

# Encounters in Nature

A photograph of three men sitting in front of a campfire in a wooded area. The man on the left is wearing glasses and a grey t-shirt. The man in the middle has long hair and is wearing a light-colored t-shirt with a graphic. The man on the right is wearing a dark hoodie. A bright campfire is burning in the center background, and a body of water is visible behind the trees.

**An Open-air Dialogue in the North Woods**  
with Celtic polytheist Drew Jacob, Vodou priest Urban Haas, and Humanistic Pagan B. T. Newberg

What does a Celtic polytheist, a Vodou priest, and a Humanistic Pagan have in common?

—Nature, of course.

Three very different traditions talk about the one thing everyone in the world has in common:

## the experience of *nature*

*Encounters in Nature: An Open-air Dialogue in the North Woods*

by B. T. Newberg  
with Urban Haas and Drew Jacob

copyright ©2011 by B. T. Newberg

photographs by B. T. Newberg, except where noted

cover design by B. T. Newberg

# Table of Contents

## Introduction

### **Section I. An Open-air Dialogue in the North Woods**

1. Sharing of Paths
2. Three Eyes on Nature
3. Story Time
4. Going Wild
5. Bringing It Home

### **Section II. Bonus Materials**

What is Humanistic Paganism?	B. T. NEWBERG
Oungan François	URBAN HAAS
The Heroic Life	DREW JACOB
A Review of Drew Jacob's <i>Walk Like a God</i>	B. T. NEWBERG



# Introduction

The three of us found each other around the coals of a crackling fire.

The interfaith dialogue that follows was recorded in the open air, under the stars, near a lakeshore in the North Woods of Minnesota. But the story begins earlier.

When I first met Drew Jacob, he was hobbling on a broken ankle that did not deter him in the least from a dream to walk a great distance on foot (more on that in a moment). Soon I learned he'd co-founded the Celtic polytheist [Old Belief Society](#), built [Temple of the River](#) with his own hands, and spent time as a hunter-gatherer. Clearly this was no ordinary guy.

Over the course of two years, Drew and I developed a creative partnership as we explored nature, spirit, and adventure. When I mentioned my grandparents had a cabin up in Ely, thirty-minutes from the nearest paved road, with a wood stove and no electricity, his eyes blazed. Shortly thereafter, I got an email saying another friend had been invited along. "You'll like him," Drew said. He wasn't wrong.

Enter Urban Haas. "Yes, my name really is Urban," he said. "Like the popes." Horses stamped as we approached his hobby farm in rural Minnesota. Conversation soon revealed that he shared the same spark that fired Drew and I. After encountering Vodou (popular spelling: "voodoo") in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, he chose to dedicate himself to the *Lwas*, or spirits.

It was going to be an interesting trip.

When you meet people with fire in their bellies, you know they are going places. They're not the kind to stick around long; they have dreams, goals. The moments you get to spend with them are as valuable as they are fleeting.

So, it is with both regret and admiration that I commend Drew on his recently-announced intention to [walk to South America](#). Yes, walk. No, I don't know how many miles that is - it's enough! But if anyone can do it, it's Drew. Urban and I will be rooting



for him as we follow his journey on his blog at [RoguePriest.net](http://RoguePriest.net).

I too will soon be on my way. My fiancée and I are headed to South Korea to teach English and explore Asia.

Urban will care for his horses here, but with a history of travel like his, there's no doubt he'll find himself in some other land soon enough, whether it's back to India or Belize or on to some new adventure.

The three of us, then - Drew, Urban, and I - are like sparks rising from a fire, whirling upward for a brief moment together in a column of smoke. Just before flying off on our separate ways.

It is for that reason especially that I knew I had to record our conversation at the cabin. I hope you find it as worthwhile as we did.

*Encounters in Nature* is a multimedia experience, incorporating audio, imagery, and text. You will get the most out of it if connected to the Internet, but away from a connection it has a satisfying quietness. All photographs were taken on site on our trip, except where noted, with a Canon IXY Digital. The audio was recorded using a Blue Yeti microphone on a Macbook. To listen to the conversation and the crackle of the fire, go to <http://humanisticpaganism.wordpress.com>, or find it as a podcast on [iTunes Store](#). To view the video, search [Youtube](#).

To make this ebook even more worthwhile, you'll find the conversation supplemented with full-color photographs and a variety of bonus materials. No reader should go away without knowing something about Vodou, how a person can be at once a Humanist and a Pagan, or what it means to live a Heroic Life.

Most of all, every reader will, I hope, recognize in these pages that one thing we all have in common: the experience of nature.

Here's to the meeting of spirits, burning of fires, and encounters in nature.

—B. T. Newberg

# Section I.

## An Open-air Dialogue in the North Woods

A Celtic polytheist, a Vodou priest, and a Humanistic Pagan walk into the woods...

To listen to each segment, click the links at the start of each section while connected to the Internet. Or, for the full-length, unedited conversation:

Listen [here](#)



# 1. Sharing of Paths





VIEW FROM DOCK AT THE CABIN

## Listen [here](#)

(chanting is heard)

B. T. Newberg: So, what were we listening to there, Drew?

Drew Jacob: That is a song of praise in Irish to the ancient Irish gods.

BTN: That was very beautiful, thank you.

So we're here tonight in the North Woods of MN not far from Ely. We have our guests here: Drew Jacob, author of [Rogue Priest](#) and the new ebook [Walk Like a God](#). We have Urban Haas, author of [Chasing the Asson](#). And I'm B. T. Newberg, editor of [Humanistic Paganism](#).

We are surrounded by birchwoods, with the crackle of the fire. We're in front of a lake that's still as glass, and above us it's a totally clear night with as many stars as you care to count. It's a really beautiful evening.

DJ: You guys are missing out. If you're listening to this right now on your computer, I highly recommend you throw that computer immediately in the garbage, and run outside to experience it. But if you don't, we'll do our best to bring it to you.

Urban Haas: I see a satellite passing overhead. Right around

eleven o'clock.

DJ: Shooting star, Urban! Shooting star!

UH: There was a shooting star.

BTN: And we're recording this with a Blue Yeti microphone on a Macbook.

So let's do this. Tonight we're talking about Encounters in Nature. Three very different traditions are coming together to have this conversation. So let's introduce ourselves. Shall we start with you, Drew?

DJ: Sure. I'm happy to. Drew Jacob, the Rogue Priest, author at [RoguePriest.net](http://RoguePriest.net). People often ask me, am I actually a priest? And the answer is yes, I am actually a priest, although not the kind most people think. When people hear the word priest in the United States they tend to think of a Catholic priest, which I'm not.

UH: Where's your collar?

DJ: Yeah, I know I always leave that at home!

But I couldn't actually be farther than that. I was trained in the *Sean creideamh*, which is the old belief of Ireland, the religion people practiced before the advent of Christianity, or at least as close as we can get to that now. That's the tradition that trained me, and that I've taught for many years, although my own personal spirituality is developing a little bit beyond that. Right about now what I practice is the Heroic Life - the idea of living gloriously, living for high ideals, and making a big impact on the world is the goal. That's the Heroic Life in a few quick words.

UH: Hello, everyone. The name is Urban Haas. I am an *Oungan* of Vodou (popular spelling "Voodoo"). Specifically I am an *Oungan Sur Pwenn*, which means I'm on point. It's kind of the start of the path of priesthood. I'm just initiated and ready to go on. I am actually scheduled in September to do *Asagwe*, which is the last step of initiation. At that point, everything will be complete. Now, I am a priest of New Orleans Vodou, compared to Haitian Vodou, which is slightly different - although a lot more similar than some think. And that's me.

BTN: And now, Urban, I don't know anything about Vodou, and sometimes when I think of Vodou I think of voodoo dolls, magic, gris gris, ju-ju... How does that compare with what you do?

UH: Well, you know, Vodou is a tough subject in the United States. It's got a lot of baggage with it, most of it from Hollywood. It's very sensationalized in the movies. Voodoo dolls are actually something we have nothing to do with. As far as ju-ju or magic or what some people might call Hoodoo--

DJ: He is sticking pins in a doll right now. You can't see it, but he is doing it.

UH: Just the microphone!

No, actually Vodou is very much a religion, and not a magical practice. It's not something that people do for ill gain, or for any ill reasons whatsoever. But actually we take a vow to heal and improve things. So it is very much a religion, not at all to do with zombies or any of those other things that have been very sensationalized. And in some ways it's a byproduct also of racism. Since it was a religion originally practiced by the slaves, a lot of people have a very negative connotation with it from those roots and that heritage. So there's a lot of racism either blatant or even passive surrounding the subject.

BTN: Interesting. Thank you for enlightening us on that.

And I am B. T. Newberg. I am a Pagan and a Humanist. And recently I have been putting those together, calling myself a Humanistic Pagan. And what I mean by that is someone who embraces the mythology and the spirit of a Pagan way of life inspired by Pre-Christian European traditions, including ritual, meditation, and myth, but taking a naturalistic view to that. The Humanism side comes in for me in two basic ways. This is totally simplifying Humanism, but the first is the naturalistic view. Another way to put that is "not supernatural." Everything is within the material realm of nature. And the other part is responsibility. Which I find in Humanism is distinguished from something like atheism insofar as there's a positive ethical component. Atheism is about what you don't believe in; Humanism is about how you are going to live your life. And that's in a way where humans are seen as capable of and responsible for meeting the problems and the challenges that we face in our lives and in the world and the environment, all of the challenges that face our species today.



DJ: I'd actually like to jump in there. I often get asked, am I Pagan? And since Brandon here is a Pagan, I will point out that I actually am not. Although people often consider the ancient Irish or ancient Celtic traditions part of the Pagan milieu, and certainly there is a lot of the Neopagan tradition nowadays that follows aspects of those traditions, the truth is that most of modern Paganism has very little in common with the religion that was practiced in ancient Europe, in terms of ceremony, in terms of many of the beliefs and practices.

UH: You're speaking of ritual and tradition?

DJ: Exactly. So what we do in my tradition is more based on what was done in the ancient world, and as such we don't consider ourselves part of that Pagan movement that's taking hold today. Although the Pagan religions are beautiful religions, it's sort of two different takes on the same gods, just like Muslims and Christians worship the same God but nonetheless they are two very different religions.

UH: So let me ask you this, since I have the two of you here, and one's obviously Pagan and one's saying he's not, how would you define "Paganism"? So we understand what you're saying you're not. Maybe that would help draw the distinction.

DJ: You know, the traditional meaning of the word "Pagan" that has been in use the longest is really a catch-all term. It doesn't refer to any one religion at all, it really means anyone



MOORING RING ON DOCK AT THE CABIN

who is not Christian, or a little more broadly, anyone who is not Christian, Jewish, or Muslim. And so it doesn't really refer to any one specific tradition, but it's a catch-all term for anything that's not that. So by that loose and really bad definition--

UH: We're all Pagans.

