

A Perennial Course in Living Druidry

The Idea of this Course

Strange as it may sound, this course contains no information. It does not provide all you need to know about Druidry. No book or course can.

For in this most ancient tradition of Druidry, it is nature that teaches us. Seeking a way of living that allows peace, freedom, satisfaction, Druidry guides us to look to our relationship with nature: with the landscape within which we live, and the flows of energy within our own soul. It teaches us to craft relationships with and within nature that are respectful, honest and responsible. And, if we are willing and able, it shows us how we might deepen those relationships to the point of intimate and sacred interaction, washing us with ecstasy and the inspiration we call 'awen'.

Druidry is the language we use for our relationship with nature. Some people have a more acute sensitivity, perceiving subtler levels of energy, consciousness, intention and presence; others find it hard to perceive anything other than the physical world. Yet, however we are built, it is possible to improve the way we connect and relate to the worlds in which we live. Deepening our relationships, finding honesty, acknowledging sanctity, fine-tuning through wakefulness, we learn to live lives that are grounded and vibrant. We learn to be creative with the power of natural inspiration.

Taking that understanding, this course offers the simplicity of reminders, guiding and directing through ideas and questions. If the course is worked well, it will be the natural world (human and non-human) that provides any information about what Druidry truly is. The course, then, aims to teach by pointing out where and how the real teaching can be found.

Of course, from that point, we may find curiosity and crave learning about mythology, archaeology, theology, and there are courses that can teach these crafts, exploring the ideas. The purpose of this course is to develop the undercurrent that flows beneath, a current that is profoundly Druidic.

Why Take the Course

Even when our dedication is strong, our commitment declared, the distractions and crises of our lives can too easily dilute our practice. Quickly we find our relationships compromised by haste and lack of clarity, our inspiration fading. A little structure can enable us more easily to hold to the tenets of our tradition on a day to day basis. Some folk are happy to attend courses that provide the

motivation and discipline, others use correspondence courses. However, both these can be expensive, particularly if we find their content of limited value.

The Perennial Course offers a simple framework. Each unit is based upon the course of one lunar cycle, encouraging awareness of this natural influence upon our nature. The whole course comprises 13 units, stretching over the journey of a year, allowing a sense of the sun's cycle of waxing and waning. Working through each unit with commitment, exploring each and every element presented, will hold that awareness. Equally it may be as easy to dip into it whenever we are seeking a little inspiration.

It doesn't matter how many times the course is repeated. Nor is there any end point when all that can be learned from the material has been learned. Nature encourages us to carry on learning. Indeed, the more often we do these exercises, the more strength and clarity we bring to our relationship with nature's teachers. As our focus develops, the more wakefulness we are able to bring to every step of the journey and every decision we make. So do we deepen our connection with nature, extending the wealth of our own creativity.

Of course, giving a course out freely carries the risk of individuals misunderstanding the material, or finding its effect on their lives beyond what they can manage. As a result, these units are overtly gentle and simple. Nonetheless, used fully and regularly, they can be extraordinarily transformative.

Who is the Course for

The course is not about the specifics of ritual, mythology, culture or heritage, but about the simplest steps that make Druidry a deep, real and utterly natural spirituality. It doesn't go into magic or alchemy, but provides a foundation of relationship that is considered essential for the deeper mysteries of Druidry. As a result, giving guidance, suggestions and encouragement, rather than a definitive body of Druidic knowledge, the course is designed to be of value to everyone.

Someone beginning their exploration of Druidry can work through it methodically, finding new ideas and exploring them as fully as they are able. The experienced practitioner of Druidry can find clues and reminders in the material that will encourage deeper exploration, passing over some elements and reaching into others.

It is designed for an individual to be able to access and explore alone. However, it is also appropriate for a group to work through the units together, perhaps meeting once a calendrical or lunar month, in person or by internet discussion, to share experience, support and discovery.

Written in the temperate northern climate of Britain, the course relates to that cycle, reaching into the ancient roots of Druidry. However, this doesn't negate the course's value for those studying in other areas, climates and hemispheres of

the world; if folk would like to submit notes from other climates and natural cycles, they would be gratefully received.

Getting Started

Each unit is linked to one of the 12 or 13 moons in the calendar year, the work of that unit to run from the dark or new moon through its cycle of waxing and waning. The first task is perhaps to find a calendar that lists the moons of the year, making a note of when each lunar tide begins, then synchronize the moons of the course to those of the calendar.

The trick is to ensure that Leaf Dance Moon moves across Samhain, 1 November; Imbolc is within White Waking Moon, 2 February; the 1 May festival, Beltane, is within White Lady Moon; and Claim Song is the Lammas moon of 1 August. Let the others find their place, and if a moon is left unmarked, name this the Quickening Moon. For myself, if it is possible, I tend to place the Quickening Moon before Imbolc for its most powerful effect.

If it is too complicated for a group to meet at the start of each moon, and/or a regular calendrical date is preferable, begin each unit around the middle of each month, working that unit through the following 4 - 5 weeks.

It doesn't matter where you begin; you don't have to wait until a certain month or moon. Just find which moon you are in and dive right into the course. A few aspects are progressive, developing over months or moons, but these will become clear and can be picked up where it makes sense and feels appropriate.

As to how much time is spent on the course: my advice would be to put aside a period of time every morning to work on the unit, stopping part way through the day to reconnect with the teaching, then reviewing in the evening. About an hour a day is a very fine goal.

The Course

NOTES

Through most of these units, there are a number of questions, some small and some dealing with the major issues of life. Choose one or two on which to focus most fully.

Festival : Each of these units has a festival written into it. If it doesn't quite fall within the moon period you are studying, work on its meaning nonetheless, using the time to prepare for the festival in the coming moontide. The unit doesn't tell us how to celebrate the festival. Ideas, information and guidance about how to celebrate in ritual can easily be found in other courses, books and websites. Instead the course works simply on the fundamental ideas to consider at this time, ideas which can be woven into a ritual or group celebration.

Humanity : Recognizing honourable relationship to be fundamental to the practice of Druidry, this element of the unit focuses our attention upon how we are relating to other human beings. It guides us to work more deeply on our understanding of human nature, within ourselves, those around us and all humanity.

Environment : This part of the unit is to encourage relationship with the living non-human spirits we share this world with. It encourages us to be aware of the trees, plants and other creatures that feel most alive, awake and influential in our environment during the moon cycle we are moving through. Spending time in the garden, meadows, fields, parks, or even simply looking out of the window, we see and feel whose energy is most prominent. Before heading for magical books, our field guides are crucial: study its nature, its cycles, habits and needs. How and what is it teaching you? Can a relationship be created?

Creativity : The piece about creativity in each unit is not something to do just now and then, when we think about it through the moontide; it is as important as any other part of the unit. Filling our allotted time with this element of study makes an enormous difference to how we see and hear the world, and how we language and voice our response to it.

Ethics : Living Druidry is about walking our talk, adjusting our behaviour as we learn deeper consciousness and connection. This aspect of the unit suggests ways in which we might shift our lives, habits and attitudes, in order to live with what the Druid calls honour. The course is designed to allow us to formulate just what that word might mean. For - like love and truth - honour is a word that takes a lifetime and more to understand. Just when we feel we have a glimpse of its meaning, life changes and we realize the word has even greater depths.

THE UNITS

Unit One

STAR FROST MOON

(December - January)

Moon : Star Frost

Star Frost is the name I use for this moon. Consider the name over the course of its cycle, feelings it in your belly and fingers and breath. Find what other names people and traditions use for this moon. By the end, choose your own name for it, one that reflects the cycle in your environment and your own nature.

Festival : Midwinter

This is the moon of Midwinter. The traditional date of Midwinter is three days after the Winter Solstice, and this may indeed fall within the days of this lunar cycle; however, more poignantly, this moon is a period during which we honour the turning of the solar tide. The days have been getting shorter and the nights longer, but no more. At Midwinter, the sun rises and sets at its most southerly point on the horizon: witness those moments and make a note of where they are. From here on, the sun will rise each day a little closer to the east, setting a little close to the west. During this moon, the changes are slow but sure. Taking the time each day to watch the sun rise or set will provide moments of stillness, allowing you to feel connected to your ancestors who have watched the tide turn before you.

Season : Winter Waning

At Midwinter, we celebrate the birth of a new light. This is poetic, expressing the first moments in the potential for renewal and regeneration, the beginning of a new cycle ahead. For many, this is an expression of deity, inspiring profound reverence and respect; here there is a god of light, a god of regeneration, of birth. What is the purpose and impact of acknowledging these forces as deity or divine?

What other gods are present and prominent during this moontide? Which do you feel most drawn to, in which do you see most beauty, and through which do you find inspiration? This is midwinter, and the darkness is still powerful. The worst of the cold is yet to come.

It is a sacred time of stillness, when all life moves slowly; if we try to speed it up, it will only drag and pull us down. Spending time awake to the environment, be aware of how nature functions at this time. Does anything in nature move quickly at this time? How can you too slow down and what value would there be in doing so?

Perception : Being

Through this moon, erase the word 'try' from your vocabulary, for too often at this time we are trying to achieve something when nature is instead calling us to be still. Be present, simply being where you are. Allow yourself to feel the moments as they pass through and around you.

If it is a struggle, remember that it isn't necessary to be alone; be with a tree, a stone, an apple, the moonlight, the rain. Hold your attention gently upon that simple experience of being together.

Allocate a period of time each day to this task of simply being or being together.

Element : Mud

At this time, allow your focus to be earth. Explore the mud of the land where you live, the soil that feeds you; what is it like and how is it distinct? What is its pH and what does that mean? How deep is the topsoil, and how much of that is natural, how much brought in from elsewhere by gardeners and developers? What of the mud beneath? Put some soil in a bowl on your altar inside, or craft an altar outside to remind you to honour this essential part of life. Be with it. Feel how it holds you.

Humanity : Earth

In terms of crafting or deepening a relationship at this time, allow your focus to be upon the earth beneath your feet. For many in Druidry, the earth is a deity; is it for you and what does that mean?

