

Walking the Unseen Roads: Utilizing Trance States for Otherworldly Travel

Facilitated by Three-Fifths of The Catskin Sisters

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About the Catskin Sisters

We are a group of five women in Central Illinois that are actively working with the German magic/shamanistic practice of Seidhr. We try to act as ambassadors between the worlds. We seek out alliances and information in the Otherworlds for our own education, for a better understanding of the worlds around us, ultimately to strengthen the bonds between this world and the others, for the good of all who seek. For our own communities, and among ourselves, we seek for a clearer picture of future events that are being woven, so that we and others may better understand them.

We meet once a month and are working on being a resource to our local communities, and, with our blog, a reservoir of knowledge based upon our mystical workings. Feel free to visit us online at <http://catskinsisters.wordpress.com>.

Seidhr Defined

- Seidhr (or seith) is the name given to a magical practice employed among the pre-Christian Northern European peoples, predominantly by highly skilled women.
- Seidhr involved a form of induced trance, during which the Seidhkona might work magic, travel outside of her body, prophesy in answer to questions, or, with practice, work Wyrð.
- She would weave good luck for the household, and answer questions about the future of the family and harvest.
- Some people use the term Spae instead of Seidhr, which refers specifically to a trance used for prophesying, in an attempt to overcome the negative reputation that Seidhr acquired in some areas; however, Seidhr is the term still used today to span the whole gamut of Northern trancework and journeying.

Wyrð Explained

- The ancient Northern peoples believed that the world was being woven into existence from moment to moment, everything comprising a vast tapestry of possibilities that coalesced into events. This great tapestry of being is called the Web of Wyrð.
- Wyrð is woven by the Weird Sisters, the Norns, who in Norse myth are named Urd, Verdandi, and Skuld.
- The sisters have the ability to see the web in its entirety, and the responsibility of overseeing its weaving. As such, they are great allies for the aspiring Seidhkona.

Understanding Altered States of Consciousness

Meditation: A Brief discussion from a Western point of view

- Used in both religious and secular contexts.
- Frequently done as an internal process, sometimes aided by breath work, prayer beads or focal objects to sharpen concentration and awareness.
- Term describes both an altered state of awareness as well as the techniques utilized during the process of attaining that mental state. Some techniques employ body postures, movements, repetitive chanting, or the use of entheogens.
- Western approaches to meditation often stress the focus of attention on a specific object or goal or on the practice of “mindfulness”, wherein one’s awareness is directed toward an object, goal, or person. These two approaches are not necessarily exclusive to one another. Meditation is also employed as a tool to connect the mind and body.

- In religious, spiritual, and secular contexts, meditation is used for a variety of purposes, some of which include: enlightenment, self-reflection, personal connection with the divine, reflection on sacred texts/mythos/events, relaxation, calming, guided imagery/experiences.

Guided Meditation

- One of the forms of meditation in which live or recorded auditory stimuli guide the listener through a meditative experience, usually in a step-by-step fashion. Many guided meditations have specific goal(s) in mind (healing, celebration, spiritual connection, energy field and/or body awareness, etc.) for the listener. They are often used as a tool for spiritual or personal growth as well as for relaxation.

Trance: An altered state of consciousness

- Trance can be used to assist in divination and oracular work (communing/conversing with spirits, gods, ancestors, etc.), journeying the Otherworlds, healing rituals, to experience visions, accessing ecstatic or euphoric states, etc.
- Trance state can be intentionally induced, as well as accidentally brought on, through several different methods:
 - Hypnosis
 - Meditation, prayer, religious/spiritual rituals
 - Singing and/or chanting
 - Rhythmic movements (dancing, performing tasks, sex, exercise)
 - Rhythmic music and drumming
 - Use of entheogens
 - Deprivation of food, water, oxygen, or sleep.
 - Yoga, breathwork
 - Ceremonial sweating
 - Visual cues, strobe lights
 - Olfactory triggers: incense, perfumes, etc.
 - Some information linking trance states to theta level brain waves can be found at: <http://www.blumoonwicca.org/trance.html>

****Disclaimer:** The listing above is not an endorsement for untrained individuals to induce a trance state without the proper preparation, guidance, and safety precautions as some of these methods can cause physical/psychological/emotional harm. Please attempt at your own risk as we cannot be responsible for any outcomes resulting from the actions of anyone using information presented here.

