The Grove of Oana

The New Order of Druids vzw/npo

Bardic Course Handbook

The Grove of Dana

Bardic Course Handbook

Written by Jason Kirkey

Except where Otherwise Noted

So learning to walk
in morning light
like this again,
we'll take a first step
toward mortality,
out of the garden,
through the woods,
along the river,
toward the mountain,
its simple,
that's what we'll do,
practicing as we go

and
we'll be glimpsed, traveling
westward, no longer familiar,
a following wave,
greeted, as we were at our birth,
as probable and slightly dangerous strangers,
some wild risk about to break again
on the world.

-from Learning to Walk

by David Whyte

Contents

Introduction to the Grove of Dana

Welcome to the Grove of Dana: Online College of Druidism. This is the first of three manuals; the Bardic manual, the Ovates Manual, and the Druidic manual. This text will be your guide through the first stage of your journey.

Dana (sometimes Danu) is the name of the primal Irish mother goddess, and its roots can be found stretching back all the way to the source of Indo-European cultures. Dana can also be expressed and experienced as an energy, or a unity of consciousness, similar to the *Tao* or *Chi* of Chinese culture. Thirdly it can be expressed as spirits, much like the *kami* of the Japanese Shinto. The material you will find throughout the courses at the Grove of Dana will be based on an understanding that Dana is simultaneously all three of these things, and that like the knotwork so famous in Celtic culture, it weaves and wraps each of these concepts around each other.

The Grove works towards the goal of fostering a true understanding of the self and the universe in which we all live, by exploring the trinity of knowledge, experience, and wisdom. Many educational programs merely require the student to learn by examining things as if they are outside objects, without allowing the student to feel their inherent connection to their studies. Knowledge is the area of the mind and the intellect, and is important to any educational endeavor; however knowledge alone will get us nowhere. As well as offering intellectual readings and assignments, our courses will also require the student to gain experience through certain exercises and meditations. Only through experience can we come to understand the knowledge we have, and thus gain the third part of our triad: wisdom. Wisdom is the product of experience and knowledge, just as mist is the product of water and air.

The college is set up in three different "grades" based on those outlined by literary sources: bard, or *fili*; ovate, or *fáith*; and druid, or *draoi*. These titles were never intended to be "grades" in any sense of progression, but rather distinct professions among the intellectual class of Celtic people. However, in order to make our courses more comprehensible, we have adopted these titles for our courses, which do serve to denote progression. Our aim is to take people through a study in Celtic and Druidic spirituality, not to train people to serve these roles, as that takes many more years of study, practice, and experience than we can offer here. We want to give people a firm grasp on the subject, and where they decide to take their studies and pursuits from there, is a matter of their own sovereignty. That being said, we have used the inspiration gained from each of these professions to serve as the basis of our "grades". In the Bardic and Ovate courses you will be guided through assignments and specific readings which have been inspired by the wisdom of poetry, seership, and the naturalworld. Upon acceptance to the Druid course however, you will take on the responsibility of shaping your own studies, working with a mentor to create a curriculum tailored to your own interests.

The Silver Branch:

An Introduction to the Bardic Course

In Irish mythology many Otherworldly adventures were initiated by the music of a silver branch, laden with apples like bells. The Otherworld, the domain of soul where men and women are initiated into the mysteries which lie in their depths, can be a dangerous place. Without a map or guide we are likely to wander it, seeing its many wonders but unable to process what these things might mean, and how they relate to our personal journeys through life. In mythology it is the ringing of the silver branch that instills in the heroes of those tales the desire to go forth on such great adventures, traveling to their own edges and returning with some gift or insight – some seed which they might plant in the world. It is my hopes that this course will be for you the silver branch that propels you forth into the mysteries of the Otherworld, soul, and nature.

When I put together the original Bardic course and opened the Grove of Dana: Online College of Druidism in 2004 I did not know the direction that the courses would take collectively. It was merely a collection of articles by others and short pieces of writing of my own that I felt could illuminate the paths of other's, and introduce them to certain concepts which I felt were necessary for an understanding of an enlivened Celtic and Druidic spirituality. While I was writing the Ovate course however, I received an insight as to what role the courses as a whole has the potential to play in the lives of students. It was a course written with intention, and written with the knowledge of where it needed to end, and what it needed to provide as ground work for the Druid course.

While doing this task it became obvious to me that the Bardic course was insufficient, lacked cohesion and vision, and did not provide the depth of practice which I feel is necessary to ground one's self in before taking on the task of completing the Ovate course. The Ovate course is very much an Otherworld journey across the nine waves; yet the silver branch was never rang. It is my hope that this revision presents a clearer, better articulated, and more engaging introduction to the Druidic tradition, one which will inspire students to dive deep within their own depths and come out with a gift for the world.

The content of this course is introductory in nature, though I also hope that it provides new and fresh perspectives and material for those who have been studying Druidism for a longer period of time. The first question addressed in this course is the most basic one we are all compelled to ask, "what is a druid and why is it relevant today?" From there the course begins to take a look at the cosmology of Druidism (particularly from an Irish perspective) with the intention of illuminating what it might mean to *practice* this spirituality. There are very few readings and assignments here that are purely based in the intellect. Most require to some extent an experiential participation with the material. We will also stop several times along the way to look at different myths and stories from Irish mythology as a means of grounding the readings and practices in the heritage and culture from which they come. These provide a valuable context for the material, and in many cases explain *why* certain cosmological features of the Druidic terrain are the way they are.

Chapter One
Keeping the Hearth Fire:
Seeking the Spirit of Druidism

That the druidism of the past is not the druidism of the present should be an obvious statement. It is the imperative of every spiritual tradition to adapt to its current time and place. Ancient druidism, even if it were entirely resurrected from the past, would not be appropriate for our modern world. As many scholars have pointed out, druidism was based upon a model of Celtic social structure that no longer exists; thus when the structure upholding it collapsed so too were the druidic fires doused. The embers however were not stamped out.

Some people may ask, "If ancient druidism is all gone, how can anyone rightly call themselves a druid?" The simplest answer to this is of course: we cannot. I believe however, that this answer is incorrect. For a materialist, this answer may be satisfying; any complete framework of druidic practice and belief has more or less vanished into time, and the social structure that supported it has also gone. These things might lead us to believe that druidism is lost to us, and that to call oneself a druid in the modern world is simply delusion. The problem with this view is that it denies the transcendent, the transpersonal, and the archetypal.

To properly answer this question we must examine what exactly a druid is. Let's start at the earliest, in the form of speculation. Like all spirituality, druidism arose as a particular part of an engaged dialogue with the world. Druidism is first and foremost, like all spiritualities, a response – it is a response to the divine beauty of the world and our desire to participate with it.

Over time, the spirit of the people in relation to the spirit of the land shaped this response. It took on the colors and textures that were birthed through this dynamic interaction; and so tradition was born. To be a druid meant to be part of the learned class of society, it meant playing a role – whether a central role such as a judge, historian, storyteller, or even sometimes a king; or the more socially marginalized shamanic roles of magician or healer. In either case, the druid was centrally concerned with the workings of society and the community's relationship with the land.

Behind the "roles" of druids lay the spirit or archetype of druidism. It is this archetypal pattern that druidism, in all its forms, has grown out of. In asking what "authentic" druidism is, we must ask what this archetype is, and whether modern druidism is in alignment with it. In this respect our answer is deeply personal. Because archetypes, which are primal patterns of consciousness, transcend human nature, and remain a numinous mystery, there can be no fixed objective scale for determining the authenticity of the response.

This is not to say, however, that it is an entirely subjective matter, or even that all responses are as equally valid as the next. Contrary to New Age notions, the universe is not a relative place. As David Whyte so eloquently puts it, "we do *not* make our own reality. We have a modest part in it, depending on how alive we are to the way the currents and eddies of time are running. Reality is the conversation between ourselves and the never ending productions of time. The closer we are to the source of the productions of time –that is, to the eternal– the more easily we understand the particular currents we must navigate on any given day."1 What this means, in the context of this topic, is that druidism is the organic outcome of the conversation which takes place between ourselves and the archetype of druidism, that

which is sourced in the eternal. It is this conversation which determines the authenticity of our response, and thus our practice.

This is not a call to judgment. While our conversation may differ from other conversations happening, it is inevitable that we will find connection with some of these, and not with others. Some we will no doubt find to be flat and superficial, just as we experience such conversations with other people. Others we will no doubt find engaging, enlivening, and sustainable. It is not an individuals job however to make absolute judgments, but rather only to navigate their own conversations and responses. Those superficial conversations with the spirit of druidism, which have more to do with pandering to the needs of the ego than they do with nourishing and supporting the emergence of the soul, are doomed to collapse. The truly sustainable responses are the ones that last, rooted as they are, in the eternal archetype of the druidic spirit.

This of course raises the question of defining the druidic archetype. This is an impossible task, however, it is possible to point in its direction, hopefully making space for a direct experience of it. The only way to get to know any archetype is through experience, conversation, and relationship. The following is a series of observations about this archetype, which I will note beforehand as being as susceptible to error as any human articulation of the numinous.

The Druidic Spirit

When Jung originally came up with his idea of the collective unconscious, he defined it as a substratum of the psyche which contains the collective imprints of the history of human consciousness. It is within the collective unconscious that the archetypes are found. Jung wrote that, "'Lower down' … [the layers of the psyche] become increasingly collective until they are universalized and extinguished in the body's materiality, i.e., in chemical substances. The body's carbon is simply carbon. Hence, 'at bottom' the psyche is simply 'world.'"2

Although Jung may not have gone so far as to take his idea of the collective unconscious into the territory of the "world soul", or to extend it into the ecological, this statement takes it dangerously close. In more recent times the work being done in ecopsychology, specifically by Theodore Roszak, has done just this, formulating a concept of the "ecological unconscious". We might talk about the collective unconscious as having two distinct layers (though experientially I believe that these layers are less than distinct) made up of the ecological unconscious, and the human unconscious. While the human collective unconscious is a repository of cultural, religious, and social patterns, symbols, and archetypes, the ecological unconscious is a repository of all the ecological, wild, and environmental patterns, symbols, and archetypes within the history of cosmogenesis. In short it is the ecological unconsciousness which connects us in deep bond to the cosmos from which we have emerged, and the earth which has provided us with a home.

To talk about the druidic archetype or the druidic spirit we must then start with this deepest layer of relationship. Simply stated, druidism is rooted primarily in the earth, in the sensuous web of interdependence between soil, plants, mountains, rivers, and animals. Any druidic expression which ignores that dimension of the archetype is missing half the conversation. Druidism is an ancient tradition, rooted in the Celtic culture, but more primarily, as an animistic response, in the land which birthed and supported those cultures. This is not to say that any authentic form of druidism must take place in Western Europe, Ireland, or the British Isles, but that it must be first and foremost a response to the land (though it is my

personal contention that any practitioner of druidic spirituality who finds a way to develop a working relationship with those lands will learn far more about druidism than they otherwise could).

Moving into the human dimensions of the collective unconscious we might begin to look at the culture in which druidism existed, the particular archetypes and symbols which it expresses, and the way these were expressed through practice. In this sense druidism is uniquely Celtic, existing within the framework of a set of myths and a particular worldview (which was of course formed through interaction with nature, culture being the outcome of a collective conversation between humans and land). This is where the most arguments for the extinction of druidism are based. Celtic culture, many scholars argue, is for the most part gone; or at any rate the particular form of Iron Age Celtic culture which supported the druidic caste has vanished. Therefore, they say, druidism has gone with it.

This would be true if society were synonymous with culture. But it is not; society is only the framework in which culture most often exists and flourishes. Culture does not need society to exist, however. Everything which informed and existed within a culture is capable of surviving the extinction or diminishing of that society. Obviously it is the case with druidism and Celtic culture that much was also lost. There is nothing to say that modern inventions, or rather modern responses to the same transpersonal content of nature and psyche, which originally formed druidism, is not just as valid as its ancient expression. Authenticity is not measured by the unbroken linear progression of tradition, but in its skill to adapt to the needs of the present while maintaining the integrity of its initial responses.

The initial responses of druidism to the land and psyche involved a deep bond with the natural world, working with non-ordinary states of consciousness, and "holotropic"3 practices, fostering growth and wholeness in individuals. In this sense, these initial responses are as available to us now as they were to our ancestors. Druidism can only cease to exist if we measure its validity through the vehicle of time. We can, however, choose to take up other standards of validity, ones which are more organic to the origins of druidism.

As we have discussed, the origins of druidism are responses to an archetypal patterning. This archetype is rooted both in a cultural collective unconscious as well as the ecological unconscious. I have often mused that druidism is a primal "ecopsychology", and as such is a mutual conversation between humans and nature. This "druidic conversation" takes place, at its deepest level, between the cultural archetypes and the archetypes of the land. This is first and foremost the druid role, as can be seen through the facilitation of the marriage of the king to the goddess of the land, and seasonal festivals which are primarily concerned with tracking and participating in the ever-shifting relationship between the tribe and the spirits of the land.

We have inherited the present moment from the ancestors, and the ancient druids are now long dead. Their legacy however lives on through us, through the re-kindling of their hearth fires. There is no sense in pretending that we are in direct inheritance of an ancient unbroken line of druid tradition. The druidism of the modern world is a re-envisioning of the tradition in a form capable of enlivening the practitioners of today. It is perhaps more imperative now than ever that we sustain this ancient dialogue between the human community and the community of the land. The hearth fire has been passed on to us, and with the guidance of the ancestors, it is in our hands to determine what that fire will illuminate.

Endnotes

1. Whyte, David. Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity. Riverhead Books: New York, 2001. p. 180.

2. Jung, C.G. Memories, Dreams, Reflections. Fontana Press: London, 1995. p. 421

3. A word coined by Stanislav Grof; from the Greek holos meaning "whole", and trepin meaning "moving towards". Literally it refers to a specific set of non-ordinary states of consciousness which move the psyche in a direction of wholeness.

Chapter Two
The Nine Strands:
Exploring the Druid Identity

In modern times we must reinterpret what exactly Druidism is. It is obvious that we cannot go purely by the scant models of the past, for even if we had all the information we would like, much would hardly be relevant to the modern era. On the other side of that coin, we cannot completely abandon the past, for with that we lose our ancestral identity and the foundations upon which our spirituality is built. One of the largest problems with non-dogmatic spiritualities such as Druidism, is that it's hard to really establish what constitutes Druidic practice and theory, and what is not. A certain amount of blending in spirituality is fine, so long as we are aware where each strand is coming from.

In essence Druidism is more than a spirituality or religion, but is a *way*, and unlike organized religions it does not interpret reality for us, but rather asks us to question everything and interpret the universe on our own. So it can, at times, be difficult to know what ground we are standing on, or whether we even have solidity beneath our feet. In Druidism, it is really that ground which defines what the path is; that foundation. Everything above the foundation hinges on our own subjective experiences, but the foundation itself, the roots and structure, are what gives us our cultural and spiritual identity.

In Greywind's book *The Voice Within the Wind* he describes Druidism as being composed of nine dimensions, or as I've called them strands. These strands are the foundation of Druidism. Not to say they are any sort of dogma, but in order to define something we need to be able to understand what *it* is. Otherwise anyone could call themselves a Druid, even if they possess qualities directly counter-productive to what we agree that Druidism is (for example, a life-affirming path that fosters community with the natural world).

The first strand spoken of by Greywind is the tribal dimension. This is the dimension that gives us our cultural identity. If it's not Celtic, why even call it Druidism? Druidism is made up of ideas which are clearly Celtic, relying on the histories, mythologies, languages, and ideologies that have come to be identified with Celtic culture. It is here that we find our identity. Druids of the past were not only wisdom-keepers but also historians, keeping the history of the tribe and genealogical records memorized. Today we honor this tradition by studying Celtic culture and Druidic history (at least that which is available). From this practice we clearly gain a sense of who we are today and where we came from. This does not mean one must be of Celtic descent to practice Druidism or even primal Celtic spirituality. In ancient times the Celts were a migratory people, stretching roots out over much of Europe. Today people of almost all cultures, though predominantly in the United Kingdom, Ireland, United States, and Australia, can trace at least a few roots back to the Celtic people. From the study of history we learn that the Celtic way of life is still alive and breathing, though struggling to remain so. By learning what is Celtic we help keep a struggling minority culture alive.

The next strand he speaks about is art. When Celtic art is seen, it is immediately understood that these were a highly artistic people, who respected beauty and the representation of the sacred. Celtic art mirrors the metaphysics of the people, providing a clear link between the spiritual and the physical and how they interact. Art does not have to be limited to what we now perceive as art, but rather can encompass every aspect of our lives.

Though visual art, prose, poetry, film, photography, crafts, and the performing arts are what usually come to mind, art can possess the whole world. Art is simply creative expression, and when we seek to cultivate creative expression and inspiration we enrich our lives and each moment is an act of creation. Through living life this way we cultivate the flow of what the Welsh called *awen*; divine inspiration.

Healing is the next strand. In ancient times Druids were the keepers of balance, and reciprocity between the human and "more-than-human" communities. In modern times, though the Druid no longer holds the same social status as in the past, there is still a great need for this aspect. Our society has become dangerously out of balance and it is in line with the Druid role to try and reestablish that balance, restoring the Earth and our collectively wounded soul to health.

The metaphysical dimension is perhaps one of the most important aspects. Through the study of metaphysics we understand the universe. Important as it is, it is also the most subjective. Though there are clear metaphysical ideas attached to Druidism, the way each person experiences the cosmos will vary depending on multiple factors, not the least of which are their individual experiences. Metaphysics also encompasses the cosmos of the Celts, the realms of *land*, *sea*, and *sky*, aspects of the Otherworld. Through contact with the Otherworld insight and wisdom is gained, as well as a better understanding of the cosmos themselves. Though most people will have their own metaphysical notions relative to their experiences, because most Druids work in similar ways, and within the confines of similar cosmological maps, there tends to often be core agreements in this area.

Directly related to the metaphysical dimension is that of seership. This does not necessarily mean divination (though it certainly includes that). There is a lot of talk about Celtic "shamanism", and its true that there were shamanistic practices in the Celtic world. Shamanism comes from the Tungus tribe of Siberia, and today has moved to become a blanket term (much like paganism) for any ecstatic trance work. This Celtic "shamanism" probably did not have its own name, but rather fell under Druidic practice, and later that of the *Filidh* of Ireland and *Awenyddion* of Wales. Much of Druidism is concerned with contact with the Otherworld as a way of wisdom and healing. The three realms of land, sea, and sky correspond with the core shamanic idea of Underworld, Middleworld, and Upperworld. Amongst the Druids this was probably the role of the Ovates.

Ritual is the sixth strand. Within ritual we join the flow of all things. The word ritual comes from the Indo-European root *rei*, which means "to flow". The entire universe has a flow to it, a certain way of moving, much like the *Tao* is Chinese philosophy and the *neart* of the Irish. It is a great river that shapes our lives and the world around us. Through ritual we can enter into that flow, thus allowing ourselves both to be shaped, and in turn to shape. Ritual can be complex or simple as one wishes. One could employ elaborate ceremonies in there life, or make the choice of simplicity and spontaneity; either way we enter the flow and so there is no right answer but for the one in your heart.

The next dimension is that of natural philosophy. This is in direct parallel with metaphysics and seership. Druidism is deeply concerned with the environment and the world we live in, not only its spiritual dimensions, but the physical ones as well. In "The Flaming Door" by Eleanor Merry, it says, "but we shall never understand Druidism, unless we grasp the fact that it was recognized that all knowledge must be sought in two directions: one, by searching the outer world - science; and two, by searching the depths of the human soul and secrets of the human body - art." This strand asks us to attend to the direct physical experience of the natural world, without the need to over-spiritualize it.

The eighth dimension is teaching. This is the most self explanatory of the strands. Teaching is fundamental for through it we keep the path alive. It doesn't have to be conventional teaching. Teaching comes in many forms, writing, tutoring, workshops, or simple conversations with others. The list goes on. There is another sub-dimension to this one however. For teaching to be done, one must also be a student. We are all eternal students, and we never truly stop learning. Too many teachers think of themselves as the experts filling empty minds with facts. To truly be a teacher though is a dynamic experience where one is truly a teacher-learner. Roles become reversed often and the relationship between the teacher and student are obscured and crossed. Through teaching we not only keep the path alive and breathing, but cultivate new knowledge and wisdom within ourselves.

The ninth and final strand is service. Fundamental to Druidism is the concept of service. We do not walk this path solely for our own purposes and growth, but rather we grow in order to be of service to the world. Our individual growth is a positive byproduct of this. Service comes in many forms, and can even be inclusive in the stand of teaching, for that too is a service to those who seek this path. Service tends to encompass all of the different strands of Druidism, as it is the most abstract, limited only by the imagination. Service is also healing. When we help restore the balance of self and world, we are giving service both to humanity and the Earth. The Druid way is a search for Truth, which might be best expressed as a cultivated relationship in harmony with the universe. In a way this search for Truth is synonymous with service, for in our search we help to illuminate a darkened world.

The Druid Way, as Greywind, writes, "is derived from experience and it is highly likely that if you are a Druid you will not agree with [the above]. That is to the good. But if you do disagree, please don't leave it at that. Work out the reasons why. In that way you will come to a more complete understanding of your own perspective. This is not an either/or competition, set in the linear context that binds us to confrontation. Even if you disagree we may both be right. We may both be wrong. We are simply striving after the Truth."

This view of what the Druid path might be is not necessarily the right one, or the only right one. It is simply a perspective, a way of defining what is often so hard to define. It's left to personal experience then, what the Druid Way is, and how it informs our actions. Like all ideas that may not necessarily hold true for all, but can neither be labeled right or wrong, this one might just bring some light to the darkened forest of the soul.

Further Reading

for *Keeping the Hearth Fire & The Nine Strands*

Greywind. *The Voice Within the Wind: Of Becoming and the Druid Way*. Girvan, Ayrshire, Scotland: Grey House in the Woods, 2001

The Druid Renaissance. Ed. Philip Carr-Gomm. San Francisco, California: Harper Collins, 1996.

Chapter Three

Myth Work 1:

The Second Battle of Magh Tuireadh

Translated by Elizabeth A. Gray

1. The Tuatha De Danann were in the northern islands of the world, studying occult lore and sorcery, druidic arts and witchcraft and magical skill, until they surpassed the sages of the pagan arts.

2. They studied occult lore and secret knowledge and diabolic arts in four cities: Falias, Gorias, Murias, and Findias.

3. From Falias was brought the Stone of Fal which was located in Tara. It used to cry out beneath every king that would take Ireland.

4. From Gorias was brought the spear which Lug had. No battle was ever sustained against it, or against the man who held it in his hand.

5. From Findias was brought the sword of Nuadu. No one ever escaped from it once it was drawn from its deadly sheath, and no one could resist it.

6. From Murias was brought the Dagda's cauldron. No company ever went away from it unsatisfied.

7. There were four wizards in those four cities. Morfesa was in Falias; Esras was in Gorias; Uiscias was in Findias; Semias was in Murias. Those are the four poets from whom the Tuatha De learned occult lore and secret knowledge.

8. The Tuatha De then made an alliance with the Fomoire, and Balor the grandson of Net gave his daughter Ethne to Cian the son of Dian Cecht. And she bore the glorious child, Lug.

9. The Tuatha De came with a great fleet to Ireland to take it by force from the Fir Bolg. Upon reaching the territory of Corcu Belgatan (which is Conmaicne Mara today), they at once burned their boats so that they would not think of fleeing to them. The smoke and the mist which came from the ships filled the land and the air which was near them. For that reason it has been thought that they arrived in clouds of mist.

10. The battle of Mag Tuired was fought between them and the Fir Bolg. The Fir Bolg were defeated, and 100,000 of them were killed including the king, Eochaid mac Eire.

11. Nuadu's hand was cut off in that battle—Sreng mac Sengainn struck it from him. So with Credne the brazier helping him, Dian Cecht the physician put on him a silver hand that moved as well as any other hand.

12. Now the Tuatha De Danann lost many men in the battle, including Edleo mac Allai, and Ernmas, and Fiacha, and Tuirill Bicreo.

13. Then those of the Fir Bolg who escaped from the battle fled to the Fomoire, and they settled in Arran and in Islay and in Man and in Rathlin.

14. There was contention regarding the sovereignty of the men of Ireland between the Tuatha De and their wives, since Nuadu was not eligible for kingship after his hand had been cut off. They said that it would be appropriate for them to give the kingship to Bres the son of Elatha, to their own adopted son, and that giving him the kingship would knit the Fomorians' alliance with them, since his father Elatha mac Delbaith was king of the Fomoire.

15. Now the conception of Bres came about in this way.

16. One day one of their women, Eriu the daughter of Delbaeth, was looking at the sea and the land from the house of Maeth Sceni; and she saw the sea as perfectly calm as if it were a level board. After that, while she was there, she saw something: a vessel of silver appeared to her on the sea. Its size seemed great to her, but its shape did not appear clearly to her; and the current of the sea carried it to the land.

Then she saw that it was a man of fairest appearance. He had golden-yellow hair down to his shoulders, and a cloak with bands of gold thread around it. His shirt had embroidery of gold thread. On his breast was a brooch of gold with the lustre of a precious stone in it. Two shining silver spears and in them two smooth riveted shafts of bronze. Five circlets of gold around his neck. A gold-hilted sword with inlayings of silver and studs of gold.

17. The man said to her, "Shall I have an hour of lovemaking with you?"

"I certainly have not made a tryst with you," she said.

"Come without the trysting!" said he.

18. Then they stretched themselves out together. The woman wept when the man got up again.

"Why are you crying?" he asked.

"I have two things that I should lament," said the woman, "separating from you, however we have met. The young men of the Tuatha De Danann have been entreating me in vain- and you possess me as you do."

19. "Your anxiety about those two things will be removed," he said. He drew his gold ring from his middle finger and put it into her hand, and told her that she should not part with it, either by sale or by gift, except to someone whose finger it would fit.

20. "Another matter troubles me," said the woman, "that I do not know who has come to me."

21. "You will not remain ignorant of that," he said. "Elatha mac Delbaith, king of the Fomoire, has come to you. You will bear a son as a result of our meeting, and let no name be given to him but Eochu Bres (that is, Eochu the Beautiful), because every beautiful thing that is seen in Ireland—both plain and fortress, ale and candle, woman and man and horse—will be judged in relation to that boy, so that people will then say of it, 'It is a Bres.'"

22. Then the man went back again, and the woman returned to her home, and the famous conception was given to her.

23. Then she gave birth to the boy, and the name Eochu Bres was given to him as Elatha had said. A week after the woman's lying-in was completed, the boy had two weeks' growth; and he maintained that increase for seven years, until he had reached the growth of fourteen years.

24. As a result of that contention which took place among the Tuatha De, the sovereignty of Ireland was given to that youth; and he gave seven guarantors from the warriors of Ireland (his maternal kinsmen) for his restitution of the sovereignty if his own misdeeds should give cause. Then his mother gave him land, and he had a fortress built on the land, Dun mBrese. And it was the Dagda who built that fortress.

25. But after Bres had assumed the sovereignty, three Fomorian kings (Indech mac De Domnann, Elatha mac Delbaith, and Tethra) imposed their tribute upon Ireland-and there was not a smoke from a house in Ireland which was not under their tribute. In addition, the warriors of Ireland were reduced to serving him: Ogma beneath a bundle of firewood and the Dagda as a rampart-builder, and he constructed the earthwork around Bres's fort.

26. Now the Dagda was unhappy at the work, and in the house he used to meet an idle blind man named Cridenbel, whose mouth grew out of his chest. Cridenbel considered his own meal small and the Dagda's large, so he said, "Dagda, for the sake of your honor let the three best bits of your serving be given to me!" and the Dagda used to give them to him every night. But the satirist's bits were large: each bit was the size of a good pig. Furthermore those three bits were a third of the Dagda's serving. The Dagda's appearance was the worse for that.

27. Then one day the Dagda was in the trench and he saw the Mac Oc corning toward him.

"Greetings to you, Dagda!" said the Mac Oc.

"And to you," said the Dagda.

"What makes you look so bad?" he asked.

"I have good cause," he said. "Every night Cridenbel the satirist demands from me the three best bits of my serving."

28. "I have advice for you," said the Mac Oc. He puts his hand into his purse, and takes from it three coins of gold, and gives them to him.

29. "Put," he said, "these three gold coins into the three bits for Cridenbel in the evening. Then these will be the best on your dish, and the gold will stick in his belly so that he will die of it; and Bres's judgement afterwards will not be right. Men will say to the king, 'The Dagda has killed Cridenbel with a deadly herb which he gave him.' Then the king will order you to be killed, and you will say to him, 'What you say, king of the warriors of the Feni, is not a prince's truth. For he kept importuning me since I began my work, saying to me, "Give me the three best bits of your serving, Dagda. My housekeeping is bad tonight." Indeed, I would have died from that, had not the three gold coins which I found today

helped me. I put them into my serving. Then I gave it to Cridenbel, because the gold was the best thing that was before me. So the gold is now in Cridenbel, and he died of it.'"

"It is clear," said the king. "Let the satirist's stomach be cut out to see whether the gold will be found in it. If it is not found, you will die. If it is found, however, you will live."

30. Then they cut out the satirist's stomach to find the three gold coins in his belly, and the Dagda was saved.

31. Then the Dagda went to his work the next morning, and the Mac Oc came to him and said, "Soon you will finish your work, but do not seek payment until the cattle of Ireland are brought to you. Choose from among them the dark, black-maned, trained, spirited heifer.

32. Then the Dagda brought his work to an end, and Bres asked him what he would take as wages for his labour. The Dagda answered, "I require that you gather the cattle of Ireland in one place." The king did that as he asked, and he chose the heifer from among them as the Mac Oc had told him. That seemed foolish to Bres. He had thought that he would have chosen something more.

33. Now Nuadu was being treated, and Dian Cecht put a silver hand on him which had the movement of any other hand. But his son Miach did not like that. He went to the hand and said "joint to joint of it, and sinew to sinew"; and he healed it in nine days and nights. The first three days he carried it against his side, and it became covered with skin. The second three days he carried it against his chest. The third three days he would cast white wisps of black bulrushes after they had been blackened in a fire.

34. Dian Cecht did not like that cure. He hurled a sword at the crown of his son's head and cut his skin to the flesh. The young man healed it by means of his skill. He struck him again and cut his flesh until he reached the bone. The young man healed it by the same means. He struck the third blow and reached the membrane of his brain. The young man healed this too by the same means. Then he struck the fourth blow and cut out the brain, so that Miach died; and Dian Cecht said that no physician could heal him of that blow.

35. After that, Miach was buried by Dian Cecht, and three hundred and sixty-five herbs grew through the grave, corresponding to the number of his joints and sinews. Then Airmed spread her cloak and uprooted those herbs according to their properties. Dian Cecht came to her and mixed the herbs, so that no one knows their proper healing qualities unless the Holy Spirit taught them afterwards. And Dian Cecht said, "Though Miach no longer lives, Airmed shall remain."

36. At that time, Bres held the sovereignty as it had been granted to him. There was great murmuring against him among his maternal kinsmen the Tuatha De, for their knives were not greased by him. However frequently they might come, their breaths did not smell of ale; and they did not see their poets nor their bards nor their satirists nor their harpers nor their pipers nor their horn-blowers nor their jugglers nor their fools entertaining them in the household. They did not go to contests of those pre-eminent in the arts, nor did they see their warriors proving their skill at arms before the king, except for one man, Ogma the son of Lain.

37. This was the duty which he had, to bring firewood to the fortress. He would bring a bundle every day from the islands of Clew Bay. The sea would carry off two-thirds of his bundle because he was weak for lack of food. He used to bring back only one third, and he supplied the host from day to day.

38. But neither service nor payment from the tribes continued; and the treasures of the tribe were not being given by the act of the whole tribe.

39. On one occasion the poet came to the house of Bres seeking hospitality (that is, Coirpre son of Etain, the poet of the Tuatha De). he entered a narrow, black, dark little house; and there was neither fire nor furniture nor bedding in it. Three small cakes were brought to him on a little dish—and they were dry. The next day he arose, and he was not thankful. As he went across the yard he said,

"Without food quickly on a dish,

Without cow's milk on which a calf grows,

Without a man's habitation after darkness remains,

Without paying a company of storytellers—let that be Bres's condition."

"Bres's prosperity no longer exists," he said, and that was true. There was only blight on him from that hour; and that is the first satire that was made in Ireland.

40. Now after that the Tuatha De went together to talk with their adopted son Bres mac Elathan, and they asked him for their sureties. he gave them restoration of the kingship, and they did not regard him as properly qualified to rule from that time on. He asked to remain for seven years. "You will have that," the same assembly agreed, "provided that the safeguarding of every payment that has been assigned to you—including house and land, gold and silver, cattle and food —is supported by the same securities, and that we have freedom of tribute and payment until then."

"You will have what you ask," Bres said.

41. This is why they were asked for the delay: that he might gather the warriors of the *sid*, the Fomoire, to take possession of the Tuatha by force provided he might gain an overwhelming advantage. He was unwilling to be driven from his kingship.

42. Then he went to his mother and asked her where his family was. "I am certain about that," she said, and went onto the hill from which she had seen the silver vessel in the sea. She then went onto the shore. His mother gave him the ring which had been left with her, and he put it around his middle finger, and it fitted him. She had not given it up for anyone, either by sale or gift. Until that day, there was none of them whom it would fit.

43. Then they went forward until they reached the land of the Fomoire. They came to a great plain with many assemblies upon it, and they reached the finest of these assemblies. Inside, people sought information from them. They answered that they were of the men of Ireland. Then they were asked whether they had dogs, for at that time it was the custom, when a group of men visited another assembly, to challenge them to a friendly contest. "We have dogs," said Bres. Then the dogs raced, and those of the Tuatha De were faster than those of

the Fomoire. Then they were asked whether they had horses to race. They answered, "We have," and they were faster than the horses of the Fomoire.

44. Then they were asked whether they had anyone who was good at sword-play, and no one was found among them except Bres. But when he lifted the hand with the sword, his father recognized the ring on his finger and asked who the warrior was. His mother answered on his behalf and told the king that Bres was his son. She related to him the whole story as we have recounted it.

45. His father was sad about him, and asked, "What force brought you out of the land you ruled?"

Bres answered, "Nothing brought me except my own injustice and arrogance. I deprived them of their valuables and possessions and their own food. Neither tribute nor payment was ever taken from them until now."

46. "That is bad," said his father. "Better their prosperity than their kingship. Better their requests than their curses. Why then have you come?" asked his father.

47. "I have come to ask you for warriors," he said. "I intend to take that land by force."

48. "You ought not to gain it by injustice if you do not gain it by justice," he said.

49. "I have a question then: what advice do you have for me?" said Bres.

50. After that he sent him to the champion Balor, grandson of Net, the king of the Hebrides, and to Indech mac De Domnann, the king of the Fomoire; and these gathered all the forces from Lochlainn westwards to Ireland, to impose their tribute and their rule upon them by force, and they made a single bridge of ships from the Hebrides to Ireland.

51. No host ever came to Ireland which was more terrifying or dreadful than that host of the Fomoire. There was rivalry between the men from Scythia of Lochlainn and the men out of the Hebrides concerning that expedition.

52. As for the Tuatha De, however, that is discussed here.

53. After Bres, Nuadu was once more in the kingship over the Tuatha De; and at that time he held a great feast for the Tuatha De in Tara. Now there was a certain warrior whose name was Samildanach on his way to Tara. At that time there were doorkeepers at Tara named Gamal mac Figail and Camall mac Riagail. While the latter was on duty, he saw the strange company coming toward him. A handsome, well-built young warrior with a king's diadem was at the front of the band.

54. They told the doorkeeper to announce their arrival in Tara. The doorkeeper asked, "Who is there?"

55. "Lug Lormansclech is here, the son of Cian son of Dian Cecht and of Ethne daughter of Balor. He is the foster son of Tailtiu, the daughter of Magmor, the king of Spain, and of Eochaid Garb mac Duach."

56. The doorkeeper then asked of Samildanach, “What art do you practice? For no one without an art enters Tara.”

57. “Question me,” he said. “I am a builder.”

The doorkeeper answered, “We do not need you. We have a builder already, Luchta mac Luachada.”

58. He said, “Question me, doorkeeper: I am a smith.”

The doorkeeper answered him, “We have a smith already, Colum Cualeinech of the three new techniques.”

59. He said, “Question me: I am a champion.”

The doorkeeper answered, “We do not need you. We have a champion already, Ogma mac Ethlend.”

60. He said again, “Question me.” “I am a harper,” he said.

“We do not need you. We have a harper already, Abcan mac Bicelmois, whom the men of the three gods chose in the sid-mounds.”

61. He said, “Question me: I am a warrior.”

The doorkeeper answered, “We do not need you. We have a warrior already, Bresal Etarlam mac Echdach Baethlaim.”

62. Then he said, “Question me, doorkeeper. I am a poet and a historian.”

“We do not need you. We already have a poet and historian, En mac Ethamain.”

63. He said, “Question me. I am a sorcerer.”

“We do not need you. We have sorcerers already. Our druids and our people of power are numerous.”

64. He said, “Question me. I am a physician.”

“We do not need you. We have Dian Cecht as a physician.”

65. “Question me,” he said. “I am a cupbearer.”

“We do not need you. We have cupbearers already: Delt and Drucht and Daithe, Tae and Talom and Trog, Gle and Glan and Glesse.”

66. He said, “Question me: I am a good brazier.”

“We do not need you. We have a brazier already, Credne Cerd.”

67. He said, “Ask the king whether he has one man who possesses all these arts: if he has I will not be able to enter Tara.”

68. Then the doorkeeper went into the royal hall and told everything to the king. "A warrior has come before the court," he said, "named Samildanach; and all the arts which help your people, he practices them all, so that he is the man of each and every art."

69. Then he said that they should bring him the *fidchell*-boards of Tara, and he won all the stakes, so that he made the *cro* of Lug. (But if *fidchell* was invented at the time of the Trojan war, it had not reached Ireland yet, for the battle of Mag Tuired and the destruction of Troy occurred at the same time.)

70. Then that was related to Nuadu. "Let him into the court," said Nuadu, "for a man like that has never before come into this fortress."

71. Then the doorkeeper let him past, and he went into the fortress, and he sat in the seat of the sage, because he was a sage in every art.

72. Then Ogma threw the flagstone, which required fourscore yoke of oxen to move it, through the side of the hall so that it lay outside against Tara. That was to challenge Lug, who tossed the stone back so that it lay in the centre of the royal hall; and he threw the piece which it had carried away back into the side of the royal hall so that it was whole again.