Be with this power of nature. Does it feel more male or female to you, god or goddess, or beyond the symbology of gender? What do you quest from the relationship? What do you need from the earth, and what does it give you? What do you give in return? Is the relationship in balance? How conscious are you of it on a daily basis and how can you extend that awareness?

Spend some time during this cycle considering the issues, but more importantly then allow your behaviour to change accordingly.

Environment : Sleeping

Some writers have allocated the birch as the tree of this moon; who? Does this tree call to you? Can you identify it without leaves?

Is there another tree that is more prominent during this moon in the environment within which you live? Is it vibrant or hibernating? Spend time with different trees, feeling how they are at this time and with whom you feel most comfortable and inspired. Who still has green leaves, and how does their spirit feel compared with those who are 'sleeping'? What can the bare trees teach you of the earth beneath you?

What plants are vibrant at this time? Are you aware of the non-human fauna (the wild creatures, not pets) that share your environment right now? How are they managing in this depth of winter? Who is hibernating near you, who is sleeping?

Self : Solitude

This moontide is often one of the hardest and one where we crave the distractions of food and company. How do you do this? Where is that behaviour healthy and nurturing, and where is it escapist and distracting? Nature teaches us of solitude at this time, of learning to be alone, or without human company. How is this so? What can you do at this time to explore your solitude or deepen your experience of it, finding the fears it provokes and the gifts it brings?

Creativity : Walking the Tale

During this moontide, in the silence of solitude and simply being in your environment, now is the time to learn the story you have chosen. You have heard it many times perhaps; now, as you learn it, explore ways in which you can more profoundly be within it, experiencing its every turn and tide, feeling how its energy rises and falls. Move with its every move, breathing in its every moment. Feel it. Walk its footsteps. Learn it from the inside out.

Ethics : Impact

Finding the stillness of the earth goddess (or god) over the course of this moon cycle, open your consciousness to what impact your life has on the earth. Consider the food you eat, what you eat and how much. Think about the earth where it was grown and nourished; how does the mud there differ from that beneath your feet? What of fertilizers and pesticides?

Be wakeful to the rubbish you generate that is taken to landfill sites. Where is your nearest landfill? Go and see it, feel your part in its creation; allow yourself to be inside its story just as you are doing with the story you are learning. Feeling the power of the earth deity, how does it accept such sites? What other gods or forces of nature are present here? How did our ancestors deal with rubbish?

Responsibility is a word that asks about our ability to respond: only when we understand and accept a situation can we hope to respond honourably. Similarly, as you feel the quiet and stillness of nature, be conscious of how much noise you put into the environment. Be patient, with yourself and others. Consider the word 'acceptance'.

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?

Unit Two

WHITE WAKING MOON

(January - February)

Moon : White Waking

White Waking is the name I give to this moon. Spend time with those words each evening as the moon waxes, each morning as you rise to the waning moon of this tide : what is the power within them at this time? As you do so, be wakeful too to your environment through this moon's cycle and allow your own name to emerge, one that speaks of your own relationship with nature at this time.

Festival : Imbolc

Imbolc or Gwyl Fair is the name given to the festival we celebrate on or around 2 February. Research the meanings of those words, the roots of the festival, and what it is most poignantly celebrating.

What is the point of a festival at this time? Whom does it serve? Only when we know this can we begin to find a way to celebrate the rite that touches our own soul and is of value to others.

Choose three things (just three) with which to make a simple ritual to honour the powers of nature pertinent at this time, and make your ritual in such a way that its expression is also in harmony with the moment in time.

Season : Waxing Spring

Imbolc can be seen as the first festival of spring, when we call to the divine forces of spring, the first of whom is now quietly but surely beginning to move through the landscape. Who are the gods of spring? How do you personally empathize or relate to these energies?

The landscape and air is still heavy with cold and dark, but the first glimpses of new life are beginning to show. Take yourself out and explore the environment as nature breaks through the frozen earth. It make take an effort, warm clothes and determination to do this regularly through this moontide, but it is worth it. Witness the power of these forces, allowing them to touch your soul. How does their touch affect you?

Perception : Dance

As the light returns, days now growing noticeably longer, the clear energy of a new cycle is starting to rise. Feel it, and, witnessing this dance of new life, let yourself move too. Break through the frozen constraints of winter's cold; find your first movement, stretching and waking.

This is not something to try only once, but an important part of staying in pace with the season, and day by day letting a new cycle begin within. Dance its emergence, yet in doing so with a wakeful awareness of your own truth emerging. Break through the frozen crust of your own fears and inhibitions.

If you find it hard to dance to the sounds of emergence, begin by finding your dance to human music. Find a piece of music, of whatever style, that you feel most closely sings the songs of this part of nature's cycle. As you let go, move your body with the music, not to the music. Once you have found your freedom to move, allow yourself to dance into and with the simplicity of spring's emergence.

Element : Breath

In this moon, it is the air that we honour, air as breath, the first breath of a new life.

Put aside time each day for stillness in which to be more conscious of your breathing. Learn how to breathe more deeply, into your abdomen (find a teacher who will show you how), and feel the difference that depth provokes.

Be aware of the breathing of others, including animals. How do birds breathe as they fly? How do trees 'breathe'? With a tree that invites your company, breathe together.

The word 'inspiration' speaks of breathing in; what are you breathing in? Focus on this through the waxing half of the moon. Remember that growth cannot be pushed but happens when we are relaxed, in the exhalation; as the moon passes its fullness and wanes again, allow your focus to rest on this process of growth through relaxation and release. How does this understanding relate to other areas of your life?

Humanity : Children

As we look at new life in the environment around us, let us find it too within our community. At this time when children are too often stuck inside, find the child within yourself and explore these relationships, finding ways to play again, being conscious and respectful of a child's ability to learn, to feel wonder, to discover new and amazing moments.

Whether you have children or know some, or are working simply with the child inside yourself, let go of some more of that tired cynicism; use this moontide to find wonder and the art of play.

Environment : Snowdrops

Some consider the rowan to be the tree of this moon: who and why? Do you have rowan or mountain ash in your landscape? What is the connection to this time?

What are the first plant and the first tree to show signs of new growth in your home environment? We speak of snowdrops, and in some places these are the first flowers, but are they native and wild or cultivated plants? What of other snow-hardy plants, bulbs and wild perennials? In my garden the lungwort are the first to flower, reminding me of the first fresh breath of spring.

What of insects and other wild creatures? If you are near sheep farmers, is this the time when their ewes are lambing? Watch for every hint of new life, and see how it dances and breathes its life into being.

Self : Dreams

As we acknowledge and honour with wonder the energy of new life, how easy is it to allow this force to inspire regeneration and hope within your own soul? What will naturally and easily regenerate for you within the cycle of the year ahead? What will take more effort and hard work? Hope is a complex feeling; what hopes do you hold within your soul?

Hope is based on a measure of possibility, or even probability. In Druidry, the breadth of potential is always kept much wider, and dreams are therefore an important part of own power of creativity. They can be realistic, but at Imbolc

realism is not as important as imagination. What dreams do you have for this year? Write them down, paint them, dance them, using any media of playful (skilled or unskilled) creativity to explore them more deeply.

Creating an altar to spring and new life, honouring the gods of emergence, is a powerful way of not limiting potential. It need not be complicated: a simple table with items upon it that remind you of this divine power. There is no right or wrong; let the altar be very personal, expressing your own vision and understanding. What would be an appropriate symbol of your dreams? Place this upon your altar.

Creativity : Giving it Breath

As this moon tide is focused upon breath, now is the time to begin to tell the story you have learned. This is not about sharing it broadly to an audience, not about performance, not yet! In this moon, it is simply about quietly and surely giving the story breath, your own breath. In doing so, find its rhythms and movement. Find its voices, feeling how those ancestral voices move through your own breath.

So whom do you tell the story to? Begin by telling it to the spirits who have inspired you to learn this tale. They may be spirits of darkness, or wind, of fire, of motherhood or mud, or ancestors.

As you give the story breath, be aware of how others have shared it through breath and sound before. Be aware of those who will tell the story in generations to come. You are part of a continuity of life, intimately connected.

Ethics : Voice

Your voice is a powerful tool. During this moontide allow yourself to be poignantly aware of how you use your voice, how you communicate with others, your tone and emotion, your reason or passion; how much damage can be caused by words spoken, and how much love expressed! Be particularly aware of this in any relationship that is not clear, productive or inspiring.

Your voice is also important in terms of provoking change: use your voice, protesting where it is needed to, with letters, emails and simply by finding the courage to share a little more truth, ever conscious of the power of your own voice.

Here again that word arises : responsibility.

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?

Unit Three

WIND TOSSED MOON

(February - March)

Moon : Wind Tossed

This moon I call Wind Tossed Moon, for it is the time when the winds come joy-riding through the valley, bringing icy cold yet cleansing rain, or biting sleet. Yet what spirits are most obviously present, guiding the energies of this moon cycle, in your environment? Find out what other names people and traditions use for this moon, and choose your own name, one that reflects your environment and your own nature.

Festival : Equinox

During this moon, we are building up towards the Spring Equinox. If you are still watching where the sun rises and sets, you'll find its position changes every day. In the last half of this moon, it leaps along the horizon: feel how that speed of change is beginning to be reflected in the landscape.

As the equinox draws closer, be aware of what that force of change is bringing to you, to those around you, to the landscape within which you live. Spend time considering how this moontide would have been for your ancestors, of 100 years ago, 500 years ago, three thousand years ago and more.

Season : Spring

Spring is now pouring through in a rush of change. Watch out for the significant moments that yell to you about how the season is truly alive. The scent of the wind will be different, bringing a sweetness of new growth and hope. Can you tell how far away the rain is by the smell of it in the wind, the shifting ions lifting its scent? Work on that skill through the course of the moontide.

What difference does it make to you to be most acutely aware of how the environment is changing?

