

## Lughnasadh 2010

Welcome to the Lughnasadh edition of **EOLAS**, the magazine of **Ord na Darach Gile - the Order of WhiteOak**.

This will be my final EOLAS as Editor, after three years I believe it is time to pass the magazine across to others who can take it forwards. I am more than proud of my involvement within EOLAS over the years, and would like to take this opportunity to thank the many contributors who have made the magazine what it is. This magazine has, I hope, focused on the wider community and reflected its strengths and the issues which make us who we are.

This edition makes the passing over of one of our community's leading lights, Alexei Kondratiev, a Celtic scholar and linguist of the highest order whose brilliance and openness touched upon many of our lives.

If anyone would like to contribute to future editions of EOLAS, please send your contributions to [membership@whiteoakdruids.org](mailto:membership@whiteoakdruids.org) - we are also keen to hear from you about your opinions on articles or important matters, so please feel free to write to us at the above email address for our Carnyx section.

Within the peace of the Oaks,  
J Craig Melia – July 2010

## Visit our Virtual Shrine

The Virtual Shrine Of The Goddess Brighid is dedicated to all people who are suffering and to their loved ones who are in need of help. It is also a place to celebrate and commemorate significant life passages. It is intended for the use of all People of Faith, here you may offer prayers, give thanks or write petitions within our Messages area.

We take our lead from the ancient and sacred places used by our Ancestors, those Ancient Shrines and Holy Wells that dot the landscape, allowing the traveller to give thanks and to make offering for safe journey and good fortune. Our Blessings and Remembrance sections offer words of wisdom and prayers from many traditions, not just Celtic but also Northern Traditions, Hinduism and Buddhism.

The shrine can be viewed at [www.shrineofbrighid.com](http://www.shrineofbrighid.com)



The Order of WhiteOak has instituted a teaching program and system of fostership. For more details visit our website at [www.whiteoakdruids.org](http://www.whiteoakdruids.org) or email us via [membership@whiteoakdruids.org](mailto:membership@whiteoakdruids.org)

## Defining the term 'Celt' - A Letter to the Editor of Keltria Journal – by Alexei Kondratiev

First of all, ethnic labels come cheap. Anyone can use the label "Celt": there's no patent on it. However, unless one defines the term "Celt", the label will have little meaning. And there does not seem to be a single, agreed-upon definition in popular use. Some people [...] think the term should refer to one's genetic heritage: if your ancestors were "Celtic", then that makes you a "Celt". But this simply begs for a further definition: how do you know your ancestors were "Celtic"? Because they came from Ireland or Scotland or Wales or one of the other countries that are thought of as "Celtic" today? All this says is that you are of Irish or Scottish or Welsh descent i.e., that some of your ancestors were born on the geographical territories bearing those names.

But what common thread runs through those national identities to justify thinking of them as representing a single genetic heritage? There's no such thing as a "Celtic race". A very diverse mix of populations contributed to the genetic heritage of each of the six Celtic nations, and while geographical proximity has given them certain traits in common, there are as many differences as similarities. So, if there is no unifying physical factor to define them, what makes them all "Celtic"? The answer would have to be that they share a cultural heritage we call by that name.

This brings us to the cultural definition of the term "Celtic". It is the definition all Celtic scholars work with, and the one I use myself. But what is "Celtic culture"? If you simply mean any cultural tradition that exists or has existed on the territory of the six Celtic countries, then that would have to include English culture, French culture, Scandinavian culture and probably, by now, a number of Asian cultures as well. The only "hard" cultural definition of the term "Celtic" (and, again, the one Celtic scholars use) is a linguistic one: "Celtic" refers to a family of interrelated languages all descended from a common ancestor (Old Celtic, spoken during the late Bronze and early Iron Age) and to the cultural traditions expressed through those languages. This means that a huge portion of western and central Europe, well beyond the present-day Celtic nations, was once part of the Celtic realm. It also means that some cultural activity in the Celtic countries (for instance, writing by English-language authors with no interest in Celtic-language tradition) has no relation to anything Celtic at all.

The six modern Celtic nations are called "Celtic" because a Celtic language is still spoken in each one of them, serving as the focus for that nation's main cultural heritage. And we can use the term "ex-Celtic" to describe the situation of regions where Celtic languages have ceased to be spoken and Celtic culture thus ceased to exist, although scattered fragments of it may remain embedded in the new culture the people have adopted. The confusion arises when cultural identity is equated with genetic heritage. Those whose ancestors came from a Celtic land may indeed, if they wish, claim the title "Celt" for themselves as a "birthright", but what precisely about them is "Celtic" in a cultural sense, beyond the name? As I've pointed out before, culture is not passed down through the genes.

