

WRITING THROUGH THE CHANGES

As we move through September, we continue Stoking Our Internal Fire in preparation for Vinotok with journaling prompts, readings and meditations offered each week until the Autumn Equinox.

WEEK 2: BALANCE & RECIPROCITY

Finding your place: Take this opportunity to unplug from technology. Get a special notebook or journal to write in, and a pen to write with. Leave your cell phone at home. Reserve a chunk of time so you can be contemplative and slow. Walk out to a spot in nature in an easy saunter, as far as you can go in the time you've allotted. Find a tree to lean against, a rock to sit on, a stream to sit by, a meadow to sit in. Take a deep breath, settle in.

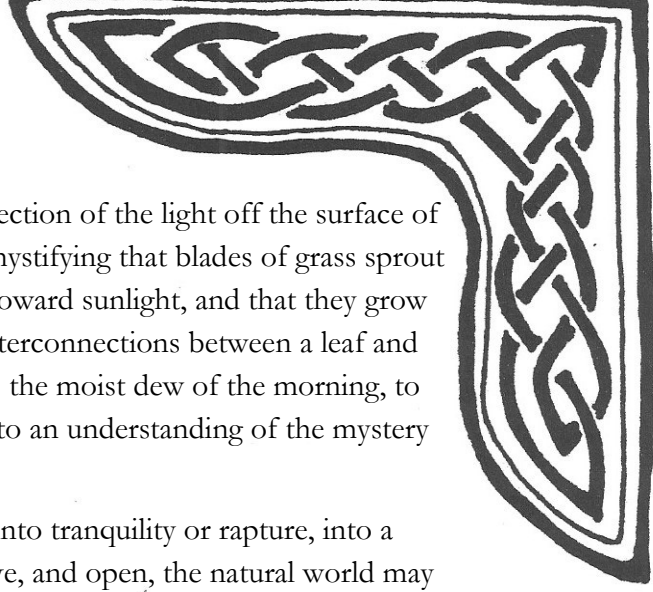
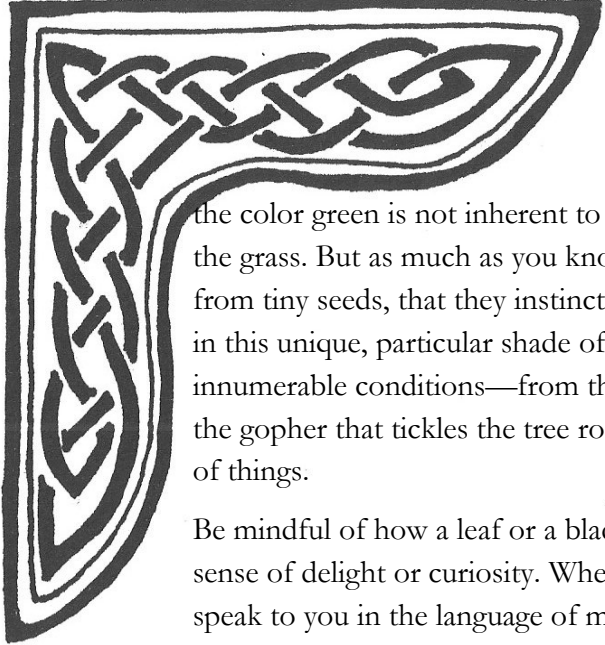
Meditation

Contemplating Mystery: Opening to mystery is like throwing a fishing line into the vast ocean and waiting patiently. You develop the qualities of receptivity, waiting and listening to what may speak to you or touch your heart in spontaneous, sacred moments.

Settle in to your spot, and listen to the silence of the landscape and the stillness of the trees and rocks all about you. Begin to turn your attention toward what evokes a sense of mystery. Try not to look for anything particular to happen, as this is not a results-focused exercise. Penetrating into the mystery cannot be forced or willed to happen. Turn toward the unknown rather than the known, and contemplate silence itself. Let the thinking, rational mind quiet, as you learn to listen not from your mind but rather from your heart and intuition. Try to drop the labels, descriptions, and evaluations of the life around you, and simply be, resting in awareness.

Choose anything you encounter in nature as the focus of your contemplation, through preferably it will be something that will stay around long enough for you to dwell upon it. For example, you may want to choose an old tree, a stream, or a leaf from a plant. Once you've chosen the object of your attention, engage all of your senses so it comes alive for you. As you look long and deep enough at this leaf or rock or tree, you may begin to sense beneath the surface appearance, beyond your ideas and views about it. Rest as deeply in the present as possible, without any agenda regarding what should happen.

