

Introduction to Celtic Wisdom and the Anam Cara Principle

*Venerable Thom Kilts, MA/MDIV, CPE Teaching Supervisor, William Osler
Health System*

Celtic Wisdom

Introducing concepts of Celtic Wisdom and the Anam Cara principle help connect modern movements in spiritual care to ancient beliefs and practices.

It can also serve as one type of organizing principle to see the universal themes in the ministry of spiritual care.

It connects higher spiritual truths with day-to-day realities.

The broadness of these concepts can be adopted and integrated with any spiritual tradition, theistic or non-theistic etc.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Balance

Balance: Very similar to the ying/yang of eastern traditions, Celtic Wisdom looks to maintaining and creating a natural balance. This is in male/female, black/white, etc. The notion here is that on every level the spiritual journey is about the “middle way” path where all things are in harmony/balance and extremes are avoided.

To walk the way of wisdom is to live in service of such balance, and to conduct one’s life in a way that supports the universe remaining in a healthy balance.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Liminality

Liminality: The Celts have long been a people who appreciate the mysterious nature of “in-between,” times and places, the space between where one thing ends and another begins.

Transitional periods of any sort are considered sacred because they provide a gap or window into higher dimensions. This can include the time of death.

Dusk, Dawn, the time between day and night are seen as points of mystical power, as are holy wells etc. It is believed that in the liminal places is where we can most easily access the wisdom of the spiritual world.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- The Power of Three

The Power of Three: Celtic Wisdom appears in threefold ways.

This is true in poetry as well where in Wales there is the triad, a poem containing three key pieces of information.

Many Celtic goddesses have three “faces,” or aspects: Brigid, the goddess of healing, poetry and fire; the Morrigan, a war goddess who appears as Badb, Macha, and Nemain etc.

The Celtic cosmos incorporates three realms: the celestial realm (where gods and goddesses dwell); the earthly realm (home of mortal men and women); and the underworld realm (home of fairy people and human ancestors).

Celtic Wisdom Principles- The Power of Three

The Triskele Image:



Celtic Wisdom Principles- The Power of Three

The Power of Three: Modern science suggests that the human brain consists of three dimensions: the *reptilian brain* where our most basic animal impulses are governed; the *old mammalian brain* which governs basic reasoning and emotions; and the *new mammalian brain* which governs abstract thought and higher states of consciousness.

Celtic Wisdom is always looking for ways in which triplicity is genuinely confirmed in nature and this can include our own minds/brains.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- The Awen

The Awen: Awen is a concept out of the Welsh tradition and seems connected to goddess energy---it is connected to poetry, music, art, singing and chanting for the purpose of spiritual fulfilment. These creative endeavors are considered sacred acts. Modern Celts speculate that Awen is a spiritual source of visions, enlightenment, or prophecy. To seek Awen is to meditate, use ritual or any type of vision-questing. It is a gift of the spiritual world that helps us connect to our inner creativity, inspiration, sense of sacredness etc.

Again, music, art and other creative endeavors are held up as sacred acts and those engaged in these activities are considered spiritual heroes.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Nature

Nature: Celtic spirituality and wisdom are profoundly connected to the natural world, from powers of elemental forces like fire and water to longstanding traditions of lore associated with animals, trees, or particular locations.

In modern times this has translated to activism regarding environmental devastation and many “back to earth” practices and beliefs.

Many rituals, traditions and practices are recommended to take place outside in nature no matter the season.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Nature

Nature: Nature is the heart of the Celtic way and one must have a reverence for mother nature. Here are some common spiritual ways in which Celtic Wisdom incorporates nature:

The Nemeton: Rituals during ancient times were all conducted outside near and with sacred trees (oak trees specifically) called nemetons. These sacred trees are considered the “womb of life.”

Stone Circles: In many parts of Europe there are ancient stone circles (Stone Henge, Newgrange etc.) erected for ritual it is believed. The basic understanding here is that ancient people sought “balance” in and within “nature.”

