**EARTH-CROÍ - STEP NINE – MÁTHAIR DOMHAIN**

Máthair Domhain – means **MOTHER EARTH.**

I remember many years ago travelling to one of the Canary Islands called Fuerteventura and being amazed by the beauty of the curving shapes of the mountains. To me they looked like a woman sleeping on her side - and I think it was the first time in my life that I had an experience of seeing the land as a living being. It made me wonder - would human beings treat the Earth with more respect and gentleness if they saw the Earth as a sacred living entity instead of just a planet to be exploited and pillaged?

For example, Sam Jones of the Native American Miccosukee Seminole tribes said – ‘The Land I stand on is my body.’[[1]](#footnote-1) So Nature is not something ‘out there’ – but all life is kin. And we’re part of that wonderful Earth family. Yet, as I said earlier - somehow, somewhere along the way we lost that connection….

Our ancestors have deep wisdom to teach us about that. Many indigenous traditions respect the Earth as Mother Earth – the Gatekeeper or Midwife of the sacred cycle of death and life. In Ireland there are two particular aspects of this which are both helpful and powerful, wherever you live in the world.

The first is the presence of the strong feminine. In the old myths there are powerfully colourful figures like Danu, Macha, Brigid and The Morrigan, whose energy – both dark and light - watches over life from its beginnings to its end. This was a strong, dynamic femininity rooted in the wild, feral energy of Mother Earth!

Danu is often associated with the element of water such as, for example, the River Danube, which according to legend was created by her waters breaking prior to giving birth. Macha is the Horse Goddess, one of the running women in indigenous tradition who hold the untamed energy of wild horses galloping free. Brigid is well known beyond Ireland, known as Ffriad in Wales and Brigantia in Europe. She is associated with the element of fire and also with childbirth and healing. The Morrigan is associated with war, fate and death. She is a shapeshifter and often appears as a crow or a raven hovering over the battlefields of the dead and carrying skulls on her belt.

These are just a few of the many goddesses in early Irish myth, representing aspects of Mother Earth and, in particular, the sacred Cycle of Death and Life. They may be figures of legend – but if you’ve a strong role-model in your head for the power of the feminine, it’s a great start for valuing your own sacredness in this life! I can remember when I was a child knowing instinctively, with a great uneasiness, that in the culture and society I inhabited as a girl, the feminine was somehow wounded. It seemed to me that so many women were sick – either physically or mentally – whereas I continually saw examples of the strong masculine. And I was still in primary school when I instinctively knew that - where, by the way, no one ever mentioned Danu, Macha, Brigid or The Morrigan – how I would have loved those women!

The second powerful aspect of Máthair Domhain is the indigenous wisdom about the sacred Cycle of Death and Life.

Our ancestors watched and experienced the cycle of the natural year – Springtime/renewal, Summer/growth, Autumn/harvest and Winter/dying and hibernation. They saw how everything came out of the ‘womb’ of the Earth, the dark soil and the body of the mother. And that in time everything returned to the Earth. This cycle of death and life is the central focus of indigenous wisdom and ceremony.

In her wonderful book, *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old* *Europe*, Marija Gimbutas, professor emerita of European Archaeology at U.C.L.A., gives detailed photographs and diagrams dating from our Palaeolithic and Neolithic ancestors. Archaeological excavations, she says, prove that ‘*the primordial deity….was female, reflecting the sovereignty of* *motherhood. In fact there are no images that have been found of a father god throughout the pre-historic record...this symbolic system represents cyclical, nonlinear, mythical time.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

Máthair Domhain is deeply aligned with Nature and the Earth. For our ancient ancestors the Universe is the body of the goddess, within whom all death and rebirth takes place, according to the rhythms of nature. In Ireland the gifts of the Máthair Domhain are not deeply buried because vestiges remain in the landscape to this day. For example, the names of mountains, rivers, stones, wells – and also sacred places like Newgrange, an ancient ceremonial site, built to acknowledge the sacredness of the death and life cycle. At Newgrange, the central chamber, as the body of the goddess, is aligned with the rising of the sun and the moon and is decorated with images of regeneration. The sunlight that enters the inner chamber at winter solstice, illuminates the room when the sun is at its zenith, representing the womb being made fertile for new life!

The ancestral gifts of Máthair Domhain remain in the landscape all over the world. In our day there is a reawakening of feminine consciousness, and an awareness of living life by the circular rhythms of nature. This death and life wisdom takes us into the essence of our human nature and our interconnection with all life and is a three-fold experience, as follows:

1. The energy of **Procreative** Nature (creativity and birthing).
2. The energy of **Destructive** Nature (death and endings).
3. The energy of **Re-generative** Nature (the cycle of death and new life).

**WAYS TO PRACTICE MÁTHAIR DOMHAIN**

1. Find a strong feminine role model in your life – whether a mythological Goddess or someone from the past or someone you admire in the world today. Or perhaps a strong feminine energy from the animal world e.g. a lioness. What does your choice tell you about yourself? Put photos or images or totems in your living space to represent your strong feminine.
2. Find ways to embrace the cycle of death and life. Allow your life to enter the rhythm of Máthair Domhain. E.g. Use the *Earth Pathways Diary* (see [www.earthpathwaysdiary.uk](http://www.earthpathwaysdiary.uk)) - or find an equivalent in your part of the world.
3. Be aware of Máthair Domhain in the natural world around you. Plant a tree or a flower or a vegetable. All life carries her energy. Be creative!

1. *In Beauty May I Walk: Words of Wisdom by Native Americans* Exley publications Ltd., 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Gimbutas, M. *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe*. Harper Collins, 1991. P. X [↑](#footnote-ref-2)