

An Interview with J.J. Middleway

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Dedication

I would like to acknowledge my greatest teachers: My children, Sophie, Naomi, Katie and Daniel, and in particular their Mother, Polly, for helping illuminate my stupendous lack of awareness: Such grace and forgiveness in times of great personal loss *to her*, have been a humbling lesson in kindness to me.

I would also like to acknowledge and honor the Spirit of the Land and all those who seek to serve to rebalance the lack of awareness with regard to her.

May the Earth's grace and forgiveness inspire kindness and humility in each of us.

And may we never lose sight of how ridiculously silly we all are.

Acknowledgement

To J.J. Middleway for the enthusiastic acceptance of the interview with the depth of expertise with respect to the dynamic, fluid, and principles-based way of life for Druids on their individual paths in Druidry, the quirky, bubbly, but mature, tone in correspondence and an opening statement about “*slightly unorthodox*” responses and an assurance of “*authenticity, humility, grace and humour*” in representation of an “*exceptionally abundant*” life with the stories of trips on Druid rituals and rites of passage, work with the BBC (Radio 4) in a program called *Beyond Belief*, issuance of a CD entitled *Enchanting the Void*, lessons from expertise in eldership and mentorship of and for others, a personal observation in an important lesson about life and language as play with both as *by their nature* expressions of thought, and the opportunity to construct an academic e-book for community, cultural, educational, moral, personal, and social value, and the encouragement of academic freedom, creativity, diverse voices, and independent thought; and to Philip Carr-Gomm for the interview recommendation in addition to the assistance of Adrian Rooke and Maria.

An Interview with J.J. Middleway (Part One)^{1,2}

Abstract

An Interview with J.J. Middleway. He discusses: geographic, cultural, and linguistic background; pivotal moments leading into druidism; responsibilities to the druid community with public exposure; “the love of all existences” and its meaning; the ways in which “the love of all existences” affects thinking and behavior in personal life; and broad-based interests and convergence on the druid path.

Keywords: culture, druid, druidism, geography, J.J. Middleway, linguistic, meaning, responsibilities.

Please see the footnotes throughout and bibliography after the interview.

1. In terms of geography, culture, and language, where does your family background reside?³

That’s an interesting question. Each of us being so strongly influenced and moulded by these factors.

¹ Druid; Member, The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids; Celebrant; Healer; ex-Mentor/Elder/Witness, UK – Boys2Men; and Ritualist.

² Individual Publication Date: December 1, 2015 at www.in-sightjournal.com; Full Issue Publication Date: January 1, 2016 at www.in-sightjournal.com.

³ In *Speakers & Workshop Leaders* (n.d.), Middleway’s biographic information states:

“**JJ Middleway** - Teacher, focaliser & facilitator, healing, massage, singing, drumming: experience in delivering a wide variety of workshops and of focalising and facilitating gatherings in the UK, Holland and Italy, across a broad spectrum – Druid, Buddhist, Other. “The meditations, the talking-stick, the chants, the rituals the massages, everything just very naturally and logically seemed to lead from one thing to another. It was a warm, wonderful inspiring weekend. And it has fed me spiritually. It feels a bit like it changes my DNA in a very subtle way, I don’t know yet how much it will change but I can feel it shifting. But the best thing of this weekend is the feeling that it will not be an isolated experience, I can take it home into my everyday life”. *Jet, Holland*

“JJ works with intuition, compassion and grace. I felt deeply honoured, cared for and nurtured during his session. This feeling stayed with me for a long time. I love the way JJ combines bodywork with singing and drumming.” *Satu.*”

Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids (n.d.). *Speakers & Workshop Leaders*. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/about-us/speakers-workshop-leaders>.

I was born and brought up in Birmingham, the second largest city in England, after London. My early years were in Handsworth, a very multicultural environment and immigrant area, near the centre of the city. It was a very poor area financially, yet very rich culturally, and – as I now see it – spiritually. The majority of the neighbourhood were of Afro Caribbean or Indian subcontinent origin, with a smattering of Irish and Polish immigrants. And then there was us. Handsworth offered cheap accommodation in an industrial city needing labour.

My Mother was effectively a refugee of the Second World War and originated from a small village in the mountains of Tirol in the Austrian Alps. I can trace my ancestors back several hundred years in the same valley; in the same farmhouse even; with the glaciers and mountains all around. I was deeply influenced and affected by my visits there; once as a three-year-old, then twice in my teens, learning the local dialect by living with my uncle and aunt and my four cousins, on their farm with cows and hens and pigs living under the old wooden farmhouse. Also spending days in the high pasture, as my uncle and three sons scythed hay and I raked and helped bring it in on huge wooden sledges to a log cabin where we slept in the new mown grass.

My Father came from Kinross in central Scotland, a small town near Perth, with the lochs and Highlands of Scotland nearby: Very scenic and rural – yet a distinctly impoverished background, with his ten brothers and sisters in a very small two bedroomed house. At 14, he left school and went down the local coal mine to work.

So, I found myself as an outsider amongst outsiders – a white child living in a predominantly black community. An Englishman with no English blood on either side whatsoever. Brought up

a Catholic, because that was my Mother's faith, yet with a staunchly Atheist Father. I learned through that, how love transcends religious boundaries: My parents loved each other deeply and I was fortunate in being deeply loved by each of them. I thought at the time that this was 'the norm'; I have learned since, how relatively unusual it is.

So, into this world of paradox and opposites, add the fact that my Father was 21 years older than my Mother, and thus had personal experience as a signaller of fighting in Afghanistan in the early part of the 20th century (the first time round, with the British Army) He also served in India while it was still part of the British Empire, and in Palestine before the formation of Israel.

I gained a range of perspectives on the Second World War from my parents' direct experience and found that each was very different. My Mother's experience of loss and deprivation in particular, gave me the 'outsiders' view. I see now how my whole life was shaped and based on 'walking between worlds' – I was an outsider who somehow learned the capacity to 'go anywhere' and be comfortable wherever that was. I learned how to cross bridges and how to be a bridge myself.

2. What seem like pivotal moments in personal life leading into druidism?

I have always felt extremely close to nature, even though I was brought up in the middle of a city with very little greenery around. I think it fair to say that as a child I was a natural mystic. I could seemingly 'feel into' persons or situations. I could somehow 'almost become' and therefore 'understand from within', pretty much anything or anyone – because I sensed how deeply we are

ultimately ‘all one’. What I later learned in Sanskrit – Tat Tvam Asi – ‘That Art Thou’ – I somehow knew intuitively as being true from birth. Although this capacity became less vivid and somewhat attenuated as I grew older, I have never lost that sense of connection: So my birth is perhaps the pivotal moment in my Druidry.

However, I have learned since, how a series of experiences shortly after birth may have shaped my life and my Druidry. My parents lived in a rented room in an old house with a number of other occupants. As a baby, if I cried, my Mother would take a lot of flak from one woman in particular, who equated crying (a natural childhood expression) with maltreatment. And of course, if I cried at night, it caused resentment among other residents who couldn’t sleep. So my Mother, frightened and scared, developed a technique of putting her hand over my mouth and stopping me crying by suffocating me. I can still recall that very early experience.

My Mother felt terrible about it in later years and we used to joke about it. However, I think in retrospect it gave me a link to the otherworld. In the weirdest and strangest of ways, it gave me an unintended initiation. I think it is perhaps another reason I am comfortable ‘between worlds.’

3. You have mention in a number of listings, publications, and reports.^{4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15}

What responsibilities to the druid community come with public exposure to you?

It's a funny thing; Public exposure seems to have somehow 'come to me' and not 'me to it'. So, for a large part, the listings, publications and reports you refer to, are at others behest, and often a surprise to me. The responsibilities that come with any 'public exposure' as you put it (though we need to be careful, since 'public exposure' can have a different connotation over here – and possibly with you too :-)) – are no less than if that public exposure were not there. I suppose that my responsibility to Druidry, the public and all I care for, starts and ends with responsibility to myself.

