

**DHARMA & DRUIDRY:
MY PERSONAL JOURNEY INTO BELIEF AND SCIENCE, PART 1**

BY RENU K. ALDRICH

My life has a theme to it: transcendence and transformation. I have transcended boundaries and labels by being Indian-American, by having brown skin amid mostly White classmates, and by following a path that combines both Druidry and Hinduism. Transformation is now how I continue to live beyond labels. Turning the seeds of my childhood pain into harvests of love and enlightenment was a personal journey that led to a calling to facilitate healing for others through psychotherapy and, more recently, conducting research.

I was born Hindu in New York to immigrant parents after the Beatles made it cool to be brown and before people confused us with terrorists. The difficulty of acculturation and immigrant life is becoming part of the research I am developing as a doctoral student at Virginia Tech because I lived it, far from a temple and apart from even the immigrant Indian community. Without the warm embrace of the collectivist culture,

our religious practices shrunk. But while specific traditions, such as my mother symbolically offering food to the moon in prayer for my father’s good health waned over the years, the inherent spiritual philosophy—or *dharma*—has always been suffused in my life.

Being spiritual for me means an integration of my beliefs into my everyday experience, living and breathing

it as part of who I am. The Sanskrit word *dharma* does not have a direct translation into English and means something slightly different in the various Eastern religions,



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Siva Temple, Kauai Aadheenam, Hawaii

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism (Das, 2014b). In Hinduism, *dharma* means your personal rules for living in accordance with virtue. This holds me accountable not just to an image of God, but to myself and to my own values as well. As I developed into an adult, I incorporated aspects of other Eastern philosophies and almost any other spiritual thought I came across into



my own religious belief. As part of my seeking, I was a Wiccan High Priestess before I found Druidry in 1997. However, the work didn't resonate with me as I thought it would. It was only after I returned to Hinduism and developed a deeper faith in the religion I was born into that Druidry made any sense to me. In all of my rituals and initiations, elements of both faiths combine to form a unified sense of deity.

The divine in Hinduism is like the sun: It is almost impossible to see the glowing orb directly, so we comprehend it through its rays. Each God and Goddess is a sunray, helping us to understand a specific form of energy that is individual and part of the whole. Human beings are like fingers on a hand, solo entities and also part of the larger Atman, the world soul. The Hindu deity that resonates with me the most is Lord Siva, who is called the destroyer. He is, in fact, an agent of change. By deconstructing what we no longer need, we can rebuild ourselves stronger and healthier, much like a forest fire destroys stagnancy in favor of new growth.

Druidry has never conflicted with my Hinduism; in fact, it has augmented my understanding of its concepts and added to my abilities to infuse my life with my spiritual beliefs. It is Druidry that inspires me to garden and see the evolution of our lives from the seeds that grow in spring to the plants that must die back in winter. As part of my spiritual development in merging my beliefs into one coherent system, I went beyond what

I thought and researched the possibility that I was not an anomaly, that indeed the Druid spirit and Hindu heart were once one. In this first article of a two-part series, I offer some of what I learned in my search for proof that back in time the Dharmic and Celtic people were one tribe.

SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION

At the base of the common ancestry theories lie multi-layered, intriguing connections between the ancient Druids and Hindus as well as their modern-day equivalents. There are significant parallels in linguistics, spiritual traditions, beliefs, sacred chant and meditation, festivals and holidays, mythology and folklore, symbols, astrology, music and poetry, and laws, customs, and trainings (Carr-Gomm, 2009; Hinduism Today, 1994).

Linguistics

The very name Druid is composed of two Celtic word roots which have parallels in Sanskrit. Indeed, the root vid for knowledge, which also emerges in the Sanskrit word Veda, demonstrates the similarity. The Celtic root dru which means "immersion" also appears in Sanskrit. So a Druid was one 'immersed in knowledge.' (Berresford-Ellis, 2000, p. 1)

The first point of entry for validating a common origin is language. During the 1,000 years of darkness for Druidry, Ireland remained free from the influence



of Latin culture because the Roman legion’s heavy fist did not extend to the area. By the time of Christian persecution in the 5th century, Irish culture had retained clear and startling links to Hindu society (Berresford-Ellis, 2000).

Spiritual Traditions & Beliefs

There are numerous common spiritual beliefs between Druidry and Hinduism, leading the non-profit educational magazine *Hinduism Today* to conduct an extensive comparison in 1994. Much of the following information is taken from their study and validated or augmented by works from leading scholars, such as Philip Carr-Gomm, the chosen chief of the order to which I have belonged since 1997, the *Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids*. (Please note that the beliefs and origin source of various Druid orders may differ [Greer, 2013].)

