



STAGE 4- ENTERING THE SOUL SHRINE.

In this stage I invite you to a place that we can visit in story and although I have explained the importance of visiting places that exist in the physical world, it is not always easy to do so and drawing from memory and traversing the inner worlds at home is an effective way to understand a tradition and the stories connected to it.

When the mythologies are told by an expert storyteller who has embodied their tradition, they give us the experience of the themes and meanings behind the story, in the same way that the incredible writers such as Fiona MacLeod and Yeats do with their works. This assimilation is ideal for soul awareness as it often bypasses the intellect and goes straight to the heart of things. We can aid this valuable process by meditating upon the themes in the story and to study each scene a little at a time to reveal its hidden depths.

To actually recreate the scenes in the story internally and to become part of the story is the most potent way to understand the deep truths hidden within it. Many of us are familiar with this process through Bible studies and then of course in other parts of the world with the Vedas and the Koran and so forth.

To truly experience the elements as deity and to meet the hidden ones we visit them deep inside ourselves and in their world. The first step is to get to know a deity or hero in a story. Learn as much as you can about them and then recreate a scene from their story especially the place they are associated with. We shall do this with the story we are examining of Boann. It is your choice whether to meet Boann or the Dagdha or the other deities in association with them but the most important element is you actively enter the story and play a part rather than witness it.

Let us begin....

Meditation 4- Visiting the Soul Shrine

In the deep recesses of the earth the Dagdha works the land and in the depths of the wells Boann maintains the waters. They unite as land and water, their offspring being the green world reflected in the night sky as Bealach na Bo Finne, the way of the white cow that most of us know as the milky way. This means that not only did she create the river Boyne but the stars above, the galaxy itself.

In the Celtic tradition the more we excavate the depths of the earth, the more we understand the cosmos as the stars themselves as well as the moon shine in the underworld.

As we enter the well, we call to Boann, the river Goddess to unite the world's waters and then we drop down into the well and arrive in the old stone circle where the moon rises upon cold stone engraved with cups and rings, spirals and circles, the deep ancestors speak to us through memory of moon on stone. We chant to the moon:

Power of the Moon, come to thee,
Spirit of the Moon, guide thee,
Song the moon, comfort thee,
In how to heal the earth.

Deep in the moonlit chamber, I await death.

Deep in the moonlit chamber I await rebirth.

Deep in the moonlit chamber my soul stirs.

Hope and memory give birth to life.

My own passions and wants.

My own pure intentions and hopes.

Bind them as one in the light of the moon.

Opposites mingle in darkness; the common thread unites them.

Ancient stone, old old ways, glimmering moon, come to thee,

Enter well, Follow tree, Stone circle, awaken me,

Passage graves, Sunlit chamber, Faerie dweller, embody me.

Deep in the moonlit chamber, deep in the womb of the earth,

Where all creation begins, where all give birth.

J.Huet 2021

We bathe in her shimmering light and old old memories come to us in the knowledge of the
Moon.

Only when we are ready, we notice three spirals joined together to form the triskele engraved
in a central stone.

We look at it and allow it to take us even further down into the landscape, the path is lit and as
the landscape opens up we see Brugh na Boinne before us, an ancient stone tomb covered in
turf. We approach the door and knock thrice and enter.

As we enter our guide or guides may well be there. In the centre is a warm hearth and the
atmosphere is friendly and kind.

We sit in the ancient tomb, our spiritual home, our soul shrine and meditate, relaxing deeply
taking in the beauty of this sunlit chamber.....

THE SOUL SHRINE

The soul shrine in Celtic lore is known as Coich Anam and is said to be made up of three conditions which make up our spiritual wholeness these are brought together in the triple spiral known as the triskele.

The three conditions as explored in Caitlin Matthews superb book- The Encyclopedia of Celtic wisdom are **Crabhadh** which is the trust and devout observance of the soul, **Credeamh**, the heart's consent and **Iris** the mind's pledge. Caitlin Matthews also has brought to our attention through her commentary on a fifteenth century treatise on poetry the lore of the three cauldrons spoken of in Bardic Irish lore also in her book Encyclopaedia of Celtic Wisdom and explored in our foundation course. Here is a summary for those who are not familiar with this lore:

The cauldron of warming (Coire Goiriath) is situated in the root of the belly and is upright in all people. This position enables it to fill with the learning of true knowledge, yet only some use it to heat the knowledge of inspiration within them.

The cauldron said to be situated in the heart is the cauldron of vocation (Coire Ernmae) which can stay inverted in some people, positioned on the side if you have awareness and in an upright position if you are a master.

