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Gathering Mistletoe - an approach to the Work of E.Graham Howe

by Ian Rees

Introduction

In the early 70s when I was training as a psychologist in Cardiff, I came across a strange and fascinating little book called *She and Me* by E.Graham Howe. The book spoke of the relationship between Non-duality and duality, and seemed to be mostly concerned with the question of opposites and the question of the soul. I can't say that I understood much about it at that time in my life, but it remained in the background of my awareness and then later I across another book by the same author entitled *The Mind of the Druid*, whose 1989 edition carries an introduction by the head of the Ancient Druid Order David Loxley, which took the essential image of the druid and used it to explore similar themes. Later I learned that the author was a psychiatrist who had been influential in the development of psychotherapy in the UK, and was in fact one of the founders of the Tavistock Clinic when it was at its most radical and experimental. He was also the mentor to the radical and innovative psychotherapist R D Laing. In some ways much of the ideas were over my head at that stage in my life, and while I kept the two books and occasionally went back to them, I did not further investigate his work. In the 80s I trained in a form of body-based psychotherapy that also explored east-west spirituality, and this reminded me of some aspects of E.Graham Howe's works, but it was not until 2012 that I commenced a serious study of it, when I came across a compendium of his work entitled *The Druid of Harley Street*.

This book presents most of his work very cogently and is in effect a digest of his key ideas. It led me to a study of his works, which can be seen as a journey from a more a conventional account of a psychoanalytic view in *Motives and Mechanisms of Mind*, through the development of an embodied psycho-spiritual approach to the process of healing resulting in him developing a path of spirituality he called The Open Way. Extracts from all his works can be found in *The Druid of Harley Street* with one exception: *The Mind of the Druid*; nor do we find any reference to Druid in the anthology, apart from the title.

The Mind of the Druid is a short and very potent book, but one that doesn't easily fit within acceptable parameters - either for therapists or Druids. What comment I have seen, dismisses it as New Age Druidry or as an add-on to his main body of work, born out of a romantic attachment to the image of the druid. But I have come to feel that this book not only contains the essence of E.Graham Howe's work, but that it offers a hidden door into the deeper reaches of Druidry.

The key to this whole work is in the title, 'The Mind of the Druid', for E.Graham Howe is presenting us with a method of accessing the inner life of Druidry, not the cultural trappings of the society and times that it emerged from, but the ground and essence from which it

continues to emerge. He shows us the deep operations of the Awen in the hidden places of our soul, and in our relationships with others and the world.

Awen

The Awen is central to an understanding of *The Mind of the Druid*. The word is derived from the Indo-European root *uel* meaning 'to blow', and it is related also to the Welsh word *awel* meaning 'breeze'. In bardic usage, there is a clear relationship between it and the early Christian approach to the Holy Ghost, seen as the fiery wind that unlocks the tongue. We first find it referred to in Nennius' *Historia Brittanicum* of 796 CE, in which the bard Talhaearn is described as *tat aguen* or 'father of the muse or inspiration' (*aguen* being the old Welsh word for *awen*). A little later in the saga cycle of Llywarch Hen in 9th/10th century, we find the poet swearing by the awen, referring to it as a source of instinctive or deep knowing. Giraldus Cambrensis in the 12th century gives us a vivid account of the Awenyddion, whom he describes as being possessed by a spirit that makes them roar and twitch and speak in incomprehensible ways. It gives them vivid dreams and visions, or they may feel as though the milk and honey of paradise is poured on their lips. In the 17th century, Henry Vaughan gives us a beautiful and interesting description of the reception of the awen through a visionary encounter described below.

"... the antient Bards ... communicated nothing of their knowledge, butt by way of tradition: which I suppose to be the reason that we have no account left nor any sort of remains, or other monuments of their learning of way of living. As to the later Bards, you shall have a most curious Account of them. This vein of poetrie they called Awen, which in their language signifies rapture, or a poetic furore & (in truth) as many of them as I have conversed with are (as I may say) gifted or inspired with it. I was told by a very sober, knowing person (now dead) that in his time, there was a young lad fatherless & motherless, soe very poor that he was forced to beg; butt att last was taken up by a rich man, that kept a great stock of sheep upon the mountains not far from the place where I now dwell who cloathed him & sent him into the mountains to keep his sheep. There in Summer time following the sheep & looking to their lambs, he fell into a deep sleep in which he dreamt, that he saw a beautifull young man with a garland of green leafs upon his head, & an hawk upon his fist: with a quiver full of Arrows att his back, coming towards him (whistling several measures or tunes all the way) att last lett the hawk fly att him, which (he dreamt) gott into his mouth & inward parts, & suddenly awaked in a great fear & consternation: butt possessed with such a vein, or gift of poetrie, that he left the sheep & went about the Countrey, making songs upon all occasions, and came to be the most famous Bard in all the Countrey in his time."

— Henry Vaughan, in a letter to John Aubrey, October 1694 [1]

Here the image is of a spiritual force that enters, possesses, transforms and remains as a centre of life, energy and power which the bard continually relates to. The later derivation of 'flowing spirit', whilst having a certain beauty of expression, seems to me too passive for what is a dynamic and upsetting, and at times transgressive experience and power, that can be compared to swallowing a hawk and have it live in your entrails. In modern Druidry there has come to be a general acceptance of the image of flowing spirit as representing the essence of the awen. If we return to these older images, we see that what is being pointed at is something altogether more vital, disturbing and personal with many modes of expression.

The Ovate and the Three-fold Way

This study may cause us to reflect on the role of the ovate in druidic tradition - the healer/prophet who stands in the liminal place, who paraphrasing an old welsh poem, goes to the Meadows of Defwy and steps into the river that joins and divides the worlds. The word ovate derives from the Latin Vates which means diviner or seer or prophet. Philip Carr-Gomm, in the OBOD website, describes the ovates as travellers in time, and using a new understanding of the dynamics of time that are akin to the understanding being offered by the New Physics, E.Graham Howe similarly asks us to find a new relationship to time, space and identity, and to apply that to our own life and to the practice of healing.

It is this different understanding of the dynamics of time that are central to a form of contemplation and therapy based in non-duality, that requires us to enter into liminal space in which past experience and future hopes come together with the nowness of the field of relationship. In this place difficulties are encountered, endured and finally embraced in an act of acceptance that frees all.

There is a way in which the whole of this study revolves around the image of the Celtic triple spiral shown below. E.Graham Howe, in his work *Cure or Heal* [2], uses it as an image of the art of therapy and inner practice - representing both the problems we face in life and their possible solution; namely the problem of opposites and conflict.



He describes all experience as a gestalt of 3: I-experience-it

This apparently simple formulation is at the root of our developing sense of self and world, taking us into the experience of I-as-subject and me-as-object when we look inwards, and of I-as-subject and other-as-object when we turn outwards. When the triadic relationship between the three terms is harmonious, then all goes well, but when there is conflict or difficulty between the experienced opposites, then we seek solutions from within ourselves or

with others, so as to resolve the tension. We meet these opposites here and now, and in that moment are inevitably concerned with both past and future.

For example, when I contemplate something that I feel good about, such as an encounter with somebody that went well, I-as-subject contemplate the other-as-object and the experience that arises is one of harmony and a sense of goodness and resolution. If, however, I contemplate a meeting that went badly, the feeling that arises is of conflict or difficulty, and unresolved energy that is seeking to find completion. There is a tension that is seeking release, working with the opposites of I-and-Other and with past, present and future.

Looking at this problem through a druidic lens, we could say that bards are concerned with making the past present, ovates with making the future present, while the druid is the oak priest - the living bridge in space and time that connects us to the origin (*pen* or 'head') within the mysterious continuum the bards called *annwn*. It is this druidic role and praxis that Howe refers to as the mind of the druid.

