



EVERYDAY TRADITION

Key elements on the Celtic Path

Our soul's journey is paramount, no matter how we feel we can enter our inner landscape to replenish, what could be more important in our lives.

Here I summarise the key practices we can use to traverse the Celtic lands and embark on the soul's journey:

1/Sovereignty of the Land

'Brought into right relationship with the wilderness he would see that he was not a separate entity endowed with a divine right to subdue his fellow creatures and destroy the common heritage, but rather an integral part of a harmonious whole.'

John Muir

Being in 'right relationship with the land' is key to being in harmony with all life including ourselves. The land is seen as a Goddess in Celtic lore. She appears time and time again in the Old Irish tales for example to King Conaire as Calib which means spear. She is also known as Flaitheas Eireann who has a blue robe which like Brigid's robe covers the land itself, she most famously appears to Niall of the nine hostages. She is the protagonist as the Morriginia and the seer Fedhelm who appears to Queen Medb.

Her later appearances call her the loathly lady most known from Geoffrey Chaucer's The Wife of Bath's Tale and Dame Ragnell in the famous 15th century poem entitled the wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell.

These women are powerful with distorted features which only change when the tested King or person accepts them in this form just as we must all accept nature in all her guises.

In the tale of Sir Gawain, the hag reveals what a woman most wants is her sovereignty which can be interpreted as what a woman wants is her own way but the deeper truth is we must all respect the sovereignty of the land and on a more personal level of course we should have the sovereignty of our own bodies which is a basic right that should never be questioned!

It is clear the Celtic stories address the neglect and oppression of the Goddess.

2/ Acceptance of all races and lifeforms

Hospitality is a key aspect to Celtic culture. In the stories we have to accept there are many races of beings and this contract to live in harmony with these beings is essential for all life on earth. This is reflected in honouring every rock, mineral, animal and landscape as well as strangers that come through the land. The wells along the pilgrim's path are places where the Traveller may refresh themselves and seek sustenance for their journey ahead.

The faerie contract between human and Otherworldly beings is what brings balance to the world, it enables us to acknowledge the sacredness of all things and to be in harmony with ourselves and everything else. When we connect with a spiritual dimension our whole world opens up to infinite possibilities and connects us to the joy of non-duality.

3/ The Elements

The acknowledgement that the ultimate power is in the three elements of Earth, Sea and Sky and that the most sacred oaths are made to these as they are the building blocks of all life. The fourth element is the fire which runs through all of life as the source of inspiration. Every action should be in harmony with the elements and in balance with the web of life. This ancient belief is reflected in our most recent scientific discoveries as we fall out of balance with the elements and lose our natural resources.

We remember the Celtic oath and understand that if we take from the earth and cause the elements to be imbalanced, we will cause terrible problems. Classical writings note that the Celtic warriors feared the elements more than the loss of their own lives which is why Roman warfare which showed no respect for the land dumbfounded them.

‘Heaven is above us, and the earth beneath us, and the sea all around us. Unless the sky shall fall with its showers of stars on the ground where we are camped, or unless the waves of the blue sea come over the forests of the living world, we shall not give ground.’

Extract from Tain Bo Cuailgne trans. De Jubainville

4/ The Otherlands

In Celtic belief there is no heaven or hell or higher or lower but simply Tir na nOg the land of youth, the place where our soul is complete and we can replenish and acknowledge our splendour where we live in harmony with all that is.

This place is here and now and we only have to lift the Feth-Fiadha (a mist which separates our world from the spiritual realms) to enter it. This realm intersects our own physical realm and everything we know is imbued with this connection to the Otherlands.

This means we do not have to live and die in a certain generic way but aim to fulfill our own personal geasa, our contact with life which is unique to every individual.

Individual Practice

Four key practices to maintain your pathway.

Here are a few pointers to help you with a daily practice of connection.

1/ Upon waking light a candle and acknowledge the elements:

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

The Deer's Cry

Feel that connection to the Earth, Sea and Sky, feel the elements around you and within you.