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Nature

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Holy Wells: All over places in Ireland and Scotland are sacred wells. From prayers to offerings to stylized rituals, many people seeking healing or comfort turn to the soothing waters that emerge from nature.

The reverence for nature lies in the ancient belief that nature is divine.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- The Otherworld

The Otherworld: The otherworld is the spiritual dimension of the universe we live in. It can be called as well the realm of “second attention,” that exists alongside and within all parts of the manifest, physical, matter-and-energy universe in which we all live out our lives. It cannot be equated with the Christian notion of “heaven.”

We have two aspects to our lives; a body and a “soul.” The soul is thought to exist inside and outside our body: It’s inside in the sense that it’s connected to our mind, which functions within the brain; but it’s outside in the sense that the soul can take a flight of imagination to be literally anywhere we wish.

The imagination is considered sacred and a “sixth sense” that allows us to discover the sacredness of the universe.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- The Otherworld

The Otherworld: In artwork—Celtic images often feature intricate designs showing colorful lines woven together in spirals, knots, and braided borders. This symbolizes the dynamic relationship between the spiritual and material worlds. The otherworld is linked to nature and is connected to every single molecule or atom that exists. Sometimes the otherworld is called the “soul of nature.”

Denizens of the Otherworld: Gods and Goddesses; Ancestors; Saints; Faeries etc.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Intricate Celtic Art



Celtic Wisdom Principles- The Otherworld

The Otherworld: The point is not what we believe about the otherworld but rather what we experience when journeying there. Its important to feel free to interpret according to your own belief system---if you would rather process it from a scientific point of view then it is helpful to relate to it as a metaphor. The word “metaphor,” literally means “to carry over,” and the otherworld is a traditional symbol that we use to carry wisdom over from the spiritual (or unconscious) world, to ordinary, conscious reality.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- The Three Paths

The Three Paths:

The Bards (Singers): Traditionally a poet or minstrel, the words of the Bard consider to have magic in them and these people were considered the “keepers of the past.”

The Ovates (Seers): Traditionally a shaman, medicine person but as well a visionary, or counselor—(Anam Cara, more on this later) and considered the “keepers of the future.”

The Druids (Sages): Traditionally the intellectuals or priests. The Druids were considered the “keepers of the present.”

Anam Cara--The Theory and Practice of Spiritual Guidance:

Anam is a gaelic word for “soul,” and *Cara* is the word for “friend.” The term *Cara* is also related to companionship which can be between people or between a person and an idea like; death, the body etc. So for example; death can be a “soul friend,” when it inspires deeper spiritual reflection and connection.

The anam cara is the companion in any moment related to the spiritual and soul journey throughout life. This means that with intentionality all experience and phenomena can be parts of the spiritual path.

Anam Cara--The Theory and Practice of Spiritual Guidance:

In Celtic Wisdom the seeking of spiritual guidance is something not necessarily related to just seeking out an expert or priest of religion or spirit. It can mean as well seeking out divination.

There are several methods of divination including seeking information through trance state or in dreams.

In whatever method used the focus then is on bringing the unconscious (otherworld) to consciousness.

Anam Cara--The Theory and Practice of Spiritual Guidance:

Receiving guidance through divination does not mean that we yield our intellect. Actually it is the opposite, one contemplates the messages, metaphors and symbols for penetrating spiritual truth.

The spiritual path comes alive through allowing each moment, experience and phenomena to speak to our individual experience. Opening oneself to divination and reading sacred signs around us, is an engaging spiritual philosophy that actually challenges our egoic notions and desires to interpret reality to our liking. The purpose is to not label experiences as good or bad but to relate to the messages as threads weaving into the totality of our lives.

Anam Cara--The Theory and Practice of Spiritual Guidance:

The inevitable question here then becomes; What happens when I read into a message and its wrong? This of course speaks directly to the nature of what “guidance” means here.

Guidance is not “advice.” Spiritual guidance from a Celtic wisdom perspective is about revelation—again bringing the unconscious to consciousness.

Being an anam cara to another is not about providing “advice” but is about relating and companioning an experience with another---to as well facilitate a way for the person to bring attention to emotion, metaphor, life commandment, meaning-making etc.