Trance Induction Methods

- A trance induction method is any approach that facilitates the transition from standard, waking conscious awareness to a deep altered state of consciousness
- Common Methods/Approaches:
 - Have clear intent before beginning, even if it is just to explore
 - If your work/destination is particular, keep that in mind. You may even state it aloud.
 - Get comfortable, either sitting or lying down. If you tend to fall asleep, then sit rather than lay.
 - Examples of techniques used by the Catskin Sisters include:
 - Meditation
 - Use a method you are used to
 - If you do not have a standard meditation, you might begin with the common Neo-Pagan grounding and centering tree meditation or find another you like and record it onto an audio device, or simply memorize the steps

- Music and/or Drumming
 - To the tempo of the heartbeat
 - Deeper tones can be helpful
 - CD, do it yourself, or have a friend who is not going into trance do it for you
- Chant and/or Song
 - Keep words simple and/or repetitive
 - Keep melody simple and/or repetitive
 - Again, try to maintain heart rhythm
- Rhythmic Movement
 - Slow and organic, swaying/rocking are good examples of this
 - Use staff or other implement to help steady you as trance comes
- Entheogens
 - Use sparingly and with caution, especially in the beginning
 - Obtain from a trusted and knowledgeable source
 - Ensure that the substance is legal in your state/country
 - Alcohol is a common and often overlooked entheogen for magickal/ritual purposes
- Cues and Triggers
 - Intended to streamline trance and shorten the length of time required for induction
 - Can be almost anything that makes sense to you – an image, a tactile sensation, a word, a smell, a sequence of actions (i.e. a trance induction ritual)
 - Must be used regularly and frequently in order to work most efficiently and effectively as a cue/trigger
- Re-inducing A Faltering Trance State
 - Take a few deep, slow, rhythmic breaths
 - Intention a deepening of the state
 - Repeat a slow, rhythmic action like swaying, or softly hum a portion of your song/chant, or anything else that you can meaningfully and effectively do without further lifting the trance.
 - Try not to panic and try not to send yourself negative messages about how terrible it is that your trance is not holding.
 - If you cannot deepen the trance, slowly emerge, thanking your guides and other spirits called for their help and try again later when you feel motivated to do so. Remember, *sans* negative self-talk.

Rules of the Unseen Roads

In the Otherworlds...

- Physics works differently! You can fly, swim, burrow, or transport yourself wherever you need to be.
- Astral body is not a “set shape” ...can be molded or shifted to take on different shape/form/height/clothes
- The energy in some areas is toxic.
- Be aware that your astral body can be harmed, and this can have effects on one’s physical body
- Some areas may be “private property” and guests will be unwelcome
- Some areas of the astral will be densely populated while other areas will be sparser.
- The passage of time, seasonality, and weather can vary significantly from that of our physical world. More local areas of the astral may match up to a higher degree.
- The more remote areas in the astral may be difficult to maintain a link with in the beginning of your traveling experiences.
- The energy in certain areas may be incompatible with your body’s energy.

- Just like our world, the Otherworlds have their own sets of inhabitants with their own customs, politics, and agendas.
- The look of many worlds will depend on how your brain translates the energy of the world into a visual for your mind. Your mental system of symbols and your expectations can have an impact on your visual impressions of astral terrains.
- Areas mentioned in lore, mythology, and sacred texts tend to have a strong astral link with our own world/local astral. They may be the easiest places to access for beginner travelers.

