



Stage 10- The Cave of Knowing.

*'A cabin on the mountain side hid in a grassy nook
Where door and windows open wide that friendly stars may look.
The rabbit shy can patter in, the winds may enter free,
Who throng around the mountain throne in living ecstasy.*

*And when the sun sets dimmed in eve and purple fills the air,
I think the sacred Hazel Tree is dropping berries there
From starry fruitage waved aloft where Connla's Well o'erflows;
For sure the enchanted waters run through every wind that blows.*

*I think when night towers up aloft and shakes the trembling dew,
How every high and lonely thought that thrills my being through
Is but a ruddy berry dropped down through the purple air,
And from the magic tree of life the fruit falls everywhere.'*

George William Russell poems The Nuts of Knowledge

In the far North of Ireland in the rugged countryside of Donegal, overshadowed by Mount Errigal a hermit sits in his home, a filidh in praise of the Earth Mother with the knowledge of the oldest of traditions pulsing through his veins.

At this time people feared to continue the old ways as a new religion had risen that was being preached through the formidable strength of Finnian of Molville, and other saints such as Patrick adze-head who fought the Druids and Columcille who had the skill and the magic of poets uttered in his prophecy.

Now the great battles of the ancient races were but memories. The guardians of the land and the old ways were deep in the hollow hills in the last wild untrammelled places of desolate caves and dark woods.

Long since had Sreng been defeated at the battle of Moytura and no longer did he hold power over Connaught and even Tailtu his Queen was no-where to be seen in her place of Telltown. The great race of the Tuatha de Danann were but memories diminished into dark fairies to scare the children at night.

A new religion had come to these shores but a filidh, a vision poet, a lone man, a shape changer, a priest of the Earth Mother in her many forms as Macha, Tailtu, Danu and Eriu continued to maintain the old contract with the Bansidhe as a poet offering milk, honey, nut and salt with prayer and chant:

'Oh Goddess fill me with your presence,

Call me to know you,

To honour you in every breath,

To acknowledge you in every moment.

May my entire being shimmer with a knowledge of you,

May my every step caress your sacred form,

May my eyes open to your undimmed magnificence of pure joy.

Oh Goddess I devote my life to you,

Oh Goddess of Earth, Sea and Sky I bow to you,

Oh Goddess I merge with you.

My muse, my inspiration, the fire in my soul, initiate me.'

Finnian the Abbott of Molville was the first to hear the rumours of this hermit, one who did not acknowledge the Saint's days or the Sabbath and how the common folk revered him and warned of his power. Finnian would hear nothing of this and stated the Lord would protect him as he decided to visit this hermit.

He journeyed through the windswept mountainous paths as wolves howled in distant woods and unseeing eyes kept watch.

The whistling wind whispered of distant memories as a proud red stag eyed him wearily and he even thought he saw a black boar upon the path. He washed his face in a clear stream and could have sworn a salmon winked at him. The wild landscape seemed alive with presence ever watchful but Finnian kept praying and kept going.

When he arrived at the hermit's hut, he pounded on the door but no-one answered. He sat and waited; a burly warrior told him to leave but he refused. He demanded entrance and fasted for justice until finally a kind man brought him in and nursed him back to life.

The man had deep brown eyes that seemed to penetrate all that they saw, he was difficult to age as it seemed his being flickered and shimmered appearing sometimes more animal than person. He sat on a deer skin and utter wisdom exuded from him.

His voice seemed to sing in harmony of an unspoken language that underpinned the words he expressed and although he sat motionless, it was as if an unseen world spiraled around him deepening an urge to fall into a world that soothed the soul into being.

He said:

'Man must be made conscious of his origin as a child of Nature. 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. He would see that his appropriation of earth's resources beyond his personal needs would only bring imbalance and beget ultimate loss and poverty for all.

