

Graham Harvey ([00:00](#)):

So thanks for the welcome and thanks very much for the invitation to be here. And thank you for being here for this session. It's a great honour to be back among OBOD Druids and some of know I spent some time with another Druid order, the Sods Secular Order of Druids. That was a rude word, but I've had some wonderful times with Obod at Obod events, particularly like the diversity of Obod, and Druidry and Paganism. So anything I say now, as with Gordon's kind of thing, I don't mean to offend anybody. I don't mean to assume anything. I'm not assuming that you will ought to agree with me about anything at all. So when we come to questions and comments, quite happy to have challenges and all of that because that proves some of you don't think Druiry is a religion or Paganism is a religion. As a professor of study of religions, let me tell you that that's the first proof that it is a religion.

([01:11](#)):

So we're going to move on that. I won't do that whole thing. So I want to talk about the amazing world that we live in. It's a world full of amazing diversity. Again, that includes amazing sensual diversity. So as David Abraham said in his book, which is about animism, the world is sensual. We have senses. The two work together, they don't work separately. So there's smells and tastes and sounds and sights and feelings and so on. The world is full of stuff for our body senses to engage with, and that's already a great thing and we should make more of it. And obviously some of us have diverse challenges to some of our senses. Some of us don't see so well, some of us don't hear so well, some of us, I was going to say don't smell so well, that's not quite what I mean. Sense of smell isn't quite so good and so on. And there are other kinds of senses of balance and so on that affect mobility and all sorts of stuff.

([02:40](#)):

So I'm, it's very difficult to speak without every time building the diversity, every sentence. So please, if I'm talking about sight or smell or whatever, don't assume that I'm assuming that everybody has the same full range, particularly because one of the really amazing things about this world is that there are all kinds of beings who have senses, which we think is similar to ours. Sometimes we project human likeness onto the larger than human world onto other species because they've got eyes, they've got noses, they've got skin that feels and so on. But one of the incredible things about the world, about our kin, cousins, whatever we want to call them, anything except nature, is that we living beings don't all use our senses in the same way. So we humans have given up some of the things that our noses could have done and dogs still do.

([03:48](#)):

So dogs use their noses differently. There are animals and birds that see more colours than we do, they see at both ends of the spectrum is much bigger than our range. Equally, there are beings who only see in black and white and there are insects who would now be experiencing strobe lighting because of lighting. That's good for us. Well for you, it's not so good for me, I'm being blinded. But especially our strip lights strobe, they see so much faster than we do. So the world is full of senses and we living beings have an amazing array of senses. And if you want a book that does that, I'm not recommending any of my books here, but I'm going to recommend somebody else's book, a book called The Immense World, which basically goes through all kinds of senses and opens up our understanding to the way that other species from deep ocean creatures to high altitude birds and insects of many kinds, how senses, physical senses are used very differently. Okay? So what I'm saying is the world is an amazing place, but actually we don't all live in the same world. We see and taste and smell and touch differently, and that's true of even if we just stick to humans. But it's even more true once we begin to think of our larger than human kin.

([05:39](#)):

So I want to shift from that to talking about an understanding of the world as a world in which many worlds are possible. So once again, we don't all live in the same world. I mean, sorry, we happy you talking about insects and animals, dogs and so on. But even if we stick to humans, not all humans live in the same world. We experience the world differently from one another. Differences of poverty, of wealth, differences of the availability of food and so on, but also the possibilities of democracy, an whole range of other things. But we also live in worlds where things that we treat as normal are not treated as normal to other people. So I'm going to step back. I wanted to say a thing before I said that about these different worlds that we live in. I'm going back to our other human kin, sorry, so my notes, but written the wrong glasses.

[\(06:54\)](#):