DJ: We're all Pagans here. In more recent years in the last century, it's really come to be applied as a name for a specific group of religions, which includes Neodruidism, Wicca, Celtic Reconstructionism, and a variety of other sort of European myth-based traditions. So that's what I would consider myself not to be part of. As much as I respect and love that branch of traditions, it's just not actually what I do.

UH: I'm confused. And I don't mean to cause too much dissension here. I've heard you talk of Reconstructionism before, so you're talking about Reconstructionism in one sense, but not the Reconstructionism that you practice?

DJ: Right, and "Reconstructionism" is used in two ways as well. The way that we use it in our tradition is, it's essentially an act. If there's a ceremony that's been lost - and this is what Reconstructionism is, if anyone doesn't know - is the idea that if beliefs, stories, rituals have been lost when cultures were converted to Christianity and religions were wiped out, that they can sometimes be recovered through scholarship and research. Or some people would also say through visions and inspiration.

UH: Try to reconnect with the divine that originally imposed those practices?

DJ: Right, to bring it back in some way. So there are folks who treat that act as a religion unto itself, and they tend to fall under the umbrella of Neopaganism. Within our tradition certainly, since there are a lot of things that were lost in the ancient world, we do engage in reconstruction, but it's just one of many practices that a priest might specialize in and pursue.

UH: Do you buy all that, B. T.?

BTN: I would agree with Drew on his definition of Paganism and the way he's described it, and mostly with the Reconstructionism. I would add, just for the sake of my friends who are Hellenic Polytheists and Reconstructionists, that a lot of them don't necessarily feel that they fall under the umbrella of Paganism, kind of in the same way that you feel that way. (gestures to Drew)



VEGETATION UNDER THE WATER OF THE LAKE

DJ: Yeah, there's a growing movement of that for people, including some Reconstructionists and many of the more traditional Pagans, sort of stepping away from the label of "Pagan" and leaving that to the Neopagans and Witches and Wiccans and that kind of thing.

BTN: And perhaps as the movement grows, or should I say the *movements* grow and get more and more differentiated, get more and more of a following, perhaps that's appropriate.

UH: You think it's part of the refinement of what Paganism actually is and means that causes that kind of distinction between the two of yourselves?

BTN: Uh, it could be. I'd be perfectly happy - let's put it this way - to see multiple different religions and traditions evolve out of what's going on in our contemporary world. If they should find a point of commonality and unity so they can all fit under one umbrella term, super. I don't know if that's gonna happen, and I don't think it needs to happen.

DJ: I also am always very dubious when a group is going under a term that not only did they not give themselves, but wasn't a very respectful term in the first place. And there are many groups that have managed to reclaim terms that were once derogatory, but Pagans have not managed to do that. It went from meaning people who have a fake religion or a stupid religion, which is what it meant for a very long time, to meaning kind of a sort of vague, hard to define group of beliefs



- or maybe belief isn't that important - and a lot of other things. It's a lot of different ideas and traditions under that umbrella. It's not a good catch-all term.

UH: I find that very interesting because my historical understanding of the term differs from yours. Not that I disagree that the word "Pagan" meant a lot of non-Christians, but my association was always more nature-based, or some kind of nature-based religion - which I only bring up because that's the topic of tonight's discussion.

BTN: Right, we're out here in nature.

UH: And that was my understanding of it, and in some ways I wonder how incorrect I've been with that.

DJ: Well, with that idea in mind, so then do you consider Vodou to be Pagan?

UH: (sigh and pause) Um, I think it would fit with the first definition, of the non-Christian. As far as the nature-based, it's obviously been practiced in nature quite a bit. In fact, especially in the United States in the early days of slavery, it was something that was very much practiced out in the woods, out in the fields, away from the house, maybe inside something. But no, I would actually I would push it more toward the realm of ancestor worship - although ancestor worship is actually a word that we kind of shy away from. Although that happens somewhat privately in the home, that's not really what the religion's about. It's more a connection to the divine, as much as we can to the intermediaries of the Lwa. So as far as that's concerned, no, I don't know if I'd fit it under the Pagan umbrella from that sense either. So I guess I'm with you, I'm not Pagan.

BTN: And now, I'm curious - in that connection with the divine or the Lwas, is the divine seen as part of or within nature? Are they separate from or super-nature? Supernatural?

DJ: By the way, for anyone listening, Lwas are - would it be fair to say gods?

UH: No, no, it's definitely not--

DJ: It's not fair. It's spirits.

UH: Spirits, yeah.

DJ: So that's what we mean by Lwas.

UH: Vodou is a monotheistic religion. There is one God, and He is very remote and very far from us, and we can't actually reach Him in the traditional sense. But we have the intermediaries, those that have gone before us, who have died and that have been so profound or exceptional that they have lived on in that sense as more of an archetype. They're the intermediaries for us. As far as, would I consider that natural? Supernatural is probably closer. We talk about the invisible world, the world behind this one. So in one sense, yeah, part of it is natural - it's this world. And part of it is supernatural - that's the other world. So it's almost both.

DJ: Now was it really, is it really monotheistic? Or is it, you know, three-hundred years ago they would have really seen it as many gods, and since that would get them frowned upon by Christians, it's sort of been re-branded a little bit, sort of a new lingo added to it to make it more acceptable?

UH: I don't think so. You know, in the earliest Lwa, they are more telling the story of man, and how man came to be with the first life. So I don't consider that godlike, although you might say that our earliest ancestors were more godlike, in the sense that they were the progenitors of our race. I wouldn't quite call that "god." At least my understanding of it today is, no, that is not the case. The closest analogy actually is that of



LEAF FLOATING ON THE WATER NEAR THE LAKESHORE

the Catholic saints, because they're intermediaries to God. I know some Christians don't believe that and some do, but that's probably the closest analogy in some way to how Vodou can be syncretic with Christianity in a way. Or at least with Catholicism.

DJ: Hm. (nods)



## 2. Three Eyes on Nature



## Listen [here](#)

B. T. Newberg: So in what respect does nature come into your spiritual path as you realize your Vodou tradition?

Urban Haas: There's a pause there. You know, that's a good question. How much does nature come into it? Obviously there are so many common natural elements that I'm going to get myself confused and lost and drift around because part of it is more personal than that too. For me, I have a strong meditative tradition from the Himalayas from the Vedic traditions and with that, one of things that I have with nature that draws me in immediately is that when I get into a natural setting such as this, sometimes I want to sit down and meditate. That's one side of it. And another side of me is more playful than that and I want to jump in the lake. So nature has so many pulls and pushes.

As far as how much does nature play? That's a good question. I did find myself going up to northern Minnesota last Halloween because I was unable to go down to New Orleans to celebrate Day of the Dead, so I went up into the North Woods up in the middle of the state and did a ceremony up in the North Woods. That to me was very natural and a very connection-oriented way to do it. Vodou is traditionally practiced at least in the open air in more Caribbean style places without doors and windows per se, that are open in that sense, back in the earlier days out in the woods. There is that natural element to it. The biggest thing about Vodou that I've been told and I agree with is, what you really have to be able to do with Vodou is dance. It is very much an active religion, an active participation religion.

BTN: And by dance, are you talking about something metaphorical or concrete, actual dancing?

UH: No, it is a full contact religion.

BTN: Do you wear pads?

UH: No, we do not. It is very active. I mean you get up and you move and you do things. And it's not the kind of religion where you sit there and someone talks to you. It is very actively participated with everyone that's there, no matter what their position, no matter what their background.



EXPOSED INNARDS OF TREE TRUNK NEAR THE CABIN

BTN: Experiential.

UH: Yeah. It's very experiential.

BTN: Now Drew, I know from your ebook *Walk Like a God*--

Drew Jacob: Best book ever written. The greatest book in the world!

BTN: --as well as from all your writing, that nature plays a big role for you and your spirituality.

DJ: Right. It does. This is the thing - anyone spiritual who thinks that they are not a nature person or not a big fan of nature is either misinformed or misrepresenting their spirituality.

UH: There's someone out there right now that feels offended.

DJ: That person should go in the woods right now! People frequently refer to themselves, "Well I'm not a nature person." What they mean by that is maybe you don't like going camping, or maybe you don't like bugs, or the rain, or you don't like the idea of hunting, fishing, these kinds of things. You don't get your recreational time in by going outside in the wild for long periods of time, but that's not the only way people connect with nature. We are beings who have evolved through a very lengthy process of living in the wild and through the vast majority of our history as a species we have not lived in houses; we have not isolated ourselves from the elements or

from nature. For most of our history we were hominids and before that primates and before that many kinds of creatures. And it is hardwired into each and every person listening here to respond to the cues of nature. When you walk outside that is so full of life, when you walk near trees and plants, if you're someplace that has those, or if you're in the desert you get that beautiful vista that lets you see how far out that land reaches and where the next place to find water might be, your body responds to that. I don't care if you spent the last 30 years in an office building or spend your weekends indoors watching movies. If you go out for a short walk in the woods, you *will* get that response. It's hardwired into us. We find medicine, we find food, we find water, we find places that are safe for us to live that are sheltered from predators and from the elements – this is in your genes. So everyone out there, can feel a sense of exhilaration and coming to life when they go outside and embrace the elements a little bit. And that includes even people whose religion or whose hobbies have nothing to do with going outside. So you're all nature people. Take off your clothing right now!

UH: So you're a nudist?

DJ: We're all naked here! (laughs) We're naked with voodoo dolls. You've got to participate, okay?

BTN: What else are you going to do in the north woods?

UH: It's just Drew who's naked, really.

DJ: It's really just me. They've been trying to get me to put clothes on for two days!

BTN: I would agree with you that nature is very important and I think it's a very personal thing. I know there are a lot of people out there who don't necessarily identify with nature the way it's usually defined and so, I guess in talking about my view of nature and how it works into my path, I guess I want to start by kind of exploring what I mean by that. Because usually when we talk about nature, we mean wild nature, especially in the American view of the wilderness, nature as something that is not man-made, that is pristine or near to it, and that you go out into it and experience this non-man-made environment. Well that's one view of nature. But I think that nature, I prefer to think of nature as more encompassing than that. That it includes the human, it includes the imagination, because we come out of nature, we are born of nature.

UH: We're in the nature world.



BTN: We are part of nature. And the natural world is in us.

UH: Yeah.

BTN: And I conceive a distinction between wild nature and I guess what you could call *urban* nature, or *domesticated* nature – I dunno, I have to think of a term that's not derogatory of it, but which includes the human. And wild nature would include both the pristine non-man-made natural environment as well as those depths of the subconscious that are really beyond your conscience control. I see that as another frontier, an inner frontier of nature. I think of something a little more all-encompassing when I talk about nature. And I think people who grow up in the city, or wherever they may be that they come about that they just don't identify with the wild nature, in terms of trees and mountains and rivers – that there's more to it than that. And they can also find nature in their city streets, in their parks, in their water fountains, in the architecture of their city hall and in their own dreams, and in their own recesses of their private moments.