It is perhaps worth saying here, that Druidry is part of rich framework for me, encompassing and embodying a whole tapestry of other threads and colours. For instance, I am privileged and

⁴ Please see Daily Mail (2009, September 12). Rock 'n' Roll, druids and the real wedding of the year. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1212087/Rock-n-roll-druids-real-wedding-year.html>.

⁵ Please see Carr-Gomm, P. (2014, May 23). On Behalf of the Earth. Retrieved from <http://www.philipcarr-gomm.com/on-behalf-of-the-land/>.

⁶ Please see Brown, N. (2014, October 21). Druid chants. Retrieved from <https://druidlife.wordpress.com/2014/10/21/druid-chants/>.

⁷ Please see Newman, P. (2014, August 1). Dance of Life.... Retrieved from <http://storyfolksinger.blogspot.ca/2014/08/dance-of-life.html>.

⁸ Please see DruidCast. (2012). DruidCast – A Druid Podcast Episode 36. Retrieved from <http://podbay.fm/show/257048136/e/1269348240?autostart=1>.

⁹ Please see Gathering Around the Linden Tree. (2014). Workshop: Earth Healing Ritual. Retrieved from http://lindhain.eu/eng/jj_earthhealing.html.

¹⁰ Please see Bertrand, I.J. (n.d.). Album. Retrieved from <http://www.ingridbertrand.be/album/>.

¹¹ Please see GoodReads. (2015, March 15). Druid Camp. Retrieved from http://www.goodreads.com/author_blog_posts/8043282-druid-camp.

¹² Please see Middleway, J.J. (2015). Enchanting the Void. Retrieved from <http://enchantingthevoid.co.uk/>.

¹³ Please see MidSussex Times. (2009, September 10). Richard Branson's nephew marries Lady Cowdray's eldest Eliza. Retrieved from <http://www.midsussextimes.co.uk/news/local/richard-branson-s-nephew-marries-lady-cowdray-s-eldest-eliza-1-1550589>.

¹⁴ Please see Middleway, J.J. (2012, March 14). Great poem with a message. Retrieved from <http://carnation-creations.blogspot.ca/2012/03/great-poem-with-message.html>.

¹⁵ Please see Druid Camp. (2015). Who's On: JJ Middleway. Retrieved from <http://www.druidcamp.org.uk/whats-on-2015/this-year-at-druid-camp/>.

grateful to be part of the MKP (ManKind Project) community. There, my mission statement is “I create a world of authenticity, courage, laughter, love and song, by daring to fully open my heart and by taking the risk of fully revealing my soul”. The shortened form might read ‘I create a world of love, by living a life of love’. That pretty much sums up my intention and what I aspire to. It doesn’t mean I get it right all the time. Far from it: – Perfection for me, is in the imperfection.

Similarly, Druidry for me (and if you ask a hundred Druids what Druidry is, you’ll likely receive a hundred and one answers :-)) – is an aspiration – something to work towards. In that sense, I believe that titles such as Druid and Poet are maybe best regarded as being posthumous.

- 4. In your LinkedIn profile, you write, “The love of all existences.”¹⁶ You define personal work in this manner beginning on January, 1994, and continue to say, “Honouring and healing ceremonies for the Land. Naming, Handfasting and Parting ceremonies for the people. Blessing and celebration of all that lives.”¹⁷ What does “The love of all existences” mean, in full, to you?¹⁸**

Wow; there’s a question and a half!

¹⁶ Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Jj Middleway. Retrieved from <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/jj-middleway/59/117/240>.

¹⁷ Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Jj Middleway. Retrieved from <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/jj-middleway/59/117/240>.

¹⁸ Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Jj Middleway. Retrieved from <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/jj-middleway/59/117/240>.

My involvement with The Order of Bards Ovates and Druids (OBOD) began in 1994. You could say that was manifesting my Druidry in the world, although as I've said, Druidry (though I didn't know it by that name at the time) has been ever present in my life.

I've alluded to my innate sense of connection 'with all that is', when talking of my early childhood. It is what mystics have always talked of, and something that I have naturally felt – both simply yet deeply – from very earliest memories and experience. I took it that everyone would naturally feel similarly (what child doesn't think that what they experience is 'the norm'?). Clearly it is not the norm.

What hasn't come out particularly thus far, is that poetry is also a key part of my 'tapestry'. So the best way of me answering such a profound question, is perhaps not best done via prose, but rather through a poem I wrote around twenty to twenty-five years ago:

A Passion for this Earth I feel
Compassion which is so, so real
My blood flows through Earth's laval veins
My tears reflected in her rains.
The winds which circulate this Earth
Breath in and out of me from Birth
The cyclic rhythm of her tides
Is matched by how I feel inside
Yet most remarkable of all

Open your heart to hear the call
 The essence which I know is me
 Is here in everything I see.

The term “the love of all existences” is part of the Druid Prayer, so that is why I quote it.

Here is the prayer in full:

“Grant oh God/dess thy protection

And in protection, strength

And in strength, understanding

And in understanding, knowledge

And in knowledge, the knowledge of justice

And in the knowledge of justice, the love of it

And in the love of it, the love of all existences

And in the love of all existences, the love of the god/dess and all goodness.

It is for each of us to find what works and what best reflects who and what we are. For me, ‘the love of all existences’ is what it says. I think that all that is perhaps truly left of us when we die is our legacy of love. (Or not of course :-)) So the question for me might be along the lines of “How much love can I generate, recycle, return, during my lifetime?”

5. How does this affect thinking and behavior in personal life?¹⁹

¹⁹ Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Jj Middleway. Retrieved from <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/jj-middleway/59/117/240>.

It brings the challenge of being aware. Or rather of trying to bring awareness of that statement into being. Of course it is relatively easy for me to love trees and streams and mountains as part of my shared existence; who wouldn't? – (yet some don't). Less easy perhaps for me to love a concrete building or a drunken lout or a murderer. Yet that is where the challenge lies for me. To at least bring into awareness, that at some level we are all connected. It doesn't mean condoning actions which might be branded evil or wrong. However, it does challenge me to at least consider that 'there but for fortune, go you or I' as the Joan Baez song so eloquently puts it. Or to at least try and open my heart to love and compassion in respect of the less loved and less loveable aspects or members of 'planet earth'. In seeking to love everyone, it doesn't mean I necessarily have the capacity to like everyone. And that's ok.

It also means that in taking risks in life I will be foolish or even downright stupid on occasion.

“It takes so much to be a human being,
That there are very few who have the love and courage to pay the price.
One has to abandon all together the search for security,
And reach out to the risk of living, with both arms.
One has to embrace life like a lover.”

That quotation has been one of my guiding aphorisms in life. I think it originates from someone called Morris West- but I'm not sure, and the full name eludes me these days.

I aspire to bring compassionate awakening into being through my thoughts actions and deeds. It doesn't mean I get it right – like everyone else, I screw things up regularly; however, I try. At least some of the time.

It means for me, allowing for 'not knowing'; of respecting others views if not always necessarily agreeing with them; of responding to situations with as much heart as I can summon in the moment. It's not always easy, but without it life loses purpose and meaning.

6. Your interests remain broad-based in involvement with the druid community.²⁰ These include “Ritualist, Celebrant And Master of Ceremonies,” “Ceremonies,” “Healing,” “Meditation,” “Wellbeing,” “Energy Healing,” “Parties,” “Personal Development,” “Stress Management,” “Coaching,” “Teaching,” “Chakra Balancing,” “Energy Work,” “Reiki,” “Relaxation,” “Mindfulness,” “Wellness,” “Holistic Health,” “Life Transitions,” “Self-Esteem,” “Stress,” and “Treatment.”^{21,22} Each spreads across the landscape of relevant conceptual overlap with the druid and pagan paths. How does each of these come together to influence the personal druid path developed by you?²³

Many of those terms are what I might call 'gifts from others'. I didn't particularly choose them.

