



Stage 9 – Heart of the Forest – Queen of the Soil.

*'O dim and deep this forest heart
And far away from haunts of pain x 2*

*I watch the gathering shadows creep
About the trees-tops, as of yore
We used to watch them, brooding deep
On some strange tale of faery lore.*

*The darkening branches move and sway,
The stars look through the dangled dusk
Thine eyes are there; I throw away
The years without thee, like a husk.*

*We are together, and o'erhead
The trees lean close to shut us in,
The giant trees whose branches spread
Back to the world where dreams begin.*

*O dim and deep this forest heart
And far away from haunts of pain x 2'*

The beloved Queen of the Firbolgs, Talitu sits on the soft brown earth deep in her underground cavern surrounded by our most ancient Druids known as Fathach, Gnathach, Ignathach and Cesard.

They know the qualities of the soil and that the essence of all life is contained within it, they can feel the old ones in their blood and bone. Corra in the depths of the soil who rebuilds and destroys the foundations of the world, they can feel the power of the sky and the towering mountains as the Cailleach, the Mountain Mother and can feel the power of the deep salty seas in Manannan mac Lir.

For they are closest to the Earth, they know the soil and the herds, they have bones of rock, flesh of earth, hair of plants, blood of water, breathe of wind, eyes of sun, mind of moon, brain of cloud and a head of sky and can feel the works of all creation. They first heed the voice of the land and its guardians.

They are gathered in Tailtu's cavern of beaten smooth earth which has many tunnels which lead under the perpetually forested floor, her Druids are not the shining white robed people of later times but are the solid connected earthy dwellers of sub terrain dwellings in the heart of the wood with alliance to the Queen of the Soil.

Before the Firbolgs arrived on Erin's soil nature had reached its height of verdant beauty, all the areas below 2000 feet above sea level regenerated into open vast stunning woodlands reaching their heights in the perfect conditions of this time known as the Holocene. The soil, sea and sky for the first time in the planet's history was stable and able to support all aerobic life.

The Firbolgs, the first race of Macha, now live as woodland dwellers in sub-terrain shelters extended with wattle and daub structures created by highly skilled woodsman, no plains are cleared or rivers burst forth just the hard labour of human effort living in the woodland ecology of Erin.

They begin to cultivate the land in the few clearings not dominated by woods and in time they clear the trees with axes made of stone, bound with plant fibres and glue made of bone and sinew. The repeated burning of moors and heaths helps maintain the newly created land. The first heavy oxen bred from wild aurochs provide milk, blood and meat and help till the soil with the first ploughs. Their love of the soil enables them to reap good harvests and flower-filled fields grow abundant grains. These are the people that created the clover-filled meadows in

barren places of thin soils across the great expanse of the sea. They caress and hold the soil in praise marveling at nature and they also master the skills of the working with tin and bronze to create lethal broad bladed spears to hunt and if needed to protect their kin.

The first people of Macha know of the otherworld and hone their skills of magic and poetry working in harmony with the seasons and all of nature. The first druids feel the presence of the most magical of races, they make offerings to their magical kin the Tuatha de Danann.

For they know of the Dagdha singing the seasons into being on his harp, of Boann and Sinend maintaining the waterways, of Brigit caring for the pastures and the animals, of Dianceht skills as chief physician, of Airmid and Miach healing with herbs, of Bres's beauty and skills with weapons, Oghma's inspiring speeches and his honed use of words, the power of Cairpre the poet and the terrifying magic of the Morriginia the dark Goddess who is known as Neamhain, Badbh and Macha and who calls us to be the caretakers of the countryside. They know of Gobhin the smith, Luchata the wright and Credne cart the metal worker and they honour them in whatever task they perform.

They also acknowledge the even older ones, the powers of the very forces of creation itself, Corra who churns up the heat of passion to destroy and rebuild, of the great ten headed monster Mata who carved out the landscape and the Cailleach who formed the mountains and the old one Mannann mac Lir who is the ferry man and lord of the otherworld Islands far away across the seas of the Western Atlantic.

In the Firbolg camp they can feel a change coming, the high king himself Eochaid mac Eirc had a dream. He visited the chief Druid known as Cesard to interpret his dream.

Eochaid entered the smoky roundhouse hemmed in by the ever-encroaching trees and sat upon the rush covered floor. Cesard approached him with staff in hand and asked Eochaid to place one hand on the staff and for them to dream together.

