

Damh the Bard:

Thank you Matthew for coming on Druidcast and spending some time with me today. You are known to our many members of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, but a lot of the people listening to the Druidcast, well they're not necessarily members so maybe you could just tell us a little bit about Matthew Baker, who you are, where you're from, and I guess what led you ultimately to the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. Let's start there.

Matthew Baker:

Yeah, that sounds great. It's a good question. So I was born outside Boston in the United States of America in Concord, Massachusetts. And Concord is most well known for really two things. First is it's the home of the American Revolution. And the second thing is it's known for really the transcendentalists, Emerson and Thoreau and the very famous, of course Walden Pond written by Thoreau who went to... lived deliberately by the pond for two years. You can think of it as almost like a proto-druid for an American. And so I grew up in an environment that was really not very far away from Walden Pond. My best friend lived up on Fairhaven Hill, which is right behind Walden Pond. And that same railroad that actually Thoreau complained about is actually still right along the edge of the pond and he lived on the other side on the hill.

And I would spend a lot of time over there in the summers and we would run down the side of the hill with this dog, Briefcase, and that was his name of his dog, which is lovely. And we would walk along the rails and then get to the pond and swim. And so we were just in the woods. And my parents, my dad had grown up in upstate New York in a farming community. And so when he settled in Concord with my mom, they also chose a house in the middle of the woods. And so I grew up in an oak forest just wandering and that was like, I didn't know that wasn't necessarily normal. So dogs, birch trees, think ravens, owls, foxes, deer, it just was a part of my life. So you'd think that was the base. And then I ended up going to college in Carlisle, Pennsylvania and I did a degree in international relations, spent a year in Bologna, Italy.

And when I was in Bologna, there were some really beautiful parts of that city, but there were also parts that were completely bombed out. And they were kind of rebuilt in that almost brutalist fashion of just concrete, soulless stuff that we all know and go, "Ow," it hurts the soul. And I lived in one of those for a year and it was almost prison-like. So outside I could get past that into these beautiful medieval buildings. And so I came away from that experience realizing I needed to connect with spaces and my history and the natural world. I couldn't just live in big huge cities that were with enormous skyscrapers and be disconnected from nature, which wasn't obvious to me at the time because it was in my early 20s and I'd grown up with it and Carlisle was a pretty semi-rural college at Dickinson College.

So I ended up going to Arizona to get my master's in creative writing and got out, there was a completely different world, just think, desert, palm trees, suburban kind of sprawl like LA. And while I was out there I realized I had read Black Elk Speaks, this wonderful book about shamanism in the indigenous tribes and the United States. I had read some Buddhism and some Herman Hesse and basically got to a place where I was like, well I'm looking for a tradition and I didn't feel comfortable and I wasn't drawn to trying to get connected with people who were part of the local indigenous tradition. I was like, where am I from? Where are my people? Now here I was in Arizona a really long way because my people from my dad's side are from Derby, they're bakers. And they came over here as Quakers in the 1720s to the US and my mom's side are Seavers and so they come from Scotland.

And so essentially what happened is I walked into a bookstore called Changing Hands on Mill Avenue in Tempe, Arizona and I was like, "I need a path, I need a way." And then I read a lot of books, but books aren't really paths. They introduce a path, but then you got to find a way. And there was The Druid

Animal Oracle and it was just... It was the cover, the old cover of the hard back version which had the hawk on it, the Merlin Hawk. And it was practically glowing. And I took it off and I was like, "What is this?" And I was a poor graduate student at the time, so it was like he's shelling out a lot of money for a bunch of oracle cards and seriously those cards were the second oracle card deck ever made, it seemed like.

They were early on. There was a Native American animal oracle card and Philip and Stephanie have told me this story about how they saw those cards and they were like, "We should do our own for Northern European animals." And I was like, "Yeah, it's great." I took it home, opened it up, and I was completely hooked and I started reading through and it was incredibly powerful. And then of course when you get to the back of the book, there's this little thing about Bards Ovates and Druids if interested. At the time, it wasn't email us, send off a letter. This is old school. This dates me big time.

It lets you know I'm about to be 55 years old. So whatever, I sent a letter to England being like, "Hey, I'm interested, whatever." A month later, something comes through snail mail and I opened it up and I also could... I'll never forget this because I was... The Druid Animal Oracle was extraordinary. Bill Worthington's art is amazing. And the stories that Philip and Stephanie were able to gather, all that material now is buried in museums and stuff, in libraries now and they were able to access it all and put some really incredible stuff together. And obviously Phil's a fantastic writer. And so the two of them putting that together was a miracle. So I had high expectations, but I was worried about a course, an Order, what's it really going to be like? So it shows up and the paper that it was on and the material, it was all so beautiful and it was all so well done.