Some advice:

- Protection is key! Don't travel without taking safety precautions however that translates in your spiritual tradition: warding, shielding, casting a protective circle, hallowing, saining, invoking protective spirits/deities, etc.
- Teaming up with spiritual allies and/or guides is helpful and provides additional safety and advice to you.
- Be polite, generous, kind and sincere with all entities you meet unless there's good reason to do otherwise. This can entail a wide range of behavior and customs...if in doubt on what to do, take a cue from the area's inhabitants...when in Rome!
- Keep track of your path in the astral so you can make the return journey much easier. Some groups advocate retracing your steps/rewinding your journey to make sure "all" of you comes back from the journey.
- Don't take gifts (objects, food, energy, etc.) from strangers! Don't know what it will do to your body; owing a strange entity a favor. If in doubt, consult your allies/guides/spirits/deities.
- Not all entities in the Otherworlds will have your best interest at heart...learning to tell the difference between truth and lies is a useful skill. Also, many entities will use "glamours" to convey messages of their power, beauty, or charm that may not actually exist in reality.
- Don't give away personal information or lend your energy to an entity if the situation feels strange or suspicious. Find a way to politely hedge the question/situation or give a vague or indirect answer. As above, consult an ally if you're not sure.
- Ask permission from the local inhabitants before building or changing things in that area, additionally don't mess with the personal belongings and property of the inhabitants without similar permission.
- Your words and agreements with entities are just as binding in the Otherworlds as they are in the physical world...don't make promises you don't intend to keep!
- If visiting areas mentioned in texts or oral traditions, doing your homework before traveling can lead to a more rewarding experience.
- When in doubt, bring a gift or offering as a token of goodwill when visiting an unfamiliar area for the first time. Consult other sources of information as to the most acceptable gifts to give to avoid unintentionally insulting your "hosts" in the Otherworlds.

Confirming Experiences in the Otherworlds

- Issues of Trust
 - Spirits can and do lie at times, just like people!
 - Consequently, we need to seek out information that confirms or denies the information obtained
 - In general, new experiences/encounters are the ones that you will want to consistently validate through one of the methods given below.
- Verifying and Validating Information and Experiences
 - Deity, Spirit Guide, or Intuition Endorsement While Traveling
 - Sometimes in a new situation, your intuition will guide you or a deity/trusted spirit will lead you down a certain path. In those instances, less caution is needed.
 - Known and Trusted Source in the Otherworlds

- With time and several journeys to the same place and encounters with the same beings, you will learn who you can trust and you will need increasingly less external verification for what those beings tell you and for the applications/significance of it
- Divination After Traveling
 - You may perform confirmatory divination yourself or have an uninterested party complete it on your behalf. The latter is preferred, especially in very new or uncertain circumstances.
 - Any method could theoretically be used; however, for confirmatory work that you are doing yourself, we recommend tarot, runes, or another divination system that is less susceptible to the machination of your own mind.
- Fellow Traveler
 - *Unplanned*: on a separate journey, another person has a similar experience or receives similar information
 - *Planned*: Two people go to the same place and then compare notes following the journey.
- Oracles, Prophets, and Seers
 - Another person who enters deep trance and via communion with the gods or other willing spirits verifies or questions key aspects of your experience
- Signs & Omens
 - Phenomena in the natural world (weather patterns, animal behavior, and the like) that seem to speak directly to your situation
- Otherworldly Corroboration
 - Two or more unrelated beings tell you the same thing at different times on different journeys

Further Reading

- *Trance-Portation: Learning to Navigate the Inner World* by Diana L. Paxson
 - A good introductory manual on trance techniques
- *Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic : Ecstasy and Neo-Shamanism in North European Paganism* by Jenny Blain
 - An in-depth discussion of Seidhr and Spae from an anthropological perspective
- *Elves, Wights and Trolls: Studies Towards the Practice of Germanic Heathenry* by Kveldulf Gundarsson
 - A good guide to who and what you might find once you start wandering the worlds, and how best to interact with them.
- Additionally, for more information on the worldview and conception of the Otherworlds among Northern peoples, anything by Dr. Hilda Ellis Davidson is a worthwhile read.