Perception : Touch

Touch is the perception to work on through this moon. As the waking world stretches, touch it, physically.

Wake your nerves by bringing a consciousness to the simple task of remembering or finding out what the world around you feels like: rock, sand, rough crystal, polished gems, bark of oak and cherry, sanded wood, tender new growth, petals, rain water, moving water, apples, potatoes, kale, broccoli, papaya pips ... even the darkness of the night's air. Allow your own soul to wake with it, exploring the world around you.

Spend time in the dark, or blind folded (with support if needed), experiencing the world of touch without the benefit of vision. What more do you discover about your environment and yourself?

Element : Wind

The element to work with during this moon is air, but now that air is moving through the environment, as wind. Be conscious of the slightest movements of the breeze. What does the wind bring with it? Does it make you or others (notably children) unsettled or vitalized? Do you flinch with stormy winds?

Explore what it is like to dance and sing in the wind: celebrate its force, finding ways to move with it. Feel it touch you, exploring your body. Watch how it explores your house, the forest, the water. What is the wind seeking?

In deep Druidry, we would speak of what is held within its 'song'; what do you think that means?

Humanity : Siblings

Brothers and sisters are the key relationships of this moontide. They are often the bringers of the first and most furious change in our own lives, and as you honour the winds of change, consider your siblings. If you have no brothers or sisters, who have taken their roles in your life, playing beside you as key support and competitor? How have the currents of your lives pushed and pulled against each other, influencing and affecting the individual journeys?

What would it take to improve those relationships now? Do it.

Environment : First Light

Some link the ash to this moon, but this correspondence doesn't clearly reflect in the landscape of my home, where at this time the ash is still quietly sleeping, albeit with last year's seed-keys rustling in the winds of the bare canopy.

What tree or trees can you feel most strongly now, and which plants are making the most of the extra hours of light, especially now while the canopy above is still bare? How does the extra light affect the birds? Who is beginning to nest at this time? What of the other fauna? Who is awake and alive and pouring energy through your environment? How does their energy feel beside yours?

Self : Change

Exploration is an important part of this moon's cycle, for the environment around us is reaching out, beginning to stretch, filled with hope, finding and feeling the edges. At this time, when you come across a limitation, challenge it. Explore other ways past it, into it, through it. This is especially important with those edges and barriers that have been in place for a long time. How many of these are now just habit, limitations that you assume to be there because they were before?

It is easy to remain in stasis, afraid of new growth. Yet Druidry is a spirituality from an island environment that is in constant change : every day, every hour, the weather changes, the light adjusting, the winds, plants, people, all reacting, responding, changing. In this way, Druidry is a religious or spiritual tradition based upon the magical powers of change. What does this mean and what is its value? Is there a god of change, or who are the gods of change? How can we revere them, and why would we want to? Let the changing of nature teach you, guiding your own process of change and growth.

Creativity : Sharing the Tale

You have given the story as an offering back to the muse, the source of inspiration, and now is the time to share it with others. Spend all the time you need to prepare, then gather together a few friends, people you know. Share food and news, laughter and support, and when you are ready still the gathering for the telling of the tale.

Making prayers to those who gave you the tale, who inspired and have guided you to feel its blood and breath, be conscious of the wild wind - and let your voice open. Remember that the tale is now a part of you. Give it to those who hear it so it touches their souls.

Ethics : Respect

Consider the word 'respect'. What right do we have to change others?

When we are in doubt ourselves or not concerned as to another's action, it is easy enough to retain flexibility, but what about when we are sure we are right? Consider issues such as the way someone eats, or treats their children, how much they smoke or drink. When is it respectful to work towards altering another's mind or course? Can it ever be entirely ethical to focus on influencing another's life? What about giving healing, and in particular when someone is unable to give consent? How does this connect with the tradition of magic?

Explore these ideas, alone and in discussion with others. Break yourself open in this regard to see more clearly your own behaviour.

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?

Unit Four

FLOWER SHOWER MOON

(March - April)

Moon : Flower Shower

Flower Shower is the name I use for this moon, celebrating both the sudden abundance of flowers in our gardens and hedgerows and the powers of the rain. The daffodils are out, the cowslips and primulas, forsythia and blackthorn, yet the rains come down in bursts of cleansing freshness. What is the most relevant name for this moon in your environment?

Festival : Alban Eilir

The festival of the Spring Equinox may well fall during this moon cycle. In much of modern Druidry it is called Alban Eilir; research the name and see how it sits within your soul during this time, allowing the words to teach you.

Note where the sun rises and sets on the day of the Spring Equinox in the environment around you : over which tree, hill or building does it break into the sky on this morning and slip away at the end of the day?

Using all you have prepared through the past moon cycle, allow yourself here a moment of stillness within the flow of change. Consider where and how far you have come since the beginning of last winter, what you have released that you had held as a burden, what you have achieved in terms of understanding and growth; consolidate, finding acceptance, with your feet on the ground.

Then consider the next six months, and what you'd like to achieve, thinking particularly in terms of relationship, honesty, integrity, peace and creativity.

Season : Spring Waning

The power of regeneration is, through this moon, in full flush. Those who have already emerged are calling to others to join them, hedgerows and gardens opening out into colour. What is the most prominent colour?

Dedicating time to being outside, whether that is in the wild, in your garden or in city park, is immensely important at this time. Let yourself be washed in the rain! Allow yourself the time and stillness to experience this potent surge of waking growth.

Be aware of how it changes throughout the course of the moon's four weeks. Can you sense the difference during the waxing and the waning of the moon? How does that change influence you?

Perception : Taste and Smell

Taste and smell are the senses to immerse yourself in through this moon tide, for there is suddenly so much around us, calling out for our attention. Spending time in this profusion of new growth, be aware of that call.

Like a young child, create opportunities to explore the world around you. Smell the earth, leaves, bark, flowers, rain, sunshine and darkness. Can you smell the changing season, the rising energies of life and growth?

This is a time when often we are inspired to 'spring clean'. As you do so, be aware of smell. Clear your home of all that doesn't smell good to you. Is that possible? If not, why not, and what can you do about it?

Don't eat anything until you have breathed in its smell and that aroma truly inspires your hunger. What smells good to you, and how does that relate and add to its taste? If little immediately inspires you, find what does!

Remember that in every scent there is a story: breathe in, 'listening' to those stories. Taste the journey. Does it nourish you?

Element : Sky

During this tide we hold the focus on air, but now, with the environment so full with change, growth and potential, we open our soul to air as the infinite skies.

Air doesn't hold us. It is unstructured and offers no support, no framework on which to hang our life. It can feel unsafe, even dangerous. Yet it also provides no limitation. How much do you need to be held and how much do you seek freedom? What is the balance between the two? Can you craft that balance across the year, instead of in each day, allowing yourself freedom to explore now that spring is here (committing to the holding of dependency and nurturing later in the year)?

Through this moon's cycle, be conscious of space, endless space. When you look up into the skies, during the day and at night, what do you see? What is truly there? Find out!

Humanity : Friendship

In any relationship it is possible to encourage, to nurture or to constrain. During this moon, consider friendship. What do you wish for in a friend? How do you define friendship? What strengths and failings are there in your own capacity to be a friend?

You may wish to take one friendship through this cycle and work on it, allowing it to teach you as you deepen its potential, giving and receiving more, ever aware of the balance between freedom and limitation.

Environment : First Leaves

It is the alder that some associate with this moon: who and why?

Which trees and plants are most strongly expressing their song at this time? In what order are the trees coming into leaf? Watch for the leaf buds and flowers on the larger trees. What is in the hedgerows?

What of the wildlife in the environment of your home? Which birds are you seeing and which are nesting? Make a note so that next year you can review and see how your neighbourhood is changing. Is it positive or are species declining? What can you do to help? Do it.

Self : Freedom

When we are working with air, we are given the greatest opportunities to explore freedom, yet the risk is always that we chose escapism. The line between the two is sometimes hard to discern.

Through this moon, be aware of what you tend to escape from, or long to escape from: relationship, intimacy, solitude, responsibility, expectations, demands, accountability, creativity. Be aware of what you use in your life to facilitate moments or periods of escape. Our culture readily supports the usual escapist tactics, such as the distraction of television, gossip newspapers and magazines, alcohol and other drugs: anything that stops us thinking. When is it

positive to take a break, to relax, carefree, and when are we escaping issues we've not yet addressed?

What is the alternative that you are confident is the journey to freedom? How important is freedom, what does it mean, and in which areas of your life do you wish for more? What would freedom allow you to do, or be, or achieve? How can you make strides now towards that goal?

Creativity : Life

Having let your story go in the last moon cycle, during this tide allow yourself time once again simply to be awake to the creativity of all that exists around you.

The physical world can be seen as the woven creativity of every spirit, every current of energy and consciousness. Allow yourself to feel wonder at the world! Explore all that goes into the things you take for granted, such as food, music, furniture, literature, and the natural world. Be awake to all those who are pouring their soul songs into each work of creativity. A cotton shirt holds the story of not just many human beings, but of the cotton plant, the soil, the sun, the rain and the communities who depend upon it.

Open your mind to the exquisite reality of every complex web of connection. How does this affect your attitude to life - your life and life around you?

Ethics : Freedom

Thinking again about respect, whom do we limit? Whose lives are affected and limited by our living? Are we being protective or needy, holding someone too close and compromising their freedom? Are we being greedy and thoughtless, taking more than we really need?

Through this moontide we are thinking about this in terms of close relationships, notably with friends, but think too on a broader level: within your neighbourhood, and even globally, consider the environment, what you consume, the issues of poverty and distribution of wealth. Who has the right to be free? What does that mean? How and where does one person's freedom bring limitation to another?

How can you change your behaviour to ensure you are living more honourably in this respect?

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?

Unit Five

WHITE LADY MOON

(April - May)

Moon : White Lady

White Lady Moon is the name I use for this the moon of Beltane. The first moon of summer, and the goddess of the moon is reflected in the white blossom of the

hedgerows: the stark white blackthorn giving way to rosy hawthorn, which in turn gives way to the heavy sprays of elder, and beneath in the grasses the myriad delicate flowers of the cow parsley.