73. "Let a harp be played for us," said the hosts. Then the warrior played sleep music for the hosts and for the king on the first night, putting them to sleep from that hour to the same time the next day. He played sorrowful music so that they were crying and lamenting. He played joyful music so that they were merry and rejoicing.

74. Then Nuadu, when he had seen the warrior's many powers, considered whether he could release them from the bondage they suffered at the hands of the Fomoire. So they held a council concerning the warrior, and the decision which Nuadu reached was to exchange seats with the warrior. So Samildanach went to the king's seat, and the king arose before him until thirteen days had passed.

75. The next day he and the two brothers, Dagda and Ogma, conversed together on Grellach Dollaid; and his two kinsmen Goibniu and Dian Cecht were summoned to them.

76. They spent a full year in that secret conference, so that Grellach Dollaid is called the *Amrun* of the Men of the Goddess.

77. Then the druids of Ireland were summoned to them, together with their physicians and their charioteers and their smiths and their wealthy landowners and their lawyers. They conversed together secretly.

78. Then he asked the sorcerer, whose name was Mathgen, what power he wielded. He answered that he would shake the mountains of Ireland beneath the Fomoire so that their summits would fall to the ground. And it would seem to them that the twelve chief mountains of the land of Ireland would be fighting on behalf of the Tuatha De Danann: Slieve League, and Denda Ulad, and the Mourne Mountains, and Bri Erigi and Slieve Bloom and Slieve Snaght, Slemish and Blaisliab and Nephin Mountain and Sliab Maccu Belgodon and the Curlieu hills and Croagh Patrick.

79. Then he asked the cupbearer what power he wielded. He answered that he would bring the twelve chief lochs of Ireland into the presence of the Fomoire and they would not find water in them, however thirsty they were. These are the lochs: Lough Derg, Lough Luimnig, Lough Corrib, Lough Ree, Lough Mask, Strangford Lough, Belfast Lough, Lough Neagh, Lough Foyle, Lough Gara, Loughrea, Marloch. They would proceed to the twelve chief rivers of Ireland—the Bush, the Boyne, the Bann, the Blackwater, the Lee, the Shannon, the Moy, the Sligo, the Erne, the Finn, the Liffey, the Suir—and they would all be hidden from the Fomoire so they would not find a drop in them. But drink will be provided for the men of Ireland even if they remain in battle for seven years.

80. Then Figol mac Mamois, their druid, said, "Three showers of fire will be rained upon the faces of the Fomorian host, and I will take out of them two-thirds of their courage and their skill at arms and their strength, and I will bind their urine in their own bodies and in the bodies of their horses. Every breath that the men of Ireland will exhale will increase their courage and skill at arms and strength. Even if they remain in battle for seven years, they will not be weary at all.

81. The Dagda said, "The power which you boast, I will wield it all myself."

"You are the Dagda ['the Good God']!" said everyone, and "Dagda" stuck to him from that time on.

82. Then they disbanded the council to meet that day three years later.

83. Then after the preparation for the battle had been settled, Lug and the Dagda and Ogma went to the three gods of Danu, and they gave Lug equipment for the battle; and for seven years they had been preparing for them and making their weapons.

Then she said to him, "Undertake a battle of overthrowing." The Morrigan said to Lug,

"Awake. . . ."

Then Figol mac Mamois, the druid, was prophesying the battle and strengthening the Tuatha De, saying,

"Battle will be waged.

84. The Dagda had a house in Glen Edin in the north, and he had arranged to meet a woman in Glen Edin a year from that day, near the All Hallows of the battle. The Unshin of Connacht roars to the south of it.

He saw the woman at the Unshin in Corann, washing, with one of her feet at Allod Echae (that is, Aghanagh) south of the water and the other at Lisconny north of the water. There were nine loosened tresses on her head. The Dagda spoke with her, and they united. "The Bed of the Couple" was the name of that place from that time on. (The woman mentioned here is the Morrigan.)

85. Then she told the Dagda that the Fomoire would land at Mag Ceidne, and that he should summon the *aes dana* of Ireland to meet her at the Ford of the Unshin, and she would go into Scetne to destroy Indech mac De Domnann, the king of the Fomoire, and would take from him the blood of his heart and the kidneys of his valor. Later she gave two handfuls of that

blood to the hosts that were waiting at the Ford of the Unshin. Its name became "The Ford of Destruction" because of that destruction of the king.

86. So the *aes dana* did that, and they chanted spells against the Fomorian hosts.

87. This was a week before All Hallows, and they all dispersed until all the men of Ireland came together the day before All Hallows. Their number was six times thirty hundred, that is, each third consisted of twice thirty hundred.

88. Then Lug sent the Dagda to spy on the Fomoire and to delay them until the men of Ireland came to the battle.

89. Then the Dagda went to the Fomorian camp and asked them for a truce of battle. This was granted to him as he asked. The Fomoire made porridge for him to mock him, because his love of porridge was great. They filled for him the king's cauldron, which was five fists deep, and poured four score gallons of new milk and the same quantity of meal and fat into it. They put goats and sheep and swine into it, and boiled them all together with the porridge. Then they poured it into a hole in the ground, and Indech said to him that he would be killed unless he consumed it all; he should eat his fill so that he might not satirize the Fomoire.

90. Then the Dagda took his ladle, and it was big enough for a man and a woman to lie in the middle of it. These are the bits that were in it: halves of salted swine and a quarter of lard.

91. Then the Dagda said, "This is good food if its broth is equal to its taste." But when he would put the full ladle into his mouth he said, "'Its poor bits do not spoil it,' says the wise old man."

92. Then at the end he scraped his bent finger over the bottom of the hole among mould and gravel. He fell asleep then after eating his porridge. His belly was as big as a house cauldron, and the Fomoire laughed at it.

93. Then he went away from them to Traigh Eabha. It was not easy for the warrior to move along on account of the size of his belly. His appearance was unsightly: he had a cape to the hollow of his elbows, and a gray-brown tunic around him as far as the swelling of his rump. He trailed behind him a wheeled fork which was the work of eight men to move, and its track was enough for the boundary ditch of a province. It is called "The Track of the Dagda's Club" for that reason. His long penis was uncovered. He had on two shoes of horsehide with the hair outside.

As he went along he saw a girl in front of him, a good-looking young woman with an excellent figure, her hair in beautiful tresses. The Dagda desired her, but he was impotent on account of his belly. The girl began to mock him, then she began wrestling with him. She hurled him so that he sank to the hollow of his rump in the ground. He looked at her angrily and asked, "What business did you have, girl, heaving me out of my right way?"

"This business: to get you to carry me on your back to my father's house."

"Who is your father?" he asked.

"I am the daughter of Indech, son of De Domnann," she said.

She fell upon him again and beat him hard, so that the furrow around him filled with the excrement from his belly; and she satirized him three times so that he would carry her upon his back.

He said that it was a *ges* for him to carry anyone who would not call him by his name.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Fer Benn," he said.

"That name is too much!" she said. "Get up, carry me on your back, Fer Benn."

"That is indeed not my name," he said.

"What is?" she asked.

"Fer Benn Mach," he answered.

"Get up, carry me on your back, Fer Benn Mach," she said.

"That is not my name," he said.

"What is?" she asked. Then he told her the whole thing. She replied immediately and said, "Get up, carry me on your back, Fer Benn Bruach Brogaill Broumide Cerbad Caic Rolaig Builc Labair Cerrce Di Brig Oldathair Boith Athgen mBethai Brightere Tri Carboid Roth Rimaire Riog Scotbe Obthe Olaithbe. . . . Get up, carry me away from here!"

"Do not mock me any more, girl," he said.

"It will certainly be hard," she said.

Then he moved out of the hole, after letting go the contents of his belly, and the girl had waited for that for a long time. He got up then, and took the girl on his back; and he put three stones in his belt. Each stone fell from it in turn-and it has been said that they were his testicles which fell from it. The girl jumped on him and struck him across the rump, and her curly pubic hair was revealed. Then the Dagda gained a mistress, and they made love. The mark remains at Beltraw Strand where they came together.

Then the girl said to him, "You will not go to the battle by any means."

"Certainly I will go," said the Dagda.

"You will not go," said the woman, "because I will be a stone at the mouth of every ford you will cross."

"That will be true," said the Dagda, "but you will not keep me from it. I will tread heavily on every stone, and the trace of my heel will remain on every stone forever."

"That will be true, but they will be turned over so that you may not see them. You will not go past me until I summon the sons of Tethra from the *sid*-mounds, because I will be a giant oak in every ford and in every pass you will cross."

"I will indeed go past," said the Dagda, "and the mark of my axe will remain in every oak forever." (And people have remarked upon the mark of the Dagda's axe.)

Then however she said, "Allow the Fomoire to enter the land, because the men of Ireland have all come together in one place." She said that she would hinder the Fomoire, and she would sing spells against them, and she would practice the deadly art of the wand against them—and she alone would take on a ninth part of the host.

94. The Fomoire advanced until their tenths were in Scetne. The men of Ireland were in Mag Aurfolaig. At this point these two hosts were threatening battle.

"Do the men of Ireland undertake to give battle to us?" said Bres mac Elathan to Indech mac De Domnann.

"I will give the same," said Indech, "so that their bones will be small if they do not pay their tribute."

95. In order to protect him, the men of Ireland had agreed to keep Lug from the battle. His nine foster fathers came to guard him: Tollusdam and Echdam and Eru, Rechtaid Finn and Fosad and Feidlimid, Ibar and Scibar and Minn. They feared an early death for the warrior because of the great number of his arts. For that reason they did not let him go to the battle.

96. Then the men of rank among the Tuatha De were assembled around Lug. He asked his smith, Goibniu, what power he wielded for them.

97. "Not hard to say," he said. "Even if the men of Ireland continue the battle for seven years, for every spear that separates from its shaft or sword that will break in battle, I will provide a new weapon in its place. No spearpoint which my hand forges will make a missing cast. No skin which it pierces will taste life afterward. Dolb, the Fomorian smith, cannot do that. I am now concerned with my preparation for the battle of Mag Tuired."

98. "And you, Dian Cecht," said Lug, "what power do you wield?"

99. "Not hard to say," he said. "Any man who will be wounded there, unless his head is cut off, or the membrane of his brain or his spinal cord is severed, I will make him perfectly whole in the battle on the next day."

100. "And you, Credne," Lug said to his brazier, "what is your power in the battle?"

101. "Not hard to answer," said Credne. "I will supply them all with rivets for their spears and hilts for their swords and bosses and rims for their shields."

102. "And you, Luchta," Lug said to his carpenter, "what power would you attain in the battle?"

103. "Not hard to answer," said Luchta. "I will supply them all with whatever shields and spearshafts they need."

104. "And you, Ogma," said Lug to his champion, "what is your power in the battle?"

105. "Not hard to say," he said. "Being a match for the king and holding my own against twenty-seven of his friends, while winning a third of the battle for the men of Ireland."

106. "And you, Morrigan," said Lug, "what power?"

107. "Not hard to say," she said. "I have stood fast; I shall pursue what was watched; I will be able to kill; I will be able to destroy those who might be subdued."

108. "And you, sorcerers," said Lug, "what power?"

109. "Not hard to say," said the sorcerers. "Their white soles will be visible after they have been overthrown by our craft, so that they can easily be killed; and we will take two-thirds of their strength from them, and prevent them from urinating."

110. "And you, cupbearers," said Lug, "what power?"

111. "Not hard to say," said the cupbearers. "We will bring a great thirst upon them, and they will not find drink to quench it."

112. "And you, druids," said Lug, "what power?"

113. "Not hard to say," said the druids. "We will bring showers of fire upon the faces of the Fomoire so that they cannot look up, and the warriors contending with them can use their force to kill them."

114. "And you, Coirpre mac Etaine," said Lug to his poet, "what can you do in the battle?"

115. "Not hard to say," said Coirpre. "I will make a *glam dicenn* against them, and I will satirize them and shame them so that through the spell of my art they will offer no resistance to warriors."

116. "And you, Be Chuille and Dianann," said Lug to his two witches, "what can you do in the battle?"

117. "Not hard to say," they said. "We will enchant the trees and the stones and the sods of the earth so that they will be a host under arms against them; and they will scatter in flight terrified and trembling."

118. "And you, Dagda," said Lug, "what power can you wield against the Fomorian host in the battle?"

119. "Not hard to say," said the Dagda. "I will fight for the men of Ireland with mutual smiting and destruction and wizardry. Their bones under my club will soon be as many as hailstones under the feet of herds of horses, where the double enemy meets on the battlefield of Mag Tuired."

120. Then in this way Lug addressed each of them in turn concerning their arts, strengthening them and addressing them in such a way that every man had the courage of a king or great lord.

121. Now every day the battle was drawn up between the race of the Fomoire and the Tuatha De Danann, but there were no kings or princes waging it, only fierce and arrogant men.

122. One thing which became evident to the Fomoire in the battle seemed remarkable to them. Their weapons, their spears and their swords, were blunted; and those of their men who were killed did not come back the next day. That was not the case with the Tuatha De Danann: although their weapons were blunted one day, they were restored the next because Goibniu the smith was in the smithy making swords and spears and javelins. He would make those weapons with three strokes. Then Luchta the carpenter would make the spearshafts in three chippings, and the third chipping was a finish and would set them in the socket of the spear. After the spearheads were in the side of the forge he would throw the sockets with the shafts, and it was not necessary to set them again. Then Credne the brazier would make the rivets with three strokes, and he would throw the sockets of the spears at them, and it was not necessary to drill holes for them; and they stayed together this way.

123. Now this is what used to kindle the warriors who were wounded there so that they were more fiery the next day: Dian Cecht, his two sons Octriuil and Miach, and his daughter Airmed were chanting spells over the well named Slaine. They would cast their mortally-wounded men into it as they were struck down; and they were alive when they came out. Their mortally-wounded were healed through the power of the incantation made by the four physicians who were around the well.

124. Now that was damaging to the Fomoire, and they picked a man to reconnoitre the battle and the practices of the Tuatha De—Ruadan, the son of Bres and of Brig, the daughter of the Dagda-because he was a son and a grandson of the Tuatha De. Then he described to the Fomoire the work of the smith and the carpenter and the brazier and the four physicians who were around the well. They sent him back to kill one of the *aes dana*, Goibniu. He requested a spearpoint from him, its rivets from the brazier, and its shaft from the carpenter; and everything was given to him as he asked. Now there was a woman there grinding weapons, Cron the mother of Fianlach; and she ground Ruadan's spear. So the spear was given to Ruadan by his maternal kin, and for that reason a weaver's beam is still called "the spear of the maternal kin" in Ireland.

125. But after the spear had been given to him, Ruadan turned and wounded Goibniu. He pulled out the spear and hurled it at Ruadan so that it went through him; and he died in his father's presence in the Fomorian assembly. Brig came and keened for her son. At first she shrieked, in the end she wept. Then for the first time weeping and shrieking were heard in Ireland. (Now she is the Brig who invented a whistle for signalling at night.)

126. Then Goibniu went into the well and he became whole. The Fomoire had a warrior named Ochtriallach, the son of the Fomorian king Indech mac De Domnann. He suggested that every single man they had should bring a stone from the stones of the river Drowes to cast into the well Slaine in Achad Abla to the west of Mag Tuired, to the east of Lough Arrow. They went, and every man put a stone into the well. For that reason the cairn is called Ochtriallach's Cairn. But another name for that well is Loch Luibe, because Dian Cecht put into it every herb that grew in Ireland.

127. Now when the time came for the great battle, the Fomoire marched out of their encampment and formed themselves into strong indestructible battalions. There was not a chief nor a skilled warrior among them without armor against his skin, a helmet on his head, a broad . . . spear in his right hand, a heavy sharp sword on his belt, a strong shield on

his shoulder. To attack the Fomorian host that day was "striking a head against a cliff," was "a hand in a serpent's nest," was "a face brought close to fire."

128. These were the kings and leaders who were encouraging the Fomorian host: Balor son of Dot son of Net, Bres mac Elathan, Tuire Tortbuillech mac Lobois, Goll and Irgoll, Loscennlomm mac Lommgluinigh, Indech mac De Domnann, king of the Fomoire, Ochtriallach mac Indich, Omna and Bagna, Elatha mac Delbaith.

129. On the other side, the Tuatha De Danann arose and left his nine companions guarding Lug, and went to join the battle. But when the battle ensued, Lug escaped from the guard set over him, as a chariot-fighter, and it was he who was in front of the battalion of the Tuatha De. Then a keen and cruel battle was fought between the race of the Fomoire and the men of Ireland.

Lug was urging the men of Ireland to fight the battle fiercely so they should not be in bondage any longer, because it was better for them to find death while protecting their fatherland than to be in bondage and under tribute as they had been. Then Lug chanted the spell which follows, going around the men of Ireland on one foot and with one eye closed. . . .

130. The hosts gave a great shout as they went into battle. Then they came together, and each of them began to strike the other.

131. Many beautiful men fell there in the stall of death. Great was the slaughter and the grave-lying which took place there. Pride and shame were there side by side. There was anger and indignation. Abundant was the stream of blood over the white skin of young warriors mangled by the hands of bold men while rushing into danger for shame. Harsh was the noise made by the multitude of warriors and champions protecting their swords and shields and bodies while others were striking them with spears and swords. Harsh too the tumult all over the battlefield-the shouting of the warriors and the clashing of bright shields, the swish of swords and ivory-hilted blades, the clatter and rattling of the quivers, the hum and whirr of spears and javelins, the crashing strokes of weapons.

132. As they hacked at each other their fingertips and their feet almost met; and because of the slipperiness of the blood under the warriors' feet, they kept failing down, and their heads were cut off them as they sat. A gory, wound-inflicting, sharp, bloody battle was upheaved, and spearshafts were reddened in the hands of foes.

133. Then Nuadu Silverhand and Macha the daughter of Ernmas fell at the hands of Balor grandson of Net. Casmael fell at the hands of Ochtriallach son of Indech. Lug and Balor of the piercing eye met in the battle. The latter had a destructive eye which was never opened except on a battlefield. Four men would raise the lid of the eye by a polished ring in its lid. The host which looked at that eye, even if they were many thousands in number, would offer no resistance to warriors. It had that poisonous power for this reason: once his father's druids were brewing magic. He came and looked over the window, and the fumes of the concoction affected the eye and the venomous power of the brew settled in it. Then he and Lug met. . . .

134. “Lift up my eyelid, lad,” said Balor, “so I may see the talkative fellow who is conversing with me.”

135. The lid was raised from Balor’s eye. Then Lug cast a sling stone at him which carried the eye through his head, and it was his own host that looked at it. He fell on top of the Fomorian host so that twenty-seven of them died under his side; and the crown of his head struck against the breast of Indech mac De Domnann so that a gush of blood spouted over his lips.

136. “Let Loch Lethglas [“Halfgreen”], my poet, be summoned to me,” said Indech. (He was half green from the ground to the crown of his head.) He came to him. “Find out for me,” said Indech, “who hurled this cast at me.” . . . Then Loch Lethglas said,

“Declare, who is the man? . . .”

Then Lug said these words in answer to him,

“A man cast

Who does not fear you.

137. Then the Morrigan the daughter of Ernmas came, and she was strengthening the Tuatha De to fight the battle resolutely and fiercely. She then chanted the following poem:

“Kings arise to the battle! . . .”

138. Immediately afterwards the battle broke, and the Fomoire were driven to the sea. The champion Ogma son of Elatha and Indech mac De Domnann fell together in single combat.

139. Loch Lethglas asked Lug for quarter. “Grant my three requests,” said Lug.

140. “You will have them,” said Loch. “I will remove the need to guard against the Fomoire from Ireland forever; and whatever judgement your tongue will deliver in any difficult case, it will resolve the matter until the end of fife.”

141. So Loch was spared. Then he chanted “The Decree of Fastening” to the Gaels. . . .

142. Then Loch said that he would give names to Lug’s nine chariots because he had been spared. So Lug said that he should name them. Loch answered and said, “Luachta, Anagat, Achad, Feochair, Fer, Golla, Fosad, Craeb, Carpat.”

143. “A question then: what are the names of the charioteers who were in them?”

“Medol, Medon, Moth, Mothach, Foimtinne, Tenda, Tres, Morb.”

144. “What are the names of the goads which were in their hands?”

“Fes, Res, Roches, Anagar, Each, Canna, Riadha, Buaid.”

145. “What are the names of the horses?”

“Can, Doriadha, Romuir, Laisad, Fer Forsaid, Sroban, Airchedal, Ruagar, Ilann, Allriadha, Rocedal.”

146. "A question: what is the number of the slain?" Lug said to Loch.

"I do not know the number of peasants and rabble. As to the number of Fomorian lords and nobles and champions and over-kings, I do know: 3 + 3 x 20 + 50 x 100 men + 20 x 100 + 3 x 50 + 9 x 5 + 4 x 20 x 1000 + 8 + 8 x 20 + 7 + 4 x 20 + 6 + 4 x 20 + 5 + 8 x 20 + 2 + 40, including the grandson of Net with 90 men. That is the number of the slain of the Fomorian over-kings and high nobles who fell in the battle.

147. "But regarding the number of peasants and common people and rabble and people of every art who came in company with the great host—for every warrior and every high noble and every overking of the Fomoire came to the battle with his personal followers, so that all fell there, both their free men and their unfree servants—I count only a few of the over-kings' servants. This then is the number of those I counted as I watched: 7 + 7 x 20 x 20 x 100 x 100 + 90 including Sab Uanchennach son of Coirpre Colc, the son of a servant of Indech mac De Domnann (that is, the son of a servant of the Fomorian king).

148. "As for the men who fought in pairs and the spearmen, warriors who did not reach the heart of the battle who also fell there-until the stars of heaven can be counted, and the sands of the sea, and flakes of snow, and dew on a lawn, and hailstones, and grass beneath the feet of horses, and the horses of the son of Lir in a sea storm—they will not be counted at all."

149. Immediately afterward they found an opportunity to kill Bres mac Elathan. He said, "It is better to spare me than to kill me."

150. "What then will follow from that?" said Lug.

"The cows of Ireland will always be in milk," said Bres, "if I am spared."

"I will tell that to our wise men," said Lug.

151. So Lug went to Maeltne Morbrethach and said to him, "Shall Bres be spared for giving constant milk to the cows of Ireland?"

152. "He shall not be spared," said Maeltne. "He has no power over their age or their calving, even if he controls their milk as long as they are alive."

153. Lug said to Bres, "That does not save you; you have no power over their age or their calving, even if you control their milk."

154. Bres said, "Maeltne has given bitter alarms!"

155. "Is there anything else which will save you, Bres?" said Lug.

"There is indeed. Tell your lawyer they will reap a harvest every quarter in return for sparing me."

156. Lug said to Maeltne, "Shall Bres be spared for giving the men of Ireland a harvest of grain every quarter?"

157. "This has suited us," said Maeltne. "Spring for plowing and sowing, and the beginning of summer for maturing the strength of the grain, and the beginning of autumn for the full ripeness of the grain, and for reaping it. Winter for consuming it."

158. "That does not save you," said Lug to Bres.

"Maeltne has given bitter alarms," said he.

159. "Less rescues you," said Lug.

"What?" asked Bres.

160. "How shall the men of Ireland plow? How shall they sow? How shall they reap? If you make known these things, you will be saved."

"Say to them, on Tuesday their plowing; on Tuesday their sowing seed in the field; on Tuesday their reaping."

161. So through that device Bres was released.

162. Now in that battle Ogma the champion found Orna, the sword of Tethra, king of the Fomoire. Ogma unsheathed the sword and cleaned it. Then the sword told what had been done by it, because it was the habit of swords at that time to recount the deeds that had been done by them whenever they were unsheathed. And for that reason swords are entitled to the tribute of cleaning after they have been unsheathed. Moreover spells have been kept in swords from that time on. Now the reason why demons used to speak from weapons then is that weapons used to be worshipped by men and were among the sureties of that time. Loch Lethglas chanted the following poem about that sword. . . .

163. Then Lug and the Dagda and Ogma went after the Fomoire, because they had taken the Dagda's harper, Uaithne. Eventually they reached the banqueting hall where Bres mac Elathan and Elatha mac Delbaith were. There was the harp on the wall. That is the harp in which the Dagda had bound the melodies so that they did not make a sound until he summoned them, saying,

"Come Daur Da Blao,
Come Coir Cetharchair,
Come summer, come winter,
Mouths of harps and bags and pipes!"

(Now that harp had two names, Daur Da Blao and Coir Cetharchair.)

164. Then the harp came away from the wall, and it killed nine men and came to the Dagda; and he played for them the three things by which a harper is known: sleep music, joyful music, and sorrowful music. He played sorrowful music for them so that their tearful women wept. He played joyful music for them so that their women and boys laughed. He played sleep music for them so that the hosts slept. So the three of them escaped from them unharmed—although they wanted to kill them.

165. The Dagda brought with him the cattle taken by the Fomoire through the lowing of the heifer which had been given him for his work; because when she called her calf, a the cattle of Ireland which the Fomoire had taken as their tribute began to graze.

166. Then after the battle was won and the slaughter had been cleaned away, the Morrigan, the daughter of Ernmas, proceeded to announce the battle and the great victory which had

occurred there to the royal heights of Ireland and to its *sid*-hosts, to its chief waters and to its rivermouths. And that is the reason Badb still relates great deeds. "Have you any news?" everyone asked her then.

"Peace up to heaven.
Heaven down to earth.
Earth beneath heaven,
Strength in each,
A cup very full,
Full of honey;
Mead in abundance.
Summer in winter. . . .
Peace up to heaven . . ."

167. She also prophesied the end of the world, foretelling every evil that would occur then, and every disease and every vengeance; and she chanted the following poem:

"I shall not see a world
Which will be dear to me:
Summer without blossoms,
Cattle will be without milk,
Women without modesty,
Men without valor.
Conquests without a king . . .
Woods without mast.
Sea without produce. . . .
False judgements of old men.
False precedents of lawyers,
Every man a betrayer.
Every son a reaver.
The son will go to the bed of his father,
The father will go to the bed of his son.
Each his brother's brother-in-law.
He will not seek any woman outside his house. . . .
An evil time,
Son will deceive his father,
Daughter will deceive . . ."

Further Reading

for *The Second Battle of Magh Tuireadh*

Rees, Alwyn and Brinley. *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales*. Great Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1961. Chapter II: Branches of the Tradition

Chapter Four

Into the Well of Beauty:

The Shape of the Sacred in Celtic Spirituality

When we look at the world with eyes that can see the sacred pulsing through everything, our heart opens. There has been no time in our collective history when we have needed to recover this gift more than now. The enlivened senses that we were born with have collectively shut down. We no longer see the sacred world. What we see in its place is the wholesale degradation of the earth as a resource; as a commodity for the use and control of human beings. In our eyes, the sacred has left the earth. If we are to heal the wounds we have caused the earth, and thus ourselves, we need to shift the way in which we think about the earth. We need an enlivened spirituality capable of re-imbuing the word with the divine presence of the sacred.

Most, if not all, of the spiritualities that are indigenous to their respective locations are animistic, honoring the earth and the spirits of the earth. The indigenous inhabitants of Ireland were no different, nor where the Celtic people who's culture mixed with that of the native population's in the beginning of the Iron Age. The result is what we talk about as the pre-Christian Celtic religion. This is just one of many viable and ancestral paths back to the wisdom of seeing the world for what it is: sacred.

Animism has come to be something of a derogatory term, especially in many circles of Western psychological thinkers. It is thought of as a pre-rational stage to be developed beyond. This is of course absurd if one takes into account that the ancient Greeks, who are thought of in the Western world as the champions of logic and reason were animists. Animism defies the modern Western mind. It is a way of seeing and participating in the world that states that all things are imbued with the numinous; that every grove of trees, stone, river, mountain, ocean, and lake has its spirit, and are filled with the presence of divine beauty. All the world is ensouled in animism. As Irish poet and philosopher, John O'Donohue, puts it, "The body is in the soul".

In animistic spiritualities soul is all around us, we move through it, just as we move through the air. We breathe it. It is no accident that in most Indo-European based languages, the word for breath and the word for spirit are the same, or else closely related. We see this in the Latin word *anima*, which has the double meaning of soul and breathe. We can also see this word echoed in the modern Irish words, *anam*, meaning soul; and *anáil* meaning breathe. To the animistic mind, spirit and soul are as close and pervasive as the air that we breathe.

The Celtic understanding of divinity has been shaped by this worldview. It was not until they came into contact with the Romans, on the continent and in Britain, that the deities were carved in human form. In Ireland, which never came under the control of Rome, this never occurred, although there are a few carvings of human forms which some scholars argue to be deities. The gods were not seen as being anthropomorphic figures. A close parallel for understanding the deities of the Celtic traditions might be the Japanese Shinto concept of kami, a word which although often translated as deities, simply means "outstanding". Patricia Monaghan, talking about the goddess in Ireland, uses this parallel aptly, describing the kami and the goddess as:

> *...moments and places and myth and beings in which divine presence makes itself felt. The blossoming of cherry trees, a sharp outcropping of rock, the sun bursting through clouds: these are kami because they remind us of the order - the divinity - into which we are born. In Ireland, similarly, the goddess is experienced as a hierophany, a breaking through, of divine power into our human consciousness, with specific natural settings and moments as the medium of communication.*[1]

The line between the Celtic deities and the ancestors is very thin. The gods and goddesses, the Tuatha Dé Danann (often translated as the People of the Goddess Dana), were the first ancestors. Because they are understood to be born from Dana, the primal "mother goddess" of Ireland, we might think of them as Dana-spirits in the same way a Shinto practitioner would talk about the kami. The idea that we are related to the gods, that we are their descendants is an articulation not only of the closeness and immediacy of the divine pulsing through our blood, but in the interconnectedness of the human community with the "more-than-human" community. If all of nature is divine, if it is indeed the body of a goddess – the same goddess that the Tuatha dé Danann, the first ancestor-deities, were born from – then it goes to say that all life, all nature (which includes humans), is interconnected and related to one another.

No matter how you choose to look at it and try to understand it, the divine is a complicated matter, a mystery that we as humans can just barely even begin to understand. In the Christian tradition, God is spoken of as a threefold deity, the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Given the Celtic love of the number three, such an approach is also helpful in understanding the pre-Christian Celtic relationship with the divine. Tom Cowan and Frank MacEowen, two teachers and respected authors on Celtic spirituality speak of the Shaper, the Shapes and the Shaping.

This is something of a modern "invention", but based on the idea that the Celts were prone to place emphasis on "shaping", rather than "creation". Creating implies that something is being made from nothing, while shaping holds in it the notion that something pre-existing is in a process of taking on new forms.

One of the words for God in Scots-Gaelic is Cruithear[2]. It comes from the root word *cruth*, meaning "to shape". We can also see this in the Irish word for creator, c*ruthaitheoir*[3], which also comes from the root word meaning "shape", *cruth*. God is seen as a Great Shaper, and this same understanding certainly holds true for the pagan experience of the deities as well; they are the Shapers of the world. From this we get the sense that nothing is truly created that is outside the shaping of the essence of the Shaper(s).

Nature, the "created" world, is the Shapes. Because these have been formed from the very essence of the Shaper(s), they are a part, an extension, of that divinity. The Shapes are the imminent blossoming forth of the divine presence, flowering from the transcendent reality of the Great Shaper(s). God, or the gods, are not entirely imminent nor entirely transcendent. They are both simultaneously, because they are both embraced by the same divine process of Shaping that transcends *and includes* both.

The Shaping is a mysterious process , much like the Holy Spirit in Catholicism. It is not *just* the Shaper shaping Shapes. One gets the idea that even the Shaper is Shaped by this, or perhaps even more perplexing, that the Shaper *is* a process of Shaping itself, rather than a fixed and motionless entity. The Shaping is the enlivening process underlying all things. It is like the Chinese concept of the *Tao*, which translates as "the Way", a harmonizing principle which we can either allow ourselves to be shaped by or not. If the Great Shaper is a process of

Shaping which encircles all Shapes, then all things are a part of this divine process. It is a triune idea, but each aspect is fundamentally bound into an inseparable whole; we are all, in our own right, shapes, shaping, and shapers, and in this way we participate in the divine play, just as God, or the gods, are present and active in each moment of this process of ceaseless shaping.

Perhaps it is in the Irish concept of *neart* in which we see the native articulation of this process of divine Shaping. *Neart* might simply be summed up as "creative energy". It is the process of transformation, or shaping, and the divine expression of forms all at once. We can see this process of shaping, or *neart*, reflected in Celtic art as flowing, interlaced lines wrap around and take a multitude of forms, shape-shifting all that they touch as they snake along. Humans become other humans, which become dogs before turning into swans, and on the journey of transformation goes. The process continues on as form gives way to form, and all things are embraced by intricate lines and spirals.

Seán Ó Duinn describes a possible meaning of this artistry in his book, *Where Three Streams Meet:*

> *...here we have great lines of creative energy emanating from God to take the form of a dog temporarily. For the dog will die and perhaps from his grave a flower will grow, and now the neart which had formed the dog is taking the form of a flower, and evetually the flower will die and be replaced by grass, shall we say. And now the creative neart has taken the form of grass.*[4]

As Ó Duinn points out that this *neart*, this Shaping power, emanates from God, the Great Shaper or Shapers, who facilitates its issuing forth into the world of Shapes. This is a world of dynamic fluidity; nothing is static.

When Christianity reached Ireland, the people began to convert. However, the Christianity that arose from them was very different and distinct from the Roman form of Christianity, which exerted little control over the Celtic church in the early Christian period. Many of the old pagan practices persisted in an ever so slightly altered form, taking on the colors of the new faith, but maintaining the form of the old.

One of the most noticeable differences is that the Irish Christians still stressed a great deal of importance on the idea of the imminence of God. It was not so much that they did not recognize the transcendence of the divine as well, but focusing on the imminence was a recognition of the close presence of the sacred in everyday life. It was right there in the fields, in the clouds, in the mountains, and the trees. It was a surrendering to the fact that the transcendence of God was an ultimate mystery, and a display of a profound comfort with that mystery.

In native Irish sources, the word used for God is *Rí na nDúl*, the King, or God of the Elements. From this we get the sense that God is a God of Nature. The Irish word for nature is *dúlra*, and also contains the same word for element, *dúil*. Another word used for God, or Creator, in the Irish language is *Dúileamh*. God is fiercely entwined with the natural world. These words suggest that the divine is intimately a part of the world, and that the world in turn is intimately a part of God.

In his book *Yearning for the Wind*, Tom Cowan points out that the same word *dúil*, can also mean desire, liking, or hope. This idea finds its way into the traditional prayer, "You are the pure love of the moon, you are the pure love of the stars, you are the pure love of sun, you are the pure love of the dew, you are the pure love of the rain, you are the pure love of each living

creature." This is radical notion to our modern world, to entertain the thought that the world is so filled with love and fondness, and that what more, we *are* the love and affection of all things.[5]

This makes vast amounts of sense if we hold to the old Celtic notion that the land is a goddess. Often the land is portrayed as either a mother or a lover. An old Scottish Highland saying states, "Within the heart of God is the heart of a mother." This idea of the Mothering power of the land survived the conversion of Christianity and its masculine God. Even God was recognized as having the feminine attribute of a mother, a recognition of the often neglected divine feminine. If nature is so full of such mothering powers, of course it loves us, and is filled with affection for us!

In his brilliant book, *Divine Beauty*, John O'Donohue plays with this idea, asking the questions we might never think to ask ourselves:

> *Concealed beneath familiarity and silence, the earth holds back and it never occurs to us to wonder how the earth sees us. Is it not possible that a place could have huge affection for those who dwell there? Perhaps your place loves having you there. It misses you when you are away and in its secret way rejoices when you return. Could it be possible that a landscape might have a deep friendship with you?*[6]

Such a relationship with the world would require from us a profound softening of the ways in which we dwell within it. It would require us to treat the world as if it were divine, as if it were God itself, or as if it were a mother or a lover. We would have to give the earth the same love and affection that it gives to us, even as we destroy her.

This way of sensing and appreciating the world needs the cultivation of a different set of senses; senses that are capable of perceiving the numinous dimensions hidden quietly within each stone, coursing in the sap up through trees, and flowing secretly in the currents of rivers. Such enlivened senses would show us a new landscape, one in which sacred springs are the eyes of a goddess, and wild mountains are her breasts. When we open these eyes, we open a new heart, filled with reverence for the earth. We need to enter this well of beauty now, more than ever. Our ancient spirituality, and the science of the 21st century have both shown us that we are part of an intricate system of interpenetrating cycles of life and consciousness. The land is indeed sacred and filled with a divine presence, we have simply forgotten this. We need to remember. We are the love and affection of the earth. We are the love and affection of the Shapes, the Shaper, and the Shaping of Life.

Endnotes

1. Monaghan, Patricia. *The Red-Haired Girl From the Bog: The Landscape of Celtic Myth and Spirit*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2003. p.10

2. MacEowen, Frank. *The Mist-Filled Path: Celtic Wisdom for Exiles, Wnderers, and Seekers.* Novato, California: New World Library, 2002. p. 127

3. Cowan, Tom. *Yearning for the Wind: Celtic Reflections on Nature and the Soul.* Novato, California: New World Library, 2003. p. 143

4. Ó Duinn, Seán OSB. *Where Three Streams Meet: Celtic Spirituality*. Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland: The Columba Press, 2000. p. 85

5. Cowan, Tom. *Yearning for the Wind: Celtic Reflections on Nature and the Soul.* Novato, California: New World Library, 2003. pg. 31-34

6. O'Donohue, John. *Divine Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*. London, England: Bantam Books, 2003. p. 43

Chapter Five
Dana:
The Primal Enlivening

Almost every culture at some point in its history has articulated an understanding of the transpersonal or spiritual experience. Whether as a multitude of gods and goddesses, spirits and ancestors, a single God, or an abstract enlivening "ground of being", this view was nevertheless expressed. What follows is an account of this experience seen through the lens of the primal Irish tradition.

The idea of "Dana" is both very old and very new. Dana was a primal mother goddess of the Celtic tradition, often called Danu, Ana, or Anu, depending on who you ask or the geographic territory her name is found in. A more encompassing view of Dana however is expressed by Frank MacEowen. This is a view that has personally resonated with me, and due to its expansive nature, can hold many different experiences and vantage points together. It should be noted however that there are people working in the Irish tradition of druidism who use this term, although MacEowen's own adoption of it came about through visionary experiences in a cairn on a sacred mountain in Ireland. There is no scholarly or historical precedent to say that the ancient Irish conceived of Dana in quite the same way, though there is nothing to say they did not either. Nevertheless I find it a valuable articulation, and so share it here.