Old Irish	Sanskrit
<i>aire</i> = freeman	<i>arya</i> = noble
<i>noeb</i> = good	<i>naib</i> = holy
<i>bodar</i> = deaf	<i>badhirah</i> = deaf
<i>nemed</i> = sacred	<i>names</i> = respect
<i>ri</i> = king	<i>raja</i> = king

Fig. 1. Comparison of Old Irish and Sanskrit words (Ellis, 2000)

According to Harvard University professor and leading linguistics expert Calvert Watkins (1963), Old Irish is closer to the language from which all Indo-European languages developed and can offer a far better comparison with Vedic Sanskrit than can Classical Greek or Latin.

Renowned Celtic scholar Peter Berresford-Ellis (2000) has analyzed linguistic similarities between Sanskrit and Old Irish (see Fig. 1). For example, both ancient Irish and Hindus used the name *Budh* for the planet Mercury; the root *budh* in Celtic languages as well as Sanskrit means enlightened, exalted, victorious, and accomplished. Derived from this root are some famous names: Celtic Queen Boudicca of the 1st century AD, Jim Bowie (1796–1836) of the Texas Alamo, and, of course, Buddha.

Both Hindus and Druids believe that the dead continue to live in alternative realms of the Universe until reincarnation into a human or animal body (Carr-Gomm, 2009; Das, 2014a). Human souls are indestructible, but the Universe is created and destroyed in a repeating cycle through fire and water (symbolic of primal light and sound). They also prize truth telling as a supernatural power and hold honor and eloquence in high esteem. Ancient Druids and Vedic Hindus honored women, who were allowed to own property and become priestesses.

Fundamentally, Druids and Hindus believe that human beings are connected to nature and are only a slice of the web of life. Both value karma, which is the law of cause and effect, reaping what we sow both in the field and in life. Restorative justice has been a cornerstone of Druidry, which believes that the Universe is our ultimate judge and juror. As such, many Dru-



ids adopt the Hindu practice of *Ahimsa*, which avoids the negative karmic consequences of violence. The Druid tradition has long honored being in service to others akin to the Hindu path of **Bhakti Yoga**. Many Druids continue to strive to be healers, counselors, peacekeepers, mediators, judges, and priests today (Hughes, 2007).

While Druids are known for their ability to manipulate energy and cast spells, some might be surprised to know that the Hindu's ancient Atharva Veda scripture contains incantations and spells (Embree, 1972).

Sacred Chant & Meditation

Kirtan is the ancient Hindu devotional practice of chanting the names of God and mantras in ecstatic call-and-response format. This is done in both temples and homes as a pathway to the Divine through the power of words and music combined. Chanting *Aum* (also written as *Om* in the West), the most sacred Hindu syllable that conveys the

essence of the Universe, is just one of the many forms of meditation inspired by the religion. (Many attribute the origin of meditation to Buddhism, but it actually evolved from the ancient Hindu faith; Buddhism developed key differences from Hinduism, such as the belief that the individual mindset is only an illusion.¹) In fact, the practice of yoga was designed by the ancient Hindus to calm the body so that the mind can be still for meditation.

Druids chant *Awen* instead of *Aum* to connect to the Universe, and meditation is an integral part of this pathway as well. They also believe that words can be imbued with power in both chanting and in spellcasting, which is just another form of prayer (Hughes, 2014).

The Ancient Druids sought meditative ecstasy and used special postures similar to yoga asanas (Hinduism Today, 1994; Nichols, 1990). Bards-in-training in Ireland during the quiet period of Druidic history were known to keep all-night vigils in the darkness with a stone on their stomachs to foster the deep diaphragmatic breathing that is the focus of **Pranayama Yoga**. A key element of yoga is the **Kundalini**, which is similar to the Druids' leaping salmon of wisdom.

Festivals & Holidays

"Ritual was developed as a means of contacting and utilizing the energy within humans as well as in the natural world" (Cunningham, 2002, p. 10).

By some estimates, Hinduism has 330 million Gods in its pantheon (Verma, 2005), and Hindus joke that

COMMON HOLIDAYS

Atonement & Mourning & Giving of Alms

Jewish: Yom Kippur

Christian: Lent (Ash Wednesday to Easter)

Muslim: Eid al-Adha

Hindu: Pitru Paksha Shradh, Navratri

Druid: Samhuinn

Return of the Light/ Creation/ New Year

Jewish: Rosh Hashana, Hanukkah

Christian: Christmas

Muslim: Eid al-Fitr

Hindu: Dusshera, Diwali

Druid: Alban Arthan



every day is a festival for one or the other. Many holidays relate to the cycle of nature, such as the changing of the seasons or the harvest, but some have lost that connection over time. Others relate to specific deities' birthdays or accomplishments. While Indians use the modern Gregorian calendar for everyday life, the dates of festivals are calculated using the Hindu calendar. Each lunar day of the 15 phases of the moon has specific properties to make it appropriate for specific observances.