2/ Call to your guide(s) by chanting or sounding in a way that feels right for you or choose a chant that especially resonates with you. If you are not confident with your voice, you can recite a poem or prayer or just BE. Sit for a few moments and feel their presence or simply know they are there. Your connection will vary day to day but still hold that space even if only for a few moments and accept the connection no matter how small or incredible it feels.

3/ Honour the Earth Mother through a prayer or poem/prose that you especially connect with. The non-verbal inner connection is always paramount to this practice though please accept the process no matter how small or incredible it is. The key is always constancy not heightened experiences.

4/ Arrive at Connla's well and enter the Otherlands as described below. Meditate for however long you are able to or however long feels right to you on this day.

Bring your insights back into your day with you. As you go about your everyday life be aware of the guides that walk with you and your connection to all life forms. Remember you are 'an integral part of a harmonious whole.'

DAILY MEDITATION

The Sacred Well

'By gazing into the well and entering a place where everything co-exists, where land and water (Boan and Dagdha) mingle, where the sun and the moon are one; we hear the still primal voice of our ancestry echoing in the chambers of the womb which is in the deep of the earth.'

Our meditation starts with honouring the land. The land is the mother, the provider of everything we need and it is she who is honoured first in Celtic lore. The land is often personified as a Mother Goddess and was seen in the landscape as the undulating hills or the life-giving waters. The three names below represent the three Queens of Ireland, the sovereignty of its land. However, these ancient Gaelic names can connect us to which ever land we live upon at this time, for they call to the deities of all Celtic lands which once stretched all across Europe and beyond. The main verses are adapted from the beautiful words of Eleanor Merry, an English poet with a deep connection with the Celtic twilight as well as the works of Fiona MacLeod.

*Eriu, Banba, Fodhla, I seek the land of Erin,
Fruitful be her seas, perpetually green her forest,
I feel her in my bones, I feel her in my blood.*

*Danu, soul of the ancient mysteries,
Wanders forever under the canopy of heaven,
Wrapped in her mantle of bluest aether,
And the vision of her calls every human heart.*

*Her shadow is the forgotten mysteries
And lives in the sadness of Celtic Twilight tales,
When hearts wake again to the longing for forbidden lands,
Or for the shining hosts of the Sidhe,
Or for the caves of the hoary sleepers.*

*The Celtic folk soul is the soul of a spiritual awakening,
The touch of a Woman of Beauty who will
Come into the hearts of men and women
Like a flame upon dry grass,
Like a flame of wind in a great wood.*

After this blessing we can make an offering of hazelnuts, milk or something similar to the Earth Mother.

As we make this offering, we do not expect it to be accepted we offer it unconditionally with an open heart for when one connects with the spirit of the earth it is in humility and on its terms for it is they who are in harmony with the sacred earth and the sanctity of all life.

Enter the Well.

After honouring the land and making offerings we then can look to entering her womb. In this tradition we seek to enter the earth first rather than looking to the skies. Our first place of spiritual nourishment is in the depths of the sacred earth where our roots and life force stem from.

There is no need to fear the dark or the depths below for this is where all new life is incubated.

We enter the inner realms of our soul and the earth through our imaginations. The images we used on this retreat are empowered by tradition, this means the pathway has already been trodden and we have the support of those who have walked the path before. This creates an opportunity to truly understand the purpose of the sacred mythologies and to experience the deep resonance of the power of story. This further enhances a natural understanding of our innate personal native tradition for even as a child these skills were known to us.

All you have to do is be comfortable, lay or sit down and allow the imagery to take you into your own soul awareness trusting the effortless technique which requires no set dogma or change in who you are right now.

Let us begin....