Others have allocated them and I've chosen to accept that. In part this is a reflection and limitation of web-world, (in balance to its many benefits.). What it does reveal is the diverse and

²⁰ Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Jj Middleway. Retrieved from <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/jj-middleway/59/117/240>.

²¹ Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Jj Middleway. Retrieved from <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/jj-middleway/59/117/240>.

²² Please see International Association of Reiki Professionals. (2015). International Association of Reiki Professionals. Retrieved from <http://iarp.org/what-is-reiki/>.

²³ Please see International Association of Reiki Professionals. (2015). International Association of Reiki Professionals. Retrieved from <http://iarp.org/what-is-reiki/>.

interlinked nature of a life; my life in this instance. It is also interesting for what it leaves out. For example, Buddhism has played and continues to play a significant part in my life. I have come to see Druidry as a Western form of Buddhism and Buddhism as an Eastern form of Druidry.

That's just my take on it; others might disagree, and that's fine. Despite obvious differences, I find that Zen Buddhism in particular embodies the Druid ethos and Druid way. What I particularly value, is that neither put much store on dogma.

A key phrase from the Buddhist side of my learning, which may help answer the question you ask, is "Love says I am everything. Wisdom says I am nothing. Between those two, my life flows freely". The first sentence was a given in my life (unusual but true). The second sentence has been the journey of much of my life. The third sentence seeks to bring it all together in balance – which ties in with the Druid prayer and the answers to previous questions.

How it perhaps relates to this question, is that in seeking to put everything into practice that I have talked about, has somehow resulted – almost magically as I look at it now – in the manifestation of all the streams referred to above. And others which aren't referred to there. I don't so much 'bring all that together to influence my Druid path'; rather, it seems as though, 'all that brings me together to reflect it'.

An Interview with J.J. Middleway (Part Two)^{24,25}

Abstract

An Interview with J.J. Middleway. He discusses: prominent interests in personal life; interest in healing, energy healing, Chakra balancing, Reiki, holistic health, and meditation; response to protagonists and antagonists in consideration of these practices; Yukon Assignment and the overarching theory and implemented practices, and plans for the future; why, and how, he became involved; “Mentor/Witness/Elder” from 2010-2013 for the United Kingdom Boys2Men organization and duties which came from this position; and the enrichment of personal skills for druid practices in the domain of leadership and mentorship.

Keywords: Boys2Men, Chakra, druid, druidism, elder, J.J. Middleway, leadership, mentor, Reiki, witness, Yukon Assignment.

7. **You have an interest in healing, energy healing, Chakra balancing, Reiki, holistic health, and meditation – among others.²⁶ Many consider these crucial to their reduction of stress and improved wellbeing, and general wellness.²⁷ Others for personal development in conjunction with their or their community’s druid path. Even further, others see these as pseudoscience and without merit, especially because of, by definition, existing in the alternative health domains rather than mainstream medicine for improved wellbeing.**

What seems the most reasonable stance with respect to these and other practices to you?

To maybe start from a place of ‘I don’t know’. That seems a good place to start.

²⁴ Druid; Member, The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids; Celebrant; Healer; ex-Mentor/Elder/Witness, UK – Boys2Men; and Ritualist.

²⁵ Individual Publication Date: December 8, 2015 at www.in-sightjournal.com; Full Issue Publication Date: January 1, 2016 at www.in-sightjournal.com.

²⁶ Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Jj Middleway. Retrieved from <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/jj-middleway/59/117/240>.

²⁷ Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Jj Middleway. Retrieved from <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/jj-middleway/59/117/240>.

Strangely enough, it was in the sciences that I furthered my education (in the mistaken and, with hindsight, slightly comical notion that I might qualify as a medical doctor). And also perhaps unconsciously, following what I think is Kierkegaard's wise advice, in that to know who you are, you must first go by the way of who you are not. So I will freely state that I am no scientist. Yet I hold science and the rational as honorable and worthy members of a wider family of attributes of the human condition.

Just as science has the wisdom of 'laws' which acknowledge that 'to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction', I am sometimes puzzled why this can't be applied to the full panoply of life. i.e. just as there is a rational, visible world view, why should its opposite - namely an irrational, invisible world view, not have equal status? Then the apparent 'opposites' might be reconciled into a wiser and healthier union; the magical and mystical fusion of opposites which is the very birth spring of life.

Re-reading the terms and practices used in your question, I just note that, for the most part, these have been chosen by others to describe what I offer. Healing and meditation I recognize and own. The other terms, I respect and accept since others have experienced it so; however, for me these have come out of what I would term 'presence' and 'love'.

So the most reasonable stance for me in relation to the above practices and treatments is to acknowledge that for me, where they work, I offer them to myself and others from a place of integrity and with love. For anyone who chooses to believe or practice otherwise, I respect and indeed value that.

8. How might one respond to those protagonists and antagonists on either side of these practices – those with outright acceptance and rejection?

With humor - Good humor. :-)

9. You have association with the Yukon Assignment.^{28,29} What amounts to its overarching theory and implemented practices, and plans for the future?^{30,31}

The Yukon assignment is a wonderful example of courage, devotion and skill. It is a great role model for boys and men in particular and an inspiration for women disillusioned by poor examples of manhood.

In essence, a ‘grown up son’ teams up with his middle aged father to plan and embark upon ‘the journey of lifetime’. Having been dropped off by helicopter, with basic supplies, they spend months kayaking down hundreds of miles of sparsely mapped river, in an extremely remote area of the Yukon. Both men have experience of ‘the great outdoors’ yet push themselves to the limits of challenge and endurance to forge and celebrate their link to the land, the wider community (through their example) and to each other as Father and Son.

These are my words and that is my understanding.

²⁸ Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Jj Middleway. Retrieved from <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/jj-middleway/59/117/240>.

²⁹ Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Yukon Assignment. Retrieved from https://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=4999455&goback=%2Eenpp_jj*5middleway%2F59%2F117%2F240.

³⁰ Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Jj Middleway. Retrieved from <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/jj-middleway/59/117/240>.

³¹ Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Yukon Assignment. Retrieved from https://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=4999455&goback=%2Eenpp_jj*5middleway%2F59%2F117%2F240.

It is designed to inspire and motivate others to 'go for their dream' and to forge their destiny through actively embracing adversity. So the plan is to use it as a model in relation to adventure training and life development. I believe the intention is to take it into schools to encourage and inspire young people in their development.

10. Why, and how, did you get involved in it?

It would be a gross over-exaggeration to say that I am 'involved'. I am an active supporter - that's as far as my involvement goes at the moment. However, it does tie in with other work I am involved in, concerning mentoring and supporting teenage boys in their journey to manhood, so there is a strong link in that way.

What is more interesting is how I come to be associated with the Yukon Assignment in the first place, and my own 'great adventure'.

In January 2006 I headed off to the remote wilds of Patagonia as Deputy Expedition Leader for a Raleigh International Expedition involving 77 young men and women aged between 18 to 25, along with 36 staff - for whom I was largely responsible - mostly aged between 25 and 35. So, aged 54 at the time, I was the 'old man' of the bunch. It is fair to say that, at that time, it was the toughest and most challenging thing I had ever had to deal with. The first week felt like climbing Everest. (emotionally, physically and mentally). The second week, like climbing Annapurna - and on it went, relentlessly. I was often working 18 hour days.

And although the title said “Deputy Expedition Leader”, I had been warned, and found it to be true - “This is the most demanding role of all”.

The basic idea was for groups of around 12 to 15 youngsters, under the leadership and direction of 2 to 3 project staff, to go off for a month on an environmental project adventure, (tree planting or deer census) then return for a few days at base camp, before getting mixed up and going off for a month on a community project (building an old people’s centre or a children's play area - we are talking fairly remote areas here) with a third month on an adventure project (e.g. trekking across the Northern Ice cap or canoeing in the wild seas off the coast of southern Chile.)

