

Part 1.

The Druid's Cosmos.

In religion, cosmology is, essentially, the study of the universe—how it is structured and how the various parts interact with each other to create a cohesive whole. In ADF, we have studied the ideas and beliefs of the ancient Indo-Europeans, and have found similarities which seem to occur across many of these cultures. These common ideas can be assembled into a coherent system that reflects the ideas of the ancients while providing us with the structure needed to create our Core Order of Ritual.

While we cannot claim that all IE cultures shared all these ideas, we have found that they do fit in well in most IE Pagan cultural contexts.

ADF Cosmology and Sacrifice.

Chaos and Cosmos.

To the ancient Proto-Indo-Europeans, the only part of their world that they could reasonably control was their own encampment, and perhaps the fields immediately around it where they kept their cattle. But out beyond those fields were unknown steppes or forested lands populated by wild animals, ghosts and hostile tribes. This outer, terrifying land they called chaos. Cosmos, on the other hand, means order, and the cosmos of these early tribes consisted of those things they could rely on—such as their encampments, their warriors' prowess, their cattle, the seasons and the great, annual dance of the stars across the sky as they circle the Pole Star.

Chaos is not always negative, for from outside the boundaries of Order come resources, and mysteries, and some of the inspiration and wisdom of the Gods.

In looking at the world around them, the ancients saw the tension between chaos and cosmos, and the opportunities and risks it offered. They created ritual to manage the relationship between the tribe and the 'Other', (those things outside the tribe), between the village and the wildwood, and between chaos and cosmos.

The Creation of the Universe.

We do not know of one, single IE myth used by the ancients to explain the creation of the Universe. As the Indo-Europeans migrated across Asia and Europe, many of them were influenced by neighboring cultures, and these influences may have changed their original mythic beliefs. However,

some diverse IE cultures share a similar creation myth that many scholars believe may reflect the original myth from Proto-Indo-European times.

In these ancient IE myths, first there were two beings, Man and his Twin, (sometimes accompanied by a cow). Man sacrificed or slew Twin and used the parts of his body to create the universe as we know it. In some myths, Twin colonized the Underworld and became the first God of the Dead. Thus, the cosmos was established out of chaos, and the sacred was manifested there. This first sacrifice shows that, since the Worlds are all made of one being, there must be a basic kinship between all beings, and communication must be possible between the Worlds.

The Three Worlds.

In general terms, the ancients saw the universe divided up into three Worlds that we use in ADF.

The Heavens, (or Upperworld), is the place of order, where the Shining Ones dwell. The predictable dance of the stars around the Pole Star shows great order, and the bright, shining sky forever exists above the storms and clouds of the Midworld.

The Midworld is the world in which we live, the place of the Spirits of the Land and of life as we know it. And here also are the Otherworlds, the mythic/spiritual counterparts to our common world, existing unseen all around us. These are the homes of the greater land spirits, such as the Sidhe, the Tylwyth Teg, the Wights, and the Dryads, etc.

The Underworld is the shadowy land of the Dead and of the chthonic deities. Here, below the surface of the Midworld, the dead, or at least their bones, are buried, and this is where their spirits dwell. Death is a reminder that the wonderful order of life soon ends in the chaos of dissolution. But the Underworld is also a source of wonderful fertility, and especially of the inspiration that arises from the wisdom of the Dead. In some cultures, the Underworld is also seen as being islands across the western sea.

The Sacred Center of the Worlds.

In ritual, we do as the Gods did by re-creating the creation of Cosmos and of the universe. In so doing, we also re-create the time and place of that first creation.

The Sacred Center is that place created in ritual where all the Worlds meet, and where a “portal” can be opened, allowing communication between these cosmic planes. In this place, we can be in all Worlds at once and in all times at once. Here, anything is possible.

In ADF worship, we do not seek to transport worshippers between the Worlds to celebrate our rites, rather we open a Gate between the Worlds.

The Triple Hallows.

In order to re-create the sacred center of the Worlds, we need first to connect to those Worlds. In ritual, we bless the symbols of the Well, Fire & Tree, (the Triple Hallows), in our ritual spaces to create gateways to these spiritual places. While the symbols of Well, Fire & Tree are the ones most commonly used in ADF, (and Fire is required), there are some accepted cultural variations such as Pit/Fire/Portal, three Fires, etc.

