



Brigid

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(This study guide includes a 30-minute audio version of the text below.)

Who is Brigid, The Celtic Goddess?

Brigid is probably the best-known Irish-Scottish deity, and certainly one of the easiest to work with. She is associated with innumerable powers: fire, water, the heavens, the earth, birth, healing, poetry, metalworking, grieving, crafting and all art-making, fertility, dawn, springtime, compassion for the poor, abundance, even crafty political maneuvering. This wide breadth of powers reflect the Mother-Goddess quality that Brigid embodies.

Brigid's many powers are pleasant, and she is seen as an incredibly loving and friendly figure, so she is very approachable for those who want to work with her. Compared to the Morrigan (the goddess of death, battle bloodlust and sex) and the Cailleach (the old hag of winter who comes to smash the green of summer with her giant hammer), Brigid is delightful, and people love to engage with her as a spiritual helper and guide. Brigid was rapidly absorbed into the Irish Christian world as Saint Brigid of Kildare, and she has remained a favorite, popular figure over many hundreds of years.

The downside of Brigid's positive and pleasant aspects is that it can be a bit easy to underestimate the sheer power of this sacred force. You'll find thousands of romantic, glowing, radiant, and, often sexy looking images of young Brigid on the Internet. These images

can be artful, striking, lovely and useful in your work, but just remember that Brigid is a force of nature. She may (or may not) appear to you as a lovely young woman, but she cannot be treated as such. And just because the internet gives you a thousand images of her as young and pretty, she may not appear to you that way. She appears to you however she wants to appear to you in order to teach you or work with you, and how she appears to you may change.

I'd like you to hold in mind this story: 2,400 years ago, a Celtic warrior king named Brennus sacked Rome and held it for a few months. The story goes that, walking down the main boulevard, Brennus gazed up in astonishment at the many statues of the



Brennus

Roman deities displayed one after another. He then turned to his men and guffawed at how utterly simple-minded these Romans were—to believe that the deities looked anything like human beings.

The deities are forces of the universe, far beyond human. To box them in with our human categories - god of war, goddess of intellect - was so utterly small-minded and arrogant. So, when you read that "Brigid is the goddess of healing, poetry and metalworking" you are actually being quite Roman, and not at all Celtic.

This urge to classify deities, to draw lines around them, is something that the Western mind does - not the indigenous mind. In truth, this "packaging" of the Gods is actually a way of diminishing them, forcing them into a form pleasing to humans (particularly upper-class humans, the ones in power. Making the deities human-shaped is actually a way of controlling the power and presence of the sacred energies. As you work with the Celtic deities, you will find that they rarely fit into neat human-made categories, and that is one thing I love about them.

In shamanism, remember that we are dealing with immense, incomprehensible powers, the powers of creation and destruction, of transformation and shape-changing. Even if they are pleasant powers, we must always approach them with respect and humility.

I like to think of the deities as more like quantum physics than mythology. For me, that helps to bring some humility. If there is a single poison potential in all spiritual work (and all human endeavors), it is the loss of humility. When we think God/dess looks and act like us, there's a humility problem there. Remember - humility is not a lack of power - it is power properly contained and used - what is called "right relationship."

Brigid is not a giant human, or a human shaped ghost - it is the name we give to the mysterious power inside the first light of dawn, and inside the force of springtime. It is a radiant energy that rises at the beginning of day - the love song of sun and earth sung with every dawn. It is the radiant life



force that rises up from the bondage of winter and carries the new life of springtime into the world. It is these natural powers that are being honored as a spirit of poetic inspiration, not because there is a big human who cares about rhyming schemes and iambic pentameter. We call these powers "Brigid," and maybe we imagine her looking a certain way, because it makes it easier to talk to her and about her.

I like to see Brigid as the force inside the element fire. What we call "she" is a quality of that fire - a sacred feminine energy, because the Brigid fire is the force that initiates and warms any new creation.

Every element has a feminine and masculine quality, and I like to think of Brigid as the feminine fire. (The young sun god, Angus, - god of springtime and love - can be considered the young masculine fire, and the god of the high summer, Lugh, can be considered the mature masculine fire energy. The Crone figures and cauldron goddesses like Cerridwen (Welsh) could be seen as mature fire figures. All of these energies have their place in the web of life - none are less or more than any other.)

In some forms, like dawn and early spring, fire energy is sweet, spacious, gentle, careful, and delightful. In this way, Brigid is the bringer of human inspiration - the Gaelic word is "Imbas" (Gaelic for "fire in the head") - the spark of "aha!" that bursts in all artistic and creative work. This is why the ancient Irish poets, who studied formally for many years, saw Brigid as their lifelong guardian, teacher and patron spirit.

One beautiful image of Imbas/Brigid is this: it is the gleam of light inside the drop of morning dew suspended on the edge of a leaf overhanging the river Boyne at dawn. The Boyne is perhaps Ireland's most sacred river.

And in this gentler form of fire, Brigid is also seen as goddess of the hearth - the central spot in ancient Irish and Scottish houses, where the fire burns constantly, warming the house

and cooking the food.

In ancient times, a nighttime ritual of keeping the house safe would be performed. The hot coals would be piled up ("banked" or "smoored") - separated into three small piles, with peat laid between and ashes spread over the top. This kept the coals from completely going out, and in the morning, with a few gentle breaths, they would ignite once more. A prayer would be made for protection of the sleeping family.

