self; different druid organizations; organizations' influence in the personal development of druids; research and practices into druidism; druidism practiced apart from the organizations; the upward scale in qualifications for the local and global druids; *On Being a Druid Today* (2011) and difference between druids in the past and present; and Awen Grove Canada's orders: first, second, and third.

Keywords: Athelia Nihtscada, Awen Grove Canada, druid, druidism, existentialism, order, qualifications, psychology, psychotherapy.

5. How do these various organizations interrelate their research and practices into druidism?

Each organization has its own approach to Druidism based on its own history, research and methods of practise that work for them. Many of them seem to incorporate the aspects of service, truth, connection, reverence for nature, the belief in the immortal soul, and honouring the ancestors. These aspects are based on Celtic and Indo-European lore and history.

6. Can one learn druidism apart from the organizations to some level of proficiency, even mastery, or does one require these organizations for self-development in alignment with the core values and practices of druidism?

⁹ Founder and Arch Druid, Awen Grove; Member of the Third Order of the Reformed Druids of North America; Member, Order of Bards Ovates and Druids; Member, The British Druid Order; Member, Henge of Keltria; Member and Past Regional Coordinator, Druid Network; Member and Past Regional Druid of Western Canada, Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship (ADF).

¹⁰ First publication on October 8, 2015 at www.in-sightjournal.com.

I believe it is possible, if one is comfortable with self-study and is willing to do the work needed to become known as a Druid. There is a whole line of debate over what constitutes a Druid today, but most will agree that scholarship, service to others in the capacity, and building relationships with other Druids and groups. One must be completely committed to Druidism and “walking the talk” as it were. Others must recognize a person as a Druid in order for one to be called a Druid, in my opinion. Otherwise, they are considered “on the Druid path” until one makes a positive mark and is ‘seen’.

Like a degree from a credible university, joining one of the established groups and completing their training will definitely make it easier to be recognized by others in the Pagan communities.

7. How does one scale upwards in the ranks of knowledge, capabilities, and responsibilities within the local and global druid associations, orders, organizations, and societies – through certifications, positions, requirements, and titles?

For many groups, it’s a matter of completing all of the coursework and being officially recognized. Like most organizations, the more one puts into serving the group, the more one gets out of it. A person can take the courses and get a piece of paper, but rising in the ranks on a social level involves going beyond mere study. It means forging positive relationships, being willing to do the extras like organize an event, serve on a Board or lead a Grove.

8. In *On Being a Druid Today* (2011), you note the differences between druidism in the past and the present.¹¹ Also, you describe the different social status, training, and literacy of druids

¹¹ Nihtscada, on the differences between druids of the past and the present, states:

“The Druids of old always struck me as being quite in line with their times and up to date on the knowledge and atmosphere of their times. They were very involved with their times because they had to be. They were not trying to “recreate” a history like many of us are today. The ancient Druids lived in a different time than we do. The needs, technology and culture of the people in that time were vastly different from what it is like today. I’m fairly certain that they didn’t just wax philosophically, practise Druidry when they weren’t busy living their lives or doing their jobs, and performing rituals. They were heavily involved with their world: they advised leaders, served their community, healed, taught, negotiated, etc. We live in the 21st Century and our needs and circumstances have

across time.¹² In addition to this, you describe the focus on “service,” “education,” “love of nature,” “connection,” “belief in the immortality of the soul,” and “seeking truth.”¹³ If you could update views on this observation and reflection, what seem like the overarching, core differences between druidism of the past and the present?

Per my answer to question 3, looking at what we know of the ancient Druids, the writings of the Revivalist Druids, and what is considered Druidism today, there are a few common threads that appear: truth, service, connection, reverence of nature, ancestor worship and the belief that the soul is immortal and can transmigrate from life to life.

changed dramatically since ancient times.”

Please see Nihtscada, A. (2011, August 12). On Being a Druid Today. Retrieved from <https://athelia143.wordpress.com/2011/08/12/on-being-a-druid-today/>.

¹² Please see Nihtscada, A. (2011, August 12). On Being a Druid Today. Retrieved from <https://athelia143.wordpress.com/2011/08/12/on-being-a-druid-today/>.

¹³ Please see Nihtscada, A. (2011, August 12). On Being a Druid Today. Retrieved from <https://athelia143.wordpress.com/2011/08/12/on-being-a-druid-today/>.

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9. You founded Awen Grove Canada.¹⁴ In the website, on the page entitled *The Druid Path* (2014), you recommended numerous resources for this with general curiosity or genuine interest in becoming a druid.^{15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22} You include some personal commentary and resources

¹⁴ Please see Awen Grove Canada. (2014). Awen Grove Canada. Retrieved from <http://awencanada.com/>.