The name of goddess Dana can be found all across Europe in various forms and in various languages. Its roots lie in the Indo-European language, and perhaps its most notable appearance is in the name of the Danube river, who's name translates to the "water's of heaven". In Ireland her name can be found on such mountains as the Paps of Anu in Co. Kerry, as well as in the name of the Tuatha Dé Danann, commonly translated to the "people of the goddess Dana". This idea of the land as a goddess, and the people as her children, is an important one, and is the first articulation of Dana.

Simply put Dana is the primal earth goddess, the land itself. It is from her womb that we emerged. One of the qualities of Dana is that it is tending, nurturing, and soul-nourishing; all qualities of a mother. MacEowen suggests that she is in a way, the "goddess of the goddesses".[1] She is the land, in both its most literal sense, as well as being the energy that is "behind" or within the land; the very essence that enlivens the natural world. She may be a goddess to you, or Dana may just be away of relating to the sensuous earth as a living experience. In this sense she is a wellspring of both abundant nourishment and transformation.

A second, shamanic way, of looking at Dana is as spirits. We might call these the dana-spirits. Like the *kami* of Japanese Shinto religion, there may be many varieties of dana-spirits; gods and goddesses, nature spirits, ancestors, and other primal powers which are often worked with in shamanic traditions. We may see a particular waterfall that evokes something within us, and brings us into contact with divine beauty; we might call this waterfall a dana-spirit. The same could be said for certain trees, such as the faery trees of Ireland, holy mountains, or sacred rivers. They may also be the spirit helpers we work with in the Otherworld, or ancestral spirits who we encounter along our journey.

A third way of experiencing Dana is as a "harmonizing principle"[2], such as the *tao* or *chi* of Chinese philosophy and religion. In this way Dana might be said to be the enlivening

force behind all of existence; consciousness itself, in all its myriad of forms. In the non-dual traditions of Buddhism they often speak of the "ground of being", which is what all forms arise from. It is non-dual because it is neither form nor formless, material nor spiritual – rather it is both at once, fully and equally. Certain mystical understandings of God, or what some people simply refer to as the Divine or Spirit may fall into this category.

It's not particularly important *what* we call Dana. The name Dana may work for you, or perhaps you have come to know it by a different name, or myriad of names. None of the perspectives above are more right than another one. They are not a hierarchy, but rather a spectrum or even interconnected web of experience. My own leanings lead me to relate to each of these three perspectives at different times and in different ways. It may serve you to hold all three, or it may serve you to hold only one (or none if your experience is outside this articulation). What is more important is developing a bond of relationship with the transpersonal.

Endnotes

1. MacEowen, Frank. *The Spiral of Memory and Belonging: A Celtic Path of Soul and Kinship*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2004. p. 45

2. MacEowen, Frank. *The Spiral of Memory and Belonging: A Celtic Path of Soul and Kinship*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2004. p. 46

Chapter Six
The Dúile:
The Shapes of the World

As has been said many times throughout the course, and will no doubt be said again, that the inner and outer landscapes are not separate. *They are the wildness of the world and the wildness of the self*. One of the primary systems of orientation in nature-based spiritual traditions is the elements; a way of locating our own bodies in the world by way of correspondence with nature. The fire in the sun is the heat of our body; the ocean the blood and water which we are made up of; air, our breath; and the earth our body.

Most modern people working in a Western tradition of paganism work with the "classical" system of the four elements, as described above, from Greek thought: fire, air, water, and earth (spirit is sometimes added to this, taking the place of the Greek *aether*). Although many have argued that the druids used a similar system, this is open to debate. In any case, working with these elements is not inappropriate to the Celtic tradition. It is however not the only way.

There are a variety of lists, often of up to nine elements, which are speculated to be a part of the native druidic traditions of Ireland. These *dúile*, the Irish word for "element" can be found in several lists, many from the Scottish text compiled by Alexander Carmichael called the *Carmina Gadelica*. There is however at least one Irish source of interest, and that is an old prayer often called St. Patrick's Breastplate, but also known by an older name, *The Deer's Cry*. This prayer is speculated to predate Christianity, and certainly at least the listing of the dúile seems to have druidic origins. The prayer is as follows in Old Irish, and translated to English:

Atromiug indiu
niurt nime
soilse gréne
etrochtae ésci
áne thened
déne lóchet
lúathe gáithe
fudomnae maro
tairisminge t[h]alman
cobsaide ailech.

I arise today
through the strength of heaven,
light of sun,
brilliance of moon,
splendour of fire,
speed of lightning,
swiftness of wind,
depth of sea,
stability of earth,

firmness of rock.
(translated by W. Stokes and J. Strachan)[1]

This is only a small section of the longer prayer of the breastplate, a morning prayer, invoking the strength and power of the cosmos into the day. As I have stated there are several other lists to be found as well. This suggests that there was no uniform system of classifying what the elements were. Perhaps a search for a uniquely Celtic system of the elements is fruitless because there was not one homogenized teaching on this subject? Rather it seems that there may have been many lists of elements, none more primary, more authentic or correct than another.

What was important, perhaps, to the Celts was the philosophy which lay behind any articulation of the elements: that within ourselves we may find the elements of nature, and that within the natural world we might find reflections of ourselves. The human being becomes a microcosm of the world, and the world a macrocosm of the human. Classifying the many shapes of the world was not centrally important, but rather what was important was that there *were* shapes, and these shapes were infused with divine consciousness, with *neart neimhe,* the "strength of heaven".

As we have previously discussed, one might broadly describe the Celtic conception of the divine as being a trinity of Shaping, Shapes, and Shapers. In this trinity the dúile are the many shapes. The Shaping, what we have called *neart* or *dana* (after the primal Irish goddess figure, Dana or Danu), is consciousness itself, the ground of being. The dúile are the specific forms in which consciousness arises, most typically as the natural world and all its life. That this holds true for the Celtic people is evident in the fact that one of the words for God in Irish is *Dúileamh* or sometimes *Rí na nDúl*, the King of the Elements.

This view is at the heart of Celtic mysticism, and is of course a theme running throughout this text. Nature is the manifestation of the eternal, of consciousness. It is not that nature is some hollow shell, filled with a redeeming divine light, but rather that the form itself is an expression of this divinity; as sacred in its materiality as the spirit which it has arisen from is sacred in its transcendence. We too are part of this great shaping, and in our participation with the natural world we find ourselves cast into the stream of the eternal, and like the wind slowly eroding the face of a stone, we find within ourselves the ability to shape the world.

Endnotes

1. quoted in: Ó Duinn OSB, Seán. *Where Three Streams Meet: Celtic Spirituality*. Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland: The Columba Press, 2000. p. 179

Further Reading

for *Into the Well of Beauty, Dana, & The Dúile*

MacEowen, Frank. *The Spiral of Memory and Belonging: A Celtic Path of Soul and Kinship*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2004. Chapters 1 – 4

MacEowen, Frank. *The Mist-Filled Path: Celtic Wisdom for Exiles, Wanderers, and Seekers*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2003. Chapters 6 and 7

Cowan, Tom. *Yearning for the Wind: Celtic Reflections on Nature and the Soul*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2003. Chapters 20 – 22 and 29 – 30

Matthews, John. *The Sidhe: Wisdom from the Celtic Otherworld*. Issaquah, Washington: The Lorian Association, 2004.

Ó Duinn, Seán OSB. *Where Three Streams Meet: Celtic Spirituality*. Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland: The Columba Press, 2000. Chapters 5 – 6

Chapter Seven
Myth Work II:
The Setting of the Manor of Tara

1. The Ui Neill were once in conference in Magh Bregh in the time of Diarmait son of Fergus Cerball, and this was what they discussed. The demesne of Tara seemed excessive to them, that is, the plain with seven views on every side, and they considered the curtailing of that green, for they deemed it unprofitable to have so much land without house or cultivation upon it, and of no service to the hearth of Tara. For every three years they were obliged to support the men of Ireland and to feed them for seven days and seven nights. It was in this fashion then they used to proceed to the feast of Diarmait son of Cerball. No king used to go without a queen, or chieftain without a chieftainess, or warrior without ... or fop without a harlot, or hospitaller without a consort, or youth without a love, or maiden without a lover, or man without an art.

2. The kings and ollaves used to be placed around Diarmait son of Cerball, that is, kings and ollaves together, warriors and reavers together. The youths and maidens and the proud foolish folk in the chambers around the doors; and his proper portion was given to each one, that is, choice fruit and oxen and boars and flitches for kings and ollaves, and for the free noble elders of the men of Ireland likewise: stewards and stewardesses carving and serving for them. Then red meat from spits of iron, and bragget and new ale and milk water [?] for warriors and reavers: and jesters and cup-bearers carving and serving for them. Heads-and-feet [?] next and ... of all [kinds of] cattle to charioteers and jugglers and for the rabble and common people, with charioteers and jugglers and doorkeepers carving and dispensing for them. Veal then and lamb and pork and the seventh portion outside for young men and maidens, because their mirth used to entertain them ... and their nobility [?] used to be awaiting them [?]. Free mercenaries and female hirelings carving and dispensing for them.

3. The nobles of Ireland were then summoned to the feast to the house of Tara by Diarmait son of Cerball. And they said that they would not partake of the feast of Tara until the settling of the manor of Tara was determined, how it was before their day and how it would be after them for all time, and they delivered that answer to Diarmait. And Diarmait replied that it was not right to ask him to partition the manor of Tara without taking counsel of Flann Febla son of Scannlan son of Fingen, that is, the head of Ireland and the successor of Patrick, or of Fiachra son of the embroideress. Messengers were accordingly dispatched to Fiachra son of Colman son of Eogan, and he was brought unto them to help them, for few were their learned men, and many were their unlearned, and numerous their contentions and their problems.

4. Then Fiachra arrived, and they asked the same thing of him, namely to partition for them the manor of Tara. And he answered them that he would not give a decision on that matter until they should send for one wiser and older than himself. 'Where is he?' said they. 'No hard matter that,' said he, 'even Cennfaelad son of Ailill son of Muiredach son of Eogan son of Niall. It is from his head,' said he, 'that the brain of forgetfulness was removed at the battle of

Magh Rath, that is to say, he remembers all that he heard of the history of Ireland from that time down to the present day. It is right that he should come to decide for you.

5. Cennfaelad was then sent for, and he came to them, and they asked him also the same thing. And Cennfaelad replied: 'It is not proper for you to ask that of me so long as the five seniors to us all are in Ireland.' 'Where then are they?' said the men of Ireland. 'Easy to tell,' said he, - 'Finnchad from Falmag of Leinster, and Cú-alad from Cruachu Conalad, and Bran Bairne from Bairenn, Dubán son of Deg from the province of the Fir Olnegmacht, Tuan son of Cairell from Ulster, he who passed into many shapes.'

6. These five were then sent for, and they were brought to them to Tara, and they asked the same thing of them, namely, to partition for them the manor of Tara. Then each of the five related what he remembered, and this is what they said, that it was not proper for them to partition Tara and its manor so long as their senior and fosterer in Ireland were without the assembly. 'Where then is he?' asked the men - of Ireland. 'Not hard to tell,' said they. 'Fintan son of Bóchra, son of Bith, son of Noah.' He was at Dun Tulcha in Kerry.

7. Then Berran, Cennfaelad's attendant, went for Fintan to Dun - Tulcha to the west of Luachair Dedaid. And he delivered his message to him. Then Fintan came with him to Tara. And his retinue consist-ed of eighteen companies, namely, nine before him and nine behind. And there was not one among them who was not of the seed of Fintan — sons, grandsons, great-grandsons, and descendants of his was that host.

8. A great welcome was given to Fintan in the banqueting house, and all were glad at his coming to hear his words and his stories. And they all rose up before him, and they bade him sit in the judge's seat. But Fintan said he would not go into it until he knew his question. And he said to them 'There is no need to make rejoicing for me, for I am sure of your welcome as every son is sure of his fostermother, and this then is my fostermother,' said Fintan, 'the island in which ye are, even Ireland, and the familiar knee of this island is the hill on which ye are, namely, Tara. Moreover, it is the mast and the produce, the flowers and the food of this island that have sustained me from the Deluge - until to-day. And I am skilled in its feasts and its cattle-spoils, its destructions and its courtships, in all that have taken place from the Deluge until now.' And then he made a lay:

9. Ireland, though it is enquired of me,
I know accurately
every colonization it has undergone
since the beginning of the pleasant world.

Cessair came from the east,
the woman, daughter of Bith,
with her fifty maidens
and her trio of men.

The Deluge overtook them,
though it was a sad pity,
and drowned them all

each one on his height.

Bith north in Sliab Betha,
sad was the mystery,
Ladru in Ard Ladrann,
Cessair in her recess.

As for me I was saved
by the Son of God, a protection over the throng,
the Deluge parted from me
above massive Tul Tuinde.

I was a year under the Deluge
at bracing Tul Tuinde.
There has not been slept, there will not be,
any better sleep.

Then Parthalon came to me
from the east, from the Grecian land,
and I lived on with his progeny
though it was a long way.

I was still in Ireland
when Ireland was a wilderness,
until Agnoman ‘s son came,
Nemed, pleasant his ways.

Next came the Fir Bolg,
that is a fair true tale.
I lived together with them,
whilst they were in the land.

The Fir Bolg and Fir Galion
came, it was long [thereafter].
The Fir Domnann came,
they settled in Irrus in the west.

Then came the Tuatha Dé
in clouds of dark mist,
and I lived along with them
though it was a long life.

The sons of Mil came then
into the land against them
I was along with every tribe
until the time ye see.

After that came the Sons of Mil
out of Spain from the south,
and I lived along with them
though mighty was their combat.

I had attained to long life,
I will not hide it,
when the Faith came to me
from the King of the cloudy heaven.

I am white Fintan,
Bóchra's son, I will not hide it.
Since the Deluge here
I am a high noble sage.

10. 'Good, O Fintan,' said they 'We are the better for every neglect [?] which we may cause thee, and we should like to know from thee how reliable thy memory is.' 'That is no hard matter,' said he. 'One day I passed through a wood in West Munster in the west. I took away with me a red yew berry and I planted it in the garden of my court, and it grew up there until it was as big as a man. Then I removed it from the garden and planted it on the lawn of my court even, and it grew up in the centre of that lawn so that I could fit with a hundred warriors under its foliage, and it protected me from wind and rain, and from cold and heat. I remained and so did my yew flourishing together, until it shed its foliage from decay. Then when I had no hope of turning it even so to my profit, I went and cut it from its stock, and made from it seven vats and seven ians and seven drolmachs, seven churns, seven pitchers, seven milans, and seven methars with hoops for all of them. So I remained then and my yew vessels with me until their hoops fell off through decay and age. Then I re-made them all, but could get only an ian out of a vat, and a drolmach out of an ian, and a churn out of a drolmach, and a pitcher out of a churn, and a milan out of a pitcher, and a methar out of a milan. And I swear to Almighty God I know not where those substitutes are since they perished with me from decay.'

11. 'Thou art indeed venerable,' said Diarmait. 'It is transgression of an elder's judgement to transgress thy judgement. And it is for that reason we have summoned thee, that thou shouldst be the one to pronounce just judgement for us.' 'It is true, indeed,' said he, 'that I an-i skilled in every just judgement that has been given from the beginning of the world until this day.' And then he made the following lay:

12. I know in this way,
no foolish one will find it,
the first judge, boasting and no concealment,
who pronounced without fault the first judgement.

Judgement on the Devil over Druim Den.
I know the manner in which it was given.
Dear God gave it, the report spread,
as it was the first crime, 'twas the first judgement.

The gift divine of dear God,
so that men should have judgement,
the law of fair speech [i.e. Latin] was given
to Moses, greater than every good law.

Moses delivered, bright deed,
the perfect judgements of the letter.
David delivered after that
the true judgements of prophecy.

Fénius Farsaid, long-life [?] of favour,
and Cai Câin-brethach,
by them were given, no trifling festival,
the two and seventy tongues.

Amairgen of the island of the Gael,
our gold, our glory, our ray,
Amairgen Glungel the valorous
gave the first judgement concerning Tara.

Three kings in Liathdruim na Ler
and the four sons of Mil,
they strove for the mighty possession
of the illustrious island of Ireland.

There Amairgen pronounced for them
the most wise and fair judgement that
the sons of Mil should go out
over ten waves on the mirthful sea.

Thereupon they put out to sea,
the four sons of the king of Spain,
and they buried, a festival over the waves,
Dond, whom they left at Tech Duind.

After valiant and cunning fight
Ir was left in the rough-splintered [?] clay of the Skellig...

Thereupon the hosts of Eber and Eremon
departed eastwards,
and after loss of their force they occupied
Ireland, on escaping from Egypt.

Thereafter Jesus was born
from Mary maiden,
and judgements were declared with goodness,
through the pure holy new covenant.

This is enough of eloquence...
the little crown of the performances of fair judgements,
that the eager hosts should know,
that they might be learned in learning.

13. 'Good, O Fintan,' said they. 'We are the better of thy coming to relate the story of Ireland.' 'I remember truly,' said he, 'the progression of the history of Ireland, how it has been therein until now, and how it will be also until doom.' 'A question,' said they. 'How hast thou acquired that, and of that history what is indispensable to help us in the matter of our discussion, the settling of the manor of Tara?' 'No hard matter that,' said Fintan. 'I will relate to you meanwhile some-thing thereon.'

14. 'Once we were holding a great assembly of the men of Ireland around Conaing Bec-eclach, King of Ireland. On a day then in that assembly we beheld a great hero, fair and mighty, approaching us from the west at sunset. We wondered greatly at the magnitude of his form. As high as a wood was the top of his shoulders, the sky and the sun visible between his legs, by reason of his size and his comeliness. A shining crystal veil about him like unto raiment of precious linen. Sandals upon his feet, and it is not known of what material they were. Golden-yellow hair upon him falling in curls to the level of his thighs. Stone tablets in his left hand, a branch with three fruits in his right hand, and these are the three fruits which were on it, nuts and apples and acorns in May-time: and unripe was each fruit. He strode past us then round the assembly, with his golden many coloured branch of Lebanon wood behind him, and one of us said to him, 'Come hither - and hold speech with the king, Conaing Bec-eclach.' He made answer and said, 'What is it that ye desire of me?' 'To know whence thou hast come,' said they, 'and whither thou goest, and what is thy name and surname.

15. 'I have come indeed,' said he, 'from the setting of the sun, and I am going unto the rising, and my name is Trefuilngid Tre-eochair.' 'Why has that name been given to thee?' said they. 'Easy to say,' said he. 'Because it is I who cause the rising of the sun and its setting.' 'And what has brought thee to the setting, if it is at the rising thou dost be?' 'Easy to say,' said he. 'A man who has been tortured — that is, who has been crucified by Jews to-day; for it stepped past them after that deed, and has not shone upon them, and that is what has brought me to the setting to find out what ailed the sun; and then it was revealed to me, and when I knew the lands over which the sun set I came to mis Gluairi off Irrus Domnann; and I found no land from that westwards, for that is the threshold over which the sun sets, just as the Paradise of Adam is the threshold over which it rises.'

16. 'Say then,' said he, 'what is your race, and whence have ye come into this island?' 'Easy to say,' said Conaing Bec-eclach. 'From the children of Mu of Spain and from the Greeks are we sprung. After the building of the Tower of Nimrod, and the confusion of tongues, we came into Egypt, upon the invitation of Pharaoh King of Egypt. Nél son of Fénius and Goedel Glas were our chiefs while we were in the - south. Hence we are called Féne from Fénius, that is the Féne, and
Gaels from Gaedel Glas, as was said:

The Féne from Fénius are named, meaning without straining,

the Gaels from Gaedel Glas the hospitable, the Scots from Scota.

Scota, then, the daughter of Pharaoh the king was given as a wife to Nél son of Fénius on going into Egypt. So that she is our ancestress, and it is from her we are called Scots.'

17. 'In the night then in which the children of Israel escaped out of Egypt, when they went with dry feet through the Red Sea with the leader of the people of God, even Moses son of Amram, and when Pharaoh and his host were drowned in that sea, having kept the Hebrews in bondage, because our forefathers went not with the Egyptians in pursuit of the people of God, they dreaded Pharaoh's wrath against them should he return, and even if Pharaoh should not return they feared that the Egyptians would enslave them as they had enslaved the children of Israel on another occasion. So they escaped in the night in ten of Pharaoh's ships upon the strait of the Red Sea, upon the boundless ocean, and round the world north-west, past the Caucasus mountains, past Scythia and India, across the sea that is there, namely the Caspian, over the Palus Maeotis, past Europe, from the south-east to the south-west along the Mediterranean, left-hand to Africa, past the Columns of Hercules to Spain, and thence to this island.'

18. 'And Spain,' said Trefuilngid, 'where is that land?' 'Not hard to say. It is the distance of a great prospect from us to the south,' said Conaing. 'For it is by a view [?] Ith son of Breogan saw the mountains of southern Irrus from the top of the tower of Breogan in Spain, and he it is who came to spy out this island for the sons of Mil, and on his - track we came into it, in the ninth year after the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea.'

19. 'How many are you in this island?' said Trefuilngid. 'I should like to see you assembled in one place.' 'We are not so few indeed,' replied Conaing, 'and if thou desirest it, so shall it be done; only I think it will distress the people to support thee during that period.' 'It will be no distress,' said he, 'for the fragrance of this branch which is in my hand will serve me for food and drink as long as I live.

20. He remained then with them forty days and nights until the men of Ireland were assembled for him at Tara. And he saw them all in one place, and he said to them, 'What chronicles have ye of the men of Ireland in the royal house of Tara? Make them known to us.' And they answered, 'we have no old shanachies, in truth, to whom we could entrust the chronicles until thou didst come to us.' 'Ye will have that from me,' said he. 'I will establish for you the progression of the stories and chronicles of the hearth of Tara itself with the four quarters of Ireland round about; for I am the truly learned witness who explains to all everything unknown.'

21. 'Bring to me then seven from every quarter in Ireland, who are the wisest, the most prudent and most cunning also, and the shanachies of the king himself who are of the hearth of Tara; for it is right that the four quarters [should be present] at the partition of Tara and its chronicles, that each seven may take its due share of the chronicles of the hearth of Tara.'

22. Thereupon he addressed those shanachies apart, and related to them the chronicles of every part of Ireland. And afterwards he said to the king, even Conaing. 'Do thou come thyself for a space apart that I may relate to thee and the company of the men of Ireland with thee

how we have partitioned Ireland, as I have made it known to the four groups of seven yonder.' Thereupon he related it to them all again in general, and it was to me, said Fintan, it was entrusted for explanation and for delivery before the host, I being the oldest shanachie he found before him in Ireland. For I was in Tul Tuinde at the time of the Deluge, and I was alone there after the Deluge for a thousand and two years, when Ireland was desert. And I was co-eval afterwards with every generation that occupied it down to the day Trefuilngid came into the assembly of Conaing Bec-eclach, therefore it was Trefuilngid questioned me through his knowledge of interrogation:

23. 'O Fintan,' said he, 'and Ireland, how has it been partitioned, where have things been therein?'

'Easy to say,' said Fintan: 'knowledge in the west, battle in the north, prosperity in the east, music in the south, kingship in the centre [?].'

'True indeed, O Fintan,' said Trefuilngid, 'thou art an excellent shanachie. It is thus that it has been, and will be for ever, namely:

24. Her learning, her foundation, her teaching, her alliance, her judgement, her chronicles, her counsels, her stories, her histories, her science, her comeliness, her eloquence, her beauty, her modesty [lit. blushing], her bounty, her abundance, her wealth — from the western part in the west.'

'Whence are these?' said the host. 'Easy to say,' he answered.

'From Ae, from Umall, from Aidne, from Bairenn, from Bres, from 'preifiie, from Bri Airg, from Berramain, from Bagna, from Cera, from Corann, from Cruachu, from Irrus, from Imga, from Imgan, from Tarbga, from Teidmne, from Tulcha, from Muad, from Muiresc, from Meada from Maige (that is, between Traige and Reocha and Lacha), from Mucrama, from Maenmag, from Mag Luirg, from Mag Ene, from Arann, from Aigle, from Airtech.'

25. 'Her battles, also,' said he, 'and her contentions, her hardihood, her rough places, her strifes, her haughtiness, her unprofitableness, her pride, her captures, her assaults, her hardness, her wars, her conflicts, From the northern part in the north.'

'Whence are the foregoing?' said the host. 'Easy to say: From Lie, from Lorg, from Lothar, from Callann, from Farney, from Fidga, from Srub Brain, from Bernas, from Daball, from Ard Fothaid, from Goll, from Irgoll, from Airmmach, from the Glens [?], from Gera, from Gabor, from Emain, from Ailech, from Imclar.'

26. 'Her prosperity then,' said he, 'and her supplies, her bee-hives [?] her contests, her feats of arms, her householders, her nobles, her wonders, her good custom, her good manners, her splendour, her abun-dance, her dignity, her strength, her wealth, her householding, her many arts, her accoutrements [?], her many treasures, her satin, her serge, her silks, her cloths [?], her green spotted cloth [?], her hospitality, from the eastern part in the east.'
'Whence are these?' said the host. 'Easy to say,' said he.

'From Fethach, from Fothna, from Inrechtra, from Mugna, from Bile, from Bairne, from Berna, from Drenna, from Druach, from Diamar, from Lee, from Line, from Lathirne, from Cuib, from Cualnge, from Cenn Con, from Mag Rath, from Mag mis, from Mag Muirthemne.'

27. 'Her waterfalls, her fairs, her nobles, her reavers, her knowledge, her subtlety, her musicianship, her melody, her minstrelsy, her wisdom, her honour, her music, her learning, her teaching, her warriorship, her fidchell playing, her vehemence, her fierceness, her poetical art, her advocacy, her modesty, her code, her retinue, her fertility, from the southern part in the south.'

'Whence are these,' said they. 'Easy to say,' said Trefuilngid.

'From Mairg, from Maistiu, from Raigne, from Rairiu, from Gabair, from Gabran, from Cliu, from Claire, from Femned [?], from Faifae, from Bregon, from Barchi, from Cenn Chaille, from Clere, from Cermna, from Raithlinn, from Glennamain, from Gobair, from Luachair, from Labrand, from Loch Léin, from Loch Lugdach, from Loch Daimdeirg, from Cathair Chonroi, from Cathair Cairbri, from Cathair Ulad, from Dun Bindi, from Dun Chain, from Dun Tulcha, from Fertae, from Feorainn, from Fiandainn.'

28. 'Her kings, moreover, her stewards, her dignity, her primacy, her stability, her establishments, her supports, her destructions, her war-riorship, her charioteership, her soldiery, her principality, her high-kingship, her ollaveship, her mead, her bounty, her ale, her renown, her great fame, her prosperity, from the centre position.'

'Whence are these?' said they. 'Easy to say,' said Trefuilngid.

'From Mide, from Bile, from Bethre, from Bruiden, from Colba, from Cnodba, from Cuilliu, from Ailbe, from Asal, from Usnech, from Sidan, from Slemain, from Slâine, from Cno, from Cerna, from Cennandus, from Bri Scâil, from Bri Graigi, from Bri meic Thaidg, from Bri Foibri, from Bri Din, from Bri Fremain, from Tara, from Tethbe, from Temair Broga Niad, from Temair Breg, the overlordship of all Ireland from these.'

29. So Trefuilngid Tre-eochair left that ordinance with the men of Ireland for ever, and he left with Fintan son of Bóchra some of the berries from the branch which was in his hand, so that he planted them in whatever places he thought it likely they would grow in Ireland. And these are the trees which grew up from those berries: the Ancient Tree of Tortu and the tree of Ross, the tree of Mugna and the Branching Tree of Dathe, and the Ancient Tree of Usnech. And Fintan remained relating the stories to the men of Ireland until he was him-self the survivor [?] of the ancient trees, and until they had withered during his time. So when Fintan perceived his own old age and that of the trees, he made a lay:

30. I see clearly to-day
in the early morn after uprising
from Dun Tulcha in the west away
over the top of the wood of Lebanon.

By God's doom I am an old man,

I am more unwilling than ever for...
It is long since I drank [?] a drink
of the Deluge over the navel of Usnech.

Bile Tortan, Eó Rosa,
one as lovely and bushy as the other.
Mugna and Craebh Daithi to-day
and Fintan surviving [?].

So long as Ess Ruaid resounds,
so long as salmon are disporting therein
Dun Tulcha, to which the sea comes
it will not depart from a good shanachie.

I am a shanachie myself before every host,
a thousand years, and no mistake,
before the time of the sons of Mil, abundance of strength,
I was bearing clear testimony.

31. So he made this lay, and remained to relate the stories of the men of Ireland even until the time he was summoned by Diarmait son of Cerball, and Flann Febla son of Scannlan, and Cennfaelad son of Ailill, and the men of Ireland also to pronounce judgement for them concerning the establishment of the manor of Tara. And this is the judgement he passed, 'let it be as we have found it,' said Fintan, 'we shall not go contrary to the arrangement which Trefuilngid Tre-eochair has left us, for he was an angel of God, or he was God Himself.'

32. Then the nobles of Ireland came as we have related to accompany Fintan to Usnech, and they took leave of one another on the top of Usnech. And he set up in their presence a pillar-stone of five ridges on the summit of Usnech. And he assigned a ridge of it to every province in Ireland, for thus are Tara and Usnech in Ireland, as its two kidneys are in a beast. And he marked out aforrach there, that is, the portion of each province in Usnech, and Fintan made this lay after arranging the pillar-stone:

33. The five divisions of Ireland, both sea and land,
their confines will be related, of every division of them.
From Drowes of the vast throng, south of Belach Cuairt,
to the swollen Boyne, Segais's pleasant stream.
From white-streaming Boyne, with its hundreds of harbours
to multitudinous cold Comar Tri nUsci.
From that same Comor with pleasant...
to the pass of the fierce Hound which is called Glas.
From that Belach Conglais, shapely the smile,
to broad green Luimnech, which beats against barks.
From the port of that Luimnech, a level green plain,
to the green-leaved Drowes against which the sea beats.
Wise the division which the roads have attained [?],
perfect the arrangement dividing it into five.

The points of the great provinces run towards Usnech,
they have divided yonder stone through it into five.

34. So Fintan then testified that it was right to take the five provinces of Ireland from Tara and Usnech, and that it was right for them also to be taken from each province in Ireland. Then he took leave of the men of Ireland at that place, and he comes to Dun Tulcha in Ciarraighe Luachra, where he was overcome by weakness, and he made the following lay:

Feeble to-day is my long-lived life,
decay has arrested my motion.
I change not shape any longer
I am Fintan son of Bóchra.

I was a full year under the Deluge
in the power of the holy Lord,
and a thousand pleasant years
was I all alone after the Deluge.

Then the pure bright company came
and settled in Inber Bairche.
And I wedded the noble dame
Aife, Parthalon's daughter.

I was for a long while after that
a contemporary of Parthalon
until there sprang from him thus
a vast innumerable throng.

The plague of sin reached them
in the east of Sliabh Elpa,
from it, fierce the hold,
is named Tamlacht in Ireland.

I spent thirty years after that
until the arrival of the children of Nemed,
between lath Boirche, it was ancient,
living on grass, without contention.

On Magh Rain, with the knowledge of the Lord,
I wedded Eblenn of the radiant skin,
sister of Lugh, swiftness without treachery,
daughter of Cian and of Ethliu.

I remember, tale without tribute,
the legend of Magh Rain,
in the puissant battle of Magh Tuired
the children of Gomer wrought havoc.

It was a spreading wood, with supple branch
in the days of the Tuatha De Danann,

until the Fomorians bore it away to the east
in their boat-frames, after [the death] of Balor

* * * *
daughter of Toga of the grey stormy sea,
at that time 'twas a woman,
she from whom Sliabh Raisen is named.

Lecco the daughter of mighty Tal
and of Mid whom hostages used to magnify,
she found them on the hill, without sorrow
in the company of Mid from the south-east.

Though I am in Dun Tulcha to-day
nearer and nearer is dissolution,
the good King who hath fostered me hitherto,
'tis He that hath put weakness on me.

35. Now he was sore afflicted when he perceived signs of death approaching, but when he knew that God deemed it time for him to die, without undergoing further change of form, he then made the following lay:

I am wasted to-day in Comor Cuan,
I have no trouble in telling it,
I was born, I prospered
fifty years before the Deluge.

The bright King vouchsafed to me
that my good fortune should be prolonged,
five hundred, and five thousand years till now,
that is the length of the time.

In Magh Mais, in the secret places thereof,
where Gleoir is, son of Glainide [?],
it is there I have drunk a drink of age
since none of my co-evals remain.

The first ship, the celebration has been heard,
which reached Ireland after the transgression,
I came in it from the east.
I am fair-haired Bóchra's son.

It is from him I was born, from the lord,
the descendant of Noah, Lamech's son;
after the destruction of Cessair I have been a space
relating the story of Ireland.

Bith son of Noah before all men
was the first who came to dwell therein,
and Ladru the helmsman after that,
the first to be buried in the earth.

I give thanks to God, I am a venerable senior,
to the King who fashioned the holy heaven;
it profits me nowise, however it be,
my decay is no help to me.

Five invasions, best of deeds,
the land of Ireland has undergone.
I have been here a while after them
until the days of the sons of Mil.

I am Fintan, I have lived long,
I am an ancient shanachie of the noble hosts.
Neither wisdom nor brilliant deeds repressed me
until age came upon me and decay.

36. So Fintan ended his life and his age in this manner, and he came to repentance, and he partook of communion and sacrifice from the hand of bishop Erc son of Ochomon son of Fidach, and the spirits of Patrick and Brigit came and were present at his death. The place in which he was buried is uncertain, however. But some think that he was borne away in his mortal body to some divine secret place as Elijah and Enoch were borne into paradise, where they are awaiting the resurrection of that venerable long-lived Elder, Fintan son of Bóchra, son of Fithier, son of Rual, son of Annid, son of Ham, son of Noah, son of Lamech.

Further Reading

for *The Settling of the Manor of Tara*

MacEowen, Frank. *The Celtic Way of Seeing: Meditations on the Irish Spirit Wheel*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2007. Chapters 1 – 3

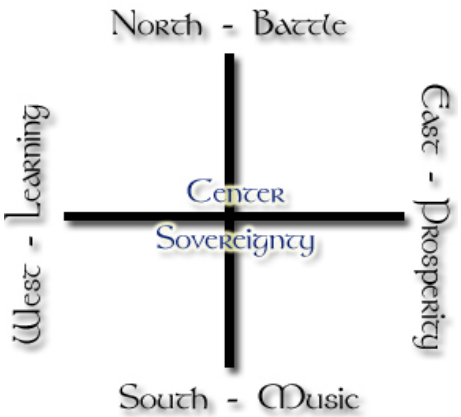
Chapter Eight
The Four Winds:
Mandala of Wholeness

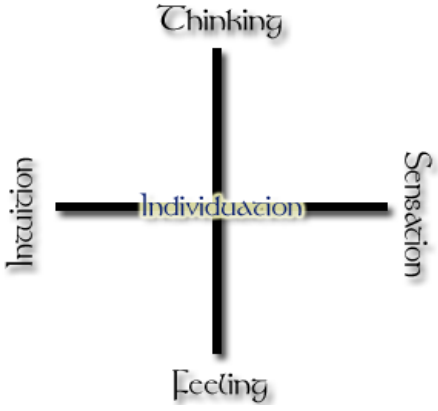
The story of the Settling of the Manor of Tara gives us a major orientation within the Irish druidic tradition. In this story the Irish nobility realize that they could no longer recall the what the proper partitioning of the manor of Tara was, and thus the proper partitioning of all of Ireland. In short they did not know by what pattern they should organize their lives. To solve this problem they send for a wise Druid, named Fintan, and it is he who comes and tells them of the divisions of Ireland. These are divisions he gives: battle in the North, prosperity in the East, music in the South, learning in the West, and kingship or sovereignty in the center. The land is a mirror of the self, and so taken together these divisions of the land also form the major divisions of the psyche.

This orienting map is what psychologist C.G. Jung called a "quaternity" (sovereignty here, like in the land of Ireland, is part of a fifth but invisible, hidden, or perhaps unconscious division, created by the four proper divisions), or a mandala, the archetype of wholeness. As Jung says of the quaternity, "In order to orient ourselves, we must have a function that ascertains that something is there (sensation); a second function which establishes *what* it is (thinking); a third function which states whether it suits us or not (feeling); and a fourth function which indicates where it came from and where it is going (intuition)." Sensation, feeling, intuition, and thinking were the functions identified by Jung.

At the center of Jung's mandala is individuation, a word which carries the connotations of both becoming an individual and *indivisible* person; in other words, a whole. In order to reach individuation, or wholeness of psyche, however we must cultivate each of the four functions, and develop ourselves in all functions.

The primal Irish mandala of the four winds or directions can be considered in the same way. Each direction holds certain associations and qualities, which when taken together form a basic map of the psyche and spiritual development. The maps fit together quite well.





Although the purpose of Jung's map is slightly different than the Irish cosmology, the similarities still provide an elucidating study of how the Irish four winds might be incorporated into a map of wholeness and sovereignty. What follows is a brief reflection on each quadrant of the Irish spirit wheel and how it might match up with the model provided by Jung.

In the east, the province of Leinster, is ***prosperity***, which may at first seem strange. The east is of course not saying that we need to be rich to achieve wholeness and personal sovereignty. Rather, prosperity here might be seen as "prosperity of spirit". In Celtic culture hospitality played an important role, and so our interpretation of this quadrant might be generosity. In the story of the *Táin Bó Cúalnge* (The Cattle Raid of Cooley), Méadhbh (or Maeve) tells her husband the three rules she has for a lover, who would be king. Her first rule is that he cannot be a stingy man; in other words he must be generous. Generosity here may mean simply taking care to offer the hospitality of a beverage to guests, or the more expansive definition of offering the world the fullness of your gifts.

This fits in quite well with Jung's quaternity. In Irish mythology the eastern province of Leinster is very much the province of the farmers, and thus carries a quality of earthiness, practicality, and physical sensation; qualities all associated with the sensation function of Jung's model. Farmers in fact may be the epitome of people who's primary function is sensation oriented.

The southern province of Munster is associated with ***music***, creativity, inspiration, and poetic art. The quality that this direction seems to be pointing to is the flowing of creativity through a person's life; not necessarily as an actual art (though art is a beautiful way to cultivate creativity of course). Life itself can be approached as an art – as if it were a poem or a painting, constantly unfolding and coming deeper into its own wholeness. We may also consider here the role that music plays in Celtic mythology, ushering people into the Otherworld (such as with the music from a silver branch).