And I just kept thinking that I was going to turn the page and see something really dumb and I didn't. And I was like, "You've got to be kidding me." And I felt like I had come home. And so anyhow, here I am on the other side of the world, but I felt like I was connecting to my indigenous tradition. And so I read through, did the exercises in the intro thing and they were like, look. And I also loved the non kind of proselytizing approach where it was just find out if this is a good fit for you and here's what it's like, really sit with it for a little while. So I did and I said, "Yeah, I'm going to do this." So then I had to come up with the money to send off for the first lessons and did those. And so came up with the money and finally sent it away and I started the Bardic grade.

And so while I was doing the Bardic grade, I was getting a master's in creative writing and writing novels and short stories. And then once I finished that, I got into the Ovate grade, I realized I needed to have a real career and I figured out essentially, there's three years of writing and I wrote a novel called The Art of Confession and it's on Amazon and it's actually called Westfall now in it's reprint. And I was like, okay, what I really love doing is I love mentoring and counseling. And so I went back and got a master's when I was in the Ovate grade in counseling and psychology for a adolescence. Yeah, I know, crazy, right? So then I was like, that was the plan. I'll just be a counselor at a local high school. And I got a job at a local art school and I used both my master's degrees. I taught poetry and then I did counseling.

And then the authorities there, the leaders there were like, "Hey, someone just left, would you like to be involved in admissions?" I was like, "Sure. Admissions, that's cool." So I had almost a full time job and then I was switching into the Druid grade and of course, life changed again. And at this point obviously I realize that somebody else is in charge besides me, that the inner world has got a hold of me there. I've done enough ritual and enough magic and stuff like that, that I'm... and enough creativity that I understand the creative process and I've deeply connected the source of my inspiration. So one point somebody came along and said, "Would you like to start your own art school?" And I was like, "That is not a dream of mine." I mean, in my mind I was like, "Not really."

Damh the Bard:

Why?

Matthew Baker:

Why would you do that? That sounds like a lot of work. I'd really like to just be a... teach kids and be a poet and write novels and go off into the woods kind of thing. But I was young and foolish and so I was like, "Sure, let's do it." And lo and behold, now I'm cruising through the Druid grade and all of a sudden the people who asked me to start the school vanish and I'm in charge. And boom, it's like now all these miracles started to unfold about the money that comes in to keep the school going. And that's a different story and you can find it, I think it's on Phillip's website. But long story short, really, Druidry and OBOD became a pathway for me to discover the true unfolding of my purpose here. And it's still doing that. And so 25 years later, done with the school and I knew I was supposed to come to England, I knew I was supposed to come to London specifically and that I had work here to do.

And so then we get to the pandemic and I started back with, I think it was Druidcast 137, Philip interviewed me and the last thing he said, "Well, what's next?" And I said, "Well, I'm starting this institute for Non-dual Shamanism." And he was like, "Yo, it's crazy. On top of everything else you're doing." I was like, "Yeah, well it feels like the next thing." And I could feel that and I was getting ready to depart from my school and hand it on to new people, which I did. And so I've been doing that for whatever, four or five years now. And that group involves some alumni from my school and people from 23 to 70 years old. And in the beginning of the pandemic, the last year at my school, one of the students says, "You know, really need to write a book." Once again, I was like, "No, that's a lot of work."

Damh the Bard:

Why would I do that?

Matthew Baker:

Why would I do that? It sounds like a lot of work. Now, of course, secretly as a writer, I've always been like, "Yeah, I want to write the book." So it's also buried way down there. The little guy in the basement, the goblin was like, "Oh, oh. Did she say write a book?" And that guy comes up to the kitchen and says, "I have an idea we should do that." And I'm like, "Ah." So I said, "Look, if you guys will support me emotionally and do some reading and all this kind of stuff, I'll take my course, Poetry, Myth and Magic and the Art of Transformation, which I had been teaching to juniors and seniors, 16, 17, 18 year olds at my school for 15 years and in development, this course, I'll take that, I'll record it all on Zoom my last year, which I did because everybody was on Zoom just screen and no faces, record all the lectures, transcribe them all on, and then start rewriting it.

And so the group supported me in doing that and I don't think I could have done it. This is a real example of what I mean by community and the idea when you're doing esoteric work and creative work, you need people, you need coaches and supporters to help you move forward. I mean, you know this with the work you've done. It's like if nobody's supporting you and say, "Yeah, go in there and write that next song," it's really hard sometimes because you're kind of on your knees. I mean, it's an act of surrender. And so in the pandemic, recorded the course, rewrote it, and a wonderful guy who was part of NDS who was an English teacher for a while, sent it to him, he read the whole thing once and then sent it off to a publisher and she said, "I'm interested, but I'm busy right now. Send it to me in six months and make it as good as you possibly can on your own."

