

Druidism Here and Now
By Linda Costello

When I first began following a Druid path, I lived in New England. The cycles of the seasons were very much in sync with the common understandings of the cycles of the year celebrated by the ancient Druids. New England's climate is very similar to that of Ireland in many ways.

When I moved to Phoenix, Arizona in 1996, I was confronted with a conundrum of how to practice my spiritual path in this new environment. Although I no longer had the stereotypical seasonal changes of New England, I began to notice subtle differences which marked the changing of the seasons in Phoenix.

For example, in the spring, although one first notices that it is already getting uncomfortably hot, one also notices the swelling buds and subsequent blooms on the cacti. Within the beauty of those desert blooms, one becomes aware of the heightened energy of this time of year. Although we don't have much in the way of frost in the winter, the earth can feel the intensification of the sun as it sends its direct rays down upon the dry desert flora, and responds in its own answer of fecundity.

In the summer, when New England is at its greenest, with an abundance of richness, of fruits ripening, of flowers bursting forth in a myriad of colors, of mild days and late sunsets, Phoenix is just preparing for a long, hot summer. The air hangs heavily with moisture, an unusual phenomenon in the desert, and all of the natural world awaits the coming of the monsoon season – the one time of year when Phoenix gets most of its rainfall. The temperatures soar to uncomfortable levels, and people seek out any shade they can find, rather than subject themselves to the intensity of the direct summer sun. Summers are endured, as we all eagerly await the autumn, when we again will feel a hint of coolness in the night air.

When autumn finally comes, we notice the air has changed at night, with just the barest breath of coolness outliving dawn. It's not yet time to wear jackets, as the days are still quite warm. But we feel a change inside. We feel the transition as the season changes from the oppressive summer heat to the milder peace of winter.

Finally, it cools down during the day, and the autumn flowers begin to bloom – the lantana and the bougainvillea grow profusely, chrysanthemums and marigolds that had been planted the year before return in a brilliant display of color and enthusiasm – a great cheer raised for the end of the summer heat.

In the southwest, the world comes alive as autumn turns to winter. Outdoor activities become the norm. Chances of rain are few, so folks focus their lives outside for as long as they can. Barbecues, the last of the swimming season, hikes, games of tennis, are all common at this time of year.

When winter finally arrives, there is no doubt that one needs to have a jacket available, especially after the sun sets. People may begin turning on their heat around Thanksgiving, to get that morning chill out of the air when they first arise from sleep.

And yet, with the coolness of the season comes a cool awareness, an ability to reflect, which once again relates to the turning inward at the dark time of the year, often characterized in New England, and in Ireland, as a time of staying indoors and contemplating one's life.

It is apparent to me that, although the seasons manifest in different ways depending upon location, the energies, themselves, remain the same. The expressions of those energies look very different, but in actuality, the energy reflects similar themes.

In days of yore, the Druids were those who went to consult their sources (whatever their sources might be), to determine the course of their days, and more especially, how they would relate to those days in ritual, piety, and hospitality. They knew the workings of their world. They were cognizant and aware of how they would proceed amidst the seasonal cycles.

In current times, I believe that the Druids are to live in the world where they are at, as they find it, and go from there. It is not our role to recreate the world of ancient Ireland in Phoenix, Arizona. It is our responsibility to create anew the awarenesses and energies as we find them in our immediate environment and to work with those findings with the same integrity, the same piety, the same understandings as our forebears did in their time. Our rituals reflect THIS world, and our participants derive meaning from how our environment informs us.

It is our mission, our legacy, to use the principles of the past to make the most of our present and to let that carry us into the future.

I am a Druid, and I live wholly and enthusiastically in these times and on this earth. I embrace the subtle changing of the seasons in the desert. I celebrate the cycles of life I find around me. I offer these gifts of awareness to others, that their lives can be more meaningful, more in harmony with the world as we find it.