



Part 11- The Dark Mother

As we enter the time of Samhain it is an opportunity to delve even more deeply into the mysteries of the Dark Mother. Here we explore her as the Morrighinia.

In the first and second Battles of Moytura, the terrifying mocking form of the Goddess declares war upon those who oppose her. However, it is important to note that she also calls to the highest peace and values to be embodied in the world and therefore is calling for a higher justice.

Let us begin therefore with the story of the Second battle of Moytura...

After the first battle of Moytura Tuan Mac Carrill was devastated, yet again he experienced the ravages of war, the abhorrent act of two races fighting one another. The stench of death and fear, the arrogance of fools claiming land and wanting power over others.

The crows circled around the battle field and slowly the Earth Mother would consume everything back into her deep belly to turn it once more into new life. But the memories would remain in the earth, the waters and the air for eternity. The cries, the anguish and the pain would never be forgotten walking as shadows on the battle field of this land.

Tuan was so very tired he once again had reached an older age, every part of his body ached and wept in weariness and slowly he made his way to his cave.

As he approached the cave and entered the darkness, he felt the deep presence of eternity envelop him. He sat and chanted and called to the Ancient Mother. She swept over him and in the darkness a blinding light consumed him. His body started to change, he stretched out his arms for them to become wings and he flew from the cave. As he soared across the landscape, he could pick out the smallest of details, the tinniest of movements and he rejoiced in youth and vigour, he was alive with passion and noted how the most wretched decrepit form can be remade once more into beauty.

Tuan was a bristly black boar when the Firbolgs first started to cultivate the land and Sreng was sent as an envoy to meet the Tuatha de Danann, the Sidhe.

The Sidhe are an incredible race who have tapped into the immense potential that we all have to master the arts, crafts and sciences of the world whilst remaining intimately in touch with the Dark Mother.

But now war had weakened them. The great shining King Nuada could no longer rule for his arm had been severed from his body in the battle and so the ever-watchful Fomorian giants saw their chance and made an alliance with them.

The Dagdha agreed to marry his daughter Brigit, the most exalted of all the young women and the greatest of their line to the giant Bres who was to be their new King.

King Bres sought to take advantage of this alliance and in doing so underestimated the strength of the Tuatha de Danann and especially the power of the poet.

The Dagdha, chief and father figure to the Dananns who had the power over the seasons through the playing of his harp, who could give and take life with his monstrous club was put to work building raths for Bres.

Ogma the chief warrior with his deadly curved blade that defeated dozens of warriors at the battle of Moytura, who was the most eloquent of speakers and capable of rallying all the warriors to his cause through the power of his honeyed words was put to work collecting fire wood.

A bleakness spread across the land as winter's icy grip remained as the now weakened Dagdha was forced to give two thirds of his meal to Bres's poet Crindenbel and Ogma was so weak he could no longer feed the furnaces that warmed the people and crafted their metals.

It was Angus Og the youngest of the company who pleaded with his father the Dagdha to take action which instigated Ogma with the last of his strength to summon the tribe once more to rise against these indecent acts of slavery to the most noble of the tribe.

Dagdha killed Crindenbel the chief poet by putting coins in his food making it look like an accident. He then demanded the greatest heifer of all of Ireland as a reward for his work under the advice of his son Angus Og.

Ogma whispered his honeyed words amongst the warriors and they conspired to bring Nuada to the throne once more.

Gobniu the smith, Dian Cecht the physician, Credne Cerd the metal worker worked together to create a silver arm for Nuada and then Miach and Airmid brought herbs and magic to make the arm flesh once more but what really changed the kingdom was the power of Cairbre the poet who Bres had mistakenly underestimated.

Cairbre came to the kingdom to replace Crindenbel and was offered paltry dry food and a cold dark cabin without a bed to stay in. The next morning, he rose and walked from the kingdom uttering the first Satire in Erin condemning Bres and his lack of hospitality to be his down fall.

*'Without food quickly on a dish:
Without cow's milk whereon a calf grows:
Without a man's abode in the gloom of the night:
Without paying a company of story-tellers,
Let that be Bres's condition.
Let there be no increase in Bres.'*

Cath Mag Tuiread translated by Whitley Stokes, sourced in Celtic Myth and Legend- John and Caitlin Matthews.