What would be a name for this moon that expresses the nature of own home and your own soul song?

Festival : Beltane

Beltane, Calan Mai, marks the place of this moon, sitting calendrically at the beginning of May. What is the history of this festival and its names? How do you think our ancestors celebrated this time?

In some Pagan traditions, it is a celebration of sexuality, and often this is represented through the coming together of a gender polarity: the male (sun) and female (earth) dance the magic of sexuality, expressing nature's fertility and the exuberance of growth. Is this an appropriate story for you to work with this year? If love and sex are in your life, it can be a powerful reflection and source of empathy and celebration.

Sexuality and gender are important forces to work with, but not the only way of experiencing this festival. Regardless of gender, consider what it is that comes together to inspire creativity in the natural world around you and in your own life, eg. sunshine and mud, moonlight and water, rain and vitality, love and hunger, experience and wonder ... What else? How can you most beautifully and effectively honour and celebrate these powers in your life?

Season : Summer Waxing

In this landscape of my home, this is the first moon of summer, the first signs of summer's songs in the environment around us. If this is the case for you, what are those signs? How do they make you feel? What do they inspire in your soul?

Druidry teaches us to live in harmony with the tides of nature, moving with instead of against their flow: how can you adjust your life in order to live in tune with the energies rising in the environment within and around you?

Element : Fire

As the season changes, let us shift our focus to the element of fire during this moontide. In Druidry, fire is seen to be transformative, purgative, cleansing on a spiritual level. Many in Druidry perceive fire as deity, or revere gods who are seen as controlling the forces of fire. How would or do you honour a deity of fire? Does a fire deity reflect a gender, being a god or goddess, and why?

The least predictable of the elements, ravenous and devouring, it is dangerous and yet critical to the course of human evolution. Spend time considering how the power of fire would have been to your ancestors of 3000 years ago, of 500 years ago, to your grandparents, and to you. Can you make fire without matches? Think of electricity. Do you understand it? Just how much has it replaced the blaze of a fire?

How can you be more conscious of these forces, honouring their power and all they allow us?

Perception : Listening

During this moon, focus on listening.

Most of us don't listen well. Think first about conversations you have with others: are you hearing their story or waiting for a chance to tell your own? Are you listening to the unspoken words or filling the gaps with assumptions?

Listening is a fundamental part of learning the craft of the Bard, for without first fully listening to a story or song, we have no hope of telling or singing it ourselves. Yet it is not only mythology we must fully hear: all of nature is filled with stories. Tales of our ancestors exist in the bones of our children, in the stones of our cities; where else? How can we hear those tales?

It is not only with our ears that we hear, for we pick up sound vibrations with every part of our body. Dedicate time to this, focussing on one thing (wind, bird, tree, person ...) for a few days or more, then another thing, simply listening, opening yourself to hear its present, then its past. What do we mean by the 'song' in Druidry?

Self : Passion

What inspires energy in your soul? This moontide is one of rising energy, of passion: the trees are coming into leaf, the world once again pouring itself into lush green growth, but what do those words mean in your own life? Like fire, passion can be unpredictable and dangerous; how do you express passion, and how do you suppress it? Many would acknowledge a deity of passion, honouring this force that is so powerful in human lives. What would be the effect in your life of creating an altar to a god of passion? What gifts could you offer such a deity?

We can justify passion or its suppression with rational arguments, both for honourable reasons and as a way of defending ourselves from hurt. Often it is that other wild emotion - fear - that holds us back. How can we express our passion more fully, celebrating its gift of vitality? How does honesty fit into this, and what of respect?

If the subject seems too big to handle, take one relationship and/or one medium of your own creativity in which there is not enough (or too much) passion expressed. How can this be improved? Allow fire to teach you.

Environment : Vibrance

You may wish to explore the willow during this moontide, as many associate this time of year with those trees. In my valley, the willow is softly green, drawing in the waters of the spring's long rains. Its energy is gentle compared with the humming vibrance of much of nature at this time, each spirit lifting out of the cold into summer's first warmth in a celebration of life.

Which trees and plants are singing most loudly at this time in your environment? What is the predominant colour of the flowers in the wild? Are you seeing butterflies, birds with their first clutch of fledglings, toads or bats? Are there summer migrants starting to arrive yet?

Creativity : Muse

During this moon cycle, find a muse. In other words, be awake and aware of who inspires you. That muse may be a human being, but as likely it may be the moon, the river that runs through your town, the sweet chestnut in front of your house, the bluebells, the daisies, the first bumble bees.

How can you find a muse?

To be inspired, we need to be receptive. Just as it is possible to listen to a song and not truly hear it or perceive its value, so we can wander through life and find nothing that inspires. Opening our hearts, our minds, our senses, we learn to be awake to hear the beautiful, to hear what nourishes us, to hear something powerful with which we can empathize. We learn to recognize what is of profound value, the divine energy of life, the potentially creative touch of another.

Being open, however, can make us feel vulnerable. It takes trust. What else does it take? How can you be open enough to find your muse, to be inspired?

Humanity : Intimacy

Partnerships are the focus of this moon, and particularly those through which we express (or long to express) our passion. These may be loving, sexual, spiritual, or creative in other ways, but they always hold a measure of intimacy: we are open to the other person, feeling their creativity and life energy, giving our own. What is the value of such relationship? Why are they a part of human nature?

If you have more than one intimate relationship in your life, address one at a time, watching how honestly and fully you pour your passion into the connection. What holds you back? How can this relationship be improved? Are you listening to the other person sufficiently to hear truly what they are asking, needing or long for themselves?

If you have no intimate partnerships in your life at the moment, broaden the scope and look beyond the reach of human relationship. With what powers of nature are you able to express your passion? How can these be improved? And how can you learn from it the lessons which would allow you to create as deep and nurturing a relationship with another human being?

Ethics : Sexuality

Sexuality is so fundamental a part of our human soul, yet too often it is complicated. Emotions such as jealousy, fears about rejection and wounds that disallow easy trust, make physical intimacy and sexual relationships a part of our culture heavily regulated by social rules. Yet, many of those rules are constantly being broken, animal passions kicking through boundaries, leaving tangles of lies, frustrations and hypocrisies. What are these social rules? What is your experience of these complications?

Druidry is a spiritual tradition that beautifully guides us through these issues. Primarily acknowledging a being's soul rather than their body, the physical gender of individuals within a sexual relationship is not important. Placing value on respect and honesty, rather than on obedience to rules or convention, allows us to create unique relationships that suit the individuals involved.

How much is your sexuality tangled up in convention? As a society, how can we craft relationships founded on loyalty, honesty and acceptance of our individual needs, strengths and desires? What are the dangers? How can you do it for yourself? What would freeing up your sexuality do for you? What steps can you take towards that?

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?

Unit Six

LOVE BRIGHT MOON

(May - June)

Moon : Love Bright

Love Bright is the name I use for this moon, for the weather is now usually warm enough to make love outside (in comfort), encouraging us to open up and celebrate life with more freedom. What name would be most poignant for you to give this moon?

Festival : Solstice

Alban Hefin is this moon's festival focus, the Summer Solstice, the height of the sun and the longest day of the year. This festival may fall within this moon cycle but even if it doesn't, the moontide is spent preparing for it, for the days grow longer, the sun higher in the sky, as we head towards to the hinge of the year.

For some, this is the easiest moon of all: energy is high and the long days allow much to be achieved. Others find it a hard time, with too little darkness for deep nourishment or sleep, and too much energy to avoid chaos. Be increasingly conscious of how this time of year affects you, and what forces and currents in nature are the key influences; craft ideas as to how you can acknowledge and honour those powers when the festival arrives.

The sun is rising and setting at its most northerly points at the Solstice; commit time to seeing just where this is on your horizon.

Season : Summer

Summer is in its flush of growth, with blossom and flowers, the air filled with scent. Whether you live in the wilds of a rural landscape or in the midst of the city, be awake to what is new - every day. Open your life to be receptive to this energy and creativity, taking time to celebrate it.

However, as we get closer to the Solstice, the world seems to slow. Those who have been going at full speed suddenly stumble, creating chaos. Within the midst of the profusion of growth, we hit a few days of stillness. Why is this? Can you feel it?

Element : Sun

Through this moon, let the focus be the element of fire as the sun.

Outsiders to the Druid tradition still mistake Druidry for a religion based upon worship of the sun. Our ancestors in Druidry, particularly over the past few hundred years, by focusing their learning upon the patterns of nature easily presented the sun as a most crucial pivot in nature: our nearest star, its heat and light allows us life.

In the modern tradition, the sun is clearly a god to many Druids. What are the qualities of this deity to you? Do you honour and revere this god? Would you say that you worship it, and if not, why not?

The sun is crucial to life. Is there any life on this planet that does not depend on the sun? Taking time to look around, to sit and watch, seek out the song or energy of the sun in everything around you. Can you see and feel it in leaves, petals, the first strawberries, in the grain of a wooden bowl? Is there anywhere you can't perceive it? Feel its pull, through time and through space. It

provides a focus; how can that focus guide and hold? And how can it guide and hold you?

Perception : Seeing

The medium of perception to work on through this moon is the ability to see.

Through the waxing half of this moon, spend time finding awareness of what is around you. It may sound like a simple task, but it is truly rewarding. Pausing from the rush of life, as we pull ourselves from the complacency of familiarity we see as if for the first time: the landscape of our home, the people close to us, the clutter we live with, the skies, the buildings, the trees.

Then, just as we can limit our hearing by only using our ears to hear the noise, if we only see with our eyes we miss a great deal of life's magical depths. As the moon wanes, relax: find a sense of not just the outer skin of the world, but also what it is made of. Cells, atoms, molecules, electrons, quarks and more, make up everything around us. Does an increasing awareness of this change the way you see the world or your attitude towards it? How?

