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A Revelation You Can Taste

The Education of Attention in Swedish Initiatory Wicca (Court of Aine)

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How do practitioners learn to recognize divine presence? Drawing on apprentice ethnography in the Court of Aine, a Swedish Wiccan coven—four interviews and some twenty ritual occasions—this article argues that revelation is best understood as the gradual cultivation of sensory intelligibility. Concealment, on this account, is less the withholding of esoteric information than didactic pacing: by delaying interpretative closure, ritual practice protects the temporal conditions under which perception matures. Reading seasonal festivals, lunar rites and post-ritual meals through Birgit Meyer's "sensational forms" and Tim Ingold's "education of attention", I show how presence becomes recognizable through ordinary, socially calibrated senses—soil handled, bread consumed, wine selected, voices heard. Where recent scholarship foregrounds the cultivation of the inner senses, the Aine material shows presence secured through the outer. Attention is trained as much by failure as by success: when clay does not crack, or a sequence outruns the body's readiness, the form itself becomes visible and is collectively reassessed.

Introduction

Somewhere in northern Scania, in a pocket of deciduous forest, the light has the thickness of late summer. Honeyed, weighted, as if it has picked up sugar on its way through leaf and heat. The air clings. Sweat gathers under linen, and the ritual garments, meant to be breathable, simple, go dark at the spine and ribs where fabric meets skin. The season is turning but has not yet turned; everything is ripe and slightly over-full. It is Lammas: the harvest feast, the first cut, the beginning of the end.

We, the coven Court of Aine, led by our High Priestess and Priest, have returned to the small grove used as a temple. The ground opens just enough for a circle of bodies to stand without tripping over roots. The grass inside is flattened from years of repetition, feet returning to the same places, the same steps, while the forest continues its slow indifference: nettles growing where they will, brambles asserting themselves at the edge. To the north sits the altar stone, dark and familiar, a weight we have learned to treat as more than a prop. The circle is both geometry and social contract: a line you do not cross, a boundary made of attention. And yet it belongs, finally, to the weather-world: wind and sunlight and rain and slugs, mosquitoes, sometimes a leaping frog. Occasionally we find animal droppings on the stone. Another time an oak shoot grows in the middle, and we adjust our movements accordingly. Even when

drawn with the sharp point of the sword, the edges germinate.

Incense rises steadily from the altar. It threads upwards in narrow, confident streams before it breaks and smears against the humid air. The smoke is not atmosphere so much as a tether: it anchors my body in this particular air, fixes me to this circle, this hour, this time of year. The scent is sharp at first: resin and something bitter—then it settles into the back of my throat and stays there. Each inhale becomes a small rehearsal of presence. You cannot even breathe without participating.

Aurvandil, the coven Priest—now sacrificial god—stands within the circle with his sleeves pulled down over his hands. It is a small gesture, almost practical, but in the harvest heat it reads as vulnerability: fingers hidden, wrists covered, the body withholding its tools. His hands tremble under the cloth. His eyes move quickly around the ring of bodies—checking faces, checking distance, checking the knife. He is usually deft at carrying the role, steady enough for everyone else's nerves to settle. Today, something else is visible: exposure. In the tightness around his mouth, in the shape of his breath, I glimpse the little boy beneath the god. We have seen him before, across the Wheel of the Year—an infant at one rite, a teenager flirting with the Goddess at Beltane—and now it is time to die.[1]

Figure 1. The Corn King on his cutting board, beside the altar stone, incense and the beer for the chalice, before the Lammas rite of the Court of Aine. Image: Olivia Cejvan, 2025.

I feel how something passes between us across the short space: empathy, fear and anticipation shared among us at close range. It arrives like a change in barometric pressure. I do not think it, I feel it in my chest. For me in this moment, the god becomes real, not as a private vision through my inner eye, but as intensity that seems distributed through posture, breath, trembling and the watchfulness of others.

The Corn King is brought forward in the form of bread shaped like a man—unmistakably so, genitals almost too charming for what will be enacted. It rests on a solid cutting board. I register the Priest's trembling hands again. He looks from the knife to the

1 The Wheel of the Year is the annual cycle of eight seasonal festivals in Wicca, comprising four solar festivals (solstices and equinoxes) and four cross-quarter days. See Hutton (1996) for historical context.

faces and thence to the ground. I think he is scared of death and pain, just like me. A sacrificial god insistently human.[2]

He lies down. The cutting board is placed on his chest, the bread-man on top. For a moment they fuse into a single medium: body, offering, altar, one arrangement that makes the god present by form and sequence, by what everyone has agreed to treat as real.

The knife is silver and catches the honey-light. When the High Priestess lifts it, a crow calls out of nowhere, close enough that my eyes dart upwards. For a second I search the treetop above us: black wings, a shadow. Then my attention snaps back to the blade as it cuts straight down into the god. The sound is soft, the crackle of crust, but it lands hard in the wood. The Priest flinches. His sleeves no longer cover his hands; they clench the cutting board. He watches the cut as if it is happening to him. And in a sense, it is. The role requires him to be both agent and victim, to embody the sacrificial god.