Mother nature is too often spoken about as in reality no mother at all. Yet how wisely, sternly and tenderly she loves and looks after her children in all sorts of weather and wilderness, no wonder the hills and groves were God's first temples and the more they are cut down and hewn into cathedrals and churches the farther off and dimmer seems the lord himself'

The Abbott could not find the words to answer him and exclaimed, 'who are you?'

He answered 'I am Tuan Mac Carrill, my mother a Queen of the Milesians Eriu herself.'

'You must be old indeed to be her son' Finnian replied.

'I am older still as I also bear the name Tuan mac Starn mac Sera so my age is beyond comprehension.'

Finnian looked at him, his presence was so still, so imbued with a steady power he believed this claim and urged him to tell the tale of Ireland for this meant he had arrived not long after the flood and knew the son of Noah's son for his Father was Partholon's brother!

He began:

How weary was I, I had lost everything. The plague had taken all my people and I was left alone and afraid. Wolves were constantly hunting me, I shivered under blankets as a howling wind striped me of any remaining warmth, my hunger depleted me of all my energy, my hair became matted, my skin torn and wrinkled. I became wretched, old and worn of any dignity I once possessed.

But in time I learnt to fend for myself, to hunt and gather herbs and build a shelter, the solitude suited me and everyday became:

'Another of those charming exhilarating days that makes the blood dance and excites nerve currents that render one unweariable and well-nigh immortal.

The whole landscape showed design, like man's noblest sculptures. How wonderful the power of its beauty! Gazing awe stricken, I may have left everything for it. Beauty beyond thought everywhere, beneath, above, made and being made forever. I gazed and gazed and longed and admired.... the colours and lines and expression of this divine landscape-countenance are so burned into mind and heart they surely can never dim.

The forests seem kindly familiar, and the lakes and meadows and glad singing streams. I should like to dwell with them forever. Here with bread and water I should be content. Even if not allowed to roam and climb, tethered to a stake or tree in some meadow or grove, even then I should be content forever. Bathed in such beauty, watching the expressions ever varying on the faces of the mountains, watching the stars, watching the circling seasons, listening to the songs of the waters and winds and birds, would be endless pleasure. And what glorious cloud-lands I should see, storms and calms, --a new heaven and a new earth every day. I feel sure I should not have one dull moment. It is only common sense, a sign of health, genuine, natural, all-awake health. Creation just beginning, the morning stars still singing together and all the sons of God shouting for joy."

John Muir

However, the days, years and decades past and I grew old, I could no longer out run the wolves and hunt for food, so I climbed higher and higher and there I found it, a deep cave, a place to rest, a place to die.

I entered the cave, water dripped along the cavernous walls, the darkness took me and I fasted for three days and nights and on the fourth day a light glimmered on cold black stone, a serpent slivered towards me and into the womb of the ancient black mother I was taken, I cried out:

*'Let our souls be mountains,
Let our spirits be stars,
Let our hearts be worlds.*

*We are clouds and must go,
Leaves that tremble and fall,
Shadows that pass,
O Mother, O Maiden, you know
Us and the flowers in the grass.*

*You hear the star-flocks singing
A proud song and high;
Hear us, our hearts too are winging
A song going by.
The star-song will last while you live:
We who have little to give,
Who see you and die.*

*Cry of the eagle,
Moan of the dove,
Falcon wing in the sky,
Of these and blossoms we make,
A word, a song for your sake;
We pray and you have joy thereof,
As you joy in the star-song high:
Have joy in one and the other,
Maiden and Mother
When we no longer go by.'*

Ella Young extract from Shasta

The serpent devoured me, every fibre of my being was remade, I lay on the hard floor for what seemed an eternity and then I dreamed, I became alive with a feeling of victory and joy, my entire being was proud and agile, I flexed my muscles and ran out of the cave as a powerful stag of nine tines. The feeling was incredible I could run for miles, stretch and jump I was in my prime. It wasn't long before I was noticed and all the deer herds gathered to me. How I enjoyed the beauty of each day and sharing the land with all of nature until a new race came to the shores of Erin.