Anam Cara--The Theory and Practice of Spiritual Guidance:

The core of Celtic Wisdom is that each person is a seeker and since “guidance” here is concerned with revelation, this questions any notions that another person will have “answers” for you and your spiritual experience.

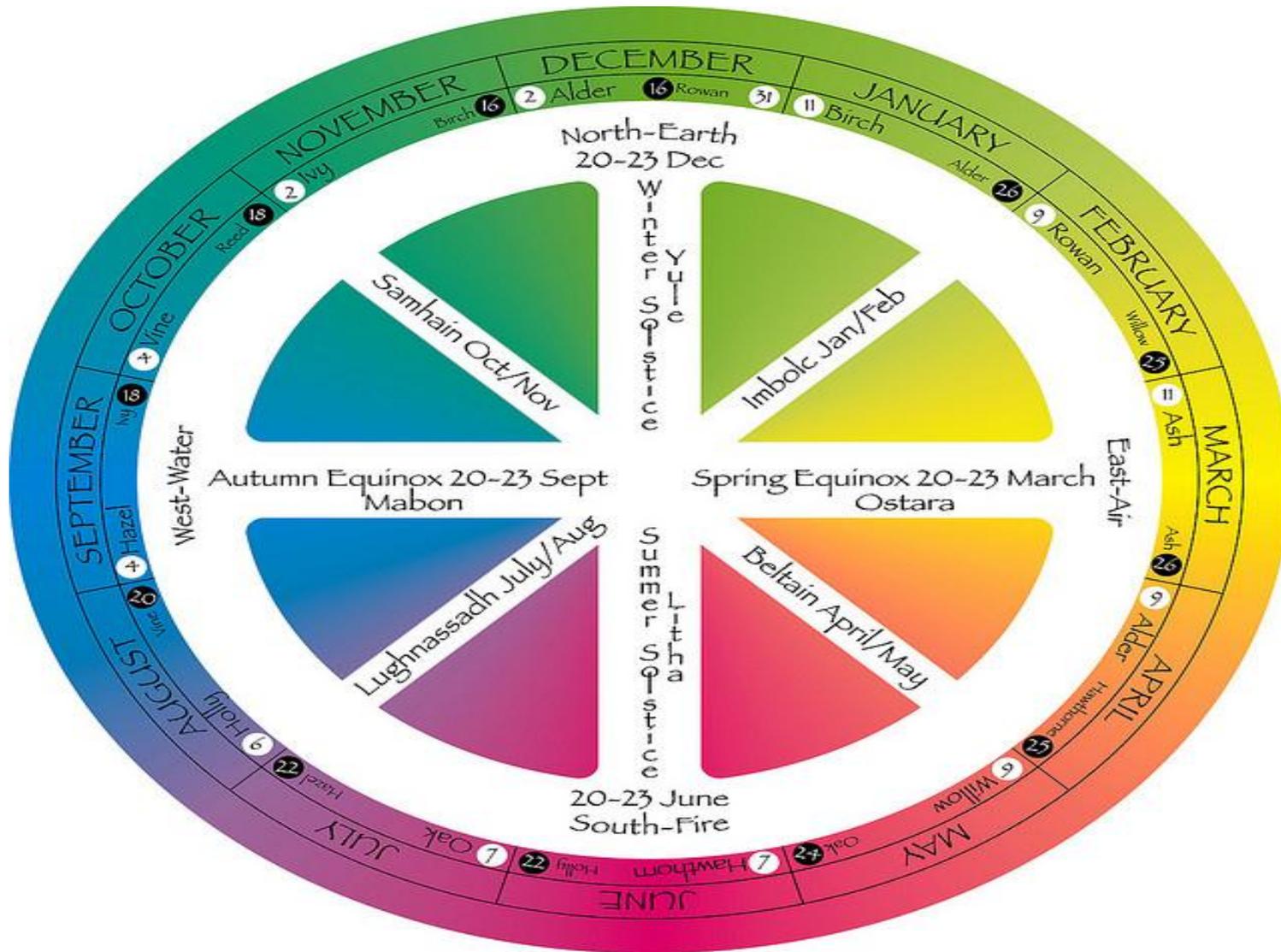
To be a spiritual friend/companion is to “walk with” and not “walk for.” The focus here is in creating a dialogical process where the person being helped can explore his/her personal “otherworld revelation,” openly and constructively. More often than not there is a reciprocal process occurring in these relationships.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Seasonal Cycles