¹⁵ Please see MacAnTsaoir, I., & O'Laoghaire, D. (1999). Why Wicca Is Not Celtic v.3.0. Retrieved from <http://home.comcast.net/~uberrod/text4.html>.

¹⁶ Of note, in the article entitled *When is a Celt not a Celt: An Irreverent peek into Neopagan views of history* (n.d.), Hautin-Mayer states:

“Many Neopagans and Wiccans feel at odds with written history in general because they consider it to be "patriarchal" and highly biased. And for many people the academic atmosphere often associated with the study of the past can be intimidating. Curious amateurs may feel out of their depth. For these same people, they believe that "mundane" history has little bearing on "us" Neopagans has degenerated into the notion that, because we don't like the history we have--for whatever reason--we have every right to create a history for ourselves that we do like. Hence we don't need to document where we really come from and what has really happened to us; we can simply invent a history to suit ourselves. I need not go into detail about how ill-advised such behavior is, but I will say that we ought to consider our history to be a foundation and starting point for all our actions. Even with an unpleasant but honest history, we are in a better position for creating change; without a real history we are lost. There is also a strong bias in certain circles of the Neopagan community against critical thinking. The view is that spiritual matters should not be judged from such a mundane perspective. In our eagerness to embrace alternative belief systems, we are too often uninterested in determining how authentic and accurate these beliefs may be. It is true that much of profound metaphysical significance often cannot be expressed sufficiently in mundane terms. Yet this need not always be the case.”

Please see Hautin-Mayer, M. (n.d.). *When is a Celt not a Celt: An Irreverent peek into Neopagan views of history*. Retrieved from <http://www.cyberwitch.com/wychwood/Library/whenIsACeltNotACelt.htm>.

¹⁷ With concision, the core aspects of the Celtic spirit come to the fore in Laurie's article entitled *Following a Celtic Path* (1995):

“First is reverence for Celtic deities...Second, connection with ancestors and land spirits...Third, poetry as intrinsic to the structure of magick...Fourth, a connection with the past...Fifth, a sense of early Celtic cosmology; doing things in terms of three realms rather than the classical Greek four elements, using Celtic symbols like triskeles and spirals rather than pentagrams, celebrating Celtic holidays rather than (or more deeply than) the holidays of other religions, threes and nines as ritually important, use of a sacred/cosmic tree and well combination. Much of this cosmology has had to be painstakingly reconstructed from fragmentary hints, and it goes back again to the argument that historical research is important to learning about and preserving the Celtic spirit. Sixth, I think that inclusiveness is important...Seventh, respect for women was a definite part of the Celtic spirit...Eighth, an appreciation of the complex and intricate...Ninth, personal responsibility and a deep sense of self are a part of the Celtic spirit.”

Please see Laurie, E.R. (1995). *Following A Celtic Path*. Retrieved from http://www.imbas.org/articles/following_a_celtic_path.html.

¹⁸ Please see Kondratiev, A. (1997). Basic Deity Types. Retrieved from <http://www.draeconin.com/database/deitytypes.htm>.

¹⁹ Please see Laurie, E.R. (1998). The Cauldron of Poesy. Retrieved from <http://www.seanet.com/~inisglas/cop1.html>.

²⁰ Please see CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts. (2015). CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts. Retrieved from <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/>.

²¹ Please see Tuathail, S.A. (1993). Foclóir Draíochta - Dictionary of Druidism. Retrieved from http://www.imbas.org/articles/focloir_draiochta.html.

²² Please see O'Dubhain, S. (1997). The Elements of the Dúile. Retrieved from http://www.imbas.org/articles/elements_duile.html.

too.²³ Awen Grove Canada contains three orders in their course of study: first, second, and third.²⁴ What does each order implicate in terms of lessons and eventual qualifications?²⁵

Awen Grove's tradition is the one I have founded and I based the "grade" system on the Reformed Druids of North America Order system. It is a work in progress as the tradition grows and changes. I have always held true to the tenet of seeking truth against the world, so I am not the most structured of teachers. I believe in providing the base knowledge and having the student progress from there. Many organizations require seekers to go through each structured grade. In my system, there are certain things one needs to know, but I tailor teaching to each person. Some are completely new to Druidism and need to start from scratch. Others have been practising for many years and may only need to hone certain skills, such as leadership. There are modules that each student must work through because they are the foundations of the tradition itself: self-assessment of beliefs, ethics, path of service, history and comparative spirituality. From there, it is a matter of what the students wants to achieve.