They tried to hunt me but didn't stand a chance of capturing me, the wolves tried too but I was so powerful and in my prime. But the decades past and I grew old again. Nature did not care for my feebleness, it just tormented me and wanted to take me once more into the Earth Mother's womb. I once again sought my cave, fasted for three days and nights and the dark Goddess devoured me once more. I dreamed and once again became young and glad of heart but this time as a bristly black boar. I wasn't agile but the strength I had was incredible, the wolves that once hunted me fled from my huge tusks.

Once more Erin was only inhabited by nature and the joy was tremendous. Time passed and the race of the Firbolgs came to the shores of Erin. They too tried to hunt me but I was too strong until age crept in again and back to the cave I went where I fasted for three days and nights and the dark Goddess devoured me once more. I dreamed and once again became young and glad of heart but this time as a great eagle. I flew from the cave, I rejoiced in youth and vigour, gliding and soaring and dominating the skies. I witnessed the Tuatha de Danann come to these shores and the great battles of Moytura. The decades past and age once more caught up with me so back to the cave I went, fasted for three days and nights and the dark Goddess devoured me once more.

I dreamed and once again became young and glad of heart but this time I wasn't agile like a deer or strong like a boar but dropped out of the cave into the expansive sea, I felt the wisdom of all the ages creep into my being. I grew and grew and spiraled far down beneath the sea where I arrived at Connla's well, the source of all creation, every memory of all the worlds flooded my being and I flowed out of the well and into the rivers which took me back to Erin's shores and beyond.

All the salmon gathered to me I was huge and swam with such vigour. In time I witnessed yet another new race come to these shores but it was different this time. The new race didn't seem to be in harmony with creation, they seemed to want to dominate and not share the land.

I wept as the people of Danu, the Sidhe retreated into the hollow hills and the deep caves and woods as this new race dominated the land's surface.

I felt the pain of the land's separation from its ancient ancestors, every scar I received from the wrath of every animal and human as I was hunted brought me back to the agony of the Mother as she cried out in bitterness at the loss of her beloveds. The scars on my scaly skin were deep and sore. Slowly I again grew weary but did not know how to reach my cave. Finally, a fisherman managed to catch me and I ended up being devoured once again by the Goddess but this time not as a serpent but as a human Queen and my cave was the dark watery world of the womb.

'O Ancient Mother,

Heart of the Forest, Queen of the soil.

Have I not been in your womb many times before, in the warm life-giving essence of the loamy earth?

Did you not initiate me and push me out and up into the blinding light of life?

But how I forget, how I cry out that I never do enough!

How is it that I have allowed the pulsing warmth of love in your muliebrous touch to deteriorate in torturous ways; unimaginable.

Am I as man allowed to taste your mysteries?

Am I as man who has abused every cell of your wise and wonderful form allowed to rest in you?

And yet the agony of searching in sorrow for that bed woven by the Goddess sometimes feels too much to bear.

Your mocking, terrible form humiliates my male arrogance as I realise my sorrow is but dust compared to my neglect of you.

And yet when I enter your chamber, glimpse the untainted bliss of union, my whole being is on fire with a knowledge that frees my soul.

I am pulled down into the black abyss to be remade.

Ancient Mother, Heart of the Forest, Queen of the Soil.

Ancient Mother, black, veiled, exiled goddess, forgive me.'

J.Huet 2021

A human birth I was given and now I was known as Tuan Mac Carrill born from Eriu herself and every memory of her filled my being. I went back to my cave, fasted for three days and nights wrapped in my woolen blanket, I prayed to the Earth Mother, how I relentlessly performed practices in praise of her.