Another way to explore revelation is through the course and cycle of a year. This is marked through festivals, rites and rituals that are designed to inspire reflection and deeper revelation throughout the year and seasons.

There are four main festivals throughout the years that mark four different seasons. Each season and part of the year is marked by different reflections tools, rituals and meditations.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Seasonal Cycles



Celtic Wisdom Principles- Seasonal Cycles

Samhain: The Celtic year begins at the end of harvest time.

Samhain marks not only the end of Autumn and the onset of Winter, but also it was the Celtic new year.

Halloween was originally a traditional Irish holiday brought to the North America by immigrants. Because the line between our world and the otherworld is so thin during this time, children were encouraged to wear costumes in order to confuse scary entities from the spiritual realm. A Jack-o-Lantern (traditionally a turnip) is carved and lit to show friendly spirits the way home.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Seasonal Cycles

Imbolc: This is the festival that marks the coming of Spring. It is particularly focused on the goddess/saint Brigid. Imbolc represents the “womb” of Spring where it is not yet manifest but clearly on its way.

Agricultural tools will be blessed and seeds readied for planting.

The symbols are focused on “pregnancy” and rebirth.

The emphasis is on the giving of life and new life itself.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Seasonal Cycles

Beltaine: Considered the “fertile” holiday it starts on May Day and includes the Summer season. It is also a thin veil time like Samhain---so people look for protection and guidance from the spirit world.

Lughnasa: The festival here marks the first fruits of the harvest and is a time for gathering and preparing for the upcoming Samhain season. This season takes place when the sun is at its strongest and so usually festivals revolve around “light” and gathering light as we prepare to step into darkness.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Living the Tradition in a Modern Era

Celtic Wisdom encourages storytelling and the telling of stories—our own and the stories of others. All stories have metaphor and deeper spiritual meanings if we are willing to hear them.

Opening ourselves and our imaginations to tales of magic and mysticism helps us learn about possible worlds beyond. Legends and myths are messages from our ancestors.

Through studying ancient culture we learn more about our identity, connection, can learn from their mistakes and possibly find wisdom in an increasingly confusing modern era.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Living the Tradition in a Modern Era

Through mythology and the great tales of our ancestors we can discover principles for relating to the spiritual realm and as well integrate this with our personal experience.

Through experiencing nature and the forces of nature we can begin to experience a spiritual sense beyond the egoic logic that is “earthy” and authentic.

Through the use of ritual we learn how to communicate with the otherworld and find new ways in which our spirits can be transformed.

Celtic Wisdom Principles- Living the Tradition in a Modern Era

Through use of various divination practices we can let go of the “self construct” and open ourselves to higher truths beyond egoic logic.

Through exploring language and discovering how words are translated and as well discover new words and meanings—we can discover a deeper reflection and path to prayer.

By fostering an ancient wisdom we can experience ourselves as part of a lineage and be closer connected to our “heart” and literal ancestors.

Celtic Wisdom Principles

Utilizing Celtic Wisdom for spiritual care can help create a sacred way to define your work throughout the course of a year. It helps us understand that to be an anam cara means to companion and not advice give our clients. These principles have been adapted and worked with in Christianity, neo-paganism, Buddhism and other traditions and spiritual practices.

The anam cara principle has created a new guidepost for openness in ministry from an ancient source where notions of: diversity, nature, companioning instead of leading, engaging sacred world and so on, can be utilized in modern times and in an increasingly diverse and secular world.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS

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OUR VISION

PATIENT-INSPIRED HEALTH CARE WITHOUT BOUNDARIES