Fire. The Fire is the ancient focus of ritual. It is the transmuter and transformer, which can take something, like oil or butter, and change it into something else, something possibly more accessible to the Gods. The Fire corresponds with the Shining Ones and Order, and serves as a connection to the world of the Heavens. The Fire is common to all IE cultures.

Well. The Well is an ancient place of offering. The ancient Celts used to offer weapons, precious objects and even household goods to water. The Well connects with the earth power beneath us, and with the fresh, ordered waters of the Earth. It corresponds with the Sacred Dead and with the chthonic deities, and is our connection to the Underworld. The Well can also be seen as a shaft, pit or chasm.

Tree. The Tree is the axis mundi or axis of the world. It is the cosmic pillar that holds up the sky and connects, through its roots, with the lands below our feet. Thus the Tree, while existing in the Midworld, connects all the Worlds above and below. It can be a tree, a mountain, an omphalos or even a pillar or boundary stone. But the Tree always stands at the center of 'our' world.

Liminal Gods and Psychopomps.

In ADF ritual, once we have re-created the Center of the Worlds and consecrated the Hallows, we call upon a special, liminal God or Goddess to "join their magic with ours" so that we might open those gateways to the Three worlds that have taken form in our Hallows. We call these deities Gatekeepers.

Liminality is the condition of being neither one thing nor another. In the physical world, liminal objects can be boundaries of all kinds, such as walls, hedges, and sea shores or even a place like a crossroads, that is neither one road nor another, or both at once. Liminal times include dawn and dusk, (neither day nor night), or even, for the Celts at least, the hinge

days of Beltane and Samhain, (neither summer nor winter). The veils between the Worlds are thinnest at liminal times and places.

Certain deities are particularly known for crossing the boundaries between the Worlds. Some carry folks into Faery, while others carry the dead to the Underworld or the Isles of the Blest. These latter deities are also called psychopomps.

“ghosti”.

This word, “ghosti”, is a reconstructed Proto-Indo-European word that refers to “someone with whom one has reciprocal duties of hospitality.” The English words ‘guest’ and ‘host’ both come from “ghosti”. Another way of putting this would be the saying, “I give that You may give,” and this concept underlies our entire religion. We give offerings to the Kindreds to form relationships with them, just as we would give of ourselves to our friends and family, to maintain close ties. In ancient days, folks would build friendship by the ritual exchange of gifts, and these ties could bind families for generations. And so we give to the Kindreds in expectation that They will give to us in return.

Sacrifice.

In our time, the word ‘sacrifice’ has a negative connotation to some people, due to its use by the dominant religion to refer to its founder’s agonizing death by execution.

But the word comes from the Latin words sacer, (sacred; to set apart), and facere, (to make or to do). Thus its true meaning is “to make sacred, to set apart.” And this is just what we do when we make our offerings to the Kindreds. And when we make these offerings, we are ‘setting them apart’ from the profane world, making them appropriate for the Kindreds.

There are a number of reasons for making sacrifice:

Reciprocity. I give so that You may give. This is one of the most common forms of sacrifice in ADF. We make offerings to the Kindreds in order to receive blessings or wisdom in return.

Apotropaic Offerings. Averting evil or bad luck. Here, the sacrificer makes an offering to say, in effect, “Take this and go”, rather than to form a relationship with that Power. The removal of any ritual pollution would also come under this heading.

The Shared Meal. Here we take food and eat some while giving the rest to the Kindreds. This act enhances the unity of the People through celebration, and allows communion with the Kindreds.

Maintaining the Cosmic Order. When we give offerings that the unity of the people be enhanced, or the earth may be healed and

strengthened, we are re-affirming the cosmic order.

Chaos Mitigates Cosmos. Too much order can cause brittleness.

Think of a tree that cannot bend in the wind, and therefore breaks. In our rites, we have Praise Offerings, which cannot be totally controlled. Spontaneity in prayers, actions and praise can keep a ritual from becoming lifeless.

Cultural Variations.

There are many different ways that the various hearth cultures of ADF interpret the Three Worlds and the Triple Hallows. Here we will only cover three of them, but other information may be found on the pages or e-mail lists of the various Kins in ADF.

Celtic Irish.