His words spread throughout the kingdom and emboldened all of the people to take action under the newly healed Nuada to take back the throne.

The power of the words uttered by a poet came to fruition and Bres fled back to the Fomorians to prepare once more for war.

At this time Dian Cecht wanted to make sure he was the chief physician for the forthcoming battle, he was jealous of his son whose skills were greater than his for although he had created a silver hand for Nuada, his son had remade it into flesh once more.

Dian Cecht approached Miach lifted his sword and struck his son's head cutting his flesh, Miach responded calmly and the wound instantly healed. This enraged Dian Cecht further who struck him on the head once more and cut down to his bone, Miach responded calmly and healed the wound once more. Now Dian Cecht was furious he struck yet again cutting down to the membrane of his brain and Miach looked into his father's eyes and fell.

As he fell Miach's sister Airmid screamed at the sight of her brother and took the body and laid it out on the earth. She shook uncontrollably as the grief tormented her soul. Her father tried to comfort her but she pushed him away.

They both gazed sorrowfully at the freshly prepared grave and as the light of the moon glistened on the newly dug earth, plants started to grow. They grew from his head, from his joints and around all his organs and there before them was the shape of Miach's body fashioned by the growth of the plants.

Each plant corresponded to the part of the body it healed. Airmid smiled with warmth at such a deed and started to collect the herbs onto her cloak to remember their properties. Dian Cecht felt his blood boil once more and he snatched the herbs and scattered them to the four directions thus destroying the knowledge of ancient herblore forever.

The words of Dian Cecht echoed through time:

'If Miach be not, Airmid shall remain'

Meanwhile the Fomorian host gathered as Bres fled North and Balor of the evil eye, the most baleful of all the giants who could kill a hundred men with a single blink of his eye brought an army of conquering giants to exact the revenge of Bres.

Deep in the wilds of Erin, a new warrior came forward, a warrior whose Father was Cian of the Sidhe, his mother Eithne of the Fomorians, his foster Mother Tailtu, the Queen of the Firbolgs and his master was Mannanan Mac Lir himself who was older and wiser than all of the Sidhe.

The blood of the enemy ran through Lugh's veins as it did in many a successful hero and he had mastered all arts, crafts and sciences, he was skilled in all ways; he would bring together the armies of the Tuatha de Danann on the eve of Samhain to destroy the Fomorian host. Dressed in Mannanan's armour he shone like the blazing sun, he rode upon a pure white steed known as Aonbharr who could traverse land and sea and held the terrifying deadly sword Fragarach, the answerer. In his possession was also the boat of Mannanan which needed no oars or sails for it would be guided by thought.

He approached Tara where the power and sovereignty of the land was held and approached the door keeper for entry.

The guard at the door saw him approach and even the doorkeeper who had been amongst the champions of the Sidhe had never seen such a warrior who now appeared at the gates.

The door keeper said to Lugh Lamhfada

‘What art does thou practice, for one without an art does not enter Tara?’

Lugh said: ‘Question me I am a wright’

The door-keeper answered: ‘We need thee not. We have Luchta the wright.’

Lugh said: ‘Question me for I am a smith.’

The door-keeper answered: ‘We need thee not. We have Goibnu the smith’

Lugh said: ‘Question me for I am champion.’

The door-keeper answered: ‘We need thee not. We have Ogma the champion’

Lugh said: ‘Question me for I am a leech’

The door-keeper answered: ‘We need thee not. We have Dian Cecht the leech’

Lugh said: ‘Question me for I am Brazier.’

The door-keeper answered: ‘We need thee not. We have Credne Cert the brazier.’

Lugh said: ‘Ask the King whether he has a single man who possesses all these arts, and if he has, I will not enter Tara.’

Lugh entered the hall, hushed voices inquired as to who he was, rumours of a powerful warrior who had mastered all the arts. The great warrior Ogma barred his way to test this new upstart. He lifted a huge stone and threw it at Lugh’s feet challenging him to a contest of strength. Lugh lifted the stone and threw it back to where Ogma had lifted it from.