Howe felt that this process of working with that tension, or continual experience of meeting, is the key task that we face as human beings. He suggests to us that there are two basically problematic stances which can be taken as we address this situation:-

1. We collapse the tension by identifying with the other, thereby creating a vacuum at the centre of our lived experience which has to be defended against.
2. We collapse the tension by identifying with the sense of I, and create a vacuum in the experience of the other, in which case we feel like we are living in an isolated and unreal world and relationship with the other becomes difficult or impossible.

Returning to our problematic encounter, either we decide that they are right and we are wrong, holding a sense of badness within us, which resolves the immediate situation but can damage our relationship with our sense of self. Or we decide we are right and they are wrong. In this instance we become good and they are perceived as bad. This does violence to the relationship with the other and our sense of connection beyond ourselves. The third, druidic way, of the triple spiral, is an act of profound peace-making which values all aspects of the experience, and allows the energy held in the tension to generate new creative solutions.

He goes on to further describe this process as I-Me and the third principle of soul, which enables the relationship of the others. Here I is the centre, Me the circumference and the radius is the child of the polarity. The capacity to hold the tension of I and me in present, aware relationship is crucial, but involves a certain degree of anxiety, which if contained can be a creative tension, but if this is not held and the person overwhelmed by that anxiety, can cause a collapse into the dimension of me. This is the act of splitting and identification in which our relationship to the centre and I-ness becomes obscured and submerged in Me-ness.

The task of effective spiritual practice is to assert the unity of the triple spiral in which the need of the opposites for each other and their containment within a wider system that holds the 3 in terms of meeting and marriage is both known, felt and embodied. In *The Mind of the Druid* we find Howe asserting: 'The druids lived in a state of single-mindedness which is quite contrary to our condition of conflict and complexity. The world was one as they also were within themselves.' [3] This state of oneness is shown in the dynamic unity of the triple

spiral and it is the exploration of this, the path to this state and the paths from it, that we will explore in the remainder of this paper.

Idea, Energy, Form - Triadic Contemplation

In *The Mind of the Druid*, Howe outlines a theology and contemplative framework which explores the triple spiral state, and which can serve as the foundation for a potent practice of therapy as well as a deeper engagement with the mysteries of Druidry. This he does in a quintessentially Druidic way, through a series of intense focused images, beginning with the triplicity of Idea-Energy-Form, which he sees as emergence of duality out of a Non-dualistic Ground, and representative of the primal creative process shown in the triple spiral. This creative process involves the disturbance of the original innocence, and the emergence of polar opposites whose tension gives a dynamism which generates activity and onward movement.

He tells us 'Thus by Divine Intention (but by no parochial God's!), was form made, as the boundless set its own bounds by dividing the indivisible THAT into its divisibility; NON-DUALITY into duality, eternity into time and space and totality into man and woman, sexed.

Thus the earth and all the other occupants of starry space are made of informed energy according to the original IDEA. But, each in our infinite variety are confronted by an opponent situation in which we are not made all together welcome; to fight our way to our predestined home, which is our own; or perish on the way.

Like any other sun, we have come spirally forth from our overheated parental nebula, to find our place in space and time, as we cooled down.

So operated the triplicity of idea energy form according to the Druids.' [4]

It is this creative dynamic that he sees as being in the background of all human experience, and the task of aligning ourselves with it and working with the distortions and complications which have overlaid it, a central part both of the contemplative process and the practice of therapy.

Seed Images - Exploring the Druidic Soul

Here he takes us through a process, presenting key images and seed ideas concerning druids, as ways of inducing in us a state of mind that can work creatively with the triadic dynamic.

He begins with the idea of fire and the idea of cooking, conjuring the image of the sun and the four great fire festivals, and an image and process which represents the movement from duality into non-duality. The notion of the kindling of the flame at Candlemas, the ecstatic union at Beltane, the fire of sacrifice at lammas, the bone-fire of the dead at Samhain, and the image of the withdrawn inner sun in the depths, awaiting the rekindling in the outer world, all demonstrate different aspects of the sacred cooking made by the eternal fire. The sun itself as creator and destroyer, and the paradox of birth and death, are all held in this image. He makes a point that in order to properly cook, you need a strong iron pot and water - here hinting at the centrality of the cauldron.

We are next asked to contemplate stone, which he describes thus, 'Once upon a time our world was molten rock composed of stone and fire. As it cooled down the fire was held compressed within the rock as coal or oil, or actually as 'living' stone.' [5] He goes on to describe the Druids' attitude to Stone, 'As already has been described the Druids lived in a state of single-mindedness, which is quite contrary to our state of complexity and conflict. The world was one, as they also were, within themselves. The stone for them epitomized this unity and held it secure. They were the stones they used for their own ends and each and every one was held to be alive and personal. The Stone was the mediator for containing, retaining and redistributing energy. As an altar it must be horizontal earthwards in space; but as a pillar of direction it must be vertical, oriented heavenwards... So simple is the structure of our world that it can be represented as 2 lines or dimensions, at right angles, this is as it were the basic brick not just of human habitations but of ourselves and the universe in which we dwell.' [6]

Here we are asked to consider how fire becomes stone, and the movement from the formless into form and, this having been accomplished, the interplay of the vertical and horizontal; the altar and the pillar. This idea is developed further, as he considers the image of the Tree - here a living form, which integrates the horizontal and vertical and unites the worlds. He makes reference here to the Grove or *rath* formed by the trees, and points us towards the archetypal *Nemeton*. He goes on to suggest that the king of the trees is the oak and that the queen is the apple tree, evoking a whole host of associations and contemplations concerned with life and death, perfection and loss. He suggests to us that the druids see a tree thus: 'Once upon a time to see a tree was to be the tree in its totality. Rooted in past time the tree lived in the present extending its life forward into the future. It was not regarded as a thing-in-itself, even of beauty, as might be nowadays. It was its own totality, as well as ours. It showed the pattern of the ever-advancing stream of life as nothing else could do.' [7]

He suggests to us that the connection to stone and tree enabled druids to find their way in all circumstances, echoing in a way a Terry Pratchett quote, 'Granny Weatherwax was not lost. She wasn't the kind of person who ever became lost. It was just that, at the moment, while she knew exactly where SHE was, she didn't know the position of anything else.' [8] Druids, like Granny, would know where they are and use tree and stone to discover in time where everything else was.

Howe then brings us from apple and oak to the mistletoe: here this process of Non-Duality becoming duality is further considered through the image of the great globe of mistletoe rising out of the living Tree. The mistletoe is a profound and paradoxical plant: in leaf and berry at the leafless time, living between Heaven and earth, itself yet rooted in the other; growing from a central point creating infinite branching connections. I recall once looking deeply into a great mass of mistletoe, into the green lush leaves and the bright white points of the berries, and feeling as if I were looking into the 'Region of the Summer Stars', to paraphrase Taliesin.