So I want to step back again and talk about our other human kin and then come back to the diverse worlds that humans live in. So it's very nice that I'm standing just behind this banner with the salmon because first line of this, part of what I wanted to say is there are salmon worlds. There are worlds in which salmon move through water and they have all the right senses for moving through water, but there are worlds where there are bear. Where's the bear? There are worlds in which bear, there's the bear worlds. Some bear worlds intersect with salmon worlds not necessarily good for salmon, but maybe they're willing, maybe they're willing to give themselves to the bears. There are of course human worlds which intersect with salmon worlds, some with some respect and some with less respect. Judge for yourself, which of them I'm going to say there are salmon worlds where humans try to catch salmon with ceremony, with respect. Don't take all the creatures, try and allow the salmon to largely live their lives in the way they want to until they hopefully willingly come to us to be eaten. And there are salmon farms where salmon are trapped - who's pretending I'm not being disrespectful. Here there are salmon farms where salmon are trapped in small cages only survived because they're heavily chemically dosed to stop them getting diseases. And even then that doesn't work. So that gets hidden from us in this industrial process. So they're already different worlds salmon, worlds of different kinds, human worlds and bear worlds that intersect and we move through those worlds in different ways. There are caribou worlds, there are hedgehog worlds, and sometimes people in this room have closer or more distant relationships with some of our larger and other than human kin who we want to look after. So we've heard of Gordon with toads other people who have closer relationships with magpies and other corvids and so on. Some of you I know will be expecting me to tell you about our close relationship with some bacteria altogether. Now, thank you. Those of you who we talked before obsessively know that if you are, you could do this, in your leisure. If you were to touch your inner elbow, you are now touching the preferred home of up to five tribes of bacteria, right? So we heard just earlier about our symbiotic relationships. We are never alone. We are not individuals. There's no way you can be an individual, anybody twisted.

[\(10:26\)](#):

We all know there are gut bacteria that we feed, and some of us probably know that those of you who have given birth to a human child and have fed them from your breasts have also been feeding bacteria. And I mean that not in the sense that the bacteria, like most bacteria in our guts, they break down the stuff that we take into our mouths and make the nutrients available to us. But when mothers breastfeed, there are things that are fed that are not absorbed by the babies that only there to feed bacteria to improve the health, certainly improve the health of the mother and the baby. But there are specific things that you as a symbiotic creature are providing for the wellbeing of the rest of the world. So we live in multiple worlds, but when we, as I already anticipated getting the wrong order of my ramble, we don't all live in the same world.

[\(11:40\)](#):

So I want to use a phrase which is popular among the Zapatista community in Chappas in Mexico, who are anarchist revolutionary movement, who are trying to create a more just and sustainable world for everybody. And it's a very interesting resistance revolutionary movement. So they have this phrase, which is what we want is a world in which many worlds fit because all these multiple worlds can just collide with each other as when we industrially farm, as when we throw our plastic into the rest of the world, the throwaway, as if there isn't a way we pollute without even thinking about it.

[\(12:41\)](#):

Here's another little throwaway. The era that we are now in the Anthropocene, as many people have called it, is a geological era, which will, if anybody survives one day, be traceable by the evidence of plastic in rocks, the increased background radiation across the planet and the water in the air and the land, but also by chicken bones. The massive amount of chicken that humans now eat has become part of the geology of this planet in a way it never was. So there are big challenges, but I just think about that something as ordinary as chicken bones. I mean, we don't think that we are responsible for nuclear radiation and we're very careful with our plastic, but these everyday things like chicken bones that are affecting, that will become part of the geology of this planet. So the world is the worlds that we live in, collide the human worlds as well as the worlds of salmon, of caribou, hedgehogs, of toads, try to cross what we think of as roads, crossing a forest. What's the phrase there? The road doesn't cross the forest. No, how it goes, sorry.

[\(14:13\)](#):

So the toads, that's their world and they're travelling through and our world collides. And these are different worlds. And there's another phrase, so just to say that phrase to give it to again is we want a world in which many worlds fit. So it's not like they want to dominate and impose one way of living, basically an indigenous anarchist world. They don't want to impose that on everybody else and certainly don't want to impose the indigenous understanding of the world. They want the diversity of many indigenous and other than indigenous understandings and ways of moving through the world to thrive together because diversities thrive better as they interact with each other. None of those worlds are separate just as we are not individuals. So none of those worlds is individual. They all at some point affect other worlds with more or less harm, with more or less respect.

[\(15:26\)](#):

But there's another world among those many worlds. There's one that's been called the one world World, and some people say it's not a world, it's just a destructive machine. But the one world, world just keep using that phrase is the world of modernity, A world in which any other world is tolerated until there are other crazy people like Druids and indigenous people learn to treat the world in a modern way. And modernity isn't just a time thing, it's an ideological construct. It's a way of being that has an education systems, economic system, and so on and so on. And I'm not going to go on and on about it. There are big books that do all this stuff. The modernity is entangled with colonialism and its earlier versions in enslavement. Its existing forms of enslavement with capitalism where everything's valued by monetary price and so on. And the one world, world will, as I say, tolerate diversity but not celebrate it as I think we do. We celebrate diversity and indigenous people typically, I know this is over generalisation, but indigenous people typically celebrate diversities. Difference is a reason for conversation, for learning, for exchange, for sharing rather than a competition.