The next ritual step is the chalice and bread, to drink and eat. The Corn King on the cutting board goes from person to person in the circle. We tear a piece of him in turn, putting it into the mouth. The Goddess follows with the chalice, bidding us to drink in turn. Bread sticks to the roof of my mouth as I wait for my turn.

The High Priestess's gaze finds mine and keeps it. I do not close my eyes. That matters here: not retreating inwards, not making the moment "truer" by withdrawing from the outer senses. Her eyes are a ritual instrument, steady and tender, and the holding of that gaze keeps you from drifting. My hands fold over hers as she places the chalice into my palms. The cup is heavier than it looks. More than a symbol of the Goddess, it is a thing with temperature and weight that insists on being held. The ale draws a wet line across my lips. The flavour arrives as earthiness, ferrous and dark, and my mouth responds before my mind can translate. Mud, soil, death. Bread, flesh of the god. I swallow and feel it travel down, cool against heat, the substance tracing my throat from the inside.

Around us the forest keeps teaching in small, timed interventions. A breeze arrives through the leaves, touching the back of the neck. Clouds hide the sun. The temperature drops by a degree and the damp linen grows cold on the skin. A moth beats briefly against someone's shoulder and is gone. These are cues—material prompts through which I respond to the world and the world responds back.

Are gods becoming real as the knife descends because we all feel a similar tightening, a similar hush, a similar quickened breath? So it seems from within the position I occupy as an apprentice Wiccan. Everyone hears the crow-call and knows what kind of presence has arrived. We have been taught through Irish mythology that the crow corresponds to the goddess of death. Goosebumps rise on my arms in recognition of myth. Barefoot in the grass, it makes little sense to call these sensations "interior". Warm tears run down my cheeks without any corresponding private image. Incense lingers in my nostrils. The ground is damp and cool under the arches

2 The Corn King is a figure from early-twentieth-century comparative mythology, representing a sacrificial harvest deity whose death and renewal enacts the seasonal cycle. Classical Wiccan accounts of this can be found in Farrar and Farrar (1996).

of my feet. Incense and ale become the states themselves rather than signs of them. Others can share or witness them, and the ritual can work on them.

This article asks how such recognition is cultivated. How do practitioners learn to hear, taste and feel what counts as presence? Could it be that concealment and revelation are organized not as the management of information, but as the pacing of perception?

Drawing on Birgit Meyer's "sensational forms" and Tim Ingold's "education of attention", I show how revelation in the Court of Aine, a Swedish Wiccan coven, is cultivated through ordinary, socially calibrated senses. During my fieldwork, I experienced concealment and revelation as a question of pacing: protecting the time needed for perception to mature within repeated forms. What is revealed is new capacity rather than new content: a trained ability to recognize divine presence in soil handled, bread consumed and voices heard.

While I foreground sensory intelligibility in this article, I should emphasize from the outset that teaching and learning in the Court of Aine is not *only* embodied. Sensory modalities operate in conjunction with doctrinal orientation (such as Irish mythology) and scripted ritual performance.[3] Inner sense cultivation is certainly also part of the curriculum. Practitioners are taught to sense the four elements and to find and interact with tutelary deities through meditation. What is distinctive about the pedagogy I encountered through fieldwork, and what this article traces, is the emphasis on educating sensory intelligibility through the material world around us. In other words, inner sense cultivation is not privileged over ordinary senses as the pathway to divine immediacy.

Method and material

This article draws on four semi-structured interviews with four interlocutors, together with my own apprenticeship in the ritual practices of the Court of Aine, which practises initiatory Wicca within the Aine tradition.[4] Longitudinal interviewing with members of the tradition began in 2018 as part of my doctoral research and has since developed into a larger longitudinal project, to which apprentice ethnography was added in 2025, with approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr 2025-00323-01). The ethnographic material presented here derives from approximately twenty ritual occasions attended between 2025 and 2026, spanning an outdoor grove and two indoor temple spaces, and encompassing seasonal festivals, New and Full Moon workings, and post-ritual meals. Fieldnotes were recorded after each rite, supplemented by the ritual scripts. All

3 As the High Priestess put it in response to this draft, the knowledge of a feast is better understood as threefold: (1) *theoretical orientation* (history, seasonal focus, ritual content), (2) *practical enactment* (participating in the sequence of words and deeds the texts scaffold), and (3) *embodied* response (how the rite lands in the body and becomes affectively and sensorially legible). My emphasis here is on the third strand, but embodied recognition is trained *through* the interplay of all three.

4 The Aine tradition belongs to the wider lineage of Swedish Initiatory Wicca, which stems from Court of Joy, the first documented Swedish coven, founded in 1987 by Laila Wiberg (1956–2002); for a brief overview of Wicca in Sweden, see Gregorius (2016).

participants are pseudonymized and have had the opportunity to read and comment on this article in draft.