Once again Jung's map matches up with the ancient Irish cosmology. The connection between feeling and creativity should be obvious. To strengthen this bond though it ought to be said that the stories most associated with Munster are those of the Fianna, which have been described as "romantic" tales. Scholars of Celtic studies, Alwyn and Brinley Rees firmly place the function of feeling in the south of Ireland.[1]

In the western province of Connaught is ***knowledge***, learning, or wisdom. This is where we get into a bit of trouble in trying to draw parallels with Jung's map. Jung places intuition in the west and thinking in the north. Both seem to fit into the western portion of the Irish map, though thinking does not fit in the north of the Irish four winds. The word used in the Irish story, knowledge (or learning), gives us a clue however. The Irish slightly disagree with Jung; intuition and thinking are not wholly separate functions but rather both are different ways of *knowing* or *learning*. The stories associated with the west, namely stories of the Tuatha Dé Danann, magicians and druids par excellence, support this view. Wisdom comes from both rational thinking and intuitive processing.

The final quadrant is the north, the province of Ulster which is associated with ***battle***. Although the stories of Ulster are predominantly warrior stories of battle, war, and heroic deeds, we can look at this idea of battle from a different perspective. In Islamic culture the concept of jihad might be a close parallel. Jihad, though twisted and skewed by fundamentalists, is related to as an *inward* battle in the more mystical branches of the tradition, such as Sufism. Battle here may be seen in the same way; it is a tempering battle; a refining of the ego into greater relationship with the soul or sovereignty. Battle may also be seen as the initiatory process (which we will explore later in the course).

Each wind presents us with a process which we must continually engage in to be "sovereign", to rest in soul. Battle may be the clearest example because it is so implicitly a process, but it is just as true for the other winds. We must continually engage in the fulfillment of our gifts, and the flowing forth of our creative spirits into the world, as well as cultivate

wisdom through learning and intuitive processing. There are always more depths to plunge, and as we go deeper into the self our relationship to embodying each wind changes.

Sovereignty lies in the center of this mandala, in the province of Meath where the sacral king held court at the Hill of Tara. Sovereignty implies that we are the ruler of our lives. It is a position of warriorship towards life; a willingness to engage fearlessly with our soul, and to meditate that energy into the world. It is important to note however that in Irish mythology Sovereignty is embodied by the goddess of the land (Méabhdh being one such manifestation of Sovereignty). In order to be king in ancient Irish society it was required that he symbolically marry the goddess of the land. Sovereignty is not total independence, but rather a balanced relationship with nature is integral to this. In order to be truly whole one must "marry" the land, must cultivate that relationship of reciprocity, and act in her service.

One may wonder what these divisions have to do with our lives now, especially if we are not living in Ireland. The answer is complex. First, for those of us practicing an Irish spirituality, it is exceedingly important to remain oriented in some manner to that land. Irish Druidism is intimately tied to the land of Ireland, and these divisions form a very basic structure of its cosmology. To ignore them is to cut out the context from which this spiritual tradition arose. On a more practical level, the answer is that this is but *one* orientation of obtaining wholeness in our lives. As this article demonstrates, Jung had his own similar understanding. Other cultures have their own spirit wheels, medicine wheels, mandalas, and quaternities. I do not suggest that this is the only path to wholeness, but I do suggest that it is a powerful and traditional lens through which we might see our lives, and through participation with the airts, order our own existence in a manner which leads toward wholeness. This is as Frank MacEowen says, the "Celtic way of seeing".

Endnotes

1 Rees, Alwyn and Brinley. *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales*. Great Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1961. p. 124

Further Reading

for *The Four Winds*

MacEowen, Frank. *The Celtic Way of Seeing: Meditations on the Irish Spirit Wheel*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2007.

Rees, Alwyn and Brinley. *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales*. Great Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1961. Chapters 5 – 7

Chapter Nine
The Otherworld:
Entering the Sacred World

This poetic vision of the landscape, ensouled with spirits,
is a particularly human and therefore humane vision of the world.
- Nigel Pennick, *Celtic Sacred Landscapes*

Why do we so often choose to stay asleep, rather than engage life to its fullest potential? It is a question I often ask myself. Much of it has to do with our view of reality. When we cut ourselves off from a subjective dialogue with the world, we lose something of our own inherent nature. As David Abram, author of *The Spell of the Sensuous* points out, "We are human only in contact and conviviality with what is not human. Only in reciprocity with what is Other do we begin to heal ourselves."[1] Reciprocity requires recognition of the subjective nature of the phenomenal world.

When we see everything as objective items in the world, we cut ourselves off from the spiritual life-currents that flow out of the Otherworld and into the physical. In effect we only feed and multiply the debilitating wounds inflicted on our souls by industrial modernization. This is by no means a manifesto that we should be trying to turn time back to a non-existent and pristine past. People often get caught up trying to discern where it was that we went wrong, so that we might return to such a state. We cannot turn time back however, nor can we ignore the positive achievements of humankind. We can only keep our minds in the present and look toward the future.

This does not mean that there is nothing that can aid us in the past though. The ancestors and the wisdom that they bring to us is an integral part of healing many of our wounds, both personal and cultural in nature. Traditions are much like signposts which point us through the dark paths of the forest. They exist so that the generations they are passed down to have a guide. However, what is right for one place and time may not be right for another. We must hold our traditions loosely, so that we also hold space for growth, adaptation, and transformation *within* the tradition.

Our current industrial worldview is one that promotes the destruction of self and nature, and through them, soul and spirit. This dissociation however is simply psychological. In reality there is no separation between nature and soul, or self and Other. The illusion of this separation is a result of our perceptions about ourselves and the world around us. To heal this dissociative gap we must have a shift in worldview, from anthropocentric (human centered) to ecocentric (earth centered), and re-imbue the phenomenal world with an acknowledgement of the sacred.

In order to do this we must kindle a more enlivened sense of the universe, a cosmological view that chooses to see all things as being animated by spirit. This sort of animistic perception is based on a way of looking at the world through what I call "the sacred senses". The sacred senses consist of all five of our physical senses, with the addition of the more intuitive aspects of the way we perceive our environment. Since "sacred" is not a quality that something either possesses or does not, but rather our perception of *all things*, the sacred senses are our ability to participate in this perception.

When we open our sacred senses we begin to see the spirit residing in all things; we hear it, smell it, taste it, feel it on our skin and in our hearts. In truth these senses are no different from the ones we ordinarily use, we have simply expanded their uses, and opened ourselves up to experiences that were once closed off. When we open ourselves in this way, we begin to be able to look through physicality like looking through a window, accessing a store-house of wisdom, and perceiving the more subtle reality of the non-ordinary, or Otherworld. This is the first step to moving across the threshold into the life of the soul.

The Celtic traditions offer us an invitation to enter an active dialogue with the spirit world. It is the tendency of the Celtic mind to look at things as cyclical, spiraling around juxtapositions like darkness and light, winter and summer, ebbing and flowing. In seeing these opposites and refusing to see the world in terms of duality, it reflects most often on a third place, where these opposites meet. This third place is the threshold, the liminal place that exists *between* these paired opposites. Mist is just such a threshold, or thin place, being not quite water, but not quite air. Mist is often used as a metaphor for a state of consciousness. This state is the threshold sought out by mystics, shamans, and druids in order to journey or gain wisdom and healing from the Otherworld. Indeed in many Celtic stories it is in a sudden mist that the character is swept away to Otherworldly adventures. By making the decision to align ourselves and step into the mists, we have taken the first step on the pilgrimage of making life holy.

It is necessary here to say a few words about the Otherworld. Its description in mythology can be deceiving. It is often described as being across the waves, at the bottom of a lake, deep in caves, or under hills. To take this literally however would be a gross misconception. Although these descriptions accurately portray its imminence (the Otherworld is *part* of this world, not a wholly incorporeal transcendent reality), a literal reading would suggest that the Otherworld is very distant.

John O'Donohue, an Irish poet-philosopher from Connemara is keen to remind us that "the body is in the soul"[2]. The Otherworld is like the soul of nature. It is not trapped within it, but rather penetrates its depths, and wraps itself around the world. As we move through the world, we move through this nature-soul, and a dynamic openness of spirit, a soft gaze, and a gentle step allows us to move with the rhythm of its fluency. The Otherworld is the interiority of place, just as the human soul is the interiority of an individual. This is not to say it is "inside", but rather that it is hidden and invisible, and its depths cannot be penetrated by ordinary means.

The Otherworld embraces and reconciles duality. In another *Imramma*, The Voyage of Maelduin, one of the islands visited displays this well. On this island there are two flocks of sheep, one white and one black. Every so often the shepherd takes one of the white sheep, and places it in the black flock. The sheep turns black. He does the same thing with a black sheep, and it turns white. On this island, the duality of black and white is reconciled, and it is demonstrated how things are far more shifting and fluid than that. This then is the nature of the Otherworld; it reconciles duality[3].

Due to this nature of the Otherworld it would be impossible to say that it is very distant, because in the same breath we must also acknowledge the closeness of the Otherworld. To dwell solely in either of the two extremes would be to deny its own nature. Certain psychologies might tend to identify the Otherworld with our psyche; the inner realm of the human mind and soul, and that the going-ons there are reflective of our own processes. Other people might lean towards the more spiritual or mystical understanding of the Otherworld as an actual place, a spirit-world, inhabited by very real beings. However, I think that neither of these

views are incorrect. Both are attempts to pigeon-hole the Otherworld into one or another extreme; real or imaginary. We have seen from the island of the black and white sheep, however, that the distance between these seeming opposites is only as far as the other flock. What is actually important is that no matter how we understand the Otherworld, in all the stories in which it plays a part, those who experience it are transformed.

Endnotes

1. Abram, David. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. Vintage Books: New York, 1996. p. 22

2. O'Donohue, John. *Divine Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*. London, England: Bantam Books, 2003. p. 216

3. Mattews, Caitlín. The Celtic Book of the Dead: A Guide for Your Voyage to the Celtic Otherworld. Rochester, England: Grange Books, 2001. p. 46

Chapter Ten
The Three Realms:
A Map of the Celtic Otherworld

The three worlds are one of the central cosmological maps of the primal Irish druidic traditions. It is however, not confined to the Irish, or even the Celts; it can be found in many cultures around the world. It is especially evident in native cultures with a "shamanic" worldview, and has found a home in the popular study of Core Shamanism. Archetypally, the three worlds are: Underworld, Middleworld, and Upperworld. To the Celtic imagination they are more specifically: Sea, Land, and Sky respectively.

One important thing to point out: there is much debate with many people over whether or not these are distinct "spirit realms" or if they are psychological states or places in the conscious/unconscious mind. In my opinion both of these understandings are equally correct, but in the end it doesn't really matter how you perceive and relate to them. What is important is that you benefit and grow from a cultivated relationship and understanding of them.

Sea (*Underworld*) - As a psychological state this is the dark realm of the unconscious. This can be a place of both great fear and great healing. The repressed contents of our psyche dwells here, and so Jung's archetype of the Shadow (the shadow being something like a splinter personality made up of the repressed contents of our psyches; positive *and* negative) plays an important role. It is also the dwelling place of soul's roots, and thus contains our dán or soul image. As a spirit-realm, the Underworld is home to the ancestors and gods and goddesses of the land and earth. Its darkness is the darkness of the womb of the earth, and so it is also the numinous realm of Dana in its myriad of forms. *The imminent sacred.*

Land (*Middleworld*) - The middleworld is perhaps the simplest of the three realms to understand, because it is the one in which we dwell. Psychologically the middleworld is our normal waking consciousness; or egoic consciousness. As a distinct realm, it is ordinary reality; the here and now of our everyday lives. That does not mean that it is an easy place to be. The middleworld is a threshold between the Underworld and Upperworld, and so a harmony of the influences from the other two worlds is important to a soulful life in the middleworld. The middleworld is the world of outward action and embodiment of the inner states of consciousness and the fruition of wisdom from the spirit-realms.

Sky (*Upperworld*) - Just as the Underworld is the place of the imminent sacred, the Upperworld is the realm of the transcendent sacred. The Underworld is within our world, the Upperworld is what is *beyond* our world. If we use Bill Plotkin's definitions of Spirit and Soul, then the Underworld is Soul and the Upperworld is Spirit. It is the realm of poetic inspiration, wisdom, vision, and enlightenment. As a spirit realm it is home to transcendent deities.

Further Reading

for *The Otherworld & The Three Realms*

MacEowen, Frank. *The Spiral of Memory and Belonging: A Celtic Path of Soul and Kinship*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2004. Chapter 15

Mathews, John, and Caitlín Mathews. *Encyclopedia of Celtic Wisdom: A Celtic Shaman's Source Book*. Rockport, Massachusetts: Element, 1994. Chapter 11 – 12

Pennick, Nigel. *Celtic Sacred Landscapes*. New York, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996.

Chapter Eleven
The Preserving Shrine:
The Memory of the Land

Early law text, the *Senchus Mor*, which encodes the Brehon Law system of the Irish, asks the question, "What is the preserving shrine?" It then goes on to give two answers: "Not hard: it is memory and what is preserved in it," and then, "Not hard: it is nature and what is preserved in it." There is a deep and abiding connection between memory and nature in the Celtic cosmology. We can see it in the practices of the druids, as well as the *filidh*, or vision-poets. It is evident in their stories, which present to us a profound connection of history, myth, and their landscapes. Through an in-depth look at these things, it becomes clear that the wisdom and the sacred landscape of Ireland has the power to connect us to what is called "the spirit of place". The spirit of Ireland is deeply connected to the Otherworld and the Celtic "dreamtime" history. By connecting with this spiritscape we are entering into the preserving shrine, and all that is preserved within it.

There exists a vast collection of place name stories called the *dindshenchas*. These are myths detailing the mytho-historical explanation of why certain places are named as they are. Many of the tales contained in this compilation of stories are late additions, which do not actually represent the native tradition. One of the stories from the dindshenchas that we can assume with some certainty to be authentic is the one that recounts the way in which the Boyne River got its name.

The story goes that after coupling with the Dagda and having a child, Oengus Mac Og, the goddess Bóand went to the Well of Segais in the Sidhe of Nechtan. Her plan was to walk counter-clockwise about it three times, a regenerative circumambulation ritual to restore herself to state of purity and virginity; walking in the opposite direction of the sun's course and thus turning back time. But only Nechtan and his three cupbearers were allowed to go to the well, and it was said that anyone else who went would be maimed. When Bóand did her ritual, the waters of the well rose up, taking one of her eyes, a foot, and a hand. These injuries resemble the crane posture taken by Lugh at the second battle of Magh Tuireadh, closing one eye, standing on one leg, with one hand behind his back. There seems to be a "shamanic" significance with this posture, and being "between the mists" of the Otherworld. Bóand fled the well, towards the sea to escape her shame, but the waters followed her. When finally she reached the edge of the sea, the water, behind her forming a great river, swallowed and killed her. The river has ever since been named Boyne, and Bóand has been its spirit.

This is a perfect example of the way in which myth, landscape, and the Otherworld, (the spiritual landscape that is "present but not present" at all times) interact with one another. It is the very character of myth to connect us to this realm. Beyond the function of explaining the unknown, myths are made to make it easier for us to slide into these liminal states of awareness, where we can access the Otherworld. Myths launch us into the misty threshold that is between this world and the other. This story is just one example of a story-telling tradition that is clear evidence of a connection in the Celtic consciousness between their myths and landscape, and the connection to the Otherworld they give us together. The *dindshenchas* are comparable to the Australian Aboriginal concept of songlines and their own dreamtime.

History and myth are not separated by the Celtic mind. By not keeping written historical records they resisted, as Alexei Kondratiev says, "being dragged into the continuum of history, held on to the Dreamtime, the eternal present, and the certainty of an unchanging pattern"[1]. Like with all things, the Celts preferred to keep both history and myth in the threshold between each other. It is evident in their mythology, as they include various historical or supposed historical events. After all why should history be forced to conform to so-called fact and rational theories of what constitutes the past. That would assume that there is only *one* past, rather than a multitude of realities and ways in which such things can be experienced or perceived. To keep history and myth united is to do exactly what Kondratiev says, to remain within the dreamtime; to remain in a constant threshold experience where they are in the constant presence of the Otherworld.

In Ireland, the entire island is spoken of as a goddess, and there is a rich tradition of honoring the land in this way, and how it is interacted with. The Goddess of the Land is actually a triple goddess, appearing in myth as the sisters, Banba, Fódhla, and Ériu. When the Milesian Gaels invaded or migrated to Ireland, they encountered each of these goddesses in turn. Each one asked for them to name the island after them, and in return they would not hinder them. To Banba and Fódhla they agreed. When they reached Ériu though, she too asked this question and Amhairghin responded, saying that the island would be named for her as well. However, as Patricia Monaghan says in *The Red-Haired Girl from the Bog*, because "the words of a poet can never be reversed, the land would be called Éire."[2] Occasionally, and mostly in literary sources, it is also referred to as Banba and Fódhla as well. This Goddess of the Land forms the essential form through which the Irish Celts understand the land. In ancient times, when there were still kings, there was a custom of the king symbolically marrying the Goddess of the Land. This was to ensure that the king was sensitive to her sovereignty, so there would be a good harvest, and of course, to retain the necessary balance between tribe and land.

There is a story surrounding this custom. One day, Niall (of the Nine Hostages) was hunting in the forest with his brothers. The day was unlucky though, and they brought back nothing. They wandered the forest, and became quite thirsty. When finally they came upon a spring, there was a gruesomely hideous hag, serving as its keeper. She offered them all the water they could drink, in return for a kiss. His brothers all refused, but Niall did not. He went to her, and going beyond a simple kiss, he made love to her. When they were finished, Niall opened his eyes to find that the ugly hag was now a beautiful goddess. He asked what her name was, and in response, she said, "*Flaitheas*", which means sovereignty. After he proved himself to her, he was made *ard-rí* , High King of Ireland. This is also a good example of how myth and history have a tendency to entwine, as Niall of the Nine Hostages is recorded as one of the most powerful High Kings of Ireland around 400 A.D.

Although this explains the important role of the landscape in the Irish Celtic tradition, it does not address the issue of memory and its connection to the land. Memory is something that was held of the highest importance in Celtic society. Celtic society, because of its oral nature, was fluid and unrestricted. It could evolve as was necessary without old beliefs and ideas persisting merely because they were written on the page of a book. Like all oral societies this demanded that the wisdom and lore keepers develop memories of encyclopedic knowledge in a large variety of subjects. The cultivation of memory, however, is far more important than just being able to remember poems and stories. As Searles O'Dubhain states in his essay, *The Traditional Roles of Druids*, "The memory techniques are import for three reasons: To remember the truth when we experience it, to make the instantaneous associations that are necessary for

creative thinking and production, to serve as a checking of truth in a matrix of facts and relationships."[3] Truth was of an extremely important value to the druids, and extended far beyond the language game we have turned it into today. Greywind, author of *The Voice Within the Wind*, says that truth is, "a measurement of the degree of which a thing is rightly integrated with the underlying unity of all things."[4] Truth then, becomes a matter of integrating subjective reality with objective reality, as evidenced by the old saying, the Truth against the world.

It was the Earth though that held the greatest memory. John and Caitlín Mathews, in *The Encyclopædia of Celtic Wisdom*, say:

> *The earth remembers everything and is witness to history in a way we cannot fully appreciate. In Celtic tradition, the land is characterized by spiritual manifestations of its power: by the Goddess of the Land, by the appearance of warring dragons, by the flowing of rivers of mystical properties. It is the shaman's task to read and know the land, to be so part of it that any imbalances within it registers in a conscious manner.*[5]

This is where memory and land interact. The poet Amhairghin, first of the Gaels to set foot on Ireland uttered a well know poem in which he recounts a series of images, claimed that he *is* them. Amongst these images are, the wind of the sea, a stag of seven tines, a tear of the sun, and a hill of poetry. This is reminiscent of the poetry of the Welsh bard Taliesin, who has similar lines of poetry claiming memory of similar experiences. Erynn Rowan Laurie recounts in an essay titled, *The Preserving Shrine*, "Because of their identification with nature, both of them know deep secrets. 'In what place lies the setting of the sun?' asks Aimirgin, and it is apparent that he knows the answer."[6] It is exactly this memory of the earth that allows one to identify so completely with all aspects of nature, that such secrets become revealed, and memory again that allows one to recall the experiences, and make the instantaneous associations between them and other facts and relationships. These techniques were employed widely by both the druids, and the filidh, or vision-poets, who took their place after the coming of Christianity.

It is this memory connection that allows for the obtaining of such wisdom. When we are able to develop such a deep connection of remembrance with the earth and our landscapes, we become recipients of its stored knowledge. This is just what the preserving shrine is. It is nature, memory, and what is preserved within them.

Each specific place in nature has its indwelling spirit in the Celtic traditions. This animistic world-view, held by many native traditions, is the product of a belief in the sacredness of all things. Unlike many world religions which hold that divinity is entirely transcendent, animistic traditions believe that this divinity is *both* imminent and transcendent. God does not only dwell in heaven, but within the Earth as well. This view was held by both the ancient Celts as well as the modern ones. While Celtic Christians speak of this as the imminence of God, Celtic pagans speak of this as the spirit of place. If human beings can be conceived of having their own spirit, individualized as well as connected to the larger whole, then it would not be too far of a stretch to conceive all of the physical world as being possessed of the same spirit.

In Scots-Gaelic, one of the words for God is *Cruithear*, a word which means "shaper". We see the same idea in Irish Gaelic with the word *Cruthaitheoir*, which means "creator". However the word *cruth*, means literally "to shape" and so this word for creator holds within it the root word that means "to shape". Shaping and creating are two very different things. The Celts have no explicit creation myth; no tales about how all this came to be. In their mind

it has always been, and always will be. God is not a creator, but rather a shaper; shaping that which already, and always has existed. This entity does not sit on a golden throne in Heaven, taking no part in the supposed creation, but rather is constantly in a process of shaping. God is within all things, and therefore everything is a constant process of being shaped.

This adds an incredible dimension to the way in which landscape is interacted with. It is not just something that exists as our environment, a backdrop in which our lives play out like the scenery of a play. The landscape holds its own personality, grows as we grow, is shaped as we are shaped, and perhaps even more importantly, shapes as we shape. Shaping is not just the Shaper(s) elite hobby. When we realize that there exits a stream of shaping, then we have a choice to either engage in this flow, letting it take us on its currents, thus being shaped, or resist it and stagnate. To let it shape us though, we realize that we too have the ability to do this, and can then take our parts in this divine play. The landscape is the same way. The ability to recognize the shaping power of the land is the ability to be shaped by it.

Similar to the Australian Aboriginal idea of songlines, the Celts too believed that the indwelling spirit of each place could be profoundly affected by song. The bardic tradition was a strong one in the Celtic lands, and in Irish the word for poet and seer are the same, establishing a mystical connotation to poetry and song. During training, a bard was expected to memorize vast areas of landscape in connection to myth, song, and poetry. To then recite the lore at their respective locations was a way of recreating the events, and so also a way of recreating that place. It was a deviation of the practice of symbolic sacrifice to recreate the world in a more localized context.

This entire idea of the Earth as sacred, as well as all the practices, traditions, and beliefs that surround it, serve a purpose of allowing us to form a bridge between nature and the Otherworld. There is a tradition in Celtic Christianity referred to as Green Martyrdom. This is the wandering of a person who has given up their life to search for God in the wilds of nature. It is a symbolic act of letting go of one's ego into the tangled "wilderness" of our deeper self, that core called the soul, which each of us possess. Our interaction with the landscape through these traditions, whether it is a Green Martyrdom or simply holding an awareness of the holiness of all the world and allowing that to be embodied in every action, can lead us deeper into the spirit of the land, as well as into our own selves. As Frank MacEowen writes in *The Mist-Filled Path*, "your life is a gift and a pilgrimage; see every day, every event, every moment, and every act as a renewable point in time offering you a new beginning."[7]

Each step we take, in either literal pilgrimage or the one that is our life, will lead us both deeper into both the spiritscape of the land and of ourselves. It is a constant rebirth of our selves and a renewal of the spirit of the land, a way of thinking and envisioning the world in which we are only the guests. To realize this sets us down a stream that is the shaping power of landscape, divinity and ourselves. These are not independent of one another. We are the bridges between these two sacred dimensions, a threshold point between earth and spirit. It is exactly this that leads to the perpetual rebirth of soul and nature, and to the opening of our holy senses which allows us to perceive their interconnectedness. This connection and dialogue preserves everything. What is the preserving shrine? Not hard: it is memory and nature, and what is preserved within them.

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Chapter Twelve
Spirals in Time:
The Celtic Year

It is current belief that time moves in a linear fashion, that we are constantly progressing from point *a* to *b* on a straight line with both a beginning and end. It was not always this way however. Our ancestors understood time in a very different way. For them, the currents of time were cyclical, represented best perhaps by that most prevalent image of the spiral. Time was always circling round itself, building upon itself, and perhaps even bleeding into itself.

A strong argument could be made for Christianity introducing the world to linear time. In the Christian tradition, time is measured linearly from the birth of the divine figure of Christ (and all times before that culminating towards the birth), which in that tradition is the hierophany of the sacred into the secular or "profane" world. Time is measured from this point of hierophany (point *a* so to speak), and life afterwards is a period of waiting for the return of the sacred in the form of the second coming of Christ (point *b*). Importantly it can be noted how this model of linear time alienates a person from the experience of the sacred by relegating it to a period of the past or of the future. There is little space for the sacred in the present moment because the hierophany has already come and gone, and life is waiting expectantly for it to return at "the end".

Ancient cultures who focused their attentions of reverence to the Earth were not constricted by such. In observing the motion of the seasons it was evident that life moved in a cyclical way. The sacred hierophany was not a point in time, but a perspective through which the world was seen and acted in. The hierophany was happening at all times, and it was important to many ancient cultures that each tribe or community had a representation of this in a visible "world tree" or "world mountain", an *axis mundi* which facilitated this effervescent flowing of the sacred into the word. The pre-Christian Celtic as well as the early Celtic Christian traditions provide an excellent example of this perspective of time.

There are four major feasts in the Celtic traditions; Samhain, Imbolc, Bealtaine, and Lughnasadh. Each is a stopping-place on the pilgrimage through the yearly cycle of the seasons, a touchstone for communion and celebration with the spirits of the season, and for reaffirming our place as humans within the cosmos.

The year begins, like the Celtic day, in the dark period, which starts at the festival of Samhain, which takes place on November 1st. Samhain is the most important of all the Celtic festivals. It is the turning of the seasons into the dark half of the year from the light half. It is a time for honoring the ancestors, and welcoming them into the home. Food is often left out for them at a place set for them on the table. Renewal is also an important aspect to this festival. One common theme associated with this period of time, even in contemporary Western society is that of the dissolution of identity. We wear disguises, we play tricks, and do things generally out of our character. There is also a sense of timelessness. This is a transition point, a threshold, where we are between the worlds, and in a place of no-time. The veil between our worlds is temporarily opened, allowing not only for the ancestors to return to this world, but for the living to more easily make the journey to the Otherworld. Another important theme is sacrifice. The first being to give honor to the land goddess for the harvest, and the second being to renew the cosmos, all quite fitting when one considers the meaning of this

festival.

Imbolc, on February 1st, is fundamentally about new growth. The name has connotations of the milk beginning to be produced by ewes. The light is now growing at this time of the year, and Imbolc is a reminder to slow down and honor the natural rhythm. This is Brighid's day. In Ireland there is a beautiful fusion of the two traditions, pagan and Christian, around this time so that the goddess Brighid became St. Brighit, and the meaning of the day has been preserved. As the light begins to grow in the womb of winter's darkness, this is a time to focus on the inner light growing within ourselves. In many traditions, trips are made to holy wells sacred to the goddess Brighid, where ablutions are made. The purpose of this might be thought of as the cleansing of the energies and emotions from the dark half of the year so that the light may grow more steadily. It is a time to spend with family, around the hearth, honoring our connections to one another.

The next festival, and opposite to Samhain is Bealtaine, which serves similar functions. It is a threshold place between the dark and light halves of the year. If Samhain is the beginning the dark half, Bealtaine is the beginning of the light half of the year, and so the first day of summer. As the light now grows far beyond the strength of darkness, the year is in a time of transformation once again. This begins a time of increased activity. As we were gestating in the womb of darkness during Samhain, growing and contemplating, this is a time to take that growth and integrate it into our lives. It is the first rays of the summer sun at dawn that purify us and transform the darkness into light. There is a tradition of catching the first rays of light this dawn in water, and storing them for the year for use in healing. The image of fire and water together is a powerful motif repeated often by the Celts. There is also a well known tradition of building two large bonfires close together and pass through them in order to purify the self symbolically (cattle are also traditionally herded through for the same reason). Along the same lines many people will jump the fires in order to promote fertility throughout the year.

The last festival of the year, before leading back into Samhain, is Lughnasadh, which traditionally lasts the whole month of August. It is primarily a harvest festival, celebrating the triumph of Lugh in the battle of Magh Tuireadh. In the story of this battle, the Fomorii are representative of the untamed power of nature, they are essentially the spirits of nature. The de Danann on the other hand, are the ordered power of the Tribe. This sets up a conflict not of good and evil as some have suggested, but between *chaos* and *order*, two very different forces without any moral connotations. The Land is chaos, and the Tribe is order, and these two struggle together, each force trying to overrun the other. But in the end, when the Fomorii are defeated, Lugh wins a certain amount of time in which the chaos of the Land is subsided, and can be cultivated to grow crops. Lughnasadh then is a last celebration of this triumph, before the chaos of the land-spirits take over again at Samhain. The festivities or great assembly is held traditionally on a sacred hill. Here, the first harvests of the season are ritually reaped and consumed, while the rest of the month serves as a time to harvest the remaining crops. Lughnasadh is also traditionally a time of legal processions, such as marriages, lawsuits, court hearings, and other business of the tribe. Fertility magic is also worked between paired couples of men and women. Flowers soaked in water, most often left over from Bealtaine, are poured into the earth and covered over, symbolically ending the summer. At this time there is a reaffirmation of the order of the tribe, strengthening this social structure so that it can co-exist with the chaos of the land-spirits. It is appropriate that this festival be dedicated to Lugh, because Lugh is not only the archetype par excellance of the order of the tribe, but also plays the role of psychopomp, who leads people to the Otherworld at death. Essentially the festival

of Lughnasadh serves the purpose of leading the tribe towards the dark half of the year at Samhain, and so is a representation of Lugh's "soul-leading" role.

Although these are the festivals associated with the pagan customs of Ireland, they have also been adopted and incorporated into the Christian church and local tradition of both Ireland and other Celtic lands. This shows a certain versatility of the Celtic spirit to hold a variety of religious perspectives at once. It is important to point out that the Christian tradition in Ireland does not perhaps see time in the same linear model of other western Christian traditions. During the conversion to Christianity, many of the same attitudes were carried over, the reason that these festivals were perhaps so well incorporated into the calendar.

Through the re-affirmation of the human connection with nature, and in viewing the shifting of the seasons as threshold times, the ground is provided for an ever renewing relationship with the sacred. Time here is seen as circular, and the participation in each festival, and the cycles of nature they mark, offer a point of renewal and reorientation of the human community to the living experience of the sacred.

The Four Shields

The "four shields", based on the work Meredith Little in, *The Four Shields: The Initiatory Seasons of Human Nature,* is a way of expressing a cross-over between the initiatory cycles of nature and the initiatory cycles of human life. This of course makes infinite amounts of sense (bordering on the obvious even) when we recognize that humans are entirely integrated with nature, whether we choose to perceive this relationship or not. Just as the earth has seasons, so too does the psyche. By participating more fully in these inner initiatory seasons, we learn to participate more deeply with the seasons of the land, thus deepening our connection. Although Meredith Little's work is based on a more general view of the seasons, it can easily be adapted to take into account the Celtic model of the year, and the particular symbolism that goes with it (much of which matches the general view of the four shields).

Our lives may not always be in sync with the seasons. We may be feeling our darkest at Bealtaine, when the summer and light returns to the fullness of its glory. We may feel our light at Samhain. However, when we work actively with the seasons, participating fully in what they evoke from the land, and working with those energies in our lives, we learn how to apply those very things to our inner life. We may even find that slowly our lives *do* begin to sync up with nature.

Initiation, whether major cycles of life-shattering proportions, or minor "skin shedding", is a natural occurrence. Working with the four shields is a bit like soul-maintainance. Often times when we find ourselves in an initiatory cycle it is because we have ignored, in some way or another, the longing of our soul. The soul is always speaking to us, whether through dreams or the stirring of longing (longing here is taken to mean almost the opposite of desire; whereas desire is what the ego wants, and as Buddhism teaches leads to suffering, longing is what the soul wants and leads ultimately to fulfillment and happiness).

Each of these festivals represents a transition, a liminal space, which allows us to engage in and prepare for the upcoming season. Samhain transitions us into the dark half of the year, a time for shedding outworn aspects of our identity and going inward to gestate on new visions. Bealtaine offers us the opposite, a time for going outward and birthing and embodying new vision in our lives, in a sense creating new identity rather than shedding it. This is really

no different than the initiatory cycles of plunging downward into the unconscious where the ego is essentially shredded, allowing us the freedom to seek new vision (threshold spiral), and then the upward spiral journey to bring that into the world. By participating in this way we are entering into the flow of the seasons, and our own lives and initiatory cycles take on a similar rhythm.

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for *Spirals in Time*

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Chapter Thirteen
Myth Work III:
The Tale of the Ordeals

Once upon a time, a noble illustrious king assumed soveranty [sic] and sway over Ireland: Cormac grandson of Conn was he. At the time of that king the world was full of every good thing. There were mast and fatness and seaproduce. There were peace and ease and happiness. There was neither murder nor robbery at that season, but every one [abode] in his own proper place.

Once, then, the nobles of the men of Ireland happened to be drink-ing the Feast of Tara with Cormac. And these are the kings who were enjoying the feast, even Fergus the Black-toothed and Eochaid Gunnat, two kings of Ulster: Dunlang son of Enna the Hero, king of Leinster: Cormac Cas, son of Ailiul Bare-ear, and Fiacha Broad-crown, son of Eogan, two kings of Munster: Nia the Great, son of Lugaid Firtri, who was the son of Cormac's mother, and Aed son of Eochaid son of Conall, two kings of Connaught: Oengus Bloody-spear king of Bregia: Fera-dach son of Asal son of Conn the Champion, king of Meath.

At that time the men of Ireland used to proceed to assemblies and great meetings in this wise: every king with his royal robe around him and his golden helmet on his head, for they used to wear their kingly diadems only on a field of battle. Splendidly did Cormac enter that great meeting, for excepting Conaire son of Etarscél, or Conchobar son of Cathbad, or Oengus son of the Dagda, his like in beauty had never come. Distinguished, indeed, was Cormac's appearance in that meeting. Hair-braids slightly curled, all-golden upon him. He bore a red shield with engraving and with mila of gold and bow-ridges of sil-ver. Around him was a mantle purple . . . folded. A jewelled brooch of gold on his breast. A necklace of gold round his throat. Around him was a white-hooded shirt with a red insertion. A girdle of gold with gems of precious stone over him. He wore two golden shoes of net-work with buckles of gold. In his hand [he carried] two golden-ringed spears with many clasps [?] of bronze. He was, moreover, shapely, fair, without blemish, without disgrace. Thou wouldst deem that a shower of pearls had been cast into his head. Thou wouldst deem that his mouth was a cluster of rowan-berries. Whiter than snow was his nobly-built body. His cheek was like a forest-forcle or a mountain-fox-glove. Like blue-bells were his eyes: like the sheen of a dark-blue blade his eyebrows and his eyelashes.

Such then was the shape and semblance in which Cormac fared to that great meeting of the men of Erin, and they say that that conven-tion is the noblest ever held in Erin before the Faith. For the rules and laws which were made in that meeting shall abide in Erin for ever.

The nobles of the men of Erin declared that every man should be arranged according to what was due to himself, both kings and ollaves and fools and landholders and soldiers, and every class besides. For they were sure that the arrangement made in Erin at that meeting by the men of Fodla would be that which would abide therein for ever. For poets alone had judicature from the time that Amairgen Whiteknee the poet delivered the first judgment in Erin till the dialogue, in Emain Macha, of the two Sages, even Fercertne the Poet and Nede son of Adna,

concerning the ollave's robe of office. Obscure to every one seemed the speech which the poets uttered in that discussion, and the legal decision which they delivered was not clear to the kings and to the (other) poets. 'These men alone', say the kings, 'have their judge-ment and skill and knowledge. In the first place, we do not understand what they say.' 'Well then', says Conor, 'every one shall have his share therein from today forever. But the judgment which is proper to them out of it shall not pass away[?]. Every one shall take their shares of it'. So the poets were then deprived of their judicial power save only what was proper to them; and each of the men of Erin took his share of the judicature: as there are the Judgments of Eochaid son of Luchta, and the Judgments of Fachtna son of Senchaid, and the Wrong Judgments of Carat-nia Tesctha, and the Judgments of Morann Mac main, and the Judgments of Eogan son of Durthacht, and the Judgments of Doet Nemthenn, and the Judgments of Brig Ambae, and Diancecht's Judgments concerning Leeches.

And though these had been previously [settled], the nobles of the men of Erin at that time prescribed the measure of advocacy and speech to every one in accordance with his dignity, as they are in the Bretha Nemed.

Howbeit each man again encroached on the other's profession, until that great meeting was held by Cormac. So in that great meeting they again separated the men of each art from the others; and every one of them was ordained to his own art.

The nobles of the men of Erin were requesting Cormac to ordain his proper right to every one in Tech Midchuarta. This, then, was the solution which Cormac invented, namely, to place on the fire the Five-fist Caldron which was in Tara, - it was a coire aisicain or ansirc - and to put into it swine and beeves, and to sing over it an incantation of lords and poets and wizards.

It was a caldron of this kind that used to be of old in every hostel of the royal hostels of Erin. And this is why it was called coire aisic 'caldron of restitution', because it used to return and to deliver to every company their suitable food.

For however long the food might be therein, until the proper company would come, it would in nowise be spoiled. Moreover, no boiled [meat] was found therein save what would supply the company, and the food proper for each would be taken thereout. It was this kind of caldron that Cormac then had at Tara.

Now each in turn was brought up to that caldron, and every one was given a fork-thrust out of it. So then his proper portion came out to each, to wit, a thigh to a king and to a poet, a chine for a literary sage, a shinbone for young lords, heads for charioteers, a haunch for queens, and every due share besides. Wherefore in that assembly his proper due fell to each.

Moreover the Twelve Ordeals were published by them. These are what they had to decide truth and falsehood. And here they are:

Morann [Mac main's] Three Collars:
Mochta's Adze:
Sencha 's Lot-casting:
The Vessel of Badurn:

The Three Dark Stones:
The Caldron of Truth:
The Old Lot of Sen son of Aige:
Luchta' s Iron:
Waiting at an Altar:
Cormac's Cup.