DJ: I would... You know, I agree with that in spirit.

UH: Oooh! Dissent. You dare dissent. The Pagan and the non-Pagan speak.

DJ: I really do. I agree that obviously we are creatures formed by nature and there are aspects of that nature within our imagination within our psyche and certainly you can have a



VERTEBRAE DISCOVERED IN THE WOODS

house plant, you can have a fountain, that kind of stuff but--

UH: A cat.

DJ: --when we're talking about the intersection of spirituality and nature, it's important to come to terms with the fact that you need to actually change something to get a different result. For all those people out there that feel a sense of spiritual longing or feel like there's something bigger that they can connect to, that there's something more out there: you actually have to work to get to that. It does take a certain amount of--

UH: You mean effort

DJ: It takes some effort, yes. And you're probably not going to find it in your house. You're probably not going to find it in the same streets you walk down every single day,

UH: I know some people that have meditation rooms in their homes.

DJ: This is very true. Meditation is helpful, but it's really when you get out of your element, when you get out of your comfort zone and remember that the way most of us live is not the way that we were designed to live, and when people feel a sense of being disconnected or feeling like they're missing something, it's oftentimes because we are not the nomadic people we were evolved to be.

UH: Do you feel like we're living an unnatural life then?

DJ: That's interesting. I think, yeah.

UH: Because, you know humans have for a long time congregated together in close groups and social settings and I think the cities in some aspects are an extension of that.

DJ: Yeah, in a way, but I think it's not just about being disconnected from nature as the wilderness, but also in terms of, do you still live in a single room with a lot of relatives? Do you see people routinely that you love? Is your residence located more than





LIVING AND DEAD TREES IN THE WOODS

a mile from the next nearest residence? So that you have room to breathe and spread out and not feel – there’s a lot of things that go into the human psyche. The way we live now is not the way that we were evolved to live. I’m not saying that you should all give up your houses and run out to the middle of nowhere.

UH: There’s not enough room.

DJ: Yeah. That’d leave nowhere to us. We’re holding it down out here! But those stresses are there. Until you step outside of that life and accept that maybe it’s not the ideal life, it’s going to be hard to find a different result.

BTN: But why does it have to be in wild nature? For example, I know you’ve done urban spelunking, which consists of, for example going through tunnels of sewers and things in an almost Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles type of style.

DJ: There was a lot of ninja going on.

UH: The goonies.

BTN: Or if you’re talking about going out of your element away from your familiar household, going into a different neighborhood with a different social class, economic class or a culture than you’re not used to and finding your way there.

DJ: I think that’s a super-powerful practice and I wish more people would do it. Travel changes you. If you can’t travel

across the world, travel to a new part of your town or the next town over. Absolutely.

UH: Get on the bus, go to the museum,

DJ: Still naked!

UH: Go to the zoo, go to the pool. Take a class ... expand your mind?

DJ: I'm on board with that.



### 3. Story Time





B. T. NEWBERG SHARES A STORY OF AN IVY'S FALLING SEEDS

## Listen [here](#)

B. T. Newberg: So what I'd really like to see now, now that we've seen that we're coming from fairly different perspectives--

Drew Jacob: I disagree! (laughs)

Urban Haas: Now who's being contrary!

BTN: We're not without common ground. I'd like to hear how we come together to this one thing we have in common - and not just us but everyone in the world - and that is this earth, this wild nature that is still available in a few places in the world, and to hear what that experience is like for each of us.

DJ: So it's story time?

BTN: It's story time!

UH: Why don't you go first, B.T.

BTN: Alright. Well, I'll share a relatively recent experience, which was just last week actually. My fiancée and I - she's also a Humanist--

UH: A Humanistic Pagan?

BTN: She's not a Humanistic Pagan. She's more of the Secular



Humanist. So we're on the same page with some things, but not others. But we get along quite well. But she also has a little bit of that wonder and vision of nature that I notice sometimes comes through in her.

There was a moment when I was coming home to my apartment. This is in the city, in Minneapolis where I live. I was going by one of the brownstone apartments across from my apartment, and this one was covered in ivy creeping along the wall of this old brownstone apartment. And I noticed that there was this green dust on the sidewalk beneath it. And as I was passing by I looked up at the ivy creepers, and all of these seeds were just raining down all at once.

It was the most touching and beautiful experience, for one thing because I had no idea that all those seeds came down at once! It was just dropping about ten per second, and just continuously. But also because I thought to myself, geez, I wish my fiancée could be here seeing this, because I know she would love it. And there was sort of a tragic beauty to that, because the experience of nature is often a very private and internal experience. And you can have other people that share the same experience, but it's not necessarily the same experience for each person. There's also a diversity of perspectives on the same experience. To me, there's a certain tragedy in how private that is, but it's also beautiful for that aspect. It's fleeting, it's unique, and it's your own.



FALLEN IVY SEEDS ON THE SIDEWALK NEAR B. T. NEWBERG'S APARTMENT IN MINNEAPOLIS







URBAN TALKS ABOUT TAKING HIS DOGS TO THE DOG PARK NEAR MINNEHAHA FALLS

So I was just appreciating that I was watching these seeds fall from this ivy. And then I went back to my apartment. And I wasn't back in my apartment for more than five minutes when who walks in the door but my fiancée. She looks at me and she says, "Omigod, across the way, the ivy creepers - the seeds are just raining down! It was so beautiful!" And she looked at me, and I looked at her, and I was like, "I just saw the same thing! I can't believe you saw that too!"

DJ: Did you guys make love then? Is that where this story is going?

BTN: Oh, burning, mad, passionate love!

UH: Monkey love!

BTN: So that was a moving experience of nature for me. But to relate it a bit to Humanistic Paganism, I do like to mythologize the way I experience nature to an extent. For example, I enjoy Greek mythology, so Dionysus - the god of vegetation as well as wine and revelry, and indomitable life - is what I think of as I pass by those ivy creepers day after day after day. But I have to say, when I'm actually gripped in the moment of an experience of nature like that, when I have one of those experiences where nature grabs me by the hair like Athena grabbing Achilles in the Iliad, it's a wordless experience. Not of a particular deity or legend. There is no name for it. It is just a presence. And it's beautiful.

DJ: Hear, hear.



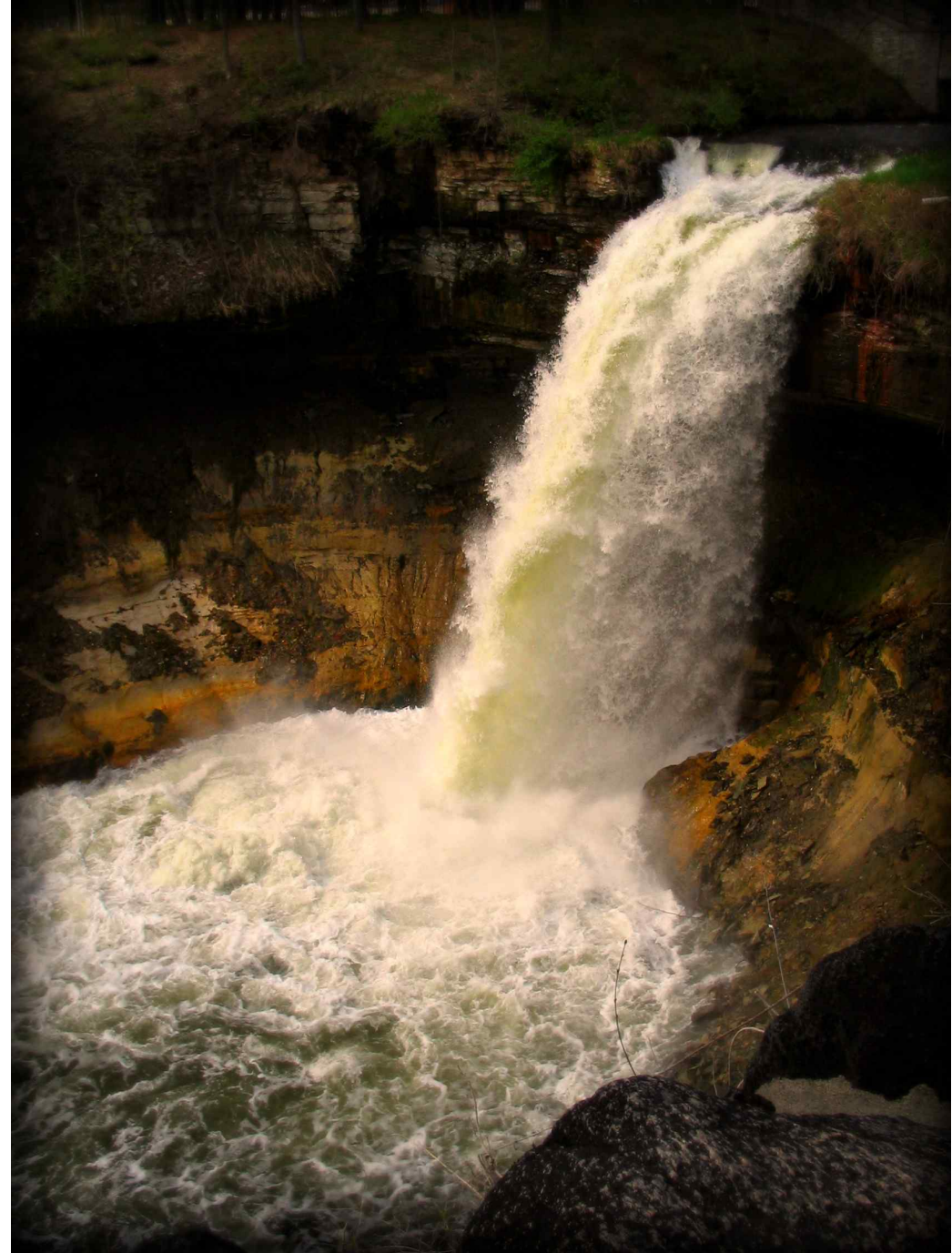
UH: That's well told.

(to Drew) Do you wanna go next or should I?

DJ: You go.

UH: Ah. I wasn't ready for that.