Because she's like, "I'm busy and it's going to take me six months to help you fix this book," because I'd only sent her 30, 40 pages. So we did that, made it as good as we could possibly make it. And this is an

example of what a profession really means in editing. So sent it off to her and she says it's great. There were four sections in the book and they were completely different sizes. One was like 120 pages long. It made absolutely no sense. And so what ends up happening is she gets back in touch, says, "Okay, okay, well, we'll start with let's do a structural rearrange, I've read the whole thing." Now there's 11 sections. It all makes sense. And I mean she must have read it 20 times and edited and helped.

So I learned a lot about the role that a really great editor makes in transforming a book. And then there was the artist who did the cover, Matthew Spencer. He's amazing. I went back and asked him if he would do all the interior illustrations, which we weren't going to do originally, and then he did all those. We had a little post book launch party and there were six of us in that party on what it took to put this book together. I mean, you know what I mean, like an album. It's so much more than people think to really do all the pieces. And each one of those pieces, you've got the editor, you've got the publisher, you've got the copy editor, you've got the proofreader, you've got the designer, and you've got the artist and then the author.

Okay, so we're talking seven people here. So that is how we got here and how I got into OBOD and how I ended up doing the book and then ended up moving to London and retiring from my job. And so I'm now living in that dream that I was given 30 years ago when I opened up the very first Animal Oracle stuff and felt like, "Oh my gosh, I've got to go live in England someday." And here I am. It took a long time to get here.

Damh the Bard:

Amazing. Amazing. And it sounds like when you talk about your entry through the three schools or grades Bard, Ovate and Druid and finding OBOD and then writing the book, it sounds like, and this doesn't happen for everybody, but I've found that when you start to celebrate the wheel of the year, your life can suddenly fall into a pattern of the wheel of the year. And when you enroll in membership of the order, I do believe there are inner guides of the order that can guide people. And it sounds to you like the reflection of the energy of those three grades were absolutely mirrored in the way that your life moved forward. And do you think that was a conscious thing on your part? Or was it like, "I'm going to do this," and it doesn't sound like that from what you are saying.

Matthew Baker:

No, no.

Damh the Bard:

It sounds more almost like a surrender to the flow of life. Would you say that was true or was it a bit more directed than that?

Matthew Baker:

I would say it's definitely true. In fact, I didn't really even fully realize what was going on about the grades and the whole thing until, already, I was halfway through the... was finishing the Druid grade, halfway through the Masters, and then suddenly all of a sudden I'm starting the school. And so I feel like when I connect with the source of my inspiration as a creative person, nobody really knows where it really comes from. I just call it my soul. Someone else could call it their muse. And there is a kind of acceptance of how it flows out into the world. And oftentimes I find that people can be good at it in one area of their life, where they trained in it. So I trained as a fiction writer and then I learned to do it in poetry.

And then I learned to do it in counseling. And then I learned to do it in leadership. So it's like I just started. The holy grail of education is called transference. You learn how to master a process or create a process and you begin to move it into other areas of your life. And it's not like it's instantaneous because there's always resistance and fear and things that come up like well, can I really go with the flow like you're talking about and allow inspiration and bring it into my world in this whole area of my life? And oftentimes it's like where you have the most at stake or the most issues is where you grip the handlebars too tight. So I would say yes, I felt like I was being guided, but oftentimes since I was dealing with career issues here and as a young man in my 20s, it wasn't always obvious and it wasn't always easy.

And fortunately, I had very supportive parents and people in my life who when I decided to take risks like that and go with my intuition and with the signs that were showing up, there'd be synchronicities and at that time, I was drawing cards all the time and was far into this sort of magical process that OBOD introduces you to, esoteric process. So I would say yes, I felt like there was an inner stream of wisdom guiding me. But it wasn't until much later after I'd finished the Druid grade and I began to be like, "Now what? And where does my development go?" And I became really interested in spiritual awakening, in non-duality and the traditions that support that, the awakening traditions, whether it be... In my case it was Tibetan Buddhism, and there's a number of other places I investigated. There's many to do. You can check out.

But what I found is that as I got involved with the [inaudible 00:17:27] lineage through [inaudible 00:17:28] who happened to... His seat is in Arizona. He lives in Arizona, which was very, very fortunate. I started to realize, oh, they have it too. They have a whole inner lineage. And the thing is they're super overt about it. They're like, "We have an inner lineage." And it's like, and it's been handed down unbroken from this person, and this is what that means. So that question you're asking, it's like for them, it's not even a question. They're like, "Well, of course it's alive in the inner world. Where do you think we're getting what we're getting?"