I had the responsibility of coordinating, monitoring and organizing all that. It was fantastic because it mixed up very privileged youngsters from the most prestigious schools in England (Prince William had been on it the previous year) along with inner city recovering drug addicts and alcoholics. There were some local youngsters from Chile on it too, including an 18-year-old convicted murderer - but that’s another story.

I learned an awful lot about myself and others on that trip - in particular, that I could lead through inspiration and respect.

You’re waiting for the link to the Yukon Assignment - and here it is. One of the adventure projects (there were three - two trekking, one canoeing) was led by a young man aged 25 at

the time (the same age as my son as it happens). His name was Chris Lucas. I was amazed at his maturity, capabilities in the wild and inspirational leadership. We became good friends.

After the expedition proper, about 17 of the staff, went on our own adventure together, with Chris and another couple of mountain leaders, guiding us towards a dramatic - quite possibly unclimbed -glacier. Four of the party - including Chris and I, together with Leanne -an inspiring nurse from Australia - and Wim - an extremely tall canoeist from Belgium, climbed up the glacier and spent a remarkable and never to be forgotten night perched on ledges in the ice. We didn't sleep; the ice was creaking and groaning around us and we genuinely wondered if we'd make it down - or at least I did. I made a vow to shave my head if I got off safely (which I did and it has stayed short ever since!).

Chris, his girlfriend and I travelled on together through Chile, Bolivia and Peru after the expedition. We forged a strong bond of mutual respect and friendship. That's how I come to know of the Yukon Assignment - Chris is 'the son' I spoke of above.

11. You held the position of "Mentor/Witness/Elder" from 2010-2013 for the United Kingdom Boys2Men organization.³² What duties came with this position?

The application of 'Mentor/Witness/Elder' as a term in my working life, extends well beyond Boys2Men or Journeyman UK. I think the vagaries of LinkedIn, or more likely the vagaries of my relationship to it, have conspired to mislead. :-)

³² Please see LinkedIn. (2015). Jj Middleway. Retrieved from <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/jj-middleway/59/117/240>.

The situation is, that I have indeed offered those skills in a Boys2Men arena over the past few years; most recently over a four-day spell in the woods, six weeks ago, with 34 men and 16 boys on a journey of initiation (for the men as it turned out, as well as the boys). My role was to 'hold space' as previously referred to, and to be fully present. To support and if needed, nurture, the lead team, by dealing with upset individuals or mediating between parties. I also ended up accompanying a boy to hospital to be checked out after an accident. More generally, I facilitated and led the ceremony of blessing and initiation at the end. A great honour and privilege - and very humbling too.

That work continues and is current. It extends to include a number of groups/tribes/clans of varying descriptions, and largely of low or nil profile on the web. Not because they are in any way 'secret'; merely that they operate 'low key' and function simply. There are advantages to that, and not everything of value is to be found online - although clearly, much of value is :-)

The role of elder is an interesting one. As with much else in my life, this seems to have 'come to me' rather than 'me to it'. It seems that while eldership is linked to age in terms of requiring some life experience to support it, it does not relate directly to being of a particular age: More that it reflects a way of being in relation to a stage in life. So I find myself invited naturally into that role in number of spheres of activity - Druidry being one of them.

The duties which come with the position of mentor/witness/ Elder more generally, are the by now familiar chestnuts of being honourable, being present and being true.

12. How did this enrich personal skills for druid practices in the domain of leadership and mentorship?

In reviewing my life and often asking “how did it come to this?” I see how each phase or experience in life has prepared or ‘enabled me’ for the next. They seem to link together in some kind of ‘random- yet ordered’ array of ‘teachings’.

So, just as my experiences with the boy’s work, have complemented and fed into my Druidry, so too have my leadership and mentorship skills learned in the Druid arena, fed into and enabled the boys2men work. Indeed, those leadership, mentoring and eldership type roles have emerged significantly, through cross fertilization between two seemingly unlikely bedfellows: Druidry and the Ministry of Defense (MOD) with some ‘compassion for each from the other’ on my part, along the way.

A prime example perhaps of ‘walking between worlds’ - and also of being unconventional. I could move almost as easily (though not always as comfortably) between Brigadiers and Wing Commanders at a Board Room table, as I could amongst Hippies on a Field. A strange combination I know. Those days are gone; however, for a considerable period of my life, I straddled this ‘complementary duality’ as I would see it now, each teaching something to the other and me learning to acknowledge and hold both.

Thus were my leadership and mentorship skills in MOD as much informed and aided by my experiences in Druidry, as they were ‘the other way round’. It is for instance, interesting on reflection to observe that much of my work in the MOD involved mediating and acting as ‘a bridge’. You get the idea I hope, as this cross fertilization of unlikely bedfellows has come to pervade my life somehow. For instance, my work these days (which isn’t work in the conventional sense, but rather a vocation which I love) takes me almost literally “from Palace to Ditch” as I term it, and encompasses “All Faiths and None”.

If you imagine a floor of wooden boards: Whilst most people might live their lives mainly in one ‘channel’ or single board, perhaps occasionally straying slightly out of comfort zone by visiting the boards on either side of ‘theirs’, my life seems to take me from one side of the floor to the other: Across all the boards - and occasionally off the edges too - although I have learned from experience where those are now, and lived to tell the tale, so hopefully less likely. :-)

13. What experience with initiation for boys becoming men most moved you?

In recounting and replying to these questions, you have inadvertently stirred memories from an unlikely source, and well beyond when I more formally became involved with Boys2Men or similar.

I mentioned earlier about the young man from Chile who had been in prison for murder (As an ‘anti- fascist’ (sic), he had knifed someone who held alternative views, at a parade in

Santiago, as I understand and recall. When he appeared 'on camp' in region XI of Chile, he proceeded to hoist a giant 'Jolly Roger' skull and crossbones flag above his tent and was carrying a knife. I say 'knife' - but given that it was about 18 inches to two feet long it was halfway to a sword.

It fell to me ('the buck stops here') to deal with him. I can't say I wasn't in some trepidation at the prospect. He was wearing a very unusual and, for me, beautiful T-shirt depicting two horses - one white, one black and one upright, the other upside down. They were framed by a full moon, a quarter moon and a star. After all these years, I can still picture it clearly, as you see. I made comment on and complimented him on the T-shirt and this may well have 'saved me' in some way. We talked a bit about it and then I told him that I would need to take the knife away as it was too dangerous. He was loathing to do so, as you might imagine, but eventually consented when I gave him my personal assurance that I would give it back to him at the end of the expedition. He trusted me for some reason. I said he could fly the Jolly Roger until sunset and then it was to come down.

He was a most unusual fellow; tall and quite gaunt and originally from the region we were in for the expedition; so he knew the landscape and was most adept at reading the landscape and could run full pelt between two steep sloped hillsides - one summit to the other - just like a gazelle - supremely graceful. I can still picture him - it was unique and quite awesome I can assure you. So he was useful to the expedition for his local knowledge and affinity with the land. Yet there was an unnerving coldness and callousness about him. I remember him finding and then skinning a large insect with some despotic glee in his eyes. Scary.

So the weeks passed and the initial phase completed. Reports came in of how difficult and unpredictable and even fearsome he could be. And also of how strong and powerful and useful he could be.

Then, during the second phase (each of the three phases lasted a month) I found myself up in the wild hills with his group. I never got to do a full phase, but visited different groups to deal with problems or sort out leadership issues and so on. I remember, the group had been out all day and there was some problem, which I can't specifically recall just now, which necessitated getting news back to base camp asap. I think the radio had broken, so people at camp might fear the worst (this was pre mobile and satellite days). Anyhow, this guy (I can't remember his name- let's call him Luis) reckoned he knew a way back which was much quicker but necessitated going over the edge of the cliff in front of us.

Nobody was prepared to go with him (too dangerous!) and he wasn't allowed to go on his own, so somebody had to be with him. So, after a few seconds and in a rash moment, I piped up "I'll go with you". Everyone's jaw dropped: After all, not only was I the 'old man' - though still in those days 'fairly fit', but I was also the DEL (Deputy Expedition Leader) and was expected to show some sense and example.