Uisnech was the cosmological center of Ireland. Here the Druid Mide built the first fire in Ireland that burned for seven years, and from which all hearth fires in the land were lit. There was also a pillar stone at Uisnech which had five sides, representing the five provinces of Ireland. The twelve chief rivers were also said to have come from Uisnech, either caused by a storm or flowing from the white-rimmed well there. Other Irish wells are said to be the sources of various rivers, and the one at the source of the river Boyne had hazel trees that dropped their nuts into the pool, where they were eaten by the salmon of knowledge.

Instead of the Three Worlds of Heaven, Midworld and Underworld, the Irish thought of the cosmos as the Three Realms of Sky, Land and Sea. The sea was equated with the Underworld because the Dead would journey to the distant islands of the West beyond the mists of the sea, where the sky and ocean touched. Most Irish Celtic Groves in ADF use the Well, Fire, and Tree for the Hallows.

Germanic, Norse.

Instead of three Worlds, the Norse have nine. While Asgardhr and Vanaheim, Midgardhr, and Helheim may correspond well with Heaven, Midworld and Underworld, respectively, the other five worlds are more problematical.

Ljossalrheimr, (Alfheimr), the land of the Light Alfs, might fit in well with the Heavens, while Svartalrheimr, land of the dwarves, (whose names translate into things like “dead one” and “corpse”), and Niflheim, the world of ice, may be part of the Underworld (Helheim may even be within, Niflheim).

Svartalfheimr may also be in the Midworld, as the caves and tunnels of the dwarves are directly below the earth. The other two worlds, (Jotunheimer, land of Giants, and Muspellheim, realm of the Fire Giants), may also fit into the Midworld part of the ADF cosmos.

Yggdrasill, the great World Tree, is at the center of the Worlds and connects them all. Odin, from his seat, could see all the Worlds at once, suggesting that it may have been on Yggdrasill. At the World Tree's base are three Wells, Mimir's Well, (connected with knowledge), Wyrd's Well (connected with the court of the Aesir) and Hvergelmir, where the serpent Nidhogg would chew at the root of Yggdrasill. Mimir's Well could be a connection to the Ancestors, as a source of knowledge and wisdom. And Fire, the great transmuter and transformer, takes sacrifices to the Spirits.

Hellenic.

In Hellenic religion, a mountain, (and possibly Mt. Olympos, home of the 12 main Gods), might best correspond with the Heavens. The world of men and of the land and tree spirits, such as centaurs and dryads, would be the Midworld, and Hades, the land of the Dead, fits in well with the Underworld.

The Triple Hallows of Well, Fire & Tree in Hellenic religion could be conceived of as Pit, Fire and Mountain. A Mountain, (again, possibly Olympos itself), could be the connection with the Heavens, (though an Omphalos might work as well), and a Pit or chasm could be the connection to the Underworld, (also, libations to the dead were often poured into holes specially made in the roofs of tombs, for the dead were ever thirsty). The Fire, seen as the Goddess Hestia, is that central point here in the Midworld where everything comes together, and where transformation is possible.

Summary.

Regardless of our various hearth cultures, the cosmology of ADF works to bring us together in ritual and as a religion. Our Core Order of Ritual is based on this cosmology and the ideas from which it springs. We all re-create the cosmos to establish the Sacred Center, allowing communication with the three Worlds or Realms. We make sacrifices to the Kindreds, ask for Their blessings in return, and wind down the rite, disestablishing the Sacred Center in the process. You can see the article on ritual elsewhere in this booklet for a more complete explanation of our Core Order.

New Druidic Triads.

Three Triads of the Worlds.

Three Realms.

Underworld - the Cauldron of Rebirth.

Midrealm - the Cauldron of Bounty.

Heavens - the Cauldron of Wisdom.

Three Worlds.

The Sea - the Wild Waste - the Road to the Blessed Isles.

The Land - the Green Earth - Dwelling of Many Kins.

The Sky - the Unchanging Order - the Place of the Shining Ones.

Three Kindreds.

The Dead - the Blessed Ancestors - who sustain the Clans.

The Nature Spirits - the Other Kins - who sustain the Web of the Worlds.

The Deities - Eldest, Wisest and Mightiest - who sustain All

ADF's cosmology was created for us—the people of today. We have not attempted to re-create ancient religions because we are not ancient peoples. Rather, we are modern people worshipping ancient Gods and Goddesses in modern times. Seen in this light, all of our hearth cultures can function well within ADF, bringing us all together as one Folk.

