

SageWoman

Celebrating the Goddess in Every Woman



Serenity

Peace Like a River · Dreams of a Garden
Finding My Brave Heart · Tara: Star of Liberation
Sacred Seclusion · Serenity in the Fast Lane

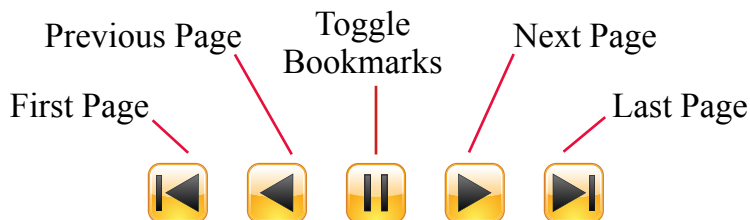


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It's a Friday, my one day off a week. Being both employed *and* self-employed, these moments are rare and precious. My husband has just left to go to work for the day, and the house is silent. I take a deep breath, feeling my relaxed body lying in the bed, the sound of birdsong floating in through the open window.

I get up, and head downstairs for a cup of herbal tea and some toast. I sit in the conservatory with my breakfast, looking out at my beautiful garden, with its array of flowers that bloom throughout the year, the old beech tree in the corner, the pond sitting silent at the bottom. I have no idea what the time is — I haven't put on a watch. I don't plan to either.

Today is my day. A day all to myself, without distraction or intrusion from the outside world, inasmuch as possible. This means no television, no internet, no phone calls, no radio. Just me, my home, my cats and maybe a book or two. I will spend some time tidying the house, cleaning dishes and bathrooms and floors, lighting incense and filling my home with its beautiful fragrant smell. I will write in my journal, I will sit outside and watch the clouds and birds overhead, the leaves moving in the wind, feeling the grass beneath my bare feet. I will sing to the sun as it sets, and offer prayers as I watch the moonrise. Very few other words will physically be spoken, until my husband returns home. I will eat when I'm hungry, and sleep when I'm tired. I will utterly let go and simply be.

My need for retreat is all-encompassing. Without it, I would probably go mad, frazzled and frayed around the edges. The seasons would pass by unnoticed, especially the busy summer months. This requires dedication, determination, and a willingness to spend time with myself. I treasure these times, although at first it was hard. The lure of social media and seeing friends, the distractions from the self, are very hard to ignore. My one full day of retreat is bliss. However, there are times every day when I can do something similar. These keep me going until it's my day again.

We all need a place to retreat, to withdraw, regroup, and re-harness our energy, so we can come back into the world with renewed energy. Everyone is familiar with the summer holiday, or some time off in the bleak of midwinter. These are chances to lay aside the worries of work, and to get back in touch with yourself, your family, and what really matters. However, what if we managed to do that each and every day? Mini or micro-breaks, at least once a day, to reconnect those threads of the weave that we have dropped, to re-establish relationships and to fully honour the time that we are alive...

Every day is a chance to stop, to enter into ritual, to take a step back and simply savour the moment. We can become so out of tune with our own bodies, is it any wonder that other people often baffle us? By understanding our selves, we can better understand

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others, and so work to help others in a more positive and productive way.

So we create the micro-retreat. Once a day, we stop, and take a moment to watch the moon, or sit on a cushion and meditate, to attune to our sense of self. When we find that centre point, that sense of self, we can then let it go, and seek out the deeper connections that can be found when the self is released. We are all living on this planet together, and by dropping that sense of self we can release into the flow that in Druidry is known as *awen*, life and inspiration itself, flowing through space and time. It is a chance to connect with the earth, with deity, with everyone and everything on the planet, instead of just your own sense of self. How wonderful is that?

BY JOANNA VAN DER HOEVEN
ORIGINAL ARTWORK BY
TANYA STEWART

R*eweaving*
TAKE A MOMENT TO
MEND THE TAPESTRY
OF YOUR LIFE.

I do not underestimate the significance of focusing on the self in order to improve one's life: change must come from within. However, there is so much more to the world than the little universe we create around our sense of self: a brilliant world full of myriad possibilities. Take for instance the ability to shape-change: we must first be able to drop our sense of self in order to take wing as the marsh harrier, or stalk a pheasant through the underbrush like a fox. On a broader level, we can simply place our hands on the Earth and feel all of life humming from this planet, but first we must silence the chattering self within in order to listen and to hear it fully with an open heart.

To be able to open ourselves up to the grander scheme of things, we must find a place where we are held, where it is easy for us to open up our *nemeton* (that space around you in which only those with whom you are most intimate are allowed) and let go into the unknown. Creation of a sacred space is key for some: whether we physically create a space or whether we simply expand our own *nemeton* to that which we would connect, with honour and respect. We must first know where our edges are before we can release them and step over them into the unknown.

In Zen, it is acknowledged that the sense of self is an illusion: the self is made up of the opinions and experiences that resonate the most strongly within us, that we wish to cultivate, or which touch us on such a deep soul level. Yet these are all attachments, to which we must release in order to fully connect with the world at large. In the Ten Bulls (A Zen Buddhist story/document), the seeker finally does manage to let go, to become one with everything, but more importantly, they then take that back into the world and work in the world with that knowledge. Releasing into the void in order to connect fully takes great courage and skill. Yet it is so simple that it feels, paradoxically, impossible.

This is where discipline is key. We must make the time if we truly do want to do this. We must want it with all our heart and soul. In Zen, there is a saying that you must want it as much as a man whose head is held under water wants air. If you want it that much, you will make the time.

Stepping away from the loudness and hectic pace of our modern lives, we can find the time to simply "be." We aren't human beings most of the time; we are human doings. We must relearn that art of simply being which can then connect us to everything else. Once we simple "are," then that sense of self fades away and the

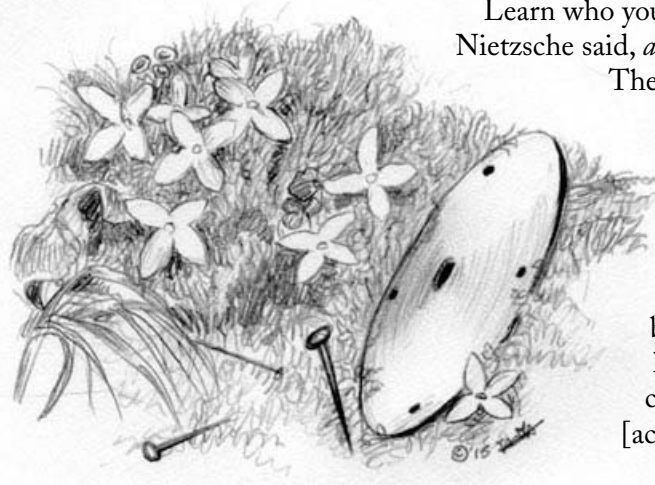
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multitudes of *awen* around us are allowed to flow into and around us – we hear what in Druidry is known as "the song."

Take a micro-retreat, once a day, or several times a day, once a week or once month. Watch the sun rise and the sun set, and let go into that experience. Work at it until you can do it for a full day. The world is so much larger than you – why not experience it wholly and with reverence and honour? Weaving those dropped threads, you will become an integral part of the

tapestry of life once again, and not just a loose thread dangling in the wind. Not going with the flow, but being the flow itself.

Learn who you are again. *Face the abyss*, as Nietzsche said, *and the abyss stares back at you.* There is nothing quite like it. ©



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