As once was custom Lugh then was challenged to a game of Fidchell to test his knowledge and Lugh won each time. He was then asked to play the harp from which he played the most beautiful music. The company were impressed by Lugh and he was forever known as Samildanach (many gifted).

Lugh spoke to King Nuada and implored him to fight against the oppression of the Fomorians. Nuada nodded his approval and the Sidhe prepared for war.

When all the company gathered Lugh wanted to spark passion and incite enthusiasm to win the war. He called to all the Druids, poets, physicians, builders, wrights, blacksmiths, metal workers and warriors to speak and boast of how they could win this war.

The magicians said they will call to the twelve chief mountains to roll their tops down onto the Fomorian host, the cup-bearers would make sure the twelve chief lochs would not provide water for the fomor, whilst providing plentiful water for the Tuatha de Danann. The Druids would rain showers of fire upon the giants and take two-thirds of their bravery, skill at arms and strength.

The poets said they will stand on a hill at sunrise with their backs to a thorn tree with a thorn and stone in their hands and cast devastating satire, the smiths would renew every broken blade and the physicians will bring warriors back to life provided their marrow is not cut through or their heads chopped off.

The Tuatha de Danann made their way to the battlefield.

They waited; the ground started to shake, the sky blackened and the waters froze as the Fomorian host led by Indech and Balor came to meet the Sidhe. The giants were terrible filled with horror and indomitable power. They wielded crude blunt weapons with adamantine strength that shook all the worlds.

The Tuatha de Danann stood their ground and prepared to face them. The poets cast devastating satire, the Druids reined fire, mountains toppled and lochs dried up and still the Fomorians fought on. Two-thirds of their bravery, skill and strength was taken from them and still they fought on.

The Tuatha de Danann replaced weapons, staunch wounds even brought warriors back from the dead but still the giants fought on.

Balor, the great leader of the giants came forward and four great giants lifted his eye lid and in an instant the Sidhe fell by their hundreds as his poisonous eye killed all that it looked upon.

Lugh had to take action as they were losing. He stood on one leg, lifted one arm and covered one eye and in this position he aimed his sling shot and took out the eye of Balor and in his rage he ran to Balor and with the clean cut of the sword of light took off his head and placed it on the nearby hazel tree where it dripped and oozed creating a tree of fear who few would dare approach.

But still the giants fought on, the cupbearers dried up the lochs, the magicians moved mountains, the warriors fought without relent and the poets cast deadly satire but still the giants kept coming.

The Sidhe army led by Lugh was now reduced to but a few of the greatest warriors. They awaited their destiny facing the baleful giants who surrounded them when suddenly a blood curdling terrible war cry sounded across the land.

The Morriginia came forth in the form of a spider, crow and raven. She enlivened the sods of the earth and the trees and the plants to fight for their cause.

Her power was incredible and as she came forth so did the energy of all her lineage erupting as the bedrock of the sea rising to the battlefield. She who is source of all, the womb of all creation.

Morriginia cried out with such malice the unstoppable force of the Cailleach Beare herself joined the battlefield. The mountains toppled and the ground ripped open swallowing the giants and taking them into the deep abyss from whence they came.

Every harmed rock, mineral, grain of soil cried out the name of every goddess forced into exile, every woman wronged, every lifeform harmed and every seed of injustice that was allowed to flourish. Thunder sounded in the depths, fire burst from the tombs of the underworld and She came:

Cailleach Cailleach Mountain Mother,

Endurance, perseverance,

Incredible resilience. x2

Back to the source, Back to the sea, Back to the womb where I was born. x2

The remaining giants who fled from the battle field were pursued by Lugh, Ogma and the Dagdha.

The battle was won.