Three Triads of Ritual.

Three Gates.

The Well, the Deep Gate, the Sustainer.

The Fire, the Bright Gate, the Transformer.

The Tree, the All-Boundary, the Connector.

Three Tools.

The Cauldron, Source of Wisdom, Love and Power.

The Wand, the Poet's Skill, the Wizard's Will.

The Cloak/Ring/Robe/Lamen, the Mantle of Magic, encompassing Spirit.

Three Deeds.

The Grove, Arriving; Honoring the Three; Opening the Gates.

The Sacrifices, to the Kindreds; to the Patrons; to All.

The Blessing, Asking; Receiving; Thanking.

Nine Holy Things.

These nine concepts make up the core Druidic understanding of the order of the cosmos. They are wide, deep symbols, that will repay study and meditation. These simple statements are presented as a starting place on the journey to comprehend the great triskelion that encompasses all.

Three Realms.

Within and behind all apparent reality is the Otherworld.

Underworld: The power under the Earth is called the ‘chaos of potential.’ The underworld realms are the place of the ancestors, of the Daoine Sidhe, of the underworld gods and goddesses. From their halls and lands issue bounty and new life, the wisdom of memory, and the root of personal strength. The underworld is associated with water, both the sea and the waters under the Earth. This water is the rich nutrient soup into which all individual existence dissolves and from which it arises. So it is sometimes called, or symbolized by, the cauldron of rebirth.

Midrealm: The midrealms are the setting of the great tales. In the middle lands dwell all the mortal kins, and a variety of spirits as well. The common world where human and nonhuman Kindreds live, the land, sea and sky, are reflected in the middle worlds, hung between underworlds and heavens. Some of the gods and goddesses dwell there, near to their mortal children, and sometimes mighty ancestors make a home in the middle lands to aid their descendants. The midrealm is associated with the surface of the land, the home of the hosts, and with the many spirit tribes that share it with us. It is the spirit-matrix that underlies the common world in which we dwell, its twin and its mirror. Within it grows every individual manifestation of life, and so it is called the cauldron of bounty.

Heavens: The power of the overworld is the pattern of the world order. The heavenly realms are the places of the brightest gods and goddesses, the Shining Ones, and those mortal heroes who have been welcomed into their palaces. From the revolving castle of the sun, moon and stars comes the pattern of existence, the wisdom of perspective and the objective eye, and clarity of thought and will. The heavens are associated with the sky, and with the sacred fire that brings the heavens’ light into the grove. This light is the catalyzing quickener that calls individual forms and beings out of the chaos of potential. When it shines in the soul it brings the pearls of idea from the sea of mind, and so it is called the cauldron of wisdom.

Three Worlds.

The middle realm is divided in a pattern related to the three realms, another reflection of the holy triskel.

Land: The land is the common earth upon which we dwell, our mortal home and support. It is the tilled field and the unseen mountain-top,

swamp and desert, town and woodland. The land is the convergence of sea and sky, the holy island. It is connected to the otherworlds through caverns and deep places, wells, pools and the tops of high places. The land is the home of those animal kins that are closest to our human life, our allies and our predators.

Sea: Surrounding our island home on every side is the boundless expanse of the oceans. The sea is the mystery, the portion of the human world most alien to humankind. Within its misty vastness may be found islands of wonder and fear, the isles of the otherworlds is the home of the cattle of Tethra, the uncounted fishes and their stranger cousins and kin. Some of those are friends to human folk, and some are not.

Sky: Arching above our common land and sea is the blue dome of the sky, the realm of cloud and storm and calm breezes. It is the airy realm that is both all around us and far beyond our reach. In its floating worlds of clouds we see the playgrounds of the gods, the seats from which they watch the world. From the sky's high distances descend the birds, so often the messengers of the gods.

Three Kindreds.

Within this cosmos of three and three dwell the Gods and the non-gods—the three Kindreds.