The treatise says it can be upturned by sorrow or joy. In the Sufi tradition they speak of the breaking of the heart to rebuild it more strongly and capable of deeper loving.

The third cauldron is the cauldron of knowledge (Coire Sofhis) and is situated in the area often called the third eye in Eastern spirituality. The sensation felt in this centre can also be very intense as it opens, piercing the brow and allowing bliss to enter the head, lifting the spirits and awakening a sensuous flow throughout the entire body. This moving energy is what the poets call inspiration, the fire in the head.

In Gaelic, inspiration is called 'Imbas' and it's source flows from the sacred water ways and the river Boyne. The seeker becomes the salmon flowing against the current of ordinary life to the source of the Boyne, the Well of Segais where they obtain knowledge by the eating of hazelnuts, and are reborn in the well of inspiration.

In meditation visit your soul shrine as above as often as you are able. You may wish to tune into the areas of the three cauldrons . Breathe vital life into these areas and allow yourself to come into balance.

WISDOM OF THE BARDS.

Deep in the soul shrine of Brugh na Boinne or New grange resides Angus Og a key figure of soul protection, his sister is Brigit who weaves a sacred mantle of protection around all who ask for it. This is the ideal place to nurture our soul, to top up and restore our strength to face the world.

Brigit in the next stage will bring us out of the soul shrine to walk our soul's landscape, the pilgrim's path which is lit by Corra, the Celtic world serpent but for now let us stay in the soul shrine with Boann, the Dagdha, Angus and Brigit and examine once more the power of story.

Let us Begin...

Invocation of the Bard

I'm Luis MacDara and I hear the ancient song,
I hear the ancient song of the Earth.

I am an exile I belong to no tribe,
I hear the ancient song the earth.

This land runs through every fibre of my being,
I hear the ancient song of the Earth.

I feel her pain, the savage lament,
I hear the ancient song of the Earth.

I witness the stories erupt from the land,
I hear the ancient song of the Earth.

I am a chronicler, a storyteller,
I hear the ancient song of the Earth.

I only sip from the sacred cup,
to heal the wastelands of the earth

I hear the ancient song of the Earth.

All of the tales I tell are true for they have come down from the ancient bards of old, from Fintan mac Bochra to Tuan mac Cairill to Urard mas Coise down to the saints of old, Patrick, Columcille and Brigit to my own ears-

For I am Luis MacDara, the son of poetry, poetry, son of reflection, reflection son of meditation, meditation son of lore, lore son of research, research son of great knowledge, great knowledge son of intelligence, intelligence son of comprehension, comprehension son of wisdom, wisdom son of the three gods of Danu.

Genealogy of memory from 'The Colloquy of the Two Sages' (Book of Leinster 1100CE sourced by Caitlin Matthews)

Fintan mac Bochra and Tuan mac Cairill were the first bards of Ireland. They lived for many hundreds of years and took the forms of different animals to witness the stories of the land.

The first invocation above relates an idea of hearing the stories erupt from the land and indeed we have already explored how we can connect with place and hear the story of that place within us.

The important lore to note here is there are no stories if no-one is alive to witness the events and the memories of the land are witnessed by the oldest of animals which we have explored in our tree folklore course under hazel.

This means we can access the lost memory of story by asking the animals which are our guides to the inner worlds. The salmon which we find in Connla's well is the oldest of animals and is therefore most associated with Fintan mac Bochra the oldest of all Bards who takes the form of the Salmon of Assaroc which also just like Boann has only one eye. This loss of one eye is representing that one eye is in this world and the other in the inner realms.

The second invocation lists the ways to wisdom which indicates effort as well as inspiration is needed and finally in my own words I list the lineage of transmission of the stories which comes down from the ancient bards who are the ancestry of the land into the new Christian tradition via the saints before reaching my own ears as Luis MacDara.

It is important to note that the old traditions can only survive if they are still transmitted through the new traditions and most importantly are still relevant today. This is a theme we will come back to in more detail.

In the tree folklore course under Yew we explore the five sacred trees which are also connected to Fintan mac Bochra for it is he that planted them. Trees also have the role as memory keepers and the oldest living tree is the Yew.

Deep in the memories of the earth in our soul shrine we can then make our first tentative steps to meet the memory of the Bards through the trees.

Five sacred trees.

Around the well of Connla we can tune into five sacred trees as well as the directions and deities.

Each tree deserves a meditation and study of its own which is possible through our tree folklore course, for now I summarise briefly the role of the trees around Connla's well which will be enough to continue the studies in this course.

We have already worked with the text- 'Connlas well is at the foot of a mountain ash...'