Eochaid brought the dream back into his memory and Druid and King saw black birds coming up from the depths of the ocean to fight them. The noblest of the birds was struck by a great warrior of the Firbolg who cut off his wing.

Cesard spoke:

*'I have tidings for you warriors are coming across the sea,
A thousand heroes covering the ocean;
Speckled ships will press in upon us;
All kinds of death they will announce,
A people skilled in every art, a magic spell.'*

Cath Mag Tiuiread Cong translated by J. Frazer sourced in Celtic Myth and Legend- John and Caitlin Matthews.

Eochaid mac Eirc called to his greatest warrior Sreng to investigate. Sreng stood tall and proud, a mountain of a man, terrifying to behold, he held his hooked reddish-brown shield, his two thick-shafted javelins, his death dealing sword, his fine four-cornered helmet and his heavy solid club to make his way to where these invaders had set up camp.

On the way he first walked towards the lone hawthorn tree and felt the earth shudder. The white bark of the thorn shone in the glimmering moonlight. Sometimes it looked like it was wreathed in fire and other times shrouded in a cool mist. At its base was an entrance of rock and soil and as he stared at the entrance, he heard a cackle of mocking laughter and a memory of Tailtu's voice stating that bravery is allowing yourself to be renewed in the fiery flames of inner change not on a battle field. That same mocking shiver he felt at these words ran through his spine as he looked at the lone thorn.

As he approached, he felt a trembling movement in the earth, a sense of older deeper realms beyond time and form. The sky darkened, shadows moved, unbidden shapes took unknown forms.

The landscape was alive and hawthorn shone out by the light of the moon like a beacon for all of creation.

'for the great lords of shadow who tread the deeps of night are no frail puny folk who move in fear of mortal sight'

Fiona MacLeod

The pooka moved before him mocking and guiding him as it took the form of horse, goat and human. Mischievous and cunning it was one of the guardians of the sacred thorn.

Fear gripped his heart and he sank into the earth following the roots of the thorn arriving on cold stone in the depths of the earth.

*'Spiraling Corra begins to awake,
She has already sealed your fate,
In the deep dark depths of the fiery magma,
Is the deep dark power of the serpent Corra.*

*Spiraling down to the depths of the earth,
Deep, deep in the hollow hills,
Rock, crystal, mineral, salt, deep in the hollow hills x2 '*

A bristly boar guided him through stone passage tombs and a dark foreboding depth ushered his fears into silence.

A vision opened up of fire, blood and obliteration and then from the chaos a single insect hummed, a small animal murmured and a single flower bloomed into new life. From the ashes new life grew that was so tender and delicate.

The vision was gone and he found himself back on the surface and where the hot sun of summer should have shone was an all-encompassing smoke as if the whole country was on fire. He was a noble proud man usually fearless but as he approached the terrain of Connemara fear gripped him once again.

Blazing fire and thick smoke filled the land and the finest man he had ever seen came forth as if from the sky, like the sun he shone with undimmed magnificence. His long golden hair cascaded down his broad shoulders. He held two of the finest and sharpest of spears ever seen upon this land. The Tuatha de Danann, the magic of Macha borne from the race of the Nemedians had returned to Erin's shores...

The Meeting of Bres.

They came from the North, a magical race which had perfected all science, crafts and arts. Their power was concentrated in the four hallows which came from the four great cities of learning. From Findias came the irresistible deadly sword of Nuada which none could escape from, guarded by the poet Uscias. The spear of Lugh from the city of Gorias which no battle could prevail against guarded by the poet Esras. The cauldron of the Dagdha from city of Murias which no company ever went from unthankful guarded by the poet Semias and the Lia Fal which proclaimed the true king from the city of Falias guarded by the poet Morfeesa.

Bres their towering herald stood proudly holding two terrible spears, a glimmering sword and shield and Sreng mastering his fears stood tall and strong. Bres noted the blood of the Fomorians running through his imposing frame and the incredible broad bladed battle javelins.

Both warriors marveled and admired each other's prowess which demonstrated any fight would cause much devastation on both sides.

Then they spoke and to their astonishment they understood each other, they were kin born of the same great Mother Macha:

'We all flow from one fountain Soul. All are expressions of one Love. God does not appear, and flow out, only from narrow chinks and round bored wells here and there in favored races and places, but flows in grand undivided currents, shoreless and boundless over creeds and forms and all kinds of civilizations and peoples and beasts, saturating all and fountainizing all.'

Both warriors with mutual respect agreed on terms to discuss with their leaders.