Well, in the end, I didn't go with him; someone else did. It was agreed, and I knew it was necessary, for me to not be reckless, but to stay with the main group and hold things together rather than launching off stupidly. Yet in that moment when I spoke to Luis, and said I would go with him, I saw something register in his eyes - almost of disbelief. He knew I

meant it. And in the days and weeks that followed, he mellowed: his attitude changed and he became helpful and a key member of the groups he was in - valued and respected. He would occasionally turn to me to check something out and I was aware he was continually testing out the degree to which I was prepared to 'be there for him'.

I'm glad I didn't end up going with him 'over the edge' for another reason: Rather than being quicker, it took them twice as long as the main party to get back to base and was quite an ordeal, with much more difficult terrain than Luis had predicted.

As the end of the expedition approached, I remember a very powerful and moving conversation with Luis. He told me how his Father had left when he was very young; how he had felt abandoned and neglected and unloved. How angry and bitter he had become and how this had spiraled out of control when he killed somebody. He told me that something major had shifted for him during this expedition (as it pretty much did for everyone), and how he had somehow opened up to his sensitivity and softer side. He pinpointed the moment of the 'cliff edge' as having been the seminal point in this, and how he had learned to trust again. He was far from 'sorted' (aren't we all!) yet something dramatic had come to pass.

He went on to say that it would be his Father coming to meet him and 'take him home' afterwards and that it was a huge moment in his life and how grateful he was. He was in tears as he handed me a present of the T-shirt I had admired at the outset. And I was in tears as I handed him back his large knife. What happened with Luis was some form of initiation - they always vary, and are unique to the individual. I have witnessed a whole host of

transformations, but I guess this stands out because it was so dramatic and the first of real note. And also because I was going through just as powerful and transformative a journey of my own in that time. However, I think what I have related answers the question.

Oh yes, and the reason I can remember the T-shirt so well? Because it is sitting here on the chair beside me now. I dug it out to recount this tale. Maybe it won't surprise you that it has brought tears to my eyes seeing it again.

An Interview with J.J. Middleway (Part Three)^{33,34}

Abstract

An interview with J.J. Middleway. He discusses: most moving initiation experience of boys becoming men; most radical transformation observed between 2010-2013 for UK – Boys2Men; important aspects of leadership to him; most spectacular moments in the druid path; most meaningful and inspiring moments in the druid path; and the ethics and values required of druids on their paths.

Keywords: Boys2Men, druid, druidism, ethics, initiation, J.J. Middleway, leadership, values.

14. What individual had the most radical transformation in your judgment of professional work from 2010-2013 for UK – Boys2Men?

Myself. (half joking, but there is truth in that)

The fact is, that just about everyone who gets actively involved, experiences dramatic and valuable transformation. That goes for boys and men alike: Those organizing and running it gain and learn every bit as much from “the boys” as the participants ever learn from “the men”.

³³ Druid; Member, The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids; Celebrant; Healer; ex-Mentor/Elder/Witness, UK – Boys2Men; and Ritualist.

³⁴ Individual Publication Date: December 15, 2015 at www.in-sightjournal.com; Full Issue Publication Date: January 1, 2016 at www.in-sightjournal.com.

15. You have involvement with The Order of Bards Ovates and Druids for 21 years with 17 as a mentor or tutor.^{35,36,37,38,39} You do not perceive of yourself as an academic, or intellectual, but as slightly unorthodox. Moreover, you see personal value in expression of authenticity, grace, humility, and humor, even in light of a highly busy schedule – which you hold in spite of reduced contact with the world through electronic means of communication. For example, your recent work, in July, 2015, worked in sharing a journey of initiation for young men, where you held the title of ritual elder and took on its concomitant responsibilities. Or another outing which involved leading a group into sacred singing, which you give the appellation “Enchanting the Void,” or conducting a Handfasting (alternative wedding) in Somerset for a couple from Hong Kong and another in Upper New York State (Hudson), which describes a bountiful life provided by the druid path.⁴⁰ What aspects of leadership, such as the aforementioned, mean the most to you?

I think that sums it up pretty well in most respects. It feels like a very rich harvest these past few years: so much abundance in my life that I need to be mindful of taking too much on (like answering random magazine interview requests like this :-)) - which I am truly grateful for and only joking when I say that; I find it very valuable - and humbling too as I approach

³⁵ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/>.

³⁶ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). Druid Beliefs. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/druid-way/druid-beliefs>.

³⁷ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (n.d.). Ethics & Values in Druidry I. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/druid-way/what-druidry/ethics-values-druidry>.

³⁸ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (n.d.). Ethics & Values in Druidry II. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/druid-way/what-druidry/ethics-values-druidry/ethics-values-druidism>.

³⁹ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). Druid Beliefs. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/druid-way/druid-beliefs>.

⁴⁰ Please see Middleway, J.J. (2015). Enchanting the Void. Retrieved from <http://enchantingthevoid.co.uk/>.

my latter years. Yes, as Autumn Equinox 2015 now approaches - it will mark 21 years since I first attended a Druid Grove meeting in Bristol. On that same evening, two other people were attending for the very first time; one Professor Ronald Hutton (perhaps the foremost authority on Paganism in the world) and another - Adrian Rooke - a valiant and vibrant 'spiritual warrior'.

Both have become dear to my heart and most valued as friends. We shall meet again together as we have all these years, to mark the 'wheel of the year' and the 'wheel of our lives'. Each of us has supported and witnessed the other as we have evolved into our respective forms of Druidry and in life. We have honoured each other's evolution on this path. Goodness what a journey we have shared. I know they would echo that. So, deep friendship is one aspect of what this path has brought me; many others too numerous to mention here.

16. What remain the most spectacular moments in the druid path for you?

The remarkable arrival and unfolding of each new day. The Beauty in a rose.

As Hafiz expressed it in the 13th century I think:

"How did the rose ever flower and give to the world of its beauty?

It felt the encouragement of light upon its being"

So, the 'most spectacular' for me is to be found within the everyday.

The ordinary becomes the extraordinary.

Einstein put it succinctly and wisely for me:

“There are two ways to live a life: One is to experience everything as a miracle. The other is to experience nothing as being a miracle” I have paraphrased from memory so it may not be word perfect, but you get the gist of it. The thing that I would add is that he missed a key part out; ‘we get to choose’. How phenomenal is that? Which points to another wonderful Hafiz poem:

“The words I speak, create the home I live in.”

17. What remain the most meaningful and inspiring moments in the druid path for you?

I could list a whole host of experiences and recollections. So I will :-)

Or at least a few. I might recollect three days and nights spent inside an ancient, between 2,000 and 4,000-year-old, hollow yew tree in Wales, 18 years ago, as a key part of my journey; a death and rebirth. Without food and water and with just my Druid cloak. Some might say “’tis madness sir.” Maybe so, but it taught me much; not least that water is the elixir of life. After 72 hours without it, the exquisite ambrosia which is H₂O, becomes a magical substance, never to be forgotten. The ancient yew tree is also ‘a magical being’ in my experience.

Or I might celebrate four beautiful children - three girls and one boy - and the remarkable good fortune of an equally beautiful Mother to those children and a fabulously enriching

experience of recently becoming a grandparent. Being Father and Husband has been a key part of the unfolding of my Druid path and a prime focus of my life. Supremely challenging and supremely rewarding.

I would also celebrate the friends and lovers who have held and encouraged and inspired me. Particularly in this moment the woman in my life right now.

I might recall visits to the sacred and special Island of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland. Of 'skinny dipping' during two separate Novembers (Brrrr!) in the 'Spring of Eternal Youth' at the top of Dun I - the only 'mountain' (it's really a big hill) of Iona. And of taking a boat from there to Fingal's cave on Staffa- a quite Magical place - where I feel my actual Druid initiation took place on one of those visits.