Howe is led to these thoughts when considering mistletoe, 'So now we are to consider the pattern that is incorporated in this seed-idea. It is a very simple one, of division not from unity to duality but from NON-DUALITY to duality which is a very different matter. Unity is divisible indeed it is explosively schismatic as all experience has shown. But NON-DUALITY which is our background in the Beyond, is indivisible. It has no opposite within itself; it is non conceptual, ineffable and has all the rest of the non-attributes which belong to infinity. And yet THAT chose to become divided, and so to become incarnate in our finite

world of space and time, light and darkness. Thus while not polarised within itself it became polarised to the world of our experienced reality as THAT I AM to "me", in my fragmented and conflicted complexity. But to the Druids THAT I AM and "me" were both still part of their continuum, experienced one with the other, together, whole; each reflecting the other and reflected in their world at large.' [9]

He would next have us consider life and experience as a continuum - an interesting word that asserts interconnection and a field of possibility - the world of fire and tree and living stone. He tells us, 'It should be clear that to live in terms of the continuum must be a mystical experience, because by definition this involves a relationship with the Beyond. The continuum includes both time and space; everyone, everything and everywhere. Its truth is never partisan but always 'divinised' or essentially mysterious and holy. How that holiness may be organised and defined is a matter for local sectarian belief around the 'parish pump'. To the Druids the particularity of any religious belief and practice was only a matter of geographical location and did not much concern them except to preserve some working sense of probity. For them, the truth was all that mattered and that must be Holy. Their function was both sanitation and communication; to act as drains for impurities on the one hand and good nourishment upon the other, for the varied flocks they fed and led. To be a Druid was to be a master of the art of living. They practiced magic yet were not magicians within the deteriorated meaning of that word today. To be concerned with the conservation and control of energy within the continuum required that they be masters of the craft of life. And within the continuum for those who knew its laws magic was no more than a prime sort of common sense... the simplest sort of magic is to define intention, then, given energy and time, the form will follow...' [10]

Here we see him inviting us into the art of practicing as a druid within the continuum, acting as drain or channel for inflow of life and its outflow. It is a profoundly ecological vision of life and activity. His invocation of the term magic as prime common sense invites us into relationship with the body and the world as experienced through the senses. If we contemplate the triple spiral at the beginning of this paper and allow a felt sense of it to arise within us, we may start to feel the dynamic ebb and flow within the overarching stillness of the continuum.

He then takes us deeper into the continuum, asking us to contemplate the circle and the square and the coming together of the space-time continuum, where time is the circle and space is the square. It may remind us of the 4 square turning castle of welsh mythology, *Caer Pedyfran*, found in the poem *Preiddeu Annwn* or 'The Raid on the Deep'. Howe sees time as the larger dimension continually moving into space; we live in time and move in space. He felt that the key to the druidic state of mind was the coming together of the opposites of circle and square in the mysterious point of the now expressed by the berry of the mistletoe going between the forks of apparent opposition in a process of continual dying. At the heart of experience, therefore, there is continual sacrifice and death leading to new life. That new expressed life, however, arises out of the depths of time and ancestry; the curved and spiral nature of time intersecting with the space we find ourselves in and all who share that space with us.

The practice of therapy and healing is of course deeply interested in this intersection - contemplating how the past plays out in the present and re-creates the future. This is, of course, not simply a matter for therapy, for as we consider collective experience and

repeating patterns we will quickly find examples of this interplay. In current world political issues in the Middle East, for example, we can find echoes of medieval war and positions.

Druidic tradition is similarly deeply connected with the time and space intersection - the hallowing of the living earth and universe around us is held in connection with the work of the Bards, which is one of deep memory and remembrance, in that sense bringing the dead to life and representing them in the councils of the living; while Ovates hold the vision of the future. The Druid by contrast we could say is in the eternal Now, working with the intersection of past and future; space and time allowing the third thing to arise.

Howe then asks us to consider that in the process of time, we have in a certain way been turned inside out - moving from the unconscious circle to the self-conscious square, and from an experience of being within the continuum to feeling that we and it are now outside. He links this with the experience of the destruction of the druids by Rome and the rise and domination of the west by Roman Christianity, commenting that ancient Druidry had much in common with Christianity such as a sense of Divinity, Triplicity and the centrality of incarnation.

The process of exteriorisation, in which God or Divinity is placed above and beyond, and no longer at the centre of the living moment where I-experience-it meant that, instead of the square and circle coming together in a sacred marriage, the world of the square obliterated the world of the circle. In direct terms, the druid groves and temples are destroyed and replaced by an imperial world which steadily colonises whatever vestiges of the circle it can find. Howe comments that there is a druid prophecy that after 2000 years the druids will return.

What remains from that period is a way of thinking and feeling that expresses itself in art, music and story that continually emerges as a counterpoint to the existing culture - its original roots are tribal, but in the early period we find it setting itself against the development of Rome and Roman imperialism and thus a contrast to the settled ordered and disciplined world that Rome was creating. It is that deposit of faith, like the hidden seed, that continually recreates itself in new form through the ages - the endless creativity of the deep arising.

We find this new life manifesting in the work of the London Welsh poet David Jones as he ruefully reflects on this destruction of the old world in his poem:-

The Tutelar of the Place

'She that loves, place, time demarcation, hearth, kin, enclosure, site differentiated cult, though she is but one mother of us all: one earth brings us forth, one womb receives us all yet to each she is other, named of some name other...' [11]

'Tellus of the myriad names answers to but one name; From this tump she answers Jac o' the Tump only if he call Great/Jill/of/the/Tump/that/bare/me...' [12]

'Queen of the differentiated sites, administratrix of the demarcations, let our cry come unto you,
In all times of the imperium save us when the mercatores come...' [13]

'...be our shadow

Remember the mound-kin, the kith of the tarren gone from this mountain because of the exorbitance of the Ram... remember them in the rectangular tenements, in the houses of the engines that fabricate the ingenuities of the Ram... Mother of Flowers save them then where no flower blows...' [14]

*'Sweet Mair devise a mazy/guard
in out and round about
double/dance defences
countermure and echelon meanders round
the holy mound
 fence within the fence
pile the dun ash for the bright seed
 (within the curtained wood the canister
within the canister the budding rod)*

troia in depth the shifting wattles of illusion for the ancilia for the palladia for the kept memorials, because of the commissioners of the Ram and the Ram's decree concerning the utility of hidden things.

When the technicians manipulate the dead limbs of our culture as though it yet had life, have mercy on us.

Open unto us,
let us enter a second time within your stola/folds in those days-ventricle and refuge both, hendref for world winter, asylum from world/storm. Womb of the Lamb the spoiler of the Ram.' [15]

This poem illustrates the problem the tribes faced in the coming of the Roman world. Jones shows us their vision of the universal expressed within the personal and local, as the Great Mother expresses her universality to Jac who lives on the tump by being Great Jill of that tump. The cry of the tribes is for remembrance, that we their descendants will perform this bardic art of deep memory. Jones reminds us that the sacred things remain, but are hidden in what he calls a mazy guard with many layers concealing the seed and the budding tree that are suspended between worlds awaiting discovery. These mazy guards are the stories, poems, images of the old world and Howe points us towards a way of recovery.

For Howe this inside-outness and externalisation was responsible for the major ills of our time. Like a true Vates from his time, he points towards this tendency that, in our time, has reached unprecedented heights. I doubt he could have imagined the world of selfies, facebook, instagram and twitter as well as the proliferation of reality TV and the centrality of self spin. All of which spins us outwards towards surface and away from depth, away from the world of the Druids and towards Suetonius and his legions.

This destroyed world and the spiral nature of time, at this time, calls on us to revisit times past. In particular the time of the destruction of Celtic culture.

In addressing this collective and personal malaise, Howe leads us to the image of the door - a powerful image in Welsh tradition, as one of the island's mythical names is the Island of the

Strong Door, and one of the access points into the mythical dimension is the image of an old oak door leading into the Hill. Howe asks us to imagine a cave and the opposites of inside and outside, and the image of an archetypal family - the woman within guarding the fire and watching the pots, and the man venturing out to hunt or gather food. He saw these worlds meeting at the door in the liminal moment point of meeting. He contemplates the experience of birth as the passing through a door in one direction and death in another. He considered perception also as an example of that process, and invites us to be present to our body and the doorways of our senses. In this way we let our body be the bridge that brings the world together. Letting the body function as the strong door, and the senses lead us into the direct experience of what might be described as the felt sense opens us to the integration of inner and outer experience. It invites us to consider the mirroring of these worlds, the correlation of inner and outer life discovered through resting in embodied awareness.

