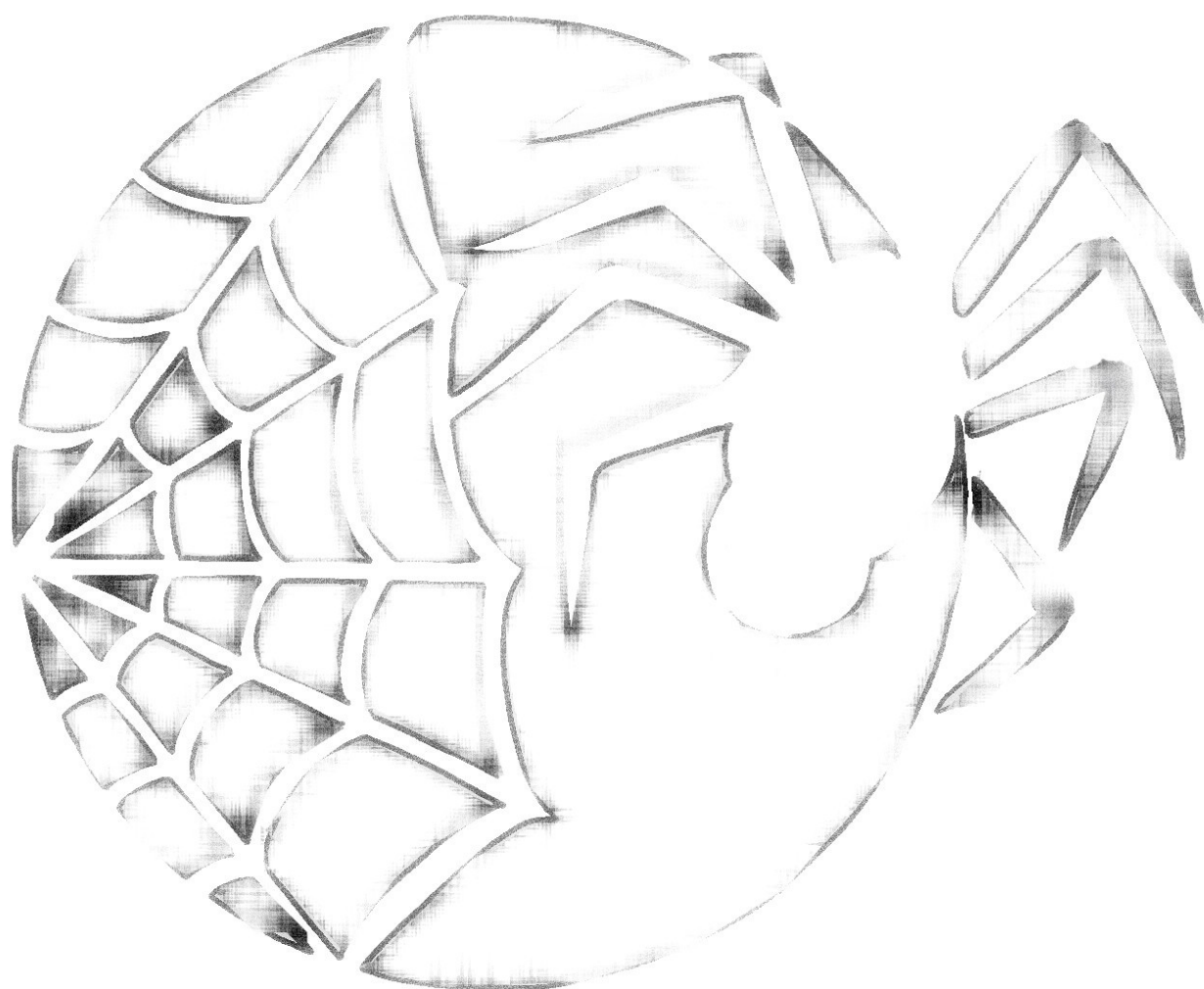


SPIDERS AS SPIRITUAL GUIDES



BY DRUID DONAGH MACBRAN



CALEDONIA'S DRUIDRY

SUPPLEMENTARY GWERS

"For as long as one hundred of us shall remain alive, we shall never in any wise consent submit to the rule of the English, for it is not for glory we fight, nor riches, or for honour, but for freedom alone, which no good man loses but with his life."

