

A LITTLE GESTURE CAN GO A LONG WAY...

In our Tradition, one of our Spiritual Practices that we do twice every day is called Rùn. It is a Gaelic word that means *Meditation*... it also means *Mystery*... *Secret*... and, most usually and most wonderfully - *Love*.

As well as the actual period of meditation, there is a very short ceremonial start and finish to the practice. When I'm teaching the practice to people, I often say to them, "If you feel the contemplative space enfold you even before you start, or half way through the introductory sequence, just drop it and go right into the space that is being offered to you... There is little point in doing the warm-up if you are already there..."

This then leads some people to ask, "What is the actual purpose of the practices at the start and the finish... surely Spirit doesn't care whether we do them or not?" Other people say, "It is *so* important to do these practices, I feel all wrong somehow, somewhere inside, if I regularly miss them out ..."

If we don't ever bother to use the prescribed actions or spoken prayers... or indeed we get them wrong, it will not matter to Spirit... But *making* the effort to use them – and getting them "right... in harmony" is *so* nourishing to the *Soul*! This is the case with so much ceremony.. It is always a matter of balance – the wondrous and paradoxical dance between Spirit and Soul.

Here is just one small reason and one small example why :-

A reason why...

The Céile Dé tradition defines the word *soul* as the interface between Spirit and World.. In it's nature, the "least dense" part of Soul most closely resembles Spirit, the "densest part" most closely resembles Matter.. (Matter here includes the world of thoughts and emotions). *Please bear in mind that these are all constructs and are not to be taken too literally. They are just ideas to help us to approach ourselves in a new way.*

When we incorporate symbolic language and gesture into our spirituality, we are no longer speaking our habitual language – that of World (matter; thought; emotions)... neither are we speaking the "language" of Spirit (which cannot be *done*, it can only *Be*). We are, however, speaking the subtle, paradoxical language of soul. The Tradition calls this part of ourselves *Anam*... The "siddhi" or "charism" it gives us is called *Coinneach* in the Céile Dé tradition. We define it as the ability to let go and effortlessly do or know something that seems to just flow through us from a "Place Beyond and Within". Some artists and performers seem to have *Coinneach*. Some Spiritual Teachers have it. We all usually recognise it when we see it streaming into the world through that wonderful Holy Trinity of the human condition/situation, surrender and Grace.

Some say that connecting with this realm can be uni-directional (from Pure Spirit only, as in transcendent religions.) For the Céile Dé, it is bi-directional... Non-manifest Spirit in-spires our symbolism from *above*... Manifest Spirit (landscapes, people) in-forms our symbolism from *below*. So this new level of soul-consciousness is arguably more roundly achieved if we frequently and consistently use the symbolic imagery of our own land and culture. (This is how the Soul-world has revealed itself to us *here*...) Prolonged and regular use of symbolic gesture, imagery and words begins to connect us with this part of ourselves, which is mostly unfamiliar to almost every

one of us. Through time (and it takes time..!) we begin to sense that there is a way of perceiving, receiving and articulating - a way of understanding - that is beyond mind... beyond emotions... Containing some of the Peace of Spirit *that passeth all understanding* and yet able to connect and re-member (again, it takes time..!) with the World.

An Example ..

At the end of Rùn... when we bless our feet, our hands, our mouths and our foreheads with holy water, we say –

<i>Far an rò mi anns an t-saoghail</i>	Where I go in the world
<i>Rud a nì mi anns an t-saoghail</i>	What I do in the world
<i>Rud a their mi anns an t-saoghail</i>	What I say in the world
<i>An ainm Chrìost...</i>	In the name of The Christ

We use the finger beside our thumb to bless our feet... the finger beside that to bless our hands... the next finger to bless our mouths and the little finger to bless our brows.

Why..?

In our tradition the first finger we use is associated with the *Rowan tree*...
...the second with the *Ash*
...the third with the *Alder*
...and the little finger with the *Willow*.

The Rowan blesses where we go in the world...