Morann Mac Main's Collar
Morann son of Carpre Cat-head, of the race of the peasants was he. Carpre Cat-head assumed the kingship of Ireland, and he slew all the nobles of Ireland save three boys, namely Corp Bare-ear and Tibraite Tirech and Feradach Findfechtnach, who were carried off in their mothers' wombs, and were born in Scotland. Now Carpre, Morann's father, had a cat's snout, and every son that was born to him used to have a blemish, and so then he killed them. Carpre had a famous wife and of a noble race. She gave him this advice: to hold the Feast of Tara, and to summon to it the men of Em in order that they might make prayer to their gods so that, may be, some profitable children might be given him. He held the Feast, and the men of Ireland were at it till the end of three months; and in each month they all used to fast and to pray a prayer to God that prosperous offspring might be born of Carpre and his wife. And that was done then, in spite of him, because he was a wicked man. So then the wife conceived, and bore a man-child, and it seemed as if he were all one hood [?] from his two shoulders upwards, and no mouth was seen in him, nor any (other) apertures. Said the queen: 'I have borne a maen [mute]. He is equal [?] to thy other son. [This] is the blessing of the men of Ireland to thee their enemy!' 'Take him,' says Carpre, to his steward, 'tomorrow to the slough and drown him.' That night a man of the fairy-mound appeared to the boy's mother and said to her: 'It is to the sea that the child must be taken, and let his head be placed on the surface till nine waves come over it. The boy will be noble: he will be king. "Morann" this shall be his name' (he was mór 'great' and he was find 'fair').

The steward is summoned to her and she told him this. Then the boy was taken to the sea and is held against the surface. When the ninth wave came to him the membrane that surrounded his head sep-arated and formed a collar on his two shoulders. Thereat he sang a lay and said:

Worship, ye mortals,
God over the beautiful world!
* * * *
* * * *
* * * wherein is a festival with joyance
with my forgiving God,
Who formed about clouds a heavenly house.

Now the steward did not kill the boy, and he durst not take him with him for fear of the king. So he delivered him to the king's cowherd. He went home and declared that to the king and the queen, and [the king] adjudged that the boy should be killed. The king said of him that maen [treachery] would come of him, even of that boy. Wherefore he, the son of Carpre Cennchait, is called 'Morann mac main.' A cover-ing of gold and silver was made round that membrane, and thus it became the 'Collar of [Morann] Mac main'. If he round whose neck it

was put were guilty, it would choke him. If, however, he were inno-cent, it would expand round him to the ground.

Morann Mac Main's Second Collar
Morann had another collar, namely, a circlet that he had, like a wood en hoop. That circlet he got from Ochamon the Fool on Sid Arfemin. For he sent him into that [fairy-mound], and thereout Ochamon brought that little collar. He saw in the fairy-mound that it was the thing [used] there in distinguishing between truth and falsehood. Now that collar used to be put round the foot or the hand of the person [whose guilt was in question], and if he were false it would close itself round him till it cut off his foot or his hand. But if he were innocent it would not close itself round him.

Morann Mac Main's Third Collar
Then there was another Sin Morainn 'Collar of Morann'. Morann of - the Great Judgments went to Paul the Apostle, and brought from him an epistle and wore it round his neck. So when Morann returned from - Paul and went to his fortress he chanced to meet one of his bondmaids at the fortress-gate. Then when she saw the epistle round his neck she asked him: 'What collar (sin) is that, O Morann?' 'Truly,' says Caimmin the Fool, 'from today till doom it shall be [called] Morann's sin' [collar]. Now when Morann used to deliver judgment he would - put the epistle round his neck, and then he would never utter falsehood.

Mochta's Adze
Namely, an adze of brass which Mochta the Wright possessed. It used to be put into a fire of blackthorn [until it was red-hot], and the tongue [of the accused] was passed over it. He who had falsehood was burnt. He who was innocent was not burnt at all.

Sencha's Lot-casting
That is, a casting of lots which Sencha son of Ailill practised. He used to cast two lots out of fire, one lot for the king and one for the - accused. If the accused were guilty the lot would cleave to his palm. If, however, he were innocent, his lot would come out at once. Thus was that done: a poet's incantation was recited over them.

The Vessel of Badurn
That is, Badurn the name of a king. Now his wife went to the well, and at the well she saw two women out of the fairy-mounds, and - between them was a chain of bronze. When they beheld the woman - coming towards them they went under the well. So she went after - them under the well, and in the fairy-mound she saw a marvellous ordeal, even a vessel of crystal. If a man should utter three false words under it, it would separate into three [parts] on his hand. If a man should utter three true words under it, it would unite again. Then Badurn's wife begged that vessel from the folk of the fairy-mound. It was given to her. So that was the vessel which Badurn had for distinguishing between falsehood and truth.

The Three Dark Stones
That is, a bucket was filled with bogstuff and coal and every other kind of black thing, and three stones were put into it, even a white stone and a black stone and a speckled stone. Then one would put his hand therein, and if the truth were with him, he would bring out the white

stone. If he were false, he would bring out the black stone. If he were half-guilty, he would bring out the speckled.

The Caldron of Truth
That is, a vessel of silver and gold which they had to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Water was heated therein until it was boiling, and then [the accused person's] hand was dipt into it. If he were guilty the hand was scalded. But if he had no guilt no harm was done to him. For these are the three things most used by the heathen, to wit, the Caldron of Truth, and Equal Lot-casting, and Waiting at an Altar. Hence has [the practice] still grown with the Gael of casting lots out of reliquaries.

The Old Lot of Sen
That is, the lot-casting of Sen son of Aige, that is, to cast into water three lots, to wit, the lord's lot and the ollave's lot and the lot of the accused. If he, the accused, had guilt his lot would sink to the bottom. If, however, he were innocent it would come to the top.

Luchta's Iron
That is, Luchta the wizard went to study in Brittany, and there he saw a strange thing [used] for discerning truth and falsehood, namely, an iron was hallowed by the wizards, and then cast into a fire until it became red, and then it was put on the palm of the accused. Now if guilt were with him the iron used to burn him. But it did him no harm unless he were guilty. Thereafter Luchta told them that it would be needed 'for us, the men of Erin,' saith he, 'to distinguish between truth and falsehood'. Luchta afterwards brought with him his hallowed iron, and it was [used] in distinguishing between truth and falsehood. Hence then [the ordeal of] the hallowed iron is still continually practised by the Gael.

Waiting at an Altar
That is, a proof which they used at that time to distinguish between truth and falsehood, namely, Waiting at an Altar, that is, to go nine times round the altars, and afterwards to drink water over which a wizard's incantation had been uttered. Now if [the accused] were guilty the token of his sin was manifest upon him. But if he were inno-cent [the water] would do him no harm. Now Cai Cainbrethach, - the pupil of Fenius Farsaid, the twelfth, or the seventy-second, disciple of the school which Fenius collected from the Greeks in order to learn the many languages throughout the countries of the world, - it was that Cai who brought this ordeal from the land of Israel when he came to the Tuath Déa, and he had learned the law of Moses, and it was he that delivered judgments in the school after it had been gathered - together from every side, and it is he that ordained the 'Judgment of Cai.' It was that same Cai, moreover, who first ordained in Erin the Law of the Four Tracks, for only two of the school came to Erin, namely, Amergin White-knee the poet and Cai the judge. And Cai remained in Erin until he had outlived nine generations, in consequence of the righteousness of his judgments, for the judgments which he used to deliver were judgments of the Law of Moses, and therefore the judgments of the Law are very abundant in the Fénechas. They were judgments of the Law [of Moses], then, that served for Cormac.

Cormac's Cup
Cormac's own Cup, then, was a cup of gold which he had. The way in which it was found was thus:

One day, at dawn in Maytime, Cormac, grandson of Conn, was alone on Mur Tea in Tara. He saw coming towards him a warrior - sedate [?], greyhaired. A purple, fringed mantle around him. A shirt ribbed, goldthreaded next [?] his skin. Two blunt shoes of white bronze between his feet and the earth. A branch of silver with three golden apples on his shoulder. Delight and amusement enough it was to listen to the music made by the branch, for men sore-wounded, or women in child-bed, or folk in sickness would fall asleep at the melody which was made when that branch was shaken.

The warrior saluted Cormac. Cormac saluted him.

'Whence hast thou come, O warrior?' says Cormac. 'From a land,' he replied, 'wherein there is nought save truth, and there is neither age nor decay nor gloom nor sadness nor envy nor jealousy nor hatred nor haughtiness.'

'It is not so with us,' says Cormac. 'A question, O warrior: shall we make an alliance?'

'I am well pleased to make it,' says the warrior.

Then [their] alliance was made.

'The branch to me!' says Cormac.

'I will give it,' says the warrior, 'provided the three boons which I shall ask in Tara be granted to me in return.'

'They shall be granted,' says Cormac.

Then the warrior bound [Cormac to his promise], and left the branch, and goes away; and Cormac knew not whither he had gone.

Cormac turned into the palace. The household marvelled at the branch. Cormac shook it at them, and cast them into slumber from that hour to the same time on the following day.

At the end of a year the warrior comes into his meeting and asked of Cormac the consideration for his branch. 'It shall be given', says Cormac.

'I will take [thy daughter] Ailbe today,' says the warrior.

So he took the girl with him. The women of Tara utter three loud cries after the daughter of the king of Erin. But Cormac shook the branch at them, so that he banished grief from them all and cast them into sleep.

That day month comes the warrior and takes with him Cairpre Lifechair [the son of Cormac]. Weeping and sorrow ceased not in Tara after the boy, and on that night no one therein ate or slept, and they were in grief and in exceeding gloom. But Cormac shook the branch at them, and they parted from [their] sorrow.

The same warrior comes again.

'What askest thou today?' says Cormac.

'Thy wife', saith he, 'even Ethne the Longsided, daughter of Dunlang king of Leinster.'

Then he takes away the woman with him.

That thing Cormac endured not. He went after them, and every one then followed Cormac. A great mist was brought upon them in the midst of the plain of the wall. Cormac found himself on a great plain alone. There was a large fortress in the midst of the plain with a wall of bronze around it. In the fortress was a house of white silver, and it was half-thatched with the wings of white birds. A fairy host of horsemen [was] haunting the house, with lapfuls of the wings of white birds in their bosoms to thatch the house. A gust of wind would still come to it, and still the wind would carry away all of it that had been thatched.

Then he sees a man therein kindling a fire, and the thick-boled oak was cast upon it, top and butt. When the man would come again with another oak the burning of the first oak had ended.

Then he sees another fortress, vast and royal, and another wall of bronze around it. There were four houses therein. He entered the fortress. He sees the vast palace with its beams of bronze, its wattling of silver, and its thatch of the wings of white birds.

Then he sees in the garth a shining fountain, with five streams flow-ing out of it, and the hosts in turn a drinking its water. Nine hazels of Buan grow over the well. The purple hazels drop their nuts into the fountain, and the five salmon which are in the fountain sever them and send their husks floating down the streams. Now the sound of the falling of those streams is more melodious than any music that [men] sing.

He entered the palace. There was one couple inside awaiting him. The warrior's figure was distinguished owing to the beauty of his shape and the comeliness of his form and the wondrousness of his counte-nance. The girl along with him, grown-up, yellow-haired, with a gold-en helmet, was the loveliest of the world's women. Her feet are washed without being observed. [There was] bathing on the partition without attendance of any one, but the [heated] stones [of themselves went] into and [came] out [of the water].

Cormac bathed himself thereafter.

As they were there after the hour of none they saw a man coming to them into the house. A wood-axe in his right hand, and a log in his left hand, and a pig behind him.

"Tis time to make ready within,' says the warrior; 'because a noble guest is here.'

The man struck the pig and killed it. And he cleft his log so that he had thee sets [?] of half-cleavings. The pig is cast into the caldron.

'It is time for you to turn it,' says the warrior.

'That would be useless,' says the kitchener; 'for never and never will the pig be boiled until a truth is told for each quarter of it.'

'Then', says the warrior, 'do thou tell us first.'

'One day,' says he, 'when I was going round the land, I found another man's cows on my land, and I brought them with me into a cattle-pound. The owner of the cows followed me and said that he would give me a reward for letting his cows go free. I gave him his cows. He gave me a pig and an axe and a log, the pig to be killed with the axe every night, and the log to be cleft by it, and there will [then] be enough firewood to boil the pig, and enough for the palace besides. And, moreover, the pig is alive on the morning after, and the log is whole. And from thence till today they are in that wise.

'True, indeed, is that tale,' says the warrior.

The pig was turned [in the caldron], and only one quarter of it was found boiled.

'Let us tell another tale of truth,' say they.

'I will tell one,' says the warrior. 'Ploughing-time had come. When we desired to plough that field outside, then it was found ploughed, harrowed and sown with wheat. When we desired to reap it, then [the crop] was found stacked in the field. When we desired to draw it into that side out there, it was found in the garth all in one thatched rick. We have been eating it from then till today; but it is no whit greater nor less'.

Then the pig was turned [in the caldron], and another quarter was found to be cooked.

'It is now my turn,' says the woman. 'I have seven cows,' says she, 'and seven sheep. The milk of the seven cows is enough for the peo-ple of the Land of Promise. From the wool of the seven sheep comes all the clothing they require.'

At this story the third quarter [of the pig] was boiled.

'It is now thy turn,' they say to Cormac.

So Cormac related how his wife and his son and his daughter had been taken from him, and how he himself had pursued them until he arrived at yonder house.

So with that the whole pig was boiled.

Then they carve the pig, and his portion is placed before Cormac. 'I never eat a meal,' says Cormac, 'without fifty in my company.' The warrior sang a burden to him and put him asleep. After this he awoke and saw the fifty warriors, and his son and his wife and his daughter, along with him. Thereupon his spirit was strengthened. Then ale and food were dealt out to

them, and they became happy and joyous. A cup of gold was placed in the warrior's hand. Cormac was marvelling at the cup, for the number of the forms upon it and the strangeness of its workmanship. 'There is somewhat in it still more strange,' says the warrior. 'Let three words of falsehood be spoken under it, and it will break into three: Then let three true declarations be under it, and it unites [?] again as it was before.' The warrior says under it three words of falsehood, and it breaks into three. 'It is better to utter truth there,' says the warrior, 'for sake of restoring the cup. I make my dec-laration, O Cormac,' saith he, 'that until today neither thy wife nor thy daughter has seen the face of a man since they were taken from thee out of Tara, and that thy son has not seen a woman's face.' The cup thereby became whole.

'Take thy family then,' says the warrior, 'and take the Cup that thou mayst have it for discerning between truth and falsehood. And thou shalt have the Branch for music and delight. And on the day that thou shalt die they all will be taken from thee. I am Manannan son of Ler,' says he, 'king of the Land of Promise; and to see the Land of Promise was the reason I brought [thee] hither. The host of horsemen which thou beheldest thatching the house are the men of art in Ireland, collecting cattle and wealth which passes away into nothing. The man whom thou sawest kindling the fire is a young lord, and out of his housekeeping he pays for everything he consumes. The fountain which thou sawest, with the five streams out of it, is the Fountain of Knowledge, and the streams are the five senses through the which knowledge is obtained [?]. And no one will have knowledge who drinketh not a draught out of the fountain itself and out of the streams. The folk of many arts are those who drink of them both.'

Now on the morrow morning, when Cormac arose, he found him-self on the green of Tara, with his wife and his son and daughter, and having his Branch and his Cup. Now that was afterwards [called] 'Cormac's Cup', and it used to distinguish between truth and falsehood with the Gael. Howbeit, as had been promised him [by Manannan] it remained not after Cormac's death.

Now rules and laws and duties were ordained at that meeting, and the men of Erin's councils were determined. Three preeminent assem-blies used to be held at that time, namely, the Feast of Tara on Allhallowtide - for that was the Easter of the heathen, and all the men of Erin were at that meeting, helping the king of Erin to hold it - and the Fair of Tailtiu at Lammas, and the Great Meeting of Uisnech on Mayday. Seven years lasted the preparation for the Feast of Tara, and still at the end of seven years then used to be a convention of all the men of Erin at the Feast of Tara, and there they would determine a jubilee, namely, the Rule of Seven Years from one Feast of Tara to another. And he who broke those rules was a mortal enemy and was banished from Ireland, with this exception that manslayings were per-missible in these [eight] places, to wit, Sligo Midluachra, the Ford of Fer-Diad, Ath cliath, Belach Gabráin, Ath n-O, Cnám-choill, Conachlaid and the Two Paps of Anu. If it were in one of these places that any man avenged his wrong no retaliation was made upon him.

Then the king of Erin appointed his soldiers over the men of Erin. He appointed thrice fifty royal champions over them to maintain his rule and his discipline and his hunting. He gave the headship of all and the grand-stewardship of Erin to Find grandson of Baiscne.

Afamous deed was also done by Cormac then, namely, the compilation of the Saltair Cormaic. The old men and the historians of the men of Ireland, including Fintan son of Bochra and Fithel the Poet, were gathered together; and [then] the synchronisms and the pedigrees were recorded in writing, and the careers of their kings and princes, and their battles and contests, and their antiquities, from the beginning of the world down to that time. Wherefore this, the Psalter of Tara, is a root and a foundation and a source for Erin's historians from thence to the present day.

Great, then, and not to be told was Cormac's control over Erin at that time. The hostages of Erin were in his hand. One of them was Socht son of Fithel, son of Oengus, son of Glangen, son of Sech, son of Socht, son of Fachtna, son of Senchaid, son of Ailill Cestach, son of Rudraige.

Out of the Book of Navan cecinit.

Socht had a wonderful sword, with a hilt of gold and a belt of silver: gilded was its guard, diverse-edged its point (eo). It shone at night like a candle. If its point (rind) were bent back to its hilt it would stretch [back again] like a rapier. It would sever a hair [floating] on water. It would cut off a hair on [a man's] head, and without touch-ing the skin. It would make two halves of a man, and for a long time one half would not hear or perceive what had befallen the other. Socht said that it was the Hard-headed Steeling, Cúchulainn's sword. They held this sword to be a tribal bequest [?] both of fathers and grand fathers.

At that time there was a famous steward in Tara, even Dubdrenn son of Urgriu. The steward asked Socht to sell him the sword, and told him that he should have a ration of the same meal as he [Dubdrenn] had every night, and that his family should have, every day, four men's food in sub-payment for the sword, and the full value thereof, at his own award, after that. 'No,' says Socht; 'I am not com-petent to sell my father's treasures while he is alive.'

For a long time they went on thus, Dubdrenn seeking and thinking about the sword. Once upon a time he brought Socht to a special drinking-bout. Then Dubdrenn begged the cupbearer to press wine and mead upon Socht until he became drunk. Thus was it done, so that Socht knew not where he was, and so he fell asleep.

Then the steward takes the sword and went to the king's brazier, Connu.

'Art thou able,' says Dubdrenn, 'to open the hilt of this sword?'

'Yea, I am able,' says the brazier.

Then the brazier sundered the sword, and in the hilt he wrote the steward's name, even Dubdrenn, and set the sword again [by Socht] as it was before.

So things remained for three months after, and the steward kept on asking for the sword, and he could not [get it] from Socht. At last the steward sued for the sword, and fulfilled all the requirements of the suit, and declared that the sword was his own, and that it had been taken from him. Then Socht pleaded that he himself had a prescriptive title to the sword and its trappings [?] and ornament, and, moreover, that he had an equitable right to it.

Socht went to consult Fithel and to request him to take part in that action, and to bring his father to defend [his claim to] the sword. 'No,' says Fithel: 'act for thyself in thy causes. It is not I who will ever arbitrate for thee, for greatly dost thou put thyself and take thyself [?] in thy causes; and [it is] not to say truth without falsehood. Falsehood is opposed in falsehood . ..

The right is done, and Socht is allowed to prove that the sword is his, and Socht gives the oath that the sword was a family treasure of his, and that it belonged to him.

Said the steward. 'Well, in sooth, O Cormac: yon oath that Socht has uttered is perjurous.' 'What proof hast thou', says Cormac, 'that the oath is false?'

'Not hard to say,' quoth the steward. 'If the sword is mine, my name stands written therein, covered up and concealed in the hilt of the sword.'

Socht is summoned to Cormac, who told him what had been said. 'It will be a short story till this is known,' says Cormac. 'Let the bra-zier be summoned to us,' quoth he. The brazier comes, and breaks open the hilt, and the steward's name was found written therein. Then a dead thing testified against a living, value being ascribed [?] to the writing.

Said Socht: 'hear ye this, O men of Erin, and Cormac with you! I acknowledge that this man is the owner of the sword. The property therein, together with its liabilities, passes from me to thee.'

'I acknowledge,' says the steward, 'property therein, together with its liabilities, passes from me to thee.'

Then said Socht: 'This is the sword that was found in my grandfa-ther's neck, and till today I never knew who had done that deed. And do thou, O Cormac, pass judgment thereon.'

'Thy liability,' says Cormac [to the steward], 'is greater than [the value of] this [sword].'

Then seven cumals are adjudged by Cormac [as compensation for the slaying of Socht's grandfather], and also restitution of the sword.

'I confess', says the steward, 'the story of the sword.' And then he relates the whole tale of it in order, and the brazier tells the same tale concerning the sword. Cormac then levied seven cumals from the stew-ard, and other seven from the brazier. Said Cormac: 'Mainech etc. This is true', says Cormac: 'yon is Cúchulainn's sword, and by it my grand-father was slain, even Conn the Hundred-battled, by the hand of Tibraite Tirech, king of Ulaid, of whom was said

With a host over valiant bands
Well did he go to Connaught.
Alas that he saw Conn's blood
On the side of Cúchulainn's sword!'

With that they, even Cormac and Fithel, decided the case, and it was Cormac that ensnared [Socht], and Cormac obtains by [his] decision the sword as a wergild for Conn. Now neither battle nor combat was ever gained against that sword and against him who held it in his hand. And it is the third best treasure that was in Erin, namely [first], Cormac's Cup, and [secondly] his Branch, and [thirdly] his Sword.

So that tale is the tale of the Ordeals, and of Cormac's Adventures in the Land of Promise, and of Cormac's Sword.

The wise declare that whenever any strange apparition was revealed of old to the royal lords, - as the ghost appeared to Conn, and as the Land of Promise was shown to Cormac, - it was a divine ministration that used to come in that wise, and not a demoniacal ministration. Angels, moreover, would come and help them, for they followed Natural Truth, and they served the commandment of the Law. It was a divine ministration, moreover, that freed the men of Erin at Uisnech from the Great Bardic Company, without leaving it to them.

Chapter Fourteen
Coming Into Being:
The Process of Initiation

Nearly all initiations, if they are truly centered in the life of the soul,
are about stepping into right relationship with the spirit of longing.
-Frank MacEowen, **The Mist-Filled Path**

In a breath, initiation could be described as the process of fulfilling our full potential as human beings. We are not speaking here of initiation into a group or religious order, though these may be valid forms of initiation. Rather, this is an inward process, which plunges us into our depths where we might encounter our true nature, before we raise back up to live those truths in the world.

Often we are unaware of the process while it is taking place. This is because we are not educated about this. Modern western psychology has no framework with which to work with this process, and so pathologizes it. Contrary to this view however are the transpersonal and animistic views that assert that this process is not only natural but desirable, and indeed healthy. This does not mean the process is always gentle however. In fact, more often than not, it is anything but gentle. It can feel like a stripping away of the self. Sometimes the process can be long and drawn out, and thus the intensity is diffused over a longer period of time. When it happens in a short length of time however, it can be an intensely dark and frightening experience. This can often be the difference between a spiritual *emergence* and spiritual *emergency*.

Before we can go into a description of the initiatory process it is necessary to do a bit of ground work. Initiation is primarily concerned with the emergence of the soul into ordinary life; it is a shifting of focus from egocentric consciousness to soulcentric consciousness. Therefore it is necessary to define what we mean both by *soul* and by *ego*.

We'll start by defining ego because it is something we are all familiar with. The word 'ego' comes from Latin and simply means "I". The ego comprises our self-identity, and is thus concerned with the preservation of that restrictive identity. The ego however is also what allows us to function socially in the world. Unlike many misconceptions about Eastern spiritual traditions, it is undesirable to entirely dissolve the ego (particularly its functional aspects). Rather these traditions, as well as the initiatory process, are more about bringing that ego-consciousness into right relationship with the soul (or "ground of being" as it might be expressed in Buddhist traditions). The ego is restrictive and limiting to our identities and experiences, and so we are concerned here with an expansion of this sense of self.

Depth psychologist and ecotherapist, Bill Plotkin, defines soul as "the vital, mysterious, and wild core of our individual selves, an essence unique to each person, qualities found in layers of the self, much deeper than our personalities."[1] There is a stigma surrounding the idea of the soul, that it is a spiritual essence that is trapped within our bodies. This sets up a duality and primacy of the soul over the body. In the Celtic traditions this concept is very different, in terms of clarifying further the nature of the soul (if such a thing can truly be understood at all). As John O'Donohue, Irish poet-philosopher writes on the soul in the Celtic tradition, "the body is in the soul". Contained in this statement is the notion that the soul participates in a much wider relationship with the world. It is not confined to our own being,

though we may each possess a unique expression of this. This notion of the body being within the soul is an expression of the soul as a field, which permeates our being, but also extends beyond our limited notions of the self, and engages and relates with all that it comes into contact with. Simply stated the soul may be said to be the "wildness" of our nature, much like the forests and mountains are the wildness of the world.

There are many models which try to describe the initiatory process. These models are metaphors trying to describe a process. As the Zen saying goes, they are the finger pointing to the moon, not the moon itself. The process must be experienced in order to be understood. That said however these models can provide us with a map and allow us to more gracefully navigate this difficult terrain. The model I would like to introduce here is the "three spirals of initiation" discussed by Frank MacEowen in *The Spiral of Memory and Belonging*. Using the ancient carving of the triple spirals on Newgrange (a megalithic site in Ireland) for inspiration, this model outlines the process of initiation as a threefold pathway.

The first spiral of initiation is the downward spiral. The downward spiral is a period of travel into the Underworld. It may also be though of as descending into the unconscious. This journey is not something that begins because we have done something wrong, per se, but rather is caused by the soul's need to further express itself. As MacEowen says of the downward spiral, "In some cases this spiral is characterized by chaos, difficult moods, emotions such as intense fear or grief, troublesome dreams, and a sense of heaviness, a heightened sense of being ill at ease with life, or an overidentification with the world that sometimes leads to an almost paralytic sense of feeling the suffering of the planet…In other expressions, the downward spiral can make a person feel as if he is disconnected from life rather than deeply identified with it."[2] Often this phase feels as though the ego is being stripped or burned away from the self. We are confronted with our habitual patterns and defense strategies which shield and guard us from the pain of living fully and openly. Often this confrontation can feel like a process of death; however it is only the death of our limiting ways of being. Initiation very much begins in the North quadrant of the Irish spirit wheel (see chapter on *The Four Winds*); the area of the battle between soul and ego. This is not the sort of battle in which soul or ego wants to eradicate one another. It is rather a process of tempering, during which the ego is brought into alignment with the soul, which is a more expansive identity of *Self* than the ego. The downward spiral is a response to this need for a deeper relationship with soul, and the soul's destiny.

The next stage is the threshold spiral. After we "land" from our downward spiral, the threshold spiral takes us to a place of quiet, inward looking. As MacEowen says of the threshold spiral, "After the tumultuous descent of the downward spiral we eventually reach a domain where we become still, as if our falling and spiraling have resulted in our landing somewhere. Some landings are harder than others. Nonetheless we are no longer plunging downward, no longer being pummeled by chaos, and no longer feeling like the skin is being ripped from our bones. Whereas the downward spiral is the dismemberment – the abyss, the breaking up, and the falling apart – the landing phase is the spiral of the threshold, a place of realignment and vision."[3] In the threshold spiral, the old life, the old egoic self, is dead, and MacEowen articulates the threshold spiral as still hanging out with the corpse of this old life, which blocks us from a clear vision. The threshold spiral above all, is a time of vision-seeking. With the old egoic self, the old vision of our life has been revealed for what it is – confining, limiting, and often times soul-negating. We need a new vision of life. During this phase we still often experience the fear of the downward spiral. We are still in a dark place, without a vision. The difference is that now we feel a sense of quiet arrival. Out of the underworld of our unconscious

a new vision of life is sure to arise. Here we encounter the soul, gaining a glimpse of the gifts contained within it. Either we uncover this for the first time, or peel back successive layers of an already received image to more deeply understand and relate to it. Initiation is usually not a one time off sort of experience. People often experience several of them, throughout various junctions of life, when their Work demands new levels of creativity and soul-oriented vision. The threshold spiral ends at the recovering of our new vision.

The final stage in the process of initiation is the upward spiral. With our new vision it is now time to take action on it, integrating it with our ordinary, daily lives. Perhaps our vision is a new project, or a new way of being which enhances the presence of the soul and gifts in the world. This is the stage of reintegrating our new vision, the gifts particular to our soul, into our life. It is now our inner-mandated task to embody our vision, and importantly *act on it*, to birth it out into the world. However, just because we are no longer falling does not mean that this stage is not challenging or difficult. Society does not always support us in this task, because it does not understand it. Therefore it takes skill to navigate the world with this new awareness, and often means hanging out on the fringe, at the borders between "civilized" Western society, and the natural, soul-conducive way of being offered by initiation.

The soul does not necessarily care how we do this. Something as simple as writing poetry might appeal to us, or we may choose to embody it by becoming a therapist. For example we may discover that our gift is to help others through grief. We might write and share poetry that follows themes of grief and healing, or we may take a more personal approach and become a grief counselor. Its all very personal, and sometimes our gift demands massive re-organizations of our "mundane" life (new job, etc), other times it may be more subtle (write and publish poetry). The effect is the same however: a powerful transformation in the way we live occurs. We move from the center of our truth rather than from our ego.

However, like the other stages of initiation, this too takes time. Before we start actively birthing our new vision into the world, we need time to inwardly integrate it and embody it in our inner lives. "Once we have undergone an authentic transition, initiation, or transformation we are not the same as we were before. It is difficult to return to the same world from which we came, precisely because we are vibrating with the energies of a different world within and around us. We often need downtime to just *be* rather than *do*. We need time to integrate the potent energies of our new life before we engage with others who will often perceive us as locked in the outworn form of whatever our previous life looked like."[4]

Below are some key definitions which might help clarify some of the terms and concepts in this chapter:

Soul-Initiation "...that extraordinary moment in life when we cross over from psychological adolescence to true adulthood, from out first adulthood to our second. At that moment our everyday life becomes firmly rooted in the purposes of the soul. The embodiment of our soul powers becomes as high a priority in living as any other. But its not so much that we *choose* at that moment to make soul embodiment a top priority; its more as if the soul *commands* us to the task and we assent."[5]

Soul-Encounter is a "glimpse [of] one or more features of your soul image. This image can be multifaceted and complex like an elaborate tapestry that has many sub-images. Woven into the fabric of the image is a mysterious symbol which holds within it the secrets of your life purpose."[6]

Soul-Image might be considered our destiny. The Irish word I use for this concept is *dán*, because it encompasses both the idea of a destiny but also a skill or art. The soul-image is that which we were born to bring out into the world, which we discover and incorporate into our lives during the initiatory process. As Plotkin describes it though, our soul-image is not particular though. The soul doesn't care if we are a writer, a therapist, a lawyer, or an artist. These are vocational channels through which we might birth our soul-gift/soul-image into the world, but it is the essence of what we are fulfilling through these mediums of work that is our sacred gift.

Endnotes

1. Plotkin, Bill. *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche*. Navato, California: New World Library, 2003. p. 25

2. MacEowen, Frank. *The Spiral of Memory and Belonging: A Celtic Path of Soul and Kinship*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2004. p. 69

3. MacEowen, p. 79

4. MacEowen, p. 85

5. Plotkin, p. 120

6. Ibid, p. 119

Chapter Fifteen

In the Womb of the Night:

Darkness and the Spirit of Longing

I have faith in the night.
-Rainer Maria Rilke

Much has been said on the topic on death and rebirth, phases that require us to embrace the darkness with open arms. This is something that we often have trouble doing in our society which focuses so much on the light, and an almost fanatic distrust of the dark side of life. Darkness carries the connotations of evil, and light being its polar opposite, must through this dualistic logic be a force of goodness. It must not be forgotten though, that too much sunlight will scorch the body, just as too much darkness can be unhealthy.

John O'Donohue speaks of the darkness and light, saying, "Darkness keeps its secrets. Light is diverse and plural: sunlight, moonlight, dusk, dawn, and twilight. The dark has only one name. There is something deep in us which implicitly recognizes the primacy and wonder of the dark. Perhaps this is why we instinctively insist on avoiding and ignoring its mysteries."[1] Humans love the light. It is the light which allows us to see, the light that we live the majority of our lives in, and the light which casts understanding onto matters which have remained shrouded in the darkness of our minds. It is the sweet single note of darkness, though, that all life emerges from, that we enter and stumble through to emerge transformed on the other side.

In our culture we are accustomed to avoiding the darkness; not only the literal darkness of night, but our own hidden depths. The dark realm of the self however is where the soul dwells, and though it is populated by our shadow, and demons of the mind, we must cross that terrain to enter the greater belonging of our soul. If we focus only on love and light, what O'Donohue calls "soft spirituality", then we have avoided the true fires of initiation into a more expansive self.

For transformation to take place we must foster an understanding and trust in darkness. We cannot hold onto ideas of light and darkness being dualistically opposed to one another, turning our face from the later. Our society's unwillingness to trust and be immersed in darkness comes from our unwillingness to consciously face our own suffering and longing. We don't want to deal with suffering, we just want to take a pill to make it all go away, or suppress it until it is forced to rise up within us.

We struggle with longing just the same. Longing is not the desires of the flesh or of material greed. These waters run much deeper than that, to the core of our very soul. This is the seat of longing. There is a deep connection between longing and suffering. When we suffer we feel cut off and isolated; no one can share in our pain and know precisely how we feel. There is a certain and necessary aspect of aloneness in the darkness of our suffering, like the womb that cradles us before we can ever commune with others. Longing is the bridge between the solitude of our suffering, and the intimacy of true and heartfelt community.

It is only in the darkness though that this bridge can ever be made. No relationships or communities can ever truly come into being without going through a period of darkness and suffering. Without that aspect we remain floating on the surface, still in isolation. The same can be said for our spiritual relationships, with the divine Shapers, spirits, ancestors, and of course our own soul. We can not truly engage these forces unless they put us through the darkness and the fires of initiation. It is in darkness and through those fires that we learn about them in the deepest ways. We begin to see their relationships, the subtle complexities that they embody, and their importance to our own existence. Without this they remain as nothing more than concepts in our minds that we have not experienced, intellectual ideas based on theory rather than experience.

In the inner world of the spiritscape, it is in the darkness that we experience these things, and that we come to *know* them as one knows the familiar landscapes of our youth. It is in the light that we act on that knowledge, that we *embody* it into our daily lives, allowing it to penetrate the way we perceive the universe around us. It is important however to note that we can never fully know the darkness. To do so would violate its own integrity as a presence of mystery. The dark stays hidden. To use O'Donohue's words, "Regardless of how you might force the neon light of analysis on your self, it can never penetrate. It remains on the surface and creates tantalizing but ultimately empty images. Even when you approach your self tenderly with the candle of receptive and reverential seeing, all you achieve is a glimpse."[2]

The *filidh* of Ireland, and no doubt those who came before, knew this wisdom of the incubatory darkness, and the wisdom and inspiration that it offered. There is a practice that continued even as late as the eighteenth century in Ireland and Scotland. It consisted of entering a special isolated cottage which all light had been sealed out of. The vision-poet would then be left alone in the darkness, having a fairly large and smooth stone placed on their chest or belly. From this they would enter into a trance from which they would kindle inspiration of vision and poetry.

The following exercise is a variant of this practice, a way of approaching the darkness with reverence, allowing it to take you on its journey. The aim is to begin to establish trust and a working relationship with the darkness, in order to heal the wounds we all carry, and so that we may once again benefit from this holy presence of the night.

The Shaping Power of Darkness

- It is probably best to begin at night, when it is already naturally dark. Pick a room in your house with as little clutter as possible. If you'd like you might like to tidy it up a little to keep you from possible distraction. Pick a time when you know the phone won't be apt to ring, or even unplug it.
- Because of city lights, it is hard to keep light out of a room even in the middle of the night. The goal is to not be able to see anything at all, and be submerged in total darkness. Make the room as dark as possible, and wear a blindfold if it is necessary. If it is noisy, wear earplugs.
- Find a large smooth round stone. It should be relatively heavy, but not enough so that it will cause you discomfort during the meditation. The purpose of the stone is as a focus for your attention, a monotonous sensory input while the rest of your body is totally deprived of sensation.

- Place some cushions on the ground (I recommend against laying on a bed, because you may fall asleep) putting the stone on your belly or chest.
- Allow your mind to drift towards the awareness of the stone, let yourself calm and sink into the meditative silence of the utter darkness.
- Feel the darkness around you, absence of light and sound. The only sensation is the stone and what you are lying on. However this is a monotone and meaningless sensation and so the mind will find it hard to analyze or "think about".
- Let your mind drift to your inner darkness, the deep places of your mind and soul that are seldom touched, and avoid intellectual grasping or naming. The places within yourself that are shrouded in mystery.
- What is your relationship to this darkness? Do you run from it and avoid it? Do you work with it in an open and reverend way? Do you except its tides, the ebbing and flowing of your inner seasons from light to dark? When it comes do you try and fight it off, or surrender to it and let it shape and transform you? What suffering does it hold? What does it contain that you have not owned about yourself (positive or negative)?
- These are important questions to ask, and by exploring these topics you can come to a better understanding of your own unconscious.
- Continue with the meditation in whatever direction the darkness seems to take you. Be aware of any emotions, visions, or sensations that come up for you. Simply hold an awareness of your being and the spiritscape and where you are taken.
- As you feel ready for the darkness to release you, slowly start to move your body, coming back to the room. When you feel ready remove the stone and blindfold, and turn on the lights. Ground yourself by doing something physical, like eating, drinking, or taking a walk. If you keep a journal, you might want to record your experiences.

This can be a powerful exercise indeed, especially for those not used to working with the powers of the darkness. It can also be frightening though, if you have been told all your life that the darkness is a place to be avoided and banished with the light. Be gentle with yourself, and aware that the darkness, for all the things it brings with it, is truly a warm womb of a mother in which transformation takes place.