Quote Robert the Bruce King of Scotland (11 July 1274 – 7 June 1329)

Dear Student,

Spiders speak to the imagination. Some people seem to be afraid of them. The Gwers you have here will show you that the Spider is also a spiritual teacher and that there is no need in fearing them.

May the Spider guide you through your life.

An Gheal Beanaicht! (A very Bright Blessing!),

Druid Donagh MacBran /\

Spiders in Druidry:

As we all know, Druidry is a spiritual path based in Nature. The knowledge we have can be found everywhere. In Druidry, the Spider represents The Bard, the Ovate and the Druid. As a Bard it produces works of art as depicted in the many kinds of webs it can produce. As an Ovate seer to determine the best spot for the web or hide-out for the hunt. And the lessons the animal teaches us shows us the Druid side of Spider lore or as some call it, Spider Medicine.

The Spider is the guardian of the ancient languages and alphabets. Every society has had myths about how the different languages and alphabets were formed. One example is the Ogham. The Ogham can be found in the web of a Spider. This is why the Spider is considered the teacher of language and the magic of writing. Those who weave magic with the written word probably have a Spider as a guide.

I have found that we can learn much more from the webs and their makers, the Spider. According to Scottish Legend, King Robert the Bruce of Scotland, hid in a cave where he saw a persistent Spider weaving her web.

The story about Robert the Bruce, the cave and the Spider is well known to all English or Scottish school pupils. However, outside the Isles it may not be this well known, so here is the story.

King Robert the Bruce I was born at Lochmaben Castle in 1274. He was Knight and Overlord of Annandale. In 1306 he was crowned King of Scotland and henceforth tried to free Scotland from the English enemy.

After being defeated at a battle, Bruce escaped and found a hideout in a cave. Hiding in a cave for three months, Bruce was at the lowest point of his life. He thought about leaving the country and never coming back.

While waiting, he watched a Spider building a web in the cave's entrance. The Spider fell down time after time, but finally he succeeded with his web. So Bruce decided also to retry his fight and told his men: "If at first you don't succeed, try try and try again".

Old legend as told on: <http://www.showcaves.com/english/explain/History/Bruce.html>

The lesson the spider is teaching here is persistence. King Robert the Bruce of Scotland and his army had this strong persistence and determination until they finally beat the English at the Battle of Bannockburn. And this is an important yet simple thing a Spider can teach us.

The Spider as an animal is a spiritual teacher in its own right. For example the Spider's web is a constant reminder of the eight festivals. This is easily seen in the wheel webs some Spiders weave. The strands of the web, like the spokes of a wheel are straight from the edge to the middle and do form the eight fold wheel. That same web also shows the pentagram and the levels of spirituality known in Druidry as: Annwn, Abred, Gwynvyd and Keugant.

The Spider is The Bard, the Ovate and the Druid rolled into one. Let's take a look at the lessons from the Druid Spider by contemplating its web.

Seeing the Spider weaving a web, it signals to us that we must weave our own lives. The Spider as a guide (or totem, familiar, etc...) serves as a reminder that our choices construct our lives. When the Spider appears to us, it is a message to be mindful of the choices we are making. Then ask yourself:

How are my choices affecting my life?

How can my choices improve my life?

How are my choices affecting others in my life?

Spiders and their webs draw attention to our life choices, but that is not all. They also show us how we can manipulate our thinking so we can construct the life we want to live.

Spiders make us aware to the amazing construction of their webs. They are fully functional, practical, and perfect in design. Spider webs serve as homes, food storage, egg incubators and are almost limitless in their functionality. When we take a good look at this diversity, we can also look at the web-like construct of our own lives. How do we get the most effective life?

We can derive even more Spider symbol meaning when we consider certain subtle characteristics that represent ancient symbols of infinity. When we take a look at the Spider itself and consider most Spiders have eight eyes and all have eight legs, we can see that the Spider also shows the meaning of the number eight, which involves cycles, passage of time, evolution and as mentioned before the eight fold path of the year.