Simply having Celtic ancestors does not give one any special insight into Celtic civilization. It can provide one with a powerful motivation to learn about Celtic culture, but it will not, in and of itself, give one a superior aptitude to learn. This is, in some ways, a peculiarly American problem: when our families came to this continent as immigrants many of them lost the use of their languages and all direct access to their ancestral cultures, so that genetic lineage has come to be more important than culture itself in defining ethnic identities within what is really one vast Anglo cultural continuum with regional variations.

Taken too far, this can lead to a really obnoxious form of racism, as in the claim that one's genetic background must define one's cultural allegiance the claim that people with black skins, for instance, should only be attracted to African traditions (and, conversely, should have no place in European ones), or that only people with Native American "blood" (however little) should have any involvement with Native American cultures, and so forth.

Given the amount of ethnic mixing that has taken place here, the demand for "pure" ethnicity becomes ludicrous. As someone who is part-Russian, part-French, what single ethnic label could I possibly give myself? I suppose I could claim

a "Gaulish" lineage through my mother's side, but it would have very little to do with why I am attracted to Celtic culture, and why I've devoted much of my life to studying and defending it. I know people of "Celtic" descent who are actively participating in African traditions, and people of African descent on this continent who feel drawn to Celtic things. For that matter, I know people of African descent in Wales and Scotland who are fluent in Welsh and Gaelic and have completely embraced Celtic language, culture and ethnic identity. One major promoter of the Breton language is Japanese.

In my own concern for linguistic minorities worldwide, I've had the occasion to learn a good number of Native American and Oceanian languages. When I've met native speakers of those languages, they've been happy to converse with me and correct my mistakes when necessary, but have never made an issue of my genetic heritage (amusingly, it is only those who don't speak the languages who have objected to me on racial grounds!); language alone enables me to share their cultural continuum without laying claim to some surrogate ethnic identity. There is thus no necessary bond between genetic heritage and culture of choice (although the two often go together, for obvious reasons); and conversely, any culture one wasn't brought up in has to be learned, regardless of genetic background.

"Few of us in today's society have the combination of time, resources, and finances to study, travel, and find a language tutor." Well, when one looks at all the language schools and home-study language courses around that are doing well, someone must be using them. There are many excellent resources available for learning languages even small, economically unimportant languages like the Celtic ones that are not financially prohibitive and don't involve traveling to where the languages are spoken. As for the time factor, the key to making time for study is motivation; and I find the lack of such motivation in the Celtic/Druid milieu extremely disturbing, especially when one compares it to what goes on in other traditions. Anyone studying to be a rabbi, or simply to gain a deeper knowledge of Jewish tradition, would see the necessity of learning Hebrew.

Anyone seeking a position of authority within Hinduism would study Sanskrit as a matter of course. And on a non-religious level, I don't think any Italian-American interested in his ancestral heritage would assert that Italian language is completely irrelevant to Italian culture; the same would go for most other ethnic Americans. It is only people who claim "Celtic" identity who treat their ancestors' languages with contempt or indifference (even though they say they revere the "culture" of the past). This simply reflects the colonial experience in the Celtic countries themselves, the horrifying process by which Celtic peoples were driven to reject the language that linked them to the culture of their ancestors, and which led them to pass on that rejection to their descendants. The same colonial heritage manifests itself when we depreciate the modern Celtic world and substitute a mostly fictitious, Anglo-derived "ancient Celtic wisdom and world-view" for the living essence of Celtic tradition.

How could we possibly have any knowledge of the "ancient Celtic wisdom and world-view" if we had not been guided by the living tradition? The Druids left no literary records. What their Roman conquerors wrote about them is fragmentary and problematic. The only other sources we have for ancient Celtic religious practices are archaeological digs of temple sites, Roman-influenced statuary, and some inscriptions and most of this evidence would be impossible to interpret without the frame of reference that living Celtic tradition provides.

Knowledge of modern Celtic languages gave scholars access to ancient ones. It is because pioneers of Celtic scholarship like Eoghan O'Curry spoke modern Irish that they were able to make sense of Old Irish manuscripts and lay the groundwork for the translation of older Irish texts into international languages. The word Samonios in the Coligny Calendar makes sense to us because we know the modern Irish word Samhain. Thanks to the Welsh word caled ('hard'), we can guess what the ancient tribe called the Caletes thought of themselves. It is because we have the Irish words cing and rÆ that we can understand what the name of the famous Gaulish rebel Vercingetorix means ('great leader of warriors'). One could go on for pages listing similar examples. And it is also the ritual practices that have been preserved in Celtic-speaking communities that many scholars turn to get an inkling of what was done at Celtic religious sites in ancient times.