The key tree we begin to connect with then is the rowan or mountain ash tree and it is this tree that the practitioners of the Celtic twilight placed a huge focus on as it is the tree that takes us into the magic of the tradition, this is explored in greater depth in our tree folklore course.

The other tree that is prevalent surrounding the lore of well is the hazel which is the tree of knowledge offering its nuts for us to digest to imbibe the wisdom of the poets.

The third tree is the oak which is associated with the Dagdha and with the great tree Eo magna that we have already explored. This tree is a foundation and support which holds us in times of need and regeneration.

The fourth tree is the apple which offers us entry to the blessed isles, the true realm of the Sidhe which is not of this world and is often thought of as many islands which we are ferried to when our soul moves on. We can visit the Isles while still alive with the guidance of Mannan mac Lir and the apple tree. This lore we will revisit later in the course.

The central tree is the ancient Yew which we can visit to bring back the memories of tradition through the bright flame of Brigit the muse of all poets who will be our focus in the next stage.

In the lore of the five sacred trees yew is one of the trees used to separate Ireland into its five provinces. The King summons the oldest and wisest man in Ireland to his court to share out the land fairly and it is the great bard already mentioned Fionntan MacBochna who is summoned, a bard who lived from the beginning of the first invasion of Ireland up until the sixth century taking the forms of the salmon, eagle and stag, witnessing the stories of the land through the oldest animals.

He informs the King that he would meditate on the issue and as he does so Trefuilngid Tre-eochair appears to him who is said to control the rising and the setting of the sun. He gives Fionntan the seeds of the five sacred trees mentioned in the poem below.

*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.*

*How fell the bough of Daithi?
It spent the strength of many a gentle hireling, An Ash, the tree of nimble hosts,
Its top bore no lasting yield.*

The Ash of Tortiu, take count thereof, The Ash of populous Uisneach.

Their boughs fell, it was not amiss, In the time of Ead slane.

The ash of Tortiu, take count thereof,

The ash of populous Uisneach.

Their boughs fell, it was amiss, it was not amiss,

In the time of the Sons of Ead Slane.

The Yew of Mugna, it was a hallowed treasure,

Nine hundred bushels was its bountiful yield,

It fell in Dairbre southward,

Across Magh Ailbe of the cruel combats.

The Bole of Ross, a comely yew,

With abundance of broad timber,

The tree without hollow or flaw,

The stately bole, how did it fall?

The five trees in order of the poem are Eo magna which is a gigantic oak whose roots extend into the otherworld supporting Connla's well which is a place of entry into the deep mysteries.

The tree stands guard over the mysteries.

The ash of Daithi and Tortiu are next in the poem and then the final two are both yews. The key trees therefore that stand as guardians for the provinces of Ireland are oak, ash and yew.

To conclude this section, we have five key trees to access the soul shrine and five key trees which are the guardians and sovereignty of the sacred land.

As with all the themes on this course the key is to meditate with each tree and discover the lore of each tree within you. It is important you take your time to allow each realisation to unfold over weeks, months or even years.

EVERYDAY TRADITION

Visit the woods or park in your local area, sit with the trees and meditate. What voices can you hear? What memories are awakened? Once you have sat with the trees you may wish to create a poem or story about the tree or woodland.

Maybe you could imagine who planted the trees or why they are there. You may wish to look at the shapes and sizes of the trees and imagine the characters of each tree and what they can teach you. For instance, there is a story as to why the yew has dark foliage. The yew tree is sad that its foliage is dark and uninteresting so the fairies wanting to please the tree turn its foliage to gold which thieves then steal. They then turn its foliage to crystal and the foliage shatters in a storm; and then into large broad leaves which are eaten by goats. The yew concludes its foliage is perfect to withstand the test of time and celebrates its dark appearance.

Can you guess the age of the tree and what it may have witnessed through the ages just like the bards of old?

You may wish to tune into the place and get a sense of the type of beings that live there and write stories and poems about them.

Finally, find a favourite tree, your sacred tree and sit under it, feeling its support and its ability to keep you safe. With this in mind first check your tree is healthy and not damaged before sitting under it. Beech, poplar and elm can be unsafe but oak, holly and thorn are generally safer, but do check.

As with your special place you can leave an offering of nuts and milk and honour the trees and site where you are.

When you get home, you can close your eyes and be with your new tree companion who will support you whenever you are low. You can also make a soul shrine, maybe a den in one of the rooms with cardboard or other materials you may have and if this is not possible just put a blanket over yourself, settle down and imagine you are in your soul shrine protected and nurtured by your invisible friends and supported by your tree companion.

In the next stage we will walk the pilgrim's path of the inner worlds under the protection of Brigit.