Druids celebrate the seasons through eight festivals per year, including four dictated by the relationship between Earth and Sun (Carr-Gomm, 2006). The summer and winter solstices, the longest and shortest days of the year, occur when the sun rises and sets at either the most southerly or northerly points. The spring and autumn equinoxes take place when the lengths of day and night are in balance. The other four Druid holidays have evolved from the traditional harvest festivals of ancient Western Europe.

In addition to chanting, both Hindus and Druids conduct rites suffused by the elements of earth, air, fire, water, and spirit (Hinduism Today, 1994). Fire is a central focus point of the ceremonies, which include food, flowers, and incense. While the Druids use herbs, mead, fruit, and cakes, the Hindus use ghee, spices, fruit, rice, and sweets as symbolic gifts to God. After giving these gifts to the deities, the rites end with the participants consuming the offerings.

There are also startling similarities

in some of the actual holidays themselves. The Winter Solstice marks the new solar year for the Druids and for Hindus (Carr-Gomm, 2006; Verma, 2005). The Hindu festival of Diwali celebrates the awareness of our inner light as the Druid's Winter Solstice, or Alban Arthan, welcomes the rebirth of the Sun-God as the Celtic Son of Light, the Mabon. During Pitru Paksha Shradh in September/ October, Hindus honor the ancestors. Druids celebrate Samhuinn, the predecessor to Halloween, on October 31st. Samhuinn is one of the oldest, most sacred Druid ceremonies on record; it is a time to commune with the dead and begin a transition to the inner world, releasing unwanted aspects of your life and the sorrows in your heart.

To be continued in Part Two...

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Note

1. See <http://creately.com/diagram/example/ha21-r9kv2/Buddhism%20vs.%20Hinduism> for a clarifying diagram on the differences between Hinduism and Buddhism.

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RESOURCES

Commonalities between the Celts and Vedic Hindus

<http://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=3289>

OBOD web site on Dharma & Druidry

<http://www.druidry.org/druid-way/other-paths/druidry-dharma>

About Hinduism

<http://hinduism.about.com/od/basics/p/hinduismbasics.htm>

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ॐ HINDUISM IN BRIEF

Hinduism, considered by some to be the oldest religion in the world, is a philosophy of life without a central belief (Das, 2014a; Morgan, 2001). It evolved in the Indus River Valley c. 6500 BCE and spread throughout Northern India in the 1500s BCE as an oral tradition until the writing of the Vedic scriptures some 600 years later. In addition to a series of texts on yogas and temple-building, existential questions, such as the very meaning of life, are addressed in *The Upanishads*.

No words exist in any Indian language for religion, whose Latin root means "to bind." Hinduism views all search for divine truth as valid (Morgan, 2001).

The *Mahabharata* is the longest poem in history, with more than 200,000 lines of Hindu myths and philosophical discussions (Mahabharata, 2016). Within this poem is the *Bhagavad Gita*, in which the God Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu, and his chariot driver Arjuna discuss war, virtue, life, and death on the eve of a great battle. Another avatar of Vishnu is the focus of the epic tale *Ramayana*, which details the kidnapping and rescue of Ram's wife, Sita (Ramayana, 2016). Their triumphant return to India is the basis for the important Hindu festival of Diwali, which celebrates good over evil, signals the time of returning to the inner light within ourselves, and honors the Goddess of Prosperity.

Hinduism is a term that reflects a diverse set of common spiritual practices centered on the basic beliefs of dharma, karma, reincarnation, and a monotheistic divinity (Embree, 1972; Hopkins, 1971; Zimmer, 1951). Dharma is spiritual law based upon natural justice, harmony, and

compassion. Living by these guidelines will create good karma, which is the result of action and reaction. Karma is the cause and effect of the choices we are free to make and the consequences meted out by the Universe. There is no hell or damnation. Hindus reach for a spiritual summit through cycles of reincarnation, and karma not only determines the experience of this lifetime, but also affects the next birth. Hindus cremate the dead to enable the soul's release for its evolution.

Hindus believe in one Divinity, with multiple Gods and Goddesses representing major and minor aspects of the Supreme Deity (Morgan, 2001). There is a major trinity: Brahma the Creator and his consort Sarasvati, the Goddess of learning and the creative arts; Vishnu the Preserver and his consort Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity; and Siva the Destroyer and his consort Parvati, the benign Mother Goddess who can become the fearless and fearsome Durga or the terrifying redeemer Kali (*see related article*).

The three major Hindu denominations are Shaivism, the belief that Siva is the Supreme Being; Vaishnavism, the worship of Vishnu or one of his avatars, principally Ram or Krishna; and Shaktism, the primary worship of the Divine Mother. In addition to the wide-ranging Hindu sects and practices of over a billion people (15 percent of the world's population) living in the subcontinent of India and throughout the world (Hinduism by Country, 2016), Vedic culture also developed Jainism in 500 BCE and Buddhism in 400 BCE as distinct religious movements for reaching enlightenment.