Many in Druidry speak of seeing 'spirit'. What does this mean? What are they perceiving and what is the value of this depth of vision?

Self : Identity

With the sun so high, this moon allows us to feel the strength of our vitality. How is your own vitality? What fuels it and what drains it? What do you do with that energy? How does your sense of identity and purpose direct that fuel of energy, forming your behaviour? How does your self-expression, the way you behave, make you feel about yourself?

At this time of long days and bright sunshine, we can't easily hide. Let yourself be seen. What are the strengths and weaknesses exposed in you and around you at this time? How does that make you feel?

Pride is a complicated emotion in the human soul. How is pride connected with identity, with light and vitality? What does pride diminish?

Environment : Petals

Some place hawthorn as the tree of this cycle, but in my valley the hawthorn is now starting to recede. The most remarkable plants at this time are the cow parsley and elder, both in exquisite profusion of white flowers.

Which tree's song is most poignant in your environment? What of the flowers, the dog rose and campion? How is the energy different now that all the trees are in full leaf? Are there fledglings from nests? What of the local wildlife?

If you live in an area where there is not much wild growth, plan for this moontide extended or regular trips into the countryside, allowing your soul to be nourished by the non-human world.

Creativity : Inspiration

Having found a muse during the last moon, this tide gives you the opportunity and encouragement to nurture that muse further, to work on the relationship, deepening the connection. It is not about reaching out to that soul in order to touch, but about opening your own soul to see, to receive, to be inspired. It is about making gifts and offerings that inspire the muse to be with us.

In Druidry, we speak of the cycle of inspiration: inspired, we create and offer our creativity to that which has inspired us, which inspires that soul to give more, which inspires us further. Sometimes this cycle happens within one relationship, and sometimes the inspiration flows through an environment.

So, in this moon, we look at that most potent Druid word: awen. The extraordinary kick of lightning that is the experience of one spirit consciously connecting with another, awen is the explosion of life's essence into our awareness. It is the power of inspiration drawn directly from the gods, from the primary currents of nature. As you nurture the connection with your muse, commit to discovering more about the power of awen and how you can find it.

Humanity : Society

Society is the focus of this moon in terms of how we relate to the world around us. The bright sun and high energy all too often encourage pride and arrogance, weakness exposed by the light clumsily hidden behind big words and colourful declarations. Where we are lacking enough confidence to be honourably assertive, aggression is used; confrontations and conflicts rise up in the summer heat.

Pause, stepping out of the rush of energy, and see how society around you is working, individuals and groups pushing and pulling. How are you adding to this tug of war? How are you not helping? How could your living be a positive force instead?

Ethics : Peace

Peace is the word of this moon, not because it is easy now, but because with energy so high it is necessary. We can learn the greatest lessons of peace at this time, not only in terms of others but also about peace within ourselves; for we can't effectively call for peace in the world if within our own soul we are in perpetual conflict.

Each time you see the turmoil of fighting (war on television, scuffles in the street, children squabbling, couples bickering), check your own state of peace. What is peace, after all? What allows you personally to feel at peace? How can you share that feeling most honestly, respectfully and effectively?

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?

Unit Seven

FIELD POPPY MOON

(June - July)

Moon : Field Poppy

Field Poppy is what I call this moon, celebrating the return of wild flowers to the fields of wheat and barley. The poppies, scarlet amidst the cereals as they turn from green to gold, are also like a scattering of blood, reminding me of all in nature that is being suppressed or killed for the sake of our corn. What is the most relevant name for this moon in your environment?

Festival : Midsummer

While in the last moon we prepared for Alban Hefin, during this moon we are celebrating midsummer, either over the course of the traditional dates that land in this moon tide (around 24 June), or simply by taking the path steadily and wakefully that leads down the other side of that peak of light. Thus we can celebrate on a particular day, but also do we add consciousness of a festival into the flow of many days.

In what way can you celebrate this turning of the solar tide?

Season : Waning Summer

Summer is vibrant around us now. There is life brimming, seething, humming everywhere we look, with new growth finding its strength, many wild flowers giving way to abundant green. The grasses are high in the meadow, wheat and barley in the fields, swaying in the breeze like the wind on water. It can be energizing but also sometimes suffocating.

How easy is it for you to be in tune with this season, and what does that mean? After the strange pause that suddenly slows life down at the peak of the year's light, the momentum starts to build again, this time heading 'downhill'; can you feel it?

Element : Energy

At this time, let the focus be fire as the energy of life. Nature is heavy with it all around us, fat with growth, petals falling and the fruit now beginning to swell that will be the harvest to come. Can you perceive that energy of life in all around you? Don't try to see some ethereal spirit; begin by simply acknowledging and accepting something to be alive.

In animism, many speak of everything in nature having its own spirit, but what do they or you mean by 'spirit'? Most theologies consider human beings to have a soul, but what does that mean? Does a cat have a spirit or soul? Does a beetle, a slug, a tree, a river, the earth, the wind, a bacterium? Where is the cut off point, if it exists at all?

To the Druid, it is not that all in the physical world contains spirit or a soul, for there is no such distinction between spirit and matter. Both are fundamentally crafted of the same stuff: energy and consciousness. And all nature is imbued with energy and consciousness (or purpose). Nothing is special, nothing set apart, chosen by a creator, deemed more important or worthy of consideration.

How does this affect the way we might live? Think of broiler chickens, puppies, rivers, forests.

Perception : Life

This moontide, as we slip down the other side of the peak, let your focus of sensory perception to be as broad as possible: explore the sensation of being alive amidst this Earth's profusion of life.

This doesn't necessarily mean actively getting busy and doing things; instead, allow yourself simply to feel how your life fits into the web of life. How do you fit into the ecosystem of your environment, and of the wider environment of nature? How does your life fit into the web of lives that make up your blood line, your community and humanity?

Feel what the Druid means by saying: we are all connected.

Self : Stillness

Explore the pleasure of stillness during this moon. There is nothing to do now but wait for harvest. Let this notion inform you as to just how quickly you are taking your life? How much do you chase your tail? How often do take time to be calm? This is not about passivity or distractions, but about taking the time to relax and be ourselves. Consider what drives you and any root fears that fuel those drives.

Environment : Strength

At this time of high summer, it is the oak that is seen to embody the season: who uses this association and why?

Where I live, by early July the oaks have had their first flush of growth but are not yet pushing into their second. The honeysuckle, which gives the first soft leaves of the early spring, is now in flower, with dog roses, elder and poppy. What are the plants and animals most alive in your environment?

Creativity : Structure

After last moontide, nurturing the relationship with your muse, during this moon let the creativity flow through you in the form of poetry. This form of creative expression was key to the Bards of the old Druid tradition, and is viewed with equal importance today. For poetry allows us to create with a balance between our analytical and spatial capacities, between colour and sound, imagery and reason. It paints pictures in our mind's eye while describing their detail. It offers ideas yet leaves gaps for the soul to fill in with emotion, mystery and imagination.

Begin by exploring structures in different forms of poetry. Read a range of different poets, and see which structures feel most comfortable for you. Have a go using a simple form of four lines, the first three with 7 syllables, the last with 3. Try a haiku: three lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables in each. What is the rhythm or meter of a traditional or Shakespearean sonnet? Try writing one yourself. The subject? Your muse!

Humanity : Solitude

During this time, find the natural balance between being with others, celebrating the long days, the warmth, and the beginnings of harvest ... and being alone.

Be conscious of the time you spend alone, using it well, walking in places that inspire and calm you, allowing yourself time to think, to ponder, to daydream. How comfortable are you alone?

Be conscious, too, of the time you spend with others. When you are in company, be aware of how easy this is. Reflect on where and how you are most truthfully yourself, where you are calmest and happiest, and how that understanding can enrich and improve your time alone and time spent with others.

This awareness will naturally deepen your understanding of yourself and your own truth. To the Druid, this is an extremely important awareness, allowing him/her to interact with honour, and a growing confidence in his/her own honesty.

Ethics : Rights

How much do we demand of life? Consider the notion of rights. What do you feel to be your rights, as a human being, as a member of your family, as a citizen of a nation, as a being who lives upon this sacred earth? How do you justify your rights, and who do you think would disagree with those rights? How many in this world have those rights assured or defended? Bear in mind that fine balance between yourself and others (human and non-human) in terms of need. Look at the blurred lines between need and desire.

Having thought the issues through, how can you change your way of life in order to improve the reality of life for yourself and for others? Consider the word 'generosity', another potent word in the history of people, our heritage, our mythology and the Druid tradition.

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?

Unit Eight

CLAIM SONG MOON

(July - August)

Moon : Claim Song

In the traditions of many peoples, this is the moon during which the harvest is celebrated; it is for this reason that I call it Claim Song Moon. Having truthfully acknowledged our own investment in the crop, now is the time to claim what is ours, whether that be the abundance or the scarcity. Our song is the expression of that truth.

What is the most relevant name for this moon in your environment?

Festival : Lughnasadh

Lughnasadh, Lammas, Gwyl Awst are names for this festival celebrated in Druidry and most new Paganisms on or around 1 August. What do these words mean and what is their history?

Although my grove gathers at the nearest Saturday to this date, I personally make my rituals when the first field of wheat or barley is harvested in the valley of my home. At that time, I spend time in the fields of golden corn, making offerings of song, and making sacrifice in thanks to the gods, the land, the plants, the wildlife, and the cereal itself, for feeding the people.

As you prepare your ritual of Gwyl Awst, consider what you personally and what society generally can give in return for this gift of sustenance. How can we give adequate thanks? And what is the purpose of our thanksgiving?

Season : Harvest Waxing

Though in Britain we use the word autumn and in the US the word is fall, the older word for the season that follows summer is harvest. This is its beginning.

In the environment where I live, by Gwyl Awst we already have an abundance of strawberries, raspberries, redcurrants, loganberries, and other sweet red berries grown for our pleasure and nourishment. If you can, find a farm (organic) where you can pick your own harvest, and celebrate this profusion of nature's generosity.