Howe reminds us that for the druids, 'Externalisation must be balanced by internalisation and no traveller must go further than he could return. So the true way of life is announced by the living-breathing of the living-dying Mandala and such was the practice of their wisdom in their lives that they lived and died, accepting the lessons of their own experience, now.' [16] Here he tells us that movement is not linear but rhythmic. In order to move forward we must go back, in order to live we must die, in order to breathe in we must have breathed out. The Mandala or circle of our lives must balance.

Howe continues his exploration by discussing meditation and contemplative practice and the return of Merlin. This is, for him, the complementary point in time and collective experience to the destruction of the druid groves, and the fulfillment of what he describes of the prophecy that the druids will return after 2000 years. He takes the myth of Merlin, who in various versions retires to a cave in the earth or is shut up in a tree, and links this with the destruction of Druidry by the Romans and the dominance of Roman thinking, or what he describes as the dominance of the square over the circle, and suggests that Merlin - whom he describes as the greatest of the druids - is returning.

Merlin, of course, was a medieval figure arising out of the later bardic tradition, but interestingly in Geoffrey of Monmouth's early account of him he is shown as driven mad by a terrible battle, and runs off into the woods where he wanders away from human contact. In Howe's terminology we could say he retreated from the square world and lived solely in the circle. He was, however, continually drawn back to the city and into relationship - periodically running back to the woods before finding a place of balance and creating an observatory in the deep wood through which the stars can be seen. Here he lives with his sister, and as they live there a new spring arises and his madness is healed. This story describes in symbolic terms the process that Howe is describing.

Howe then moves on to discussing collective experience and what he calls one world, one sickness: this is the movement from fear to anxiety, danger into safety and the unknown into the known. This reflex then causes us to defend the self and destroy the other, and is at the root of all our personal, relational and collective problems. This is the logical consequence of following the path of collapsing the tension described above. If we are not able to work creatively with the tension of opposites, we create a sense of self and world based on warring. This can happen in our personal life but also informs all the rest of our relationships. If we are not able to contain and work with fear and anxiety through the triple spiral, we make the stranger an enemy who has to be contained, made separate and even destroyed.

Howe's Approach to Druidic Contemplation

Howe's meditation instructions sound banal. He asks us to sit still and comfortably, and to establish what he calls, 'your right angles of spine and knee, leg and foot, within the set square of your situation.' [17] He then asks us to be attentive to our bodies and senses, to notice our breathing and to sense a cross at our heart centre and simply rest there. After a little while he tells us we will find that our mind has wandered to some aspect of our life. In the moment we notice this, he bids us pay attention to wherever we have arrived, to make that conscious for a moment, and then to return our attention to the heart-cross. He asks us to do that for not less than 20 minutes and not more than 40, whenever and wherever we feel like doing so. He does not tell us how often to do this and warns about becoming fixated on meditation as a technique.

For him, the point of meditation is the conscious connection between the dual and the non-dual, experienced here now in our living experience. It is consciously knowing I-experience-it and working with the process of Idea-energy-Form.

The seed images that Howe has given us help hold us in this place, of being the head in the midst of the grove, and will arise as we continue our practice. We may be aware of fire and stone, of the tree and mistletoe, of the experience of having being turned inside out, and the door into a new way in which we touch the return of Merlin and experience the seamless continuum.

If we are used to working with visual images, we may need to learn a slightly different way here, as these seed images are more gestures of awareness and being than invitations to go on journeys. They are felt more than imagined, and it is the aligning of our will with their intention that creates an inner movement which we are invited to pay attention to for a moment. We then return to the centred point where opposites come together- the crossover between annwn and the changing world.

As we rest centred in ourselves and feeling the crossing point in the heart, we slowly move through the felt sense of the seed images:-

Feeling the fire in all its moods
Entering the stone in itself and the right angle of altar and pointer
Being the tree
Gathering mistletoe
Sensing the continuum
Contemplating the square and the circle
Time and Space
Inside-out
The Strong Door
Feeling the Return of Merlin
Touching one world, one sickness.

This practice, described in few words, is the key to E Graham Howe's work and a hidden door into the mysteries of Druidry. It is, however, a particular method – it is not intended to be a guided visualization or inner journey in the way that has become dominant in alternative spirituality. We begin by aligning our bodies in an upright sitting position (the right angles of spine and knee leg and foot), we sense our bodies and breathing, and then centre ourselves in

the midst of our bodies, feeling the cross of vertical and horizontal polarities. When we feel our connection to our bodies, our centre aligned with the cross, then we work with the seed images.

The seed images are designed to focus our awareness and wills; they are held at the centre of the cross; they act as catalysts opening us to deeper awareness - so for example, as we contemplate fire, we may touch the experience of energy being liberated from form, or may touch the energy of any one of the fire festivals. We feel this for a moment, and then return to the centred place, letting the seed of intention work within the deep places of our body.

The sequence is designed to open our awareness within the field of our body and is a progressive process; fire leads us to stone and the interlocking nature of altar and pillar; we relate to the principle of form and formation. These initial images come together in the image of the tree, remembering that for Howe the tree is the pattern of the ever-advancing stream of life. The tree leads us to the mistletoe and the experience of duality within non-duality, which in turn leads us to a lived experience of the universe and our part in it as a continuum. This opens us to the opposites of square and circle, and the possibility of squaring the circle, which shows us the interplay of Time and Space. As we come to an embodied understanding of these categories we notice that we, and the social milieu we live in, are in a certain way inside out, and we seek the entrance through the strong door which will bring us into the presence of the Merlin within us - understanding from that place the connection between these intimate inner issues and the wounding and struggles of the world.

In this work, we are - as Howe suggests - working with will and intention, giving energy to the process which will enable it to become increasingly embodied, and affecting our relationship to ourselves and the world we are folded into. We are planting seeds, which will continue to work within us after the formal period of contemplation is completed.

As we follow it, we will find ourselves resting in the Mind of the Druid becoming the 'Noble Head', and as we do this we simply rest, moment by moment, in the unfolding experience. Contemplation is an art, and we may find that in the beginning we may just stay sensing into one image or we may move through the whole sequence. The key, as Howe reminds us, is to not become fixated on method and to hold the work firmly but lightly.

What Howe has given us is a framework and method for contemplation and healing based around the image of the druid and key images from druidic tradition. As this approach becomes embodied in us, we can then apply it to other aspects of Druidic tradition.

Iron Age Druids, the Line and Spiral; the Great Deep and the Noble Head

Howe seems to have based his sense of Druidry on the Revivalist Druidism of the 18th/19th and early 20th century. We do not find reference in his work to the Mabinogi, Tridoedd Ynys Prydain, the Book of Taliesin or the many wonderful Irish stories and poems about the life and work of druidic tradition. When I began this study, I thought the second part of it would be addressing this very point, but as I listened more deeply and experientially to the process he is describing, I came to understand that he, in his small easily disregarded book, is pointing us to the beating heart of Druidry - to a triadic contemplation from which action arises suffused with the energy and potency of the awen.

