



## **STAGE 5- THE PILGRIM'S PATH**

Now it is time to come out of the soul shrine and walk the pilgrim's path. By this stage we know we are no longer alone we have guides and soul protection as well as trees and the elements to hold and guide us. Once we have the grounding and support of a tradition our whole world changes and we can look beyond the horizon to a sea of possibilities.

We have spent several months connecting to our place, discovering our entry point to the mysteries at Connla's well, the deities, directions and even the sacred trees that surround it. We have entered the well and been empowered by the moon rising on cold stone and then from there we have entered our soul shrine.

Here we are safe and supported and connected to both an ancient and new unfolding tradition of realisation. Held by Boann and Dagdha in the shrine of Aengus we can now follow Brighid firstly into the wild woods of memory before beginning our pilgrim's path.

**Let us begin....**

Brighid stands in the vast old wood, kestrels hover overhead, eagles soar, giant beetles bore holes into gigantic bollings of trees. In the distance wolves howl and beavers build dams. In the forest clearing aurochs (wild cattle) graze and deer bound through the shrubbery.

*'Everything awakening alert and joyful; the birds begin to stir and innumerable insect people. Deer quietly withdraw into leafy hiding places; the dew vanishes, flowers spread their petals, every pulse beats high, every*

*life cell rejoices, the very rocks seem to thrill with life. The whole landscape glows like a human face in a glory of enthusiasm, and the blue sky, pale around the horizon, bends peacefully down all like one vast flower.'* -

**John Muir**

She lights the first fire from a single spark and as it flickers and brightens, she takes a single flame and swallows it. The flame grows and pulses giving her the deep knowledge of the *Glefoisa*, the inspiration of all the poets which she feels deep in her belly as *Coire Goriath*, the cauldron of warmth fed by the fires beneath the earth, the life force itself called Nyart. As it burns bright it lights up her heart, the place of *Coire Ernmai* and she feels exquisite compassion for all life forms and as she does so all the herbs of the forest gather to her and she distributes them amongst the poor and the sick.

Finally, the flame reaches to her head, the place between her brows as *Coire Sofhis* and as it does so she feels the wisdom of all the universe as it pours into her being as the *Navehigi* the knowledge of all the worlds.

Many moons have passed since this first fire in the deep dark woods at the beginning of time. Now a young woman called Brighid prays by a well, she has prayed for so hard and long that the stone slabs by the well have her knees imprinted on them, she cries and shakes for she is a slave, her mother has been sent away and she is to be married off to a stranger for money. Brighid is kind and gentle but also has a flame of power and defiance burning within her. She prayed to God but felt the old ones all around her, she felt creation in her soul and in the plants and streams caressing and speaking to her.

Brighid lives at Faughart amongst gentle pastures, rippling streams and pleasant trees as she prays, she feels the old ones standing before her, a flicker of red hair, and a towering presence. She remembers how Boann defied her father and challenged the status quo of her time and that by doing so lost an eye but gained the knowledge of all the worlds.

Inspired by Boann the young woman takes out her eye to disfigure herself so that no man would want her and as she screams her own well boils and bubbles. At this point she sees another Brighid, a Brighid that stands tall and strong with an awesome power for she has been weaned on Boann herself - the white cow of wealth and raised by the green strength of the Dagdha, a Brighid that has stood in the dark woods and in the shadow of the black mountains and called to all of the herbs of the land.

This Brighid overshadowed the young woman and gave her power.

Brighid, the young woman leaves her home and follows the Boyne to its source at Carbury, she prays to the well invoking the elements and the green world and feels the presence of the old ones. A gift of a white cow which has red ears and the finest milk in all the land comes to her, it appears to her and is followed by many cattle that sustain her. However, she needs land to graze them on, so she approaches the King of Leinster and asks him for land to graze her cattle. He mocks her saying she could have as much land as her cloak will cover.

The land she knows is not his to give for its guardians are the Sidhe and they will support her. She places her cloak on the ground and it grows and grows, up to Tara where the heart of the Kingship is held, to Slane where Patrick dared to defy the Sidhe and onto Faughart where she was born thus creating the pilgrim's way to re-member the sanctity of all the land of Leinster and beyond.

Her cattle produced more milk than could be expected, she distributed it to those who had very little and she healed the sick with the herbs that grew from the land. She became famous across all the land for her kindness and generosity but knew the gifts of nature were not owned by any one person and all she gave flowed from the power of the land itself from Corra the primal connection to the womb of the earth:

Deep Deep in Mother Earth, Corra moves, creation shudders.