The First Order involves the basic foundations of the tradition, as well as a looking at the history of Druidism through the ages and the common factors, ritual practises, seasonal observances, etc. The Second Order is focused on Service, where students discover the type of service that they are passionate about. The Third Order is focused on Leadership, taking one's place in the larger community, and starting one's own Grove.

²³ Please see Nihtscada, A. (2014, November 22). The Druid Path; Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from <http://awencanada.com/FAQ.html>.

²⁴ Please see Awen Grove Canada. (2014). Learning About Modern Druidry. Retrieved from <http://awencanada.com/COS.html>.

²⁵ Please see Awen Grove Canada. (2014). Learning About Modern Druidry. Retrieved from <http://awencanada.com/COS.html>.

10. In *Basic Deity Types* (1997), Kondratiev describes some of the generalized deities within the druid world including land and tribal deities.²⁶ What purpose do the gods and goddesses, and the panoply of deities serve in the druid initiations, rituals, traditions, and worship services?²⁷

The purpose depends on the individual, of course. Some Druids see Druidry as a philosophy that can either be incorporated into another religion (e.g.: Christianity, Buddhism, etc.) or followed with no religious context at all. For this question, I am answering for myself who practises Druidism is a religion on its own.

I am quite far away from the deities of my ancestors' land and culture and personally do not know or identify with deities indigenous to the land I actually live in. Local deities have not made themselves known to me, but certain deities from the lands of my ancestors have connected with me as "patrons". I believe a lot of Druids in North America or in lands outside of Europe also have

²⁶ Please see Kondratiev, A. (1997). *Basic Deity Types*. Retrieved from <http://www.draeconin.com/database/deitytypes.htm>.

²⁷ Kondratiev, in *Basic Deity Types* (1997), states:

"The Celtic "Mercury"...The Celtic "Mars"...The Celtic "Jupiter"...The Celtic "Silvanus" or God With Antlers (Karnonos/Cernunnos)...The Celtic "Minerva"...Because horses played such a large part in the Celts' military successes in Europe, the horse was a symbol of sovereignty and political power (as opposed to cattle, which were a symbol of the Land and of material wealth). Thus the goddess who gave legitimacy to the power of the tribe was portrayed as riding on a horse, or as a mare herself. This (Epona, "Great Mare") was a particular aspect of the sovereignty goddess, distinct from, say, Rosmerta, who gives rulers the intoxicating drink of flath/wlatis. The Celtic "Minerva", on the other hand, was a more general representation of goddess-energy, who could be invoked in a far greater range of situations: she gave the energy of rulership to rulers, but also provided every other kind of energy wherever it was needed....The Hindu model can be very useful in helping us understand the Celtic view of goddesses, which was quite similar. For Hindus, goddesses are sources of energy, and they are often referred to collectively as simply Shakti (which can be personified as Durga, the supreme virgin goddess who is the source of all energy in the universe). But when the energy is applied to a specific purpose, the goddesses become differentiated: as Sarasvati (culture and creativity), Lakshmi (fertility and wealth, material comfort) or Kali (destruction and rebirth)...'Sucellos' ("Good Striker"). (i.e. giving death with one side, life with the other). This is evidently the same god-type that became known as the 'Dagda' "Good (=Efficient) God" in Ireland. He is often chosen to represent the trifunctional tutelary god of a tribal territory ('Toutatis'). His consort is the territorial river goddess. In southern Gaul he was sometimes interpreted as "Silvanus" (both he and Cernunnos had cauldrons)...'Maponos' (meaning "Superboy", essentially!)...The Divine Twins. The only literary survival of these important Indo-European divinities consists of Nisien and Efnisien in the Second Branch of the Mabinogi...The Celtic "Apollo"."

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Practitioners of “Druidcraft”, a hybrid of Druidism and Wicca, may be duotheistic in that all Gods are aspects of one God and all Goddesses are aspects of one Goddess: the Lord and Lady. For me, each God and Goddess is an individual with his or her own personality, preferences, wisdom and reason for connecting with me.

When I first started on my path and read about the various Gods and Goddesses in the Welsh and Irish pantheons, I found that certain ones seemed to invoke that tug in my heart; much like the one I felt when I discovered Druids in the first place. I also began to notice certain omens, such as seeing crows everywhere, as well as dreams of meeting the deities. Like my father had said, the best connection with the Divine is the one forged for oneself. I opened myself to their wisdom and was then “called” by the ones who wished to connect with me. I had never felt that kind of feeling before and was happy to finally feel this divine connection that so many of my friends in Catholic school had claimed with their God. Over time, I learned how to “tune in” to each one’s presence and knew whether I was making the right offerings, learning the right lessons, or not. For me, it was like befriending someone important and those relationships have grown over time. I am not one who subscribes to the practise of calling upon certain deities based on correspondence charts in order to get what I want. A relationship with deity needs to be respectful, mutually beneficial and consistent. If I need something, I may ask my patron deities for help finding a direction or strength to make it happen.

