

Grounding

by Judy Harrow (HPS, Proteus Coven)

Have you noticed that Pagans use the word *grounding* to mean two entirely different activities? Sometimes it means releasing excess energy at the end of a working. At other times it means latching on, tapping in to the Source of the energy, empowering ourselves in preparation for the worship or work at hand. This activity is about latching on, although both usages are important to our practice.

According to my *American Heritage Dictionary*, the ground is the solid surface of the Earth, and also an area of land designated for some particular purpose. By analogy, ground also means the foundation or basis of an argument, a belief, or an action, and the underlying conditions upon which our beliefs and actions are based. As a verb, to ground can mean literally placing something on the ground, providing a basis for something, or supplying people with basic information. To ground in this sense is to find your feet, find a place to stand.

One ancient way of blessing a newborn baby is to briefly place the naked child on the bare Earth. This simple and powerful ritual action would also be the best possible way to consecrate yourself to spiritual development within the Earth religions. Regrettably, few of us have access to private, secluded outdoor space where we could safely press our naked breasts against Hers. Still, we can all find somewhere to simply lay our bare hands upon Her skin and ask for Her guidance. Modern Pagans know how to make do.

Frequent, tangible and mindful contact with the Earth is what matters. Consider, you can hug a human loved one -- and feel pleasure and comfort in the contact -- even when both of you are fully dressed. A couple of layers of cloth is not that much of a barrier. Even the soles of a sturdy pair of shoes allow you much more Earth contact than concrete or floorboard ever could. So, dress for comfort and safety -- and get outdoors, get off the pavement. Let yourself feel your body in close proximity, if not direct contact with the irregular, resilient, living surface of Mother Earth.

Stand still and breathe. Look and listen. Walk around, paying attention to the sensations in your feet. Are you going up or down hill? Is the ground soft or firm? Try walking on a beach, on a piney forest floor, on a lawn -- how do they feel different underfoot? If you feel safe, try them barefoot. (beware of broken glass, poison ivy, disease-bearing ticks).

Sit down, and plan on sitting for a while. Find a place where your back is supported by a rock or the trunk of a tree. If the ground is chilly, a folded-up old blanket will insulate you. Let yourself enter a relaxed and alert state of mind, sort of like meditation, but directed to the life around you rather than to your inscape. Rest your

gaze on the square foot or so of ground that is right in front of you. Quietly observe all the tiny, intricate life activity in that one small area.

When you've been still for awhile, you may be visited by a ladybug or a bird. A leaf or petal may fall into your lap. Mother Earth is present all around you, far more palpably than She is indoors. Feel Her presence.

Lie down. If you're in a safe place, you might nap. Sleeping outdoors replenishes the spirit. If you're under a tree, look up at the dancing leaves. Clouds by day and stars at night, Father Sky preens Himself for Mother Earth. If you feel like rolling over on your belly, don't hesitate. You are not prostrating yourself, you are snuggling up. You may want to let go to gravity (and to levity) and just roll down a gentle, grassy slope.

Pay attention to your experience, both the physical sensations and the emotions they evoke within you. Remember all this, so that you can draw on it when you are back indoors. Although we live most of our lives indoors, we are still Gaia's children. Even in a skyscraper, even in an airplane, we remain within Earth's biosphere. Estrangement is an illusion.

Indoors, it helps to have some token, some anchor for your memories. This need not be anything obvious. In most workplaces, a potted plant, or even a small rock or piece of driftwood, "souvenirs from your last vacation," will not draw notice. At home, you can be as blatant as your space or taste allows. Whatever you choose, keep it handy as a visual and tactile focus.

Your mind can certainly reach right through any building to the living Earth. The classic grounding meditation is to imagine a taproot extending down from the base of your spine to the living soil, and even to the bedrock below. Draw the energy up, like nurturing water, through this taproot and up your spine. Let it form branches like a tree. The fruit can go where it is needed, or fall to ground like the leaves in the autumn to nourish the Earth again. You can do this grounding meditation as a brief stress-buster, or use it as a preparation for further work.

Creating a Geological Grounding Meditation

The scientific study of the origin, history, and structure of the Earth is called *geology*. The word itself is built around Gaia's name. Lately, some Pagans have been creating geologically accurate grounding meditations. Instead of talking generically about soil, water table and bedrock, these meditations describe the actual rock strata in your area, and also a bit about how those particular rocks were formed. Doing the research for such a grounding is a good way to learn about the deep history of your own bioregion.

A nicely printed out, or even calligraphed, local grounding meditation also makes a particularly thoughtful and inexpensive housewarming gift. My own favorite geologist, the erudite Dr. Raven, gave me such a gift, so I asked her how it was done. She explained that geological papers have been written about nearly all settled areas. Your local library may not have this material, but a nearby university or government library probably will.

Geological information is becoming available on the Web as well. Two good web sites to start with are the United States Geological Survey and the Geological Survey of Canada.

Remember, you're trying to understand two related things: the vertical succession of materials beneath your home, and the various ways these materials came to be there. So it's not just ancient rock strata. It might also be old mine workings or the rubble of buildings that stood there before yours. Both belong in your grounding, if you are truly describing what is beneath you.

Geological papers normally include a synopsis of the geological history of the area in question. You may also find the same information presented as a table of formations (a listing of the scientific names of the rock layers, beginning with the grass roots and working down as deep as has been observed so far) or a geologic column (the same information presented graphically). To a geologist, these are the true magical names of the place.

Want more? Visit Robin Wood 's site (<https://www.robinwood.com>) for some excellent material on grounding and centering.

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