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# Path of the 9 Sacred Trees

An Initiatory Druidic-based Pillar Tradition

The Path of the 9 Sacred Trees is an initiatory shamanic spirituality that merges concepts and ethics of the 9 Sacred Pillars with contemporary Druidic (and more broadly Celtic) practices, myths, and early writings. The emphasis of the tradition focuses on developing a close working relationship with trees and plant essences for healing, divination, and guidance. Students at all years of study move through two types of lesson cycles: the Sacred Tree Cycle and the Grail Cycle, explained shortly.

The Path of the 9 Sacred Trees is a shamanic-based tradition that seeks to reexamine contemporary Druidic concepts within a strict ecocentric ethical and theosophical framework.



The program is structured upon the premise that *Awen* (pronounced Ah-Oh-En) is not only the creative force (Three Rays) that is received (Menw's "awakening"), but follows a more precise spiral of emergence–reception–consciousness–generation–dissipation–reemergence as symbolized by the Great Heartbeat of the Pillar tradition<sup>1</sup>.

The presence of *Awen* may be awakened for individuals through both deep self-study coupled with immersion in the energy of the 9 sacred trees (Ash, Ivy, Rowan, Willow, Holly, Yew, Gorse, Heather, and Aspen) coupled with 22 additional minor trees. Students actively learn about the physical, aromatic, and energetic healing properties of these trees as well as develop relationships with trees in their own locales to facilitate knowledge and shamanistic journey work. Students work through each degree of study (Bard, Ovate, and Druid) through 9 Sacred Tree lessons

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<sup>1</sup> For those already familiar with contemporary Druidism, this tradition does not follow the three circles of manifestation—whereby individuals move through incarnations beginning as a single-celled organism and reaching success as a human. This is an anthropocentric view that holds nonhuman animals as *less* than humans and is not only inconsistent with our contemporary understanding of the lives of nonhuman animals, but is inconsistent with any nature-based tradition that holds nature as sacred. In this path *all* living organisms are equal in value and importance and equally evolved and ensouled. This tradition holds a different perspective of the soul's development that is much more complex than linear time.

coupled with movement through a Grail Cycle (Earth [Nature/Physical/Body], Solar [Ephemeral–Spirit/Solar Holidays], and Lunar [Self/Lunar Rites]).

At the Bardic level of study—the Earth or Grounding Level—students focus on learning the foundations of shamanistic/druidic ritual, form an active relationship with trees in their area, begin activities to directly increase their emotional and intellectual knowledge of the natural world around them, as well as engage in creative activities that celebrate the natural world (prose and poetic writing, exploring nature writing and pastoral/romantic poetry; music for those who have this knowledge; and other artistic forms of expression). In addition to creative work, students develop critical self-examination skills; learn the basics of Ogham divination; and begin work with plant essences for healing. Finally, students will read a variety of texts that explore Celtic myths of Ireland and Wales coupled with exposure and exploration of several critical triads that serve to illuminate the ethics and theosophical systems of this tradition.

At the Ovate level of study—or the Sun Level—students begin work that specifically examines and develops skills associated with divination, healing, as well as dig more deeply into ecocentric ethics and theosophical concepts. Students continue their relationships with their surrounding natural ecosystem and expand upon their growing expression of *Awen*. Students also begin to actively engage in shamanistic journey work and to more deeply examine myths and triads.

Finally, at the Druidic level, students transition into elders and take on leadership and mentoring positions. While, they continue to expand on their knowledge from the prior two years of study, they focus their attention on issues of leadership, counseling, and teaching. At this level of study, students examine the mystical cycles of death and dissipation and the mysteries of moments of transition. Students explore myths related cauldrons of transformation, shapeshifting, magick, and seeing outside of linear time. At this stage, students spend equal time on pragmatic skills as they do on refining and expanding their mystical capacities and becoming a full-fledged shaman. This is a rigorous process of study and exploration as students move through 31 Sacred Tree lessons prior to taking their final degree.

Those interested in applying for the Path of the 9 Sacred Trees program may apply online at <http://www.OceanSeminaryCollege.org/Admissions.html> or may email Dr. Katherine MacDowell for further information: [oceanseminary@verizon.net](mailto:oceanseminary@verizon.net). Students admitted are required to complete their Pillar Constellation. Once this is reviewed, students may elect to begin formal study. Students studying the Path of the 9 Sacred Trees program may elect to obtain a degree from any other program at Ocean Seminary as well as pursue another initiatory program. Additionally students may withdraw from the program at any time for any reason. Students may additionally study this tradition as it merges within three additional initiatory paths: The Path of the 9 Sacred Pillars (contemporary shamanic path); Womyn’s Wheel (a Goddess-based, women-only path); and the Pillar Seiðr (Norse, women-only shamanic path).

About Dr. Katherine MacDowell. Dr. MacDowell holds a masters degree in Counseling Psychology and is presently completing her doctorate in Health Psychology. Additionally, she holds two theology doctorates and has studied the initiatory path of Dianic Witchcraft with Z. Budapest and eclectic Wicca with High Priestess Lady Raven Moonshadow. She is the founder of the path of the 9 Sacred Pillars and has been practicing this tradition for more than 25 years. She is also a professional writer and produced, award-winning playwright and composer. She is the president of Ocean Seminary College and has been teaching adult learners for more than 8 years. In addition to her theological work, she has worked as a professional psychotherapist and addictions counselor for more than 10 years.

She is the author of *Sacred Groves, Ethics & Professional Practice for Neopagan Clergy*, and *Introduction to the Path of the 9 Sacred Pillars*, which are slated for publication in Summer 2009. Her research on the psychological and health effects of Eminent Domain is currently in revision for publication.