When we are in the depths of darkness and initiation it can often seem hostile and painful. It never seems to end, and we feel alone in its deadly embrace. But death is just the preface of life, and as we emerge from it we find that the darkness is really a gentle power of nurturing and growth.

Endnotes

1. O'Donohue, John. *Eternal Echoes: Celtic Reflections on Our Yearning to Belong*. New York, New York: Harper Perennial, 1999. p. 146

2. O'Donoehue. p. 145-146

Further Reading

for *Coming Into Being & In the Womb of Night*

MacEowen, Frank. *The Spiral of Memory and Belonging: A Celtic Path of Soul and Kinship*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2004. Chapters 5 – 8

Plotkin, Bill. *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2003.

MacEowen, Frank. *The Mist-Filled Path: Celtic Wisdom for Exiles, Wanderers, and Seekers*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2003. Chapters 3 – 5

Chapter Sixteen

Presence:
The Language of Nature

If we cultivate skills of deep listening it is possible for us to communicate with the other-than-human world. It seems strange and foreign to most westerners that we might actually *speak* with nature; not so for animistic people, who see it as a natural part of life. We find it strange because our only understanding of communication has been inherited from our experience of human language. Human languages, though complex and fascinating, are far from the only languages.

Trees, mountains, rivers, and animals may not communicate with words but they certainly communicate. It is by means of *presence* that the natural world communicates and expresses its own subjectivity. Everything has a presence; I'm not necessarily talking about some mystical energy which enlivens it, but rather something much more down-to-earth and "mundane". When we experience presence, whether of another human or of nature, we feel and experience something in our body.

Presence starts with the physical nature of a thing, what we can experience with our five senses. It is the authentic embodying of its own inherent nature. The natural world can be nothing but present. The experience of speaking with nature is inherently synaesthetic (the blending of one or more senses) one. David Abram has this to say:

> *The animistic proclivity to perceive the angular shape of a boulder (while shadows shift across its surface) as a sort of meaningful gesture, or to enter into felt conversations with clouds and owls – all this could be brushed aside as imaginary distortion or hallucinatory fantasy if such active participation were not the very structure of perception, if the creative interplay of the senses in the things they encounter was not our sole way of linking ourselves to those things and letting the things weave into our experience. Direct, pre-reflective perception is inherently synaesthetic, participatory, and animistic, disclosing the things and elements that surround us not as inert objects but as expressive subjects, entities, powers, and potencies.*[1]

What does this mean? It means that through our direct sensual experience of the world we can commune with the subjective nature of all nature and the world. Speaking with a tree or a stone does not require the development of any "psychic" or transpersonal abilities. The experience is transpersonal however, in the sense that it goes out beyond ourselves as a bridge to the rest of the subjective community of life before us.

Sitting at a stream and hearing the gurgle of its water, and the way it falls over rocks is an excellent example of this. We say that nature cannot speak, but I think that we simply are too anthropocentric to realize it has been speaking to us our entire lives! What else is the sound of the river if not the way in which it expresses itself through its own presence? The way a person speaks, the way they hold themselves, dress themselves, the contours of their face – all of these things contribute to their presence. In the same way, the way a tree grows, the shape of its branches, and texture of its bark are all ways in which the tree expresses its presence. The outward appearance is an expression of interior way of being in the world.

When we can experience the presence of nature, it is easy to understand that all things are subjects, not "inert objects". Suddenly walking through the woods is a meeting of the subjective nature of the forest with our own subjective presence. Everything becomes a dance and a dialogue. Our perceptual *participation* with the world opens us to this exchange.

If we go out into nature expecting to hear the booming voices of the trees resonating within our head, we will be sorely disappointed. When we hear nature literally speak to us, it is our own psyche formulating the experience into a verbal exchange. This is alright though; this is part of the synaesthetic experience. Humans are verbal creatures, and it is through this mode that we are most capable of understanding communication. What needs to be understood though is that these words are not the words of nature, they are our own. They are a response to a pre-reflective, pre-verbal sense-based experience of subjective participation.

There is a danger in this though. As self-reflective beings with egos we have the capacity to create messages and make things up. The ego loves to do this as a way of turning even the transpersonal (and thus trans-egoic) experience into something which serves itself. Speaking with nature, like any transpersonal activity comes with this risk, and that it is why it is important to develop the skill of discrepancy, between the actual nature of our experience, and the things the ego wants to fabricate in order to reinforce itself. Contemplative practices, such as sitting meditation, are a great way of observing the mind and learning its strategies, so we might catch ourselves in the process of deluding our experience, and allowing the ego to run the show, blocking true communication with the other-than-human world.

An Experiential Exercise

Go out into nature, and wander until you come across something which calls your attention, and seems to draw you in. Bring an offering with you, it might be something physical like an offering of herbs, or it may be that you are going to sing to it. It might be a tree, a boulder, a stream, a blade of grass, or a cloud. Consider that call an invitation for connection.

Make your offering now, and give your attention to this presence. What is your sense experience of it? Be with that without the need to place words on it. Move into that presence, the felt-sensation of it (not the story you tell yourself about it, but the actual emotional and bodily experience of it). Now talk to it. Try speaking out loud. You don't really *have* to; nature doesn't understand human languages anyway, and it's your presence that communicates with it – but try it out. Introduce yourself. What do you want to communicate to it? Perhaps tell it "your story".

Now open yourself up to this presence. Feel it. What is it communicating back? There does not need to be words. You may not know how to translate what you feel into words yet. As Abram notes, this is a pre-reflective experience, and there is no rush to make it verbal. If there are no words attached to it, no intellectual understanding of what has been communicated, that is perfectly acceptable. Sit with it for a while; maybe there is no need for intellectual understanding, or maybe it will come in time. Honor this new friendship. You may not experience anything the first time you try this, but keep at it. We are used to immediately labeling and creating stories about our experience. We are so engendered in our self-reflective abilities that the pre-reflective (or perhaps even *trans*-reflective) experience can feel foreign and difficult to us.

Endnotes

1 Abram, David. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996. p. 130

Further Reading

for *Presence*

Plotkin, Bill. *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2003. Chapter 8

Abram, David. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.

Chapter Seventeen

Myth Work IV:

The Coming of the Milesians

Translated by Tom P. Cross and Clark Harris Slover

After the death of Mil, as we have said, Emer Donn and Eremon, his two sons, took rule and chief government of Spain between themselves.

There was a father's brother of Mil, Ith son of Bregan, with them; he was expert and accomplished in knowledge and in learning. Once when Ith, of a clear winter's evening was on top of Bregan's Tower, contemplating and looking over the four quarters of the world, it seemed to him that he saw a shadow and a likeness of a land and lofty island far away from him Me went back to his brethren, and told them what he had seen; and said that he was mindful and desirous of going to see the land the had appeared to him. Breg son of Bregan said that it was no land he had seen but clouds of heaven, and he was hindering Ith from going on that expedition. Ith did not consent to stay, however.

Then Ith brought his ship on the sea, and came himself with his son Lugaid son of Ith, and others of his people in it. They sailed toward Ireland, and their adventures on sea are not related, save only that they took harbor in Bentracht of Mag Itha. The neighbors went to the shore to interview them, and each of them told news to the other in the Irish language. Ith asked them the name of the land to which he had come, and who was in authority over it. "Inis Elga," they said; "Mac Cuill, Mac Cecht, and Mac Greine are the names of its kings".

It happened in that day that there were many chieftains and nobles o Ireland in Ailech Neid, making peace between Mac Cuill and his brethren; for they said that he had an excess of the goods of Fiachna son of Delbaeth, who had died previously. When Ith heard that, he went with his son and with two-thirds of his people to Ailech. The kings welcomed him when he reached the assembly, and after he was a while among them, they told him the matter about which they were in opposition and contention between them. And he said to them:

"Do just righteousness. It is fitting for you to maintain a good brotherhood. It is right for you to have a good disposition. Good is the land and the patrimony you inhabit; plenteous her harvest, her honey, her fish, her wheat, and her other grain. Moderate her heat and her cold. All that is sufficient for you is in her." Then he took farewell of them and went to his ship. The nobles plotted to kill him, in jealousy for Ireland, and for the testimony of praise he gave to their island; and they sent a great number to follow him, so that he was wounded to death in Mag Itha, and from him the plain took its name. He reached his ship wounded and bleeding, by the valor and bravery of his people; and he died with them in his ship on the sea.

Then they reached Spain and showed the body of Ith to his brethren, and they were anguished and sorrowful at his dying thus. Then the sons of Mil and the posterity of Gaedel in general thought it was fitting and proper for them to go and avenge their brother on the Tuatha De Danann. They decided on this at last: they collected their warriors and their men of valor from every place where they were, through the lands and the districts, until they were in one place in Brigantia, numerous and fully assembled. Then the sons of Mil, with their brethern and kinsmen, and their people in general, brought their ships on the sea to go to Ireland to avenge their bad welcome on the Tuatha De Dannann. Three score and five ships was the number of the expedition; forty chiefs the number of their leaders, with Donn son of Mil at their head. These are the names of their chiefs.

Emer Donn ,Eremon,Eber Finn, Ir, Amergin, Colptha, Airech Febra, Erannan, Muimne, Luigne, Laigne, Palap, Er. Orba, Feron, Fergin, Eber son if Ir, Brega, Cuala, Cooley, Blad, Fuad, Buirthemne, Eblinne, Nar, Lugaid, Lui, Bile, Buas, Bres, Buaigne, Fulman, Mantan, Caicer, Suirge, En, Un, Etan, Sobairce, Sedga, Goisten.

To commemorate the names of those chiefs and leaders, this was said; Flann Mainistrech (Poet died A.D.1056) composed it:

The chiefs of the voyage over the sea
By which the sons of Mil came,
I have in recollection during my life,
Their names without lie.
Donn Eremon, noble Emer,
Ir, Amergin without [partiality,
Colptha, Airech, Febra the keen,
Erannan, Muimme fine and smooth.
Luigne, Laigne, Palap the lucky,
Er. Orba Feron, Fergin,
Eber son if Ir. Brega, I shall say,
Cuala, Cualgne, Blad rough and strong.
Fuad and Muirthemne with fame,
Eblinne, Nar, Buas with battle,
Bres, Buaigne, and Fulman.
Mantan, Caicer, slender Suirge,
En, Un and rigid Etan,
Sobairce, Sedga of spears,
And Goisten the champion.
The conquered noble Ireland
Against the Tuatha De of great magic,
In vengeance for Ith of the steeds-
Thirty, ten, and one chieftain.

As for the sons of Mil, they sailed in a great expedition on the sea to Ireland, and did not pause in the course until they saw at a distance the island from the sea. And when they saw Ireland, their warriors made a contention of rowing and sailing to their utmost in their eagerness and

anxiety to reach it; so that Ir son of Mil advanced a wave before every other ship by reason of his strength and valor. So Eber Donn son of Mil, the eldest of them, was jealous and said:

It is no good deed
Ir before Ith to proceed—

That is before Lugaid son of Ith, for Lugaid had the name Ith. Then the oar that was in the hand of Ir split, so that Ir fell backwards across the thwart and broke his back there He died on the following night, and they preserved his body so long as they were on the sea, and buried it afterwards in Scellic of Irras Desceirt of Corco Dibne. Sorrowful were Eremon, Eber Finn and Amergin at the death of their brother; and they said, as it were out of one mouth, it was right that Eber Donn should not enjoy the land about which he was envious of his brother, that is of Ir.

The sons of Mil advanced to a landing in Inber Stainge. The Tuatha De Danann did not allow them to come to the land there, for they had not held parley with them. By their druidry they caused it to appear to the sons of Mil that the region was no country or island, territory or land at all, in front of them. They encircled Ireland three times, till at last they took the harbor at Inber Scene; a Thursday as regards the day of the week, on the day before the first of May, the seventeenth day of the moon; the Year of the World 3500.

Then they came at the end of three days thereafter to Sliab Mis. Banba met them in Sliab Mis, with the hosts of druidry and cunning. Amergin asked her name. " Banba," said she, "and it is from my name that Banba is given as a name for this country." And she asked a petition from them, that her name should remain always on the island. That was granted to her.

Then they had converse with Fodla in Eblinne, and the poet Amergin asked her name of her in like manner. "Fodla," said she, "and from me is the land named." And she prayed that her name might remain on it, and it was granted to her as she requested. They held converse with Eriu in Usnech of Mide. She said to them, "Warriors," said she, "welcome to you. It is long since your coming is prophesied. Yours will be the island forever. There is not better island in the world. No race will be more perfect than your race."

"Good is that," said Amergin,

"Not to her do we give thanks for it," said Donn, "but to our gods and to our power."

"It is naught to thee," said Eriu; "thou shat have no gain of this island nor will thy children. A gift to me, O sons of Mil and the children of Bregan, that my name may be upon this island!"

"It will be its chief name for ever," said Amergin, "namely Eriu(Erin)."

The Gaedels went to Tara. No Drum Cain was its name at that time among the Tuatha De Danann, Liathdruim was its name among the Fir Bolg. There were there kings before them in Laithdruim; namely, Mac Cuill, Mac Cecht and Mac Greine. The sons of Mil demanded a battle or kingship or judgment from them.

They adjudged to the sons of Mil that they should have possession of the island to the end of nine days ,to depart, or to submit, or to prepare for battle. "If my advice were carried out," said Donn son of Mil, "it is a battle it would be." The sons of Mil did not grant the respite they sought to the Tuatha De Danann..

"We give," said the kings, "the judgment of your own poets to you, for if they give a false judgment against us they will die on the spot."

"Give the judgment, Amergin; "said Donn.

"Speak it," said Amergin. "Let the land be left to them till we come again to take it by force." "Whither shall we go?" said Eber Donn.

"Over nine waves," said Amergin; and he said this:

The men you have found are in possession:
Over the nine green-necked waves
Of the sea advance ye:
Unless by your power then be planted,
Quickly let the battle be prepared.
I assign the possession
Of the land ye have found:
If ye love concede this award,
If ye love not concede it not-
It is I that say this to you.

"If it were my counsel that were followed," said Donn son of Mil, "battle it would be." Nevertheless the sons of Mil went by the advice and judgment of Amergin from Liathdruim to Inber Scene, the place where they had left their ships, and passed over nine waves. "Let us trust to the powers," said the druids, " that they may never reach Ireland." With that the druids cast druidic winds after them, so great was the story; so that the storm took them westward in the ocean until they were weary. "A druid's wind is that," said Donn son of Mil. "It is indeed said Amergin, "unless it be higher than the mast; find out for us if it be so." Erannan the youngest son of Mil went up the mast, and said that it was not over them. With that he fell on the planks of the ship from the mast, so that they shattered his limbs.

"A shame to our men of learning is it," said Donn, "not to suppress the druidic wind."

"No shame it shall be," said Amergin, rising up; and he said:

I invoke the land of Ireland.
Much-coursed be the fertile sea,
Fertile be the fruit-strewn mountain,
Fruit-strewn be the showery wood,
Showery be the river of water-falls,
Of water-falls be the lake of deep pools,
Deep pooled be the hill-top well,

A well of the tribes be the assembly,
An assembly of the kings be Tara,
Tara be the hill of the tribes,
The tribes of the sons of Mil,
Of mil be the ships the barks,
Let the lofty bark be Ireland,
Lofty Ireland Darkly sung,
An incantation of great cunning;
The great cunning of the wives of Bres,
The wives of Bres of Buaigne;
The great lady Ireland,
Eremon hath conquered her,
Ir, Eber have invoked for her.
I invoke the land of Ireland.

Immediately a tranquil calm came to them on the sea. Said Donn, "I will put under the edge of spears and swords the warriors that are in the land now, only let me land." The wind increased on them thereupon, so that it separated from them the ship in which was Donn; and he was drowned at the Dumacha. Twenty-four warriors of valor, twelve women, and four mercenaries, with their folk are the number that were drowned with Donn in that ship. After that Donn was buried in the Dumacha; so that from him "Tech Duin" is called, and there is his own gravemound and the gravemound of everyone who was drowned of the chieftains of his people with him, in that place. Now Dil daughter of Mil, Eremon buried her, " for the love he had for her, so that he said in putting a sod on her, " This is a sod on a "dear one" (dil)"said he. These are the chieftains who were drowned with Donn at that time: Bile son of Brige, Airech Febra, Buss, Bres, and Buagne. Ir was buried in Scellic of Irras, as we have said above, Erannan died in the creek after going to contemplate the wind, and after breaking his bones on the deck. Eight chieftains were their losses among their nobles up to then.

In the night in which the sons of Mil came to Ireland was the burst of Loch Luigdech over the land in West Munster. When Lugaid son of Ith was bathing in the lake and Fial daughter of Mil his wife was bathing in the river that flows out of the lake, Lugaid went to the place where was the woman, he being naked; and when he looked on him thus she died of shame at once, and from her is named the river with its creek. Downcast was Lugaid after the woman's death, so that he said:

Sit we here over the strand,
Stormy the cold;
Chattering in my teeth,—a great tragedy
Is the tragedy that has reached me.
I tell you a woman has died
Whom fame magnifies'
Fial her name, from a warrior's nakedness
Upon the clean gravel.
A great death is the death that has reached me,
Harshly prostrated me;
The nakedness of her husband, she looked upon him

Who rested here.

Six woman of their nobles were their losses on the sea and land from their setting out from Spain till then. These are their names; Buan wife of Bile; Dil wife of Donn; Scene, he woman-satirist, wife of Amergin White-Knee (she died with them on the sea while they were coming to Ireland; so that Amergin said, "The harbor where we land, the name of Scene will be on it". That was true, for from her is named Inber Scene); Fial wife of Lugaid son of Ith; the wife of Ir and the wife of Muirthemne son of Bregan, were the other two.

When the sons of Mil reached the land in the creek we have mentioned, and when they had buried the troop of their nobles who had died of them, Eremon and Eber Finn divided the fleet with their chieftains and servants in two between them. After that Eremon sailed with thirty ships, keeping Ireland on his left hand, and he landed in Inber Colptha. These are the chieftains that were with him: Eber son if Ir, Amergin the poet, Palap, Muimne,Luigne, laigne, Brega, Muirthemne, Fuad, Cualgne, Colptha, Goisten, Sedga, Suirge, and Sobairce. The three last were champions. These are the slaves that were with Eremon: Aidne, Ai, Asal, Mide, Cuib, Cera, Ser, Slan, Ligen, Dul, Trega, Line.

On putting his right foot on the shore at Inber Colptha, it was then Amergin spoke this rhapsody:

I am a wind on the sea
I am a wave of the ocean
I am the roar of the sea,
I am a powerful ox,
I am a hawk on a cliff,
I am a dewdrop in the sunshine,
I am a boar for valor,
I am a salmon in pools,
I am a lake in a plain,
I am the strength of art,
I am a spear with spoils that wages battle,
I am a man that shapes fire for a head.
Who clears the stone-place of the mountain?
What the place in which the setting of the sun lies?
Who has sought peace without fear seven times?
Who names the waterfalls?
Who brings his cattle from the house of Tethra?
What person, what god Forms weapons in a fort?
In a fort that nourishes satirists,
Chants a petition, divides the Ogam letters,
Separates a fleet, has sung praises?
A wise satirist.

He sang afterwards to increase fish in the creeks:

Fishful sea-
Fertile land-

Burst of fish-
Fish under wave-
With courses of birds—
Rough Sea-
A white wall—
With hundreds of salmon-
Broad Whale-
A port song-
A burst of fish.

As for Eber Finn son of Mil, he stayed in the south with thirty ships with him, until they came in the hosts of the battles that were fought between them and the Tuatha De Danann. These are the chieftains that were with Eber; Lugaid son of Ith, Er. Orba, Feron, Fegana the four sons of Eber, Cuala, Blad, Ebleo, Nar, En, Un Etan, Caicher, Mantan, Fulman. The six last,-En, Un, etc. Were champions. These are the slaves that were with him; Adar, Aigne, Deist, Deala, Cliu, Morba, Fea, Liffe, Femen, Feara, Meda, and Obla.

When the sons of Mil reached their landing-place they made no delay until they reached Sliab Mis; and the battle of Sliab Mis was fought between them and the Tuatha De Danann, and the victory was with the sons of Mil. Many of the Tuatha De Dannan were killed in that battle. It is there that Fas wife of Un son of Uicce fell, from whom is named Glen Faise. Scota wife of Mil fell in the same valley; from her is named " Scota's Grave", between Sliab Mis and the sea. The sons of Mil went afterwards to Tailltiu, and another battle was fought between them and the Tuatha De Danann there. Vehemently and whole-heatedly was it fought, for they were from morning to evening contending, bonehewing , and mutilating one another; till the three kings and the three queens of Ireland fell there- Mac Cecht by Eremon, Mac Cuill by Eber Finn, Mac Greine by Amergin, Eriu by Suyirge, Banba by Caicer, and Fodla by Etan. Those were the deaths of their chiefs and princes. After that the Tuatha De Danann were routed to the sea and the sons of Mil and their host were a long time following the rout. There fell, however two noble chiefs of the people of the sons of Mil in inflicting the rout, namely, Fuad in Sliab Fuait, and Cualgne in Sliab Cualgne, together with other warriors besides, who fell together on both sides. When the Tuatha De Danann were crushed and expelled in the battles that were fought between them, the sons of Mil took the lordship of Ireland.

After that there arose a contention between the sons of Mil about the kingship, that is between Eremon and Eber, so that Amergin was brought to make peace between them. He said that the inheritance of the eldest, of Donn, should go to the youngest, to Eremon, and his inheritance to Eber after him; Eber did not accept that, but insisted on dividing Ireland. Eremon agreed to do so. Accordingly Ireland was divided in two between them, the northern half to Eremon, from Srub Brain to the Boyne, the southern half to Eber, from the Boyne to Tonn Clidna. There were five chieftains in the division of each of them. With Eremon first, Amergin, Sedga, Goisten, Suirge, and Sobairce. Now in that year these forts were dug by Eremon and his people: Rath Beothaig, above the Nore in Argat Ros; Rath Oinn, in the territory of Cula, by Eremon; the Causeway of Inber Mor, in the territory of Ui Enechglais, by Amergin; the building of Dun Nair, in Sliab Modoirn, by Goisten; the building of Dun Delginnse, in the territory of Cuala, by Sedga; the building of his fort by Sobairce in Morbolg of Dal Riada; the building of Dun Edar by Suirge. These are the forts built by Eber and these the chieftains that were with him: Etan,

Un, Mantan, Fulman, and Caicer were his five chieftains. Rath Uaman, in Leinster, was dug by Eber; Rath Arda Suird by Etan son of Uicce; the building of Carrig Blaraige by Mantan; the building of Carrig Fethnaide by Un son of Uicce; the building of Dun Ardinne by Caicer; the building of Rath Riogbard, in Muiresc,by Fulman.

So that for the commemoration of certain of the aforesaid matters this was said:

Expeditions of the sons of Mil over sea
From Spain of clear ships,
They took , it is no deed of falsehood,
The battle-plain of Ireland in one day.

This is the tale that they went
On sea, With multitude of wealth and people,
To a brave show God brought them,
With sixty-five choice vessels.

They landed at the noble creek
Which is called the White Rampart;
It was a cause of sickness, and attempt without failure,
From the sight of the warrior Lugaid.

From thence it is from that out
The creek of Fail of generous bands;
From the day she died in white Banba—
Fial daughter of Mil of Spain.

At the end of three days, brilliant preparation,
The Tuatha De fought
The battle of Sliab Mis, —glory that was not failure,
Against the great sons of Mil.

They won, a saying without reproach,
The battle against fair-headed Banba,
Where died Fas woven in verse,
With the very fair daughter of Pharaoh.

Before the end of a year, it was lasting fame,
Among the chieftains of the heavy hosts,
Into twice six divisions, a pleasant course,
They afterwards divided Ireland.

Over the north side a progress without sorrow,
Eremon was taken as high prince;
From Srub Brain, which verses adorn,
Every tribe to the Boyne.

These are the five guardians of control
Whom he accepted to accompany him;
Amergin, Sedga also, Goisten, Sobairce,
Suirge.

Eber, son of Mil grace-abounding,
takes the southern half,
From the eternal Boyne, choice the share,
To the wave of the daughter of Genann.

These are the five, with hundreds of exploits,
The chiefs who were subordinate to him;
Etan, and Un of joyous rule,
Mantan, Fulman, and Caicer.

In this same year
The royal forts were dug,
By the sons of Mil,—honor of pledges,
After the full division of Ireland's island.

Rath Oinn, Rath Beothaig here,
By Eremon in Argat Ros;
In Sliab Mis, after a series of omens,
The building of Dun Nair by Goisten.

Suirge wide-extended, who displayed valor,
Built the high Dun Edar;
And the sounding, glorious achievement,
Of his fort by Sobairce.

By Eber of bright valor, was dug
Rath Uaman in the plain of Leinster;
Rath Arda Suird, it enriched him,
Was dug by Etan son of Uicce.

Rath Carraig Fetha thus,
Was made by Un son of Uicce;
And by Mantan,—glorious deed,
The founding of Carrig Blaraige.

Rath Rigbard in good Muiresc,
Very keen Fulman built it;
Caicer of battles, a pleasant fulfilment,
Took Dun Inne in the west of Ireland.

These are their deeds of valor,
Of the clear, glorious, great royal host;

It was a great achievement, after battle , without stain;
Theirs was every profit, every expedition.

Of the adventures of the Gaedels from the time when they went from Scythia till they took Ireland and the division of Ireland between them, with their chieftains, the poet Roigne Roscadach son of Ugaine Mor said to Mal son of Ugaine his brother, when Mal questioned him: "Sing thy description in the great knowledge of Ireland, O Roigne," Roigne answered him and said:

O noble son of Ugaine,
How does one arrive at knowledge of Ireland,
The conquest of its company?
Before they overflowed Scythia
They reached the host-king of Shinar;

They approached Egypt,
Where Cingeris was extinguished,
So that a great troop was destroyed,
Who died in the Red Sea.

They flowed through a space very faithful,
With Pharaoh fought;
Niul contracts with Scota,
The conception of our fathers.

They took the name "Gaedels,"
The name "Scots" spreads,
The fair daughter of Pharaoh.

They overspread lands,
Burst into Scythia,
Determined long combat—
The Children of Nel and Noenbal.

Golam was a young lord,
Who slew the son of Neman,
Escaped to Egypt,
Where was Nectanebus.

Pharaoh was welcoming
To Golam; gave
A marriage Nectanebus,
Scota was at cot's head;

A name was changed from them.
They advanced past Africa,
Good was the man under whom they trembled;

Fenius Farsad, the keen,
Well he spread for us a lasting name.

They approached Spain,
Where was born a numerous progeny,
Donn, Airech, Amergin,
Eber, Ir, Colptha himself,

Eremon, Erannan,
The eight sons of Golam.
Mil's renown came upon them,
The sons of Mil wealthy;

Their scholars resolved,
Divided ships,
The Men returned from the burial of Fial.
They divided Ireland,
In twice six, an inheritance of chieftains.

Seek the truth of every law,
Relate sharply the inquiry, O Son!

After Eremon and Eber had divided the chieftains, they had two distinguished artists who had come into their company from the east, namely, a poet and a harper. Cir son of Cis was the poet, Cennfinn the harper. They cast a lot on them to know which of them should be with each of them; so that, through the decision of the lot, the harper went southward to Eber and thence melody of music and harmony followed in the Southern Half of Ireland. The poet went to Eremon, and knowledge of poetry and song followed him in the North ever after. To commemorate this it was said:

The two sons of Mil, famous in dignity,
Took Ireland and Britain;
With them there followed hither
A gentle poet and a harper.

Cior son of Cis, the bright poet,
The name of the harper Cennfin;
With the sons of Mil, of bright fame,
The harper sounded his harp.

The princes, with many battles,
Took the kingdom of Ireland;
They did it with brightness, merry the sound,
Eber and Eremon.

They cast a lot swiftly
About the great men of art;

So that there fell to the lot of the southerner
The harper, just and fair.

Melody of music more beautiful than any company
Is from the southward in the south of Ireland;
It was thus it will be to the fortunate Judgment
With the famous seed of Eber.

There fell to the lot of the northerner
The man of learning with great excellence;
Hence the tribes who brought him boast
Knowledge of poetry and learning.

Chapter Eighteen
The Sacred Dreamtime:
Doorways to Eternity
By James Liter

…in the Otherworld all of time exists simultaneously in an eternal present.
-John Carey

In his novel "Ireland", Frank Delaney takes readers on a journey through the history and mythology of Ireland through the eyes of a storyteller and a young boy who is fascinated, not only by the tales of the storyteller, but by the storyteller himself, his knowledge, his art, and his way of life.

In this book, time is ever present in the life of the boy and the storyteller, but also in the history and mythology of Ireland being recounted in the storyteller's tales. Readers experience the worlds of historical and contemporary Ireland simultaneously. While reading the book, the reader listens to the storyteller in a crowded kitchen of a 1950's Irish farmhouse, and in the tale being told, the reader/listener is suddenly on the banks of the Boyne witnessing the construction of Newgrange. At the same time she wonders what will happen next (in both stories).

In that moment there is no distinction between past, present, and future, for it is all happening now: The Sacred Dreamtime.

On a recent trip to Ireland, I had the opportunity to listen to one of the last practicing storytellers in Ireland, Eddie Lenihan. It was a rainy and chilly spring night in Co. Clare, but nestled in a pub around a peat fire, we paid no attention to the cold rain outside. Instead, we visited the fairy trees and sacred wells of the hills of Ireland, while at the same time we were a part of the Irish Diaspora amidst the skyscrapers of New York. We were, at the same time, upon the green slopes of Ireland and upon the asphalt of New York.

The Sacred Dreamtime is inexorably connected to place.

W.B. Yeats said that place is "the only hieroglyphs that cannot be forgotten." All places are within the Sacred Dreamtime, along with their souls, their stories, their memories. When we enter into the Sacred Dreamtime, we go to these places and experience their essence. They open up a vista before us in a dizzying rush of the sacred into our soul, making the soul and story of the past alive in our soul in the present moment. Boundaries vanish in the Sacred Dreamtime.

One of the most mystical and powerful expressions of time is when mythology, history, and place are joined into one massive swirl of soul and story of the Sacred Dreamtime. Experiencing this is a most immanent presence that makes the "then and there alive in the here and now".

Innisfallen is an island in Lough Leane (Lake of Learning) in Co. Kerry in southwest Ireland. When the rest of Europe was in the Dark Ages, Ireland's spiritual and intellectual centers were flourishing, and Innisfallen was one of the more renowned of these centers. In the seventh century, St. Finian the Leper established a monastery on the island, which continued a scholarly and spiritual tradition there for approximately seven hundred years. The Annals of Innisfallen, one of the oldest histories of Ireland, were compiled on Innisfallen. I suspect

that the spiritual and scholarly tradition of this island goes even farther back than St. Finian to the time of the Druids, as is often the case in such places.

I remember the ferry ride across the Lake of Learning as we headed toward Innisfallen. From a distance, the island looks much the same as the other islands on the lake, albeit larger. The moment I stepped from the boat and placed my foot on the soil of Innisfallen however, I knew that I was on sacred ground. All of the history and legends surrounding the island merged with the sound of the lapping waters on the shore, the mountains in the distance, the breeze coming off of the lake. In that second my awareness and consciousness were completely in the Sacred Dreamtime. This was a powerful encounter with the Sacred Dreamtime. All aspects of it, history, myth, and place all merged into one. Truly, Innisfallen is a "hieroglyph that cannot be forgotten." As I wandered about the abbey and university ruins, and through the lush vegetation, the Sacred Dreamtime was ever present. I experienced hours on the island, when in reality I was only there for thirty minutes. Time moves differently in the Sacred Dreamtime.

The Sacred Dreamtime does not move in a linear progression. It is not a progression at all. It is only now. Within this moment are all things that are. Within this second resides everything that is, everything that will be and everything that was. There is nothing that has been or will be. They are. Now. Within this moment, are all universals, all archetypes. To be in the now is to enter the otherworld, to touch the sacred; to wakefully experience the Sacred Dreamtime.

It is ironic that something that is often considered linear by the modern mind is represented by a circle a clock. In this irony though is a very simple lesson.

The ancient Celts had a very different concept of time. The Celtic High Days illustrate their cyclical perception of time. There were no clocks to force obedient punctuality, there were only the sun and moon and seasons with which to mark the passage of time. Time did not pass with the precise ticking of the second hand, but rather the seasons merged slowly into one another, as in this excerpt from my poem "Behold, the Mourning Sky Pales":

I call to her through twilights shadow
Echoes of silence; illusions of sight
As the maiden with the old crone merges

Celtic mythology concerns itself with the structure of time in many ways. One of the most obvious is the exposition of time within the tale, especially in connection to the otherworld. Time in the otherworld is almost always shown to be of a completely different nature than that of the ordinary world. Heroes spend what to them is a brief time in the otherworld, only to return to the ordinary world to find that several years have passed, indeed sometimes even several hundreds of years.

In the Sacred Dreamtime all things are now. In mythology the stories become real again, for as Patricia Monaghan says: "A story makes then and there here and now." This is also true of the ancestors and their wisdom. History is culminated in the Sacred Dreamtime where all things are. The then and there is available to us in the Sacred Dreamtime, as is the wisdom of the ancestors.

A few months ago, I spent a day at Lough Gur, just south of Limerick. Mary Carberry, in her book "The Farm by Lough Gur", describes the area: "…lying in summer sunshine like a bright mirror, in which are reflected blue sky, bare hills, precipitous grey rocks and green pastures dotted with cattle and sheep; then a small white house, half hiding the farm buildings

behind it. Lough Gur with its ruined castles; Knockadoon and Knockfennel with their caves and ancient forts; the stonecircles, the cromlechs and gowlauns were enchanting places…"

She goes on to describe some of the myths surrounding Lough Gur: "…"Lough Gur has been called the Enchanted Lake; some say that in ancient days there was a city where the lake is now, before an earthquake threw up the hills and filled the hollow with water so that the city was submerged. The hills round Gur are bare of trees, but once they were covered with forest. Great giants, who were among Ireland's first people, hunted in the woods. On BailenaCailleach one of these giants lies buried in a stone coffin with a long gold sword beside him. Old people who lived on the shore believed that the giants built the stone circles which stand near the lake, for who but giants could move such great stones?"

Lough Gur is also said to have been the home of the Goddess Aine, which means brightness. The hill Cnoc Aine (Knockainey), which is on the shore of the lake was named after her. One of her legends says that she dressed herself as a beggar and went to beg from a poor family who showed her kindness. In return, they found several new sheep in their pastures, and their fate improved ever afterward – until they sold the sheep.

When I visited Lough Gur, I had a very powerful encounter with the Sacred Dreamtime. As I wandered through the enchanting "…ancient forts; the stonecircles, the cromlechs and gowlauns…" around the lake, I had a constant feeling of having been there before. This was not simply deja vú, but I had actually been there before, in the nonordinary reality of a shamanic journey a few weeks prior. In that nonordinary reality, I was given to know that the wisdom of my ancestors was to be found among the visions of that journey. One after the other, things I had seen on that journey appeared before me in my physical journey at Lough Gur.

I learned much about myself and about my ancestors at Lough Gur because I allowed the boundaries of mythology, history, place, and levels of reality to dissolve. I was engulfed in the Sacred Dreamtime, which encompasses ordinary and nonordinary reality.

The convergence of mythology, history, and place is not limited to Celtic lands or other ancient and mysterious places. Every place has its own history and its own mythology. Every place has a story to tell and it is waiting for us to open ourselves to it so it can tell us.

Another way that time is addressed in mythology is through the use of archetypes of the soul journey. The story of the soul journey is shown symbolically in mythology, illustrating the archetypes again and again in different guises. These archetypes and the soul journey itself are in no way limited to the tales of mythology, but rather they are living universal entities that know no boundaries of space or time. They are constantly returning to visit all of humanity throughout all time. The same archetypes that confront the heroes of mythology are the same that confront us today, and the same that confronted our ancestors hundreds or thousands of years ago. These universal archetypes are timeless and we can find and experience them in the Sacred Dreamtime. We can learn of their secrets, we can be guided by them as we move on our own soul journey.

Samhain celebrates this vanishing of boundaries and presents us with a time between times. The old year has ended at sundown, but the new year will not begin until sunrise. The still and focused deepness of Samhain brings the Sacred Dreamtime alive and our souls experience it through our senses. We leave the ordinary behind, embrace the mysterious, and live in the moment of eternity in all places, at all times, with all.

What is a moment? Is it two seconds? Two days? Six hundred years? All that is, is now, and can be experienced now. Instead of dreading the future or regretting the past, we can enter into the Sacred Dreamtime and experience all.

It is in the Sacred Dreamtime that we can experience the spirit, where we can engage our souls and our souls can engage this world. The gifts of entering the Sacred Dreamtime are many. It is an ecstatic spiritual experience where we gain insights into the nature of our souls and the sacred; it is where we truly become one with spirit, and where our longing is at last answered with the melody of the Oran Mór.

The Sacred Dreamtime can be a gateway to insights and truths otherwise difficult to come by. It can aid us on our soul journey. In the stillness of the Sacred Dreamtime, we can hear the whisper of the spirit and soul. These things certainly are worthwhile, but I feel the treasures within the Sacred Dreamtime are much greater.

The Sacred Dreamtime is ultimately a place of transformation. When we enter the Sacred Dreamtime, we are transformed. Within the Sacred Dreamtime is spirit and soul, waiting to welcome us and whisper to us their stories, their longing to be one with us.

Each individual is a manifestation of the Sacred Dreamtime; the culmination of their story thus far, of their history. As we move through our lives, we make choices and decisions. It is obvious that each of these decisions have an effect on our lives, but not so apparent is the effect it has on our psyches, our egos, and our souls. Most choices and decisions are made by the ego, without consulting the spirit or the soul. It is apparent that decisions made only by ego can hardly be conducive to our spiritual journey.

Today's society is also a manifestation of the Sacred Dreamtime; the culmination of history, and is also the culmination of our collective choices and decisions. Each of our choices and decisions has an effect on those around us, who also are making decisions, creating a ripple effect. As most of these decisions are made by the ego, conflict within society is inevitable. It is when we make our decisions and choices from within the Sacred Dreamtime that we begin to be transformed. When we are transformed, our actions stemming from the Sacred Dreamtime, the effects on our lives and on the lives of those around us is immediately apparent.

The ancient Druids are known to have been peacemakers between armies, and I can certainly imagine that these peacemaking efforts were done from within a foundation of the Sacred Dreamtime.

Exercise

There are many doorways to the Sacred Dreamtime, but one that is nearly always effective is the doorway of the senses. It is ironic that the senses are also the very things that often prevent us from entering the Sacred Dreamtime with distractions of noise, vision, or smells. It is by learning to use the senses differently that we can enter the Sacred Dreamtime. We must train our senses to be all-encompassing, even as the Sacred Dreamtime is all-encompassing.