Spiders are also found to be connected to Halloween or Samhain. This is because Spiders are related to death because of the venom they carry. This venom is of course also used as basis for the antidote, connecting the Spider both to death and rebirth and thus she stands for the completion of the circle.

The Spider teaches us to maintain a balance - between past and future, physical and spiritual, male and female. The Spider also teaches us that everything we now do is weaving what we will encounter in the future. In the tarot deck is a card - The Wheel of Fortune. This is a card that has to do with rhythms - the rise and fall, the flow and flux. It is linked to the energies of honour and fame, and the sensitivities necessary to place ourselves within the rhythm of Nature. Meditation upon this card would be beneficial for anyone with the Spider as a guide.

The Spider, because of its characteristics, has come to be associated with magic and energy of creation. It is a symbol of creative power, reflected in its ability to spin a silken web. It is also associated with keeping the feminine energies of creation alive and strong. This has ties to the characteristics of some Spiders, i.e. the female black widow, which will kill and eat the male after mating has exhausted it.

The Spider is also associated with its spiral energy, the links with the past and the future. The spiral of the web, converging at a central point, is something to be meditated upon by those with Spiders as a guide. Are you moving toward a central goal or are you scattered and going in multiple directions? Is everything staying focused? Are you becoming too involved and/or self-absorbed? Are you focusing on others' accomplishments and not on your own? Are you developing resentment because of it - for yourself or them?

If a Spider is a guide in your life, ask yourself some important questions. Are you weaving your dreams and imaginings into reality? Are you using your creative opportunities? Are you feeling closed in or stuck as if in a web? Do you need to pay attention to your balance and where you are walking in life? Are others out of balance around you? Do you need to write? Are you inspired to write or draw and not following through? Remember that the Spider is the keeper of knowledge and of the primordial alphabet. The Spider can teach how to use the written language with power and creativity so that your words weave a web around those who would read them.

Spiders in Druidry are linked with the Goddess, some Gods, the wheel of the year, spinning, weaving, each individual human, the world, creations and creation.

Spiders in other cultures:

Spiders are very delicate creatures that play an important role in the myths and lore of many peoples as the teacher of balance between the past and future, the physical and spiritual. To the Native Americans, Spider is Grandmother, the link to the past and future. In India, its associated with Maya, the weaver of illusions. With its gentle strength, Spider spins together the threads of life with intricate webs. Spider knows the past affects the future and visa versa. It calls us to make use of our creativity and weave our dreams into our destiny. If you want to make a deeper connection with your Animal Totem, fill your environment with images of the animal to let the animal know it is welcome in your space.

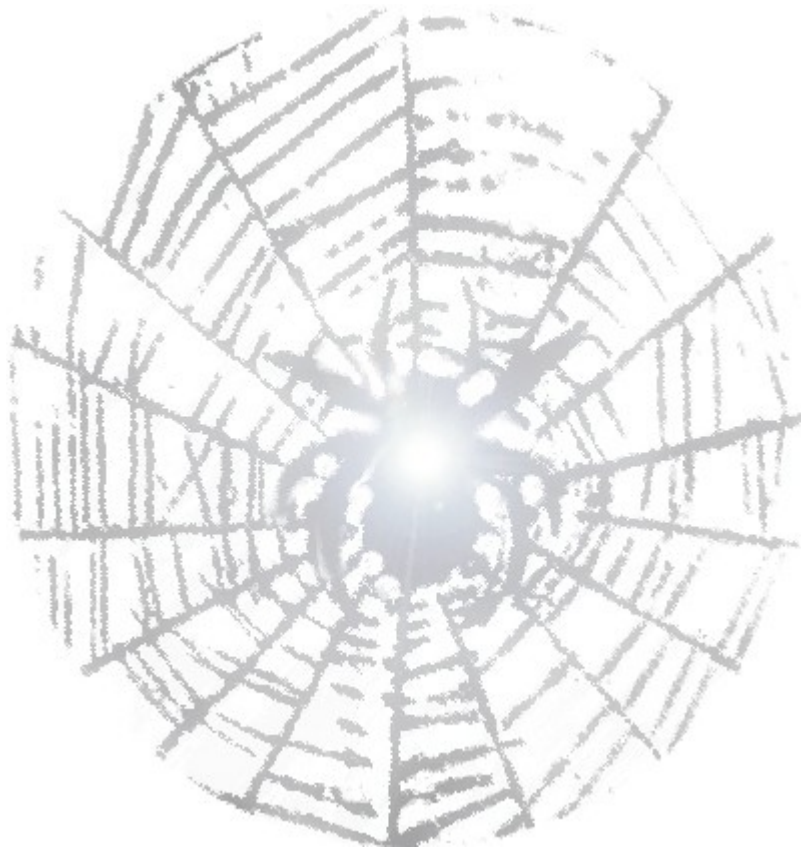
Among the various Native American traditions, spider medicine has been known to represent creativity. Her eight legs represent the four winds of change and the four directions on the medicine wheel, while her body is in the shape of the infinity symbol, which represents infinite possibilities. Spider was said to have woven the alphabet, creating the means for people to communicate and record their history through language. Just like the Greek myth of the Fates, three women who weave the tapestry of life, spiders are said to weave the creative forces that bring forth the intricately symmetrical patterns of our lives.

