



## **WOODLAND BARD COURSE**

### **A DETAILED AND PRACTICAL EXPLORATION OF CELTIC TRADITIONS THROUGH THE STUDY OF NATURE**

#### **STAGE 2 - INVOKING FATHER EARTH**

Spiritual practice starts with repetition, a consistency which settles the mind into a familiar landscape that then allows freedom for the imagination to come to the forefront of the mind. A quiet, simple gentle state that promotes peace and stillness enables us to connect with our inner worlds and be aware of energies that are being drawn to us or that surround us.

So let us come back to the sacred well and open our meditation with honouring the earth, make offerings to the Sidhe, the ancestry of the land and then enter the well to connect with the Earth Mother.

It is important all these stages are done in quiet gentle ways to not allow the intellect to take hold of these concepts and awaken a thinking mind.

The immensity of folklore that we could explore just to arrive at this first stage is inexhaustible. Every tradition has its own feeling and unique nature. This course encourages a more personal connection to an individual tradition that is practical and embodied.

If we encourage too much speculation in the mind to arrive at an academic study, we sometimes can block the creative spirit that comes through in the practices, although it is also important to acknowledge that the academic studies can also infiltrate and awaken awareness of soul provided the knowledge is then applied.

## **Meditation 2 – The Earth Father**

Now we will start our meditation with invoking the male aspect of the Earth which as already discussed can follow the first invocation to the Earth Mother written in the first stage of this course. The invocation below is to the Dagdha, who is considered to be a father God or a God of the earth in the Irish tradition which we shall explore further after the meditation.

The invocation is:

Good God Dagdha, Father of Many, Parentage of the Sidhe, All-knowing Noble,  
Spirit of the Green Wood shelter us; Power of the soft brown earth comfort us.  
May the strength rising from the roots of the trees transport us to the bright realms acting as pillars of hope.  
May the roots of trees ground us in one reality,  
taking us into the depths of our being, the womb of the earth.  
Inspiring us to be caretakers of all Nature.

Good God Daghdha, May we be as steady as a tree,  
serving all beings and taken only that which we need to sustain our lives.

Good God Daghdha, Envelop us in the knowledge of the Green Wood.  
Teach us to have a compassionate heart and truly love all souls equally as one.

Great God Daghdha teach us to be light of spirit, tender of heart, steadfast in being.

May the wild wood of all souls continue to blossom for all eternity.

### **Jonathon Huet 2017**

Contemplate these words and then get a sense of the presence of the Earth Father and Mother surrounding you. Allow the image of the well to come before you or just know that it is there and then get a sense of the directions around the sacred well. Know where East, South, West and North are in relation to where you are sitting or lying and in relation to the well. You may wish to be guided by the video below.

We shall call to the directions through the four main Celtic male deities experienced in the elements and landscapes. We shall get to know these deities throughout this course through story, but for now just take the impressions you receive as you use your imagination to know the form the wind, sun, sea and earth would take. This is then your personal connection to the tradition and if you wanted to adapt these themes or use different deity names, that limitless choice is before you as you travel the inner landscape of your own soul.

This is your first step in entering the primal traditions and in creating the first stories for yourself. The early forms of spirituality stem from the gigantic elemental forms that surround us. As we make a personal and emotional connection to the land and its elements, we experience a deep and lasting connection to these forces of nature and instead of believing in a God or Goddess we experience them all around us. If this feels like play and you perceive the imagination as fantasy but are still able to feel

its benefits, then surely, it's still worth it.

This is not creating a delusion but enabling us to connect with our natural environment in our own unique way. It may well take years to let go of the idea that it is made up and to just accept it is as true to you as your physical world.

For now, you can just enjoy its benefits and know it's still good for you. The role of story and imagination for good mental health is key in psychotherapeutic practices as well as key in aiding the development of children as they learn to navigate the world. This is why tuning into the directions is so important as it enables you to orientate yourself in the world. The place where you are seated is your centre and from here you can link the outer with the inner realms.

### **Let us begin...**

Imagine listening to the wind caressing the trees and waters, the voice of Oengus Og in the East speaking of birth and of song, of spring and of dawn and of youth. In the South the sun rises from the heat of Lugh Lamhfada speaking of passion and of war, of summer and of midday and of adolescence. In the West we experience the vision of Manannán mac Lir in the waves of the sea, speaking of sorrow and of dream, of autumn and twilight and of maturity and in the North the form of the Dagdha in the landscape, the old rocks and trees speaking of life and of death, of winter and of midnight, and of old age in the eternal landscape.

In the centre is the Earth Mother and we speak the words:

'Herein lies the soul of the land, the guardians of the Earth, the makers of kings, the honour of maidens, the gift of life, the contract of humanity, the destiny of soul, the doorway into the soul of the land, a temple to the Sidhe, the ancestors of the land.'

We now enter the well and are drawn down into our inner landscape connecting with the waters but then also with the strength of the Dagdha in the form of an oak. The great oak of Celtica is known as Eo Mugna as described below and connecting with that strong male energy is essential to balance the feminine energies of the water whatever gender that you are.

