



EAST

WORKING SHAMANICALLY

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The Spirit Wheel

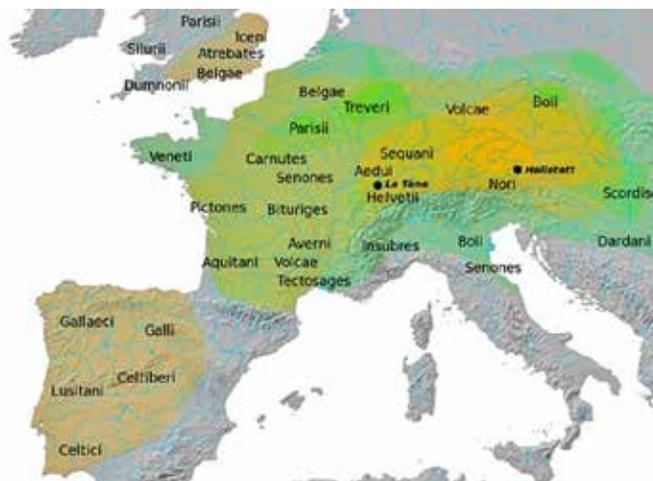
Working with the Celtic Wheel of the Year can be very powerful. It can bring healing and insight to you, and it can help you open your heart, mind and body the great unnamable, untamable presence of the Great Song of Creation – the Oran Mor. As a consistent prayer and meditation tool, the Wheel is exceptional.

Star of the east, give us a kindly birth,
Star of the south, give us great love
Star of the west, give us quiet age,
Start of the north, give us death.
- Fiona MacLeod, late 1800's

Working with the wheel can go very deep, but it's also one of the easiest, most simple and basic practices you can do, and often, the effects are immediate, visceral and helpful.

Two caveats:

There is no such thing as “Celtic.” This is a word that we have attached to try to lump together many tribes of people who lived over a vast range of territory throughout Europe and the British Isles. It's like the phrase “Native American” or the word “European.” It's vaguely useful, but inherently inaccurate. Most of the time when we think of Celtic, we are talking about Ireland, because the Roman Empire did not physically conquer the island, nor the highlands of Scotland. Hadrian's wall was built in 122 AD by the Romans stretching from sea to sea near the boundary between Britain and Scotland, and another wall was built 20 years later farther north. So in this way, the Roman empire had less contact with Irish and Scottish peoples than the rest



Ancient Celtic Tribes

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of Europe. However, please keep in mind that many tribes lived in Scotland and Ireland too. So there really is no such thing as an overarching, united Celticism. Many tribes, many languages, many stories, some overlapping, some echoing, many completely different, and many meshed with Ancient Roman influences and Christian influences.

Likewise, the word “shamanism” is useful shorthand for talking about a certain spiritual point of view and set of practices, and to describe the person who fulfills a certain role. Every tribe and culture has its own word for this role, and we adopted the word *shaman* for this. It’s just a word.

The practice of working with the directions or the wheel is found in many cultures. The symbols in the wheel vary from culture to culture, and they can become complex as they are interwoven with that culture. But the Wheel in itself can be simple, straightforward and accessible. It’s not inherently about culture; it is about the structure of the human body and the relationship of the human being to the land.

The four (cardinal) directions are inside the structure of the human body. Our eyes are in the front of our head. This gives us a sense that there is a “before me” and a “behind me.” We have an arm on each side of the body and this gives us a structural sense that there is one side and another side. We cannot fly like birds and we cannot live below the ground or water like some creatures, and this gives us a sense of above, below and, finally, “here” – the center, where “I” am.

The wheel is about the rotation of the earth which causes night and day, and it is about the way the earth moves around the sun – its tilt on its axis and its orbit, which create the seasons.

All creatures structure their life cycle around the seasons. It’s good to remember that the shamanic path is always fundamentally about the living land and our relationship to it. The land grants us life and has its own life. If you ever get lost in ideas or complexities, just return to the living land for clarity, and to your body for clarity. When you work with the wheel, you are entering into a prayerful relationship with fundamental structures of life on earth.

Please work with the ideas in the chart and diagram below as just that - ideas and images, not as “Celtic Shamanism Facts.” Some of these are supported by literature and tradition. Some emerge from my experiences. This is the way of the shamanic path – we draw on teaching from many sources, and draw on our own experiences and insights. We mesh this into a living path that is walkable. We should always be open to correction by teachers and tradition and be open to new insights that replace our current understanding. And we should always trust our own experience. This is ongoing dance of the shamanic path. Flux, growth, new knowledge, and shedding what is no longer useful or healthy – it’s how nature works.

In working with the Wheel, you are 100% guaranteed that someone will say to you “that’s not the way I learned it!” (Sometimes this will be expressed with delight, and sometimes as an accusation. Just know that’s how this path works.) Use each idea or image offered here as a place to stand on, a place to begin your own relationship with the Wheel. Don’t try to memorize the list of attributes of each direction, for this is a way of controlling and diminishing their power. Let the images work on you and become organic in you. Think of them as seeds tossed into the furrows of your Inscape; some will sprout, others

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may not, and some may lie dormant for a long time before opening. Struggle with the images below, if you need to. Struggling is important because sometimes the Wheel doesn't like to give up its wisdom without some payment from you. But if, in the end, your Wheel is different than mine, congratulations, Pathwalker.

The simplest advice I can offer about the directions is to approach them as living entities, not abstract concepts or symbols. The directions are alive. Approach them like that and things will go well.



It is lovely, oh lovely we turn our eyes to the East:

The graceful air, the awakening light,

The unfolding of the blooms.

Arise in me, and pour forth from me

Thou grace of the East (or any other attribute of the East...)

It is lovely, oh lovely, we turn our eyes to the South:

The fiery sun, the dancing melody,

The ripening of the fruit.

Arise in me, and pour forth from me

Thou music of the South.

It is lovely, oh lovely, we turn our eyes to the West:

The darkening sea, the beckoning horizon,

The heartbreaking goodbye.

Arise in me, and pour forth from me

Thou mystery of the West.

It is lovely, oh lovely, we turn our eyes to the North:

The frozen earth, the defense against the dark,

The silence between the dreams.

Arise in me, and pour forth from me

Thou silence of the North.

It is lovely, oh lovely, we turn our eyes to the tree:

The branches reaching up,

The roots reaching down,

The marriage of earth and sky.

Arise in me, and pour forth from me

Thou wholeness of the tree.