When I founded Awen Grove, certain deities also made it clear that they were going to be “patrons” for the group itself. Each member found themselves connecting with those deities in their own way.

This purpose would be very similar to tribal deities.

In short, I believe the various deities' purpose is to guide us, teach us, and help us along the way toward spiritual and personal growth and development.

11. Kuno Meyer in *The Triads of Ireland* (1906) states:

“One of the most important things that defines a people as a distinct social and cultural group is how they act toward one another; what they expect from each other socially, what their rules of conduct are, and how they deal with those who step outside the boundaries of what their culture considers "proper behavior." These social rules, whether "don't stare at strangers" or "thou shalt not kill," are among the cultural guidelines to ethical behavior within any given group. Ethics govern not only these social interactions, but also what is acceptable in religious ritual, and the whys and whens of the appropriate use of magic. Without an ethical structure of some sort, religion and magic become self-serving, meaningless beyond the single individual. Magic can easily become manipulative rather than transformative, serving only the needs of this moment rather than the needs of a lifetime, or of an individual rather than a community. Religion and social interaction become a minefield where killing your neighbor because you want tomatoes from her garden is as valid a method of obtaining your dinner as trading for them. *Within many public NeoPagan organizations there are no agreed upon ethics, no generally accepted rules of conduct. While individual freedoms are a good thing...* Without trust between individuals, there can be no tribe. Groups with known and expressed ethical guidelines seem to be spared the worst aspects of this kind of struggle. People know where they stand and what the boundaries of interpretation are. Trust develops more easily, and community becomes more than a group of people who claim they believe similar things...Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism recognizes the need for a set of ethical guidelines and bases its structure upon that of the ancient

Celts...*Knowing our ethical history allows us to intelligently modify those beliefs into modern applications for Celtic Reconstructionist Pagans.*"^{28,29} [Emphasis added.]

How do the ethics of druidism and paganism bring about social and cultural cohesion for druids and pagans?

Ethics has always been an interest of mine because it is a paradox of simplicity and complexity.

Some people feel that ethics are the same as morals or laws of virtue, which can be forced upon

others. Morals and laws of virtue can be unmovable, or at least some sort of debate or process will

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need to be undertaken to change them. These are usually decided by more than just one person and are external.

For me, ethics are fluid and personal. We all have values and personal codes of conduct, which are the cornerstones of our ideas of right and wrong. In normal situations, we have a pretty fair idea of what we would and would not do. Throw in an unusual situation or factor which doesn't really fit within that framework of values. What if something deeply challenges a value and causes one to rethink it? What if one has always said they would do something a certain way, but when push comes to shove, they find themselves torn? This is how an ethical dilemma starts. No one can take ethics away from a person or impose their own ethics on another, because the human being has the free will to choose what to do in any given situation. We make choices based on our own personal code of conduct and we must take responsibility for the consequences of those choices. Can we stand by those choices? Do we feel they are right? Are the choices aligned with our values and morals?

Bring that concept to a larger picture, such as a group setting, and one is now dealing with other people who have their own internal codes of ethics. Each person has their own idea of what is "right" and what is "wrong". It is useful to discuss these differences as a group and come up with ethics that will guide the choices of individuals and the group in general.

Reading Kuno Meyer's quote, I am in complete agreement with the need for social and cultural cohesion as well as a well-defined set of ethics. Without those standards of conduct and ethics, things do become very self-serving and manipulative in the magical and social sense. We are not exempt from society or its rules of conduct. I have been witness to many attempts to come up with some

sort of unified statement of ethics in groups and with Paganism in general. Usually, these attempts arise from some sort of scandal, such as a pedophile claiming to be a Druid, or just out of general interest of having such a unified statement. There is much debate and then it sort of fizzles out, never to be discussed until the next person raises the subject. Why is this so difficult?