The Morriginia looking upon the battlefield saw the fallen who had fought so valiantly. She questioned if anyone truly does win in a war. She cried out for an everlasting high peace:

*'Peace high as heaven,
heaven to the earth,
earth under heaven,
strength in everyone.*

*Cup's great fullness,
fullness of honey,
mead til satiety,
summer in winter.*

*Green growth after spring,
autumn increase of horses,
a company for the land,
land with trade to its farthest shore:
may it be mighty forested, perpetually-sovereign!*

*Peace high as heaven,
life eternally.*

Cath Mag Tuiread translated by Whitley Stokes, sourced in Celtic Myth and Legend- John and Caitlin Matthews.

She watched an eagle fly over the battlefield and as she calmed, she entered into a state of knowing and the knowledge of the ending of the world was given to her.

Once again, she spoke and this time of the future that awaited us all:

'I shall not see a world that will be dear to me.

Summer without flowers,

Kine without milk,

Women without modesty,

Men without valour,

Captures without a king,

Woods without mast,

Sea without produce,

Wrong judgements of old men.'

Cath Mag Tuiread translated by Whitley Stokes, sourced in Celtic Myth and Legend- John and Caitlin Matthews.

The Dark Mother

This epic battle sees the end of the reign of the indigenous beings of the land of Ireland, a new power has risen and it is the Goddess of War who calls for peace and laments the end of the world.

The story is packed with many themes allowing us to explore the Deities of Celtica in intimate ways from the loss of herblore and the power of the poet, to the ritual at the doors of Tara to the eventual winning of the battle and the proclamations of the Dark Mother.

The Morriginia plays the role of the protagonist, fighting for the rights that all people should be allowed to have access to their homeland as well as treated fairly without oppression.

A woman of power standing up for the rights of her people and upholding the sovereignty of the land. It is the phantom Queens, the menacing war Goddesses that bring divine justice and challenge an oppressed status quo.

When society needs change and our leaders are not making good decisions, it is they who come through the strength of the people. They are the sovereignty of the land.

However, she also seems aware of what these changes will bring for as the giants no longer dominate the land it seems a gradual decline of the old ways will start to materialise.

We have already met the Earth Mother many times in this course and have noted her in many forms. As we enter the time of Samhain, she beckons us into the deep dark heart of our soul to be remade and prepared for the year ahead for Samhain is the Celtic new year.

Rebirth happens in the dark places and therefore in the second part of the year as nature rests we prepare for our own connection that enhances our soul awareness and our identity with the deity that speaks to us.

We have entered the cave of knowing to be transformed and acknowledged our primal self. Now we dare to approach the Dark Mother who appears how she wishes to but holds us in truth and support throughout our lives. She is there for all peoples of all persuasions.

For we now come out of the cave walk to the sea and feel her presence all around us just as the Morriginia did on the battlefield of old...

Dark Mother meditation:

Cailleach Cailleach Mountain Mother,
Endurance, perseverance, incredible resilience. x2

Back to the source,

Back to the sea,

Back to the womb where I was born. x2

Prepare for mediation chanting the above words, you may also wish to contemplate the words of Ella Young once more in the last stage as she connects us further to the Mountain Mother.

*'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.'

Contemplate your own temporary life and allow the knowledge of eternity to enter your understanding as you are consumed and reborn by the ultimate mother just as Tuan Mac Cairill has been many times. This process is happening to us all and the memories are deep within us....

So once again let us enter those memories, gaze into the deep well at Samhain and feel that connection. Acknowledge the sacred trees around the well and as you look within you may see the salmon of silver scales looking back up at you.

Enter the well focusing on connecting with the dark mother, there is nothing to fear.

You arrive at a shoreline and look out at the expansive sea, you may wish to call out to the Mother once more with the chant above and sense her all-encompassing presence.

As you gaze at the sea you feel the sea bed lifting, you feel the Mother rising as black stone or granite rock. She is the foundation of all creation and even the vast seas are held in her embrace and as she rises to the sky you know even the heavens are bound by her grace.

Meditate on this immense power, this force beyond comprehension that dwarves even the seas, skies and mountains.

You are in the presence of the Mountain Mother.

Everyday Tradition

When we trace our indigenous roots back to the Mother we arrive at the bedrock of creation. Religion has sought to oppress and eradicate the Goddess from the mainstream beliefs of her people. When you explore our history, you discover how the feminine principal has been maligned to the degree where she owes her entire existence to a male principal.