Be aware of when the harvest of wheat and barley is ready. Although most Druidry can well be practised in the city, we are all dependent on this harvest; find a way of knowing how the harvest is going. Has there been enough rain or too much? What is the state of the land? Take a trip out into the country and sit yourself down in a field of wheat just before the harvest ... and just afterwards.

Perception : Dance

Through each moon we have focused on different ways in which we perceive the world; this moontide's focus is dance. We may think of dance as an activity, but in Druidry dance is also a medium through which we experience our own life and the world around us.

That is not just about our own movement, but about the way in which all of nature moves. To what rhythms is nature dancing? How can you improve the way you hear or feel those rhythms? Listen to the earth, to gravity, to the

heartbeat of humanity, to the wind, the rain, to your cravings and your ancestors. Find a deeper, a sacred and a more meaningful way of dancing.

Element : Water

With the shift in season from summer to harvest, we change focus on elements, from fire to water, and this moontide we look at water in everything. Just as it is possible to see earth and sunshine in all of nature, so it is possible to acknowledge the element of water.

Scientists are now speak of the notion of water having memory, an idea that is integral to most Paganisms around the world, to homeopathy and other natural medicines. Find out what you can about this idea. What does that mean in terms of the power, the spirit or song of a river, of the ocean, of rain? Find out how much of a human body is water, how much our brain is made up of water, how much of the earth's surface is water. Be aware of the water in the food you eat, understanding where that water came from. What about the water you drink, water bottled and transported miles for your convenience, and water drawn from a kitchen tap? How does it feel to have a bath, or slip into a swimming pool or the sea?

What is the effect on your perception of life with this consciousness of water? How does it change your behaviour?

Humanity : Connection

Through the fluidity of water, through its omnipresence, during this moontide the focus is on the way in which we connect with all life.

Druidry teaches us that we are all connected: through blood, stories, breath, love, grief and landscape, we are linked to our ancestors and our descendants. Through food, tears, laughter and song, through all we excrete, through every thought and action, we are linked to the land and seas. Through energy and consciousness, through the molecules and subatomic particles of our being, we are connected.

It can be hard to imagine the threads that make up the complete web of life; seeing them as currents within water can be easier. Similarly, when we are used to feeling the threads existent in space, to shift that awareness to water can also be a useful and potent change of perception. Why?

How does your relationship with nature change, and your relationships with individuals, when you are conscious of these threads and currents of connection?

Environment : Verdancy

Holly is the tree noted by some at this time; who and why? Although holly is not so prominent in the forest or hedgerows at this time as it is in the middle of winter, when other trees are bare, it is associated with the harvest and sacrifice. Can you feel that link?

Growth is heavy and often wet in the valley of my home at this time. The tide is clearly turning, and hints of darkness and decay are creeping in. Can you feel them? Leaves are rotting underneath the lush green growth, petals and fruit fallen, the stark shaven vulnerability of a field newly harvested.

In terms of trees, plants and the wild creatures, what seems to you most awake and vibrant, most poignant, in your environment through this moontide?

Self : Sacrifice

Sacrifice is the key focus of this moon, for as the harvest is brought in we rise to celebrate the gifts of the land, of the ancestors and the gods. What are these gifts?

Yet the word sacrifice has negative connotations in secular modern culture; why? Many in Druidry consider it to be a key part of their practice. As such, it is useful to find out why that may be. Talk to others in the tradition, read and ask questions of practitioners and students of Druidry.

How would you define sacrifice in a positive way, and how would you distinguish it from the offerings that you make in thanksgiving? Whom do we make sacrifices to in Druidry? If we recall what our ancestors sacrificed (livestock; what else?), each item was clearly of significant value. What can we sacrifice in our modern and relatively comfortable world that would be of similar value? And what would be the purpose of doing so?

Creativity : The Gift

Having spent a moontide writing poetry, through this moon you are encouraged to give it away! How? Keep writing, now exploring in your poems your perception of our complete connection within nature, allowing yourself to receive inspiration through the growing trust and openness of your interaction.

Some poems you may feel are strong enough to learn and recite to your muse(s), to those who have inspired you to write, offering the verses in thanksgiving. Some you may offer to the gods, to the land, to the wind, or may burn, knowing that poetry, like water, continuously flows if we let it. Nothing is ever lost, but much decays in order to regenerate in a new form. Let your words float upon the currents.

Ethics : Payment

Through a moontide during which we acknowledge and give thanks for powerful gifts of abundance offered by the land, as we consider sacrifice, think about what you can give back. You may feel this is a good time to clear excess from your house and give it to charity, or find the courage and generosity to give an amount to charity or a number of charities, or give a gift to a friend in need.

This may be a time to do some fundraising for an ethical cause, or perhaps to give time in voluntary work for a charitable organization you support. Another form of sacrifice is to stop buying cheap food, determining here to buy organic and fair trade produce.

It always takes an effort to make a sacrifice; if it doesn't, no sacrifice is made.

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?

Unit Nine

GREEN STILL MOON

(August - September)

Moon : Green Still

Green Still Moon is the name I use for this tide. For the green growth is now dark, thick and heavy; there is a sense of waiting, a stillness while the apples swell, the earth is dry, and the wasps lazily seek out sweetness to steal.

Find out what other names people and traditions use for this moon, and by the end of the tide choose your own name for it, one that reflects the cycle in your environment and your own nature.

Festival : Equinox

During this moon we prepare for the Autumn Equinox, and again I encourage you to go out at dawn and dusk to chart exactly where the sun rises and sets upon the horizon near your home. Just as it did through spring, you'll see the position changing quickly, the sun emerging and disappearing significantly nearer the east each day.

Through the inertia of sticky warm days and heavy growth, the undercurrent of change rising beneath us, drawing us closer to the point of balance. What do you rely on to hold you balanced through periods of change? How present or reliable is that in your life? Think about the issue with relevance to your family or close community, and to all humanity: in the turmoil of change, what do we need to feel secure? Becoming aware of these issues will be a guide for the festival rite.

Season : Harvest

This moon takes us through the thick of harvest season, a time which for our ancestors (until only a few generations ago) meant blistering hard work. Long hot days spent in the fields, the whole family at work, sharing laughter, stories, sweat and tears, drinking gallons of ale or cider where safe water wasn't available. Once gathered, that harvest was given over to the land owner, or needed to be sold; either way, its value was crucial to the community. How much contact do you have with this powerful cycle and understanding of food? Can you find a way of getting more involved, or - if you do grow your own food - allowing others to get involved who don't have the opportunity. How does it change your behaviour and your awareness of food, of the land, the weather, the gods?

Perception : Touch

In the sweat of the day's working, in the lazy evenings, through this moontide wake yourself to the power of touch once again. This sense is also a focus in the tide before the Spring Equinox, yet then the land was hard with cold and sleep. As you explore, be aware of just how is it different now.

Indulge in the heightened awareness of what the world feels like on your fingertips, beneath bare feet, upon your cheek or lips, resting on your belly. Explore sensations of wet and dry, sticky and slippery, sun-baked warm and shadow cool, prickly thistles, soft moss, hazel leaves and beech leaves, oak bark and cherry bark. Close your eyes, and touch. Open again to the wonder.

Element : Thirst

Staying with water, through this tide acknowledge the element in its most precious forms. Explore what happens when you are thirsty, and consider how that powerful craving is ever-present in many communities of the world.

Find a place where water is scarce and sit, in summer's stillness and warmth, until you can feel the value and power of water here. Raise your awareness of the precious nature of tears and sweat: what is released in these two, physiologically, chemically, and emotionally? How much do you sweat and shed tears? Raise your awareness of what is happening when you do.

Recalling how water connects all life, holding memory, how are sweat and tears so important in and to the stories of our people?

Humanity : Human Beings

Through this moontide, the relationship to work on is your relationship with humanity as a whole. What do you share with every other human being across the world? What do you share with human beings who have lived through the past five thousand years, and the past fifty thousand? What makes your culture, your family and yourself unique? What makes this period of time unique for humanity?

In holding awareness of these things, the Druid feels acutely the connections that link him/her into the energy and consciousness, or the spirit, of humanity, as it exists within the flow of time, upon the Earth. What is the benefit of this wakeful connection?

Through our actions and attitudes, we can each make a difference to the wellbeing of our species; how can you improve what you contribute to humanity? Do it.

Environment : Nuts

The hazel is the tree honoured by many through this moon, and indeed it is at this point a dense green, putting forward its precious nuts, food that will be all too quickly devoured by the wild creatures (notably squirrels here) of any environment. The thistles are at their height where I live, tall and gloriously spiked, their purple flowers transforming into the softest cotton down.

Which plants, trees and animal are most visible in your landscape? Which are putting out nuts and seeds? Amongst the birds, which migrants are already disappearing and where are they heading? Which are most commonly seen now? Can you see that mix of inertia and change in the wild creatures around you? What is the energy and life on the fields that have been harvested?

Self : Harvest

At this time, our personal harvest is becoming clear. Before us are the results of what began as dreams at Gwyl Fair, of the seeds that we sowed in the spring, that we nurtured through the sunshine of summer. Some may have thrived and offer us a harvest of those dreams, bringing an abundance of achievement and wellbeing. Some will not have germinated, some will have withered and died, and at times that will have been a good thing, while at others there will be a sense of failure and regret.

Through this moontide, let us consider our own harvest, looking back to midwinter and the journey through the tides of this growing cycle. What lessons can be learned? Where did we push against the season and where did we allow nature to support our work?

Creativity : Sharing

Sharing poetry is about sharing a perspective. It can be suffocatingly bland, devoid of inspiration, like a narrative told without enthusiasm. It can be hugely dull simply because there is no depth or originality in our vision. However, the poet's skill is in part similar to that of a photograph: framing, in time and space, a moment and presenting that moment in a way that is poignant.

During this moon, writing more and looking at what you have already written, see if you can touch others with your poetry: not skin on skin, but soul to soul, as you share the poignance of your perception of a moment.