This practice, instead of taking me to my familiar territories of Welsh myth and story, led me into the Iron Age - to La Tène culture and the Romano-Celtic collision that David Jones mourns. It took me to the work of a contemporary Welsh sculptor, John Meirion Morris, and his study of La Tène art. Iron Age art has been much studied from the archaeological and historical points of view, but Morris' approach is fresh and interesting as he looks at it with the eye of the artist and unlocks the dynamics within these ancient forms, describing a very similar process to that of Howe.

He begins his account by asserting that La Tène art is essentially spiritual, and quite early in the account focuses on the threefold spiral movement we have considered in Howe's work. He asks us not to understand or match the forms with historical fact but to engage with them in the way Howe has asked us to contemplate key druidic images. This means feeling and letting ourselves be affected by the dynamic movement of the line and shape. He begins his investigation by considering the ubiquitous head, which we find as a central image in Celtic religious culture. It is this potency that Howe is referring to when he speaks of the Mind of the Druid.

The Welsh word for head is *pen* - a word that also has the meaning of origin or source. It is used in the poem *Preiddeu Annwn* to indicate the one who is the possessor of the cauldron of inspiration. This idea is at the centre of the second branch of the *Mabinogi*, in that Bran the Blessed who lays his body down between warring islands becomes the bridge between opposites, dies, and becomes the oracular head who guards and protects the mysteries of land and tribe. The experience of becoming the head was one of the advanced aspects of druidic contemplative practice, and referred to one who had joined the worlds in their body and was the Green Man or Woman manifesting the life of the deep. That person was a source of life, vitality and presence that enhanced all they came into contact with. We find its echo in later history in the images of the Green Man heads that hide in church and cathedral sprouting with greenness and vigour. To be the head is to be a centre of originative life and a doorway to a deeper world.

Morris begins his study of the head by asking us to consider the Durrenberg head from Austria. [18]



He asks us to consider the horizontal and vertical polarities of the image as Howe has asked us to earlier; he invites us to feel how the leaf-like lobes on the skull seem to push together giving a sense of upwards movement that he describes as phallic, while at the base of the image he suggests there are outward turning root-like forms which move downwards. We are struck also by the contemplative stillness of the eyes. This dynamic triplicity and horizontal and vertical mirroring has much in common with the internal and relational process that Howe has been addressing

He goes on to consider the *Tal y llyn* plaque, shown below, in which we see the same vertical and horizontal mirroring, but with the dual movement made more explicitly and the themes of ascent and descent and stillness made more visible. He asks us to notice the leaf images, again noting that they are ubiquitous in this style of art and continually remind us of the rhythms of organic life - of flow and counter-flow. He suggests that for the La Tène Celts, the threefold cosmos of underworld, middle world and overworld or sea, earth and sky, was a backdrop to all their activities, but bids us note that their key direction was downwards into the Deep. This is the place later called *Annwyfn*, 'the very deep place'; the subject of the poem

Preiddeu Annwyfn or The Raid on the Deep, and the place that begins the Mabinogi as Pwyll Prince of Dyfed finds his way to becoming Pwyll Pen Annwn or Head of the Deep. The Tal y llyn plaque graphically shows the whole of the first branch of the Mabinogion, which is concerned with the descent into the deep and the interchange and colloquy between the deep life and the life of Dyfed. It shows also the dynamic Graham Howe is describing in his triplicities of relationship. The descent into the deep inevitably involves sacrifice and a death that leads to new life. This newness emerges out of the tension of rising and falling at the centre point of their meeting even as the berry of the mistletoe is found in the centre of the forking.



The Tal y llyn plaque. [19]

Morris develops his theme by suggesting that the movement into the deep, and the ascent into the height and the point of cross-over, define not just a cosmology but a process of initiation

in which the joining of opposites enables the third place to manifest. He feels the deep represents the cauldron or womb out of which life arises and to which it returns. He suggests we contemplate the inside of the Gundestrup cauldron where we find a bull with erect penis, a woman with a knife, a dog, a new born calf and clusters of leaves. The fertility and power of the bull is counterpointed by the fragility of the calf, the woman with the knife - the energies of death, the dog, the guide and guardian, and the leaf images - the green life continually rising out of the depth. These images hint at the elliptical winding paths of the descent and return. The Poem *Preiddeu Annwyfn* with its mysterious images and allusions and the complex, spiralling stories of the Mabinogi also describe this process. Morris speculates that the later bards might have lost the essential meaning of the triadic contemplation as the preservation of the stories, poetry and the tradition replaced the fundamental spiritual meaning. He describes the original meaning as:

"The presence of the Triads in the old art signifies the completion of Spiritual Transformation. Initiation, in a way that conveys its elements - death, birth or rebirth and the attainment of a state of tranquil meditation - as a complete unit. This is the essence of a Celtic idea of a three which is also one." [20]

This is an important question posed to us also by Graham Howe: how do we move beyond simply being conservators of a tradition, its songs, stories and poetry? How do we penetrate from style into substance?

Howe's contemplations are, in a way, an answer of Morris's question and the embodiment of the triskel image we began with. It begins with personal experience of I-it-other and takes us through a series of contemplations which takes us through fundamental categories like time and space, inside and outside, self and other, and engages us without reduction with the one sickness of the one world and the possibility of healing that sickness. Morris likewise engages us with line and movement; with the Deep and the height; the phallic head and the cauldron and the bridging still presence in the middle of all the opposites.

The image of the celtic head seen here holds this deep contemplation of horizontal and vertical opposites and the stillness of the third place. [21]

Pliny's story of the druidic rite has deeply influenced the development of modern druidry and is implied within Howe's contemplative method.

The image he gives us is of two white bulls being brought to the foot of a sacred oak tree at the leafless time of year and the priest ascending to harvest it with a golden sickle. The mistletoe must not touch the ground and at the end of the gathering the bulls are sacrificed.

At the heart of this ancient ritual we find paradox - at the leafless time of the year we find the mistletoe flourishing in fruit and leaf. It is the plant that is between, not in the sky but not on the ground, it grows in the shape of a multi branching sphere. It heals all, promotes fertility and yet is poisonous. The plant is sometimes linked with the golden bough of Aeneas that opens the way to the underworld and to the silver branch that opens the way to annwn. In order to make the golden stroke we must ascend the tree, literally being between earth and heaven with the bulls beneath us, and not let it touch ground and the bulls must die. We are deep here in the mysteries of the Awen - the secret fire that empowers all engines of druidry.

Charles Williams hints at this mystery in his poem, *Taliesin's Return to Logres* in which he says:

The seas were left behind;
in a harbour of Logres
lightly I came to land
under a roaring wind.
Strained were the golden sails,
the masts of the galley creaked
as it rowed for the Golden Horn
and I for the hills of Wales.

In a train of golden cars
the Emperor went above
for over me in my riding
shot seven golden stars
as if, while the great oaks stood,
straining, creaking, around,
seven times the golden sickle
flashed in the Druid wood.

Covered on my back,
untouched, my harp had hung;
its notes sprang to sound
as I took the blindfold track,
the road that runs from tales,
through the darkness where Circe's son
sings to the truants of towns
in a forest of nightingales.

The beast ran in the wood
that had lost the man's mind;
on a path harder than death
spectral shapes stood
propped against trees;
they gazed as I rode by;
fast after me poured
the light of flooding seas.

But I was Druid-sprung;
I cast my heart in the way;
all the Mercy I called
to give courage to my tongue.
As I came by Brocilande
a diagram played in the night,
where either the golden sickle
flashed, or else a signalling hand.

Away on the southern seas
was the creaking of the mast;

beyond the Roman road
was the creaking of the trees.
Beyond the farm and the fallows
the sickle of a golden arm
that gathered fate in the forest
in a stretched palm caught the hallows.