[\(17:18\)](#):

So the reason I wasn't going to say this, but the reason that Gordon said I don't like the word nature is because that's one of the markers of the modern cosmology. The modern understanding of the world is a duality between nature and culture. So we quite easily think about different cultures and we quite

easily think about one thing called nature. And I'm saying we, and I think we in this room are kind of, if not struggling with it, we want to reject it. It's a difficult thing because if the idea of nature in that modern construct, a modern culture, the one world, world is quite mechanical, animals are instinctive. Animals don't make choices like what we do. Humans are different because we have cultures plural and the rest of the world, including our bodies, they're kind of mechanical systems, kind of mechanical isn't the right word, but they're regular, they're organised.

[\(18:38\)](#):

So the sunrise rises, okay? The sunrise rises point. Well, it doesn't use the proper language. The earth tilts so that the sun appears to rise over the eastern horizon and it does it in a regular way that can be recorded and can be predicted. So that might seem like there's no problem with that. And everything else in the world of nature is like that and it might not seem a problem. But for many of us and for many indigenous people, our stories suggest a different world or different worlds. And in these different worlds, the sun chooses to stick to the tradition of rising in the way that they rise. And the sun, the moon, the stars are very traditional people and so they stick to the rules. There are stories of course that they didn't always. So there's a wonderful Mori story in which Maui tricks to hero character somewhere like Taliesin in the sense that he was stillborn and thrown into the ocean and reborn and so on.

[\(19:58\)](#):

So there's some interesting parallels, accidental or whatever. Maui and his brothers are a bit fed up because the sun zips across the sky too fast for them to do all the other things they want to do. So they make a net and they trap the sun and they beat the sun up. So now the sun travels much more slowly across the sky and gives us time to do the things we want to do. And there's a lot of stuff in Maori's mission about the shaping of the world, the cosmos, so that life is more possible for more beings from not the beginning because the beginning is Tepo is a nothingness or not nothing, it's a chaos.

[\(20:51\)](#):

But after many generations in the Maori evolution story, Maori cosmology story in the glimmer of light early dawn, you see mother earth and father sky locked in sexual embrace, and there are children being born, but there's no way for 'em to move in that rather sticky, squashed space. So again, their children, one of them pushes father sky off mother earth to make space for other life to become possible. There are lots of stories like that which encourage the hearers us to make life possible for others, to increase the possibilities, the worlds in which many worlds fit rather than insisting on a single world where only one thing can happen, which is to improve the economy or something like that. We know where that comes from.

[\(21:59\)](#):

So in the blurb I was saying things about paganism, including pagan Druidry and many other varieties is quite radical even if we don't always realise it sometimes. Sometimes we use the language of modernity. Sometimes we want to be kind of individuals that the modern world wants us to be. Sometimes we want to be the consumers the modern world wants us to be, and we're not going to escape from that world. That's one of the worlds we live in. But we're also at the same time creating other worlds, more pagan and more Druidic worlds in which other worlds are possible, other worlds fit, other worlds are allowed to fit, other worlds are allowed to thrive. And some of you heard me say before, one of the signs of pagan druid radicalism is the fact that from the early days of pagan revivals, plural, we made ritual.

[\(23:15\)](#):

The big thing that we do, we do ceremonies for things like sunrises. Anybody can see a sunrise, but we turn it into a ceremonial occasion. I mean, we're not alone, I'm not saying that only Pagans do this. There are other things that are very ordinary that other religious and other cultural communities do too. Other people also give thanks, at least for the food they eat. Some of us who identify ourselves as animists, as Gordon and Lucy are saying to some in other ways, we want to say thank you to those who we eat. Because as Gordon quoted from an Iglolic shaman who told a Danish explorer that the danger of the world is that everything we eat is souls. How are we going to do that? And okay, the word soul is kind of a tricky one. It might suggest some sort of interior a bit.

[\(24:26\)](#):

So we can translate that as everything that we eat is alive. It's a person, a being who deserves respect, who has its own desires, its own wishes for its wellbeing, and the wellbeing of its closer kin. So there's a danger in eating those who have kin and with whom we're also kin. So there are lots of animistic cultures in which the foundation is about saying, please, thank you and sorry to those who we want to eat because they are our relations further or closer. They don't exist in the world for us. They weren't given to us by any deity that you could name or not name, no anonymous deities. They're here like us because we're all co-evolved, symbiotically together. We wouldn't exist if all these other beings didn't exist and we need to eat. All beings need to consume something, plants need to consume light.