They're almost all like, "We're not smart enough to keep the whole thing going." It's got to be. And I feel that way. I feel like the inner world's holding an enormous amount of knowledge and wisdom and that we just get these little downloads and they're like, "Put this out. Put this song out. Put this poem out. Put this book out." And you're like, "All right. All right. Okay, I'll do that." So in a sense, it's almost like it got corroborated in another tradition that is unbroken in the sense that our tradition, the Druidic tradition is broken in a number of places. But I like the kind of way that Philip talks about it better. It's like it went underground back into the earth or into the inner world for a period of time, and then it comes back out. Well, to have a tradition where you're looking at someone who's got 1600 years where it never went underground is quite remarkable and they can trace it and they have all the great inspirational books that came out.

I mean, it's almost like there's too much, almost in the outer world to really even keep track of. And even despite that, what's interesting about it is that even though the whole time it's been overt and they understand that they're dealing with inner world masters and awakened people who are holding the space for them, there's still transformation. There's still wave function. There's still times when a particular lineage is flourishing and new materials are coming out and new teachers are coming. And then there's times where it goes into a kind of trough and a quiet period. And when you have that much time to look at... I was up in Chino Valley and I went to the 600th anniversary of the (inaudible) inside this one and I was just like... And there were monks everywhere.

And I was like, "Okay, 600 years." And I was like, "Okay, United States is like 200 something years old." So you can imagine coming from that kind of richness. So that really validated what you're talking about, gave me a sense of, oh, what I'm feeling inside OBOD and in Druidry, it's legit. We have a whole group of

people and that's just one group of people, let alone the other traditions around the world that would be able to corroborate that. So I'm very thankful for what OBOD connected me to, because I feel like I'm a part of it and I feel like the book is my way of paying it forward, trying to be like, how do we take what happened in the esoteric order and then everything I learned after OBOD which I integrated into my stream and was still... I mean, I feel like my school is a manifestation of the inner order.

And so I just said to them, "What's next?" And they were like, "Okay, take everything you've learned from your school and give it back to the world. Give it back to the order and teach." And I was like, "Okay. All right." So just kind of paying it forward because it was a real gift to run into OBOD. I mean, I was looking and there were the cards and it changed the course of my life. So yeah. So I think you're right, it was a stream that unfolded, that gave a gift, and then I recognized it later.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, I think there's the energy of the awen within Druidry, that creative force.

Matthew Baker:

Yeah, love that.

Damh the Bard:

You can't entirely just go with the flow because you'll never get anything done. You can't just sit there and wait for inspiration. So for me, it's like I know that if I try and force it, if I'm that reed that doesn't bend with the flow, then I will write a rubbish song. It won't come from the heart, it will be forced and all those kinds of things. And I know that if I literally don't do anything, I won't tune into anything. So you have to actually sit down with the guitar or the typewriter or whatever it is that is your creative force. And I love it.

I read that Stephen King, what he does is he... The writer Stephen King, I'm a huge Stephen King fan. He says he makes an appointment with his muse. He says, "Right, I'm going to be sitting in front of my well, typewriter back in the day, word processor now, whatever at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning. And if you aren't going to turn up, I'm just going to write rubbish until you arrive. But that's my appointment with you." You're either there or you're not, kind of thing. And I really love that. It's like, I'm going to make an appointment with the awen tomorrow morning. I'm going to grab my guitar and I'm just going to strum and sing nonsense until suddenly bang-

Matthew Baker:

Until something happens, yeah.

Damh the Bard:

... I get a melody that just touches my heart or something like that. And suddenly you know that the floodgates opened and you're off.

Matthew Baker:

Yes, yeah, yeah. And in creative writing, when we talk about this, in the fiction writing world, we call it minute 21. And so what it is that you come and you sit in front of your typewriter and you sit for 20 minutes and you don't get up and you wait till the 21st minute. Because basically what you're trying to do is break through your resistance, your normal egoic structures, which are getting stuff done in the world and just focusing on your egoic needs. But what you're really trying to do here is break through to

a deeper mystical level of the self and the egoic self needs to soften. And often it won't soften until it hardens and then breaks.

And so when I was teaching fiction, I would say, "Look, you sit there," and like, "Well, I don't have anything. Nothing's coming." Set your clock and wait till minute 21. And then what happens is you break and then something comes through. And so yes, I think very much so. You have to plow the field, which is what I call the 20 minutes and put in the seeds and then you wait for the rain. And I do that every day. And that's in many ways what the Way of the Mystic Wizard is about, the book. It's about how to develop a spiritual creative practice. And when I say creative practice, it can be anything. It can be guitar, it can be dance, it can be drawing cards. But you turn it into a practice that you use every day so that you get better at getting to the appointment with the muse and also listening and you can get better at opening.

And then once again, once you get really good at that, then you take it off what I call the meditation chair. You take it out of the studio and you're like Mozart. You're wandering around the world hearing the music in all kinds of opportunities because it's become such a part of your life. And the same thing in Tibetan Buddhism, they talk about this where you get to a point where your practice is no longer... You're still doing this stuff in the cushion, you're still sitting there meditating, you're still going, picking up the guitar, whatever it is, but now you're really a walking around writer, you're a walking around musician, it's always part of you.