Today there is a movement which seeks to drop the concept of male and female completely to arrive at the non-binary androgenous principal which is deep in the core of our oldest traditions. It is likely that before this can happen, we have to address the exiled Goddess.

Once we recognise and accept the feminine in ourselves and end her exile to heal our wounds we can then enter the older principle.

It may be a newer generation will not have a need to address the grieving process by truly seeing a non-binary world and creating once more an equalitarian society. However, this has to be a true experience for it is all too easy to deny our feelings and attempt to bypass them in our search for spirituality.

A spiritual bypass limits our understanding as our pain lingers in those dark places stopping us from being free to be our true selves. Feeling the pain and meeting the devouring aspect of creation deep in our cave enables us to be reborn and only then to be free of our past conditioning.

A story of agriculture.

The conclusion of this epic battle is in deciding the best way to farm the land. What could be more important than the Earth's resources that we depend upon?

The great warriors Druids, poets, physicians, builders, wrights, blacksmiths, metal workers all need the farmer.

Does Lugh represent a new way of being, the introduction of more modern agriculture, a new wave of people wishing to develop the land further moving away from the early farmer who hunted and foraged to supplement their provisions.

Interestingly enough the traitor Bres is spared for he shares the skills of farming with the Sidhe. The shining knowledgeable Sidhe are asking the great giants for the secrets of cultivation. Are the giants more in touch with the essence of creation through the working of the land?

Bres offers to create crops all year round but the Druid Maeltine of the Great Judgements replies:

"It has suited us that the spring is for sowing, the summer for strengthening, the autumn for harvesting, and the winter for consuming the grain."

The above statement confirms there is a season and time for doing things. Bres goes on to state that much of the ploughing and sowing should be done on a Tuesday this is borne out in this Traditional Reaping blessing translated by Alexander Carmichael:

*On Tuesday at the feast of the rise of the sun
And the back of the ear of the corn to the East
I will go forth with my sickle down
While the fruitful ear is in my grasp
I will raise mine eye upwards
I will turn on my heel quickly.*

*Rightway as travels the sun
From the direction of the East to the West
From the direction of the North with motion slow
To the very core of the direction of the South.*

*I will give thanks to the King of Grace
For the growing crops of the ground
He will give food to ourselves and to the flocks
According as He disposeth me.*

Traditional Reaping blessing translated by Alexander Carmichael.

The Dagdha towards the end of the saga uses his proud black heifer to call upon all the cattle of Ireland thus bringing the fruition and fecundity of the land into being.

The story recognises the absolute importance of crops and livestock and if these matters are not addressed first then the battle can never be won.

Let us conclude therefore with this Irish poem translated by Caitlin Matthews describing the qualities of the seasons:

*Autumn is a good time for visiting: During its short days there is work for all.
See the dappled fawns among the hinds, Sheltering in the red bracken;*

See the stags run from the round hills At the belling of the deer tribe.

There are sweet acorns in the high woods, Cornstalks are king over the brown earth.

A palisade of brambles guards the ruined rath, The hard ground is enriched by a treasury of fruit.

Profuse the hazel-nuts from the ancient hedge-trees.

Black is the season of deep winter, The margins of the world are storm crested.

Sad are the birds of every meadow, Lamenting the harsh winter's clamour,

All save ravens gorged on blood.

Winter- rough-black, dark-smoked, cold-flinted.

Dogs splinter the cracking bones, Cauldrons sit on fires at the dark day's end.

Raw and chill is icy spring, Cold sits on every wind.

On the sodden pool, ducks cry out, Eager is the harsh-shrieking crane.

From the wilderness Wolves scent morning prey, Birds rise from meadowed nest,

Many are the wild things of the wood, That they flee from out of the greening earth.

Good is the season of peaceful summer; The council of trees gather together,

A band unshaken by the whistling wind, A green gathering in the sheltered woods;

Eddies swirl the stream, Good is the warm turf beneath us.

Anon. Irish poem, 11th Century, trans C.matthews.

Wishing you all a fruitful harvest and abundant winter.