[\(25:45\)](#):

So maybe they have ways of expressing gratitude and so on. So I have theorised as a professor of religious studies, I've been trying to work out how we might think about what religion is apart from being a load of people saying, ours isn't a religion, it's a philosophy or something else. Or we don't do religion. That's what they do. Ours is given to us by a Deity or something. All those things, very typical of people denying that they have religion. But one of the big challenges for western academic study of religions and of spiritual cultures, whatever you want to call them, is that we've inherited a lot of ideas from a predominantly Protestant Christian culture in which, so if you were to try and apply for charitable status 10, 15 years ago, it's changed somewhat now. Now what you have to prove is to get charity status that you benefit the public. And what you do religiously is not really bothering those people. But in the old days of not so long ago to prove your religion, you had to show that you had, if not a singular deity, certainly a singular principle that underpins the cosmos. You had to have a coherent set of beliefs. You have to have all the things that Martin Luther and John Calvin and perhaps Findley, my favourite reformer, died in battle with battleaxe. That's not really wise, my favourite one.

[\(27:38\)](#):

That's the kind of thing they would understand to be religion, coherent set of beliefs about a transcendent deity. We don't need those things and most religions don't need those things. So I've been trying to work out how else might we work out what religion means. If for example, an alien came from space and said to any one of us, we've been watching your little planet, it's nice colour. And we like, we've seen what you call politics. We've seen what you call sport, and we've kind of got the hang of that. We've even seen a bit of catering going on and we kind of understand that all these other bits, but religion, show me some religion. We haven't quite got the hang. What does this word mean? So I'm kind of intrigued by what would you show such a being? Where would you go? What would you show them? And I think that one of the ways to do this is to take them to a very ordinary meal or a festive meal perhaps, because that's more often where we do the please thank you. And sometimes, sorry. And the sorry bit is I need to take your life because I need, if not me, the human bits of me to survive, the bacteria in my guts need to be fed as well. So the person that seems to be Graham Harvey needs to be fed in multiple ways, but it's a dangerous thing to do.

[\(29:17\)](#):

So we need to say these kind of words and we do them best in ceremonies, which will be very simple. Like people saying grace before or after meals, different religions do them differently. Or in the big festive occasion where we pick one being one central kind of food person to say thank you, you represent the whole of our dietary system and we are very grateful and we're not going to kill all of your species, but we need to do this. And we recognise too that we are part of the food system. We will one day if we are buried or whatever, put away properly, we will feed other beings. We are now feeding other beings. We'll feed even more and we want to do that. So in this world in which it's necessary to we, but it's also dangerous ceremony becomes very important. So yes, the alien, right? So I think there's been a mistake. We keep thinking when aliens turn up, they're going to say, take me to your leader. This is a really bad pun because what they're really saying is, take me to a larder.

[\(30:39\)](#):

Perhaps I'll never tell that joke again. It came to me along with another phrase I wanted to tell you in a second in the middle of crow wood in Northumberland. So I blame them. But okay, so I did say to some of you on a previous talk with OBOD that it would be good if we stopped saying nature because it takes us back into that world of culture, nature, duality. And we are not dualists are we because we call this plant all heal and it's poisonous, right? So there's no dualism involved in if you were a real dualist, you'd separate all heal from toxic plants. But we are not, we're people who tell multiple stories that tell, that make us different kind of people.

[\(31:37\)](#):

So the other phrase that came to me in the middle of crow wood in Northumberland, because I also struggle not to say nature except when I'm talking about modernity in its dualism. So I wondered if we can say instead of that paganism is a nature religion and that humans are part of nature and all these other phrases which are of course true, and I'm not denying any of those things, but maybe the phrase, the nurturing world rather than the natural world might help us shift to what I think is a more pagan and certainly more animistic understanding of the world. So just, I don't know, I mean it's similar enough to the natural world to say the nurturing world, but it pushes us further towards that sense of an animist, multi-species world in which many worlds fit in which we're all symbiotic in which we're all always engaging with our relations, that we can't do that.

[\(32:51\)](#):

And that includes buildings, includes technologies, they're all in some way our relations and we need to find ways to be more respectful. And that's the big ethical challenge of animism. It's the radical bit of paganism is certainly doing ritual. It's certainly that we in multiple ways, not just animistic ways, but in other ways want to root ourselves in this planet. Particularly groups like you who regularly go back to the same bits of geography to celebrate the same bits of cosmic sunrises, moon rises and so on. You're getting to know a particular place and the place is a community and you are being part of it in a way that we are not meant to be in the modern one world world because we're meant to be beyond locality. We're meant to have universal truth, which is everywhere the same. But we resist that and we say no, each place is special.