I practise apprentice ethnography (Downey et al. 2015), following anthropologists who became students of the ritual practices they set out to describe: Paul Stoller (1997), Stoller and Olkes (1987), Jeanne Favret-Saada (1980; 2012) and Sabina Magliocco (2004), who was initiated into Gardnerian Wicca in the course of her fieldwork. Their research shows how entry into a practice through fieldwork, and training within it over time, is a condition of understanding it rather than a compromise of one's ability to do so. My approach also rests on Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's theory of situated learning (1991): knowledge of ritual practice is acquired through legitimate peripheral participation, by moving over time from the edge of a community's activities towards competence within them.

As an initiate in the Court of Aine, I am simultaneously an apprentice of Wiccan practice and an analyst of it. Because the object of study is learning itself, this doubling is methodologically productive rather than merely convenient: I submit to being taught while documenting how the teaching works. The descriptions that follow, including passages in the first person and the first-person plural, render my own experience as co-participant; they do not claim to represent what every participant perceived on a given occasion.

My engagement with the coven was preceded by several years of practice in Sodalitas Rosae Crucis, an esoteric society teaching ritual magic, whose pedagogy centres on inner sense cultivation and solitary ritual work (Cejvan 2023; 2024). That training shaped what I noticed: the salience of the ordinary senses in the Court of Aine became perceptible to me partly through contrast with a practice oriented in the opposite direction. My own case illustrates a wider condition—the coven's education of attention is not applied to blank slates. Participants arrive with perceptual histories that shape what they notice and how they enter a new ritual setting.

While this methodology shares with auto-ethnography an acknowledgement of the researcher's subjectivity as epistemologically significant (Anderson 2006), it treats that experience as a methodological instrument rather than the primary analytic object. My embodied immersion serves to illuminate the community under study. The reflexive dimension of this account discloses the conditions under which the knowledge was produced, and counts as data insofar as it illuminates the coven's ritual practice, its teaching and its outcomes.

A note on the limits of this account is warranted. What it shows is an education of attention as it succeeded; it does not show the full range of individual trajectories through that pedagogy. Some participants will experience the same rite differently, and trajectories of partial participation, quiet renegotiation or departure form an important dimension of the social world under study. Mapping that variation systematically lies beyond the scope of this article; it belongs to the broader longitudinal project of which this study forms a limited part.

Theoretical framework

Over the past two decades, the anthropology of religion has increasingly foregrounded learning as an analytic lens for

understanding religious participation, expertise and transformation. A key point of departure is *Learning Religion* (Berliner and Sarró 2007), which reframed religion not as the internalization of beliefs but as a socially organized, practice-based process unfolding through participation, imitation, correction and evaluation. Learning, in this perspective, is situated, relational and temporally extended. This orientation was sharpened by the *Ethnos* special issue "Learning Spirit Possession" (Ethnos 2012) which treated religious experience itself as something acquired through disciplined practice, social calibration and situated techniques of attention. The recent thematic issue "Religion and Spirituality as Sites of Learning" (*Approaching Religion* 2024) extends this learning religion paradigm across diverse empirical fields.

Parallel to this "learning turn", researchers on healing, mediumship and extraordinary experience have argued for embodied epistemologies: knowledge practices in which epistemology and ontology cannot be cleanly separated, and in which what counts as "real" is stabilized through lived, sensory participation (Pierini et al. 2023, 7–8). In this register, "spiritual technologies" are explicitly framed as requiring apprenticeship and skill acquisition (Bowie 2023, 230).

While recent work on learning religion has foregrounded inner sense cultivation (Luhrmann 2020; Cejvan 2023), my current fieldwork in the Court of Aine showed how divine presence is cultivated primarily through ordinary, world-mediated senses, even if inner sense cultivation is also present in the coven.

I analyse this sensory pedagogy through two complementary frameworks. Meyer's "sensational forms"—recurring mediating structures that generate immediate experience of transcendence—explains how ritual arrangements (chalice, timing, taste) become phenomenologically transparent through repetition (Meyer 2013, 314–19). Meyer develops this concept in explicit conjunction with Webb Keane's "semiotic ideologies": historically situated, reflexive frameworks that define what categories of signs (words, things, substances, images) are taken to be, and how they relate to the reality they purport to mediate (Meyer 2013, 315–17). A semiotic ideology authorizes certain material forms as genuine bearers of spiritual presence. In the Aine tradition, the operative semiotic ideology holds that ordinary substances, bread, soil, ale and seasonal wine, can carry divine presence without ceasing to be ordinary. Taste does not symbolize the sacred at a remove; it is its presence. It is this semiotic ideology—the authorization of ordinary substances as bearers of the divine—that makes hearing and taste function as diagnostic senses rather than metaphors, a point that becomes analytically visible only when Meyer's synthesis of sensational form and semiotic ideology is taken as a unit. Ingold's "education of attention" helps explain how practitioners become capable of recognizing significance within these forms (Ingold 2000, 416). These two frameworks operate from divergent meta-theoretical commitments. Meyer's is semiotic: presence is an effect of authorized mediation, and immediacy is always produced through form (Meyer 2013, 312, 317–18). Ingold's ecological approach resists the premise that experience is organized by cultural codes, insisting that perception is direct participatory engagement with a world in continuous

becoming (Ingold 2000; 2014).[5] I treat them as complementary at different analytical scales: sensational forms account for the institutional and material infrastructure through which presence is made recognizable; the education of attention accounts for the perceptual process by which practitioners become capable of noticing what those forms make available. Revelation, as I use the term, names the convergence: when trained perception meets authorized form, and divine presence becomes experientially immediate.