Of course I must not forget the Greek myth of the maiden Arachne and the Goddess Athena. In the myth, Arachne claimed that she was a better weaver than the Goddess Athena. After winning from Athena, she was turned into a Spider and she and her offspring became the best weavers in existence. Nor must I forget to mention the West African and Caribbean trickster spirit Anansi, also known as Ananse, Kwaku Ananse, and Anancy whose story is like the tricksters Coyote, Raven or Iktomi found in many Native American cultures and Loki found in Norse mythology. Anansi literally means spider. These tales show spider teaching skill and wisdom in speech, slave resistance and survival as well as teaching mankind the techniques of agriculture and so we see again a kinship in spider's lessons reaching many cultures in a profound way.

PRACTICUM

This practicum is designed to get to know the spider a little better. Perform this while in your Sacred Grove after performing your Light Body exercise or in a state of meditation or visualisation.

In your mind, you see an open place with one exit. From that exit, you see a small garden Spider approaching. You follow the Spider and you see that she walks to a tree. In that tree she starts to weave a web blocking the exit. The spider weaves her web so steadily that it fascinates you and soon you realise that the weaving itself is a meditation. With that weaving you imagine her as a creator weaving the whole universe and you also imagine her as a dream catcher weaving the net to manifest our deepest desires. When the Spider is finished weaving, she sits in the middle of the web and she starts her teaching to you. She ends her teachings by telling you that she weaves a new web every day. She tells you that she takes down the web when it is ruined and begins again every day and she never has to think about it, she just spins her web with great care. After giving her lessons to you, she takes down her web blocking the exit and leaves. By doing so she is signalling that it is time to end your meditation or visualisation.



EISTEDDFOD

Grandmother Spider Steals the Fire. A Mississippi Choctaw Legend.

The Choctaw People say that when the People first came up out of the ground, People were encased in cocoons, their eyes closed, their limbs folded tightly to their bodies. And this was true of all People, the Bird People, the Animal People, the Insect People, and the Human People. The Great Spirit took pity on them and sent down someone to unfold their limbs, dry them off, and open their eyes. But the opened eyes saw nothing, because the world was dark, no sun, no moon, not even any stars. All the People moved around by touch, and if they found something that didn't eat them first, they ate it raw, for they had no fire to cook it.

All the People met in a great powwow, with the Animal and Bird People taking the lead, and the Human People hanging back. The Animal and Bird People decided that life was not good, but cold and miserable. A solution must be found! Someone spoke from the dark,

"I have heard that the people in the East have fire." This caused a stir of wonder, "What could fire be?" There was a general discussion, and it was decided that if, as rumour had it, fire was warm and gave light, they should have it too. Another voice said, "But the people of the East are too greedy to share with us," So it was decided that the Bird and Animal People should steal what they needed, the fire!

But, who should have the honour? Grandmother Spider volunteered, "I can do it! Let me try!" But at the same time, Opossum began to speak. "I, Opossum, am a great chief of the animals. I will go to the East and since I am a great hunter, I will take the fire and hide it in the bushy hair on my tail." It was well known that Opossum had the furriest tail of all the animals, so he was selected.