[\(34:05\)](#):

Each place is a community and we need to find the right way to engage and we need to find the etiquette for engaging with those places. And that's what you OBOD and other pagan and druid and other religious groups do all the time. And the animistic bit is just a bit that says, let's listen a bit more. Let's do the please, Thank you, sorry, a bit more. Let's be, perhaps we can be more radical than we have

been in sometimes challenging the one world world so that we too, like our indigenous cousins, Kin, can also say what we want is a world in which many worlds fit. Thanks.

Eimear Burke ([34:53](#)):

So a lovely reframe from the natural world to the nurturing world. And I think we feed each other with relationships, with love and food in so many ways. So I love that. Any questions?

Question 1 ([35:22](#)):

You said that animals or nature, don't do religion. I watch the crows every morning celebrating the sun rise, and they all face the east. There are flocks of them come in.

Graham Harvey ([35:37](#)):

I hope I didn't say that animals don't do religion. I can give you a long lecture on animal religion. But let's give you a couple of examples from respective scientists. So just me hippie, weird person. Chimpanzees. So two things that chimpanzees do. One is they have a dance of awe. We've heard about awe. So often when they encounter a waterfall or a thunderstorm, they do a particular dance that they don't do in any other situation. Alright? And that has to be for some people, that's the core definition of religion, expressions of awe, experiences of awe and their expression. That's fine. The other thing is there are two communities of chimpanzees in a particular bit of forest in central Africa. They both live in a place where they could eat both ants and termites. But one of the communities eats ants but not termites. And the others eats termites but not ants. They both have specific tools that they teach their children to use. They make the tools and they teach the children to use. So there's other bits of culture too. Now, one of my obsessions is obviously about the centrality of food. And if you want to understand religions, it's all about food, who you eat with, what you eat, what you don't eat. So whether it's halal or or whether it's Dutch Catholics and Protestants knowing they're different because one smokes pipes and smokes cigarettes. The things we consume, mark, our religions. If any human being had food distinctions like ants, not termites, we would easily say it's religion. But chimpanzees, it gets scientists very edgy about it. I have no trouble saying these chimpanzees, chimpanzees have religion. And you are exactly right. There are all kinds of other evidences of animals greeting the dawn, animals respecting the dead, remembering the dead, all kinds of things. So I'm sorry if I sounded like I was saying, animals don't do religion. They very much do. We all very much do. Maybe the bacteria too.

Eimear Burke ([38:09](#)):

You've certainly softened the meaning of religion for me. Having been brought up in a very strong religious background. Any other questions before Daniel?

Question 2 ([38:18](#)):

Not a question. More like a challenge. Good.

([38:22](#)):

Sorry about that. I've been wondering, I do get the whole idea that of various worlds and might be more of a semantic discussion here and do get the criticism on the one world concept. But on the other hand, if we frame it like this, doesn't it separate us even more? I mean, if we start to, instead of speaking of living in various worlds saying we are living in various systems, but we are all still living in one world. But this world needs to be diverse and not to be unified in a well basically fascist way.

Graham Harvey ([39:11](#)):

Yes. Okay. The stories we tell make our worlds differently. And one of the things I think is by twisting the language, we might get a bit further. So we've been presented for, what is it now? 50 odd years, maybe longer, I can't remember bad at numbers, with the image of the planet as a lovely, blue, green marble. And we've been told that that shows us that we all live in one world. There's good ecological messages there too, but also collapses those differences and suggests something about management and it suggests we can step outside and see the whole thing. So sometimes that notion of the globe as a kind of smooth marble, I think undermines the kind of attempt to celebrate diversity, to allow other beings to thrive and survive more than survive. So yes, I think if we were in a world in which if we got into a single world in which we we're all just different ways of respecting the one planet that we live in, then I'd have no trouble with the oneness. But I think at this point we need the story that says there are many worlds and many of them are colliding and we need to make peace between the worlds. And that's not always easy. If balance isn't static, it's continuous movement. So no, I entirely, I agree with you in many ways, but I think that we we're trying to shift things the different way. Telling the story might achieve

Eimear Burke ([41:12](#)):

To go back to a food analogy, I like to think of OBOD , and I think maybe this relates to this as a salad. So we've got our bowl, which is the globe, and it's not a puree. So that notion of a smooth world, everything's the same as the puree where everything is assimilated and all expressed as one. But with a salad, you have various leaves. You might have cheese, meat, or not nuts, seeds, dressing or not. And it allows the individual expression of the ingredients within that salad to be experienced. Anyway, that's my wisdom for today. I think the last words to you, you wanted to finish,

Graham Harvey ([41:47](#)):

I wanted to give you a message that I just received from a box of Bja Bja chocolates, which I do recommend to everybody and I'm not addicted. So this is Abuja ground number 12. It says All things loved are truly beautiful.