The pilgrim's path is lit by the spiralling movement of Corra,  
The primal connection with the womb of the earth,  
Which erupts in the deeds of those who hear her call.  
The fiery flame of Brigit born in the innocence of young women  
who will light up the world.  
A fiery red arrow, a white cow with red ears,  
A sacred well, the joining of Cygnus, the cross of Brigit,  
Bealach na Bo Finne, Power of Boann,  
Brugh na Boinne, Shrine of Aengus,  
Strength of Dagdha in the Heart of Corra.

Time passed and one day she approached an aged giant Oak and built her monastery near to its illuminating presence calling the area Kildare, the church of the Oak unifying once more the male and female energies of the land set in place by Boann and the Dagdha across the lands of Leinster for all to see.

And to this day the fire of Brighid and the cross of Cygnus is named after Brighid not Patrick as she united the old ways into the new and taught us to follow the pilgrim's path, the spiralling movement of Corra, the primal connection to the womb of the earth that erupts in the deeds of those who hear her call.

This version of the story I have created based on traditional sources, it is a perfect way to explore the changing traditions in Ireland.

In 433AD St Patrick lit the fire upon the hill of Slane before it was ignited by King Laeghaire on the hill of Tara, the heart of the Kingship of the land, the spiritual heart of Erin. As he did so a cosmic cross lit up the sky ( the constellation of Cygnus) and the newly lit fire burnt bright in the centre of it. The King should have sentenced him to death but instead bowed to the new power at this awesome sight.

This act sends ripples through the land for it defied the Sidhe, the lands ancestry, those who hold the key to the soul of the Celtic lands and until now had always been shown respect. This marks the changing of the guard, the dawn of Christianity usurping the old tradition.

However, St Brighid was born after this event and seemed to bring together the old with the new and once more a feminine power upon the land. The cross above Slane is now known as Brighid's cross and she as well as Patrick are known as key Irish saints.

This is a demonstration of how the Celtic path stands as a sentinel going back to the Megalithic path of the Sidhe in Newgrange and then forward to give birth to a new path as Brighid fuses them both

together. The pilgrim's path of Brighid still exists today linking her birth place at Faughart to Tara (the spiritual centre of the land) across to Slane which marks the beginning of the new ways to her monastery at Kildare where a female power in a patriarchal time is built.

Brighid in Celtic Christianity took the form of the high abbess of Kildare and her sanctuary which no man could enter was tended by nineteen or nine nuns. At this time her importance was considered to be greater than the bishops which upset the Roman Catholic Church. A papal decree was passed in 1151 to close the hermitage which was later reopened, only to be challenged again in the reign of Henry V111 when the sanctuary was closed forever.

However, she still lives on in our culture as the archetypal mother of all and as the caretaker of Celtic society. She takes on many roles as a healer, foster-mother and midwife, demonstrating the strength and power of the Goddess.

Brighid's role is key in Celtic Christianity as she is known as the foster mother to Jesus and linked to the holy trinity in the form of three sisters. Her threefold prayer of protection is considered so powerful it can protect the one who utters it from any calamity.

She is the ultimate protection of the soul on the pilgrim's path as her mantle of protection covers all who honour her.

She is the maiden, daughter of the Dagdha, the coming of spring and the guardian of poetry, smithcraft and healing, the three key components of Celtic life. We have already met her symbol the triskele in previous meditations and now it's time to enter the wildwood under her mantle of protection where our inner pilgrimage begins.

## **Meditation 5- Mantle of Brigid.**

Let us begin with invoking Brighid, you may wish to use the Dagdha invocation written early in the course first to invoke the spirit of the Wildwood, followed by this invocation to Brighid.

CH: The Sacred Three My fortress be Encircling me,  
Come and be round My hearth, My home.

Brighde na brig,  
Brighde na freeth,  
Bratach Brighde,  
Cumhdach na ri.

Brighid of the peats,  
Brighid of the augury,  
The mantle of Brighid,  
Sovereign protection.

As before we descend the well and enter our inner landscape to arrive at Brugh na Boinne known also as Newgrange. We enter the soul shrine where Brighid, a fiery young woman with red hair and confident stance greets us.

We follow her out of the chamber into the deep dark woods of knowledge and as we enter we get a sense of meeting an aged yew tree as old as the earth itself.