However, Eochaid the leader of the Firbolgs was suspicious and didn't agree to the terms and refused to yield any land to the Tuatha de Danann.

In the red hills of Rian in Brefne Nuada, Bres, Ogma and the Dagdha discuss the defiance of Eochaid and are joined by the powerful war Goddesses collectively known as the Morrighina...

The Wroth of the Morrighinia- the Battle of Druids

Macha and her two sisters Neamhain and Badbh cackle at this show of defiance and the arrogance of Kings. Who were they to deny land to their kin? Who were they to argue the sovereignty of the land as if the Earth Mother was someone to own?

The three sisters known as the Morrighinia rise in malice, they let off a blood curdling battle cry, the sound of ten thousand warriors fill the sky. They rise as fully armed battle crows to challenge anyone who would deny them, the power of the land itself would not be usurped by the arrogance of Kings.

In Brega, the land of the fertile plains created by the beloved Tailtu the terrifying cries are heard but before the Firbolg have time to understand what is happening they are blinded by a heavy fog as the Morrighinia first calls to the power of water.

Droplets of water congeal into a tight impenetrable curtain as the crows circle, battle ready using fear as their weapons they call to the power of fire which falls like a furious downpour of rain tormenting and destroying everything in its wake.

Sreng musters his courage calls to the people who are blinded and burning to reach for the wells and try to quench the flames and as he does so the Morriginia calls once more, this time to the power of the earth and thick blood pours upon the scattered Firbolg people.

Finally, a horn is blown, a drum is beaten, bells are shaken and spells are cast as the Firbolg Druids gather to face this sorcery. Fathach, Gnathach, Ignathach and Cesard step forward and call to the most powerful of oaths, the earth, sea and sky and ready themselves for a battle of magic...

'Heaven is above us, and the earth beneath us, and the sea all around us. Unless the sky shall fall with its showers of stars on the ground where we are camped, or unless the waves of the blue sea come over the forests of the living world, we shall not give ground.'

Extract from Tain Bo Cuailgne trans. De Jubainville

*Ancient Druids of the Fir Bolg,
Ancient Druids of Earth, Sea and Sky x2
Fathach, Gnathach, Ignathach Cesard*

For three days and three nights spell are cast and terror reigns but the Fir Bolg's defiance and determination increases and the Morriginia returns to Brefne to prepare for war!

The Morriginia and Firbolgs

Battles were fought and hard won until finally the Tuatha de Dannan prevailed but not without loses and their great leader Nuada fell by the clean cut of Sreng's sword. Nuada was taken away to the physician Dian Cecht by the champions Ogma and Dagdha.

Fathach the Druid laments the Firbolgs defeat in battle and as he cries out so do the very rocks, waterfalls and the hollows of the earth as the furies, monsters and hags of doom lament with him. Described as the last fearful agonising cry such as what would be heard on the last dreadful days of the human race.

Sreng gathers to him the last of the Firbolg warriors as he prepares for one last savage charge of fury against all odds. The Tuatha de Danann call for peace and offer Sreng and his warriors land. Sreng agrees to settle in Connacht and so the battle concludes. A fantastic, incredible

battle of the Tuatha de Dannan skilled in every art against the Firbolgs who are kin to the soil and the old guardians of the earth as well to the oldest of Bards.

The Firbolgs retreat to Connaught and no longer do they hold power over the land. Many may mock them as a failed race, but let us not forget their love of soil and their incredible skill with spears, their Druids who held back the Morriginia herself and Sreng's last fearsome stand against all odds.

The Tuatha de Danann took over Tara where the sacred kingship to this day is held.

These two races who are the offspring of Macha settled in Erin and the third race of Macha, the Britons settled over the water in Albion and the adventures of the Britons are many, as they too cleared the Forests and fought the Giants of that land.

This time no plague or flood came, it seemed the chaotic creative energies had settled but the wars of the races had only just begun for our origins are easily forgotten that we are all from the same Earth Mother of Macha or Danu and older still are the giants the original inhabitants of aboriginal lands born from Domnu.

The Morriginia plays the role of the protagonist, fighting for the rights that all people should be allowed to have access to their homeland. A woman of power standing up for the rights of her people and upholding the sovereignty of the land. We shall return to this powerful goddess in the next section.

This incredible story of fearless warriors with terrifying battle skills brings us to the conclusion of the invasions of our most ancient races. The five races being the race of Cessair, Partholon, Nemedian, Firbolg and the Tuatha de Danann. After the two great battles of Moytura another race comes to Erin's shores, the race of humankind, the Milesians which is the story of our ancient race's descent into the hollow hills and of a new era to which we all now belong to but that is another story for another time...