When [anyone] dismisses the modern Celtic world as a "muddied shadow", I'm not sure they realize there still are communities where Celtic language and tradition are fully alive. [In my interview in] People of the Earth, I talk about an ex-Celtic land, where the Celtic language had vanished long ago and the continuity of the cultural tradition was broken, leaving scattered remnants of Celtic customs that are no longer fully understood; but this is not at all the case in places where Celtic languages are still spoken.

Examples of traditions becoming corrupted through time all refer to cases where the language that carried the tradition has been abandoned. I see no evidence that Native American languages have become particularly corrupt over the last 150 years; wherever they have remained strong, the culture remains strong, too. It is where they have ceased to be spoken that the traditions have disappeared, or been replaced by New Age ersatz. "Jazz, talking jive, and eating soul food" are not lineally descended from African culture: they are cultural traditions developed on this continent by people of genetic African ancestry who lost their direct connection with African tradition when they lost their ancestral languages. In Latin American slave communities (especially in Cuba and Brazil) where use of the Yoruba language was preserved, ancient spiritual traditions have survived that Yorubas from Africa can still recognize as authentic.

Is there a "spiritually relevant link between modern and ancient Celtic culture"? Of course, people don't go around worshipping gods and goddesses with names from the Mabinogion or the Book of Invasions (there's no evidence that the ancient Celts did, either). Many of the divinities have been transformed into saints with identical attributes (although some have maintained their pre-Christian identity).

What has remained solid and constant is the ethos of relating to the Land, and the ritual forms needed to maintain that relationship properly. If this comes as news to some people, I suggest that, just for starters, they take a look at Mçire Mac NÄill's *The Festival of Lúghnasa* (1962): they will be made to appreciate that the "few surviving folk customs" can amount to a very hefty volume indeed! Mac NÄill had originally planned to study Lúghnasadh customs throughout the Celtic and ex-Celtic lands, but was so overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the Irish material that she decided to limit her research to Ireland. What emerges from her study is a consistent body of theological and ritual material related to the feast which explains its ancient meaning, but which could never have been known from archaeology or from Classical or mediaeval literature (although they can provide some corroborating evidence).

And Lúghnasadh was until then the least documented of the great quarterly feasts: the material on Samhain and Bealtaine could fill entire libraries (for a less in-depth but similarly instructive study of another feast, turn to F. Marian McNeill's account of Scottish Imbolc customs in *The Silver Bough*). Many of these customs are still alive today. It is the language of tradition, wherever it survives, that keeps them meaningful.

As for my use of the name "Kondratiev", why, it's the name I was born with: it reflects my partially Russian ancestry, and the fact that Russian is my native language and that I function quite naturally in Russian cultural milieus (among others). It is an aspect of my identity I am quite happy with, and which I see no reason to hide. In lieu of the "cultural genuflections" demanded of me, I spend the greater part of the year teaching the Irish language and matters relating to Celtic culture and history to "genetic" Irish people who feel a need to re-connect with the tradition of their ancestors. I have been doing this for over a dozen years, and have proudly watched many of my students achieve fluency and the cultural awakening that comes with it. I think this represents a far more tangible and profound investment in Celtic culture than if I had adopted a fake Celtic name. By the way, one of the best-known and most dynamic figures in the Irish-language scene in Ireland today is named Gabriel Rosenstock. Doesn't sound very Celtic, does it? Funny, no one over there seems to care.

Beir bua agus beannacht, Alexei Kondratiev

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## In Remembrance of Alexei Kondratiev

The passing of Alexei is a personal loss for me and a great loss for the Pagan Celtic community. Alexei helped me to write the glossaries for all my books, making sure that the Old Irish in each one was correct.

Though a Russian Orthodox Christian, Alexei had the breadth of Spirit to help the nascent Celtic Reconstructionist and Druid movements for decades. He was one of the very first members of the Order of the Whiteoak and was my own Druid to whom I turned, in matters of language, culture, religion, art and history.

May your journey through the veil be peaceful and swift  
May you share a cup of joy with the heroes of old

Slan leat old friend

Ellen Evert Hopman (Saille)

May the nature spirits guide him home, may the honoured dead welcome him among them, may the High Ones grant him rest, and rebirth in due time. As it was, as it is, as it will be; there will be a returning for him.