Ethics : Generosity

What can you do to make life easier for others? In the heavy long days of August and early September, energy is slow, irritation and apathy rising in tides, the sun pulling us into a new flood of change. Looking around you, see who is finding it particularly hard. How can you help?

It is important that what you offer is given because the other person wants or needs that service, and not because it's what you think he might want or need, not because it will make you feel good about yourself.

Think about that powerful word that was so important to our ancestors: generosity. Big gestures may be appropriate, but continuity is more important; commit yourself to giving no more than you can wholeheartedly and truly give, ensuring that you can maintain the gift for as long as that help is needed.

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?

Unit Ten

BLOOD BERRY MOON

(September - October)

Moon : Blood Berry

This moon I call Blood Berry Moon. The hedgerows are full of blackberries that reveal the quality of the summer now gone in their taste, sweet and soft, or tight and tart. The last of the maize is coming in, the apples and plums are with us in abundance, and there is now a clear sense of the worth of our harvest. And by this time it is usually obvious what we have paid for it.

What is the most relevant name for this moon in your environment?

Festival : Alban Elued

Autumn Equinox is the festival of this or the last moon. Druids often use the name Alban Elued: what do those words mean and why are they used? Consider the words with your whole body, not just your mind.

Through the course of this moon, once the equinox is past, spend time recognizing and accepting the journey we are taking through the cycle of the year, the days becoming shorter, growth slowing down. The cold is creeping in. We are riding the current that will take us into winter; how does that make you feel?

Most poignantly and effectively, how can you celebrate that current? Celebration is a powerful action and, to the Druid, is not something done without deep thought and consideration. What do we celebrate, how can we do so, what impact will that have on others, and what of those who are not able to celebrate? We are all connected. Let this be a strong part of your understanding of the festival.

Season : Harvest Waning

The last moon of the harvest, this is the time when we celebrate the apples, such a significant fruit of our land and our heritage. For some they are the sacred fruit of the dead, while others consider them the fruit of fertility. Explore that symbology and, as importantly, explore what the apple means to you.

That the sun rises and sets now past the point of balance, rapidly moving towards the south, can be seen clearly in the speed of change within the landscape. Which of the deciduous trees are already dropping their leaves?

Perception : Taste and Smell

Taste and smell are the media of perception to focus on through this moon. Can you smell the changes in the air as the darkness begins more effectively to seep into the cycle's growth? Can you smell the change in the land as it receives this darkness, welcoming it as the process of decay? In the soil, in the hedgerows, in the plants of the verges and gardens, in the bark of trees, in the wind and in the rain, the scents give out stories. Allow the change in the air to wake your sense of smell and taste. Use your altar to remind you.

As you give thanks for the harvest, make sure that you are fully tasting all that you eat, honouring the gods of the land, the ancestors, and all that has poured energy into it for your nourishment.

Element : Flowing Water

Through this moon, let the focus be water in the form of rivers and streams, oceans and rain. This is about flow, about tides and cycles, about the currents of life. The water that falls as rain is the same water that has been here on earth for millions of years. Moving through the cycles of nature, it has been ocean, cloud, rain and mist, streams and rivers; it has been drunk and become a part of the bodies of humans and birds and beetles; it has been sweat and tears and piss, carried babies in the womb and bled onto the land.

Find a source of flowing water and, during these weeks of Blood Berry Moon, let yourself become aware of the continuity and power of water in motion.

Humanity : Stories

When we think about relationship, it is often personal connections with individuals that come to mind. However, in this moon look to the flow of history and mythology. Do you have a sense of being a member of a community, a people, a tribe, sharing a history with others, stretching back along that current of history? What are the stories that flow with that current?

In Druidry, stepping aside from the polarities of right and wrong, good and bad, we also don't work with the black and white notion of fact and fiction; instead we honour stories. What are the stories of your tribe? What are the tribe's mythologies, the tales that help both to form and to guide the tribe as it moves through time?

How do you yourself relate to these stories and what in what way do they influence or affect you?

Environment : Wild Food

The vine is the plant some associate with this moon, but other than through wine it is not a part of my own environment or culture. The blackberries, sloes, elderberries, the woody nightshade are in the hedgerows and along the edges of the forest. What are the berries and other wild foods of your environment at this time? Spend time, as you gather, taste or find stillness with the berries, to consider your ancestors and how important these foods would have been - and perhaps will be again.

What is the tree, plant or animal that seems to you now most prominent? Who is calling to you as you walk through the landscape? How many of the deciduous trees are dropping their leaves now? What are the last flowers of the cycle still in blossom, reaching for the sun, and who is pollinating them? What of the insects, the last wasps and moths? Who is already retreating? Which birds have flown to warmer lands?

Self : Direction

As water flows through our landscape, and stories flow through the soul of our tribe, this moon gives us an opportunity to consider that force of nature that is flow, that offers direction.

At this time of year, with the harvest come in and a sense of what we have achieved through the cycle, it is poignant to look at what direction our life is taking. On what currents are we moving? Are those currents in tune with our own soul-song? Are they supporting and born of what we honestly feel to be our own truth? Is the momentum our own?

How does it feel to be riding upon someone else's current? Or your own?

Creativity : Our Own

As we explore the honesty and integrity of our direction, feeling the flow of life through time, considering our personal story is important.

If you were to take your own life, or a key moment from your life, how would you tell the tale? The telling of a myth lays to one side the need to distinguish between fact and/or fiction, yet it does so without compromising the tale's honesty: can you do the same with your life story? What is your own mythology? Craft the tale in the third person (referring to yourself as he or she, not I), writing it down in prose or in poetry, and - as the moon comes to its end - tell it to your ancestors. Your audience may be the long dead of your bloodline, your words offered into the wind or the sunlight, or it may be your own living family.

Ethics : Loyalty

Loyalty is a powerful word and one that is not often used nowadays, yet to our ancestors it was a crucial part of honour. Consider the word, and how it is used in society around you.

What is the value of loyalty in your life? Where do you express the most loyalty undiluted, and where is it given most powerfully to you? When have you suffered from loyalty being broken, and when have you broken it?

Consider loyalty when you think about the history of your tribe, your people, your nation. Patriotism and defence of one tribe (or person) can create violence that is detrimental, dangerous and unnecessary. Where is the line most honourably drawn?

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?

Unit Eleven

LEAF DANCE MOON

(October - November)

Moon : Leaf Dance

Leaf Dance is the name I give to this moon, and in the beauty of my valley it is not hard to see why, for the winds come and draw the leaves from the deciduous trees, and they dance, a thousand colours of russet and brown, gold and copper, spinning and twirling, lifting up and dipping down. Then in the piles of leaves, with celebration of the season, we dance!

Find what other names are used for this moon, and by its end, choose your own name for it.

Festival : Samhain

Samhain, Samhuinn or Calan Gaeaf are names for this festival, known in Christian and now secular culture as Hallowe'en. What do the old names mean and where do they come from?

Usually celebrated on or around 31 October, for me it is a festival that arrives with the first thick frost that is still upon the ground at dawn. With this frost comes a force of decay that prunes back the annuals, declaring the end of cycle. The festival is an opportunity to find that release within ourselves, ending a cycle, letting go of what is no longer needed. This then, for many in Druidry, is the end of the year.

In secular culture, that is now celebrated on 31 December, when a second passes taking us from the end of one into the beginning of the next. However, in the old nature traditions, life isn't that precise. For many, Samhain is the end of a cycle, but the new one does not begin until the birth of the new sun at the winter solstice. Between now and then, there is the empty space of growing darkness, of quiet and decay, a time of death, as the world is prepared for the new light. How does that feel? How can you celebrate it?

Season : Winter Waxing

Samhain is the festival that welcomes winter. The nights are suddenly longer, the stretching days of summer now a memory. It is important at this time to prepare for the winter's cold and darkness, adjusting our homes so that we are welcoming the change instead of simply dealing with it.

In the valley of my home, it is through the last week of October and the first of November that the leaves usually fall, leaving the forest and hedgerows suddenly bare. When do they fall in your home environment? How long does it take? Which is the last tree or plant to let go?

Perception : Listening

Listening at this time of year is important. We listen to the wind, to the dance of the falling leaves, and then we listen to the stillness of the forest with its canopy now bare.

Brought in from the dark cold, we gather with family and friends around the hearths of our community, and we listen to each other in a different way, different stories are told than those of summer's parties. Through this moon, wake yourself to the sounds of life, of your home, of nature, listening to the stories of those around you.

How much do we hear with our ears and how much do we hear through the rest of our being? How much do you truly hear? How can you improve both your listening and your hearing?

Element : Stone

As the season changes, so does the element, taking us at Samhain into studying earth. Through this moon let the focus be earth not as mud, but as rock and stone.

Explore the biggest stones you can find, feeling the power of their stability and history; if you can, lie down on a great stone, or lean against it, and let your soul dissolve into it, listening to its story of millions of years. Play with gems and crystals, and - equally - with pebbles and gravel. What about bones, shells and fossils? You may like to study the geology, but also simply be with a sample each day; keep one in your pocket. Open your soul to wonder at its journey through time and space, and all that has formed it.

Humanity : Ancestors

The relationship to work with through this moon is with the ancestors. In Druidry we look at three strands of ancestry: those of our own bloodline, those of the land on which we live, and those of our spiritual heritage, our teachers.

If you don't already have one, create an altar to the ancestors. What would you make it of, where would you put it, what would you place upon it? As in all of this tradition, this is not an act of worship, but one of respect and wakefulness. It is easy to let the dead slide into becoming an abstract, no more than a photograph and a limited box of memories; to remember the dead as individuals, each leading their own lives of love and laughter, struggle and discovery, guides us to be aware of the continuity of life and learning. It helps us to behave with patience and compassion when slowed by weakness and, recalling ancestral achievements made in hard times, it encourages us to celebrate our strength, and the source of that strength: the generations who have lived before.

How can you better honour your ancestors? Offer time to learning about who they were, what they did, how they behaved and why. Make sure that you are giving thanks with sincerity, awake to their struggle and all that they have given you.