Phillip Carr-Gomm makes an interesting observation as to why this is such a difficult undertaking in his online article, “Ethics & Values in Druidism II” (<http://www.druidry.org/druid-way/what-druidry/ethics-values-druidry/ethics-values-druidism>). “...*little has been written about ethics in contemporary Druidism since most Druids are keen to avoid the problems caused by dictating a morality to others. So much suffering has resulted throughout history because one group of people have decided that it is good to do one thing and bad to do another. Just as most Druids have avoided dictating which type of theology someone should adopt, so too have they avoided telling each other, or the world, how to behave.*” I believe this might be one of the main reasons behind the lack of ethical standards of conduct: the fear of dictating behavioural standards due to past experiences with other religions.

This is the main reason I started Awen Grove in the first place. I did not want to ‘dictate’ a moral code, but I wanted ethics to be one of the cornerstones of the Grove. It took us about 2 – 3 years to come up with a unified statement, but it was done. Granted, most of that time was spent researching other codes of conduct with the goal of rewriting the original Statement of Ethics that I had written in 2003. It took only a handful of meetings to actually come up with a Statement of Ethics we could all agree upon, and it was not a difficult process at all. That statement is quite simple and is as follows:

We believe:

- In following a sincere Path of Service
- In upholding the Truth - Starting withourselves
- In upholding the respect and dignity of each of us and our Community
- In maintaining a healthy balance of personal, professional, environmental and spiritual priorities
- That abuse of any sort is unacceptable and will not be condoned

Awen Grove has been in existence for the past 12 years, with very little drama. Why? Because we took the time to come up with a standard of conduct that we could all agree upon and work with.

12. How did the druid and pagan groups manage schisms in the past based in personality conflicts, or ideological and philosophical disagreements?

The one thing I find interesting about the main modern Druid organizations around the world is that they all started as a protest or quiet rebellion. The Reformed Druids of North America started out as a group of students who protested the university's mandatory Sunday Service attendance rule.

Rather than go to church, these young people decided to develop their own little "religion" and hold their own services. It was all meant as a joke at first, but it grew. Eventually, the university dropped the requirement, yet the RDNA has lived on for over 40 years!

A young fellow by the name of Isaac Bonewits, joined RDNA, but ended up starting his own group, Ar' nDraocht Fein (ADF), because he wanted an all-Pagan Druid group that would become a religion. These Druids could pick an Indo-European hearth culture, study it and develop their practise from there. A few years later, a group of disgruntled ADF members would tape a list of "theses" on Bonewits' van because they wanted their Druidism to be strictly Celtic. Thus, the

Henge of Keltria was born.

It was no different across the pond in the United Kingdom. In the early 60s, it came time to elect a new Arch Druid for the Ancient Druid Order (one of the Revivalist orders that is still in operation today). A Cambridge academic by the name of Phillip Peter Ross Nichols was approached for the position, but he wanted to see more focus on Celtic mythology and celebrating the 8 seasonal festivals. (Fun fact: Gerald Gardner, the founder of Gardnerian Wicca was also a member of ADO. Mr. Nichols was a good friend of Mr. Gardner and influenced the development of what we know as Gardnerian Wicca today.) Ross Nichols founded the well-known Order of Bards Ovates and Druids (OBOD) in 1964. A few members of OBOD would eventually start their own group, the British Druid Order. From there, the Druid Network came into existence.

This, of course, is my very simplistic explanation of the development of modern Druid organizations. Ronald Hutton delves into this subject in far greater detail in his book “Druids: A History” (Hambledon Continuum, UK, 2007).

13. How about the present?

The best example I can give is of one of our members. Ten years ago, this member was very shy and slightly adverse to performing rituals with a group; preferring solitary ritual. Over time, the member began to show a large amount of aptitude for leadership and found that the Grove was not providing her with what she needed. The member started a Grove with one of the larger Druid orders in response.

This easily could have ended up as a schism with hurt feelings all around, but I considered our standards of conduct and looked at the situation for what it actually was: a member had developed

excellent leadership skills, a desire to start a separate Grove, and was ready to “leave the nest” as it were. Instead of a schism, I recognized the member by awarding a Third Order and publicly recognizing the person as a peer. The member had been worried about losing friendship or starting some sort of conflict, but was relieved when I said it was simply a matter of growth and change. Our two Groves operate on their own and both of us are happy with the outcome. We are still friends as well.

I know there have been schisms in other groups, but I do not have the details and cannot speak to whether they were positive or negative.

An Interview with Athelia Nihtscada (Part Three)^{30,31}

Please see the footnotes during and bibliography after the interview, respectively.

Abstract

An interview with Athelia Nihtscada. She discusses: *Basic Deity Types* (1997) from Kondratiev in relation to the purpose of gods and goddesses, and the panoply of deities in druid initiations, rituals, traditions, and worship services; and Kuno Meyer in *The Triads of Ireland* (1906) in relation to the ethics of druidism and paganism to bring social and cultural cohesion for druids and pagans.