I've had some wonderful experiences in nature on pilgrimages, in lovely places where I've traveled, whether it be islands in the Caribbean, or going down to Belize in Central America, or traveling through India doing camel safari. But going on some of the things you guys have been saying, I want to hit a little closer to home. One of the things I've found particularly magical in the city of Minneapolis actually, is taking a trip to the dog park down by Minnehaha Falls. I have two dogs. I've had two dogs for a long time. They haven't always been the same two dogs, but I would take my dogs down there. There's something like 17 acres of land that is off-leash, you know fenced in, but on the banks of the Mississippi River. And taking them down there and walking, I find it an incredibly magical place. First of all, it's forest. Second of all, it's on the beach. You can walk along the shores of the Mississippi, you can sit there. And there's this incredibly amount of trails you can just walk and hike. And walking through these trees, some of which are hundreds of years old, and others which are on the banks of the Mississippi, and their roots are exposed because the sand and dirt has been washed away by the river flooding. And then there's high trails up on the tops of bluffs, and you



MINNEHAHA FALLS, MINNEAPOLIS





DREW TELLS OF HIS EXPERIENCES IN A HUNTER-GATHERER CAMP

can walk down the bluff to the river, and walk back up the bluff to the trail. It's just been a truly magical experience for me. That is one way I would connect with nature. Just in the cityscape setting almost, and yet still very natural close to home.

DJ: So my relationship with the wilderness is uh... a lengthy and sometimes rocky love affair. But I've made an effort in my life to increasingly go out and spend time in nature as such. And to do that without trying to impose my own way of life on it. So, growing up we would go camping. And like most camping we would take a tent, and food, and a lot of amenities with us. And sure we'd cook on the fire, and sleep in sleeping bags, but it was not exactly in the bosom of the wilderness. It was much more of a controlled experience.

UH: Was it a community camp site, or was it just out in the middle of nowhere?

DJ: Well, with my family it was always a community camp site in some kind of state park or something like that, with actual like you know roads that go to designated camping areas.

As I got older - because you know I fell in love with nature in those years, I love that camping - as I got older I thought I wanted to really experience nature, so I started taking less and less with me. And after that went badly a few times, I thought well I better find out how this is done properly. Eventually enough years of becoming more and more of an outdoors person, I went and spent about three weeks one summer with



a group of hunter-gatherers at a [wilderness school](#) in northern Wisconsin, and actually lived I would say a 95% full hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Which I don't recommend that everyone run out and do that. It's really incredibly... trying. It's not just that you're outside and you might get rained on. It's so many hundreds of little things that you take for granted as part of your routine when you're living in your house in the suburbs or the country, that you can maybe do without for a few days on a road trip or camping trip, but as time wears on, your mind gets fixated on them.

BTN: For example?

DJ: For example, having bread, having the ability to have a set of solid walls with a locking mechanism that seals you into a place at night. Rather than just like, things are creaking and blowing and walking by you. Being able to go an hour without checking yourself for ticks. Having something deep-fried. Having something sweet, sweeter than berries, something like chocolate. These things are all really unnecessary, they're absolutely unnecessary for a human to be happy. But if you're used to them from twenty to thirty years of life, going cold turkey on all of them at once is incredibly challenging. So that was really what those three weeks with the hunter-gatherers--

UH: I don't know if I could go without coffee.

DJ: Yeah there was no coffee, no source of caffeine. No alcohol, which was big for me. No smoking allowed, actually.



DREW EXPLORES WALKING BAREFOOT ON OUR HIKE TOGETHER THROUGH THE WOODS





FINDING BOTH SOFT GROUND AND SHARP THORNS, HE WALKS AS LONG AS HIS FEET CAN STAND IT

BTN: Fermented berries?

DJ: Yeah I might have been able to get away with that. If I was fermenting berries in the woods, they might have turned a blind eye to that. But they did ask people not to bring any substances - no alcohol, no marijuana, no nicotine. Even though some of those might be very natural, and might be used in ceremony by many hunter-gatherer cultures. But when you're going through that difficult experience, and you're using those to lean on, you're gonna hit them really hard. So they've just learned not to allow newcomers to bring that stuff.

So it was a very interesting time, and um... (laughs) hmm, so many things.

My first night there someone had caught a turtle. Which is not hard. I mean, if you see a turtle, you've caught a turtle. Success!

UH: So it was not a snapping turtle.



DJ: For all I know it was, but you know it's pretty basic. And so, among the standard diet - which I had come to accept every single day was going to be boiled deer meat - in addition to that, they had cooked up this turtle. And they said, well the very best part of the turtle is the feet. It's got all the good fat in it, and all this oil. So in honor of our new guest, Drew, we'll give him one of the four feet. They usually just give those to the elders, or maybe the person who hunted it would get one of them and the elders would get the rest. But you know, since it's his first night in the camp, let's give him the turtle foot. Which I accepted with an undue sense of pride, having really done nothing to earn the turtle foot. And I pretty quickly started to suspect that maybe they were just joking--

UH: It's like rocky mountain oysters.

DJ: Yeah, I mean, is this actually, am I actually supposed to put this in my mouth? I didn't want to be insulting, because it seemed to be a big deal that they had given it to me. And so I kinda just you know waited, and started looking around to see if anybody else was eating theirs. Sure enough, they put theirs in their mouth, so I thought it must be safe.

But, I tell ya, a turtle foot-- actually, right now look around your house and see if you can find maybe like a belt, like a leather belt, and put that in your mouth and start chewing on it. And when you get through that, and it's ready to be ingested, then send me an email, cuz it's gonna take you a while.



WHEN HE CAN STAND IT NO LONGER, HE DISCOVERS HE HAS LOST A SANDAL, AND MUST CONTINUE BAREFOOT



UH: Took you a while to masticate the turtle, huh?

DJ: It did, and you know you're trying to get this turtle leather off of kind of like a claw to suck to toe fat out. It's neither easy nor appealing, so you're not even that motivated to do it except that they really gave you this "treat."

And that was my first night at the hunter-gatherer camp. So that gives you a sense of the pace at which I was moving here.

During that time though - and this is what I'm getting at - my relationship to nature changed dramatically. Because when you spend time away from a quote-unquote "civilized" life - which could be in the countryside - people in the countryside are not necessarily any more nature-oriented than people in the city, they're still living off the same commodities, any time you're dealing with agriculture you're not really getting in tune with nature - but my relationship started to change. If you go without that lifestyle for a while, you can get over it. I mean yes you want your coffee, you want your bed that's actually soft and not the ground, you want temperature control, but after a while you don't. You just don't care anymore. It goes away. And you start to just adapt to your new lifestyle. Once that happens, you can start to view nature in a very different way. It's no longer this private, amazing experience.

UH: Something to be tamed?

DJ: It's not something to be tamed. It becomes the backdrop to everything you do. And it becomes almost communicative. You're really reading a million cues a day. You know where things are, you know what you can put in your mouth, you know where not to step, you can hear people coming long before you can see them. You become aware on so many different levels, using senses in ways we just don't in the city. Smell is amazing. I mean, when the human nose gets to work, you can smell a lot of things. And you can follow - well, I'm not going to say you can follow a trail, but you can tell when something is safe to eat, even if you don't recognize that plant. You can sniff out things that you maybe shouldn't be able to sniff out. And it also becomes very comforting, because--

UH: Shouldn't be able to?

DJ: You know, yeah, I mean people don't bathe in the woods so much, but it becomes comforting on a level, because we don't

smell each other in the city. Or on the farm, if we can help it. And that essentially means you're walking around blind in one of your five senses every day. Everyone covers up their smells.

UH: I think we've tried to do that on purpose.

DJ: That's, well... (laughs) We've tried to do that on purpose in cities.

UH: That's what I mean.

DJ: It's disgusting having that many people in a close area. In the wilderness, you're talking about a small group of people spread over a great distance. You're never have to get so close that it's uncomfortable, that you feel someone else is stinking up the place. You never have to deal with someone else's sewage. It's never gross. But when you're able to be in proximity and kinda notice that slight musky scent - not bad B.O. but just that I've-been-sweating-all-day-walking-in-the-woods kinda scent - you start to be able to see the other human beings around you in all five of your senses, and not just the four that we restrict ourselves to normally. And in a weird way, it's a deeply emotionally-gratifying experience, as if you've been blind your whole life.

UH: I have to ask. So you went through this wilderness thing, and obviously you gave up a bed, and you gave up a house, and all these comforts - what about clothing?

DJ: Interesting.

UH: Did you stick with that, or is it part time, or?

BTN: Naturism, right?

UH: Well, because I was there for a shorter period of time, I remained with my own wardrobe. And I took basic things - some long pants, shorts, some tee shirts. I learned a few things about how to adapt to living in the wild, such as throwing away my hiking shoes after three days and just using soft shoes the whole time. If I had been there longer, I would have done what many of them did, and give up the modern clothing and get maybe some leather breeches - but that's a little bit of a pain in the ass to





FINALLY, ON THE WAY HOME HE RECOVERS HIS LOST SANDAL

make. A lot of them would just wear a leather loincloth, which is extremely handy. So that kinda stuff.

UH: I mean, cuz clothing isn't always just about modesty. Sometimes it's about protection, right?

DJ: It is, yeah.

UH: Protection from getting scratched by the thorns that you're walking by, or--

DJ: And also access. You know, when you got the leather loincloth on, it's so much easier to go to the bathroom in the woods than if you've gotta deal with your pants. I mean if it's a number two, or for ladies anytime.

But yeah, pooping in the woods is a whole epic unto itself.

But I will stop hogging the spotlight. The point being, my relationship with nature changed and I view it now not so much as sort of this abstract concept of Nature with a capital "N" and more as - it's just the happiest way to live. It's what we were designed to do.



## 4. Going Wild



## Listen [here](#)

Urban Haas: Well, I live on a hobby farm in Minnesota, and it's probably a half step, or a quarter step, or even an eighth step towards what you're talking about. It's not the quantification that I'm actually concerned about. Moving out from the suburbs to the middle of nowhere, the nature starts to hit you everyday. I can sense weather patterns that I wasn't able to sense when living in the city. I know if we're having a wet summer or a dry summer, or I know if it's going to rain soon. You can feel things that are different, that I just wasn't in tune with before. And that was really interesting for me. We used to go camping out in Wyoming every year and camp with a tent- not in an organized camp ground- places in the middle of nowhere where you could be comfortable taking your clothes off where's it just you and your wife.

Drew Jacob: And my camera.

UH: No, there was no camera.

DJ: That you knew about!

UH: But my dogs were there, and I let their noses pick up if someone was coming around. But no, you can hear things coming. You can hear the bugs and the birds, and when things get quiet. Okay, something's going on – what is it? My point is that one of the things that has changed for me is that since we moved out into the country, we used to take all of these camping trips out into the wilderness, and now, since we moved out into the country, we tend to take all of these trips into the city. That, to us, is more of an adventure because we live out in nature all of the time. And not to the extreme you're talking about. But it's like, we have that camping, nature, outside experience so much now we kind of crave the urban life. And now, where we never did before, we go vacation in the cities, which is just kinda different.

B. T. Newberg: I had a similar experience growing up in a very small town, about the same size of a town that you're in – now? Or that you grew up in?

UH: Yeah, our city is like 1,200 people.



POND IN A GRASSY SWAMP IN THE WOODS

BTN: Yeah, I grew up in a city of about 1,100 and something, and it was thirty minutes to the nearest McDonald's. And it was a treat, let me tell you, when our family went to McDonald's. And that's how it should be!