Here is a prayer I wrote that you can use, adapt, and change in any way:

I smoor this fire as Brigid herself would:
With the power of love
The power of life
And the power of protection
Around this house these powers spread
Like Brigid's cloak
Around the family
Around the herd
Around the land
May we rise tomorrow
Seven times stronger
Seven times more wise
Seven times more loving

Most of us don't smoor the fire at night, but you can do this prayer to your body as you go to bed. The three "piles" of coals could be the three "cauldrons" of the body: the head, heart and belly. Or you could smoor your chakras! The fire is in you.

In more concentrated form - with more heat - Brigid of the fire brings the warmth of springtime to melt the constricting forces of winter inside the land. She calls out the new life hidden under the layer of ice.

This is why she is a healer, because she unbinds the death force (death is cold), she evaporates darkness, and she melts hard, frozen, constricting winter where she finds it - whether in the land, or in the body, or the heart or the mind.

She sees beyond the layer of ice - she sees the new life waiting just under that which is hiding it. She sees underneath our story of victimization and trauma,

she sees under our martyrdom and arrogance and blame - she sees the new life waiting to be called forth.

Brigid is "warmth" - an elemental energy in nature, and "warmth" underlies healing in many ways. This is why she is connected with the earliest spring flowers, which sometimes arise through the snow.

In even more concentrated form, Brigid is the intense fire in the forge - the fire that transforms something into a different shape. As the goddess of the forge, she is involved in making beautiful and useful metal objects: containers, farming implements, adornments and weapons.

Fire is the symbol of the dynamic, divine power that penetrates all matter, bringing it to life, transforming it, sustaining it, and surrounding with protection. The modern Irish word neart (nert/niurt in ancient texts) is the name for this divine power of creation.

The forge is the fire womb wherein the things of this world are shaped. It is the place of the un-manifested (or pre-manifested) universe, where only pure neart exists. It's no wonder that for the ancient Celts,



the blacksmith was a revered figure - the human who works directly with this creative power of the universe.

The Celtic god Goibniu (GOV-nyew) was the god of the forge, creating weapons that never missed their mark, and the magical cauldron of regeneration. Warriors killed in battle lined up to be fully immersed in the cauldron. They came back to life and returned to the battlefield (but strangely, could not speak - or

perhaps, they could no longer speak in mundane language, or maybe they had to be taught to speak human language again after the journey to the beyond stripped them all small human concepts.)

Neart/Fire penetrates into all matter, bringing life. Heavy iron (earth/matter) is penetrated by fire and it is unshaped – it takes on the unformed flux, heat, and color of the fire element itself. The forge is the marriage bed of fire and earth, of Spirit and matter. Inside the forge, matter becomes inspired, glowing the color of Spirit, radiating the heat of Spirit. It is then that human hands (or Spirit working through human hands) can shape raw earth into something useful or beautiful. That new being is plunged into the element water, which seals in the transformation making it permanent.

When we have a peak experience, when we have that fleeting direct contact with Spirit, we are in the forge.

The heat of the forge needs to be intense because the iron does not want to change. It wants to stay the way is. So, when it is necessary to affect transformation, Brigid turns up the heat. In this way, Brigid is present in any initiatory event in our life, and in those events where we feel great resistance, she may come as a gentle flame at first, but if our resistance does not melt away, she may turn up the heat.

We move through initiation after initiation in our lifetime. Some are planned by us: college, any kind of progressive training, projects that challenge us. Many of our initiations are not planned by us, but by Spirit, or our soul essence: sickness, divorce, disintegration, coincidences and mistakes. Brigid, the fire goddess of the forge, the mother of transformation into something usable by the world, is there, in every moment, singing the song of neart into us, setting us aglow.

Humans cannot bring new daylight to night, cannot melt the ice of winter, and cannot transfigure raw earth, by searing heat, into gleaming objects. So, I urge you to be careful about shrinking Brigid down into a 19 year old sexpot with a crystal hanging on her forehead. Brigid may not look so sexy and mild to the iron – or to the parts of us in great resistance to the new life that she is bringing forth from our inner earth.

Brigid is spelled and pronounced many ways: Brigit, Brigh, Bridey, Brighid, Brigit, Briggidda. The name can be pronounced like the common girl's name, Bridget, or in Gaelic it can be pronounced BREE-ya or BREE-ja or Breet. In Scotland she is called Bride (pronounced BREE-ja), and in the Scottish lowlands/northern England she is seen in the goddess of the land named Brigantia. Even the fact there are so many variations and pronunciations of her name give you the idea of how widespread, flexible, welcoming, assimilating and adaptable this figure is.

The root of her name – Brig – is the Gaelic word for "power." Brigid is power, and what is fire if not pure, radiating power? That Gaelic root, "Brig" can also be translated as "exalted." That is a great word for us to muse on, because we automatically think of exalted as "high status." But it also means "great joy."

One of the most serious illnesses in our time is the inability to summon true joy.



Margarita Kriebitzsch

One of the most powerful ways to work with Brigid is to ask her to help you with authentic joy – not the distracting and addicting pleasures that dress up messily as joy, but actual joy. One of the best (and perhaps hardest) questions you can ask yourself is "What does joy mean

to me, and do I currently have it in my daily life?" You can ask how you can retrieve lost joy (bring new spring out of dead winter, bring new day from night, bring healing to your joylessness).

These are prayers you can make: Brigid, breathe the new life into my body, my heart and my mind. Send your inspiring, healing and transforming fire into me, to dissipate the cold that holds my inner land prisoner, and the darkness wrapped around me