At the falling of the first
chaos behind me checked;
at the falling of the second
the wood showed the worst;
at the falling of the third
I had come to the king's camp;
the harp on my back
syllabled the signal word.

I saw a Druid light
burn through the druid hills,
as the hooves of King Arthur's horse
rounded me in the night.
I heard the running of flame
faster than fast through Logres
into the camp by the hazels
I Taliessin came. [22]

The road into Brocilande is the path we take when we pursue this inner way, receive the falling hallows that, like the mistletoe, must be caught and held in the heart and body through activated opposites until we come to the camp by the hazels and begin the new cycle. The flashing of the sickle, the falling and catching of the hallows and the running of fire all signify the action of the awen as the holy herb is cut and caught.

Lindow Man - the King beneath the Hill

This experience of death and resurrection of new life arising from the depths of the cauldron and the mistletoe sacrifice has links to another potent image and event coming out of iron age celtic and druidic ceremony. This is the discovery of a bog body found on Lindow common at the foot of Alderney edge. The naked body of a man in his prime wearing only a band of fox fur around his left arm was found buried near to a small lake called by the Celts Llyn Dhu or the Black Lake. He has found to have been killed in 3 ways: an axe blow to the back of the skull, garrotted by a cord of three knots, and his jugular opened to bleed him. Anne Ross speculated that the triple death may align with the celtic deities: Taranis the thunder god, hence the axe stroke; Iesus, the strangulation, as sacrifices to him were hung upon the tree, and the bleeding into the earth or cauldron and his immersion in the peat pool, face down, the offering to Teuates the god of the tribe. She further wonders if he is totemically linked to the fox and concludes that as his sacrifice happened subsequent to the destruction of druidry on Anglesey, it was likely an offering of an initiated druid to the gods to enable druidry to be restored. One interesting discovery, as he was studied, was the fact that he had eaten a charred black bannock or oatcake, and mistletoe pollen was also found in his stomach.

Anne Ross has been criticized by archeologists, perhaps with some justice, for mixing fact and speculation, but for the purposes of this study what she has to say points to a mythic and poetic possibility. Lindow Man is a mystery, a sacrifice performed in a mythic place at a mythic time, and it is in that spirit and using Howe's contemplative method that we approach him.

The image of Lindow Man reminds us of the times and places of desolation, and connects us to the dominance of the square over the circle; the rational over the intuitive. The finding and emergence of his body and the reconstruction of his story can be seen as a metaphor for the recovery of the inner process. We begin with the sense of destruction and loss and the hope of recovery and return- of Merlin awakening from long sleep and look deeply into the black lake, letting ourselves sink down. Gradually in distorted form the body emerges, and by repeated study and coming together of many worlds, the shape of a sacred rite of death and renewal takes shape.

If you look into a pool in a peat bog, initially you see the sky - your eyes bounce off the surface. But if you persist and look past the surface image, you start to see in depth, noticing the texture of the water and the shapes of things within. Keep it up for long enough and you may even come to see the sky deep down in the pool alongside the things of the depth. This is the contemplative process that Graham Howe is inviting us into as we work with these core images of druidry.

If we apply this process to our sense of Lindow man and contemplate the images that arise for us we will find:-

The pool and the peat bog,
The elements of the triple death - the lightning strike from above; the hanging that holds you between worlds; the giving of blood into the depths and the descent into the pool;
The following of the fox totem into the unknown region.

These can be used in the same way as Howe's seed images to enable us to create our own mytho-poetic sense of Lindow man and his relevance to our life.

This inner practice can teach us much about the operations of the Awen- the experiences of being being struck by an axe, or garroted or giving all your life blood into the cauldron/earth is perhaps a true description of that potency as it embodies in us. The old welsh word for priest is *offeiriad*- the one who makes the offering - and here we are shown a truly priestly offering of all, so that the world may live. Here the mistletoe is truly gathered and the fire set running, so that not just Merlin but a different way of thinking, breathing and healing can find its way through the spin-surfaced world we now live in.

Oddly there is a folk legend about King Arthur and his knights sleeping beneath Alderley Edge waiting to ride forth and restore the world - odd because at the foot of the edge 2000 years ago a priest-king, in the shape of Lindow Man, is buried deep to await the restoration of an older world. It may remind us of the interconnected world of the La Tène line and spiral, so that even a secret ceremony can manifest down the years, in a caravan of whispers, that keeps alive the possibility of the great Deep and the oracular head, and the hope of a great return.

Austin Osman Spare the Druid?

What Graham Howe is asking us to do, though, as we apply ourselves to these images is not to be bound by them - to go beyond the conventional image, to strip off our robes and like Lindow man go naked into the depths, letting the quick senses of the fox take us to the place where the treasure can be found. This involves a certain degree of iconoclasm - of destroying of beloved familiar images of self and world in order to make space for the new and deeper gods and goddesses.

In order for the oracular head of Bran to arise, two islands had to die. The tale concludes with the image of the head and birds of Rhiannon and the gathered company on one island and pregnant women in a cave in the other island. Things are stripped down to the essentials. This is a literal process, not merely symbolic or poetic, and if we wish to truly go into annwn there is a point where the old images do not serve us.

The artist and writer Austin Osman Spare can be useful to us here, for he is someone who followed a very different path in outer life to Graham Howe, in just about every possible way, yet his description of and encouragement to inner process and work comes up with very similar conclusions. He was contemporary with Graham Howe, though dying in 1956. He was a skilled artist and exhibited at the Royal Academy when only 14. He was an occultist and colleague of Aleister Crowley and developed an individual and idiosyncratic approach to inner work.

Spare postulates a background to our lives which is very like the idea of the Deep of Annwyfn or the Gnostic pleroma; this he calls Kia and Kia's vehicle of expression he calls Zos, which he describes as our manifest identity, our body of flesh and senses, and moment by moment sense of time and space and location, which creates a sense of who we are and where everything else is. This is the moment where the quantum uncertainty and probability wave arising from the Kia collapses into certainty and fixity of form. This process he describes as a trinity of Will-desire-belief which is the reification of the formless life of Kia through the energy of desire. This is a very similar formulation to Howe's Idea-energy-form that he suggests is at the heart of druidic practice.

Spare evolved a practice he called the Death Posture as a central path for working with this dynamic, so as to link to the roots of life and creativity and break up the fixed beliefs of the past, and free the energy of desire to manifest in new and more appropriate forms. The death posture is his equivalent of the triple death; it begins by Spare suggesting that you look at yourself in a mirror until your reflection becomes blurred and you lose sense of self and reflection. Then let your eyes close, and let yourself be aware of a small point of light in the distance; focus on this until you feel you are touching a great voidness or sense of space. Then the body is physically stressed by standing on tip toe with rigid arms held behind the back; the neck is stretched and you hyper ventilate until the body comes to the point of exhaustion. At that point you lie down and let go of your sense of time, space and identity giving yourself to the experience of what Spare calls neither-neither.

In the state of neither-neither you encounter the opposites, and do not identify with them saying neither this nor that and also neither-neither. This brings you into a paradoxical frame of mind in which new possibilities become available. The body and senses are the bridge into this place. Spare suggests that as you come to a relationship with the state of awareness of the neither-neither, then it becomes a gesture of consciousness rather than a just a physical practice. Though the physicality remains central, as you become used to the method of working with opposites, the need to stress the body in such a dramatic way will recede. The

physical practice echoes the physical death of Lindow man, whilst the triadic practice of neither thus nor that nor neither, echoes into the druidic practices that Howe is pointing us to. The sacrifice here, though not literal, is a sacrifice of belief and identity, a death that leads to a resurrection.