UH: This is Minnesota. We're looking for a DQ - come on!

BTN: But I also have to say, that that area where I grew up in, which is south-central Minnesota, was agriculture land. It was completely flat. It was the kind of environment you think of when you think of Illinois, Iowa - lots of cornfields, etc. When you look at it from above from an airplane, it looks like a checkerboard where all of the fields are cutting it up and the roads are graph-like on the landscape.

UH: Yeah, it's like a grid.

BTN: So I didn't feel as I was growing up, even though I was immersed in plant life and animal life, I didn't feel like I was connected to nature because it was very man-made. And in a sense, now I'm going against a bit of how I was defining nature earlier. But in terms of wild nature, I didn't feel connected to that. And I do think there is a very important distinction between the wild nature and the human nature. There's something very sublime about encountering wild nature. I definitely acknowledge and embrace that powerful experience of going beyond the realm of what is familiar to man, to humanity.

UH: So what is it you're seeking then?

BTN: What am I seeking?

UH: I mean, are you seeking to break out - when you say you're looking for this wild nature, what are you trying to experience, or how would you define wild nature?

BTN: Well, I mean it's always kind of an *ad hoc* definition. But if you could break it up between what is familiar to man, and within sort of his realm of control, and that which feels beyond his control.

UH: Well I was just thinking, one of the experiences we had today, with the three of us out canoeing, was like it's nice to be in a place where we're very much a minority compared to the creatures living around us. Really, there's not people staying around out here, except for someone across the lake. It was nice to feel like we're not the majority species in this dense little clump of land. Is that what you mean by wild?



BTN: Yes. Yes, I'd definitely say that. It's a very different experience. I value both types of nature, but I really enjoy and identify a lot with the wild aspect of nature. There's a different sort of relationship I think, especially if you're more or less alone in it, or if you just have a few trusted friends with you. A lot of your interaction is no longer with humans and human-made things, but it's with trees, the trail you're on, or the thing that's brushing against your foot right now and you don't know what it is. The sound of the water off somewhere - you're not quite sure, but it's off on another ridge. It puts you in your place. And I think that's healthy.



BLOSSOM'S-EYE VIEW ACROSS THE GRASSY SWAMP IN THE WOODS

UH: It can be disorienting, too. When we used to go camping out in Wyoming, we'd spend like seven days without seeing

anyone else, and then we'd go into a grocery store, and we'd go into culture shock! I remember one experience when we were going into this grocery store in Wyoming. You know how in the produce area where sometimes they'll spray it—like a little water will turn on and mist everything up to keep it wet and fresh? So we're walking through this grocery store and all of a sudden there was this sound of thunder. The lights flashed, and then the water started. It was so surreal to us we couldn't handle it. We had to get out of there!

BTN: Drew, when you were talking earlier, what really struck me about the way you were describing your experiences was that you were very sensual in the way you were describing your experiences. Sense-based. You could describe the nuances of what you were experiencing, not in abstract terms, but in how it was actually coming to your five senses.

DJ: Right, yeah.

BTN: And to me that is a very important aspect of spirituality. Because to me, we experience the world beyond us, and the world of which we are a part, through the five senses. And being mindful of our experience, being present with that, is freeing and liberating in a way that is rarely experienced in the common day-to-day, job-dominated, work-dominated consciousness that we tend to, by habit, live our lives in. And when we take that moment to take a break from that, whether it's through meditation in our own homes, or whether it's through going out into wild nature or semi-wild regions of nature, it's therapeutic. And profound.

DJ: Hm. Yeah, I agree. I think that that's, uh... Hm, I don't disagree in any way. I totally agree that is true. But to me, my relationship with nature is different than that. To me, the idea of using it as sort of the therapy or sort of the release in-between a life that is stressful is not appealing. It's, hm... It's about the breakthrough experience of starting to actually understand the world that we live in.

BTN: I can identify with that.

DJ: When you spend a lot of time out in nature, and learning to live within nature – so, taking your food from nature, building your shelter from nature, etc., rather than bringing those things with you, or going back to them – it stops being an unknown, it stops being a mystery, and it becomes a comfort. Because the things we need in life – so food, shelter, and so forth – are things you can just get freely from nature. There's never ever a concern of, well what if I starve? Once you know how to gather things,





MUSHROOMS ON A TREE TRUNK

how to hunt things and so forth, there's really no such thing as a famine in hunting and gathering society. Famines are usually dependent on people storing large amounts of crops and needing to store them over a certain season for a later season, and then something going wrong – a drought with that one crop, or a pestilence, or a war. In nature, there are hundreds or even thousands of edible things that are coming in and out of season at all times. I've never been to a grocery store that has as many varieties of food as a couple of acres of Minnesota forest. And when you start to realize that everything you could ever need – literally everything – can just be gathered for *free* off of the ground! Shelter – and when I say shelter, I don't mean like you're going to be miserable living in a little pile of dirt. No, you can actually build comfortable shelter out of fallen trees and so forth. It's going to be warm in the winter, dry year round, cool in the summer. And you can find a really rich, varied diet that's healthy, and has some sweet things, that has some protein, and lots of greens – and just pick that up walking around. People often focus on the dangers of nature – well what if I was attacked by a bear or a mountain lion? That's possible, but you also learn how to avoid or drive off bears and mountain lions. And it stops being this sort of scary, momentous, abstract force, and it does become central. I don't want to undermine the fact that nature can be dangerous, but nature is also incredibly generous. It just gives whatever you need; it's never withheld.

UH: So, I've heard someone describe you as *hardcore*.

DJ: Okay. (laughs)

UH: And this sounds pretty hardcore. Granted, I think that for a lot of us, we fear the unknown. And what makes nature very scary is that there's a lot we don't know about it, so therefore it's scary. I know you've gone through a lot of these trainings and practices, to kind of train you and get you knowledgeable about what to eat and what not to eat, and how to survive. But getting back to maybe some of your stories or your book or whatever, how do you make this more accessible to most people, instead of something that is maybe completely un-relatable to them?

DJ: Sure, that's a good point. Well, it is something we all have the ability to do. When I first started, I didn't just walk out into the wilderness with a hatchet and go about building myself shelter. I think if people have an interest—

UH: You said you may have tried that and it was a disaster or something.

DJ: You know, I did try some increasingly difficult camping trips, but I wasn't that hardcore until I was in training. But let's put it this way, you don't want to just walk out and throw yourself into it. You know, if you're interested in that kind of thing, set it up as a personal goal or challenge. Maybe the first summer – and do it in summertime, because that will make it a lot easier for you – go out into a wilderness school and learn the basics of how to track and forage, or how to build shelter, and put it to the test over the course of three or four days. And do that a few times, build it up to a week, or maybe trying going in the autumn or the spring when it's a little bit tougher but you're not gonna lose a foot to frostbite. Just build it up slowly, and don't go past your confidence level. It's like learning anything else that's potentially dangerous but highly rewarding. If you start way beyond your skill level, you'll have a miserable time and maybe get hurt. But if you start with the basics, and build it up slowly, you'll have amazing discoveries. It is in every single one of us. And if you're not sure, if you're thinking well that probably isn't my thing – there's nothing wrong with trying it for just one weekend. Get out of your comfort zone and just try it out.

UH: And if it's a disaster, you got the car right there.



DJ: You got the car right there. Take your cell phone with you in case there's a problem, and just take good common sense. But yeah, there's nothing more transformative than truly - not just living in nature with your bubble of stuff, but starting to live *from* nature.

Plus, when you learn to enjoy pooping in the woods, it's one of the best experiences.

UH: I tend to agree with you on that one.



A FERN-COVERED STREAM IN THE WOODS

## 5. Bringing It Home





URBAN MEDITATES BENEATH A CLIFF

## Listen [here](#)

B. T. Newberg: So, there's one more thing that I'm wondering about. And this is going to be a slightly funny question depending on what your perspective on nature is, but--

Urban Haas: Nature sucks. (laughs) That's why we're here.

BTN: When you go out into nature, whatever that means to you, and you have a profound experience, whatever *that* means to you, and then you go back to your daily life, what do you bring back with you? What do value that can continue on throughout your life?

UH: Well, I'll start with that one.

I think we've already answered that. And the reason I say that is because we've talked about a transformative experience, or an experience that changes you. Obviously that becomes a part of you, and that part of you goes back and sees things a bit differently than you did before. So hopefully when you go out into nature and you do some camping, in a tent or a cabin, in a boat or whatever it is that you do, you're having experiences that tend to make you see things a little differently. I mean, in a case in point, we're out here in northern Minnesota and there are thousands and thousands of stars overhead. And I can't see that in the city. I know I can't. Maybe I'm lucky to see three. Or maybe a dozen, depending on what kind of city I'm in. But



that's a vision that I can see right now that stays with me. And I know that they're there, no matter where I am. No matter what I'm doing, I can remember that. That's just one tiny example. Or jumping in the lake at night when the water's warmer than the air. Or cooking on a camp fire. Whatever that experience is for you - hiking in the woods, maybe by yourself, maybe with some friends. It's something that you take with you because it changes who you are, and those kinds of experiences to me are highly spiritual in a way because they lift up your spirit.

BTN: I agree with that 100%.

Drew Jacob: My answer to the question would be confidence and freedom. When you come back from that kind of intensive trip in the woods, when you come back from living in nature, even the first time you do it, there's this sudden sense of possibility, of knowing that no matter what happens with your life - if your career goes awry, or you were to lose your house, or all these other things--

UH: You could be a mountain man someday.

DJ: You know, you could be. You could be a hermit in the woods. Or a part of a community in the woods. The price of failure is not necessarily that you're going to be a hobo eating garbage, and sleeping with a newspaper over you in the winter. You have the option of - not eking out a sad existence, but living a happy life, at any time you want in the woods for free, with very little to no money needed to start, and everything you need on an ongoing basis for free, except for companionship,



DREW CONTEMPLATES ON A CLIFF TOP



which you can bring with you. Once you realize that, once you've seen first of all your own hands and body make it through what you once thought was impossible, but then the added dimension of what that means - the fact that you could lead a completely satisfying life for free - nothing can really scare you or phase you anymore. It becomes more and more a sense of understanding that all of the stuff you're doing in your career or school or with your family or the rat race or whatever else, is really something you're choosing to do and not something you have to do.

And that is an incredibly liberating experience.

BTN: That's freedom.

DJ: Yeah, and suddenly you realize, is there a reason why I'm doing this? And if so, you focus on that and you have a goal. And if there's not a reason, you can change it. A lot of people don't get that.

UH: It must be very empowering.

DJ: It is.

UH: Like I said earlier, I think nature is very spiritual for people, and to be able to conquer a fear is a very empowering and liberating experience, like you described.

DJ: Yeah, good point.



