

## **CREATING A PERMANENT NEMETON**

By Rev. Kirk S. Thomas

Normally, Groves start out holding ritual in parks, members' homes or just about anywhere they can find enough space at a reasonable price. In time, however, many Groves will decide that it is time to build a permanent Nemeton. This article will first cover permanent Nemetons in general, and then follow with the description of an example in Arizona.

There are some advantages that a permanent ritual location can have over temporary ones. The primary one may be consistency. While a temporary Nemeton can always be put up and purified, there's something to be said for a site already there and ready to go. A space dedicated to the sacred and never used for profane activities is one that need never have its energies dissipated. These energies can build up over time and the location cannot help but become more powerful.

A permanent Nemeton can also become a focal point for the Grove's energies. Members can decorate it in a more permanent fashion, making the space their own.

A permanent location is also good for community building. People are more likely to show up for ritual when they don't have to search out the location every time. And having a permanent Nemeton can also give newcomers the impression that the Grove is "successful" and therefore more attractive. Of course, the quality of the rituals held in the Nemeton may be the deciding factor for potential new members.

So how does one go about getting started?

Once the land and/or building are secured, decide what sort of layout would work best with your Grove's ethnic focus or rituals. The two most common ones are based on the rectangle and the circle.

### **LAYOUTS**

#### **Rectangular Nemetons**

In at least the ancient Hellenic and Roman cultures (and possibly in the Celtic lands during Roman times), it was common for a small temple to exist at one end of a rectangular space. The statue of the God or Goddess dwelled in the temple, and the doors would be opened for ritual. In front of the temple would be an altar for sacrifices, and the people would stand in the space facing the altar and temple.

Outdoors, this could easily be accomplished by using a small garden shed, purchased at your local garden center, as the temple. The backyards of most houses are rectangular in shape and would fit this layout very well. Indoors, most rooms are

rectangular, and could also be laid out in this fashion, though the 'temple' might be suggested rather than actually built.

With rectangular Nemetons used in this way, the people and priests all face one direction – towards the altar and the image of the God or Goddess. As Rob Barton put it, our clergy represent the face of the people in dealing with the sacred, not the face of the sacred dealing with the people. All of our members, not just the clergy, are able to perform any sacramental functions. No one claims authority from the Kindreds, only the people.

### **Circular Nemetons**

A very popular layout is the circle. Probably drawn from Wicca and Ceremonial Magic, the circular sacred space is quite common. The megalithic stone circles of the ancient British Isles and Western Europe may also be reflected in this layout, however. There are scholars in the academic community that believe that the Celtic cultures came to Britain via a sort of cultural osmosis rather than by physical invasion. If this is so, then the megalithic stone circle builders may have been ancestors of the Insular Celts, making a circular layout for a Celtic based Grove not unreasonable.

Indoors, there can be the problem of making a circle within a rectangular room. One Grove has solved this problem very neatly. Their well, fire and tree symbols have been built into a single unit in the shape of a straight line, and the unit is situated in the center of the room. The people can surround this in a circular way.

Outdoors, stones can be arranged marking the edge of a circle with the ritual taking place inside. These stones can range from simple flagstones laid on the ground up to large standing stones in the megalithic tradition.

In circles, the people and clergy all face inward, towards one another. While this may make for a more egalitarian feel to ritual, care should be taken to ensure that everyone is focused on the appropriate Deities, Nature Spirits, Ancestors or symbols.

### **Marking Sacred Space**

Indoors, when an entire room is the Sacred Space, little is needed to mark it out. Entrances will be the doors, and any Outdwellers area will be elsewhere. Spaces out of doors, however, may require markings to delineate the area. Stone circles are obviously marked with the stones. Other circles and rectangular spaces can be marked with stones, stakes, fencing or anything else that pleases you. Some groups put up posts with markings in a culturally appropriate script, or with carving or with art. But you will want to mark the edges of your sacred area.

Well, Fire And Tree

The symbols of the Indo-European cosmos that many Groves use are the Well, Fire and Tree. Other Groves use symbols more culturally specific, such as the Focus, Mundus and Portus of Roman cosmology.

Groves wanting to use these or other more culturally specific symbols should contact the appropriate ADF Kin for information.

Ideally, the Well should be a free-flowing spring. Failing that, it can be a small pool or large cauldron. The Fire is usually a fire pit – indoors, a fireplace will do nicely. The Tree can be either a real tree, planted in the ground or in a large pot, or a carved pole. Whatever you use, be sure that it is large enough to be seen and be useful with large groups.

Some Groves also include a shaft or pit used for offerings to the earth.

### **Outdwellers**

Different Groves handle the Outdwellers differently. Many make an offering to Them, asking Them to stay away and not bother the rite. Others dispense with offerings and instead invoke a warrior God or Goddess to protect the rite. Still others don't bother with Them at all.

For those Groves who make offerings to the Outdwellers, simply having the celebrant walk somewhere outside of sacred space to make the offering is enough. Other Groves have built altars for the Outdwellers outside of sacred space for the offerings.

### **Summerlands Stone Circle**

One purpose-built Nemeton is the Summerlands Stone Circle in Tucson, Arizona. The home Nemeton for the Sonoran Sunrise Grove, ADF, this circle was laid out as part of a larger sacred precinct.

As the procession approaches the Sacred Space, they first come to the Outdwellers Altar, built of a basalt stone set upon smaller stones with a grimacing plaster face attached to the base. Beyond that are two granite pillars marking the entrance to the sacred area, each carved with a triple spiral. The Procession then winds down a path to another pair of stones flanking the entranceway to the circle itself. The Procession enters the circle from the east, and there are benches built into the foundations holding the standing stones. The twelve standing stones are quite large and vary in weight from 3500 to 7000 pounds each.

There is a Southern Live Oak tree (representing the World Tree or Bile) in the north end of the circle with a large, stone altar just to the south of it, a "Well" (actually a small, raised pool representing the earth power, underworld and the western sea) in the

southwest and a raised fire pit (representing the sky power and the heavens) in the southeast. There is also a covered socket in the center of the circle for a Maypole.

Outside the circle itself are the altars, each with appropriate glazed icons. The altar in the east (Brigit) marks the rising of the sun on the Equinoxes and the altar on the west (Cernunnos) marks the setting of that sun. Altars on the southeast (Taranis) and southwest (Rhiannon) mark the rising and setting of the Winter Solstice sun and the altars on the northeast (Lugh) and northwest (Manannan Mac Lir) mark the Summer Solstice sun. There are also altars on the south wall of the Sacred Precinct.

As of this writing, there are also plans to add two more altars (Nature Spirits and Ancestors) as well as a labyrinth and Sweat Lodge to the Sacred Precinct. Since the circle was completed in early 2001 until today (December, 2003), the Sonoran Sunrise Grove has gone from 7 members to nearly 30 (with ritual attendance between 35 and 80). But even if no one else ever came, the circle gives the Grove a special home, full of power and wonder and beauty.