To make this argument concrete, I turn first to a new moon ritual dedicated to the Norse goddess Hel—a reflection of the coven's eclectic practice, where multiple mythologies are given space, within the main Irish framework. Read through sensational forms and the education of attention, the rite illustrates how immanent presence is achieved not through explicit inner sense cultivation, but through soil handled, runes traced, mead drunk, and transformation recognized over time.

The germinating revelation of a New Moon ritual

The New Moon ritual dedicated to Hel unfolded in three movements: grave, portal and spring, with each organizing attention through specific material forms. Unlike the seasonal dramaturgy of the eight seasonal feasts, of which Lammas is one, this lunar working condensed transformation into a contained sequence of descent, activation and renewal.

The ritual began with a box filled with soil, serving as the ritual grave, prepared in advance. Each participant brought something bio-degradable to lay in the grave, a symbol of what was to be relinquished. The rite also depends on the performative force of speech. Holly recited the opening statement: "Hail is the coldest of grains, Hel's white beads of ice, borne by the winds of the sky, barren they seem and dead, yet give life to the earth when they melt" (Hel New Moon script 2025).[6]

Holly's recitation operates as both description and enactment, folding language into the sensory infrastructure of soil, incense and bodies. Its force lies as much in how the words sound, when they are spoken, and by whom, as in what they mean. The circle has learned to hear tremor, steadiness, hesitation and command as cues of presence. Speech thus functions within a sensational form: an authorized, repeatable arrangement in which sound, gesture, sequence and material props converge to make the sacred recognizable (Meyer 2013). What is paced in such rites is the cultivation of auditory and affective readiness rather than access to hidden content. Words become efficacious as bodies become capable of receiving them as such.

5 The tension is not merely terminological. For Meyer, immediacy is an effect of mediation—the medium "disappears" through social authorization (2013, 317–18). For Ingold, perception was never mediated by representations in the first place (2000; 2014, 157). I do not resolve this but hold both frameworks in productive tension, following the ethnographic material in which they prove inseparable in practice.

6 The opening adapts the rune-poem tradition for *hagall* (hail). The Old Norwegian rune poem Holly drew on gives "Hagall er kaldastr korna"—"hail is the coldest of grains" (Dickins 1915, 24–25). The recitation thus embeds inherited liturgical material within a newly composed rite.

The grave remained fixed in the north, and participants approached it one by one. "Let what you carry sink down" (fieldnotes, October 2025).

Fingers entered soil. Bodies bent toward ground. Earth was pressed, handled and felt. The pedagogy was tactile. Soil became a mediator, organizing perception through kneeling, placing, covering, pressing.

The second movement intensified this mediation through technique. Holly describes feeling prompted to bring their athame and carve Hel's runes in the air above the grave, first to open the threshold, then again after the burial to seal it.[7] Runic tracing functioned as trained activation. They knew the runic alphabet by heart and could improvise on the spot. Tracing the runes generated what Holly describes as a powerful opening "like some kind of whirlwind" (Holly 2025). This runic bracketing framed the grave work within activated boundaries, marking both entrance and closure.

The third movement shifted to the spring. After burial and portal-opening, participants gathered around a shared bowl of mead. Drinking sealed what burial began. If the grave enacted descent, the spring enacted circulation. Liquid crossed lips. The ritual was incorporated. The sequence did not conclude at circle closing. Days later, Holly returned to empty the box at a marsh. "And when I open it, there are a couple of shoots that have come up. It had stood closed for a few days—not long, but a few days. And already a couple of green shoots with small green leaves had come up. In that darkness they had grown" (Holly 2025).

The sprout marked the temporal extension of ritual into matter. Revelation did not occur in trance or inner vision; it appeared as vegetal fact through ordinary senses. Hel was encountered not as transcendence interrupting the sensible world but as immanent process of earth receiving, threshold opening, life re-emerging. The grave trained descent. The runes trained activation. The spring trained incorporation. The sprout rendered transformation visible.