Domi

There is little else I can add to the comments already made about Alexei that others haven't already said. The man was a giant, his knowledge and wisdom set him up as an authority who universally was held in high regard, but to me the measure of the man was his kindness.

Whereas others may have his levels of knowledge few had his compassion and good nature, dealing with people of all levels evenhandedly, no matter how stupid the question I never saw him belittle anyone (I know because sometimes I asked the questions!), his generosity in giving his time and experience is something that will remain with me (and inspire me) always.

Alexei was, in every sense of the word, a teacher of the highest order. His legacy remains in all that he taught....

J Craig Melia

## Alexei

Bear bearing a branch  
Of blossoms and fruit  
A twinkling  
And swims a salmon  
Leaping over the rainbows of the moon  
Scattered drops of words,  
Warm memories falling,  
Remaining behind like,  
Westward pointed stars  
Shining on the standing stones  
Leaps the salmon upward  
Bounds the bear forward  
Love and affection his trail,  
His honeyed wisdom  
As addictive as sweet green fairy  
Curled cloudy, clearing,  
His markers left to follow.

Ash Maire 5/30/10



Alexei Kondratiev (1949-2010)

## The Future of Druidism

By Ellen Evert Hopman, Elder of The Order of Whiteoak (Ord na Darach Gile) [www.whiteoakdruids.org](http://www.whiteoakdruids.org)

Three things must be united before good can come of them: thinking well, speaking well and acting well  
(Ancient Celtic triad)

I begin with the usual caveat; I can only speak from my own perspective on this issue as a Celtic Reconstructionist Druid of Ord na Darach Gile. Each Druid of the twenty-first century will see things through a slightly different lens.

## Finding other Druids

In many ways the future is already here. When I began on this path in the very early 1980's, it took years to find another Druid. Now we are but a quick Google search away from each other. While we do have our own Groves and regional gatherings, Druidism has become a cyber-path where we study, research, communicate, initiate, and do rituals online, a boon to widely scattered memberships spread all over the planet.

We have developed our own Druidic holy places and shrines that exist only online, for example The virtual Shrine of Brighid found at <http://www.shrineofbrighid.com> , the Temple of Manannán <http://www.manannan.net> and the Shrine of Lugh [http://www.newtara.org/lugh\\_home.asp](http://www.newtara.org/lugh_home.asp)

In future as our numbers grow it will hopefully be easier for Druid students to find live teachers in their areas. For now the World Wide Web is a critical tool.

## Is this a religion or is this a philosophy?

The old English Masonic derived Orders (whose founders were Masons in the 1700's) will claim that Druidism is merely a philosophy, a stance that has made it possible for old style Masonic Druids to remain Christian, Jewish, Muslim or Hindu while practicing Druid rituals with only a paper-thin veneer of Celtic flavoring. Modern American Druid Orders have for the most part been Pagan from their birth. But over time even the English Orders such as OBOD (the English Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids) are drifting deeper and deeper into the Pagan religious camp.

So what does it mean to be a member of a Druid Pagan religion? A large part is the honoring of the ancient Celtic Gods and Goddesses (we have about four hundred names to choose from) with the proper offerings and seasonally appropriate rites and as with any great world religion we also have our own values and ethics derived from the ancient wisdom teachings.

One document that modern Celtic Reconstructionist Druids look to for ethical advice is the Audacht Morainn. Written down in the seventh century it was in the oral tradition long before that;



”Darkness yields to light  
Sorrow yields to joy  
An oaf yields to a sage  
A fool yields to a wise man  
A serf yields to a free man  
Inhospitability yields to hospitality  
Niggardliness yields to generosity  
Meanness yields to liberality  
Impetuosity yields to composure  
Turbulence yields to submission  
A usurper yields to a true lord  
Conflict yields to peace  
Falsehood yields to truth.

Tell him, let him be merciful, just, impartial, conscientious, firm, generous, hospitable, honorable, stable, beneficent, capable, honest, well-spoken, steady, true-judging.”

“Testament of Morann” (Translation by Fergus Kelly)

Another wisdom text we turn to is “Instructions of King Cormac”

Be not too wise, be not too foolish  
be not too conceited, nor too diffident  
be not too haughty, nor too humble  
be not too talkative, nor too silent  
be not too hard, nor too feeble  
If you be too wise, one will expect too much of you  
If you be foolish, you will be deceived  
If you be too conceited, you will be thought vexatious  
If you be too humble, you will be without honor  
If you be too talkative, you will not be heeded  
If you be too silent, you will not be regarded  
If you be too hard, you will be broken  
If you be too feeble, you will be crushed.