B. T. NEWBERG TAKES IN THE VIEW FROM THE TOP OF A CLIFF

BTN: It must also be quite an experience of, as you said, confidence, as well as willpower. Because I can only imagine, anyone who embarks upon something like that is going to encounter no shortage of naysayers--

DJ: Yeah.

BTN: --from their family, friends, bosses, pretty much all directions coming at you. And yet if you can continue to summon that will, follow that dream, and discover that truth about yourself, that you can live free in that sense, what does that mean for your self-esteem, for your value of yourself as a person, and for your value of life as a whole?

DJ: And a sense of integrity, that you don't ever have to sell out or do something you don't agree with in order to get by. Which is kind of at a premium these days, that kind of integrity. But it's something we all have if we so choose it.

UH: I don't know. The part I don't know about is the "these days" part.

DJ: Ah, interesting.

UH: There's an ongoing conversation my wife has with another individual: are things really different, or have they always been this way? It could be that a feeling of a lack of integrity is not necessarily unique to our time and place.

BTN: Yeah, my grandpa on my dad's side used to say "times



change, people don't."

UH: I like that.

BTN: The cynical side of me - that appeals to it a lot. But does it matter?

UH: No. No, it doesn't matter at all. I mean, the point we made, which is being able to break out of that and do it is empowering for yourself, and it doesn't matter whether other people change or not. The thing that's important is that you change yourself.

BTN: Yeah, that sense of personal transformation.

To me, what I really value about an experience in nature, and what I think sticks with me more than anything else as I grow into the rest of my life, is really less a lesson learned and more of an experience that is totally unique, that will stay with me for the rest of my life. It's that wordless presence that I was talking about before, where you have an encounter in nature, and it takes your breath away. There's something about that which is transformative, and changes how you're going to live the rest of your life. Once you know that is possible in life, and that you are able to go out and find that experience, or at the very least, that you are able to be open to that experience - because there's two parts of it. One, there's the experience coming to you, but there's also you being receptive enough to recognize it. So that has something really important to say about who you are and how you're going to live your life. And I don't know, there's just something that's permanently memorable and transformative about going out into the woods and having an experience that no one else is going to experience. It's just a precious gem that will be with you forever.

I was here - the location where we're at is actually my grandparents' cabin.

DJ: They have good taste, by the way.

BTN: (laughs) Thank you. So I've been here--

UH: The end of a long road.

BTN: I've been up here a number of times throughout my life, and about seven years ago, I remember walking out along the gravel road that leads into here, and striking off the path into the woods, just following my nose, and I came upon this one particular tree. It was a big tree, with a wide girth to its trunk and a beautiful spanning canopy. Other people might not have noticed it for anything particularly special, it wasn't enormous, but it really struck me at that particular moment. I was moved, and I just decided that I wanted to do something to mark this. So I started gathering stones, and I made a stone circle around it. And it took me - it was about a whole afternoon's worth of labor. And I knew that, you know what, I'm probably never going to be able to find this spot again.

UH: No one else may ever see it again.

BTN: And no one else may ever see it again! But it didn't really matter. And I tried to mark it a little bit. I took some stones out by the gravel road. I thought *maybe* I would be able to find it again, but I thought you know, this is going to be gone in one winter's time. But you never know. Today I went out and tried to find it, and I couldn't of course.

But somewhere out there, there's that stone circle, and there's that tree. And there's nothing to replace an experience like that.

UH: I hope it's still standing.



B. T. NEWBERG AND URBAN TRAVERSE A BRIDGE





A FOOT BRIDGE ACROSS A NARROW STREAM

You know it's interesting, you talk about the way - one of the things I heard out of there that struck me was that of perception. You're having these spiritual experiences, and you perceive that. I've been asked by people, you know, why did you become a priest? And to me, I couldn't deny the spiritual experiences I was having.

DJ: Mm, yep.

UH: And these things happen on a day to day - everywhere, whether you're in the city, whether you're in the wilderness, no matter where they are, they happen. But most people don't see them. They're oblivious, they're invisible, whatever it is that they are. I don't mean to be derogatory. They're just not seeing that, not sharing that kind of experience with themselves. And to me, it's that perception that spiritual experiences are happening all around you - *that* was the reason that I chose the path that I was on. It just strikes me that I hear that with you. You know, you're an atheist, you're doing your own thing, which is different from my thing, but yet that part of it is common between us.

DJ: Right on.

BTN: Yeah. Being true to yourself and your experience.

UH: And being able to recognize it.

BTN: Yes.



UH: For something that is actually happening in our lives.

BTN: And to value that.

UH: And to value that.

BTN: And to have the confidence, as Drew was saying, to go against whatever other people might be saying about it, and say no, this is important to me and to life.

DJ: Mm. (nods)

BTN: So, I want to thank my guests tonight: Drew Jacob, author of Rogue Priest and Walk Like a God--

DJ: And I'm gonna put in a quick plug. [RoguePriest.net](http://RoguePriest.net) - check it out sometime.

BTN: And Urban Haas, author of Chasing the Asson. Am I saying that right?

UH: Yeah, that's fine.

BTN: And what is the *asson* by the way?

UH: The asson is the rattle that the Vodou priest holds, or the priestess for that matter, that they shake to get the attention of the spirits, and draw them to them.

BTN: And once again, I'm B. T. Newberg, editor at Humanistic



MOSS-COVERED STONE DEEP IN THE WOODS





LAST GLEAMS OF DUSK LIGHT ON LAKE TAMARACK

Paganism. So, check us all out. Little plug - never hurts!

So I think we're going to enjoy the rest of this night. And the stars and the fire and the silence all around us.

UH: And the loons.

BTN: Thanks for listening.

DJ: Have a good night everybody.

UH: Good night.

## Section II.

# Bonus Materials

Everything you ever wanted to know about Humanistic Paganism, Vodou, and the Heroic Life...





PHOTO BY B. T. NEWBERG

PONDSIDE TREES AT WIRTH PARK, MINNEAPOLIS

# What Is Humanistic Paganism? BY B. T. NEWBERG

Humanistic Paganism is a nontheistic way of life rooted in nature, myth, and wonder. It accepts modern science as the best way to access knowledge about our world, and myth as a particularly useful means of enriching and deepening experience. The yield is a life filled with wonder.

Humanistic Paganism is a hybridization of Humanism and Paganism. Humanism is a life-stance which asserts the power and responsibility of humans to meet challenges without recourse to supernatural aid, while Paganism is a group of religions rooted in Pre-Christian European traditions.[1] These two cross-fertilize to produce a powerful way of life grounded in modern science and enriched with mythic texture.

## Why Humanism?

For many in the 21st century, the metaphysical claims of most major faith traditions are no longer tenable. Modern science has revealed an orderly universe that is beautiful and complete in and of itself, requiring no divine being(s) to set it in motion or maintain it. Yet the modern era has also shown us the darkest faces of man, with some of history's bloodiest wars and most contemptible offenses against humankind. What we need now is a way of being-in-the-world that fully embraces the advances of modern science while also affirming the dire need for ethics and responsibility. Humanism is such a way.

Humanism goes beyond atheism, agnosticism, skepticism, and other similar philosophies by introducing an ethical element. Not only must we invoke no deity to solve our problems, but also we must actively acknowledge our responsibility to solve these problems. Responsibility is a necessity if we hope to prosper as individuals and as a species on this planet.

## Why Paganism?

A rich tradition lies in our past. While the Pre-Christian religions of Europe have been largely dormant for many centuries, we are still rooted in a fertile field of Pagan culture, tradition, and symbolic imagery. The Pagan traditions of our past, embedded in modern Western culture through myth, metaphor, art, music, and other modes of symbolic expression, still speak to many of us in the 21st century. They form a bedrock of identity and an aquifer of emotive experience. Pagan myths and rituals offer shared forms and structures enabling the expression of certain human experiences that cannot be fully expressed in any other way. This expression is vital to human fulfillment, as vital as scientific understanding and ethical action.

Paganism is uniquely suited to fulfilling our human needs at this time in history. We have learned from centuries of tragedy the danger of promulgating singular dogmas of Truth with a capital “T”, and today’s global village demands that we learn to live peaceably with differences of culture, gender, race, politics, and so forth. The Abrahamic religions which have dominated the globe, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, focus on single Truths; meanwhile Paganism offers a vision of diversity, with multiple deities, genders, perspectives, and versions of myths. At the same time, Paganism also grants value to the natural world, which some Abrahamic religions undervalue or even devalue. For these reasons, the time is right for a resurgence of Pagan forms of being-in-the-world.[2]

## Why these two together?

Humanism began in Pagan contexts. In Europe, Humanism flowered especially in the budding arts and philosophies of Classical Greece.[3] It declined throughout the Christian period but enjoyed regrowth during the Renaissance, a time which also saw a renewal of Pagan imagery. Today, Humanism is once again growing at the same time that Paganism is putting out new shoots and buds. There seems to be something mutually nourishing about the two.

Humanism and Paganism are complementary. While Humanism is well-adapted to address the latest intellectual and social issues, it lacks the kind of deep symbolic texture conducive to psychological fulfillment. Paganism is positioned to fill that void, providing a field of symbolic imagery in which the modern individual can feel rooted and nourished. Meanwhile, Paganism by itself is prone to superstition and factiousness. Humanism, which embraces a vision of knowledge rooted in the five senses and



verified through the scientific method, offers empirical inquiry as a means to sift the wheat from the chaff, as well as to mediate the varieties of Paganism without eradicating their differences. Together, Humanism and Paganism keep in check and mutually nourish each other. Humanism keeps Paganism true to the empirical world around us, while Paganism enriches Humanism with deep symbolic imagery.

## **Where does this path lead?**

A life grounded in Humanistic Paganism can take a remarkable variety of forms. For some, Paganism may provide a meaningful backdrop for otherwise secular Humanist activities. Others may foreground Paganism as a primary spiritual endeavor, informed by the empirical methods of Humanism. Most will find a balance somewhere in-between. Amidst such robust diversity, what is held in common? Four elements unite Humanistic Pagans: exploration of the Five +1, relationship with mythology, responsible action, and a sense of wonder.

### **Exploration of the “Five +1”: five senses, plus an introspective sense**

First of all, the life of Humanistic Paganism is grounded in the five empirical senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. These are the faculties by which we experiment with and learn about our world, and modern science is founded upon information revealed through them via empirical observation. Yet an important source of information is missing: introspection. Our minds are also aware of sensations of emotions, thoughts, and mental imagery. It is expedient, for reasons to be explained shortly, to conceive of this awareness as a semi-empirical faculty of sensation. This is not to posit a psychic, magical, revelatory, or prophetic “sixth sense”; on the contrary, the introspective sense is natural, materialistic, and thoroughly familiar to all of us. We simply don’t usually think of it as a sense. But something is gained by conceiving of it as such – namely, the power to stand back and observe the contents of our minds. We spend so much time completely identified with our thoughts and emotions that it rarely occurs to us to observe them as such. Yet doing so is a powerful means of growing in self-knowledge. It is also the method which enables exploration of traditionally theistic practices from a nontheistic point of view. Meditation, prayer, ritual, and so forth can be approached as practices with observable effects upon the mind. Introspection allows observation of these effects. Thinking of it as faculty of sensation allows one to observe mental phenomena without getting lost in them.