When Opossum came to the East, he soon found the beautiful, red fire, jealously guarded by the people of the East. But Opossum got closer and closer until he picked up a small piece of burning wood, and stuck it in the hair of his tail, which promptly began to smoke, then flame. The people of the East said, "Look, that Opossum has stolen our fire!" They took it and put it back where it came from and drove Opossum away. Poor Opossum! Every bit of hair had burned from his tail, and to this day, opossums have no hair at all on their tails.

Once again, the powwow had to find a volunteer chief. Grandmother Spider again said, "Let me go! I can do it!" But this time a bird was elected, Buzzard. Buzzard was very proud. "I can succeed where Opossum has failed. I will fly to the East on my great wings, and then hide the stolen fire in the beautiful long feathers on my head." The birds and animals still did not understand the nature of fire. So Buzzard flew to the East on his powerful wings, swooped past those defending the fire, picked up a small piece of burning ember, and hid it in his head feathers. Buzzard's head began to smoke and flame even faster! The people of the East said, "Look! Buzzard has stolen the fire!" And they took it and put it back where it came from.

Poor Buzzard! His head was now bare of feathers, red and blistered looking. And to this day, buzzards have naked heads that are bright red and blistered.

The powwow now sent Crow to look the situation over, for Crow was very clever. Crow at that time was pure white, and had the sweetest singing voice of all the birds. But he took so long standing over the fire, trying to find the perfect piece to steal that his white feathers were smoked black. And he breathed so much smoke that when he tried to sing, out came a harsh, "Caw! Caw!"

The Council said, "Opossum has failed. Buzzard and Crow have failed. Who shall we send?"

Tiny Grandmother Spider shouted with all her might, "LET ME TRY IT PLEASE!" Though the council members thought Grandmother Spider had little chance of success, it was agreed that she should have her turn. Grandmother Spider looked then like she looks now, she had a small torso suspended by two sets of legs that turned the other way. She walked on all of her wonderful legs toward a stream where she had found clay. With those legs, she made a tiny clay container and a lid that fit perfectly with a tiny notch for air in the corner of the lid. Then she put the container on her back, spun a web all the way to the East, and walked tiptoe until she came to the fire. She was so small, the people from the East took no notice. She took a tiny piece of fire, put it in the container, and covered it with the lid. Then she walked back on tiptoe along the web until she came to the People. Since they couldn't see any fire, they said, "Grandmother Spider has failed."

"Oh no," she said, "I have the fire!" She lifted the pot from her back, and the lid from the pot, and the fire flamed up into its friend, the air. All the Birds and Animal People began to decide who would get this wonderful warmth. Bear said, "I'll take it!" but then he burned his paws on it and decided fire was not for animals, for look what happened to Opossum!

The Birds wanted no part of it, as Buzzard and Crow were still nursing their wounds. The insects thought it was pretty, but they, too, stayed far away from the fire.

Then a small voice said, "We will take it, if Grandmother Spider will help." The timid humans, whom none of the animals or birds thought much of, were volunteering!

So Grandmother Spider taught the Human People how to feed the fire sticks and wood to keep it from dying, how to keep the fire safe in a circle of stone so it couldn't escape and hurt them or their homes. While she was at it, she taught the humans about pottery made of clay and fire, and about weaving and spinning, at which Grandmother Spider was an expert.

The Choctaw remember. They made a beautiful design to decorate their homes, a picture of Grandmother Spider, two sets of legs up, two down, with a fire symbol on her back. This is so their children never forget to honour Grandmother Spider, Fire bringer!

Author unknown. Story found on:

http://www.turtletrack.org/Issues01/Co11032001/CO_11032001_Grandmother_Spider.htm

Dennis Hazenbroek was born in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. After joining the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD) in 2002, he was given the name Donagh for his Druid work. After receiving his certificate from the OBOD, he became Druid Donagh. He is able to perform the following tasks: rituals, counselling, workshops, meditation/visualisation and spiritual healing. Druid Donagh aims to be open for all, so therefore prices are negotiable per person or per case. To contact Druid Donagh please visit his website:

<http://druiddonagh.co.uk/>

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