Or perhaps the unfolding of the journey after my time in Patagonia and South America. I recalled above how leading that expedition was the most challenging and demanding experience I had experienced 'at that time,' i.e. "If I can survive this, then I can survive anything" is how it felt. Yet what happened subsequently was even more challenging. The breakup of my 30-year marriage shredded me to pieces and shattered my heart.

And that in its turn, prepared me for an almost mythical journey of healing and redemption in regard to one of our three daughters - a pilgrimage spanning several years, with spells in Nepal and the next year in India, trying to locate and rescue her from what was, at the time, every parent's worst nightmare. A life process for which I have invented the word

“Humilification” since I don’t think there is word to adequately describe the process of being humbled, often through humiliation,) and returned in humility, to the earth (which is where the Hum in our Human name comes from: We are creatures of this earth.) T

he life process offers us - certainly it has offered me - the opportunity for humilification. The words Humour, Humus and Humanity are pointers on that journey.

So, unlikely as it might appear as a candidate at first viewing, it is the supreme humbling through humilification which has molded and made me the man I now am, and thus paradoxically qualifies as being one of ‘the most meaningful and inspiring moments on the Druid path for me.’”

Here is the poem I wrote a few years back to sum it all up (it also goes a long way toward telling you where I am now) All things pass - and I know I’ll get over it, however my life feels as blessed and as graced, at every level, such as a simple fool of a man as this, could ever have imagined or wished for.

I have relinquished

I now accept

I am surrendered

Without regret.

I’m blown wide open

I'm stripped quite bare

I stand in silence

Beyond despair.

Reduced to nothing

I have it all.

Forsake illusion

Embrace the fall.

I would also like to honour and bless the five years I spent living alone, in a yurt in the woods, in Oxfordshire England, including two particularly cold winters. Of connecting deeply and being healed by 'sleeping upon the earth' - (metaphorically, since I did at least have sheepskins to lie on :-))

18. What do ethics and value require of druids on their own paths?^{41,42,43,44}

'First know thyself; then to that self be true.' - A guiding principle of the Western Mystery Tradition.

⁴¹ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). Druid Beliefs. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/druid-way/druid-beliefs>.

⁴² Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (n.d.). Ethics & Values in Druidry I. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/druid-way/what-druidry/ethics-values-druidry>.

⁴³ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (n.d.). Ethics & Values in Druidry II. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/druid-way/what-druidry/ethics-values-druidry/ethics-values-druidism>.

⁴⁴ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (n.d.). How Beautiful Are They— Some Thoughts on Ethics in Celtic and European Mythology. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/druid-way/what-druidry/ethics-values-druidry/how-beautiful-are-they%E2%80%94some-thoughts-ethics-celtic-and>.

It is for each of us to find that unique blend which best describes us, and then act accordingly in response.

We may help each other find our own path in that quest; however to ‘tell’ another ‘this is the truth’ or to point and say ‘this is the way’, are not ‘the druid way’ - at least not as I understand it. To enable another to directly experience their own personal unfolding, then see this embodied in ‘a virtuous way of being’ is the reflection of ethics and value in action I think.

What also comes to mind is one of my favorite Druid Triads (so called because each one always has three lines or component parts):

Hearth as Altar

Work as Worship

Service as Sacrament.

This too has been a welcome guide in relation to ethics and values upon my path

‘Hearth’ can perhaps be seen as the inner work of lighting and tending the fire of the soul. Though it might equally be seen as an outer activity.

‘Work’ - as has come to be the case for me - which complements and is fully in accord with one’s values and ethics; and therefore based in, and an expression of, love.

And 'Service' - The subjugation and at the same time magnification, of the lesser ego driven self, in service to the greater 'Self' - that which furthers and unconditionally aids the needs of others.

An Interview with J.J. Middleway (Part Four)^{45,46}

Abstract

An interview with J.J. Middleway. He discusses: community provisions for The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids for members' personal growth and sense of social life; common ritual practices in druidism; role of elders and chiefs; necessary knowledge prior to the druid path; druid and pagan exemplars for personal inspiration; articles, books, general resources, and organizations, societies, and orders for those with an introductory interest in Druidry; unlisted resources for self-development and support; and the development of the current crop of individuals in Druidry.

Keywords: druid, druidism, Druidry, J.J. Middleway, pagan, The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids.

19. The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids have a number of resources online with short documentaries, trailers, songs, lectures, interviews, and

⁴⁵ Druid; Member, The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids; Celebrant; Healer; ex-Mentor/Elder/Witness, UK – Boys2Men; and Ritualist.

⁴⁶ Individual Publication Date: December 22, 2015 at www.in-sightjournal.com; Full Issue Publication Date: January 1, 2016 at www.in-sightjournal.com.

others.^{47,48,49,50,51,52,53,54,55,56,57,58,59,60,61,62,63,64,65,66,67,68,69,70,71,72,73,74,75} A number of insights to demystify the spiritual practices and mystical aspects of the druid path for individuals

⁴⁷ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2015, June 19). OBOD 50th Anniversary 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x00Imc9ZG2o>.

⁴⁸ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2015, Jan 10). OBOD 50th Anniversary 2014 TRAILER. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yqi2In_V3E.

⁴⁹ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2013, July 2). OBOD from the Archive. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04zuz0idDLI>.

⁵⁰ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2012, November 15). OBOD Mount Haemus Lectures, Salisbury, 29th September 2012. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3D0GtjkjY>.

⁵¹ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2012, November 4). A Druid Tree Meditation. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnVRE8yME9g>.

⁵² Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2009 October 6). Pt - 6: Beyond Belief - a talk by Philip Carr-Gomm at the Glastonbury Symposium July 2009. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGGNsXb5kdE>.

⁵³ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2009, October 6). Pt - 5: Beyond Belief - a talk by Philip Carr-Gomm at the Glastonbury Symposium July 2009. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LROLGzdM4Pw>.

⁵⁴ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2009, October 6). Pt - 4: Beyond Belief - a talk by Philip Carr-Gomm at the Glastonbury Symposium July 2009. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiVb9ytrLWE>.

⁵⁵ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2009, October 6). Pt - 3: Beyond Belief - a talk by Philip Carr-Gomm at the Glastonbury Symposium July 2009. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnaNg7ppY1A>.

⁵⁶ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2009, October 6). Pt - 2: Beyond Belief - a talk by Philip Carr-Gomm at the Glastonbury Symposium July 2009. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOF5uMsAxDA>.

⁵⁷ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2009, October 5). Philip Carr-Gomm in conversation with Henry Tricks. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FA39Q0CzCo>.

⁵⁸ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2009, August 6). David Curtis and Rachel Rose - OBOD 2009. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29dY14yT5Sk>.

⁵⁹ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2009, August 6). Corwen and Kate - Cruel Sister - OBOD 2009. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evI0heU2wYM>.

⁶⁰ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2009, February 18). OBOD Summer Gathering Ritual - Glastonbury 2008. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guhPZPqfF-4>.

⁶¹ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2008, December 5). Philip Carr-Gomm on the Paul O'Grady Show March 2008. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xu4BF8xoKA>.

⁶² Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2008, July 8). Introduction to the Order's Mount Haemus Lectures 2004. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z56BUx8IRjk>.

⁶³ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2008, July 6). OBOD Summer Gathering 2008. Damh the Bard - Fith Fath Song. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XWOf126wg>.

⁶⁴ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2008, May 1). Seven Gifts of Druidry (higher definition version). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NccJ89BupI>.

⁶⁵ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2008, January 31). You were meant to be here - Ideas on the spiritual life. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQ093g-FofA>.

⁶⁶ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2007, December 18). OBOD Summer Solstice 2006 Public Ritual on Glastonbury Tor. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agGrwPo911s>.

⁶⁷ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2007, November 6). The Seven Gifts of Druidry. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dV7dOBMdcA>.