Keywords: Athelia Nihtscada, deity, druidism, Kondratiev, Kuno Meyer, paganism, rituals, traditions, worship.

14. In *Basic Deity Types* (1997), Kondratiev describes some of the generalized deities within the druid world including land and tribal deities.³² What purpose do the gods and goddesses, and the panoply of deities serve in the druid initiations, rituals, traditions, and worship services?³³

³⁰ Founder and Arch Druid, Awen Grove; Member of the Third Order of the Reformed Druids of North America; Member, Order of Bards Ovates and Druids; Member, The British Druid Order; Member, Henge of Keltria; Member and Past Regional Coordinator, Druid Network; Member and Past Regional Druid of Western Canada, Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship (ADF).

³¹ First publication on October 15, 2015 at www.in-sightjournal.com.

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The purpose depends on the individual, of course. Some Druids see Druidry as a philosophy that can either be incorporated into another religion (e.g.: Christianity, Buddhism, etc.) or followed with no religious context at all. For this question, I am answering for myself who practises Druidism is a religion on its own.

I am quite far away from the deities of my ancestors' land and culture and personally do not know or identify with deities indigenous to the land I actually live in. Local deities have not made themselves known to me, but certain deities from the lands of my ancestors have connected with me as "patrons". I believe a lot of Druids in North America or in lands outside of Europe also have found connection with European deities in a similar fashion.

Practitioners of "Druidcraft", a hybrid of Druidism and Wicca, may be duotheistic in that all Gods are aspects of one God and all Goddesses are aspects of one Goddess: the Lord and Lady. For me, each God and Goddess is an individual with his or her own personality, preferences, wisdom and reason for connecting with me.

When I first started on my path and read about the various Gods and Goddesses in the Welsh and Irish pantheons, I found that certain ones seemed to invoke that tug in my heart; much like the one I felt when I discovered Druids in the first place. I also began to notice certain omens, such as seeing crows everywhere, as well as dreams of meeting the deities. Like my father had said, the best connection with the Divine is the one forged for oneself. I opened myself to their wisdom and was

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Please see the footnotes during and bibliography after the interview, respectively.

Abstract

An interview with Athelia Nihtscada. She discusses: past druid and pagan schism management based in personality conflicts, or ideological and philosophical disagreements; present schism management; druidism and paganism foundation in Celtic traditions, persistent ethics in the present framework in addition to the relevant transformations, and ethics and morality in druidism; important initiations and rituals in their way of life; systematized philosophies and ideal types which embody the ethics and moral values and thoughts on the ideal druid, or druids; the most probable near and far future trajectory for druidism; and further information for those with an interest in Nihtscada and associated organizations, and advice to them.

Keywords: Athelia Nihtscada, Celtic, druid, ethics, ideological, Kondatriev, morality, pagan, philosophical, rituals.

16. How did the druid and pagan groups manage schisms in the past based in personality conflicts, or ideological and philosophical disagreements?

The one thing I find interesting about the main modern Druid organizations around the world is that they all started as a protest or quiet rebellion. The Reformed Druids of North America started out as a group of students who protested the university's mandatory Sunday Service attendance rule.

Rather than go to church, these young people decided to develop their own little "religion" and hold their own services. It was all meant as a joke at first, but it grew. Eventually, the university dropped the requirement, yet the RDNA has lived on for over 40 years!

³⁶ Founder and Arch Druid, Awen Grove; Member of the Third Order of the Reformed Druids of North America; Member, Order of Bards Ovates and Druids; Member, The British Druid Order; Member, Henge of Keltria; Member and Past Regional Coordinator, Druid Network; Member and Past Regional Druid of Western Canada, Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship (ADF).

³⁷ First publication on October 22, 2015 at www.in-sightjournal.com.

A young fellow by the name of Isaac Bonewits, joined RDNA, but ended up starting his own group, Ar' nDraocht Fein (ADF), because he wanted an all-Pagan Druid group that would become a religion. These Druids could pick an Indo-European hearth culture, study it and develop their practise from there. A few years later, a group of disgruntled ADF members would tape a list of “theses” on Bonewits’ van because they wanted their Druidism to be strictly Celtic. Thus, the Henge of Keltria was born.