Holly's Hel New Moon ritual demonstrates that revelation in the coven is organized as material continuation. Ritual action sets processes in motion that extend beyond the ritual frame and return later as recognition. Learning, in this sense, consists in returning to see that growth has occurred. A note of Ingold's framework is warranted here. Ingold argues that James Gibson's model, for all its virtues, presupposes an environment already laid out, "like a furnished room awaiting its occupants" (2014, 157). Religious perception, Ingold contends, lies not in the skilled engagement with a ready-made world but in the perception of a world that is itself "continually coming into being both around and along with the perceiver" (2014, 157). He recovers the etymological resonance of the French *attendre* (to wait) and proposes that attention in religious practice is less the mastery of skilled discrimination than a form of disciplined waiting: the perceiver waits upon a world that has not yet revealed its hand (2014, 157–58). Holly's sprout is precisely such an arrival: a revelation that no one authored but that the ritual form made recognizable. The grave-box was

7 An athame is a double-edged ritual knife used in Wiccan and ceremonial magic practice. Runes here refers to the Elder Futhark runic alphabet.

prepared, the soil was handled, the runes were traced—these are the authorized sensational forms. But what emerged in the darkness was not scripted by the form; it was offered by the earth's own becoming. What the practitioner learns through such encounters is to discriminate significant contrasts within a structured arrangement and to attend to what is incipient—to wait upon processes whose outcomes are not yet given. Education of attention, in this expanded sense, includes the cultivation of receptivity to what the world is becoming.

The Wheel of the Year: seasonal return as education of attention

If the Hel New Moon made pacing visible at the scale of a single rite—through material continuation and delayed recognition—the Wheel of the Year renders that same logic infrastructural. In this way, seasonal repetition functions as a didactic device for producing revelation by return.

Early in training, Linnéa, formerly a member of the Court of Aine (currently the High Priestess of her own coven), recalls being shown the curriculum as an Excel grid of recurring topics. She was "impressed by the transparency" (Linnéa 2019). Yet she immediately marked the limit of that openness: the box is visible, but its lived content remains unintelligible until experienced: "you don't know until you are doing it" (Linnéa 2019). The map is disclosed; interpretative purchase is temporally protected. This distinction matters. Concealment here is a delay of interpretative closure, not storage of secret information. The Wheel returns the same ritual-mythological problems: seasonal thresholds, deity aspects, polarity, elemental textures, yet each return unfolds them differently because the practitioner has changed. Themes recur "each year, but with deepening" (Linnéa 2019). The Wheel itself functions as a macro-sensational form: a recurring, authorized arrangement of seasonal thresholds, deity aspects, elemental textures and ritual gestures. Its power lies in repetition. By returning to the same forms under altered experiential conditions, practitioners encounter difference within continuity. Presence is stabilized through structured return. Revelation therefore arrives not as new content, but as new capacity: the ability to recognize significance in forms that were already present. If Meyer helps us see how the Wheel mediates presence through recurring form, Ingold clarifies how seasonal repetition recalibrates attention. What went unnoticed one year becomes perceptible the next. The curriculum may be transparent in outline, but intelligibility emerges only through participation across time.

The High Priestess makes this evaluative dimension explicit. Because one performs "the same things at the same time of year", it becomes easy to ask: where was I a year ago? (The High Priestess 2018). Recurrence functions as a built-in mirror. What may have unfolded imperceptibly in real time becomes visible against the stable surface of return. The Wheel thus embeds assessment into the calendar itself.

The Book of Shadows[8] extends this logic private. Journalling can become self-assessment, a scaffold for retrospective intelligibility. By revisiting earlier entries, practitioners learn to perceive their own

8 A Book of Shadows is a personal ritual journal maintained by Wiccan practitioners, recording spells, rituals, reflections and initiatory material.

trajectory. The "reveal" often arrives in hindsight, less as disclosure than as recognition of development. If return is part of the infrastructure that educates attention, the Hel and Lammas rituals show what this education makes possible in the moment, through ordinary senses. The Wheel and journal train recognition in hindsight.

Seen together, the Hel ritual, the Wheel of the Year and the Lammas rite illuminate how revelation is organized across multiple scales of practice. At the micro-level of the ritual moment, presence becomes perceptible through intensified sensory coordination: knife, voice, taste, hearing, within an authorized form. At the meso-level of the individual rite, transformation unfolds through sequenced material mediations of grave, rune, mead, whose effects may only later become recognizable, as in the sprouting soil. At the macro-level of the annual cycle, recurring forms recalibrate perception through return, allowing practitioners to encounter difference within repetition. Nature becomes tutor through germination as well as seasonal return, both of which on their different scales, makes transformation perceptible.

Across these scales, Meyer's sensational forms provide the structured environments in which presence can emerge, while Ingold's education of attention explains how participants become capable of perceiving that emergence. Revelation can be seen as the convergence of these two processes: when trained perception meets authorized form, and significance becomes experientially undeniable.

Immediacy and diagnostic senses

As the opening Lammas scene illustrates, the Corn King becomes real through shared sensory intensity rather than hidden content suddenly disclosed. Analysed as sensational form, the ritual appears as a relatively fixed, authorized configuration that organizes access to the sacred. The circle, the altar stone, the bread-man, the timing of the cut are mediating forms that, through repetition, generate immediacy. What "revelation" looks like in this setting is therefore less an unveiling of esoteric doctrine than the felt coherence of a form working as it should, though doctrinal and sensory intelligibility typically reinforce rather than exclude each other. When the crow calls at the moment of the cut, we register it as alignment, not coincidence. At the post-ritual debriefing, all participants acknowledged the crow as the arrival of Morrighan, the Irish triple goddess of death. The knife's descent and the priest's trembling breath are not interpreted from the outside but absorbed within an already authorized sensory arrangement. In Meyer's terms, mediation disappears into presence.