Normally, our minds focus on the strongest sensation it is experiencing: the loudest sound, the brightest color, the strongest scent. This leads our senses to be exclusive, excluding all other sensations for the sake of experiencing the strongest. By practicing two exercises, we can train the senses to be all inclusive, mirroring time, mirroring the sacred.

- The first is this: experience all sensory inputs to one of your senses simultaneously. Do not allow your mind to focus on any one stimulus. Let your thoughts float and soar experiencing all input as one. For example, attempt to hear all sounds at once. Do not allow your sense of hearing to "latch onto" any one sound, but receive all sound as one

sound. This is sometimes difficult and requires concentration, but even if you can do this only for a space of one or two seconds, the results are great.

- The second practice is to deeply experience one sensation - this is the exact opposite of the preceding exercise. For example, focus your hearing on one sound and experience all nuances of that sound. Let the sound enter through your hearing and expand to fill your entire being. Exclude all other sounds. This is very similar to shamanic drum work and can be very rewarding.

- Do one of these exercises three times a day for ten days. Although being in nature is ideal, I have done these exercises in busy railway stations and other "busy" places. There is no need to do it for hours. Try for a few minutes. If you find yourself being distracted, relax and try again. You will find that it becomes easier with practice.

- On at least three days, do this exercise for an extended time (30-60 minutes) in a place that calls to you. Again, a wild place in nature is preferred, but not required.

- After the exercise write a journal entry describing your emotions, thoughts, and/or visions you experienced before, during and after the exercises. For the exercises done in a certain place, include any insights or visions you had of the story and soul of that place.

Chapter Nineteen
Òran Mòr:
Amhairghin and the Great Song

In many traditions the universe, creation, and music or sound are all intimately linked. In the Christian tradition God spoke the earth into creation. As the Book of John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John I:I). In the Hindu tradition they talk about *Nada Brahma*, "the universe is sound". Similarly in the Scottish and Irish traditions we find the concept of the Òran Mòr or Amhrán Mór, which translates to "great song".

It is interesting to note, that we have no explicit trace of a Celtic creation myth, particularly in Ireland where a great many myths were preserved. The Òran Mòr however seems to be a trace of this, a primal orientation to perceiving the world and creation as a song, or as coming out of a song. The world is infused with this divine music. As I said there is no *explicit* creation myth amongst the Celts. However the *Lebor Gabala Erenn*, the Book of the Taking of Ireland, seems to establish something of a cosmology. Could it perhaps also contain the keys to a Celtic understanding of cosmogenesis, the creation of the world?

The final invasion of Ireland as told in this text is by the Milesians, who are in fact the Gael. With them is the poet Amhairghin. When they land in Ireland they make a deal with the Tuatha Dé Danann to leave the island, sail out past the ninth wave (in other words to go back out to sea, and enter the Otherworld). They could then try to land again and take Ireland. Amhairghin agrees to this, and they sail off.

Here, things get interesting, as Amhairghin sings two very famous poems, whith some rather explicit themes of cosmogenesis. He first sings:

> I invoke the land of Ireland.
> Much-coursed be the fertile sea,
> Fertile be the fruit-strewn mountain,
> Fruit-strewn be the showery wood,
> Showery be the river of water-falls,
> Of water-falls be the lake of deep pools,
> Deep pooled be the hill-top well,
> A well of the tribes be the assembly,
> An assembly of the kings be Tara,
> Tara be the hill of the tribes,
> The tribes of the sons of Mil,
> Of Mil be the ships the barks,
> Let the lofty bark be Ireland,
> Lofty Ireland Darkly sung,
> An incantation of great cunning;
> The great cunning of the wives of Bres,
> The wives of Bres of Buaigne;
> The great lady Ireland,
> Eremon hath conquered her,

Ir, Eber have invoked for her.
I invoke the land of Ireland.[1]

It is as if he is creating the land itself through this invocation. In a sense he is mortalizing the land, which up until this point has been the domain of various Otherworldly races. Amhairghin sang this song in order to calm the sea, which was stopping them from landing. They could not land to take Ireland until it was invoked. As Amhairghin steps on the shore (importantly, this occurs on the eve of Bealtaine), he sings another poem:

I am a wind across the sea
I am a flood across the plain
I am the roar of the tides
I am a stag of seven (pair) tines
I am a dewdrop let fall by the sun
I am the fierceness of boars
I am a hawk, my nest on a cliff
I am a height of poetry (magical skill)
I am the most beautiful among flowers
I am the salmon of wisdom
Who (but I) is both the tree and the lightning strikes it
Who is the dark secret of the dolmen not yet hewn
I am the queen of every hive
I am the fire on every hill
I am the shield over every head
I am the spear of battle
I am the ninth wave of eternal return
I am the grave of every vain hope
Who knows the path of the sun, the periods of the moon
Who gathers the divisions, enthralls the sea,sets in order the mountains. the rivers, the peoples.[2]

This has long been interpreted simply as a "boast" by a skilled poet and magician. However, a cross-cultural look at the Bhagavad-G+t may illuminate exactly what is taking place here. In this sacred Hindu text Krishna recites a similar chant: "I am the radiant sun among the light-givers…among the stars of night, I am the moon…I am Meru among mountain-peaks…I am the ocean among waters…Of water-beings I am Veruna: Aryaman among the Fathers: I am Death…I am the wind…"[3] As the Rees brothers say of Krishna in *Celtic Heritage*, "He is the cosmic juggler or magician and he is all those appearances through which the true essence of existence manifests itself – the cycle of the year, light, wind, earth, water, the four quarters of space, and so on."[4] They suggest that Amhairghin has a similar role as can be seen from his incantations above; he *is* the unity of things, and so it is through him that their essence becomes expressed.

The common translation of Amhairghin's name is "born of song". I opened this article with a quote from the Gospel of John in the Bible, which said that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John I:I). This makes Amhairghin's name quite interesting, if the translation given is accurate. Amhairghin sang the world into creation, the song was with him, and *he is the song*. This is not to suggest that

Amhairghin's role is cognate to the role of God in Christianity, but to suggest a parallel attitude towards the shaping and creating of the world. This fits in perfectly with the idea of the Òran Mòr. Is this song of Amhairghin an expression of the Òran Mòr – in Irish, the Amhrán Mór – which seems to be entwined with his very name?

I am not suggesting that the Òran Mòr is actually the verbal incantations of Amhairghin, but rather that it is the primal essence of creation, the song which lies at the heart of everything. It is *this* that Amhairghin has access to which allows him to sing the world in creation. In a sense, Amhairghin *is* the song, he is born of it, and so it can infuse the world through him.

This raises an important question about the nature of the Òran Mòr itself. At first glance it may seem that the Òran Mòr is simply a different articulation of the concept of Dana (see *The Spiral of Memory and Belonging* by Frank MacEowen or the articles *Weaving the Soul* and *Soul of the Body, Soul of the World* by Jason Kirkey), this primal "ground of being". The word Dana shares its Indo-European roots with the Danube River, whose name translates as "the waters of heaven". If we imagine Dana as a stream of consciousness enlivening everything, then we might imagine that the Òran Mòr is the sound of that river as it flows. Beneath all forms is this ground of being, the "collective unconscious" as Jung called it, and from this all forms arise.

The Òran Mòr might be understood as the music of consciousness arising as form. There as a mountain, there as a tree, there a stone, and there a person; each form is at its most basic nature made up of this unified consciousness. This arising of forms, the act of the shaping of consciousness itself, is the music of the Òran Mòr. We can see this in the story of Amhairghin, singing the world into creation. Through the power of voice and song he sings the unity of all things and through this, form arises – the cosmos of Ireland comes into being.

An Exercise

This idea of the Celtic creation myth, Amhairghin, and the Òran Mòr may be very interesting, but it doesn't necessarily say much about the nature of the Òran Mòr, or inform our practice in any tangible way. The only way we can really come to understand this topic is through direct experience.

For this exercise, go for a walk. A park, or some place close to nature and away from the hustle and bustle of the city may be best, but anywhere will do. The object of this walk is quite simple in theory, simply tune in and feel the Òran Mòr. Because the Òran Mòr implies sound, start there. Open your senses to the sounds around you. *Feel* them reverberating through you as you hear them as much as possible. Contemplate the nature of sound itself. It has been said that because the universe consists of matter, and matter is condensed energy which is vibrating, and vibration is sound that thus the universe is in fact one great symphony. The simple act of listening can wake us up to this in a very real way.

Now, go through each of the other senses and try to connect with the Òran Mòr this way. This may seem counter-intuitive at first. However, if we consider that the way in which we experience the world is inherently synaesthetic (the blending of two or more senses) then it begins to make more sense. Just as when we read a text we are engaging in a visual activity which results with "hearing" words inside our head, we can also "hear" the sun shining through leaves, the smells carried by the wind, or the taste of wild herbs. Each thing in the world contains the Òran Mòr, can be experienced as song and music. This may be tricky at first, despite the fact that you do it everyday. Really, it is a process of letting go of the thinking mind, and letting sensations flow as they naturally occur, listening as you go.

When you feel comfortable with this part of the exercise, bring it home, back to the body. Tune in to your self, perhaps starting with the sound of your breathing. Tune in, and hear the same primal song that infuses the world reverberating and infusing your own body. In a sense you are constantly singing with and to the entire world.

Endnotes

1. Translation from: http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/ctexts/lebor5.html

2. Ó Tuathail, Seán. *The Excellence of Ancient Word: Druid Rhetoric and Ancient Irish Tales*. 1993. Accessed 4 February 2007. < http://www.imbas.org/articles/excellence_of_the_ancient_word.html>

3. Rees, Alwyn and Brinley. *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales*. Great Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1961. p. 99

4. Rees, p 99

Further Reading

for *The Coming of the Milesians, Dreamtime, & The Òran Mòr*

Rees, Alwyn and Brinley. *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales*. Great Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1961. Chapter 4

MacEowen, Frank. *The Celtic Way of Seeing: Meditations on the Irish Spirit Wheel*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2007. Chapter 1 & 6

MacEowen, Frank. *The Mist-Filled Path: Celtic Wisdom for Exiles, Wanderers, and Seekers*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2003. Chapter 7

Chapter Twenty
Myth Work V:
Tuan mac Carill

1. After Finnen of Moville had come with the Gospel to Ireland, into the territory of the men of Ulster, he went to a wealthy warrior there, who would not let them come to him into the stronghold, but left them fasting there over Sunday. The warrior's faith was not good. Said Finnen to his followers: 'There will come to you a good man, who will comfort you, and who will tell you the history of Ireland from the time that it was first colonised until to-day.'

2. Then on the morrow early in the morning there came to them a venerable cleric, who bade them welcome. 'Come with me to my hermitage,' said he, 'that is meeter for you.' They went with him, and they perform the duties of the Lord's day, both with psalms and preaching and offering. Thereupon Finnen asked him to tell his name. Said he to them: 'Of the men of Ulster am I. Tuan, son of Cairell, son of Muredach Red-neck, am I. I have taken this hermitage, in which thou art, upon the hereditary land of my father. Tuan, son of Starn, son of Sera, son of Partholon's brother, that was my name of yore at first.'

3. Then Finnen asked him about the events of Ireland, to wit, what had happened in it from the time of Partholon, son of Sera. And Finnen said they would not eat with him until he had told them the stories of Ireland. Said Tuan to Finnen: 'It is hard for us not to meditate upon the Word of God which thou hast just told to us.' But Finnen said: 'Permission is granted thee to tell thy own adventures and the story of Ireland to us now.

4. 'Five times, verily,' said he, 'Ireland was taken after the Flood, and it was not taken after the Flood until 312 years had gone. Then Partholon, son of Sera, took it. He had gone upon a voyage with twenty-four couples. The cunning of each of them against the other was not great. They settled in Ireland until there were 5000 of their race. Between two Sundays a mortality came upon them, so that all died, save one man only. For a slaughter is not usual without some one to come out of it to tell the tale. That man am I,' said he.

5. 'Then I was from hill to hill, and from cliff to cliff, guarding myself from wolves, for twenty-two years, during which Ireland was empty. At last old age came upon me, and I was on cliffs and in wastes, and was unable to move about, and I had special eaves for myself. Then Nemed, son of Agnoman, my father's brother, invaded Ireland, and I saw them from the cliffs and kept avoiding them, and I hairy, clawed, withered, grey, naked, wretched, miserable. Then, as I was asleep one night, I saw myself passing into the shape of a stag. In that shape I was, and I young and glad of heart. It was then I spoke these words:

Strengthless to-day' is Senba's son,
From vigour he has been parted,
Not under fair fame with new strength,
Senba's son is an old .

These men that come from the east
With their spears that achieve valour,
I have no strength in foot or hand
To go to avoid them.

Starin, fierce is the man,
I dread Scemel of the white shield,
Andind will not save me, though good and fair,
If it were Beoin, ...

Though Beothach would leave me alive,
Cacher's rough fight is rough,
Britan achieves valour with his spears,
There is a fit of fury on Fergus.

They are coming towards me, 0 gentle Lord,
The offspring of Nemed, Agnoman's son,
Stoutly they are lying in wait for my blood,
To compass my first wounding.

Then there grew upon my head
Two antlers with three score points,
So that I am rough and grey in shape
After my age has changed from feebleness.

7. 'After this, from the time that I was in the shape of a stag, I was the leader of the herds of Ireland, and wherever I went there was a large herd of stags about me. In that way I spent my life during the time of Nemed and his offspring. When Nemed came with his fleet to Ireland, their number was thirty-four barques, thirty in each barque, and the sea cast them astray for the time of a year and a half on the Caspian Sea, and they were drowned and died of hunger and thirst, except four couples only together with Nemed. Thereafter his race increased and had issue until there were 4030 couples. However, these all died.

8. 'Then at last old age came upon me, and I fled from men and wolves. Once as I was in front of my cave — I still remember it - I knew that I was passing from one shape into another. Then I passed into the shape of a wild boar. 'Tis then I said:

A boar am I to-day among herds,
A mighty lord I am with great triumphs,
He has put me in wonderful grief,
The King of all, in many shapes.

In the morning when I was at Dun Bré,
Fighting against old seniors
Fair was my troop across the pooi,
A beautiful host was following us.

My troop, they were swift
Among hosts in revenge,
They would throw my spears alternately
On the warriors of Fál on every side.

When we were in our gathering
Deciding the judgments of Partholon,
Sweet to all was what I said,
Those were the words of true approach.

Sweet was my brilliant judgment
Among the women with beauty,
Stately was my fair chariot,
Sweet was my song across a dark road.

Swift was my step without straying
In battles at the onset,
Fair was my face, there was a day,
Though to-day I am a boar.

9. 'In that shape, he said, I was then truly, and I young and glad of mind. And I was king of the boar-herds of Ireland, and I still went the round of my abode when I used to come into this land of Ulster at the time of my old age and wretchedness; for in the same place I changed into all these shapes. Therefore I always visited that place to await the renewal.

10. 'Thereupon Semion, the son of Stariath, seized this island. From them are the Fir Dornnann, and the Fir Bolg, and the Galiuin; and these inhabited this island for the time that they dwelt in Ireland. Then old age came upon me, and my mind was sad, and I was unable to do all that I used to do before, but was alone in dark caves and in hidden cliffs.

11. 'Then I went to my own dwelling always. I remembered every shape in which I had been before. I fasted my three days as I had always done. I had no strength left. Thereupon I went into the shape of a large hawk. Then my mind was again happy. I was able to do anything. I was eager and lusty. I would fly across Ireland; I would find out everything. 'Tis then I said:

A hawk to-day, a boar yesterday,
Wonderful . . . inconstancy!
Dearer to me every day
God, the friend who has shapen me.

Many are the offspring of Nemed
Without obedience . . . to the certain King,
Few to-day are the race of Sera;
I know not what caused it.

Among herds of boars I was,

Though to-day I am among bird-flocks;
I know what will come of it:
I shall still be in another shape.

Wonderfully has dear God disposed
Me and the children of Nemed;
They at the will of the demon of God,
While, for me, God is my help.

12. 'Beothach, the son of Iarbonel the prophet, seized this island from the races that dwelt in it. From them are the Tuatha Dé and Andé, whose origin the learned do not know, but that it seems likely to them that they came from heaven, on account of their intelligence and for the excellence of their knowledge.

13. 'Then I was for a long time in the shape of that hawk, so that I outlived all those races who had invaded Ireland. However, the sons of Mu took this island by force from the Tuatha Dé Danann. Then I was in the shape of that hawk in which I had been, and was in the hollow of a tree on a river.

14. 'There I fasted for three days and three nights, when sleep fell upon me, and I passed into the shape of a river-salmon there and then. Then God put me into the river so that I was in it. Once more I felt happy and was vigorous and well-fed, and my swimming was good, and I used to escape from every danger and from every snare — to wit, from the hands of fishermen, and from the claws of hawks, and from fishing spears — so that the scars which each one of them left are still on me.

15. 'Once, however, when God, my help, deemed it time, and when the beasts were pursuing me, and every fisherman in every pool knew me, the fisherman of Cairell, the king of that land, caught me and took me with him to Cairell's wife, who had a desire for fish. Indeed I remember it; the man put me on a gridiron and roasted me. And the queen desired me and ate me by herself, so that I was in her womb. Again, I remember the time that I was in her womb, and what each one said to her in the house, and what was done in Ireland during that time. I also remember when speech came to me, as it comes to any man, and I knew all that was being done in Ireland, and I was a seer; and a name was given to me — to wit, Tuan, son of Cairell. Thereupon Patrick came with the faith to Ireland. Then I was of great age; and I was baptized, and alone believed in the King of all things with his elements.'

16. Thereupon they celebrate mass and go into their refectory, Finnen with his followers and Tuan, after he had told them these stories. And there they stay a week conversing together. Every history and every pedigree that is in Ireland, 'tis from Tuan, son of Cairell, the origin of that history is. He had conversed with Patrick before them, and had told him; and he had conversed with Colum Cille, and had prophesied to him in the presence of the people of the land. And Finnen offered him that he should stay with him, but he could not obtain it from him. 'Thy house will be famous till doom,' said Tuan.

Chapter Twenty-One

The House of the Ancestors:

Newgrange and the Cult of the Dead

The folllowing essay is an exploration of Newgrange, a megalithic site in Ireland. It is interdisciplinary in nature in that it uses both archeological evidence and mythology in order to attempt to illuminate the purpose of this site for the people who built it. It is my hope that it will give some insight into the possible attitudes and religious beliefs of the ancestors.

High atop a ridge overlooking the Boyne River, there is one of the most precious treasures of Europe. 200,000 tonnes of stone piled in a high cairn, covering a Stone Age passage tomb of significant proportions. At its entrance lies an enormous boulder, intricately carved with spirals and lozenges, abstract Stone Age art, the meaning of which is obscured. The place has captured the imagination and wonder of humans for over five thousand years. Its makers have vanished into the mists of time, and with them they have taken the secrets of this architectural wonder. We do not even know what they named it. The Celtic people who left their mythological and literary mark on Ireland called it *Sí an Bhrú*. We just simply call it Newgrange.

According to the most accurate Carbon-14 dating methods, Newgrange dates to roughly about 3200 BCE. This situates it as being over a thousand years older than Stonehenge in England and the pyramids of Giza of Egypt. It is not a single site however, but part of a larger complex known collectively as the *Brú na Boinne*, which is situated in a bend in the Boyne River in Co. Meath. Newgrange is just one of three large passage tombs in this complex, the other two being known as Knowth and Dowth. There are thought to be around thirty five smaller passage graves making up this complex, as well as a variety of other monuments of archeological significance, such as standing stones. Several pits and hut sites were also found, indicating that the complex was most likely an important tribal center.

The entrance was discovered by a farmer who owned the land that Newgrange was on, when he was moving some of the stones from the cairn. In 1928 fifty-two of the surrounding kerb stones where uncovered by R.A.S. MacAlister, though work was stopped when the landowner objected. The complete excavation of Newgrange was carried out by Michael J. O'Kelly, principally from 1962 through 1975, funded by the Irish Office of Public Works.

During the initial excavations trenches were dug in order to determine the original ground level. It was in this stage that the entire kerb of 97 stones was exposed, which supported the mound. A layer of quartz and granite stones, which had presumably slumped off from a facade, was also found. There is still debate over whether or not the stones were originally a facade, or if they were on the ground. However a possible point of evidence suggests they were a facade, because where several of the curbstones had fallen forward there was no quartz found beneath them, indicating that they fell at a later period.[1]

The most immediately recognizable of the kerbstones are the ornately carved Kerbstone 1 and 52. Kerbstone 1 is also known as the "entrance stone", because it is situated directly in front of the entrance. It is carved most noticeably with triple and double spiral patterns. Similarly Kerbstone 52 is carved with spirals and lozenges. Many of the other kerbs are also

decorated, but none so elaborately. Curiously some of the other decorated stones are carved on sides which face inward and are not visible.[2] This probably hints to a ritual significance to the art that went beyond the simplicity of decoration.

It is the inner chambers of Newgrange, however, which are truly spectacular. Newgrange was constructed using the corbeling method, which is a dry stone (no mortar involved) method of layering stones in consecutive rings, each layer arching forward so that when the stones came nearly together, a capstone could be placed on top to complete the structure. Stones were layed and often carved with ridges, at such an angle that rain water would slide down off of them, and not enter the chamber. The successfulness of this method is demonstrated by the fact that after over 5000 years, the passage and chambers remain perfectly intact and dry.

The passage and chambers are similar in design to many other sites in Ireland. It is layed out in what is often referred to as a "cruciform" shape; that is a long central passage, with an inner chamber and three small chambers extending off of it. The total length of the passage and chambers is 24 meters long. The excavation of the interior of Newgrange revealed more megalithic art, predominantly lozenge patterns, however the triple spiral motif, similar to the one carved on kerbstone 1 is repeated on the right-hand wall of the inner chamber opposite the passage.

Each chamber within the mound held an oval shaped basin stone, thought to possibly have held cremated remains of the dead. Around 750 fragments of bones were discovered in the chamber, containing a large number of both animal and human bones. The bones of three dogs were also found within the mound, though it is not known if these were connected to the site at all, of if they were strays who got into the chamber only to get stuck inside. The latter is thought most likely. A large phallus shaped stone was also found near the entrance to the passage. Additionally several gold pieces including torcs, chains, and rings were found, as well as a number of beads and pendants, and a collection of Roman coins. Beads and pendants are common finds in passage graves in Ireland, but the Roman coins may indicate a relatively late surviving tradition of pilgrimage to the site, or at the very least suggest its continued importance even after it was closed up.

It is the roof box which was discovered during excavation which is what Newgrange is most known for however. The roof box itself is simple, just a small slit above the entrance. However, on the Winter Solstice, the dawn sun shines through this perfectly aligned south-east facing slit. The sun shines down the 24 meter passage to illuminate the inner chambers for seventeen minutes. Such was the knowledge and engineering genius of the builders that they made up for the "wobble" of the Earth's orbit along its axis. 5000 years after the building of Newgrange, the position of the rising Winter Solstice sun has shifted over time and this anomoly was compensated for however, and the sun continues to shine into the chamber even after all this time. Interestingly enough however, the Winter Solstice event at Newgrange is only the beginning of a longer solstice event. Between Newgrange, Knowth, Dowth, and the other small passage graves, the sun's light is continually held in one of the mounds throughout the entire Winter Solstice day.

What to make of all this though? The obvious facts are that Newgrange is a passage tomb, used for the burials of select, likely important, individuals. Evidence also suggests that it was an important and thriving tribal center. There was obviously some sort of ritual significance to the place. O'Kelly suggests in his excavation reports that with a team of 300 individuals the construction of Newgrange would have taken roughly about thirty years. The time and care taken to build Newgrange, as well as its more elusive ritual functions, suggests

that it was something more than a repository for the dead with a calendrical function for determining the Solstice.

We will of course never really know for sure what Newgrange's purpose was in the life of the community which built it. It is worth exploring the topic however. Archeology alone cannot really tell us much more than what was left behind with the site. A more interdisciplinary approach, looking at the archeological evidence in light of other disciplines, can possibly shed more light on the topic. Speculation on the ritual significance of Newgrange must take into account the people who built it. Because these people are dead and gone, the only feasible option for this is to survey the mythology which has remained connected with the site. This seems a reasonable thing to do, and was even included in Michael J. O'Kelly's original excavation report.

This however poses an initial problem. The mythology which remains and deals directly with Newgrange is all Celtic in origin. Celtic culture did not arrive in Ireland until roughly 500 BCE, nearly 3,000 years after the construction of Newgrange. However most scholars are now in agreement that there was never a large scale Celtic migration or invasion of Ireland. This is supported by the fact that archeologically Ireland is not typically Celtic, and retains a unique Stone and Bronze Age collection of monuments. Additionally, data suggests that the Irish and continental people descended from the Celts are genetically different. Of course this has nothing to do with whether or not the Irish are Celtic or not, because Celtic is a cultural and linguistic group, not a racial one. However it does suggest that a population change may never have occurred, even if a shifting of culture did.

With this in mind it is not very far fetched to suggest a certain element of the early mythology of the building of Newgrange was retained in the Celtic mythology connected to it. This would be far from unusual. When Christianity came to Ireland, this same blending of mythology happened, with Christian monks integrating native Irish mythology into their own body of myth and knowledge. It is a simple fact that often when one group or culture asserts dominance over another the mythology is altered for a variety of reasons, not least of which is to establish ancestral claim on a place. It seems more than likely then, that at least many of the general themes and motifs surrounding Newgrange in Celtic mythology actually pre-dates the Celts in Ireland, and reflects an older belief about the nature of the site.

The predominant mythological motif of Newgrange is quite clear from even the briefest of readings; Newgrange is the house of the gods. Originally connected with the Dagda, a father god figure of the Celts, ownership was soon passed on to his son, Aonghus mac Óg. Aonghus was unaware of his parentage until it came time for the Dagda to start distributing the Sidhe (the word used in mythology for passage graves, but having the connotations of being doorways to the Otherworldly realms) amongst the gods, the Tuatha dé Danann. When Aonghus discovers this he goes to the Dagda, seeking his own Sidhe. Unfortunately the Dagda has already distributed it all, but he suggests that he ask for possession of Newgrange, the *Brú*, for a night and day. Nechtan, the original owner of it, allows this, and at the end of one night and day, returns to reclaim his home. Aonghus however argues that because all of eternity consists of day and night, that possession of the *Brú* is his forever. Nechtan takes his case to the Dagda, but judgement is ruled in favor of Aonghus.

This is but one story that details the switching of the ownership of Newgrange by way of trickery involving the theme of day and night. Day and night might be taken to be representative as transition, in which case these stories might be detailing that exact memory of a "pantheon change" so to speak. This may be a dramatic memory of the transition from the Stone and Bronze Age culture to the incoming Iron Age culture of the Celts. This would

have been a more distinct and marked change from the transition of Stone Age to Bronze Age, because Celtic culture was coming from outside influences and therefore could to some extent be considered foreign and alien.

It is also possible that this is connected with the Solstice event at Newgrange. If we were to think of the year as having a light half and a dark half (which the Celtic people likely did, as evidenced by the Coligny calendar fragments found in France, which reflect to some extent the same marking of festivals as has occurred in Ireland since the coming of Celtic culture), then we use day and night as metaphors for these. It would be reasonable to suggest then that the builders of Newgrange divided the year by the solstices, and that the Winter Solstice, as the longest night of the year, marked the beginning of night, the dark half of the year. Perhaps, with Aoghus mac Óg's connection with youthfulness, the ownership of the *Brú* coming into his hands, represents a seasonal change towards summer and the light half of the year; day to continue the metaphor.

Although this may satisfy the light display of Newgrange it does not speak of its other, equally important, function; that of a grave. It is important to understand here, that the gods of the Celts, the Tuatha dé Danann, held ill defined boundaries between the ancestors. In a sense, the dé Danann were considered the first ancestors, and it is possible that as a race they were a mythological representation of the early inhabitants of Ireland, the ones who built Newgrange. Considering that the *Brú* is considered the "house of the gods", and a doorway to the Otherworld realm of the Sidhe, where the gods and ancestors dwelled, the connection of Newgrange with the honoring of ancestors, a prevalent practice among such cultures, seems a clear link.

An interesting story, which may possibly shed some light on this is a part of the tale of Diarmuid and Grainne. In this tale, Diarmuid's life is tied to that of a boar. If the boar dies, so does Diarmuid. When out hunting on the mountain of Ben Bulben in Co. Sligo however, Dairmuid ends up killing the boar, and the boar, as prophesied, inflicts him with mortal wounds. Aonghus mac Óg shows up at this point, taking the now dead body of Dairmuid to Newgrange to attempt to restore his life. He is unable to do so, but does succeed in bringing Diarmuid back in a new form, in which he will be able to communicate with the people.

Is it possible that Newgrange was seen as a place of making ancestors? That it was not just a repository to place the remains of important tribal leaders, but was actually seen as transforming these people into the ancestors, something that could possibly be a cognate of making someone a saint in the Christian tradition. Perhaps it was the role of the midwinter sun to imbue the dead with its solar power. It would certainly fit with the reverence of the dead, the complexity of the site, and its obvious importance.[3]

A third and final theory is not supported by much literary evidence, however it is an intriguing line of thought to follow nonetheless. The entrance stone at Newgrange was of obvious importance given the ornateness of its carvings, the repetition of the triple spiral motif on the stone and within the mound, as well as its central location.

It has been suggested that perhaps the entrance stone is a symbolic representation of the salmon, which travel up the Boyne to spawn. With the Boyne River's connotations as a sacred place, it seems reasonable that Newgrange may have had some sort of ritual connection with the great river. The answer may lie in the sky. 5,000 years ago, at the time of the building of Newgrange, there was a constellation of a salmon visible in the sky. Irish tradition refers to the Milky Way in a manner strangely familiar to the Boyne River: it is called *Bealac na Bofinne*, while the Boyne was named for the goddess Boann, *BóFinne*. The Road of the White Cow, and the river who is the White Cow goddess. The same Boann who *Brú na Boinne* may likely be

named for. A salmon on earth, a salmon in the heavens; a white cow on earth, and a white cow in the heavens. Given both the salmon's symbolism as a fish of wisdom and second sight and the Boyne's reputation for giving the second sight if drank from in July, is it possible that Newgrange was also connected to a practice of initiation into some mysteries of the tribal religion?[4]

We will of course never know for sure what significance Newgrange and the entire *Brú na Boinne* complex held. Every suggestion is by nature just speculation. However Newgrange has ignited the minds and hearts of those who look upon it since it was built. It almost begs to have its secrets explored. These theories may be right, and they may be wrong. The precarious nature of poetic attempts to understand Newgrange in light of the facts and archeology should not keep one from trying. If such an endeavor is capable of even shedding the smallest amount of light on the dark and secret interior of this most magnificent creation, then it is surely worth the endeavor of potentially uncovering the depths of our ancestor's psyches and religious attitudes.

Endnotes

1. J. O'Kelly, Michael. *Newgrange: Archeology, Art, and Legend*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1982. p. 11

2. Mythical Ireland. "101 Facts About Newgrange". 15 April, 2006. http://www.mythicalireland.com/ancientsites/newgrange-facts/kerb.php

3. Ó Duinn, Seán. "Pagan Celtic Spirituality of Ireland". Theology and Native Irish Spirituality. Díseart Institute, Dingle, Co. Kerry, Ireland. 6 March, 2006.

4. Ibid.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The Memory of the Ancients:

Honoring the Ancestors

In the traditional Western understanding of time, the past remains alienated from us, distant and inaccessible from the present moment. As we have seen however, the primal Irish, and indigenous culture's, view of time and history is quite different. It is less linear and more cyclical. Most importantly, emphasis is not placed on our relative experience of time, but on the eternal nature of the present moment.

This is a perspective that allows us to consider the impact of the past on the present, not in some causal way, but more directly. One of the most important expressions of this in traditional cultures is the honor given to the ancestors. It is widely held that their spiritual presence is not constrained by the relative movement of time, and that their wisdom is always accessible to us. The deceased are not gone, but rather diffused into the eternal, and invisible present.

Contrary to this view that the dead have left us, we might consider that they are in fact all around us. The eternal, afterall, is not a place just as certainly as it is not a time. It is No-Time and No-Place; All-Time and All-Place. They are still capable of guiding us.

If we allow ourselves to see through the eyes of the ancestors, we can learn that we are not so isolated in this moment of history as we may have first supposed. We are the culmination of everything that has come before us, a collection of memories, wounds, gifts, loves, and fears. Additionally how we act in this life determines the ancestral inheritance of future generations. The responsibility then is on us to both honor the memory of our ancestors, and also to be good ancestors for the generations who will come.

In Irish mythology the Tuatha Dé Danann are considered the first ancestors of the people. A fine line is drawn between deity and ancestors. As we have seen from story of Diarmuid and Grainne it is possible that there was a relationship to certain ancestral figures as a cognate to Catholic saints, or certain realized beings in the Buddhist traditions. The ancestors were "dana-spirits" as we have discussed in previous chapters, and thus they are a tremenous resevoir of beauty, luminosity, wisdom, and often healing. It is important to remember though that working with the ancestors is to engage in a *relationship*. Like any relationship this involves a two-way dialogue, a reciprocity of spirit, and it is inappropriate to treat them with anything less than the same respect you would show to a loved one or a friend.

This is also not to say that all ancestors are looking after us, that all of them have wisdom to share. Many of them are also wounded, or existing in states of consciousness and being that although are beyond the physical, are still wrapped within habitual patterns of suffering and woundedness. To those ancestors we may be able to offer healing and perhaps even freedom from such cycles.

One of the profoundest realizations and opportunities of working with the ancestors is that ancient memory and past teachings can become available to us. This is particularly important in traditions, such as Druidism, where there is a broken lineage of transmission, and much wisdom has been lost. In Tibetan Buddhism there is something called *terma*, which are teachings tha have been hidden in the memory of the earth by realized beings to be revealed at the right time in history by the right person, called a *tertön* in that tradition. The idea of a

sort of Celtic terma is an interesting concept, and though it may be questionable whether the ancestors have hidden their teachings in the memory of the earth, it does illuminate for us the idea that spiritual traditions are constantly unfolding, and that lost or entirely new teachings can be uncovered. The ancestors in any case are an important part in the re-emergance of Druidism.

An Exercise

Little can really be said intellectually about what it really means to engage the ancestors as a part of spiritual practice. It is something that must be experienced. For this exercise you are asked to set up an altar for the ancestors. It does not have to be permenant, but you may find after working with it that you would like to continue doing so. If you already work with an altar, it is up to you whether you create a new one specifically for this exercise or to add to your existing one. Create on this altar some focus point for connecting your ancestors. It could be pictures or objects passed down through the family. If you have nothing that connects you to your family line, then you could improvise in a variety of ways, perhaps creating a piece of art with the intention of it forming this connection. Be creative, and make an altar that truly helps you reach this place.

Now, as a form of meditation, similar to that given in the appendix of this handbook (which is essentially *shamatha* meditation, to use the term from the Buddhist tradition) use the object on your altar as the focus of your attention. That is to say rather than playing the mind on the breath, place your mind on this altar. When your mind drifts, return your awareness to the altar and thus the object of your contemplation.

Use this time to simply contemplate the ancestors. You might focus your contemplation by considing these questions:

- Who are my ancestors?
- What wounds have I inherited from my ancestors?
- What gifts have my ancestors bestowed on me?
- How best can I serve my ancestors and future generations through the transformation of my wounds and the skillful use of my gifts?
- How can my own way of being in this world create an opportunity for healing in my ancestral lines?

The idea is not that these questions have any fixed answers, but rather that the process of engaging them brings insight, knowledge, wisdom, and transformation. The further reading section which follows has some suggestions for experiential work which can deepen this practice and provide a powerful pathway to forging a relationship with ancestral presences.

Further Reading

for *The House of the Ancestors and Honoring the Ancestors*

Ó Duinn, Seán OSB. *Where Three Streams Meet: Celtic Spirituality*. Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland: The Columba Press, 2000. Chapter 4

MacEowen, Frank. *The Spiral of Memory and Belonging: A Celtic Path of Soul and Kinship*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2004. Chapters 12 – 14

Mathews, John, and Caitlín Mathews. *Encyclopedia of Celtic Wisdom: A Celtic Shaman's Source Book*. Rockport, Massachusetts: Element, 1994. Chapter 4

Chapter Twenty-Three

The Cauldrons of the Soul

The cauldron is an important and recurring motif in the Celtic tradition. It is the womb of the goddess and the earth, and thus a symbol of rebirth and initiation. It appears in countless stories: as the Grael of the more ancient Arthurian sources; as a vessel for brewing awen, the liquor of inspiration in the story of Taliesin and his initiation; and as the Dagda's "cauldron of plenty". Additionally the Gundestrup Cauldron was found in a bog in Denmark, showing what appears to be some sort of initiation ritual on one of its plates. It is a pervasive symbol, offering enlightenment, prosperity, and nourishment, which seems to be common to all Celtic people.

With this text I would like to explore another context in which the cauldrons are used as a symbol for very similar themes: the cauldrons of the soul, more commonly known as the cauldrons of poesy to the scholarly community. In the 16th or 15th century a poem was transcribed in an Irish legal codex, appropriately told by Amhairghin, detailing the process by which poetry is made. In short, it describes three internal cauldrons, in which poetic verse and wisdom is incubated and dispensed. The following is a preliminary introduction to the topic, with further work being explored in the subsequent course.

The three cauldrons are given the names *Coire Goiriath*, the cauldron of warming; *Coire Ernmae*, the cauldron of vocation; and *Coire Soís*, the cauldron of wisdom or knowledge. Each of these is said to be located in a part of the body, with the cauldron of warming being in the belly or the womb, the cauldron of vocation at the heart, and the cauldron of wisdom in the head. Each of the cauldrons is also said to be in a certain position naturally in people. The cauldron of warming is upright, indicating health and vitality. The cauldron of vocation is "upside down in unenlightened people; it is on its side in those who practice bardic and poetic skills."[1] This ties in closely with the difference between an *aes dana*, the people of skill or art, and an ordinary person: the *aes dana* drink from both the "streams of the senses" and the "pool of wisdom" in the Land of Truth. Those who practice poetry, or in more general terms, those who tap into the inherent creativity of the soul and the Otherworld, have their cauldron of vocation tipped on its side, dispensing art. Others' cauldrons are inverted, "indicating a closed circuit of experience,"[2] as Caitlín Matthews says. The cauldron of wisdom is born on its lips, inverted, and before it can be turned the cauldron of vocation must also be activated.