It was no different across the pond in the United Kingdom. In the early 60s, it came time to elect a new Arch Druid for the Ancient Druid Order (one of the Revivalist orders that is still in operation today). A Cambridge academic by the name of Phillip Peter Ross Nichols was approached for the position, but he wanted to see more focus on Celtic mythology and celebrating the 8 seasonal festivals. (Fun fact: Gerald Gardner, the founder of Gardnerian Wicca was also a member of ADO. Mr. Nichols was a good friend of Mr. Gardner and influenced the development of what we know as Gardnerian Wicca today.) Ross Nichols founded the well-known Order of Bards Ovates and Druids (OBOD) in 1964. A few members of OBOD would eventually start their own group, the British Druid Oder. From there, the Druid Network came into existence.

This, of course, is my very simplistic explanation of the development of modern Druid organizations. Ronald Hutton delves into this subject in far greater detail in his book “Druids: A History” (Hambledon Continuum, UK, 2007).

17. How about the present?

The best example I can give is of one of our members. Ten years ago, this member was very shy and slightly adverse to performing rituals with a group; preferring solitary ritual. Over time, the

member began to show a large amount of aptitude for leadership and found that the Grove was not providing her with what she needed. The member started a Grove with one of the larger Druid orders in response.

This easily could have ended up as a schism with hurt feelings all around, but I considered our standards of conduct and looked at the situation for what it actually was: a member had developed excellent leadership skills, a desire to start a separate Grove, and was ready to “leave the nest” as it were. Instead of a schism, I recognized the member by awarding a Third Order and publicly recognizing the person as a peer. The member had been worried about losing friendship or starting some sort of conflict, but was relieved when I said it was simply a matter of growth and change. Our two Groves operate on their own and both of us are happy with the outcome. We are still friends as well.

I know there have been schisms in other groups, but I do not have the details and cannot speak to whether they were positive or negative.

18. The historical perspective into the nature of druidism and paganism provides the basis for connection with the Celtic traditions.^{38,39} As noted by the website excerpt of Laurie (2010) from Meyer (1906), the ethics persist into the current framework with relevant transformations for incorporation into the modern delineation of the druid traditions.^{40,41} How much do ethics and morality come into the theory of druidism?

³⁸ Please see Meyer, K. (1906). The Triads of Ireland. Royal Irish Academy, Todd Lecture Series vol XIII, Hodges, Figs & Co., Dublin

³⁹ Please see Laurie, E.R. (2010). The Truth Against the World: Ethics and Model Celtic Paganism. Retrieved from <http://www.seanet.com/~inisglas/ethics.html>.

⁴⁰ Please see Meyer, K. (1906). The Triads of Ireland. Royal Irish Academy, Todd Lecture Series vol XIII, Hodges, Figs & Co., Dublin

⁴¹ Please see Laurie, E.R. (2010). The Truth Against the World: Ethics and Model Celtic Paganism. Retrieved from <http://www.seanet.com/~inisglas/ethics.html>.

Ethics provide the moral framework on which all good societies are built. Without them, there would be no trust, no integrity, no communication, no decency and no respect. Knowing the ethical framework of our history allows us to incorporate an ethical base for modern practise. In Awen Grove, ethics and morality are quite important and are the cornerstones of the Grove. Looking at many online message boards and organizational websites, ethics and morals are subjects of much debate and importance. I would say ethics come into the theory of Druidism quite a lot.

19. Furthermore, what personal observations exemplify this through actions and practices by druids in everyday, mundane life to the most important initiations and rituals of this way of life?

I believe that maintaining integrity and taking responsibility for one's own actions are ways that modern Druids can exemplify ethics and morality. Through consideration of others, as well as the ability to remain steadfast in one's own ethics, a Druid will find that everything from the mundane to the esoteric will reflect that.

20. Systematized philosophies in the world tend towards formalization of an ideal type, and the ethics and moral values in which this ideal comes to embody, which seems to mirror some of the particular values in the druid and pagan traditions, as noted by Kondratiev.⁴² What remains the ideal druid, or remain the ideal druids?

I have always enjoyed "Celtic Values" by Alexei Kondratiev and have used the article as an example of virtue ethics. Recently, I came up with my own set of virtues, gleaned from the Audacht Morainn, which could be seen as ideas for modern Druids.

⁴² Please see Kondratiev, A. (n.d.). Celtic Values. Retrieved from http://www.imbas.org/articles/celtic_values.html.