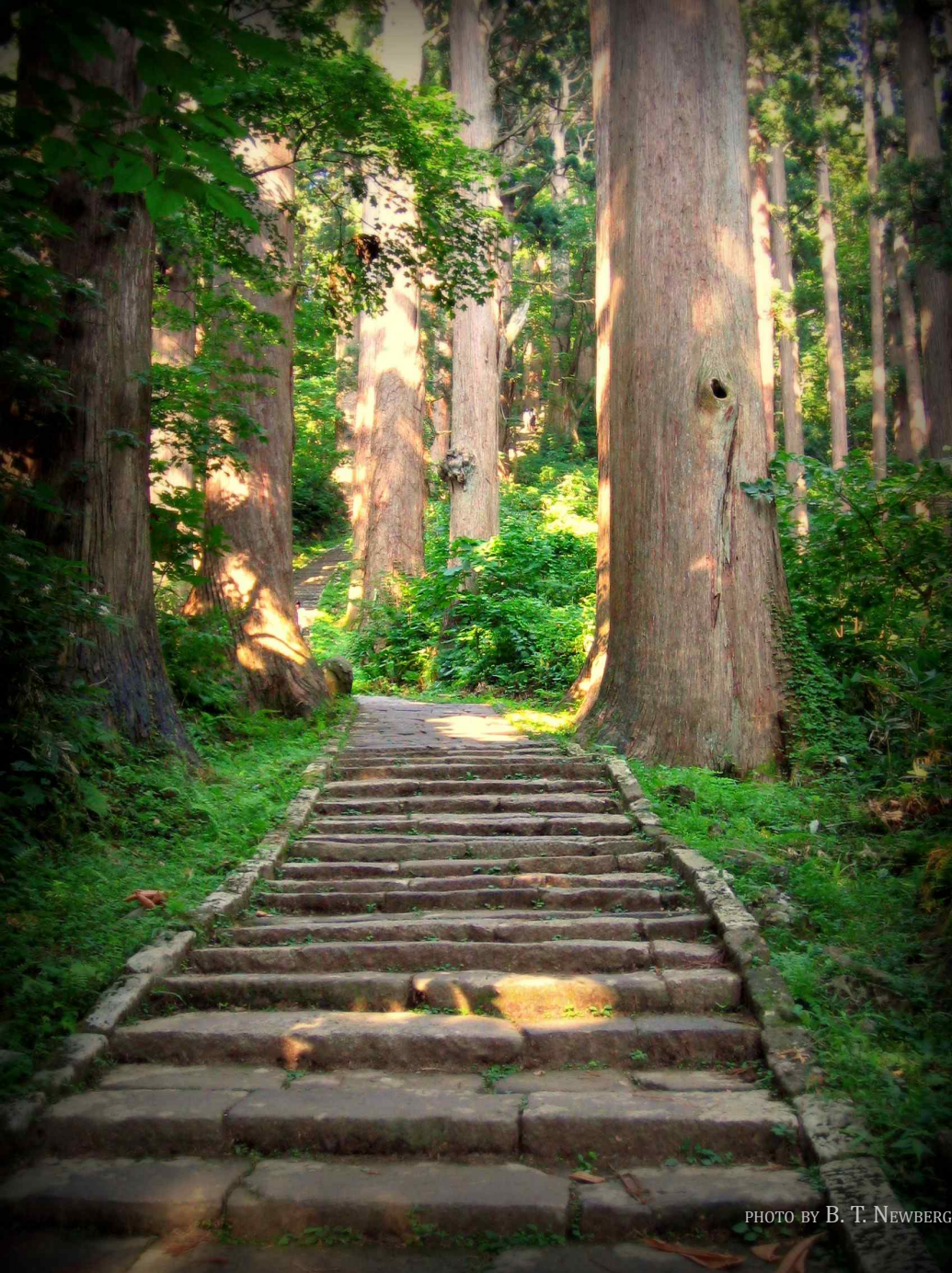


PHOTO BY B. T. NEWBERG

STEPS AT HAGURO-SAN SHRINE IN YAMAGATA, JAPAN

Of course, this process is not entirely empirical. While all perception is subject to influence by unconscious prejudices and biases, mental phenomena are particularly malleable. Furthermore, it is difficult if not impossible to subject interior sensations to peer review, which is a key element of the scientific method. For these reasons, the introspective sense is called “semi-empirical”, while “empirical” is reserved for the five external faculties of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

The sum total of senses available to you are the “Five +1.” This term avoids confusion with the paranormal connotations of “sixth sense.” The Five +1 are the natural, ordinary, and familiar powers by which all human beings learn about their world and themselves.

All inferences we need make about the world and how we ought to live can be traced back to these six sources of empirical and semi-empirical data shared equally by all humans. Those things neither confirmed nor disconfirmed by reference to the five senses are simply placed in the category “unknown.” For example, metaphysical claims not subject to verification via the Five +1, such as the existence of divine beings or authority of revealed texts, are unknowns. The introspective experiences of others are also appropriately labeled unknown, even if one’s own such experiences are knowable. As a result of this method, Humanistic Paganism is equally accessible to all. There is no dependence on individuals, texts, or initiations privileged with special authority; every Humanistic Pagan can investigate truth-



claims for him or herself. Furthermore, truths once found can be shared with others without special pleading; they can be demonstrated through simple empirical verification. This allows the development of a common body of knowledge and experience shared by all, accessible to all, and uniting all. Humanistic Pagans thus devote themselves to the contemplation of the Five +1 and the study of knowledge deriving from them.

### **Relationship with mythology**

Second, the Humanistic Pagan cultivates a relationship with a mythology, a set of cultural symbols drawn from Pagan tradition. There is no need to posit the real, independent existence of deities or the historicity of mythic events; instead, these may be treated as shared cultural forms and structures uniquely capable of expressing certain facets of human experience.[4] In this way, the individual opens to a deeper, more comprehensive field of expression than is communicable by purely rational, scientific reasoning.[5] Relationship with a mythology may take some active attunement. This can be accomplished through researching a Pagan culture, meditating on its symbols, sharing its myths with others, and participating in rituals designed to inspire. The net effect of such effort is not only familiarity with Pagan mythology but also self-development, as the psychological nature of the work can unleash new levels of self-awareness and understanding. Humanistic Pagans thus devote themselves to mythological development. In this way, they embrace not only the science but also the art of life.

### **Responsible action**

Third, Humanistic Pagans accept responsibility for their actions. Our impact on the world is more visible than ever in this age of globalization and environmental crisis. The mere act of living has consequences for society and nature, and the way we choose to live can help or hinder. Accepting responsibility involves two affirmations: first, that we cause many if not most of our problems, in whole or in part; and second, that we are capable of solving our problems. We have no need of divine or supernatural aid; the power is ours. Thus, Humanistic Pagans devote themselves to meeting the challenges of life with positive action.

### **A sense of wonder**

Finally, the life of the Humanistic Pagan is marked by a sense of wonder. The mysteries of the natural world, from human psychology to the farthest star, never cease to fascinate. If any aspect of the path truly deserves to be called spiritual, this is it.

Wonder is that feeling felt in the presence of natural beauty – beauty which is all the more astounding for having been self-created, free of purpose. Humanistic Pagans sense the sublime majesty of nature, and know that they belong to that very majesty as integral parts of the whole. Wonder is also felt upon the realization that within that whole we are free to determine our own purpose, free of any interloping deity and free of the threat of what may come after death. Wonder is what is felt when we understand that the present moment is all that is certain, all that we have, and all that we need. The thing that makes life worth living is, at bedrock, wonder. Humanistic Pagans acknowledge that, and nurture their natural sense of connection to nature through wonder.

These four characteristics unite the cornucopia of diverse lifestyles grounded in Humanistic Paganism. Through dedication to the Five +1, mythological development, responsible action, and wonder, Humanistic Pagans embrace a powerful way of being-in-the-world. They take a life-stance rooted in the best aspects of Humanism and Paganism, two traditions that together give birth to a hardy hybrid well-suited to the modern era. They walk a path that is positive, fulfilling, and ultimately life-affirming. That path celebrates human experience, diversity, and the natural world. It makes virtues of human reason, self-development, responsibility, and curiosity. It addresses the intellectual, social, and psychological needs of our time. Through it, one may live a life grounded in modern science, enriched with mythic symbolism, and inspired toward responsible action and wonder. Humanistic Paganism is a path of human fulfillment for the 21st century.

---

[1] “Paganism” can also be used more broadly to mean virtually any non-Abrahamic religion, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Shinto, etc. While the value of these traditions is acknowledged, it becomes extremely difficult to make any valid generalizations about Paganism at such a broad level. Thus, I restrict myself to European forms. Even within Europe, there is a wide variety of different traditions that should be carefully distinguished. Mixing and matching generally produces superficial results, so the Humanistic Pagan would be well-advised to stick to a single culture with a single pantheon or mythology, such as Norse, Greek, Gaelic, Roman, etc., within any given ritual or meditation.

[2] Indeed, such a resurgence is already underway. For a good primer on the modern Pagan revival see Margot Adler’s Drawing Down the Moon, and for a broad account of Paganism from ancient to modern times, see Jones and Pennick’s A History of Pagan Europe.

[3] Non-European roots of Humanism are also acknowledged. Confucianism, for example, is a particularly venerable tradition basically Humanistic in outlook. Also, it should be noted that Classical Greek Humanism was significantly different from modern forms of Humanism, as was Renaissance Humanism. All these should be considered historical strata contributing to the overall character of modern Humanism.

[4] While some Pagans today do assert the real, independent existence of deities, many others do not. Both literal and metaphorical interpretations have precedents going back millennia, all the way to Classical times. Thus, Humanistic Pagans should be aware of and sensitive to those who interpret deities literally, but know that neither interpretation has any more claim to the “real” Pagan tradition.

[5] This is not to imply that a life without mythology is necessarily incomplete, only that a life with it opens certain doors, just as an artist’s life is certainly enriched in ways not so for those with no interest or inclination to create art. Mythology enriches the lives of those inclined to it.





PHOTO BY URBAN HAAS

# Oungan François

BY URBAN HAAS

On May 9th, I became an Oungan Sur Pwenn, a priest of Vodou. I serve the spirits. I chose the name François of the Crow; François after my grandfather Francis. I live on the Crow River. The Crow feeds into the Mississippi, which in turn flows down to New Orleans (NOLA), a sacred city to me. Sur Pwenn means on the point; I'm at the beginning. While I can't speak much of the actual process of initiation, it would nevertheless be meaningless. I'll try to explain what I mean.