I was a Filidh, a seer at one with the ancient Mother and the ancient ancestors. I discovered old carvings in the stone walls which shone in moonlight and led me to other lands in the depths of hollow hills or salty waters. An old language was taught to me that contained the magic and mysteries of all Bards. Connla's well the source of all creation was forever in my vision and within my being and as a deer, boar, eagle and salmon I could travel its many paths and bring the soul into being once more.

The Shaman

Tuan Mac Carrill was briefly mentioned in stage 8 with the prose I put together of his shamanic journey:

I'm Tuan MacCairill, ancient bard of old,
remembering our Celtic ancestry and the stories once told.

*'I approached the caves of the hoary sleepers. I was old and decrepit.
In the cave I was born again, young and glad of heart.
I was a stag of nine tines, king of all deer,
Victory and joy were easy for me.
I witnessed all the deeds of Neimheadh.*

*I was a wild black, king of all boar herds,
Faithful to any custom.
I witnessed all the deeds of the Fir Bolg.*

*I was a great eagle,
King of all the skies,
I rejoiced in youth and vigour.
I witnessed all the deeds of the Tuatha de Danann*

*I was a speckled salmon,
King of all fish,
Wise beyond all years.*

I was eaten by the Queen of the Milesians and as a human born again.'

In Celtic traditions we sometimes shy away from the concept of our native shamanism. We can feel that we have to back up all our findings with clear historical evidence so as to not appear flaky or inauthentic.

However, tradition is spoken in the heart and is most alive in the embodied practices that give us direct contact to our ancestral knowledge that we cannot find in books. That isn't to say that a thorough exploration of source texts is not an essential part of our journey but to also acknowledge if the evidence isn't there, we can also enter our own cave of knowing.

The primal traditions of Shamanism are key to the Celtic tradition, the stories such as the one above describe the Shaman's flight or journeying in clear terms in exactly the same way that first-hand accounts of indigenous Shamans from all around the world also have done.

Here is a chant used by Manuel Cordova-Rios of South America:

*'Spirits of the forest...,
Bring us knowledge of the realm,
Assist in the guidance of our people,
Give us the stealth of the boa,
Penetrating sight of the hawk and the owl,
Acute hearing of the deer,
Brute endurance of the tapir,
Grace and strength of the jaguar,
Knowledge and tranquillity of the moon,
Kindred spirits, guide our way.'*

The Celtic seers such Fionntan mac Bochra and Tuan mac Carrill just like the living Shamans of today often took the form of different animals and brought back the memories of the ancient stories. The Tuatha de Dannan who we shall continue to explore in more detail in the next stages are master shape shifters.

There comes a time when we have to move away from learning from books and enter the deep knowledge of our own inner being. Throughout this course we have been doing so by entering Connla's well.

At some stage we will know that we are actually entering Connla's well and the old stories in a way that is as real as anything in the physical world although there is no need to rush this process.

We are defined by our experiences and we cannot expect ourselves or others to believe what they haven't experienced; all we can do is explore for ourselves and see where the journey takes us.

The primal shaman is within us all, it is scientifically proven that we still have the same genes as our palaeolithic ancestors and our response to fire, sitting in nature, meditation and the old spiritual practices still resonates with our innermost being on a cellular level and beyond.

The Shamans discovered how to help their communities through journeying into the inner worlds and discovering knowledge not available to us in our physical lives. The fact that the practices are so similar across all the world's cultures and have survived for thousands of years confirms how effective shamanism is. If it didn't work it would not exist!

Of course, the word 'Shamanism' would not have been used or known by the Celts and it is a term that can be over used inaccurately in the same way as the very word 'Celtic' would also not have been used by the indigenous tribes that we now collectively call the Celts. However, these terms today help convey a collective understanding of the concept we are exploring.

Meditation 10 - Cave of Knowing

Enter Connla's well as you have been doing in previous meditations and when you arrive in your inner landscape you find yourself on the sea shore and look to the cliffs for your cave of knowing.