(Translation by Kuno Meyer)

Druids have always been philosophers, but we are much more than that. The ancient Druids studied nature and the heavens, taught the children of the nobility, composed poems, made laws, passed judgments, settled disputes, negotiated peace treaties and mediated between the tribe and its Gods.

As more and more of the general population turn away from established religions and look for ways to honor great Nature, She who has been ravaged almost beyond repair, perhaps the Druids will one day be turned to again as mediators between the Worlds.

## **Indo-European ties**

Many Druids have become aware of the full Indo-European spectrum of history and religion. The Dharmic paths have many similarities with the ancient Celtic teachings and ways. Offerings to sacred Fire and sacred Water, triple deities, High Gods associated with thunder, lightening and oaks, and Sanskrit words embedded in Celtic languages are just a few of the similarities that point to a common spiritual heritage.

Last October (in 2009) I was honored to present a paper on Celtic Cosmology at the ICCS Conference on Spirituality in Indigenous Cultural and Religious Traditions, in the Washington DC area. The conference was held at a Hindu temple and it was exciting to explore the spread of Harappan and Vedic culture from the East into Western Europe with Hindu scholars.

This October (in 2010) OBOD is sponsoring The One Tree Gathering in Birmingham, UK, at the Shri Venkateswara Hindu Temple. This gathering will also explore the connections between Druidism and the Dharma.

Many Druids are reading the Rig Veda, the Upanishads, the Laws of Manu, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Ashtavakra Gita and other Vedic texts in an effort to learn the ancient philosophy that may have informed the religion of the Druids. In future this kind of mutual exchange between Hindus and Druids should become more frequent.

## **Druid Clergy**

As with any religion Druids are actively training clergy, developing ritual forms based on actual Celtic precedent, and establishing standards of religious education for lay folk and clergy alike. A major problem is that while the Druid community clamors for public and private religious rites and educated clergy to lead them, they are still not prepared to compensate said clergy for all their years of study and the time required organizing gatherings and rituals.

At this moment in history many Pagans are still in the throes of leaving the religion of their childhood behind and seeking to create their own spiritual path without the intervention of priesthood and without the paying of regular tithes. Yet modern Pagans still want and expect clergy to be there for their life passages such as births, baptisms, hand-fastings, funerals, and seasonal rites.

Pagans want experienced ritual leaders who will offer their homes as a free teaching and ritual space and they also want competent instruction, well written articles and books. There are many generous clergy who labor for years with no compensation and a huge eventual burn out rate as a result.

Pagans will cheerfully spend their money on jewelry, robes, and entertaining regional festivals, yet somehow it is still seem as immoral to pay for clergy and clergy services. In the future this will have to change. Only when Pagans begin to contribute regularly to their religious groups will it be possible to have Pagan hospice services, Pagan cemeteries, Pagan schools and Pagan old age homes. These things are vitally needed.



## **Isn't Druidism a Nature Religion?**

As a culture we are growing more and more anxious about the state of the Earth. As I write this article a volcano of oil and gas is still spewing from the ocean floor of the Gulf, thanks to the negligence of British Petroleum and other oil related corporations. Every day the Earth grows warmer, more species are lost and cancer rates continue to rise.

Along with ethical and religious scholarship Druidism provides a context for modern Europeans and those of European ancestry to reconnect with their own ancient tribal reverence for nature (indigenous peoples all over the world have never stopped doing this), within a context where listening to the animals and the winds, to the voices of the fire, trees, and waters is taken seriously.

When we as a people learn to listen once again to the voices of nature we will open our hearts to Her and reconnect with Her creatures as aspects of the divine. If we see the Earth and Her creatures as sacred beings in their own right we will be more likely to work towards their preservation.

The Order of Whiteoak (Ord na Darach Gile) has begun to talk about "Organic Druidism" and "Bio-regional Animism" in a Celtic context. We are looking for ways to engage with and more deeply feel into and support our own bio-regional habitats; forests, deserts, oceans, mountains, streams, lakes and ponds. We are looking for ways to deepen our sense of belonging within the watershed areas in which we live by connecting with the ancient Spirits of Place.