And there could be this moment where you stop on the side of the street and you look up and there's this raven looking at you, and then you look at the house and the house has some plaque on it and it's exactly what you're looking for. And you're like, "Oh, thank you."

Damh the Bard:

In the flow.

Matthew Baker:

Yeah, and you're in the flow. And it turns out that's getting the letter for Hogwarts, because what you've really done is now you're living in a magical world, which is pretty fun quite honestly.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Brilliant. So I'd like to talk about your book a little bit deeper now. The title is The Way of the Mystic Wizard, and that really got me when I heard the title because Mystic Wizard, I mean wizard is not a magical term you see very much these days. You see obviously, witch and you see Druid, and you see all these different words. I love the term wizard and the name wizard, but somehow that word, I don't know what it is, it seems to be connected with maybe it's the Wizard of Oz or something like that or something like that, but tell me, what was it about the word wizard that made you put that in the title as your definition of the magician, I guess?

Matthew Baker:

Yeah. Well, I think that I spent a long time working on this and what I was... I'm trained in archetypal studies and archetypal... I think in archetypes and these sort of deep structures. And so when I was playing around with what this path was really about, I floated through and I wanted to connect to... I was connecting to the Druid tradition, and then there's the magical tradition with magician, the whole thing. And what I finally got to was I kept seeing the image of Gandalf, and then I saw the image of Yoda, and then I saw the image of Merlin, and then I saw the image of Dumbledore and I asked myself, "Okay,

wait a minute, what's going on here?" And I realized that this archetype in each of those cases had this really positive cast, this really positive energy to it, and it means wise one or something along those lines, or someone who is able to use in the Buddhist terms, skillful means to get to accomplish things instead of being brutal or uninformed.

And so it's the wise old man, and we're all really familiar with it. It's Obi-Wan Kenobi. He is a wizard. He's even referred to as that old wizard or something at one point. And so I think it was archetypally, it's not associated with any specific magical tradition. Druid is very specific. It sort of associates you with nature and the Druidic traditions that are very alive and real and magical, particularly in the UK, is connected with very specific ceremonial magical tradition and everything. And what I was looking for was something that's almost like archetypally, a step broader than that, that you can be any of those things under the term wizard. And I was like, "Okay, but that's not quite enough because I understand what a wizard is doing is they're playing with reality, they're transforming things, they're helping people just like Merlin helped Arthur and Dumbledore helped Harry and Yoda helped Luke, you get this thing, there's this helper kind of piece to it."

And then I was like, "Yeah, but there's something missing here too." And that's why I pulled in mystic because I was like, all right, I'm also really interested in people awakening to essentially the recognition of, if you're going to use Star Wars terms, it would be the force, or if you're going to use Druidic terms, it would be the spirits of nature, the literally presence of the spirit of nature all around you, which we as Druids we can feel while we're walking through the forest or with our plants or whatever it is. But how do you take that up to another level? And that's actually called non-dual mysticism. And what it means is no matter where you are, it's there. And I had to work really hard as someone who was spending a lot of time in parks while I was getting my master's degrees. I had to go drive into downtown Phoenix, which was kind of a wasteland when I started my school there.

And it was painful, viscerally painful for me because it was kind of soulless in a lot of ways. And I was like, "Man, I got to figure out a way to survive this." And I did research. I found Ken Wilber, I found... And he kind of described, there's deity mysticism, there's nature mysticism, and then there's non-dual mysticism. I was like, "Okay, what the hell's that." And he was like, "That's the mystic sense of pure awareness that you can see and perceive everywhere." And I was like, "I need to learn to do that." And the thing is, so many of us live in cities today. It's not easy for us to get out into nature or something like that. So having the ability to cultivate your awareness of awareness, of pure empty, formless awareness, a presence, if you were going to use... I mean in mystical terms, it is our Buddha nature in Buddhism terminology.

Everybody has Buddha Nature, in Christianity, it's going to be the presence of the Holy Spirit. They're all different kind of names for this pure, empty, formless, beautiful awareness that's present. It's not some distant thing. So I was like, how can we cultivate both an awareness of awareness, awareness of this mystical insight and an awareness of how to work in the world like a wizard to help transform our own lives and the world. And it turns out the two work really well together because in Tibetan Buddhism, what's called rigpa, which is your awareness of awareness is in fact called the ultimate medicine because what it does, it allows you to see through the knots of delusion that you have around things that are causing you suffering and pain. And well, there's lots of that around.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, indeed.