The Cauldron of Warming (*Coire Goiriath*)

It seems no coincident that the cauldron of warming is located where traditionally many cultures have said our life force exists, such as the Chinese *tan t'ien*, and the first two chakras of Hindu philosophy which seem to embody many of the same properties as the cauldron of warming. In the Irish tradition we might say that the cauldron of warming is the receptacle of our life force, of Dana if you will. Not much is said of this cauldron in the poem, so it is perhaps safe to say that its function is as simple (and important) as providing the nourishment of life that keeps us breathing and moving. We might imagine, if Dana is what fills this cauldron,

that the process of turning the other cauldrons happens through a process of raising this energy though the body; similar perhaps to the Hindu kundalini awakening.

The Cauldron of Vocation (*Coire Ernmae*)
In the text of the poem this cauldron is intimately connected with joy and sorrow, and it is said that by these emotions it is turned. For this reason I have also heard it referred to as the cauldron of longing. Interestingly however it is not named anything that one normally thinks of in relation to emotions in the text; it is called the cauldron of *vocation*, and is said to be our connection with the poetic arts. What is interesting about this is that the Irish word for both a poem and for destiny is *dán*. This seems to suggest that this cauldron is important for the uncovering of our "soul-gift", the gift which lies in our soul which we were, in a sense, born to birth into the world. This action of engaging with our own creativity is the motion which allows the cauldron of wisdom to be turned as well.

The Cauldron of Wisdom (*Coire Soís*)
Finally we come to the cauldron which is our connection with vision, poetic inspiration, and Otherworldly wisdom. To turn this cauldron is to drink from the pool of wisdom, the Well of Segais. It is likely that this cauldron's association with the head is the reason that many scholars have interpreted Celtic headhunting and head revering traditions as a sign that the Celts saw the soul as residing in the head. Personally I am drawn more to Irish philosopher John O'Donohue's explanation that the body exists within the soul, rather than vice versa. This does not discount native Irish sources, which place an emphasis on the head. Rather it suggests that the soul is pervasive to the whole being, but that within the head, the third cauldron of the soul connects us in a very deep way with our spiritual power and with the Otherworld. An interesting way one might look at these upper two cauldrons is to be in a relationship similar to the Zen concepts of kensho and satori. Kensho is a brief glimpse of enlightenment, a flash of insight such as a peak experience which reveals the illusory nature of the self in the Buddhist tradition. Satori however is much deeper, a constant state of dwelling in such knowledge. Likewise, the cauldron if vocation is a taste and understanding of our dán, but the cauldron of wisdom is the integration of dán into our lives.

An Exercise

Sit or lie down as you would for a meditation exercise. If you are sitting on the ground or a cushion, cross your legs loosely, and keep your spine erect. If you are sitting in a chair keep your feet firmly on the ground. Take a few moments to connect with your breathing. You don't need to change your breathing, just notice it. It may change naturally as you place your awareness on it, become more full and deep. Don't force it, just let your breathing become natural.

Now, place your hands on your belly, on the cauldron of warming. Gently breathe into where your hands are. Allow your breath to become deep and slow. Place your awareness in your breath, which is entering this cauldron. What do you notice? Is your life force flowing freely? Is something stuck or constricting the movement of life force? If so, examine this. You may choose to try the following breathing exercise or not.[3] Allow your breathing to become more rapid, but maintain its depth and fullness. Breathe quick deep breaths, as if you were hyperventilating (a technique called "holotropic breathwork" used by transpersonal

psychologist Stanislav Grof, but found as a technique for altering consciousness in many traditional societies). Maintain this breath for as long as you are able or for as long as it feels appropriate. Allow it to be your guide as you explore your cauldron of warming.

When you feel complete with this part of exercise move your hands up towards your heart area, the cauldron of vocation. Breathe into your heart, using your hands as a guide to where your breath is being placed. Allow your awareness to drift up from the cauldron of warming into the cauldron of vocation. What do you notice? What position is the cauldron in? Is it inverted? Is it on its side? Is it upright and bubbling? Do not place judgment on the position of this cauldron. Just notice it, and try to become aware of what conditions might turn it, or further support its development. As with the previous cauldron you may want to go deeper, and use a similar breath to guide your explorations with this cauldron. The breath here is a long deep inhalation followed by a quick exhalation, as if you are sighing.

Finally, move your hands up to your head, and let your breath fill your head. Allow your awareness to drift up from the cauldron of vocation to the cauldron of wisdom. What do you notice? What position is this cauldron in? What is its activity? It is unlikely that this cauldron will be completely upright. What might be blocking it? How does your relationship with the other cauldrons seem to affect this one? Be honest with yourself. There can be a tendency here for the ego to reinforce itself by giving us visions of fully upright cauldrons, suggesting spiritual mastery. In all cases try to see through what you might want to think, to what really is. What conditions might support the further growth and development of this cauldron?

When you feel complete with the exercise, slowly begin to come back to your awareness of the body. Move your fingers and toes, your arms and legs. When you feel ready sit up if you were lying down, and open your eyes. Place the palms of your hands face down on the floor if you feel ungrounded. Eating and drinking is a good way to support yourself getting back into your body after this type of work. Try to take it easy with yourself for at least thirty minutes after this meditation.

Endnotes

1. Matthews, John and Caitlín. *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Wisdom: A Celtic Shaman's Sourcebook*. Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1994. p. 225

2. Matthews, p. 231

3. Like all intense breathwork, you should not attempt this part of exercise if you have heart or respiratory problems without first consulting your doctor. If at any time during the exercise you start to feel faint or nauseous, stop the breathwork, and place your hands palm down on the floor. Eat some food or drink the water to help ground yourself.

Further Reading

for *The Cauldrons of the soul*

Mathews, John, and Caitlín Mathews. *Encyclopedia of Celtic Wisdom: A Celtic Shaman's Source Book*. Rockport, Massachusetts: Element, 1994. Chapter 7, "The Three Cauldrons of Inspiration"

Laurie, Erynn Rowan. "The Cauldron of Poesy". *Inis Glas Thoir.* <http://www.thunderpaw.com/neocelt/poesy.htm>

Chapter Twenty-Four

Ecology and Activism:

Reciprocity with the More-Than-Human World

Celtic spiritual practice, whether we consider the ancient or modern people who live in this stream of being, concerns itself fundamentally with an enlivened relationship with the natural world. The Celtic tradition is a "sensual spirituality", engrossed with the phenomenal world of perceptions. Like all such animistic, earth-based traditions, nature was experienced in a very different way than the modern world now conditions us to perceive it. As the renowned eco-theologian Thomas Berry notes, "the universe is a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects."[1] This is perfectly in line with the Celtic experience of nature which is imbued with soul and personality.

This experience of nature as a communion of subjects engenders the possibility for relationship which is not possible with a world of objects. It is however entirely evident to the engaged human being that we are in constant communion with the phenomenal world. How else could nature elicit such emotive responses from us if there was no dialogue, no relationship?

The ancient Irish knew this relationship, and lived it. We can see evidence of this orientation in the Irish word *tuatha*, a word which refers both to the community of people as well as the land on which they live out their lives. Within this word, the people and nature are one. Place as a presence in life is something foreign to most of the modern world. We do not consider that our place may be important to our integrity, let alone that it may be an extension of our own identity. The loss of deep belonging to a place often marks the loss of wholeness in self-identity. I am fond of quoting David Abram in this matter, "We are human only in contact and conviviality with what is not human. Only in reciprocity with what is Other do we begin to heal ourselves."[2] If we are to characterize the spiritual and psychological quest as the search for wholeness, then it is imperative that we include within this the healing of our fractured relationship with the natural world. Without that relationship of reciprocity we cannot fully live up to our potential as humans.

In the Celtic traditions, as well as other animistic traditions around the world, much is made of what we might call the "spirits of place". In this understanding, the spiritual framework of the universe becomes embodied by the material world. Each form that arises is ensouled. This can be said for all forms, whether they are humans, animals, plants, stones, rivers, or even places. Should it really surprise us that a place might have a soul? Everyone has experienced the presence a place holds itself in; hostile or inviting, aloof or engaging, gentle or harsh. Presence is nature's way of expressing the quality of its soul. The spirit of places where honored in the Celtic tradition; offerings were made, and great care was taken not to upset the local spirits.

Although this was done in small ways by individuals, it was also done on a community level. Ireland had a long tradition of the high king, or sacral king. The sacral king however was not a powerful political figure. Although he may hold political sway, it was dependent on his popularity and the truth of his rule, not born from the social duty of obedience. Rather, his role was much more in line with religious practice. This is made evident through an

examination of the rites of kingship. During these rites the king would be symbolically married to the goddess of the land. Only though this marriage, and the king's right relationship with truth, would the land be fertile, and allow itself to be cultivated.

The king was selected by the goddess, as expressed in the story of Niall of the Nine Hostages. One day Niall was out with his brothers hunting, and after a long and unsuccessful day, they laid down to rest. They were thirsty from their long hunt, and so one of the brothers went in search of water. When he returned he told of a well guarded by a hideous old crone who demanded a kiss in exchange for water. The brother had refused. Each of Niall's brothers went in turn, and each one, upon seeing the hag, refused her offer and returned without water. When Niall went however, he did not refuse her, and indeed even in some versions of the story made love with her. After kissing her he opened his eyes to find that she had turned into a beautiful maiden. She declared that she was Sovereignty, and that for his actions he would be the high king of Ireland. Niall was afforded his position because he was willing to engage in a relationship of reciprocity with the goddess of the land.

The king was a symbolic figure of the necessary relationship between the human community and the community of the natural world. The king's truth, his ability to act in right relationship with the patterns of nature, is what allowed the human community to thrive on the land. Without this embodiment of truth, the land would go fallow, the springs dry up, and cows would not give milk. The land would be turned over to the chaotic spirits of nature and would become a wasteland. Survival of the human community depended on this.

Along with the king the druids were the ambassadors of this relationship. The druids were in charge of the ceremony of marriage between king and goddess. As magicians this sets them in the classical shamanic role of mediator between the human community and the natural community. They spoke the language of both, and were able to walk between these worlds. Their ability to commune with Otherworldly forces set them in a unique position of ensuring the maintenance of balance between human and Other. There was a law in Ireland that no one could speak before the king, and the king could not speak until a druid had spoken.

The druids were the true mediators of this relationship, because unlike the king they belonged to both worlds. Although in Celtic society great stress was placed on personal responsibility for one's own relationship with the spirits and with nature, the druid was the true communicator of this relationship when it came to community matters. The boundary which the druid keeps open between the human world and nature allows for the balance of energy between them. The druids role is to ensure that the scales do not tip too far to one side, causing illness and harm on either the human or natural community, and correcting this balance when it does occur.

This relationship can be seen in the Celtic approach to the year. The year is divided into the light and dark half. During the light half of the year the chaotic spirits of nature, called the Fomorians in the Irish tradition, are held at bay, and allow for the cultivation of the land for the use of the human community. It is a willing sacrifice on their part. At the dark half of the year however, beginning at Samhain, it is the human community's role to make this sacrifice, and turn the land back over to the spirits of nature. In practice, the boundaries are allowed to be dissolved for a short time as the world turns over to chaos. Sacrifices of the harvest are made, giving back some of what was grown and given through the fertile part of the year. Metaphysically speaking the world of the humans is consumed and destroyed by the chaos of nature, so that it might be reborn with renewed and reinvigorated boundaries. At Bealtaine, the spirits of nature once again allow for the cultivation of the land by humans.

Although this is an ancient expression of this relationship, it is no less necessary today than it was in the past. As the conditions of society have changed, so too have many of our specific needs and the dynamics of this possible relationship. Some things have also not changed. It is still entirely appropriate to make offerings to the spirits of a place. Social practices which are no longer upheld by the appropriate cultural structure however, such as a marriage between a king and the goddess of the land would not be appropriate in these times. The practice of druidism also must evolve to meet these needs. As many scholars such as Jean Markale have pointed out, the social structure which needed druids has transformed. Markale's answer is that we no longer need druids. My own answer is different; that the druid role must also by necessity transform. It must become more diverse and personal, while at the same time concerning itself with service to and reciprocity with the earth, and affecting change in the wider world. We must ask ourselves, what are the deeper truths behind the forms of the past?

I am reminded of the story of the rainmaker, which psychologist C.G. Jung used to tell. In this story, there is a village experiencing a terrible drought, and all the crops are failing. So the people of this village call the rainmaker. Upon arrival the rainmaker asks to be given a small house, and he locks himself within it, requesting that he not be disturbed. He remains within this house for three days. On the third, it suddenly begins to rain in a great storm, and the rainmaker emerges. The people ask the rainmaker, "how did you do that?" He replies that he in fact did nothing special. The village community was not balanced, and so the natural world reflected this. When he arrived, the group dynamic disturbed his own sense of balance, and so he had to remove himself from this influence. When he regained his own sense of balance with the *tao* (often translated in Chinese as simply "the Way"), it began to rain naturally. His own relationship with "the way", with balance, affected the community *and* the land.

Our way of being and holding ourselves in this world can have a profound effect on the natural world and human communities in which we are so deeply embedded. As the Buddha lay dying he gave his last teaching to, "be a lamp unto yourself." There is a sense in this teaching that our own wakefulness is in itself a service of brightening the world. From the Irish perspective we might speak of being a "king unto yourself". We must each engage in this relationship with sovereignty, our own personal sovereignty, as well as the sovereignty of the land. Through the embodiment of our own authentic nature, our own truth, we become like a lamp. The act of waking up is in itself a form of engaged activism.

This does not mean that we should all retire to our private chambers and spend our lives in meditation though. Like the rainmaker, we must also come out of our homes, and engage the world. How can we sink into our own authentic nature, if we are too uncomfortable, too afraid to show that face to the world? Being a druid, being a lamp, and connecting with our sovereignty, is to become a fugitive from our own neurotic society. We have a choice though, a choice of accepting a citizenry in a *different* world; we accept this by pouring ourselves into it, by taking that bold step of shining our brightest light into the world, and declaring "here I am!"

Like the story of the rainmaker, this is a way of affecting change through our own relationship with the world and with the Self. Through our own authenticity we have the opportunity to connect authentically with others, including the more-than-human world. Through embracing our own sense of personal sovereignty in the world, we become like the old Irish kings, able to be an ambassador between the sovereignty of our human world and the wild creativity of the natural world. In this way we are living in alignment with truth, the *tao*, that upholds the natural order of all things.

Endnotes

1. Berry, Thomas and Swimme, Brian. *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to The Ecozoic Era: A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992. p. 243

2. Abram, David. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. Vintage Books: New York, 1996. p. 22

Chapter Twenty-Five

Pilgrimage:

The Art of Sacred Travel

Pilgrimage has a long and diverse history in many spiritualities and religions as a contemplative practice. From Tibetan Buddhist circumambulatory rites around sacred mountains, dangerous Celtic Christian circuits to sites such as Skellig Michael, or the Islamic *hajj* to Mecca – all of these and more provide us with a framework of sacred travel; a practice of awareness, contemplation, and an enlivened relationship with the terrain of our voyages.

Although pilgrimage is most often associated with a journey to an actual location, usually of spiritual import, I maintain that the experience and practice of pilgrimage has as much to teach us about our daily lives as it does of those in which we travel. All of our life is a journey, and we are capable of bringing meaning to each moment. Whether we are simply traveling to work in the morning, taking a journey to a sacred site, or are navigating a difficult time in our life, the art of pilgrimage has something to teach us. Our footsteps through this terrain, whether internal or external, can be approached as prayer. There is a similarity between this process of pilgrimage and the initiatory journey because both deal with cultivating a relationship between the ego and the soul. One might say that initiation is a kind of pilgrimage, but that pilgrimage is the way we walk the path itself.

Longing

It is longing, what the Welsh refer to as *hiraeth*, a deep longing of the soul, which calls us to journey. More than half our lives are lived below the "ground", so to speak; within the underworld of our unconscious. Psychologist Carl Jung writes that, "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious."[1] Longing is the force in our lives that conspires to make this darkness conscious, by calling us to the cliff-edge of our life. This is the frontier of pilgrimage, and the unknown horizon is our destination. Longing, not to be confused with the selfish desires of the ego, is rooted in the soul, and a cultivated relationship with it can act as a trustworthy navigator on our pilgrimage through life.

Perhaps we are called to make a journey to the homeland of our ancestors, to make a major life change such as marriage, children, or a change of career. Perhaps we are called to plunge deep within ourselves and find our true gifts and quest in life. All of these things, if truly grounded in the sustainable vision of our unfolding souls, are the calls of pilgrimage. The call is an imperative set before us to grow beyond the comfortable confines of our life, and to seek new meaning and direction within the unknown. This imperative can be ignored, but tends to continue to re-assert itself to greater and greater degrees until ignoring is no longer an option, and it is followed.

Severance

Severance is an important stage in this process, but one which I think sometimes is taken for granted, and not honored and approached consciously. To make our journey, whether through the soul or across the land, we are required to let go. It may be the temporary letting go of our homes, our families, and our friends – or the more permanent letting go of a way of life, habits, or patterns of thoughts. Whatever it is, in order to give ourselves to the experience wholeheartedly, we must also give away that which will not serve us through the journey.

I have made several pilgrimages in the past, and have developed a particular approach to this stage of the journey. I act, as fully as possible, as though I do not know if I will be returning. None of the pilgrimages I have taken have been particularly dangerous or harrowing; the most that may have happened to me was the possibility of cold rain on a mountain in the spring of Ireland. And yet by bringing this awareness of severance; of being prepared for anything, including death, a deeper understanding and a deeper surrender to the process was allowed.

In some cases severance could even be the purpose of a pilgrimage. That night on top of Knocknarea in Ireland, a soft drizzle of rain began coming down, and I contemplated returning to the warm hostel where I was based in Sligo. I did not know at the time why I had come to the mountain, only that I was following my longing. I brought with me two stones which I had taken from Ireland on my first trip, over a year earlier, and left them on the cairn there, said to be the grave of Queen Maeve. I did not leave however, but stayed until the sun rose that morning. Later, I wrote these lines in a poem in honor of the experience:

Then you must
give everything you
ever knew
to the darkness of the
night,

you belong to
whatever returns
with the rising sun of dawn.

Sometimes we must give up everything to learn what is truly ours.

Voyage

Pilgrimage asks us to give up everything, so that we might learn what is truly ours; and at the same time it also asks us to adopt something new. It asks us to adopt a new way of "walking", one with a rhythm that honors the voyage. There are ways of moving across the land, and of moving through the terrain of our souls, which places us in the role of participant, rather than observer.

When we move across the land, how often do we retract into the unconscious chatter of the mind, missing the landscape stretched out before us? How often do we actually take the time to attend to the feast coming in through our senses? Most of us are not accustomed to

moving this way, and so it can present a challenge at times. The way of pilgrimage asks us to walk gently with a deepened awareness for the environment we are *within*. It is not just walking or just traveling; it is a sensuous participatory rhythm which forms a dialogue with the land. When we open our senses – attending to the sights, the smells, the tastes, and the feel of our environment – we simultaneously open ourselves to an awareness of the dreamlike quality of our more subtle experiences.

This is the place where inner and outer pilgrimage meet. Whatever the journey, our way of moving is the same. This sort of awareness brings us to the place where the boundaries between inner and outer are dissolved. There is no "this land" and "this mind", but rather one continuum of consciousness, arising here as a tree or stone and here as a thought or feeling. The way a waterfall cascades down a granite wall could tell you just as much about your life and situation as your thoughts and mind could. The way of doing this is softening the gaze and opening the soul to the shaping power of the land.

This holds just as true for the inner pilgrims of mind, traveling perhaps through some difficult circumstance. Too often our interior gaze is too harsh and penetrating. This sort of gaze may be suitable for watching television, but can see nothing of the soul. John O'Donohue calls this "neon vision" and writes that "This neon light is too direct and clear to befriend the shadowed world of the soul. It is not hospitable to what is reserved and hidden."[2] To befriend the soul we must soften this gaze.

Threshold

There comes a time in our journey when we reach a threshold. The threshold is a powerful place of transformation, recognized as such in the Celtic traditions, where mist, twilight, dawn, the seashore, or crossroads are recognized as symbols of the juxtaposition of opposites. Within the threshold these opposites are united. This union of opposites creates a liminal space, a potent transformer of consciousness. Threshold, however, also signifies a doorway, and this liminal space acts as just that.

When we travel, whether we travel on land or through the soul, we do so most often with purpose. Even if we have no destination, we hold an intention which guides us. Arrival to destination or intention is the reason for which we travel, and the threshold is the space in which we are *prepared* for that arrival. In order to arrive we must be transformed in some way, for that is the purpose of pilgrimage. The common saying that "the journey is the destination" holds true here. The journey fundamentally changes something about us, allowing our arrival to whatever destination or intention we set out towards. Without the threshold of transformation our arrival would be hollow.

If we knew what the threshold would ask of us, I think often we would never set out in the first place. Sometimes we choose to take a pilgrimage, and other times we are thrown into it without ever consciously making a decision. Even in pilgrimages made intentionally we never know the price that we will later be asked to pay. This is why when we set out we let go of everything, as if we may never return, because we must be willing to pay that price. Often pilgrimage can ask us the most frightening thing; to change our fundamental being in this world, moving from the egocentric to the soulcentric. The threshold is the true purpose of our pilgrimage.

Arrival

We think we travel to meet an arrival, but as I have said, the true purpose of pilgrimage is the threshold of transformation. We can never know what sort of arrival waits for us at the end of our journey. We do not know the condition of our arrival, or even sometimes, whether we will arrive where intended or not. As David Whyte says, sometimes "the nature of our struggle disqualifies us from the very garden we have so long desired."[3] We cannot dictate the journey, but rather it co-arises as a conversation between our own bodies and the terrain through which we travel.

We do not always arrive where we want or how we want and the reason for this is the threshold. Sometimes we were heading to the wrong place, or heading to the right place for the wrong reasons. The threshold strips these from us, leaving only what truly belongs to us, or rather *what we belong to*. We may arrive weary and bruised in a place we had never anticipated, but we can be sure that if the place is where our longing lead us, then it is exactly where we need to be.

Arrival can be joyous or it can be painful. Sometimes we arrive exactly where we hoped, a beautiful "Promised Land" in our psyche or our lives. Sometimes though, our arrival is tinged with the pain of loss. We may know it's just where we need to be, but that doesn't make it any easier to arrive, whatever beauty may follow. In difficult arrivals it is easy to feel as though we have been abandoned, but important to remember that we have not been; longing will always continue to carry us towards new horizons. There is always beauty to be found, even in the painful places, if we can maintain the open softness of our gaze.

Return

The journey metaphor often leads people to believe that the so called "spiritual journey" is a linear one. This is not true. If anything it is circular or spiral. It takes us to our depths, or out beyond the edge of ourselves, but just as important as this is the return home, or back to our center.

In 2004 I made my first pilgrimage to Ireland. It was an incredible time, and one which I will not soon forget. It was also a very transformative experience. I was there with a group for the first week and a half, visiting sacred sites and doing ritual work. My plan was to stay for another month afterwards, and continue the pilgrimage on my own. By the end of the group trip however, I was hit with what my friend, who was leading the group, called the "cosmic two-by-four". I got on the bus back to Dublin, planning to spend a night there and then make my way to Kildare. When I arrived I broke down in tears, knowing that my time here had to come to and end. I was being overambitious with my time and energy, and was not properly honoring the process of returning home. The transformations I had undergone through the trip were now surfacing in a way that I could not ignore, asking to be integrated.

Return does not mean forgetting the journey, and coming full circle without any of the boons of the voyage. Pilgrimage changes us, and it must be recognized that any return, be it to a physical home, or the "center" of our psyche, will require some adjustment from us. This is similar to the upward spiral of the initiatory journey. We gain our new vision, but we must take that back to our lives. Returning is the stage of our journey in which we begin to embody the pilgrimage and arrival. If we stayed forever we could never do the real work of integration.

Integration

The work of integration is where we come face to face with the sustainability of our vision and arrival. In order for us to truly reap the benefits of the journey we must integrate it into our lives in a way which supports our deeper unfolding and engagement with the spirit of life. This task can be, and often is, a life long pursuit. Pilgrimage brings us a treasure house of insight and transformation, and richer and richer rewards can always be uncovered – even years after we thought we had "processed through it".

In *Four Quartets* T.S. Eliot wrote the following lines that speak to this process of homecoming and integration:

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

The integration of a pilgrimage is both the act of coming home and developing a new, hopefully more aware and enlivened relationship to the place we left. Whether we left our homes, or went within to search the hidden corners of our soul, we must return to the center, and bring new life and vision to it. If we stay small and hidden we will never grow, but the transformative power of the threshold itself can not create this growth. The threshold provides the impetus, but integration of the threshold is what makes it real for us.

As I have stated several times throughout this essay, the process can be a painful one, but ultimately rewarding. I wrote the following poem after reading some lines by Rainer Maria Rilke, and was inspired by the power of his words to reconcile dissonance with beauty. I thought similar words might be said to someone after the ordeal of a pilgrimage. The poem is called "And the Song Goes On."

Whatever the shape of your
faithful vessel upon arrival,
whatever lives or dies within
through the fierce trials of
the voyage,
whatever your grief of loss
or joy of love
you will always have
the singular pillar
of breath to turn you
towards the embrace
of the one song
you were born to sing.

The sun rises for another dawn
and the geese return from their
winter migrations
announcing their arrival
through the clear air
and always the sure return

of life moves in to claim us.

And looking back towards
the dark voyage
of an arrival we could never
have anticipated,
suddenly all our struggles are
confirmed
as we tracked the footsteps
of our breathing to
this moment of renewal.

Whatever our darkness,
our brokenness,
the longings lost to us
to the unrelenting waves

the song always goes on,
resonating in the dark
and secret chambers of the
hidden night of your soul
– beautiful.[4]

Endnotes

1. "The Philosophical Tree" (1945). In Collected Works 13: Alchemical Studies. p.335

2. O'Donohue, John. *Anam ara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World*. New York: Bantam Books, 1997. p. 109

3. Whyte, David. *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity*. New York, New York: Riverhead Books. p. 140

4. Kirkey, Jason. *Portraits of Beauty*. Boulder, Colorado: Hiraeth Press, 2006. p. 101

Further Reading

for *Pilgrimage*

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Guide to Meditation

Meditation is a basic practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness does not mean a distracted mind full of thoughts, but rather a state of sensitivity and awareness to the presence of mind in oneself. Simply put, meditation is a technique of slowing down and cultivating the awareness to observe one's self. Because meditation is a practice, it is important to develop the discipline of actually doing it. Meditation is also a process. There is no easy step-by-step guide to perfecting the practice. It is something you cultivate. That said, below is an outline of a style of sitting meditation which the Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Chogyam Trungpa, called Shambhala meditation. It is a secular form of meditation meant to be part of 'sacred warriorship'.

- **The Posture:** Sit on the floor with your legs crossed comfortably. You may want to sit on a cushion to elevate yourself a bit, and provide comfort for longer meditation sessions. If you're unable to sit on the floor it is alright to use a chair. Keep your back straight and upright. Place your hands on your thighs. Keeping them on your thighs rather than your knees or resting in your lap will help straighten your back. Keep your eyes open, looking at the floor (or wall) about 6-8 feet in front of you. The mouth can be slightly open allowing for easy breathing.
- **The Practice:** is simple: follow your breath. Breathe in deeply but comfortably, then out. On each out breath apply a tiny point of awareness. Just for a moment become completely aware of your out breath. Because it is the nature of the mind, thoughts will no doubt arise. Without judgment of analyzation, label each thought that arises: 'thought', and then let it go, drifting through your mind like clouds. Visualizations are also thoughts, let them go too. Whatever you are feeling, you also do not need to "think" about it, or tell yourself the story of why you feel the way you do. Just allow yourself to feel whatever you are feeling without judgment or thought. You will know when your mind has wandered when you have either forgotten why you are sitting, or you have lost track of your breath. Label whatever you were thinking as: 'thought', and then return to your breath.

It sounds much simpler than it is of course, but stick with the practice and you will no doubt find it to be immensely illuminating. For a more detailed study of meditation and the path of sacred warriorship (a path which I think is incredibly relevant to the Druid path and awakened Celtic warriorship) I highly recommend:
Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior by Chogyam Trungpa.

Appendix I
Guide to the Pronunciation of Irish Words

There are many Irish words within the course, the pronunciation of which can be quite difficult. Like any language there are exceptions to grammatical rules in Irish, and so this guide should not be viewed as exhaustive. It is a brief guide to the basics of Irish grammar to help you pronounce some of the words in the course handbook. For a more complete study you might look into a distance learning course or one of the many book and tape study guides.

Vowels

Below is an approximation of the pronunciation of each vowel in Irish using examples of English phonetics. They are divided into long and short. Further, each vowel is marked as either broad *(b)* or slender *(s)*.

Long vowels
á - pronounced like *aw. (b)*
é - pronounced like *ay. (s)*
í - pronounced like *ee. (s)*
ó - pronounced like *ow. (b)*
ú - pronounced like *oo. (b)*

Short vowels
a - pronounced like *o* as in hot. *(b)*
e - pronounced like *e* as in let. *(s)*
i - pronounced like *i* as in sit. *(s)*
o - pronounced like *o* as in done. *(b)*
u - pronounced like *u* as in put. *(b)*

Consonants

Broad consonants are ones either followed by or preceded by broad vowels; slender consonants are similarly either followed by or preceded by slender vowels. Lenited consonants (consonants followed by an *h*) are also marked below.

Broad
b - pronounced like *b* as in box.
m - pronounced like *m* as in mail.
p - pronounced like *p* as in put.
d - pronounced like *d* as in door.
n - pronounced like *n* as in naked.

t - pronounced like *t* as in tome.
l - pronounced like *l* as in lord.
s - pronounced like *s* as in stock (*fh* is not pronounced).
f/ph - pronounced like *f* as in foe.
bh/mh - pronounced like *v* as in value or like *w* as in wort.
c - pronounced like *c* as in coat.
g - pronounced like *g* as in guard.
ng - pronounced like *ng* as in hung.
ch - pronounced like *ch* as in a Scottish loch.
dh/gh - pronounced like a French *r.*
r - pronounced like *r* as in bar, but rolled slightly.
sh - pronounced like *h.*
th - pronounced like *h.*

Slender
b - pronounced like *b* as in beat.
m - pronounced like *m* as in me.
p - pronounced like *p* as in pen.
d - pronounced like *d* as in dean.
n - pronounced like *n* as in nit.
t - pronounced like *t* as in tin.
l - pronounced like *l* as in lip.
s - pronounced like *sh* as in she.
f/ph - pronounced like *f* as in feed.
bh/mh - pronounced like *v* as in vie.
c - pronounced like *k* as in kick.
g - pronounced like *g* as in gain.
ng - pronounced like *ng* as in sing
ch - pronounced like *ch* as in the German ich.
dh/gh - pronounced like *y* as in yellow.
r - pronounced like *r* as in rid.
sh - pronounced like *h.*
th - pronounced like *h.*

Source: Ó Cróinín, Breandán (editor). *Pocket Oxford Irish Dictionary.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Appendix II
Listing of Course Assignments

The Silver Branch:
An Introduction to the Bardic Course

Spend some time meditating (instructions can be found in the Bardic Course Handbook). Contemplate the following question: What circumstances have drawn me to become interested in Druidic spirituality? What do I hope to get from this course? Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced), reflecting on these questions. This assignment is ungraded.

Chapter 1
Keeping the Hearth Fire:
Seeking the Spirit of Druidism

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) answering the question "why is druidism relevant today?" Please incorporate the idea of the archetype of druidism, the collective unconscious, and the ecological unconscious in your response.

Chapter 2
The Nine Strands:
Exploring the Druid Identity

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) reflecting on the differences between what we know about ancient druids and druids today. Use your reflections to illuminate what a modern druid's role in society may be. How can you incorporate this role into your life?

Chapter 3
Myth Work I:
The Second Battle of Magh Tuireadh

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) on the Second Battle of Magh Tuireadh. How do the themes of light vs. dark, order vs. chaos figure into this story? In the story it is Lugh, who is both a Dé Danann and a Fomorian (ie. consisting of both light and darkness, order and chaos), that wins the battle and brings peace to both sides. What does this story seem to be saying about the nature of this apparent conflict?

Chapter 4
Into the Well of Beauty:
The Shape of the Sacred in Celtic Spirituality

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) reflecting on your own relationship to the sacred and/or divinity. How does it (or does it not) relate to what is written in this chapter of the text?

Chapter 5
Dana:
The Primal Enlivening

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) exploring the themes of this chapter. The text outlines three general orientations to "Dana". What way, or ways, or seeing Dana makes the most sense to your own sensibilities? Frank MacEowen writes that Dana is characterized by a quality of "tending". What is being tended or needs tending in your life? How can you open yourself to Dana as a way of being tended?

Chapter 6
The Dúile:
The Shapes of the World

In Chapter four we considered that the deities, Dana, and the Dúile of nature could also be called the shapers, the shaping, and the shapes. Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) integrating the material from chapters three, four, and five. How does an awareness of the shapers (or the shaper), the shaping, and the shapes provide a context of embodied spirituality in your life?

Chapter 7
Myth Work II:
The Settling of the Manor of Tara

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) on the story of the Settling of the Manor of Tara. This story suggests that in order for our lives to be properly balanced there are patterns that must be observed (i.e. in the story the Great Feast could not begin until the nobles remembered the sacred orientations of the land). Using the story as a guide, what basic orientation to life is necessary for you to cultivate balance.

Chapter 8
The Four Winds:
Mandala of Wholness

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) on the four winds of Ireland. In what ways can you invite these energies into your daily life? In what ways do you already honor these energies, consciously or not? What do these energies mean to you, and how do they promote wholeness in your life?

Chapter 9
The Otherworld:
Entering the Sacred World

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) exploring the following two quotes:

"This poetic vision of the landscape, ensouled with spirits, is a particularly human and therefore humane vision of the world." (Nigel Pennick, *Celtic Sacred Landscapes)*

"We are human only in contact and conviviality with what is not human. Only in reciprocity with what is Other do we begin to heal ourselves." (David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*)

How do you experience these quotes in connection with the importance of developing a relationship to the Otherworld?

Chapter 10
The Three Realms:
Map of the Celtic Otherworld

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) exploring each of the three realms outlined in the reading. What is a realm? How have these realms (or experiences one might attribute to these realms) been woven together in your own life?

Chapter 11
The Preserving Shrine:
The Memory of the Land

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) exploring your own elaborated answer to the question, "What is the preserving shrine?" answering it based on the two answers traditionally given: "It is nature and what is preserved within it. It is memory and what is preserved within it". In your answer, also address the questions, "why is this true for you?" and "how do you know?"

Chapter 12
Spirals in Time:
The Celtic Year

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) on the Celtic year. In general what have you observed about yourself and your way of being throughout the seasons? What might this say about your sense of connection and relating with the natural world and its own cycles?

Chapter 13
Myth Work III:
The Tale of the Ordeals

In this story Cormac is given a cup which will break apart if a lie is spoken over it, and will reassemble if three truths are spoken over it. Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) exploring Truth as a relationship to life capable of harmonizing our lives.

Chapter 14
Coming into Being:
The Process of Initiation

Where on Frank MacEowen's "Three Spirals of Initiation" do you place yourself right now (you may find you are at different places in different parts of your life)? What terrain have you traveled through to get there? Through a relationship with nature, the Otherworld, and the three realms, how can you more consciously approach and embody your place on this spiral? Write a reflection (3-5 pages, double spaced) exploring these questions. (Note: track your experiences; you will be asked this question again in the Ovate course)

Chapter 15
In the Womb of Night:
Darkness and the Spirit of Longing

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) exploring initiation (darkness) as the bridge between longing and the belonging found in relationship with nature and the transpersonal. What are your longings? How do you (or how do you not) feel a sense of belonging in your life? Incorporate your experiences with the exercise.

Chapter 16
Presence:
The Language of Nature

Try the exercise given in this chapter of the handbook. Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) reflecting on your experiences. What is it like to communicate with nature? If the "language of nature" is presence, how does this dialogue connect you with your own authentic presence?

Chapter 17
Myth Work IV:
The Coming of the Milesians

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) on the story of the coming of the Milesians. The two poems which Amhairghin (Amergin) recites (beginning with "I invoke the land of Ireland" and "I

am a wind on the sea") both teach us something about the interconnectedness of all things. Explore this theme in your essay.

Chapter 18
Dreamtime:
Mythology and History

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) integrating your intellectual understanding of the article with your experiences with the exercise given at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 19
The Òran Mòr:
Amhairghin and the Great Song

Returning to the two poems from the story of the Milesians, we explore the idea that the nature of this interconnectedness can be experienced as a primordial music. Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) integrating your intellectual understanding of the article with your experiences with the exercise given at the end of the chapter. How might this Great Song be shaping your own life? How can becoming conscious of it promote wholeness and balance?

Chapter 20
Myth Work V:
Tuan mac Carill

In the story of Tuan mac Carill, Tuan explains how he continuously shapeshifted into other forms and has thus survived so long. Consider that the suggestion here is that this continuity of experience has produced wisdom. Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) exploring how drawing on the collective wisdom of the past may illuminate the present.

Chapter 21
The House of the Ancestors:
Newgrange and the Cult of the Dead

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) exploring the idea of ancestor veneration. Why do you think it was so important to the ancestors to honor the dead? What might the ancestors have to teach us about our own lives?

Chapter 22
The Memory of the Ancients:
Honoring the Ancestors

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) integrating your intellectual understanding on the topics of this reading and the previous one with your experiences of the exercise given at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 23
The Cauldrons of the Soul

Try the exercise given at the end of this chapter. Integrate your understanding from the text with your experiences. What might be the benefit of working with these cauldrons as a path toward transformation and growth?

Chapter 24
Ecology and Activism:
Reciprocity with the More-Than-Human World

*Consider the following quote: "When human beings lose their connection to nature, to heaven and earth, then they do not know how to nurture their environment or how to rule their world - which is saying the same thing. Human beings destroy ecology at the same time that they destroy one another. From that perspective, healing our society goes hand-in-hand with healing our personal, elemental connection with the phenomenal world." (*Chogyam Trungpa, *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*) *Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) exploring the question: how does the awakening of your mind, and an engaged relationship with the phenomenal world contribute to the healing of society?*

Chapter 25
Pilgrimage:
The Art of Sacred Travel

Write an essay (3-5 pages, double spaced) exploring how these stages of pilgrimage or "sacred travel" have appeared in your life-journey and process of transformation and growth. If you have taken a literal pilgrimage you may incorporate that as well.

Congratulations on completing the course! Please provide some feedback in the journal provided for you here to help us improve the course in the future.

Resources

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