Yet the disappearance of mediation is not the only modality available. Meyer (2013, 317–19) identifies three ways in which media relate to what they mediate: they may "disappear" into the substance they convey, becoming phenomenologically invisible; they may become "contested", subject to explicit debate about their adequacy; or they may become "hyper-apparent", celebrated as technologies that fulfil or even amplify the religious project. The Lammas moment exemplifies the first modality: the chalice, the bread, the timing of the cut vanish into presence. But the coven's evaluative practice regularly reveals a second modality at work—one in which the form surfaces as form, and its material and temporal adequacy is collectively assessed.

The Serpent New Moon illustrates this. As a first degree initiate[9], like Holly, part of my training includes creating moon rituals. I had designed the ritual around skin-shedding: clay masks applied to faces and arms, intended to dry, crack and fall away during the rite—a tactile pedagogy in which transformation would be felt as the skin splitting and flaking of its own accord. The sequence mattered: the shedding was meant to arrive through ripeness rather than effort, the clay releasing when it was ready. But the clay did not dry. The ritual moved faster than I had anticipated—a miscalculation familiar to anyone who has written a ritual that runs longer on paper than in practice. When we reached the shedding, the clay was still wet. We improvised with water, washing the clay off rather than peeling it away, and several participants reframed the gesture as a water-serpent shedding. The intended haptic revelation—the cracking, the effortless release—did not arrive. In the debriefing, we assessed the failure with material precision: which formulations would crack properly, which would peel like a membrane, whether a mask that dries to dust might better enact the principle that transformation need not be violent—that sometimes, as I had written in the script, "when the skin is ready, it simply falls". The High Priestess had already flagged the drying time as a concern when she reviewed the script before the ritual, asking whether the clay would have set by the time we reached the movement sequence. She was right; it had not. The sensational form, momentarily stripped of its phenomenological transparency, surfaced as an arrangement whose material properties could be weighed, contested and refined.

In the same ritual, the poison-to-medicine sequence—in which each participant channelled their personal "venom" into a cup of bitter tea, then drank it back as transformed substance—moved too quickly and with insufficient guidance. I had underestimated how much internal process the sequence demanded. In the debriefing, one participant observed that she could not simultaneously manage the ritual's procedural demands and the slower work of identifying and releasing what she carried. Others proposed restructuring: interspersing the poetic text with explicit, paced instruction—"focus on your poison; let it leave you; now focus on how it becomes medicine"—so that the temporal scaffolding of the form would better support the experience it was meant to enable. Here the verbal-sequential structure of the sensational form was assessed as inadequately paced—the medium surfaced because it outran the body's readiness.

These moments of reflexive visibility are integral to the coven's pedagogy rather than mere failures of the form. It is precisely by oscillating between transparency and contestation that practitioners refine their diagnostic capacity. The education of attention is driven not only by occasions when mediation disappears but also by occasions when it does not, and the coven members must co-assess why.

The Lammas scene shows the intensity of recognition, but that recognition is cultivated over time through more specific sensory disciplines. In the Court of Aine,

9 Wicca typically structures advancement through three degrees of initiation. In the Aine tradition, a first-degree initiate has undergone formal entry into the coven, but has not yet attained the teaching responsibilities of the second or third degree.

hearing and taste function as diagnostic senses—modalities through which practitioners learn to evaluate whether the form is "working".

During invocation and drawing down a deity, a successful moment is often marked by an audible shift in the officiant's voice. Aurvandil, the coven Priest, describes this as a change in cadence, force or timbre such that "it is not my voice any more" (Aurvandil 2021). This shift is not treated as a private interior conviction. The regular practice of post-ritual debriefing allows for collective validation of these markers: "we usually have a debriefing after each ritual where we talk about it and there you can sometimes hear people say 'there, I heard that it happened', if it's that palpable" (Aurvandil 2021). Hearing thus becomes an intersubjective index of presence[10] (immediacy in Meyer's terms). Through repetition and post-ritual reflection, practitioners learn to discriminate between ordinary vocal variation and what counts as divine descent. The ear is trained within the sensational form. The vocal shift is legible as divine descent because it unfolds within a recognized invocation structure; outside that form, it would remain ordinary variation.

Taste operates in parallel. In the Lammas ritual, bread sticks to the roof of the mouth; ale tastes ferrous and dark in the late-summer heat. These sensations complete the sacrificial sequence through incorporation. More systematically, the beverage chosen for the chalice is curated for its sensory qualities, such as colour, dryness, effervescence, seasonal resonance. The High Priestess and Aurvandil select beverages that feel appropriate to the ritual theme, often consulting knowledgeable liquor store staff. Participants are not merely told what Lammas signifies; they learn what it tastes like. Here too, perception is trained. Not every flavour would be acceptable at a given point in the Wheel. The palate, like the ear, is educated.