'Connla's well lies at the foot of a mountain ash, those who gaze within may if they can find a guide be lead to the fountain of perpetual youth. The ash berries fall into the waters and turn then to fire. Connla the druid is the guardian of the well. '

Fiona MacLeod

William sharp writing as Fiona MacLeod is tapping into the essence of tradition. She writes in such a way that she bypasses the literal academic mind to enter the heart. Her writing at times can be stirring and sinister but this enables the dark and light to coexist in a continuum that brings soul awareness to the individual.

Let us just take the few lines written above for they not only contain the essence of the tradition but the means to access it.

Meditation 1- Connecting to the Earth Mother.

Lay or sit down in a comfortable posture. Close your eyes and take a few deep breathes allow yourself to let go of anything other than being fully here and now in this meditation. In each meditation we will build up imagery that will take you deep within yourself.

We start with a well, this can be any well or pool of water (see images above), notice the patterns of light upon its rippling surface, allowing the vision to take you within or if you cannot visualise just know it is happening. Let go to whatever images, feelings and thoughts stir in your imagination in response to this visualisation.

We repeat the words: *'Connla's well lies at the foot of a mountain ash, those who gaze within may if they can find a guide be lead to the fountain of perpetual youth. The ash berries fall into the waters and turn then to fire. Connla the druid is the guardian of the well.'*

Once you have imagined the well and made it as real as possible you can reach out with your senses and imagination to feel if there is a guide to help you to explore your inner journey, it may be a sense of an animal or an ancestor. Allow this to happen organically without pushing the experience trying not to force the imagery or experience. It may well be just a glimmer on the peripheral of your senses which you can build on each time you meditate. For now, just know you are safe and being looked after.

When you are ready, enter the well or imagine a doorway in front of you.*

*take your time with each step as it doesn't matter if you only do part of the meditation as you can build on each component each time you meditate.

Enter the doorway and descend into your soul landscape.

As you descend get a sense of arriving in a stone circle, experience the moon rising and slowly a soul awakening that is connected to all of the web of life. Take whatever images, thoughts and feelings that come to you. Meditate on the feel of the circle connecting with the energies of the earth with the help of the following words:

'She has her feet far down among the roots and trees, and stars thickening in her hair as they gather in the vastness and blackness of the sky on a night of frost. Her form fills all the world where wisdom dwells. But she is sorrowful and terrible for the hearts of men know her no more in her ancient loveliness.

She is the washer at the ford, a tall gaunt woman, chanting the death dirge as she washes the shroud of he that sees her. She may grow great and terrible and inhabit darkness.

She loveth loneliness, solitude is her breath. She is Queen of all things on the earth and in the sea and in the white palaces of the stars built on the dark walls of time above the abyss.

Now She is under the brown earth in a vast cavern where she weaves at two looms, with one hand she weaves life upward through the green grass and with the other she weaves death downward through the mold.'

Sit and be with the Earth Goddess in the stone circle which is in the womb of the earth and allow her to communicate with you. You may just sit and be in darkness allowing a deep relaxation in the soul of your being or you may receive images or feelings to sit and contemplate. The simplest experience can be deeply profound just allow it to happen or to not happen, it doesn't matter if this meditation takes days, weeks or even months or years to come to fruition.

This is your sanctuary deep in the earth and in your soul, you can top up here and deeply relax forgetting the woes of the world for a time in order to refresh and face them renewed and invigorated by the life force of the earth, in the soft brown earth.

When we meditate with the land and especially with its energies, we may find a deep pain and sorrow which William Butler Yeats says is the mood of all ancient peoples for we are incomplete and out of harmony in our human lives. In the Celtic tradition we seek that completion through connecting with all of life and its web.

The sense of non-duality and acceptance of life creates a sublime feeling in the depths of our soul. However, it also carries a responsibility for this type of meditation isn't about creating a personal nirvana but more about a profound awakening to being in harmony with all of life. To understand these deep concepts, we meditate on the Earth Goddess.

The Weaving Goddess appears in sorrowful and terrible forms as we see her in nature, however this shadow side is always in balance and as the invocation above states she weaves life upward through the green grass as well as death downward through the mold.