The male energy of the Dagdha through the oak calls us to settle under its boughs, to rest and recharge. To resist the urge to respond and react and top up our energies for the coming day, week or year.

Meditate deeply with the image of the oak and receive the deep blessings of peace as nature and soul merge together in the inner cave of the web of life.

Here is a description of Eo Muga the great sacred oak of Irish traditions:

Eo Mugna, great was the fair tree,  
High its top above the rest,  
Thirty cubits it was no trifle,  
That was the measure of its girth.

Three hundred cubits was the height of the blameless tree.  
Its shadow sheltered a thousand.  
In secrecy it remained in the north and east  
Until the time of Conn Ceadchathach.

A hundred score of warriors, no empty tale,  
Along with ten hundred and forty  
Would that tree shelter, it was a fierce struggle,  
Until it was overthrown by the poets.

## **Danu and Dagdha**

As I have mentioned earlier in the course each tradition has its own feel and unique nature. I feel it is good to resist the urge to interpret each tradition in the same way. For instance, seeing all Gods as of the sky and the sun and all Goddesses as the moon and the earth. Resisting the urge to label the key deities in the same way as we are taught in Classic studies allows us to let go of the need to categorise and compare.

The concept of the Celtic twilight encourages us to let of labels and to enter in what the Aboriginals call the dream time. The Celtic twilight was brought alive through great writers and poets such as William Butler Yeats, A.E. (George William Russell) and Lady Gregory who helped bring about a revival of Irish literature and poetry. The Scots Alexander Carmicheal and Professor Magnus Maclean also helped renew interest in Gaelic literature and Celtic studies. Lady Charlotte Guest put the ancient stories of Wales (the Mabinogion) into a modern print format for the first time in 1841 and Kuno Meyers a German Scholar brought much ancient Irish poetry back into the light. I have already mentioned how the writings of Fiona Macleod give us the experience of the Celtic tradition.

For me the Celtic twilight is as real as ever and is not a neo-pagan tradition, but a living tradition brought alive by practitioners working directly with these traditions that are still alive in all of nature. More modern writers continue this work such as Caitlin and John Matthews who offer that same living tradition through their incredible works.

Danu is considered to be the Mother Goddess and she may be called by many names such as Anu or Aine, she also is known as Donn in Welsh lore. I tend to use the name of Banbha who we will explore later in the course. She may at times be the maiden especially in the spring and the hag especially in winter. She may be known deep in the earth as well as far up in the stars in the vast skies of eternity.

She may weave the web of life or wash the shrouds of the dead appearing in both terrible and beautiful forms.

If she is nature then the elements, seasons and life force is expressed through her in a myriad of different ways and forms. If she is nature then it is obvious that she can be many things just as nature is cruel and kind, beautiful and ugly all at the same time. The only way to assimilate all this changing knowledge is through regular practice steeped in the elements, directions, seasons and all of nature. To understand it in the heart of things through story, meditation and contemplation so it is embodied and not conditioned into human labels.

The Dagdha is considered to control the sun and the seasons but dwells deep in the earth, his appearance can be unkept with ill-fitting clothes and unbrushed hair and yet he creates the most divine music, intoxicates the most beautiful women, is poetic, insightful, rustic and of the earth all at the same time. He is humbled through harsh labour and yet creates a world of perfection through his toil. He can bring about death and create life, again he embodies all the contradictions that life has to offer.

Our journey has only just begun to understand these two key deities. In the next stages of the course, we will build on this knowledge, get to know deity as raw, powerful, incredible forces in nature and then also as friendly faces overcoming adversity in the land of myth.

## **EVERYDAY TRADITION**

## Exploring Role models

In the first stage we looked at finding a guardian, an imaginary friend to protect us as we travel the inner worlds or even as a companion in the outer world when we are fearful or struggling with emotion. The companion is also a protection for the soul which if supported feels safe.

In this section we shall explore deities as role models. The conditioning of how we should be in the world is deep within us and although modern society especially the newest generations are challenging these role models, we can still become very stuck in them.

However, it is also true that now more than ever there is increasing pressure to also be a certain way and to fit in. The reason I say more than ever is because in many ways this has always been the case but now our lives are being made more and more public through the internet.

In the Celtic twilight we look to the state betwixt the opposites, recognising that we all have opposing qualities and that the common thread is found in accepting the contradictions of life. Accepting that we all have male and female, fair and foul, strong and weak qualities. All of these qualities can be brought to the lime light through story and by exploring the deities more intimately which we will begin to do in the next stages.

Although the female qualities in society have been maligned in terrible ways and many of us have grown up in a patriarchal society which does not honour the subtle, kind, feminine qualities, I also feel as a man we are missing the strong steady qualities of the male role model. In fact, despite a more accepting society of the LGBTQ+ community we still find the role models of men are super fit and muscled which doesn't always reflect an inner strength.