Matthew Baker:

So what I wanted to do was not only did I study it for 20 years and then have my own spiritual awakening experiences along the way, when I came out and was like just going to write the book, I was like, "Well, what's the most important things I could deliver?" And it really was an approach to life that is not trying to escape life into pure spirit and formlessness, but is also not just totally enmeshed in life. So the idea of being a wizard is to be in the world and not of it, that old phrase. Well what does that really mean?

All I know is that when I bring a problem before me in meditation, if I can do what's called in Tibetan Buddhism, it's called trikaya. You see through it, you see through the dualistic illusion, then what happens is I can release. I can release my anger. I can release my frustration because I see that awareness is there and that who's showing up in front of me or the problem is showing up in front of me is actually perfectly designed for me right now, and how can I work with it? So that's like a gift, but it's hard work. It's hard work.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, so what's the journey that someone, if some of our listeners want to buy your book, which I would recommend, because I've read it and it's great-

Matthew Baker:

Well, thank you.

Damh the Bard:

Can you say the kind of journey that someone would go through as they start the book and then work their way through the book? What's the journey of the book?

Matthew Baker:

Yeah, that's a great question. I'd say the journey of the book is, it starts with what I would call an interest in what I just talked about, sort of trying to figure out a way where you can heal some of the suffering in your life around using the mystical approach, but also practically manifest changes in your life to become successful and in a way that's authentic for you and in terms of expressing your creativity, your passions, your love and practical stuff, very grounded four element kind of stuff like everything from job and all kind of stuff. So trying to bring them both together. So the book takes you through a process of, if you're interested in starting a daily spiritual practice that supports developing mastery in both your insight into pure awareness and the spirit, and also your insight into how to manifest a successful life simultaneously and how the two relate, then the book is going to walk you through very developmentally some stages of how do I build that practice.

Things like, okay, I'm going to build an altar. Okay, I'm going to find what kind of deity or formless being, if you even need one, is going to help guide me in this process. So it's pulling upon various kinds of mystical approaches and magical approaches that I've used for many years to become successful in my own life in a variety of ways. And I was like, "Okay, let's hand this on." And I've been teaching it to students for those years. So as you walk through the book, you'll get these little pieces that you can experiment with and it doesn't tell you how to do yours, exactly. It's introducing the piece conceptually and gives you a lot of... There's a lot openness and freedom for how you're going to manifest it. And in the very first 30 to 60 pages of the book give you an orientation, have you take a look at your mythology, your inner way of thinking of the world, and maybe making some potential adjustments, trying on a different way of thinking about how the universe may or may not work.

And then you have to come to your own conclusions and begin to build your daily practice. And then the second half of the book is a whole series of almost like each chapter introduces you to tools that help you master these different aspects, the mystical aspect and the magical aspect. I mean, I would imagine that if someone was going to work through the book, you could read through the book in a week or so and just kind of get a feel for it. But then you would start this process of developing your personal practice and you would have the support of the energy in the book and the energy in the inner world that's behind the book.

So if you're a person who's, I mean, essentially where I was all those years ago where I was... I had read a lot of books and I knew that I needed to have a practice and I knew I needed to have a path, but I knew what it was. And then I found the Druid Animal Oracle, which is still sitting here right at the center of my altar. I use it almost every day. If you're at that place, then the book kind of says, "Okay, here you go. Here's a way that you can develop the practice that will support the life that you really want to live, even though you don't even entirely know what that is." And that's part of the journey

Damh the Bard:

And the practice, it's called a practice for a reason, isn't it? That's the thing.

Matthew Baker:

Yes, because you're going to practice.

Damh the Bard:

A lot of people I've heard, say Druid is something you can't... I'm a Druid being, but I think also that Druid is an outward expression of what you do as well. And you also do being in a funny old way, don't you?

Matthew Baker:

Yes, you do. Yes, you do.

Damh the Bard:

You're still doing if you're being.

Matthew Baker:

In fact, you just nailed it. The big, strange paradox in spirituality is being and doing. And what is the relationship between the two? And the answer is the relationship is that they're actually the same thing from a non-dual perspective. That doing arises out of being. And so as human beings we're always doing. There's no not doing, because our bodies are always stuff. But when you sit in meditation or you play the guitar and you're getting into the space, what you're doing is connecting into what I call taking a bath in the non-dual presence and you're letting go. I call it an agenda free zone. And so you're just opening to that place of inspiration again. And it's profoundly rejuvenative. It's like deep sleep. I think it's actually more powerful than deep sleep. And what happens is then from that place comes the inspiration to begin to actually move in a certain direction and then you're doing.

And it's just really developing in a sense. The Way of the Mystic Wizard is about learning to master how you specifically go back and forth successfully between being and doing like a mobius strip or an infinity symbol. And your practice as you move it into your daily life, is literally just, oh, am I standing at the supermarket waiting to check out my stuff and I'm falling into a state of being, and suddenly it gets more

spacious and opens up a little bit, and there you are. And all of a sudden I'm hearing someone say something over there, and a poem starts constructing itself in my head, and then all of a sudden it's my turn and then boom, now I'm checking out stuff. And so it's back and forth all the time.