Climb the cliff or simply arrive in your cave. As you enter you are greeted by an ancient man with deep brown eyes that penetrate your soul, he is difficult to age as his being flickers and shimmers appearing sometimes more animal than person. He is sat on a deer skin and utter wisdom exudes from him.

You sit awhile with him and then ask to experience your own primal self.

His voice sings in harmony of an unspoken language that underpins the words he expresses and although he is motionless, an unseen world spirals around him deepening an urge to fall into a world that soothes the soul into being.

You are your primal self, sit and be with that experience, know your indigenous tradition in whatever land you belong to and know that no matter how far removed it seems, it is deep in the memory of your DNA. Make offerings to the ancient Mother, praise her in your every word and actions. Be in your own primal tradition without conditions or expectations. Trust your own primal instincts of the path that you choose and accept your own personal connection and truth to your path.

Allow the memories of your primal self to arise within you. You may wish to recite or learn this poem exploring that You are your Tradition:

*'Ancient soul, embodied in a physical temple.
Unique individual that cannot be replicated.*

You are your Tradition.

*Every moment, every breath, new light emerges,
new experiences unfold, new insights are born.*

You are your Tradition.

*Deep within you, in the wellspring of inspiration,
deep knowledge enlightens you.*

You are your Tradition.

*Allow it to unfold, unfurl, like petals of a perfect flower,
taking shape into a perfected expression of who you are.*

You are your Tradition.'

It is in our cave of knowing we connect to the Mysteries and our re clothed and transformed.

Everyday Tradition

The story of Tuan Mac Carrill points to a spiritual heritage going back to primal roots as well as bringing the transition of the tradition into Christian times.

The description in the early sources paints a picture of how old age can be so wretched and miserable as well as how living in the wilds can be so challenging. This concept of age and of nature challenging our physical bodies runs through many Celtic texts.

In the story of Merlin by Geoffrey of Monmouth he describes the agony of Merlin when he flees to the wilderness:

'Now I lack apples and everything else. The trees stand without leaves, without fruit; I am afflicted by both circumstances since I cannot cover myself with leaves or eat the fruit. Winter and the south wind with its falling rain have taken them away.'

Vita Merlini Geoffrey of Monmouth

And yet when he returned to civilisation and was offered great gifts from the King, Merlin still preferred the harsh life of the wilderness:

'I prefer the groves and broad oaks of Calidon, and the lofty mountains with green pastures at their feet...'

Vita Merlini Geoffrey of Monmouth

The same scenario repeated itself in the tale of Suibne Geilt who also suffers the challenges of the wilderness and still prefers them to the entrapment of society.

Both Merlin and Suibne flee to the wilderness after the abhorrent acts of war and are both guided by the wisdom of strong women. In the Merlin story the Queen helps Merlin and the old hag challenges Suibne taken him further into the wilderness once more.

Tuan Mac Carrill had no choice for he was the only survivor of a terrible plague. He also spoke of his depravity before his transformations and his elevation at being reborn. We could add the Welsh story of Taliesin to this mix who flees Cerridwen and transforms into several animals to see the world-wide Shamanic practices are prevalent throughout Celtic literature.

The need to leave society and be tested is the initiation and then the cave of knowing or the woods in the other two examples is the transformation and the Shaman's flight into knowledge.

Women appear in all the other tales and although this doesn't happen in the Tuan Mac Carrill tale the cave can represent the womb. In my tale I have explored this concept further for several reasons. St Patrick enters what he calls the Cave of purgatory and fights the goddess Corra who appears as a giant serpent, this continues the hermit tradition of entering a dark place to be reborn as well as the slaying of one's demons reflected in the later tale of George and the Green Knight.

The serpent as with the giants is the guardian of the earth, the primal power that tests us in our dark night of the soul. It is common in Shamanic traditions to be devoured and to be remade.

This initiation is the sacrifice the shaman makes to fully enter soul awareness in a physical body, this is also true of the mystic and yogi from other traditions.