Our ultimate aim is to view ourselves as the custodians of our own little patch of planet, exquisitely aware of the plants, animals and unseen beings that live there. As this awareness becomes more acute, Druids are organizing activities such as tree plantings and trash removal from wild places, and notifying each other of other opportunities for service to the remaining wild.

## **Druids and Politics**

After many years of online debate it has become obvious that Druids represent all political stripes; from Progressive to Liberal to Middle of the Road to Conservative to Ultra Right Wing Libertarian. What is important for the future recognition and acceptance of our religion is that polls include us. The Zogby poll still refuses to include Pagan or Druid or Wiccan as a religious category (despite repeated requests from many). Some more forward thinking polls are just starting to include Druids and Pagans which is cheering.

It would be very interesting to finally know what the prevailing political slant of Druids actually is. The main thing is that politicians need to know that we are out there and that we vote.

On a more local level we need to do things in our own communities to gain recognition such as adopting highways and beaches and working to keep them clean, serving food at homeless shelters and donating food to food banks. These are just a few examples of community out-reach that will bring good will to our name. We need to make sure that the recipients of our services know who we are, as a way to develop name recognition.

Those who are involved in the arts can use the ancient stories and sacred sites as inspiration, and keep their memory alive for the future. Musicians who play on public stages can make a point of mentioning the Druidic holy days and deities in their songs and stage banter.

## Can Druids be Warriors?

Many Druids are serving in the military at this time but throughout history Druids have been known as peace makers. Roman historians tell us that the moment a Druid stepped on to the battle field all hostility would cease. This was partly due to respect for the office, and also because harming or killing a Druid was the equivalent of burning down a library. Each Druid carried the laws, precedents and religious teachings within their head.

These days there is a “Druid warrior” movement that seeks to create a modern Fiana, modeled on the tribes of warrior-poets who once roamed the Celtic lands. Trained as Druids these eco-warriors work to develop survival skills, are trained in martial arts, diplomacy, and conservation.

The martial-arts training is crucial because the masters of these ancient disciplines are not trained to attack anyone, rather they exist to aid and protect the defenseless.

## Druidic Goals for the Future

Druidism deserves to be recognized as one of the great world religions. Our history, traditions, literature and teachings go back thousands of years. Our clergy and lay folk need to be aware of the rich cultural and ethical legacy we represent.

Anyone who aspires to the title of “Druid” should remember that in ancient times it took twenty years to earn the title. Plunking down twenty five dollars to join a Druid Order or reading just one or two books does not begin to scratch the surface of what we are and what we can be.

With thanks to Uwe, Niall, Morgan, Coinneach, Caur, Daibhi, Moonwriter, Craig, Eilidh, Caerwyn, and all the members of Whiteoak for their input. May their work be ever blessed.

Ellen Evert Hopman

*Ellen Evert Hopman is the author of the novel Priestess of the Forest: a Druid Journey and its sequel The Druid Isle as well as nonfiction works such as A Druids Herbal of Sacred Tree Medicine and other volumes.*

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## **Listen – Tony the Prof**

Listen, and you can hear my voice, in the blade of grass rising, in the earthworm churning the good soil beneath your feet, in the land beneath your feet that is now my gift for you to use with wisdom.

Listen to my voice, I am the spirit of stone and soil. I was here before men and women worked this land, when all was wild and free, and the great forests grew with deep roots nourished by my spirit.

I am the oldest, the first born. I remember the first raindrop and the first acorn. I knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless.

Listen to my voice, I was here when the first tribes came, and sowed the corn, and farmed the land, and my soil nourished them.

And remember those tribes, for this is the time of year when they rejoiced in the ripening of the first fruits, and of the cutting of the first sheaves of corn. And I say to you, rejoice also!

Rejoice, I say, but remember the darker places, leaner times.

Remember times of hunger and famine, of drought, when the earth was barren and dry, and there was only dust to eat, and the tribe was sore afflicted.

Remember those in other lands, whose bellies are hungry and whose crops have failed, and answer their cry. For your ancestors upon this land also knew these times of hardship and hunger, and others heard their cry.

Take what I give, for I am generous. Take and taste the sweetness of the first fruits, cut the first blade of corn.

But also give to others with generosity of your bounty. Give to the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and those far away across the seas, in distant lands, and great will be your joy.

Rejoice in the abundant rain on the ploughed fields, soaking them with water, softening the soil with showers and causing the young plants to grow.

But where there is no rain, and my soil grows dry, and the crops are parched and thirsty, ask the gods of air and water to send the good rain, to feed me, that the dry springs may run again, and hope spring eternal once more.