If Meyer helps us see how ritual forms generate presence, Ingold helps us understand how bodies become capable of perceiving that presence. Hearing the god "come through" in a voice and tasting the season in the wine are experiences that are individually felt but collectively recognizable. They are neither arbitrary nor infinitely interpretable. Sensory evidence is bounded and refined within a community of practice. What appears, in the Lammas moment, as spontaneous alignment between knife and crow-call is sustained by also having learnt the mythological lore (Irish in this case).

Seen in this light, sensory immediacy and diagnostic refinement are two aspects of the same process rather than separate domains. The sensational form provides the structured environment in which presence can emerge; the education of attention equips participants to recognize when it does. Revelation, here, names that convergence: when trained perception meets authorized form and the sacred becomes experientially undeniable.

What remains concealed is not doctrinal content but perceptual readiness. One

10 Invocation refers to the ritual calling of a deity into a sacred space. Drawing down a deity, as is done in "drawing down the Moon" or "drawing down the Sun", is a rite in which the deity is called to speak or act through the officiant, most commonly the High Priestess or High Priest. In Court of Aine, this technique is taught to third-degree initiates only.

cannot simply be told what to hear in the voice or what Lammas tastes like. One must learn, within repeated forms, to recognize significance as it arrives

The coven's pedagogy is scaffolded through shared attention to material cues (smoke, taste, sound, weather, texture) and through inter-subjective calibration (watching, mirroring, responding, handing over roles). In contrast to initiatory settings where expertise is pursued through disciplined inwardness, this mode of learning renders the sacred immediate through the body and through nature's timing. What becomes knowable is what can be *felt together*, and what can be learned to notice together.

In that sense, concealment and revelation operate less as a binary and more as pacing: what is "concealed" is often not information but perceptual readiness; what is "revealed" is an educated capacity to recognize significance as it arrives—sometimes as a tremor in speech, sometimes as a bitterness or sweetness on the tongue, sometimes as a crow calling at precisely the right moment.

Eating the tradition

Following all coven rituals, participants gather for a shared meal where experiences are evaluated and calibrated. The Wheel of the Year celebrations typically involve more elaborate dinners than New or Full Moon workings, but regardless of scale these post-ritual meals extend the ritual's sensory and evaluative work rather than closing it down. They are, in other words, integral to the education of attention, not merely its social aftermath.

As Ingold observes, learning occurs when the novice is placed "in a practical situation" and guided to notice what something feels, sounds or tastes like (Ingold 2000, 416). Around the after-ritual dinner, this noticing continues. While eating, coven members informally debrief the ritual that has just taken place. Participants comment on moments that felt powerful, confusing or surprising—often in sensory terms and thereby extending the diagnostic work described above for hearing and taste. They may remark on how a particular invocation "shifted" the air in the room to hotter or colder. Very often, a particular sensory magic is mentioned: how the wine tastes entirely different after the circle is closed.

Over the post-ritual dinner following the January New Moon, dedicated to the Norse goddess Skaði, huntress and archer, the High Priestess's comment about the new indoor temple captures revelation as something that settles into matter rather than being transmitted through instruction: "you can tell the temple is starting to get used to it", she observes. "it's much easier now than before" (fieldnotes, January 2026). The phrasing indicates that the temple acquires responsiveness through repeated use, functioning less as a fixed backdrop than as an active participant in the cultivation of presence. In Meyer's terms, the temple functions as the material medium through which sensational forms—the stabilized sensory arrangements of altar, objects, speech and bodily routines—can achieve calibration. As the space becomes habituated to ritual practice, presence becomes easier to recognize and share.

The ritual's material continuity intensifies this effect. A real arrow is shot, yet the High Priestess's hand gesture also

shoots it symbolically, binding physical force to ritual meaning. The hand-carved bowl made by her grandfather "which we always use for the Skaði moon", she notes (fieldnotes, January 2026), returns annually as a tactile anchor for this ritual. Even where ritual scripts are newly composed, these recurring objects and the fixed opening invocations function as a pedagogical spine, holding form steady so that change can be perceived. This is reiteration enacted through things: an education of attention that recruits both living nature and crafted materiality (arrow, heirloom bowl, liturgical stability) to make transformation retrospectively legible.

The circle, now filled with potluck dishes, becomes a low-intensity site of evaluation and calibration. Senior members may gently guide interpretation; novices are encouraged to articulate their experience. Authority is present but softened. The ritual chalice, earlier passed from the Goddess's hands (those of the High Priestess acting as divine vessel) continues to circulate until the bottle is empty—there is a rule that it cannot be set down before then. What was sacramental becomes convivial, but the sensory continuity remains. Taste anchors reflection in the body.