You sit by the aged tree which is as old as the ancient stones and it contains the memories of all of creation. Here your guides become even more real, do you sense an animal that is with you? You may already have a strong connection with an animal guide in which case spend a little time with them. If you are not aware of an animal start to focus your intent on one, an animal that feels right, an animal that probably reflects your own innate characteristics, what we call a familiar. Brigid's mantle will protect you from any calamity but your animal is part of your soul shrine, it will guide you through the rich tapestry of life.

After a time, you may sense a presence in the wood, an aged man who can take the form of a deer, boar, eagle and salmon, the archetypal bard of old. We shall come back to this concept in other stages in the course.

Here, is the primal path the place before field and farm, a time when people lived in complete harmony with the woods. Here are the beings who existed before even the Sidhe , the woodland dwellers whose origins are unknown and permeate mythologies from all over the world going back to a time of a shared ancestry and heritage.

In your soul you know these beings they have many names such as Cernunnus, Pan and the great giants of old such Gogmagog in England and the Fomorians in Irish lore. They spread across the Western world as Cyclops and Cronus, they are the earliest Gods the titanic forces of earthquake and volcano. At some point if you work with earth energies you will meet them. They are the raw elements of the essence of our wild nature, the untamed aspects of our free souls. Today there is so much fear around them but they maintain the ancient ways and old paths and they will come to you if there is a need, there is no need to seek them out they will find you.

They take the forms of half human and animal (known as the Puca in Irish myth) and balance the very forces of nature. As we sit by the old yew supported by a familiar animal and the aged man we may chant to these forces:

I feel the forest within me (x3), plants growing inside.

Tree spirits I see you (x3), I know you are alive.

Plant spirits encompass me (x3), weave your wisdom of life.

Under soil, under sea, old old woods, take thee.

Nymphs, fauns, centaurs, giants, teach me to serve.

A giant appears the same one we spoke of who appeared to Fintan mac Bochra in stage 4 , Trefuilngid Treochair, the Triple bearer of the triple key. He offers you three key tree seeds or saplings to plant within you, note which trees these are and bring them back with you once your meditation is concluded.

## **TRADITION FOR ALL THE FAMILY**

In stage 4 we visited a wood or park with trees, in this stage we are discovering the deep memories in the untamed depths of a woodland. This fear many of us have of dark places is often a fear of the unknown or the shadow side of ourselves. This also can be conditioning as new religions demonise the darker aspects of nature as already discussed.

The horned deities were simply those closest to the heart blood of nature, those ancient beings that were there before the advent of farming who were the closest to the womb of the earth and the dark places. Maybe these deities are seen as an affront to progress or maybe they remind us of the

uncontrollable forces of nature we are not in control of.

This is why we do not seek them; they will come to us for we are not the ones in control. These chaotic forces of nature created life and since life began they keep it all in balance. At this time the arrogance of human kind is challenging and at times trying to harness these titanic forces but at the detriment to all of society.

I feel it's important we embrace these unknown dark areas of our soul in gentle ways. When I was sixteen, I went on a vision quest course. I built a huge fire and just like Boann challenged creation, I wanted to prove I wasn't scared. As the light dimmed and the forest awoke the fear gripped me and I blew the whistle for help and felt I had failed.

Two weeks later I returned to this wood, the wood in question was an ancient wood and it did have a potent presence. It also had some troubling energies as people had misused it by fly tipping and making fires etc...

I slept under a mature tree and when the light dimmed, stags bellowed and foxes screeched. I simply felt the comfort of the tree and remained gentle rather than challenging. From this day on I can sleep in any wild area and feel safe. These days if I am fearful or worried, I can feel the comfort of my animal guide as well as the spirit of the trees which is why I emphasised the importance of an imaginary friend in stage 1.

If you can go to a dark wood or visit or even camp at a wood overnight never underestimate the power of gentleness, a quality we seem to not engage with enough these days. The soul can be shy and tentative and when reassured with the power of gentleness creates a fearless potential within us.

Find the gentleness of nature in the vast forces of creation. I once had a meditation where I connected with the incredible forces of nature which were way beyond anything I could perceive. To traverse these forces, I felt the rooted strength of these ancient deities but also the gentle strength of the women of beauty mentioned in the invocation to Danu. She was ethereal and light on foot so was able to weave her way through these forces untouched.

The adage of the willow bending in the wind rather than resisting the storm and breaking comes to mind as I contemplate this feminine force within us all.

Teaching ourselves to face fears with gentleness as well as to be in touch with beings that can comfort us is essential as we grow up to develop a strong foundation that can cope with life's challenges.

In the next stage we will go further into the wild wood and be healed by the gentle strength of our wooded landscape through the key women of power in the Fenian cycle.