In Christian lore we have the mystery of three which is rooted in Celtic traditions often thought of as Christ, the Holy Spirit and God. It would also be true to say it is an age-old method of connecting with your supreme deity known as God in Christian terms. The three could therefore also be yourself (Holy spirit running through you), a guide which is Christ and then the deity which is God.

The idea of an intermediary between yourself and your chosen deity is prevalent throughout world religions. In Hinduism the guide is called a Guru, the energy awakening is the Kundalini which is also considered to be a snake and then a connection to a deity.

A true teacher would also be in a state of honouring a deity beyond themselves demonstrating humility and a focused giving practice. The paradox is the ultimate deity is yourself and all worship is in praise of you.

How does this relate to ourselves in everyday terms? We have already expounded upon the fruition of setting up a meditation practice and that even spending just ten minutes in a state of prayer or contemplation can permeate your entire life. If once your practice is finished and you can focus on a state of beingness throughout your day the benefits to yourself and the rest of the world are incalculable.

Your practice can be further enhanced by connecting with your guide, an animal or ancestor such as Tuan Mac Carrill and sitting with them both in meditation and whenever you have any quiet time especially in nature.

You may wish to imagine what it feels like to be them and visualise or feel them within you. You could compose a song, poem or invocation to call them to you when you wish to embody them, to experience a wiser more peaceful aspect of yourself.

It is most effective to connect and embody them through movement and dance which can be enhanced by drumming or shaking rattles or bells.

Allow yourself to experience them in your body and in your imagination, in a place which is non-verbal and a place where you don't need to intellectualise the process. You may become an animal and practice moving like the chosen animal or if you are an ancestor how does it feel to be them?

Are you more confident or more at peace?

Are you more in touch with your body?

Do you move or think differently?

How do you perceive the world?

Tune into your senses and experience how you see, hear, touch, taste and feel as an animal or ancestor.

The more you can learn about them, the more effective this practice will be. If you can learn the stories associated with them, discover where they live and their key characteristics you will be able to connect even more deeply.

Allow yourself to enliven your imagination and feel this experience in the body. Eventually you can start to feel connected to them as you go about your daily business in a more subtle way, there is no need for to be noticed by others when doing this practice.

What is also important is you remain in a state of knowing who you are, the experience can be subtle and you need to know the boundaries between your inner worlds and how you function in your everyday life.

This guide can become your inner teacher someone to turn to when you cannot see a solution or feel you need more support.

The sacred three can be reflected in a sense of who you are, of who your guide is and who the deity is that you are honouring in order to enable clear boundaries to be maintained throughout the practice.

For instance, I may spend time with Tuan Mac Carrill in meditation. Then this may be extended to feeling his presence when sitting in nature. I may call to him in a subtle way to embody a steady quality of his in order to teach whilst behaving in an acceptable way to others who do not know I am doing this.

In time I may experience him in my body and allow myself to know what it feels like to be him. I may experience his oneness with deity, invoking him and together praising the Earth Mother thus allowing a merging of the sacred three as a grounded, real, tangible experience in ritual and meditation.

After this experience it is important to use definite words or gestures to come back to yourself. You may wish to shake a rattle or bang a drum to bring you back.

In more modern times we can stumble across spiritual practice without observing the procedures and honouring the process which is why it is important that as we go deeper into our experiences, we remain humble and true to ourselves without the need to demonstrate and show our experiences to those who may not understand or who may put us on a pedestal.

This is the initiation in the above stories that keeps us humble, we cannot pretend in nature when the elements constantly test us and we cannot deny the needs of the body for food, drink and warmth. Only when we do not pretend and know the difference between our inner and outer worlds, we can then become the grounded, functional person who can face the challenges of both our outer and inner life.

In the next stage we shall again step out of the cave into the mythological landscape of the Celtic lands and the epic tale of the Second Battle of Moytura.