These meals are pedagogically important: they extend the ritual's sensory work into co-assessment. Food functions as a sensational form, a recurring sensory medium through which the sacred becomes recognizable. In the Aine tradition, seasonal dishes, such as asparagus at Beltane, cheese and a particular fruitcake at Imbolc,[11] accumulate mnemonic force through repetition. To eat them is to participate in an embodied archive of communal practice. Taste is especially powerful because it operates through incorporation: when you swallow, the tradition enters the body. Knowledge is absorbed somatically through flavour, texture and the rhythms of shared eating. This is what might be called "eating the tradition", a learning that exceeds formal instruction and unfolds through ordinary embodied participation.

Revelation is paced through the Wheel of the Year by protecting the time needed for attention to be educated within sensational forms. What was once merely tasted or heard becomes, on later returns, recognizable as presence. In social learning terms, understanding here emerges through repeated participation rather than formal instruction (Lave and Wenger 1991). This is congruent with Ingold's notion of an education of attention: learning is not the acquisition of representations but the gradual tuning of perception within a shared practice-world. By listening to others describe what they noticed, participants learn what to notice next time. The meal provides an interpretive infrastructure that stabilizes intense ritual experience without abstracting it from the senses.

Potluck meals further reinforce this logic. Each participant typically introduces the dish they have brought, explaining why it was chosen, how it connects to the season, or what associations it carries.

11 Beltane, celebrated on 1 May, marks the beginning of summer, associated in Wiccan practice with fertility and the union of the God and Goddess. Imbolc (1–2 February) marks the first signs of spring and is sacred to the goddess Brigid.

These introductions function as micro-narratives that weave individual biographies into the coven's ritual calendar and "community lore" (Cejvan 2024). Over time, certain dishes become expected and anticipated; their recurrence signals continuity and belonging, while subtle variations allow room for creativity and personal expression.

These meals thus exemplify how concealment and revelation operate as sensory pacing. What is protected is the temporal conditions under which participants learn to recognize presence, not content as such. Seasonal foods quietly teach the calendar; flavours cue memories of past rituals; eating together normalizes evaluative talk about experience. The sacred is heard, seen and tasted, repeatedly and in company. In part, Wicca in this coven is made to be cooked, shared and eaten.

Conclusion: revelation as sensory intelligibility

This article has argued that revelation in the Aine tradition is best understood as the gradual education of sensory intelligibility. Concealment functions less as the withholding of information than as didactic pacing: by delaying interpretive closure, the tradition protects the temporal and material conditions under which recognition can emerge. What is *revealed* is not new content but a cultivated capacity to notice, evaluate and trust what has been present all along.

Form and attention are the two axes of this argument. Meyer's sensational forms account for the authorized, recurring arrangements—chalice, bread, seasonal timing, clay, voice—through which presence is made recognizable and socially shareable. Ingold's education of attention accounts for the perceptual process by which practitioners become capable of perceiving what these forms make available—including, as the Hel ritual's germinating grave-box demonstrates, a receptivity to what the world is becoming rather than only to what the tradition has arranged. Revelation occurs when trained attention meets authorized form. This convergence is not without metatheoretical tension: Meyer treats immediacy as an effect of mediation, while Ingold resists reducing perception to semiotic codes. Yet the ethnographic material is better grasped by combining them: the coven's sensational forms are necessary conditions without which presence would have no recognizable shape while the perceptual attunement Ingold describes is what allows those forms to yield revelation rather than mere routine.

Across the Wheel of the Year, ritual performance, journalling and post-ritual meals, practitioners are trained to attend to presence as it manifests through ordinary sensory forms such as hearing, tasting, touching, breathing, sharing space. Expertise develops through repeated participation in socially calibrated environments, where perception is gradually tuned, rather than through privileged access to esoteric knowledge. The Lammas rite shows what such tuning makes possible in the moment: mediation disappearing into presence, the sacred arriving as taste, tremor and crow-call within an authorized arrangement. The Hel New Moon shows what it makes possible across time: transformation extending beyond the ritual frame and returning as vegetal fact. The Wheel of the Year shows how seasonal return itself functions as a macro-sensational form, recalibrating attention by returning practitioners to

thresholds where the world, not only the tradition, has turned.

But the forms do not always work. The Serpent New Moon showed clay that remained wet when it should have cracked, and a poison-to-medicine sequence that outpaced the body's readiness. In such moments, mediation does not disappear into presence but surfaces as form—its material and temporal adequacy collectively weighed and refined. Such contestation, read through Meyer's modalities, is part of the sensory pedagogy: it is by oscillating between transparency and reflexive visibility that practitioners sharpen the very diagnostic capacity on which future immediacy depends. The education of attention is driven both by occasions when the form does not work as by occasions when it does.

The framework suggested in this article may be productive for comparison with other traditions where a sense of the sacred emerges through the disciplined refinement of bodily senses rather than retreat from them, though whether the aspects identified here operate with comparable dynamics across different cultural, institutional and doctrinal contexts remains an open question for future investigation. I have argued here for revelation as a sensory intelligibility: the cultivated capacity to recognize divine presence in bread that sticks to the roof of the mouth, in a crow calling at the moment of sacrifice, in clay that refuses to crack on schedule, and in earth that continues teaching long after the ritual ends. ■

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