- **Rectitude** – Maintaining a standard of moral integrity. I believe in maintaining a high standard of morality. This has always been a touchy subject among many Neo-Pagans who may feel that agreeing on morals and ethics will dogmatize them and violate all that Pagans hold dear in the way of personal freedom. Morals are morals and are not the exclusive domain of one religion or another. Good moral standards uphold good moral people, no matter what their faith path happens to be.
- **Truth** – Morann states that a ruler must “exalt truth” and that it is the “Truth of the Ruler” that will achieve great things. I believe this can apply to all people since truth is not exclusively the domain of leaders. We all seek it, most people value truthfulness in other people and the truth is often inescapable in the end.
- **Mercy/Compassion** - Morann states that a ruler who exalts mercy will find that mercy exalts him. One of my heroes, the Dalai Lama, says that one way to be happy is to practice compassion. If one is feeling down, practice compassion. Caring for the world around us not only benefits everyone else, but it benefits ourselves as well.
- **Wisdom from Experience** – Morann instructs the younger ruler to watch the older charioteer. Watch how the man’s experience causes him to see things that a newer driver would miss. A lot of wisdom is gained by sampling experiencing something. Our best lessons are often learned through experience.
- **Justice/Fair Judgment** – In my opinion, a Druid not only has to uphold justice, but practice fair and honest judging. I also see this when it comes to accusations. Will someone provide all

information and research facts before jumping to conclusions or spreading rumours?

- Commitment to Oaths – Keeping any commitment or promise would fall under this one in my opinion. Whether one makes an official oath or a promise to someone, it is beneficial for the person to keep that oath or promise. He or she will be seen as a reliable and true person.
- Hospitality – One of the cornerstones to a good society, hospitality was vitally important to the Celts. It is also a value that many modern Druids hold sacred.
- Steadfastness – The ability to be true to one’s beliefs, standards and commitments is another cornerstone to good society in my opinion.
- Impartiality – I find the best way to be is to be objective in all situations. When being impartial, it is easier for me to see things from more than one just one emotionally-driven angle. This helps me to make a clear judgment about something.
- Generosity – No one likes a miser, but being a spendthrift is also not good. Generosity, like hospitality, shows that a person is willing to share his good fortune with others. Generosity in the true sense also shows that a person is capable of living within one’s means.
- Eloquence in speech – As a Toastmaster, I know the value of eloquence and excellent communication skills. A species that is based on verbal and non verbal communication as human kind is, a good communicator is a respected person, no matter what the culture. Excellent communication skills will take a person far in life if he is virtuous.

- Competence - Best for him who knows what he is doing! If one is going to undertake any task, one must be competent or trained.

21. With respect to the trajectory of druidism into the near and far future, what seems like the most probable future for the world's druids?⁴³

By using the wisdom of the past and remaining in the moment, the Druid of the future will certainly be there to serve in whatever capacity is needed at the time. Just as the Druids of the past and present have been.

22. For this with further interest in Nihtscada and associated organizations (at one time or another), please see the footnotes to this sentence.^{44,45,46,47,48,49,50} If you could talk to someone with an interest in the druid path, as if yourself from 1991, what advice comes to mind for them?

Before anything else, know who you are and what your personal beliefs and ethics are; your Core Values.

Take some time to sit down, contemplate and write down what your values are. If you're stuck, think about certain situations. Where do you stand on topics in life, such as the environment, hunting, abuse, politics or religion? What are your strengths and weaknesses? What do you admire

⁴³ Please see Kondatriev, A. (n.d.). Celtic Values. Retrieved from http://www.imbas.org/articles/celtic_values.html.

⁴⁴ Please see Awen Grove Canada. (2014, November 22). Contact Us. Retrieved from <http://awencanada.com/Contact.html>.

⁴⁵ Please see Ár nDraiocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship. (2015). Send an Email: Contact Us. Retrieved from <https://www.adf.org/contact.html>.

⁴⁶ Please see Henge of Keltria. (2015). Contact Us. Retrieved from <http://www.keltria.org/contact.htm>.

⁴⁷ Please see Order of Bards Ovates and Druids. (2015). Contact Us. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/contact-us>.

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⁵⁰ Please see The Druid Network. (2015). The Druid Network. Retrieved from <http://druidnetwork.org/>.

or dislike in other people, faith paths, or political circles? What attracts you to them or pushes you away?

Knowing these will assist you in making the right choices with regards to your spiritual path and education. When approaching a potential teacher or group, look at their core values in comparison to yours. Do they fit or do they clash? Knowing your values inside and out will overrule the glamour that often accompanies a new spiritual path or teacher. If your core values do not match, there may be a feeling of extreme discomfort, which will leave you vulnerable and prone to being hurt in the process of learning this is not the right path for you. If your core values do match, you will feel a synergy unlike any other because you are in tune enough with yourself to know what is right for you. (This is actually good knowledge for any aspect of life, from relationships to vocation.)

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