Meditation 9 – Entering the sacred landscape

O dim and deep this forest heart
And far away from haunts of pain x 2

I watch the gathering creep
About the trees-tops, as of yore
We used to watch them, brooding deep
On some strange tale of faery lore.

The darkening branches move and sway,
The stars look through the dangled dusk
Thine eyes are there; I throw away
The years without thee, like a husk.

We are together, and o'erhead
The trees lean close to shut us in,
The giant trees whose branches spread
Back to the world where dreams begin.

O dim and deep this forest heart
And far away from haunts of pain x 2

Enter the old woods in the spiritual centre of the land (Tara in Ireland). You come to an entrance that leads beneath the Forest floor. You step down into a deep underground cavern whose walls are of beaten earth with many tunnels leading out to secret paths under the forest floor. In the centre of the chamber there sits an aged woman on the soft brown Earth, Tailtu the Queen of the Firbolgs.

You honour and chant to her:

Talitu chants :

*Spiraling Corra begins to awake,
She has already sealed your fate,
In the deep dark depths of the fiery magma,
Is the deep dark power of the serpent Corra.*

*Spiraling down to the depths of the earth,
Deep, deep in the hollow hills,
Rock, crystal, mineral, salt, deep in the hollow hills x2*

Her long hair cascades down her shoulders and her deep dark eyes tell stories of old memories and deep places. As you approach her you make an offering to the soil and sit with her awhile in her chambers.

As you sit you contemplate what the best course of action is to be in harmony with the sacred landscape. You may wish to ask her what you can do on the physical plane to help heal the Earth.

-Meditate-

Accept whatever answer you are given whether it is a simple practical offering or a life-changing quest.

Meditation 9 part 2

Enter the chamber again and as you enter the earth you begin to feel its wisdom and contemplate the Firbolgs and how it feels to be exiled from your home lands.

In the chamber you connect with Tailtu as well as the Firbolg Druids:

*Ancient Druids of the Fir Bolg,
Ancient Druids of Earth, Sea and Sky x2
Fathach, Gnathach, Ignathach Cesard*

You bring to mind the most sacred oaths of Earth, Sea and Sky, this binds you in service to the Earth and ends your exile from your true path honouring the sacred Earth Mother.

'Heaven is above us, and the earth beneath us, and the sea all around us. Unless the sky shall fall with its showers of stars on the ground where we are camped, or unless the waves of the blue sea come over the forests of the living world, we shall not give ground.'

Extract from Tain Bo Cuailgne trans. De Jubainville

You contemplate:

Am I exiled from any aspects of myself?

Am I still connected to the deep wisdom of the land and its ancestry?

Reach out to your own spiritual ancestry and take whatever thoughts, impressions or feelings come to you in the depths of the soils where all life begins.

Renew your sacred contract to the Earth through the most sacred oath which is the essence of your indigenous spirituality.

Fionntan and the Firbolgs

The Firbolgs are an interesting race of people which are not given the focus that the Tuatha de Danann are given and yet play an important role in the mythologies of Ireland. The Nemedians or the sons of Nemed who's Queen was Macha flee the land of Ireland in the end due to the Fomorian giants who take advantage of their weak position after the plague. Fergus red side leads an army to Connaing's Tower to fight the great giant Conan. This epic battle between thousands of warriors ends in disaster on both sides with death and sickness and just as Fergus believes he has won Conan is reinforced by his brother Morc. Finally, the water rises to take away the living and the dead. Those who survive seek Fionntan's council who advises them to depart and enable their grandchildren to retake Ireland.

Fionntan in the mythology seems to be accorded the role of the guardian of the land maybe as Merlin is to Britian. He is sought out by the races that invade and is obviously not considered a threat but in his words is, 'a great noble sage'. This role is further enhanced as he apportions

Ireland amongst the Fir Bolg, joins them in the up-and-coming battle and in later stories reaffirms these boundaries as the five provinces of Ireland. Each province has a sacred tree which demonstrates the important role trees play in the governance of the sacred landscape.

There are several themes to explore in this episode from the terrible abhorrent acts of war, sickness and plague to the intervention of the elements and the need of someone truly wise who steps out of time. Even in the advent of the adamantine powers of the elements there is still a wisdom beyond this that we can connect to as Fionntan illustrates.