Damh the Bard:

I find those moments when I'm out in the natural world, in the woods and things like that. To me, mythology is the key to these kinds of things. The myths, the legends, they're the keys to these things that you're talking about. They aren't the things themselves, they're the keys to them. And sometimes I think we paw so much over the actual key that we forget to use the key, steps in the door.

Matthew Baker:

Yes. Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. The golden key actually opens a box.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, exactly.

Matthew Baker:

You have to actually open the box.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. The key opens the box. Yeah.

Matthew Baker:

It's empty. And people are like, "Wait a minute, it's empty. What do you mean it's empty." It's like that's the point. Go ahead and sit in the empty box for a minute and you'll understand what empty means. It means full of potential.

Damh the Bard:

Absolutely. So if people take the journey with your book, are there online resources and things people can use as well?

Matthew Baker:

Yes. Yeah. My website, matthewthomasbaker.com, super easy to get to. On there, you can go and order the book, and then there's also a section for the Journeys. So the way the Mystic Wizard has a number of journeys in it, they're written out, so you can read them if you want, and then you can go and you... And I have them narrated, and they were all done live. It's all relatively raw bootleg like, so but they're all on there. And so my suggestion is you do the book, you do the journeys, and then you have a journal and you keep track of things. And then I'm about the Institute for Non-Dual Shamanism, I have a key group of about 18 people and we go on the quest all year round for the five hallows. So that would be the four elements basically and then the fifth element, pure awareness or spirit.

So we're on the quest every year, and the quest is seven weeks long. And we go after the spear of intuition and fire, and then we take a break, and then we go on the cup for a feeling in the fall and autumn, and the cup represents a feeling function. And then in the winter we go after the stone, the foundation, and that's the body. And then in the spring, we're back with a sword. And the whole time

our awareness of awareness and spirit is woven through. So this year alone, actually, I mean we've been going on it for five years now, and I've recorded all the journeys, but this year we have some really wonderful people involved in the group. And so what I've been doing is recording them the Zooms, and I'm about to post the whole spear quest on the thing.

So if somebody wants to read the book and really do the work, the spear quest will be there. And then when we finish the quest, each one, each piece, I'll put them up. And then at the very end, there's a great sort of ceremony of weaving the five hallows together. And then what you can do is you can just do that over and over again every year. And I have a guy who's joined the quest this year who just finished OBOD and out of the Druid grade and everything, and he said to me the other day, he's in Morocco, wonderful dude, and now that we're done with the spear quest, I was like, "So tell me, what's this done for you?" He said, "I feel like I've returned back to the Bardic grade when we dealt with the four elements and we did these rituals and we really connected to them. And then you did things in the real world like get your hands in the dirt, that kind of thing."

He said, "But it feels like it's just been taking it to a much deeper level, and I'm learning, I'm getting to the place of... with this, I'm taking it to a level of mastery." I was like, "Yeah, because it's really focused. It's coming in and saying, how are you learning to use intuition and the power of flame to transform and you go into the inner world, and you're doing your imagination so you're able to really play with it, and then you bring it into the outer world." So that's the goal. And that was my goal was... And that's the wizardry part.

Damh the Bard:

That's the wizardry part.

Matthew Baker:

Imagine if you could be really good at all five of those hallows. And you can see how this traces back to John and Caitlín Matthew, their stuff about the quest for the hallows which is my course was based on that. And the whole idea that they were setting up of, when you do this work, you ultimately mediate the hallows, you're bringing them into the world and I can think of no other time in history where we need thousands, hundreds of thousands of people who in their own way develop mastery over all five hallows because it's easy to be good at one of them. We're all good at one of them. And then we're kind of okay at the next one. And we pretty much suck at the two we don't pay attention to. And so that's how human beings are formed.

And so the idea is just like wow, if you can really develop some mastery here, then you can bring a more potent gift to the world. And that's the goal. The people who join NDS, I'm like, "Look, this is for your life. It is, to you to transfer your life into a living manifestation of happiness and joy and expression and creativity and love. But also, when the inner world gets a hold of you, as in my experience, there's going to be something they ask of you as well." My thing was starting a school, someone else might start a business, somebody else might learn how to make guitars by hand. I mean, there could be any number of things, but your gift matters.

And the image I was given was that the world is covered by almost like a... It was a very Druidic image. I was like, "Well, why does this all matter?" And there was this old forest and it was dying and so the trees were going gray, almost like in the Lord of the Rings, the leaves are turning and the... And I said, the next question was, well, why does my journey or anybody else's journey really matter in the face of what we're dealing with as a species? And then they showed me all these little trees popping up in the dead forest and then growing up larger than the old dead forest.