While this is Spare's central practice, he developed an interesting method of working with our desires which shares some resonances with the Iron-Age celtic practice of casting precious objects into lakes like Llyn Cerrig Bach. He suggests we write down the desire as a prayer such as, 'MY DESIRE IS TO EXPERIENCE THE DRUIDIC STATE OF MIND.'

In his *Logomancy of Zos* he says, "All prayer dissipates without an intermediary or carrier. Gods, soul or the psycho-substantive seem only to respond only through the mind by in-direction and hetero-suggestion." [23]

This carrier is provided by a symbol, and he feels it important that the symbol be both personal and have no obvious conscious connection to the object of desire. He uses various methods of construction, such as chopping up the letters of the sentence and creating a simple geometric form to represent the wish, or doing something similar with the phonemes, or staying with the desire and the opposite desire, allowing a form or shape to bubble up from the depths. In the process of working with the sigil, the conscious desire must be forgotten, in a sense sacrificed. What must also accompany it is the frustration of other desires, to create a free energy of desire which can energise the sigil. It could be seen as a modern example of the ancient practice of sending the precious objects into the lake and breaking them before they are consigned.

There is much more that needs saying about Austin Osman Spare, but for our purposes here he shows us a way of operating as a druid, working with sacrifice and with the triadic principle.

Entering the Nemeton

There is a way in which the contemplative process begins by entering the grove or primal Nemeton - this is, of course, a central exercise in druidry; groups are organised in groves and meditation methods are orientated around the archetypal image of the grove. Let us reflect for a little on what the grove is and what happens when we enter it.

Lucan in his *Pharsalia* describes the Nemeton thus: "no bird nested in the nemeton, nor did any animal lurk nearby; the leaves constantly shivered though no breeze stirred. Altars stood in its midst, and the images of the gods. Every tree was stained with sacrificial blood; the very earth groaned, dead yews revived; unconsumed trees were surrounded with flame, and huge serpents twined round the oaks. The people feared to approach the grove, and even the priest would not walk there at midday or midnight lest he should then meet its divine guardian." [24]

While he is of course playing to the Roman public and telling us how barbarous the Celts are, he is also invoking the awesome and numinous qualities of the Nemeton as a place set apart, filled with the mysterious life of the awen; his description brings us into the stillness and absence of normal life and the goose-pimpling presence of the awen that can be felt but not seen. It is a place where the earth groans, the dead come to life; the green and burning tree is found here; it is the place of the oak and the winding snake. Here can be found the awesome

guardian present in its fullness at noon and midnight. The trees are rooted in the blood of sacrifice and at the centre is the altar and the images of the gods.

This is the place within us we enter into as we begin our contemplation and turn away from outer preoccupations. One of the great problems we have in the contemplative process is that it becomes familiar and known, and the usefulness of Lucan's account is it reminds us that turning in is no light task and connects us to the sacrifice and the spilling of blood, to the revival of the dead, to a place where the altar and the living gods are central. Here be dragons!

The contemplative process we are describing continually strengthens our connection to the deep and aligns us with the generative head that is at the centre of Celtic tradition. The method of doing this, however, is to enter the experience of opposites and allow the non-duality/duality dynamic to embody and move us. Lucan's images graphically show this:

The quivering leaves and no breeze,
The tree of leaf and fire
The oaks and the snakes
Noon and midnight
The altar and the god image
all rooted in the blood of sacrifice and held by a mysterious guardian.

As we enter the contemplative state, therefore, we are also entering Lucan's grove - feeling the power of the awen, the invisible quickening wind and contemplating sacrifice. We enter as the oak priest/ess making the offering and feeling the dead things revive; we touch the paradox of the green and burning tree, the motion of the snakes and the stillness of the oaks. It is the practice of the triskel in which we bring opposites together into a new unity and knock on the strong door of the heart, that is simultaneously the door into the universe.

The very act of sitting, breathing and attending in this way brings us into the play of the opposites. Firstly, the opposites of inside and outside as we bring our sense of presence into the body, the in-breath and out-breath, filling and emptying. Then being focused in the centre of our experience, feeling both centre and crossing point, letting ourselves notice I-experience-it, and letting the seed images embody themselves within us. From this place, we can explore druidic tradition in a contemplative way, exploring La Tène imagery, Pliny, Lucan, Lindow Man, letting the mysteries of the noble head reveal themselves.

This work is simple and profound; as simple as resting in the experience of the body and the senses; as deep as centreing in the midst of time and space. The Welsh word *taw* which has the meaning of 'silence', 'stop', 'hold' and is also a conjunctive word meaning 'that', and therefore denoting a being state, is a hint into the contemplative process. As we enter into this silence that connects, we become available to the operations of the awen. Like the awenyddion we are moved by it, from the simple act of sitting through both the complications of our nature and the spiral teachings of druidic tradition, returning to the still quivering place where we mediate between in and out, I and it, Self and other, depth and surface. This contemplative stillness is the essence of what Austin Osman Spare called the death posture or the triple sacrifice of Lindow man - it is the high magic of druidry.

The lesser, but no less important magic works with the content of our lives. Here we work with the energy of intention and desire, bringing our requests and issues before the Deep,

offering life and energy to the deities of the depth just as those who cast objects into Llyn Cerrig Bach did. Here we practice the magic of intention as Howe bids us, working with the triplicity of Idea-energy-form. Like Spare, we must devise carriers for our prayers: sounds, images, gestures, that enable the crossing and response. The key, as Howe reminds us, is to define intention - offering time and energy in sacrifice so that the new form can arise.

Applying Howe's Work in our Lives - Gathering the Mistletoe

Howe's work over the years shows a movement from a more or less orthodox Freudian psychoanalytic view of human experience to one which increasingly becomes centred on the relationship between spirituality and embodiment. He takes issues like aggression, war, adult-child relationships, maleness and femaleness, and explores them in depth, eventually developing a way of life and practice he called 'The Open Way'. This is a way of living and being that is based on the principle of presence and acceptance. This is symbolized by the image of a cup which receives; this is held in dynamic tension with the image of the sword of will and intention that defends, circumscribes and directs. In *The Mind of the Druid*, which has been our principal study in this text, he brings this process of working with a combination of intention and acceptance to a place of fruition. He asks us to address the whole problem of opposites and the way in which we become separated from the ground of our experience, away from the directness of I-Experience-It into the defended opposites of Me and Other. In that process we lose our connection with the arising flow of awareness from the depths, and can no longer work with the triplicity of Idea-Energy-Form. In place of the dynamic triad we have the closed door that divides and ossifies.

Howe's practice of contemplation is intended to return us to our state of original awareness by connecting us to our immediate sense of life here and now, and then via the seed images to free our fixated wills to become once again at the service of the flow of life and awareness symbolized by the mistletoe. This involves the death of Me in the service of I, and the restoration of the ancient druidic magic of intention.

He is asking us to move from thinking, feeling and acting from a place of fear, in which the world is perceived as dangerous and something to be defended against or overcome - essentially a war paradigm where survival is the principal - to a peace-making paradigm founded on the triskel. To make this more concrete and personal - recently I showed a good friend a piece of work, which I felt pleased with and which I expected they would like. I received no response at all from them; I felt ignored and hurt - in the paradigm of Me and Other (the war paradigm). My hurt turns to anger, which I turn towards them and experience them as not a good friend or turn towards myself and feel that the piece of work was so bad that it didn't deserve an answer. If I turn to the pattern of the triskel and apply Howe's contemplative method, other possibilities arise. To do this, I must notice my body and place the experience within the set-square of my situation. His use of this term is significant and evokes the image of the square and compasses of masonic tradition; it asks me to frame the issue, to create a boundary around it and to take it into my heart. My heart here is seen as the centre point of my embodied experience, and he asks me to feel it as a cross - the meeting of vertical and horizontal as well as many other associations.

