

Neopagan druidry is a part of the larger Neo-pagan movement. In general, many of us are polytheistic, also known as the honor and or worship of multiple gods, and have a very high level of nature worship as well.

Many people's first exposure to paganism is through Wicca. While druidry shares the neopagan umbrella with Wiccans we aren't wiccans. Specifically in the organization I belong to, we don't cast circles, we don't call quarters, we typically don't believe in all gods being facets of one god and all goddesses facets of one goddess. Our rituals, what we call our worship services, are structured very differently. As are our groups. A wiccan group is called a coven, we gather in groves and the internal organization structure is super different as well.

The organization I belong to is Ár nDraíocht Féin, yes, that's how you say that word with all the accents from the description. It is one of the international organizations that works within a Neopagan Druidic format. Yes, calling it by its english translation of "A Druid Fellowship" is perfectly fine. Yes, calling it ADF instead is perfectly fine and honestly what I am going to use for the rest of this because frankly, it's easier!

ADF Druidry is based on the cultures surrounding the Indo-European language branch. That means we deal primarily with the Irish Celtic, Norse, Greek, Roman, Vedic, Welsh as well as some of the smaller less known cultures such as Tocharian. These cultures are known as the hearth cultures, or hearths of ADF. Most people and groves will gravitate to one or a few of them. Personally I work both in an Irish Celtic hearth as well as that of the Norse.

Religious services in all of paganism are called rituals. The most common ones to find publicly are the 8 highdays which follow the solstices, equinoxes and their cross quarters. While we put on our rituals etc, ADF is an orthopraxic versus orthodoxic religion. What that means is we care what the practice looks like vs what the beliefs are. The thing that makes ADF ritual ADF ritual is that it follows the same core order no matter where you are in the world. It doesn't matter if you're honoring the Ancestors or the Spirits of Nature and you have almost no mention of the gods at all. Was it in the ADF core order of ritual? Yes? It was an ADF ritual!

Some of the main pieces of that core order are that we welcome and honour the Earth mother both first and last in our rites. That we gather around an altar space with a fire well and tree, or other hearth appropriate triplicate, as gates, we work with a gatekeeper to make it easier to communicate between our world and that which some of the other spirits live in, we bring welcome and honour to the Three Kindred, we use a system of divination to find out what gifts or messages that the Kindred give to us in return for our honor, and we drink of those blessings.

Now I know that was a lot all at once, however our rituals can be rather involved. The pieces that I find most important personally aren in the ritual itself but in the virtues that are taught

within ADF. We call them the nine virtues. As a list they are Courage, Wisdom, Perseverance, Hospitality, Moderation, Fertility, Vision, Integrity and Piety. Each one in a way can be found in our rituals as well, the biggest one being hospitality. The reason for this is that each time we call to one of the spirits we work with, it is based off the ghosti\* principal. Now, this is a re-created word from a language that scholars believe could have been a parent to the whole Indo-European Language branch, including English. It is the root word for both guest and host in all of the Indo-European languages, yep including English again. It is the idea that we are both a guest and host in the lives of everyone we interact with. Not just when we are gathered together for religious services or parties etcetera. It's even when we're driving down the road or in line at Timmies for a coffee.

You'd think that as one of the priests I'd think that piety, the idea of right action would be the most important, but I still state that it's hospitality. The reason being is that, especially as an ADF druid, you can't manage proper action with regards honoring the spirits, without the act of hospitality as we almost always give a physical offering with our words. If you are celebrating the solstices, equinoxes and their cross quarters, with others, you cannot do so effectively without being a proper guest and host in the life of others. Personally for me this also means making sure others with disabilities that are not like my own are able to take part in the ritual safely and in a way that is fulfilling for them. Thinking about what offerings you are making so that you're also being a proper guest in the area you are doing the ritual in is important as well. Many times if we are outside offerings will be left behind after the ritual. Are these safe for the local squirrels and birds? Are you being a proper guest in their lives also? The offerings that are given to the Spirits by those practicing ADF druidry can be anything from water and grains, to expensive alcohols. One thing that is always noted is to ensure you are giving within your means. Do you have a severely limited income? You don't need to get top shelf whiskey for an offering if you can barely afford the whiskey in the first place, this is where moderation comes in.

What is within my means as someone on ODSP is very different from someone that has been able to work or that was born into money. One thing I do want to bring up is that alcohol is never a required offering. There are other options if you wish to use them or need to use them no matter the reason. Many times the halls and parks where rituals are done are dry. Groves in ADF have a lot of autonomy and as such each group will deal with that differently, typically based on their own area and how much of a problem they could have. A couple of the options I've seen are there is no alcohol at all even for offerings, or there is no alcohol that will be consumed by the folk but it can and will be on site for offerings. This also allows for groups to be a proper host for the community for those who require a dry event due to recovery.