⁶⁸ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2007, August 2). OBOD Glastonbury Summer Eisteddfod 2007 - Damh the Bard 2. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRblSc0CM0s>.

and in collective celebrations, gatherings, and lessons. What does the community of The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids provide for its members in personal growth and sense of druid social life?^{76,77,78}

This very much depends upon the inclination and disposition of the individual. For some, the term ‘Hedge Druid’ might apply, which means they prefer a more solitary or less social path. Such individuals might simply follow the OBOD correspondence course over several years or more. They would also receive the monthly ‘in house’ magazine, called ‘Touchstone’. They might, or might not, opt to join one of the on-line forums in order to network and share questions and experiences.

In addition to the above:

Others are part of a worldwide network of many dozens of Druid Groves and ‘Seed Groups’; particularly throughout Europe, USA, Canada and Australia, but more widely too. This

⁶⁹ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2007, August 2). OBOD Glastonbury Summer Eisteddfod 2007 - Paul and Greg. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsomX_Tsh9w.

⁷⁰ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2007, August 2). OBOD Glastonbury Summer Eisteddfod 2007 - Damh the Bard. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnTHrFh2T4k>.

⁷¹ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2007, March 23). Lughnasadh in 60 Seconds (05). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3lBj-rsHcQ>.

⁷² Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2007, March 23). The Wickerman Dance (06). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75RDi77JaoE>.

⁷³ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2007, March 23). Summer Solstice ritual at Stonehenge, Summer 2000. Part 1. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEj_ctdF5PE.

⁷⁴ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2007, March 21). Ritual at Stonehenge, Summer 2000 Part 2. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZBjUjjlIdg>.

⁷⁵ Please see [Order of Bards Ovates and Druids]. (2012, November 15). OBOD Ritual on Glastonbury Tor, Summer 2000. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uR41PONJAEw>.

⁷⁶ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/>.

⁷⁷ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). About The Order. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/about-us/about-order>.

⁷⁸ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/about-us/frequently-asked-questions>.

would likely include meeting together to celebrate the 'Wheel of the Year' - the eightfold seasonal cycle of the seasons (e.g. Winter Solstice). Such celebrations might extend more widely to include others in the local community.

Then there are various Druid camps and gatherings in both the Southern and Northern hemispheres, again often aligned to seasonal festivals. These offer an extended community experience of 'living Druidry.'

Twice a year, near to Summer and Winter Solstice, there are larger Assembly gatherings, typically of two hundred or so members and friends, and occasionally even larger gatherings, such as for the 50th anniversary gathering, which accommodated circa 400. Typically, these take place in Glastonbury, England, and will involve open ritual either upon Glastonbury Tor summit, or in the sacred Chalice Well gardens. There would typically be inspiring talks and teachings coupled with what is termed an 'Eisteddfod' - an opportunity for the Bards, poets, storytellers, singers and musicians of OBOD, to entertain, bedazzle and amuse.

The three-part correspondence course, referred to above, forms the heart of the teachings, learning and practice of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. This is the framework connecting all members, commencing with 'Bard', where individuals essentially learn how to 'flower unto themselves', creatively expressing through such media as poetry, story, song and art.

Then follows the deeper, often more intense, Ovate studies; to do with aspects such as, Ancestors, Trees, Divination, Healing, Death...and Rebirth.

Next comes the Druid element of the course- essentially drawing it all together and seeking to be of 'service in the world'.

I hope this gives some inkling of the opportunities for personal growth and of Druid social life available via OBOD: Of course many OBOD friends just like to get together where possible and simply share good company - accompanied perhaps by a glass of 'Druids Delight' -golden "mead", made from honey (the bee symbolizing community in Druid teaching).

21. What remain the common ritual practices, their names and purposes, for those in the world of druidism to express various public initiations or important moments of life in the druid path of the individual and community?

I have already referred to the 'Eightfold Wheel of the Year', where key points in the cycles of the Sun and Moon are honoured and celebrated. This provides an insightful framework for better understanding the cycle of life and key points within it - both for oneself and the wider natural world.

Key rituals on a life path might include 'Naming': - the allocation and honouring of a new name being given to a baby or young child.

‘Handfasting’: - The sacred union through love of two individuals - Hence the term ‘tying the knot’.

‘Parting’ - witnessing and marking the passing of a soul from this ‘seen’ world to another ‘unseen’ realm.

Additionally, there are sometimes rituals to mark the transition to ‘Elder’ within a community.

In all cases, there is generally a significant benefit through connection - both to oneself, to others and often to something mysterious - ‘beyond’. The process of experiencing, witnessing and honouring key moments in the natural cycle and within an individual life, help give purpose, meaning and inspiration to community, family and tribe.

It may be that the original meaning of religion - ‘to re-bind’, ‘to re-connect’ is reflected to some degree through these practices. However, Druidry does not particularly classify itself as religion, but rather as a set of guiding principles; a philosophy and practice through which a virtuous and amusing life can be manifested.

22. The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids does have structure and history.^{79,,8081} Ross Nichols founded the order and Philip Carr-Gomm remains the current chief of it.^{82,83}

What role do elders and chiefs perform for the druid community?

Principally, such individuals would provide vision and leadership.

The focusing and facilitating of rituals and gatherings - especially the larger ones, is often, but not necessarily, performed by an elder. It is for the chief and elders to provide guidance, counsel and teaching to enable the flourishing and enrichment of the wider community.

Others may do this too, but it would naturally fall to those recognised as embodying the characteristics of an elder - such as wisdom, compassion, humour; humility, presence and experience.

It is through providing effective and simple role models of these behaviours, that the overall health of the Order - and indeed the wider world - is enhanced.

23. To better comprehend the knowledge and understand some of the organizations involved in the world of druidism and paganism, numerous resources and

⁷⁹ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). Who Runs The Order? How Is It Structured?. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/about-us/who-runs-order-how-it-structured>.

⁸⁰ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). The Order as a Five Dimensional Network. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/about-us/who-runs-order-how-it-structured/order-five-dimensional-network>.

⁸¹ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). Ross Nichols – The Founder. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/about-us/ross-nichols-founder>.

⁸² Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). Ross Nichols – The Founder. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/about-us/ross-nichols-founder>.

⁸³ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). Philip Carr-Gomm – The Current Chief. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/about-us/philip-carr-gomm-current-chief>.

organizations exist for personal research and self-development, if one does have that inclination, including the Order of Bards Ovates & Druids.^{84,85,86,87,88,89, 90,91,92,93,94}

Insofar as those with an interest in the general aspects of druidism based in skimmed reading and glances at the publications of the druid community, what core aspect does the individual in search of the druid path need to know prior to, or at least in the early stages of, the journey provided the druidic ways?

The simple desire or intent to manifest one's true self in the world.

The knowledge that it's not just you who doesn't know, and that its perfectly ok to 'not know'.

The wisdom to allow oneself to be the fool.

⁸⁴ Please see *Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship*. (2015). *Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship*. Retrieved from <https://www.adf.org/>.

⁸⁵ Please see Awen Grove Canada. (2014). Awen Grove Canada. Retrieved from <http://awencanada.com/>.

⁸⁶ Please see CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts. (2015). CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts. Retrieved from <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/>.

⁸⁷ Please see IMBAS. (2015). IMBAS. Retrieved from <http://www.imbas.org/imbas/>.

⁸⁸ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/>.

⁸⁹ Please see Reformed Druids of North America. (2015). Reformed Druids of North America. Retrieved from <http://rdna.info/>.

⁹⁰ Please see The British Druid Order. (2015). The British Druid Order. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.co.uk/>.

⁹¹ Please see The Druid Network. (2015). The Druid Network. Retrieved from <http://druidnetwork.org/>.

⁹² Please see The Henge of Keltria. (2015). The Henge of Keltria. Retrieved from <http://www.keltria.org/>.

⁹³ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/>.

⁹⁴ Please see Tuathail, S.A. (1993). *Foclóir Draíochta - Dictionary of Druidism*. Retrieved from http://www.imbas.org/articles/focloir_draiochta.html.

Also the knowledge that there is no pressure to continue - it is ok to change your mind at any time and look elsewhere.