Even in something as minute as a blade of grass, you can sense or touch the mysteriousness of life. You may know how plants germinate, grow, and photosynthesize or that



the color green is not inherent to the grass but is only a reflection of the light off the surface of the grass. But as much as you know intellectually, it is still mystifying that blades of grass sprout from tiny seeds, that they instinctually know how to reach toward sunlight, and that they grow in this unique, particular shade of green. Sensing into the interconnections between a leaf and innumerable conditions—from the sun burning in space, to the moist dew of the morning, to the gopher that tickles the tree roots—may take you closer to an understanding of the mystery of things.

Be mindful of how a leaf or a blade of grass can invite you into tranquility or rapture, into a sense of delight or curiosity. When you are present, receptive, and open, the natural world may speak to you in the language of mystery and wonder. You may feel that communication as a sense of silence, stillness, or breathtaking wonder. This dimension of mystery or awe can take you to a place beyond language, that is nearly impossible to articulate and is best left silent. Yet such moments can uplift our heart and make our spirit soar and sing. As we engage more and more in extended periods of silence, stillness, and quiet contemplation of nature, the mysteries of life and the universe will continue to reveal themselves to us.

- Adapted from *Awake in the Wild* by Mark Coleman

Prompts

Finding your voice: *As you respond to the prompts following the meditation, don't worry about grammar, punctuation or writing rules—just let it flow. Write thoughts as they come to you, without any editing or judgement. Take time to stare at the clouds, the water moving by, the leaves in the breeze. Ponder. Consider. Contemplate. For these kinds of prompts, it is best to write until you have no more to say about the matter.*

About the Wastelands: The Wastelands appear as a concept in ancient Celtic mythology as a consequence from lack of respect and relationship for and with the Earth and her gifts. We must seek **balance** and **reciprocity** with our natural world, where what we give back to the Earth, is as equal to or greater than, what we take. Part of regaining balance and practicing reciprocity with our natural world, is **healing** and **nourishing** the wounded places we have created in the land – these Wastelands. Similarly, we can have internal Wastelands—places that have been made devoid of our life energy by feeding ourselves with things that do not serve our greatest purpose. Globally and nationally we are living in an age of the Wastelands. From climate change to the pandemic, from racial injustice to political ineptitude, this social and environmental barrenness rises from a culture of neglect and imbalance. We are here to change this paradigm.

Finding Balance: What is out of balance in your life? What are your own internal Wastelands? What is draining you of your energy, and should be left behind? What needs to be swept away? And then, what feeds you, and you need to bring in more of in your life? What feels like it might be holding you back from living your best life? What might you be able to improve to magnify your life's energy? What should you be walking more toward?

Naming the Wasteland: Where do the Wastelands exist in your home place? What has made them that way – both logistically as well as culturally or ideologically. What is your relationship to these places? What could it be? What are your underlying feelings about these Wastelands, your emotions. What does your soul have to say about

all this? Your inner scientist? Your own inner reluctant or outer warrior? What voice can you lend to the Wastelands? What is your calling, your purpose here, your modality here? What actions can you specifically take to heal the Wastelands in your home place?

Moving Forward: Considering your own personal, internal Wastelands, what physical, real steps can you take to bringing balance back into your life? Then, considering the external Wastelands in your home place, what organizations or efforts can you become engaged in to help heal those places physically, emotionally and spiritually? How can you lend your talents, aptitudes, expertise and best life energy to healing the Wastelands? What might the Wastelands need from you, especially you?

Practices

1. Either by visiting the Maiden altar at the Dogwood in Crested Butte, or by downloading the Blessing & Beckoning activity on the Maiden's page on www.vinotok.org, make your own prayer flag beckoning more into your life and home place that is good and nourishing.
2. Either by visiting the Knight altar at the top of Elk in Crested Butte, or by downloading the Rune activity sheet on www.vinotok.org draw a rune for this Autumn Equinox season. Consider and journal about how the message of this rune might deepen your understanding of what needs balance in your internal and external Wastelands.
3. Make some physical calls to organizations and causes that could use your particular talents or who are engaged in repairing and restoring Wastelands in your home place. Contribute to their cause or find out how you can become actively involved.
4. Clean your house. Sweeping deep into the corners, getting all the muck and residue not only of dust and dirt but of old resentments, angers and wounds can be energetically freeing. Rid yourself of the grunge of yesterday, to make space for new, more positive, more enlivening energy to live in your house.

Suggested Reading

If Women Rose Rooted by Sharon Blackie explores tapping into our own personal and ancestral mythologies to help us connect to place and rise up as active participants in taking care of our homeplace. In its chapters, you'll find mythology and exploration of the concept of the Wastelands—and healing them.

*For more on Vinotok's
Stoking the Internal Fire practices visit
www.vinotok.org*



*For more on author & educator
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www.mollymurfee.com*