There is a Gaelic legend which gives us a powerful image of Brighid, the Goddess who is the Foster-mother of Christ, carrying the Light of the World all across the world, through all eternity. As we also travel though our lives, through time and through the World, one day - the legend says - our paths will happen to cross with Hers and we will receive that light into our hearts as a Grace... We recall this entire legend and its many-layered meanings every time we make this simple gesture that takes two seconds in real (non-mythic) time.

Both our Matter (Bodies, thoughts and emotions) and Spirit receive this gesture in their own ways. We are also connecting meaningfully with our ancestors, who told this legend in the darkest nights of the year, when our journeys can seem long and graceless...

The Ash blesses what we do in the world...

The ash tree in our tradition is connected through symbolic imagery to the ideas of focus and intention... Spears are made from ash trees. They aim for their target and they fly straight there... They don't take any wasteful diversions. In this two second gesture, we remember the power of holding our intention and the power of Doing.. Not in the usual sense of *busy activity* – but in the ability to make a lasting and meaning-full difference in all of the worlds, both visible and invisible.

The Alder blesses what we say in the world...

It is the tree of prophetic speech. In this tiny slaking of holy water across our lips, we state our wish to speak from *Fírinn* – our Highest Truth. To enable this gift, we have to somehow be present and to disappear at the same time. A good trick if you can do it! The Alder tree often lives right *in*

the edge of water, with its lower trunk and roots beneath the surface of the river. It is in the world, but rooted in Another Place. Water does not rot alder wood very easily and so earlier people used it to make buckets and so on. The symbolism tells us that we need to learn to *use*, not suppress our water (our feelings). But to use our water effectively, we need somehow to contain it without letting it drown us and soak everyone all around us! The alder principle helps us to pour forth speech that is not just wooden fact. It is moistened with feeling, but not drowned in emoting.. and it is rooted in the ground below the water – it bottoms out in matter – what *matters*. From all of this, *Fírin* is born.

The willow blesses the Christ in us...

Most people know the story of the oak and the willow tree.. how the oak is so strong and yet it is the soft yielding nature of the willow that, unlike her mighty brother oak, survives the most ferocious storm by bending to a different law... one that the force of might cannot comprehend. In this gentle blessing of our brow, we invoke a wish for the values of the beyond. The values that our hearts know well but that every other part of us struggles to incarnate in the manifest world.

And what about the thumb? Does this biggest and strongest of our fingers play no part in this passion-play?

It is the finger of the Birch tree...

Associated with Borders and Boundaries , the Birch tree is associated with discrimination and discipline.. Its values under gird all the meanings of its four siblings. Without the thumb, we could not exert a complementary counter pressure to any meaning.. We could not lift...We could not hold... We would have so much meaning but no way to root it into the world... And without its four siblings we would have force of intent, but no meaning to give it Life.

A glimpse of the teaching in just one tiny part of our tradition..

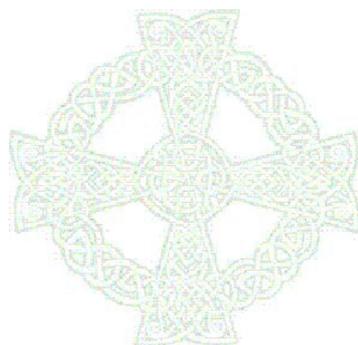
Yes... we are right when we say, it doesn't matter if you get the traditional gestures wrong.. or indeed if we dispense with them altogether. Spirit needs no meaning in Itself...

Yes... we are right when we say, it does matter if you get the traditional gestures wrong, or if we dispense, one by one, with the symbols and traditions altogether. Then, piece by piece, we take apart the traditions that connect us to our roots, which have given us our souls' vocabulary since wo/man first uttered a prayer to the Great Mystery. When all our fingers are gone, how will we use our hands?

Yes... we are right when we marry all the "yes's".

Then the Soul is dressed in Beauty and is transfigured into the Bride of Christ..

*Far an ró mi anns an t-saoghail
Rud a nì mi anns an t-saoghail
Rud a their mi anns an t-saoghail
An ainm Chrìost...*



Fionntulach

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2006