And all of a sudden they were all over the whole planet and said, "Everybody's tree matters because we're trying to transform the planet from a place that was functioning in a sense, disconnected from the inner world, really not connected to inspiration, not connected to a deep inner stream, but just egoically running around, breaking things like a kid with a bat." No, that doesn't mean that we haven't gotten really, really good with obviously our science and stuff like that. I mean, we're incredible but the idea is we need to use that now from an inspired place to grow these trees. And so your tree matters and my tree matters. This image came to me when I was kind of resisting doing the book, and I was like, "Look man, why do I need to do a book?" And they said, "Because your tree matters." Because it'll get other people to go make their own tree. And I loved that they came to me with a Druid image. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So anyways, that was-

Damh the Bard:

Oscar won't stop knocking on the door. My dog wanted to come in.

Matthew Baker:

I love it. How perfect, right?

Damh the Bard:

I'll edit that bit out. That's fine.

Matthew Baker:

Yeah, yeah. But still, I do love it that a dog wanted to come in.

Damh the Bard:

He's just scraping at the door.

Matthew Baker:

Scraping at the door. Oh gosh.

Damh the Bard:

He's just gone to sleep under my desk. That's all he wanted to do. There we go.

Matthew Baker:

It's perfect. Dog under the desk. Dog is the foundation.

Damh the Bard:

So do you know, to me, that image is also how I see the order planting trees around the world, encouraging that closer relationship with the natural world, which I think we've lost. And the current way is just is not working. And the way to make it work, again, is to reconnect to the natural world through the powers of Druidry or the Wizard of... the mystic wizard, these things.

Matthew Baker:

Yeah, mystic wizard. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

They can only help, I think. We've been talking now for nearly 45 minutes, so I don't want to keep you too much longer but the book is available from all of the usual places, I guess?

Matthew Baker:

Yeah, so you can get it on any online seller, should be able to get it on Amazon, wherever. The only place, the only bookstore, hard bookstore that I'm selling it, I mean, you could order it from a bookstore, but the people who represent me in London are the Atlantis Bookshop. And so if you're in London or out and about, or if you don't want to buy it through Amazon, but you want to buy it through an independent book seller, the Atlantis has been sending it around the world so you can get it. You can have it sent to them, so depending on how you feel about those different things. So they're basically my book representative here. And that allows you to get what you want, how you want to get it.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Okay. And the book's out, everything's done with that. Obviously it is an ongoing process. But what's next for Matthew Baker?

Matthew Baker:

Well, it's a good question. Back when we did the interview with Philip, Number 137, and I started NDS and was maybe thinking vaguely about a book someday, basically this interview is the end of phase one. It's here we are. The book launch was June 1st. And I've been teaching and doing different opportunities here and about, went to the OBOD annual meeting this summer, which is fantastic. For the first time in 30 years, I got to go. After this, I'll move into phase two. And phase two is probably starting to put more on my YouTube channel for people because now that people are getting access to it, that's like the spear quest journey will be going on... But I'm probably also going to start to do... answer some questions, do directly stream from Zoom, and I might have guests on, or I have a magical partner that I work with, and she might be available to look at... go on a journey and then come back and do discussion on it.

So we're looking into what does phase two really look like and what do people need and want? It's got to be organic. The way I built my school was all about word of mouth in an organic approach to growth. And so same thing, that's the way this will happen. The right people who need to work in the way of the mystic wizard will find that, and then they'll find the YouTube channel and my website and it'll grow. So really, this is the end of phase one is getting the information out there. And then I'll kind of just like everything else, I'll see where the inner world guides me and what to do.

And half the time it's unexpected. You could have told me a week ago that I was thinking about doing a live journey on YouTube and then talking to people straight, I would've been like, "That sounds crazy. I don't want to do that." And then this morning I woke up and someone was like, "Hey, would you be willing to do it?" And I was like, "Yeah, okay. That sounds like that might be a good idea." So that's the way it works.

Damh the Bard:

It does.

Matthew Baker:

You just keep going and you're ultimately, you're kind of acting as a... You're serving something larger than yourself. That's the goal.

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Damh the Bard:

Brilliant. Well, thank you for coming on to Druidcast and spending some time talking to me. I thoroughly recommend your book to the people listening, and I wish you all the success with it. And we'll meet up at the end of phase two then, shall we and see where that was gone?

Matthew Baker:

Oh, yes, yes. That sounds great. Yeah. May that be at least a year or two down the road?

Damh the Bard:

That's it. All right, Matthew, thank you very, very much.

Matthew Baker:

All right. Thanks Damh.

Damh the Bard:

Cheers.

Matthew Baker:

Take care.