The Sacred Oath

The ultimate power acknowledged by the Celts was the elements and possibly the greatest fear for what could be more potent than the Earth mother who can bring about both the beginning and the end of things. This is reflected in the Norse tale of Ragnarök where battle and flood bring about the end of all things. However, the Celts are acknowledging something beyond even that and that ultimately there is no beginning or end but a continuous spiral.

The one who steps out of time who lives beyond even the elements and has transcended the physical limitations to embody the soul is free from any fear or conditions.

As we explored earlier there is a part of your soul that is invulnerable, a wise all-knowing aspect just like Fionntan.

By entering into meditation and deep communion with the land and our ancestors we can access this deep wisdom.

Everyday Tradition

Our Sacred Land and soil

The takings of Ireland address such difficult issues such as plague, war and exile. The Firbolgs are unable to live in their place of birth. The pain of this separation is tangible in the texts as they hold such importance to the hope of return and their native soil. They are wrenched from their roots in the land of their birth as it is no longer safe. A familiar tale of tragedy and oppression.

Fionntan advised that they flee their homeland to reassure them with the hope that their grandchildren would be able retake the land once again. The Firbolgs never let go of that return and held the soil of the land in such a sacred and endearing way. They carried in bags the very soil from their homeland and it is this soil that brings beautiful life from a barren landscape.

This also demonstrates how our ancestors connected to their own group soul rather than just their individual desires and beyond their own lives with a focus on the future of their people.

The story speaks of smiling clover – covered plains, smooth broad and grassy fields and wide expanses of fruitful cultivated land created from barren, cold rough stretches, rugged rocks on hill sides and mountain slopes, inhospitable heights, deep ravines and broken infertile land.

The Firbolgs work mightily with the Sovereignty of the land, they understand the soil and how to work with it and never forgot their place of birth. Even when they return some 200 years later, they are again expelled. The Firbolgs seem to represent the fate of the races of humanity that are forever oppressed despite all their efforts. Fionntan the very guardian and witness of the land seems to hold them deeply in his heart.

Their oppression just like many exiled races continues in their new home as they are not accepted as the true people of this new country. Each time they inhabit new lands they create beauty and fecundity and each time they are moved on.

This theme of oppression is reflected all over the world from the taking of land in ownership by force whether it be in North and South America, Australia and New Zealand or the rural people of the Western world reflected today in the oppression of working-class people.

Many of us in Western societies grow up in inner city areas disposed of our rural lands in just the same way indigenous people are all across the world.

We can end up working for little money in factories or as labourers and can be considered to be uneducated and therefore of less value. This oppression has been with us for centuries reflected in the feudal barons of the Norman worlds through to the enclosure acts and the industrial revolution. People working many hours a day to maintain and uphold society for those with greater means. This deep-seated ancestral battle continues today as working-class people are sometimes mocked in modern day society and paid little for their hard labour which in turn leads to severe frictions in society. The Firbolgs had good reason to not share their ancestral land but their invading kin also had a right to live in their own homelands, where does the vicious cycle stop?

This connection to the soil of the earth, this knowledge of oppressed races that are never accepted even in their own homeland is acknowledged in these extant texts and through the festival of Lughnasdha. Lugh is the bright shining hero of Celtica and his foster mother was Tailtu, the Queen of the Fir Bolgs. Her name means great plain and so it is every Lughnasdha (August) we remember the Earth Mother in the form Of Tailtu who gave her life to create the green pastures and work with the all-important soil. This festival may also be an opportunity to remember all the exiled people that are driven from their homes just like the Firbolgs.

Teltown in Meath is traditionally the place where this festival is held and therefore the stronghold of Tailtu.

Here is a chant in praise of Tailtu :

*'In praise of the Soil, Tailtu great plain,
Bless us with abundant crops x2
Tailtu, Queen of the soil,
Tailtu of the old, old ways,
Connected to Earth, Sea and Sky,
Connected to Cailleach, Mannann, Corra
Tailtu, beloved of the Earth.'*

The other form of exile is spiritual and this is seen in many lands where the native traditions are usurped by an influx of new traditions from invaders or from within the Country itself.

When people can no longer worship in their chosen form or connect with their ancestral traditions, they become cut off from the importance of the land which can lead to forgetting their sacred duty to the soil, sea and sky, breaking the all-important element oath that was so sacred to our Celtic ancestry.

In the next stage we shall have a break from the epic battles of the Celtica and enter the cave of knowing to deepen our practices once more.