The Shining Ones: In the first days the Mother of All bore children, the people of the Mother, who are our Gods and Goddesses. They are the first family, the eldest and wisest, their youth continually renewed by their magical feasts. They are the kings and queens, the magicians and the poets, the powers of love and delight, the warriors, and the cow women, the smiths and all the powers of the wild. In every culture, the gods and goddesses guide their mortal children. Each Pagan culture has a family of deities whose wisdom, love and power sustain the worlds and humankind. Whether these cultural forms portray separate, individual entities; or whether they are names and titles of one great family of gods and goddesses, they are the object of our highest worship, and are our greatest allies.

The Ancestors: Many tales tell us that humankind is descended from, and intermarried with, the Gods and Goddesses. The fire of the heavens and the dark waters of the underworld flow in our human spirits, and death cannot extinguish us. So we remember and honor the ancestors, the Mighty Dead. The old lore makes it clear that human spirits sometimes reincarnate in the mortal world, often in their own family bloodline. But it is equally clear that many of the dead are 'reborn' in the otherworld, in the

land of the dead. There they live the lives their fate has woven for them, just as we do here. Pagan tradition teaches that the ancestors hear the voice of the living, that they value our worship and offerings. It teaches that the mighty dead still have power in the mortal world, to guide and protect, or to chastise. So we make our gifts to them, and listen closely for their voices.

The Nature Spirits: Humankind and our ancestors share the worlds with a myriad of other beings, other forms of life both physical and spiritual. The other kins share with us and the gods and goddesses in the weaving of the web of fate. They are as various as the species of our world, filled with magic and skill and cunning. Some of them are the beast-spirit peoples. Many of these are close allies of human folk, the hound and bull and pig and more. Others are of the deep wild, the wolf and deer and boar. The spirits of birds go freely between Earth and sky. Other spirits are the wonder peoples, the magic races of the many cultures—fauns and dryads, Alfar and Daoine Sidhe. They roam in midrealm countries sometimes very close to ours, sometimes very distant. We honor them and sometimes seek their aid in magic.

The Two Powers.

The Underworld Power.

The primary image that evokes the underworld power is of the waters that seep, pool and flow beneath the surface on which we dwell. These waters are in some way connected with all the world's waters, an ever-flowing current. In that water is dissolved every nutrient required to sustain all life, nutrients derived from the natural processes of decay and dissolution. From this matrix every being arises, all the bounty of the world. Even crystal condenses from the waters under the Earth.

In Celtic lore this primal water can be connected with the primal Mother—Danu, Mother of the gods and goddesses. She can be envisioned as the ocean of undifferentiated awareness, her mind the ever-flowing current of being deep beneath our surface life. Every individual manifestation is rooted and connected through the waters of the 'all-mind.'

When we contact the underworld power we reach deep into the dark, to the current from the past, to the flow and store of the memory of the worlds, the undifferentiated flow of possibility that is sometimes called the 'chaos of potential.' Through our underworld awareness we can reach out to touch the roots of other minds, other forms of consciousness. We grasp the raw material, that can be shaped by magic into new forms and manifestations.

The Heaven Power.

The primary image that evokes the heaven power is the light of sun and moon, the great lights that wheel and turn in their eternal order. When this power falls upon the earth it draws forth individual lives, stirring and transforming the potentials of the waters, providing the pattern that allows individual existences to grow. In the same way, this heaven power is made real to us in fire. Just as the sun warms the waters of the earth, so the sacred fire warms the contents of the magic cauldron, transforming raw materials into food, medicine or sorcery.

In Celtic lore this primal fire can be connected with the first Father, Bel, the ancestor of the Gods and Goddesses. He can be understood as the spark of kindling, the point around which individual beings grow from the matrix of potential. He inspires the creative power that allows us to shape reality from the river of fate.

When we contact the heaven power we feel the inner light, the precipitating, crystallizing force that makes us who we are. We grasp the organizing pattern of cosmos, that allows continuity of form and life, which can be called the world order. Through heavenly awareness we gain the power of shaping, that orders the flow of potential, that allows us to bind fate to some small degree, according to our will.

These two powers are the dynamic tension that produces our apparent reality. They are present in every being, every spirit. In humankind they flow in our bodies and souls, and can be directed to some extent by will and imagination, or by emotion and its accompanying impulses. So the student learns to become aware of the two powers as they flow in the worlds and in herself. She learns to use will and vision to accumulate the powers in body and soul, and to draw strength from them. From this skill many kinds of practical magic arise, beginning with the power of the gate, the place at the boundary between heaven and the underworld.