## Now I Get It

After returning home I had a laugh to myself. I had a thought, "Now I get it," thinking back on my initiation, when I remembered hearing pretty much the same thing said by others before.

I remember asking what I should do to prepare for initiation. I wasn't given anything to prepare. No homework. Of course, I need to preserve the songs. I was already helping maintain our altar, but I was surprised at the answer. So I read. But after initiation, I'm different. And that's the point I now get. It's an experiential thing. It's something that happens, not something you study. You *experience* Vodou. You feel it, you know it.

Three years ago when we took that first trip to NOLA, I felt like I got hit by the Vodou stick. NOLA has an energy, a feeling that's all around you. It gets into you. When I went in for initiation, it wasn't that stick that hit me. I got swept up in a flood. It carried me like a river. It flowed through me. I experienced it.

And that's the feeling I'm left with after. I couldn't do homework for it. It's something that happens. That's what it meant. Now I get it.

## Feeling Different

I realize when I started writing this, I assumed that first trip to NOLA was earlier than it actually was. I was off by a year. I have some reoccurring events in my life – things I seem to miss until it's time. I had tickets to *Phantom of the Opera* two times before I made it on the third attempt. Something would always happen at the last minute causing me to miss the show. The same thing happened with going to NOLA. I was set to go twice before I made it. Something would stop me each time, the trip would get cancelled at the last minute, once on the way to the airport. I wasn't ready – the right circumstances hadn't aligned. On that third time, after Katrina passed over me while in the Bahamas, I made it. It swept me up. I confuse how long ago it was because I had that timeless feeling I've written about before.

So the most common question I get is, “do you feel different?”





The short answer is yes. I feel much different. I feel plugged in, a feeling of being connected. The closest analogy I can get is in deep meditation, in the moment of kundalini. Only it's happening most of the time, not just in the point of breath, that moment outside of time. It's constant. I see and feel the world differently. It's a wonderful feeling.

I'm not assuming this is universal. Being experiential means it's my experience. Different people may experience the Lwa in different ways. It is only my understanding at the beginning, of Sur Pwenn, of where I am at this particular moment in time.

## **Serving the Spirits**

The spirits call. This is not meant to be a statement of ego, but rather a point beside it. At my best, putting ego aside, that's where my service does it's best. That's what it means to serve.

They call it an initiation. It's not an event, but a beginning. Understanding deepens with time and more experience, additional service. This is the point on which I stand, striving for a deeper awareness.

I feel good where I stand, on the point. There are more steps beyond it. Each moment of my life came together for this step; they continue beyond. Everything I perceive has a different meaning. It's a beautiful thing.

This article was first published at [Chasing the Asson](#).



PHOTO BY B. T. NEWBERG

# The Heroic Life

BY DREW JACOB

I decided to live the Heroic Life after many years of telling the myths of the ancient heroes. One day I realized that although their stories are fun to read or hear, they would be more fun to live. So I've begun to change my entire life to be able to travel and do great things.

To live the Heroic Life means taking action, living for high ideals, charging fearlessly into new and grand plans, building a name around your art or skill, and using your life to change the way the world works.

In the Heroic Life it's not terribly important whether there is an afterlife, whether gods watch what I do, whether prayers are answered. Instead, I try my best to answer my own prayers. And when I die, if there is nothing more, I'll have lived a life so exciting and worthwhile that I'll have no regrets. That is my spirituality.

## Four Core Beliefs

As I've come to understand the heroic path I've accepted four basic beliefs. Taken together they define the mindset it takes to change the world.

1. **Everyone has a purpose in life.** There is something you're good at, that you love doing—something that gives your life meaning. Know what that thing is, and pursue it.



2. **If you don't know your purpose, you should travel.** Travel changes the mind and it also introduces you to exponentially more possibilities than staying put. If you don't yet have a passion in life, go on a journey. You might meet the love of your life, find a master worth learning a craft from, or simply find a culture that fills you with inspiration.
3. **Ideals, not rules.** I find ideals far more useful than rules. Rules are a poor substitute for a moral compass, and they don't require critical thinking. So choose your values, your ideals. Maybe Respect? Bravery? Peace? You get to choose, but *choose*. And then stick by them.
4. **You can do amazing things.** Has anyone ever said something that stopped you in your tracks? Have you ever seen a master at work—a musician, a martial artist, anything—doing something better or faster than you thought possible? It's almost supernatural. But you can cultivate those amazing moments. You can become so good at something, and so full of knowledge, that it's uncanny.

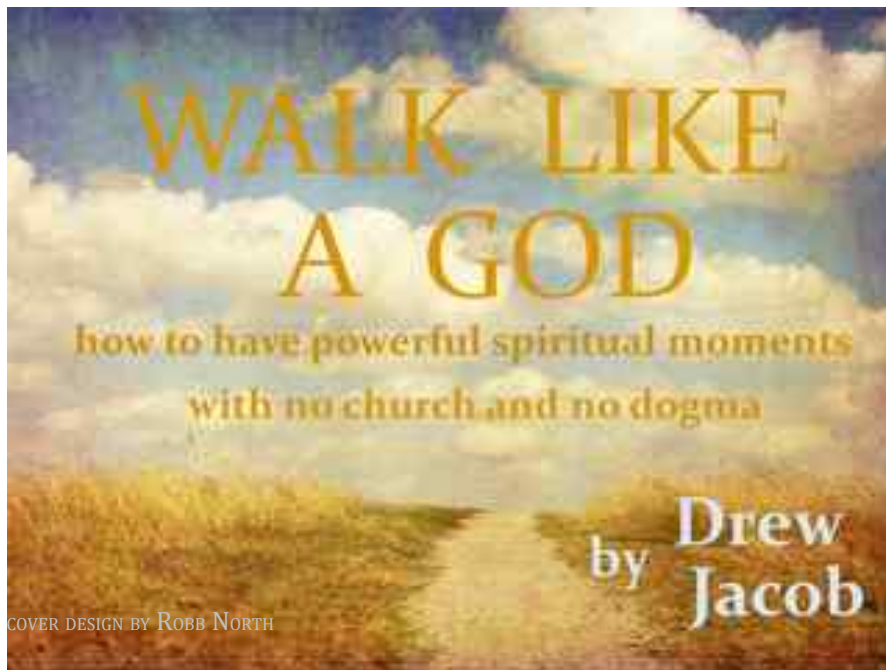
No one *has* to do this. If this stuff doesn't interest you, you don't have to follow the heroic path. **You won't get fired, fined or divorced for not doing amazing things.** On the other hand...

These four principals build a life that's about more than just getting by. It's a life of passionately following what you believe in and accomplishing great things. The entire process bristles with the energy that comes from a sense of purpose. These are the experiences that give meaning to a human life.

More than that, **the heroic path is meant to change the world.** Your goal might be wealth, love, fame, or something else. Those are fine goals. As long as you live your life by high ideals your successes will benefit those around you as much as they benefit you.

That's why it's called the *heroic life*.

This article was first published at [RoguePriest.net](http://RoguePriest.net).



# A Review of Drew Jacob's *Walk Like a God*

BY B. T. NEWBERG

As I read this ebook, memories flashed over me. Long forgotten memories of riding my bike in the rain as a boy. Or trudging into the tall grass of a creek to be alone with my thoughts. Or climbing the tallest mountain in Southeast Asia, just to prove to myself I could do it. These are the kinds of experiences evoked by *Walk Like a God*.

From simple walks in nature to challenging journeys, Drew provides a manual for experiencing spirituality through action. He leads the reader gently but firmly into a world where adventure is possible.

The aim of the book is what Drew calls the "Heroic Life." By cultivating skills, facing fears, and pushing personal limits, one becomes the hero of one's own myth. One learns to "walk with the gods."

This is spirituality not of innocence but of experience. Spirituality, for Drew, is less about the divine and more about personal growth. The divine may play a part, but it need not. He is quite explicit about that. This is not faith, it's practice.

The journey begins by entering a natural environ, opening to a sense of place, and beginning to listen:

"With this basic talent – this ability to listen to nature – you are witnessing something of immense importance. By addressing the natural forces around you as living beings, you re-enact the origin of religion itself. I won't comment on whether these are actual spirits or if they are in your unconscious mind. Regardless of who is doing the answering, this technique is a powerful way of



receiving insightful, unexpected guidance." (p. 40)

This basic practice leads to a deepening relationship with nature. While this may not sound very heroic yet, readers are encouraged to push personal limits. Each foray should expand toward ever-greater challenges:

"Challenging yourself to your limit is a tool of spiritual development. It is such a strong tool that I call it a **weapon of spirituality**. By racing into your fears, you radically alter the landscape. Everything changes when you yourself are changing." (p. 17)

But this is not a book about leaping off the nearest cliff - not without wise preparation and maybe a parachute. "Controlled crisis" is how Drew puts it. Advice on planning more elaborate adventures, beginning with outlining the skills you'll need and how you're going to acquire them, moves goals step-by-step into the realm of possibility.

These adventures are not limited to the wilderness. The goals you set are your own. Examples Drew gives include trying free running, winning a dance competition, or sailing across an ocean.

The overall impression left by *Walk Like a God* is that of verve and potential. The visual layout works toward this, too: the 86 pages, set in landscape orientation, are full of short lines, half pages, and photographs of wide-open natural scenes. Each page gives a sense of the wide-open road expanding before you.

As for the prose, it's simple but elegant. Vivid imagery gives a warm, personal impression, dripping with richness like dew on a vine of grapes. Most stunning was how often I saw myself reflected in these lines. It was as though Drew had been peaking over my shoulder all these years, writing down what I was experiencing.

At times I felt intellectually starved by Drew's writing, like I couldn't take a single further page of sentimental build-up. But each time, he culminates in a point that makes me realize the significance of what he's saying by bringing me back to an experience of my own that pops to mind, and I realize I never consciously gave it the value it deserves.

If there is any weakness to the book, it is that it promises too much. It claims to provide tools to make one god-like - a hefty boast, to be sure. Yet the first forty pages barely get one out on a leisurely stroll. This leaves less room to explore the truly challenging stuff, which is sorely missed. The way is left open for future volumes dedicated to greater adventures that await

along the road of the Heroic Life.

More than a manual of spirituality, *Walk Like a God* is a handbook for living. *Really* living. From connecting with nature to scaling mountains, this is how you'll do it. If you ever had a dream you thought wasn't possible, this is the book that will be with you when you achieve it.

*Walk Like a God* by Drew Jacob is available for [purchase here](#).

Jacob, Drew. *Walk Like a God: How to Have Powerful Spiritual Moments With No Church and No Dogma*. 2011. 86 pages. \$8 or get it free from a friend (no really, Drew encourages passing it around to help the maximum number of people!).