The Dagdha as a male figure is strong and steady but also is caring and providing. He may reflect a male quality where there is an emotional maturity of not reacting and responding all the time but holding one's self. Of course, the extreme of this can mean men are too inhibited and deny their feelings but the positive quality is an inward calm that can hold its own and be supportive. In Celtic lore they recognise the young warrior living for the moment in a state of restlessness but also the older mature wizened man that is so needed in society.

In most stories the warrior leaders become wizened very early on in life with a deep knowledge of the arts such as poetry and music enabling them to lead from a mature understanding place, rather than through brutality.

As a man it is harder for me to comment on female role models but certainly in Celtic tradition the women can be strong and defiant and portrayed as warriors as well as gentle, wise, older women. In a society where we live longer and old age takes longer to come upon us it is still important to value the slower, stronger wiser qualities of the older person.

The apparent contradictions portrayed in the qualities of Danu and the Dagdha are within us all and the more we are exposed to role models that are comfortable with their way of being the more our confidence can grow. Whether your son or daughter, brother or sister, mother or father are warriors or poets, steady or reactionary matters not, it is more whether they can truly embody who they are in all their complexity or simplicity without apology.

Danu and Dagdha are not dissimilar in sound to mamma and dad these primal utterances of our need to be taken care of as we arrive and develop in this world.

The metaphor of story in providing key figures to nurture both our young and ourselves is vital for our well-being, to grow up with the concept of the earth as our parents that provides all our needs will instigate a love for nature in all its forms.

## Exploring Story and Place.

In order to enter the tradition further it helps us to familiarise ourselves with story. By now you will know I am drawing mainly from the Irish myths as they have been kept alive more so than many of the Celtic stories in Britain and beyond. They encapsulate the Celtic tradition bringing us a pantheon of Gods and Goddesses not dissimilar to the Greek Olympian Gods and Goddesses. What is of paramount importance to the primal tradition is that the stories are bound to a place.

For instance, the Greek Gods are associated with Olympus and the primal stories from all around the world are connected to place. Place is essential to enter tradition for the minute it becomes disassociated from place we enter into a more detached mode of thinking. To see the stories and the deities, as we have already explored, coming alive in the landscape brings a deep understanding of the tradition.

The question you may then ask yourself is do I then need to be Irish or at least visit Ireland to continue this course?

My answer to that can only be from my own experience of working with place. I have always connected with nature from a young age. After leaving school I worked in Forestry and Horticulture before setting up my own venture which I still run today.

Already on this course we have connected with our own relationship to deity by using our own imaginations as to how the elements may feel or look to us when we perform ritual or meditate, we have therefore created our own storylines and our own relationship to the tradition.

However, as I have said in other writings by using visual aids from traditional tales, we find the pathways are more accessible as others of past generations as well as our own have already walked them, thus these pathways bring alive a true awakening in the heart and an experience of the tradition you are practicing.

This means to mix and match traditions especially at the early stages is the equivalent of digging lots of small holes to find the treasure instead of committing to one hole and exploring its depths to arrive at the treasure.

Once we have found the treasure the danger then, as religion has demonstrated, is to think the tradition that we are part of is the most important and everyone needs to adhere to it. We all have seen evidence of when traditions are misused and tap into extreme nationalism. Although we live in far more accepting times, this dualistic idealism still keeps rearing its ugly head.

Sometimes this awareness means that we turn our backs on all traditions or water down traditions to make them all the same. The balance is always in unity whilst still allowing the individual song of your patch of the world to be heard.

In this course the tradition is Celtic, and the spiritual hub is Ireland. This means our point of entry into the tradition so far has been Connla's well. This is representative of all wells and spiritually the source of all rivers, streams and our senses. However, this well is of the other world and so we can visualise it in the form of a well we know in our physical life.

For me it is St Anne's well in Brighton. Which is exciting for me as it is the name St Anne which is rooted in the old name of Aine or Anu which takes us back to Danu. This we shall see with the name of St Brigit and its association with the Goddess Brigit later in the course.

St Anne's well is messy, it has metal railings around it at the moment, glass bottles and other rubbish is dropped there and it has been concreted over probably for safety. The park itself is beautiful with the most exquisite mature Elm trees which is a rare find today; but nevertheless, the well at times looks abused.

This is part of the spiritual work, our 'geasa', to give life back to our neglected areas of place rather than all increase our carbonimprint by escaping to sacred sites in other areas. If we all go to the same spots, we will also lose the solitude that we need to help connect intimately with the site.

The answer then is I need to work with my own locality and the spirit of the places that I live in whilst tapping into my chosen tradition to understand how to excavate the wisdom from such places.

We can then explore the local stories of the place whilst creating our spiritual hub in the tradition we are a part of. The further back we go in time often we find the tradition, birthplace and our home are all in the same area. Today I find my spiritual heritage in Celtic Mythology and my place in the South of England. I see no conflict with this as the Celtic heritage is my own and this may well be true of those

of you on the other side of the world.

I have focused on the importance of story and place in detail here as the next stages will have an increased focus on both these key principles.