I might need to call on one or more of Howe's seed images to help align my will. If I feel very bound and depressed by it, I might need to contemplate the fire or touch the life within the tree. What I need to do in this, is to take the sense of Me and Other and offer it to the

contemplative depths. In this example, the material to be worked on is my perception of myself, my perception of my friend and my hurt, angry feelings.

As I remain in contact with this experience, using will and intention to keep steady in the process, and acceptance to remain open to all aspects of the situation, something small will change. In this case, I see other times when this has happened between us, and also that at times I have no interest for things they feel are important. This leads to other subtle shifts, which gradually move me towards the sense of I-Experience-It and away from the locked sense of Me and Them. It isn't that the hurt feelings vanish or that I suddenly feel free of the prior experience; it is held in a wider framework in which I see more deeply into the situation. I deepen into it and it into me; and the complexity of the relationship between I and me and I and friend becomes visible. The encounter becomes enriching, part of the unveiling of the mystery of life even though there is no superficial resolution. I may still need to challenge my friend, or move away from him or forgive him, but whatever action now follows comes from a very different perspective.

This practice can be applied in all the situations of our life from immediate situations like the one described, to contemplating long-term relationships, ethical issues and spiritual dilemmas. It can be applied also to working with others, as of course Howe did in his work as psychiatrist and psychotherapist. Here the situation that is brought into the heart as far as the therapist is concerned, is not simply a personal one but the sense of themselves as therapist; the sense of the client and the issue or process that is unfolding between them. It is normally the case that when people come to see a psychotherapist, they are very locked in a sense of Me and Other, and at war with themselves or some of the universe or both. As the psychotherapist comes into relationship with them, the therapist must work with the cup of acceptance and the sword of will to help them first of all have some sense of their bodily experience in the present. This is the beginning of the movement towards "I" but they will also need help to find and place whatever needs therapeutic attention within 'the set square of their situation.' The main thing that the therapist needs to do, is to take care of their own movement towards and away from the triskel, noticing what happens when locked polarities emerge. Working in this way involves a continual experience of imprisonment and freeing. It helps me to use two simple-sounding phrases, which keep me connected to the world of the druidic mind:

“What is happening now?” This helps us return to the now and creates an intention of curiosity and interest. The second question is: “How is that?” This question helps us discover how that moment of the now is manipulated and defended against; it is the moment of the collapse from the mystery of the quantum wave/particle, triadic flow to the encapsulated and separated lone particle.

It is important that the questions are applied to both therapist and client; they are in Howe's terms non-dual questions evoking the field of mistletoe into the room. The collapse is also inevitable and importantly just the next stage of the process of this alchemy, as this too is placed within the “set square of the situation.” Here again I might need to call on the seed images to help realign my will; I might share this seed image with my client or not, depending on the circumstances and invite them to work with it.

This more relational aspect can of course be applied in any relational situation; it has a particular usefulness in any situation where mediation or peacemaking is needed.

It can also help us in our practice of Druidry and, as we have described above, ancient forgotten mysteries can be experienced through this contemplative process. As we have done, one can contemplate Pliny, La Tène art, Lucan, and Lindow man and find a direct and personal connection between these ancient events and our daily experience.

What is remarkable about Howe's work is that he visits the heart of Druidic work simply by working with the common images of Druidic tradition. We find no learned archeology, or advanced understanding of medieval texts, no in-depth study of La Tène art. What we do find is a willingness to listen and engage with the key images of the tradition and let them speak. I have chosen what I feel to be key passages from his book but there are many others. It needs reading in a contemplative way:- a *lectio divina* as in Christian monasticism, but the fundamental method presented here on its own can unlock much.

Conclusion

There is much more that could be said about E Graham Howe's work; we could for example look at his application of this approach to the art and practice of psychotherapy or consider his discussion of maleness and femaleness in his work *She and Me*. The art of druidic contemplation and the unveiling of the Mind of the Druid is the heart of his work and a key that unlocks other aspects of druidic tradition.

This contemplative method takes us into the centre of our embodied experience and uses that felt sense as a fulcrum through which our own deeper identity and the depths of the universe are made visible. It transports us into a grove in which old dead things revive and demand sacrifice; it involves a different relationship to time and space and asserts the importance of each and every one as part of a profoundly interconnected continuum. It is a profoundly ecological vision that, while rooted in the past, can connect us to ecological thinking, quantum theory and chaos theory. In the words of the Druid oath, it invites us to stand heart to heart and hand in hand with all life.

This work is demanding in many ways not the least of which may be a revisioning of the very tradition it arises out of; a particular challenge may be the moving on from the old stories with their beauty and complexity into the direct confrontation with Mystery that Howe and Meirion Morris point to. We may need to consign the sacred things to the deep as did those who prayed at Llyn Cerrig Bach, or make a more profound offering like Lindow man letting our cherished images and sense of druidic identity dissolve so that a new life may emerge. This new life is the incarnate Mind of the Druid speaking out of the depths of the land and heart, continually creating and destroying and deepening all connections.

It brings us in the end to a lived experience of Iolo Morganwg's prayer:-

“The Gorsedd Prayer, called the Prayer of the Gwyddoniaid (From the Great Book of Margam)^[SEP]

God, impart Thy strength;^[SEP]

And in strength, power to suffer;^[SEP]

And to suffer for the truth;^[SEP]

And in the truth, all light;^[SEP]

And in light, gwynvyd;^[SEP]

And in gwynfyd, love;

And in love, God,
And in God, all goodness” [25]

If we have the strength to turn within and sustain that turning, we gain the strength to suffer the loss of the old known world, seeing a deeper truth and being illumined with the inner light. This brings us to the circle of Gwynvyd or paradise here and now. In that place we feel the love that is continually arising from the origin of all things - *Pen Annwyfn* - the true Mind/Heart of the Druid.

From here we enter that goodness of life that is beyond all forms and identities; the Awen that touches us in a thousand ways as flowing spirit, as lightning bolt, as hawk in the belly. It leads us through Howe’s contemplations and the twists and turns of La Tène art, through the death of Lindow Man and the return of Merlin. It is that mystery, as near as our breath and heartbeat, that directs this process of becoming the Head that is the Bridge between all beings and worlds.

Bid Ben Bid Bont Amen.

Ian Rees
April 2015

Footnotes

[1]Early Modern Letters online archive, Bodlean Library

[2]Cure or Heal p. 15

[3]Mind of the Druid p. 21

[4]Mind of the Druid p.7

[5]Mind of the Druid p.21

[6]Mind of the Druid p. 21-22

[7]Mind of the Druid p.28

[8]Wyrd Sisters p.161-162

[9]Mind of the Druid p. 31-32

[10]Mind of the Druid p. 37

[11]The Sleeping Lord, Tutelar of the Place p. 59

[12] The Sleeping Lord, Tutelar of the Place p. 59

[13]The Sleeping Lord, Tutelar of the Place p. 62

[14]The Sleeping Lord, Tutelar of the Place p. 63

- [15]The Sleeping Lord, Tutelar of the Place p. 64
- [16] The Mind of the Druid p. 59-60
- [17] The Mind of the Druid p. 67
- [18]The Celtic Vision p. 13
- [19] The Celtic Vision p. 22
- [20]The Celtic Vision p. 79
- [21] The Celtic Vision p. 101
- [22] The Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams, Taliessin's Return to Logres p. 3
- [23] Zos-Kia p.33
- [24]Pharsalia iii 412
- [25]Williams, J, Barddas p.361

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