Offerings for our rituals are typically specific to the spirit in question that we are dealing with. We are wanting to be proper hosts when we welcome them don't we? When it's one of the gods of one of the hearth cultures, these offerings are typically gleamed from the myths and stories of the deities. For example, one of the Irish Celtic goddesses that my local grove works with is Brigid. Many times she is given honey, milk, cream, red raspberry leaf tea, and breads when we welcome her. These are used because she was known for being a midwife, and a

goddess of the home. Within certain cultures there are offerings that are able to be used for all the gods. Typically in Norse, and Irish Celtic cultures you can easily use alcohol if you're not sure what they will like, treating with the Greek deities, which is known as the Hellenic hearth you typically would use olive oil. If I'm not sure what a deity will like, and I'm in a situation that I can't use alcohol, I typically use bread. Unless you're allergic who doesn't like nice fresh baked bread?

I've mentioned the Kindred a couple times. The gods are part of this group of spirits. However this grouping includes both the nature spirits and the ancestors as well. The Nature spirits include all those spirits of nature both seen and unseen. If you're someone that feels there are spirits in the river or rocks, these are nature spirits. It is also the category that includes the unseen such as the Irish good neighbours. Most of the time when making these offerings they are things that the seen ones can use. Things like seeds, nuts, veggies, etc that can be left outside for them afterwards.

Before I explain the last section of the Kindred I would like to note, the lines between these sections are not cut and dry, black and white, whatever description you like to use. They are blurry. For those who like Dr Who they are wibbly wobbly blurry wurry stuff. Certain spirits can fit into multiple categories. How you define those that fit multiple categories is part of the personalization of ADF druidry and only you can answer it for yourself. One of the biggest ones that comes up is pets that have died. Are they Nature Spirits or are they Ancestors?

The Ancestors are the section of the Kindred that gives some people pause if they have had any sort of issues with their family because of what society typically deems "your Ancestors" as. In the case of ADF druidry, it is not just your direct blood line. It's your friends, your lovers, those you looked up to, your neighbours, the celebrities that changed your life with their work, and for some, yes your pets. All of these spirits fall within the Ancestors. See why pets are a blurry line? Typically the Ancestors themselves are broken down into 5 categories. Ancestors of Blood, Ancestors of Spirit, Ancient Wise, Ancestors of Place, and the Restless Dead. Most of those are pretty self explanatory except for the Ancient Wise and the Restless Dead. The restless dead are those that most people would see as ghosts being problematic in their homes etc. I do not typically suggest dealing with them yourself when new as well, turning on and off lights isn't all those ones can do! They are those who aren't at peace and there is typically a reason why. The Ancient Wise on the other hand are ones that are safe to deal with. They are a group worked with by the Priests of ADF. They are the bards, priests and druids of old. Some of our own Clergy have joined their ranks. The ADF Clergy wrote a song for them years ago called the hymn to the Ancient Wise. The words are:

We call through the mists to the ancient wise,  
To poets magicians and priests  
We too keep the fires of the ancient ways,  
We have honored you well at our feasts

Wisdom and love we have gained in the work,  
But greater from you we now seek,  
The voice of the wise has been stilled for too long,

And with it we now hope to speak,

So lead us and speak to us Open our eyes,  
Guide us in mind heart and hand  
Teach us we pray you the ways of the wise  
For the gods for the folk for the land.

And it sounds like this:

We call through the mists to the ancient wise,  
To poets magicians and priests  
We too keep the fires of the ancient ways,  
We have honored you well at our feasts

Wisdom and love we have gained in the work,  
But greater from you we now seek,  
The voice of the wise has been stilled for too long,  
And with it we now hope to speak,

So lead us and speak to us Open our eyes,  
Guide us in mind heart and hand  
Teach us we pray you the ways of the wise  
For the gods for the folk for the land.

Dealing with Offerings for the Ancestors are always the easiest, if you knew what they liked in life, those tastes don't change. If the person liked snickers bars, pickled eggs, or cheese when they were alive, those are in fact the best offering for them after they've died. The amount of treats for pets when my grove honours our dead is well, quite high. Only the best treats too! As you can see, the offerings made to the spirits even includes a large amount of hospitality and forethought as if you were having physical beings over for dinner.

My local grove, Dancing Lights Grove has been providing opportunities to give hospitality to the spirits for 20 years this coming June. We are an Irish Celtic Grove and when we are open for the public to join us in person, we rent Harman community center in South Oshawa as its one of the community centers that is accessible and can be traveled to by bus. Right now we are still mostly providing services virtually as we have both immunocompromised members as well as those who work forward facing jobs in the community and we have chosen to keep things a little more closed to protect both our members and the public alike.