As in freedom you come, so in freedom you may leave at any time.

24. What druid or pagan exemplars inspire you?

The Oak Tree; The Birch and The Yew.

The Moon, The Sun and The Stars.

You, Me, Everyone!

25. What articles, books, general resources, and organizations, societies, and orders seem worth pursuing for those with an introductory interest in druidism?

My honest answer? It's all on the OBOD website.

(including reference to, and recommendation of, other organisations)

My own path has been greatly aided by books by Joseph Campbell, such as 'The Masks of God' and 'Myths to Live By'. Also those by Christmas Humphries; especially 'Studies in the Middle Way' and "Buddhism".

Others which come to mind and have inspired me:

1. John Welwood's 'Journey of the Heart',
2. John and Caitlin Matthews 'The Western Way'.
3. Jonathan Briggs - 'Mistletoe',
4. and numerous others too many to mention,
5. although here are a couple more: 'The Sacred Yew', Anand Chetan and Diana Brueton.
6. 'Anam Cara' - John O'Donohue.
7. And 'The Natural Death Handbook' published by the Natural Death Centre.

You can see that these are not all overtly 'druidic'. Each of us must find our own way if we so choose. My own experience is of a 'perennial wisdom' which suffuses and transcends all paths. While druidry works well for me, it does not suit all. I am just as happy with terms such as 'The Nameless Path' or 'The Path of the Open Heart.'

26. In consideration of the same organizations and resources, and unlisted others, how does the individual member of the druid community turn to these organizations and

**resources for further self-development and support,
respectively?**^{95,96,97,98,99,100,101,102,103,104}

By opening the heart, daring to ask and trusting the process.

One might also add; ‘by applying common sense, modest effort and intuition’.

27. Formal, and informal, general descriptors of druidism exist in multiple websites, articles, and so on. This includes the Order of Bards Ovates & Druids, which, in *What is Druidry* (n.d.), states:

“The Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids works with Druidry as a spiritual way and practice that speaks to three of our greatest yearnings: to be fully creative in our lives, to commune deeply with the world of Nature, and to gain access to a source of profound wisdom. Each of these yearnings comes from a different aspect of ourselves that we can personify as the Singer, the Shaman and the Sage...Druidry, or Druidism as it is also known, manifests today in three usually separate ways: as a cultural enterprise to foster

⁹⁵ Please see Awen Grove Canada. (2014). Awen Grove Canada. Retrieved from <http://awencanada.com/>.

⁹⁶ Please see CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts. (2015). CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts. Retrieved from <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/>.

⁹⁷ Please see IMBAS. (2015). IMBAS. Retrieved from <http://www.imbas.org/imbas/>.

⁹⁸ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/>.

⁹⁹ Please see Reformed Druids of North America. (2015). Reformed Druids of North America. Retrieved from <http://rdna.info/>.

¹⁰⁰ Please see The British Druid Order. (2015). The British Druid Order. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.co.uk/>.

¹⁰¹ Please see The Druid Network. (2015). The Druid Network. Retrieved from <http://druidnetwork.org/>.

¹⁰² Please see The Henge of Keltria. (2015). The Henge of Keltria. Retrieved from <http://www.keltria.org/>.

¹⁰³ Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (2015). The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/>.

¹⁰⁴ Please see Tuathail, S.A. (1993). Foclóir Draíochta - Dictionary of Druidism. Retrieved from http://www.imbas.org/articles/focloir_draiochta.html.

the Welsh, Cornish and Breton languages; as a fraternal pursuit to provide mutual support and to raise funds for good causes; and as a spiritual path...The practice of Druidry was replaced with Christianity by the seventh century...Like seeds that have lain dormant for centuries before suddenly flowering again, Druidry began a process of revival, started by scholars in Britain, France and Germany who became fascinated by the subject...Druidry appeals in particular to people who have become disenchanted with much of conventional religious practice, and who are seeking a sense of spiritual connection with the land, and with their ancestors. In today's fast-moving and environmentally-threatened world, they are looking for a sense of rootedness in Time and in Place, and for a sense of reverence for the Earth."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ In *What is Druidry?* (n.d.), it, in full, states:

“The Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids works with Druidry as a spiritual way and practice that speaks to three of our greatest yearnings: to be fully creative in our lives, to commune deeply with the world of Nature, and to gain access to a source of profound wisdom. Each of these yearnings comes from a different aspect of ourselves that we can personify as the Singer, the Shaman and the Sage. In Druidry, Bardic teachings help to nurture the singer, the artist or storyteller within us: the creative self; Ovate teachings help to foster the shaman, the lover of Nature, the healer within us; while the Druid teachings help to develop our inner wisdom: the sage who dwells within each of us.

Druidry, or Druidism as it is also known, manifests today in three usually separate ways: as a cultural enterprise to foster the Welsh, Cornish and Breton languages; as a fraternal pursuit to provide mutual support and to raise funds for good causes; and as a spiritual path. Each of these different approaches draws upon the inspiration of the ancient Druids, who were the guardians of a magical and religious tradition that existed before the coming of Christianity, and whose influence can be traced from the western shores of Ireland to the west of France – and perhaps beyond. Caesar wrote that the Druids originated in Britain. The practice of Druidry was replaced with Christianity by the seventh century, and even though little is known about these ancient sages, groups in Britain who were inspired by the idea of the Druids began to form in the early eighteenth century. Like seeds that have lain dormant for centuries before suddenly flowering again, Druidry began a process of revival, started by scholars in Britain, France and Germany who became fascinated by the subject, and continued today by a small but rapidly growing number of people around the world who are inspired by the tradition, rituals and teachings that have evolved over the last two and a half centuries, which draw upon mythology and folklore whose origins lie in the pre-Christian era.

Druidry appeals in particular to people who have become disenchanted with much of conventional religious practice, and who are seeking a sense of spiritual connection with the land, and with their ancestors. In today's fast-moving and environmentally-threatened world, they are looking for a sense of rootedness in Time and in Place, and for a sense of reverence for the Earth.”

Please see The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids. (n.d.). *What is Druidry?*. Retrieved from <http://www.druidry.org/druid-way/what-druidry>.

Where will this growing crop develop, based on current trajectories, for the previously dormant seed?

From the acorn grows the Oak.

This growing crop of motivated souls is already sprouting. Taking OBOD as a microcosm of the wider whole, more and more individuals are waking up to the notion that the earth is sacred and cannot continue to be desecrated and abused as it has been.

A movement is underway; a conflagration of ‘warriors of the heart’.

Where once there were a few, now there are growing numbers.

For me it is like this: In the 1960’s (my youth) emerged the spark of this movement.

Somewhere - quite possibly ‘on some weird hippy field’ - a fire was lit. From this fire, a brand was carried to several distant lands.

Over the years, I have witnessed and been privileged to experience, a range of camps or gatherings all round the world. Initially it seemed like these were rare and each camp or tribal movement tended to think it was the only fire in the darkness of the forest. I glimpsed that there were more fires than superficially evident.

Over time, and especially in the last ten to fifteen years, the number of fires being lit, has grown, such that in each poetic landscape, individual 'hearth fires of the forest', can now see a range of other fires in the distance; across the valley, or further up the mountainside, like fireflies dotting the side of a creek.

These are still slowly, yet ever more rapidly, growing; each taking sustenance and encouragement from the other.

A 'confidence through communion' is taking place, such that this phenomenon (for that is what it is) is now linking fires, linking arms, in order to light up the world.

I sense the 'growing crop' developing in every land, across every nation and eventually, if not exactly 'in every heart', then certainly in enough hearts to make a paradigm shift inevitable.

Come dream the world anew

For the time it is upon us

As the land cries out

Let consciousness be stirred.

Re-dream the sacred sites

So long silent, so long dormant

For the time is ripe

Moonlight dance is in the air.

Re-imagine rivers flowing

Re-envision forests merging

As the drums now beat

Re-incarnate Goddess Earth

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