Environment : Mushrooms

With the trees losing their leaves, the annuals of our gardens and of the wild places being cut back by the frost, this moontide is one of great change. Although some point to ivy as the focus of this moon, what is the tree or plant which you would choose to represent this tide, if you could choose just one?

Mushrooms are a wonderful expression of the time of year. Find a place where you can seek out mushrooms, in the woods, gardens, parks, under the trees and in dark corners. How can they teach us of this moontide?

Self : Release

Although some speak of their fear of death, for many it is the process of dying that is harder. Caring for someone who is dying, watching strength and energy slip away, can be devastating. Yet it is not just the death of another person that is hard to bear; as a culture, we are not fluent with the emotions of any process of release. Relationships die, love affairs wear out, creative projects come to an end. Our offspring leave home, their childhoods ending. We cling on. Grief is about holding on to something that we must release; when we do let go, that grief is able to transform into relief. We may journey through numbness, through rage and resentment, but in tenderness we may also find the freedom beyond.

Through this moon, consider what it is that you are clinging on to. What can you release? What, if you were to let go, would allow you the freedom to live more fully? Now is a good time.

Creativity : Empathy

Spending a moon's cycle heightening our ability to hear allows us also to find a story that touches us, a story with which we empathize deeply.

Listening to stories told by the people around us, by the stones, by the wind and the trees as they lose their leaves, wakes us to both the diversity of

individual experience and also to the continuity of life - for our 80-odd years are a tiny blink in the flow of nature.

As you listen to nature, also spend time listening to the old stories of your ancestors and of this land, to the mythologies of your heritage. Wakeful to that feeling of empathy within your being, find one that you can truly hear, one that touches the fibres of your soul. Keep listening to it. Ideally find a storyteller who tells the tale, in person or on CD. Listen as you read it, hearing the voices of all the Bards who have told the tale through centuries. Keep listening.

Ethics : Honesty

Humanity is flawed. Within the lines of our ancestry, whether of our own immediate blood or of our culture, our people, our heritage, there are heroes and there are bastards. There are abusers and the abused. There are slaves and slave traders. Indeed, all humanity is within each one of us, seen through the many facets of each individual soul, with its weaknesses and strengths.

Accepting both the beautiful and the barbaric within our ancestry allows us to accept it within ourselves; and through that acceptance are we better able to address the weakness and change. As the darkness creeps in, let the focus of this moon be on personal honesty. For the first step to honesty is accepting the fullness of a reality.

How honest are you with yourself, let alone others? How honestly do you express who you are, who you wish to be, who you have been? What difference would it make to your wellbeing, your creativity, your sense of freedom, if you were more honest?

Honesty has an impact. It requires an acute sense of responsibility; there are times when telling the truth will be hurtful, times when this is necessary and when it is not. The Druid will avoid unnecessary harm, aware of all the threads which weave together a situation. Honesty also requires respect, for others can be more perceptive and more adaptable than we may have anticipated.

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?

Unit Twelve

FIRE FRIEND MOON

(November - December)

Moon : Fire Friend

Fire Friend is this dark moontide of winter. You may have the pleasure of a real fire in your home and friends to share it with, but the deeper meaning of this moon's name to me is a reminder of the power of fire. Making a friend of the wild spirit that is fire allowed humankind to survive and evolve, and to live within these colder lands.

Find your own name for this moon, one that reflects the cycle in your own home environment and your own nature.

Festival : Solstice

This moon takes us towards or through the Winter Solstice. In modern Druidry, the festival is called Alban Arthan. What other names does this festival have, in British and other Paganisms and in other spiritual traditions?

The longest nights of the year are wrapping themselves around our lives, and at this time we are given an opportunity to learn from the darkness. Our society, afraid of the dark, fills it with coloured lights, pushing away the dark, yet to do so is to lose the chance to engage with this rich and beautiful power of nature. While in many light-oriented religions and philosophies, darkness is considered negative, in Druidry it is a source of life, a womb, a cup or cauldron of potential. Let these ideas fill your celebration of the Alban.

Season : Winter

The heart of the winter moons, this tide offers long nights to explore the nature of the season. Feel the world as it gently and quietly slows down; humanity is rushing around trying to fight the current of nature, filling it with noise and lights, avoiding the fear, but beyond the human chaos nature is slowing.

At the darkest point of the year, there is an exquisite stillness. After a long journey, as the Solstice looms, we come softly to a halt. See if you can walk this path, stepping aside from the mayhem of Christmas and the human fears of cold and dark. Let the darkness embrace you, velvet stillness and serenity.

Perception : Seeing

Through this moon, the perception we work on is our ability to see. To focus on seeing at this darkest time of year may seem strange, but in the depth of winter our vision is crucial. How well do you see in the dark?

Fear of the dark is instinctive; infants are not born with it, but immediately they start to comprehend their separateness from mother, the fear sneaks in. It is a good time of year to address the fear, breaking through this limiting instinct into strength and freedom. Reason can't break it easily, but practice can: with the safety of company or familiarity, spend time in the dark, gradually pushing back the boundaries into unfamiliar ground. Be aware of how you do 'see' in the dark, using visual imagination to translate energy and touch, crafting a map of the world around you. Relax and explore.

Element : Womb

The element of earth is again in focus through this moon, this time as the womb of creation. Allow yourself to build a consciousness of that womb space within nature, the dark holding of the mother. It is in all female mammals. It is in the egg. We can find it in the mud of the earth in which seeds will germinate when light and warmth return.

Not only in woman, as any space that holds, there is a womb for ideas and dreams, for hope, for stories. Can you find these places in our culture and in your own life? How can you honour this womb of life? Use your altar.

Humanity : Family

Family is the focus of this moon in terms of our human relationships. Though in much of our life we are eager to be allowed the freedom to change and grow,

family can feel restrictive. Yet at this time, when the energy slows, allow yourself time to consider your family, those still alive and those who have died.

In the gentle dark and within the pause of the solstice, acknowledge where there is strength and where the relationships can be improved. Consider the notion of acceptance, acknowledging your family members without demands or defensiveness.

If the task seems too great, take one person from your immediate family and work on that relationship, directly or indirectly, allowing it to teach you of the value and power of the family unit, not only for yourself, but for your ancestors of millennia.

Environment : Evergreen

The yew is the tree associated with this moon; by whom and why? In the forest, it is a haze of darkness amidst the bare grey of the deciduous trees, as if calling us forward to feel its embrace. What other evergreens are there in your environment? How does their energy or 'song' differ from those who have lost their leaves?

What is the tree, plant or animal that speaks to you most at this time? Why is mistletoe connected with this time of year? What is the tradition of the fir tree brought inside, and what is the older tradition of your landscape and people?

Self : Mystery

Consider the Druid's understanding of darkness as something richly positive, filled with potential.

In darkness are the parts of life that we cannot see or understand: do we need to? While there is freedom found in knowledge, it can equally be found in mystery. Let knowledge be sought at midsummer: here and now, explore mystery. I am not talking about getting involved in paranormal drama! Simply consider, explore and experience the unknown and the unknowable in life. Much of life we can't explain; what are key examples of this? Why do we crave understanding? What is the value of establishing something as 'fact'? Think about the power and dogma of science.

What benefit is there in not understanding?

Find the freedom of accepting that we don't know. Don't try and explain.

Creativity : Imagination

Having chosen one of the old stories and spent a moon listening to it, becoming familiar with it, take this moontide to learn that tale inside out.

Although some of us are able to learn by hearing, most of us need a visual input. Build on the visual as you listen to the story, extending your imagination, creating pictures in your mind for each character and each scene. Smell it, move through it, look around you in the midst of it. Imagine what it is like to be every character and every part of this story. For as a myth of your people, it is already a part of you.

Ethics : Courage

It takes courage to face the hardest teachers in our lives, and very often those teachers are members of our own family. As we face our fear of the dark and the

unexplained, as we prepare for the rebirth of a new cycle of light, consider the courage it takes for regeneration, for renewal, for starting again.

Courage is another of the those words that was crucial to our ancestors, living in times that required more immediate and ongoing courage than our own. What is courage in this 21st century western culture? Where do we find it? How is it acknowledged? When does it become complicated by pride and what underlies it when it is pure? When do you need most courage, and when does yours fail? Whose courage inspires you?

Review :

In the last few days of the moontide, when the moon is dark, consider what you have achieved through the cycle. What have you learned, changed, understood, and given in exchange?

Unit Thirteen

QUICKENING MOON

This unit will only fit into the calendar every four years, when another moon slips into the cycle of the sun. It will be obvious where it fits in, and such a month is a blessing and a drag, considered both lucky in some cultures and unlucky in others. Dismissing the constraints of superstition, this moon is an opportunity to find where we are upon our journey: to review. Instead of the same guidelines used in other units, the Quickening Moon has just two.

Review : The Trail

Although the Quickening Moon comes every four years, at each of these moons we review the past seven years. The reason for this is that every seven years we have renewed through regeneration every cell in our bodies. The new may be crafted by the instructions of the old, but change, healing, adaptation make significant alterations.

Spend time through this moon considering and writing a review of the past seven years, thinking about the physical changes that have happened in your life, and the emotional and spiritual journey that you have been walking. When you have done it, check what you retain in your life that is older than seven years. Is it necessary to keep it? How long is the visible and tangible trail you are leaving (dragging) behind you? Make sure that you release what can be released. Make sure you are living with as much freedom as you can.

Ethics : Honour

How well we know middle Welsh, the Brehon Laws, the celestial alignments of Stonehenge, does not measure us as valuable members of the Druid community, nor as worthy human beings. It is how we live that measures our worth.

In Druidry we live by a code of honour, but what does 'honour' mean? Like love and truth, it is both a word and a way of life that we continue to learn throughout our lives, repeatedly coming to a deeper level of comprehension. Through the units of this course, each section on ethics guides towards an

understanding of honour, but this moon is an opportunity to review your own understanding, knowing that through time this will only get deeper.