

Awakening to the sacredness of the living earth

Ireland is a place where beneath the thin veneer of modernity lies a deeper layer of reality. There, it is possible to access the memory of an older race of people, who embodied a different understanding of the nature of reality. Theirs was a different cosmology and this formed the foundation of their lives.

Even though there has been serious destruction of parts of the landscape, much of Ireland still remains a beautiful country with many magical places that exude beauty and power. These qualities emerge not only from the physical dimension but from the spiritual essence embodied within the physical landscape. In order to access this dimension of the living earth, a person must develop within themselves the capacity to be fully present in the here and now. This quality of presence is crucial for a person to experience the other-worldly dimensions of physical reality.

Prior to the arrival of the Corona virus in March 2020, most people's lives were too busy. Moving too fast, people were distracted by many things resulting in a disconnection from the present moment. In such a reality, the chances of dropping down sufficiently into the present moment where they might connect with sense of presence within the living world and sense their relationship with the living world was uncommon.

During the lockdown that followed the arrival of Corona Virus, many people were forced to stay at home, to slow down to a pace of life, that a few weeks earlier, would have been unthinkable. Throughout the country, in towns, villages and cities, everything apart from essential services, closed down and something considered unthinkable was actually happening.

This was a strange experience which some people loved and others found very difficult. But for everyone, life was new and uncertain! People responded in a huge variety of ways. Some people reclaimed the magic and joy of simple pleasures, things which were considered unimportant in the previous busy lives of normal people. One of the most striking changes was the increase in the numbers of people spending time in nature walking, running, cycling or just being present somewhere quiet in the natural world.

Rediscovering and engaging with nature impacted many people in a very positive way. For some it opened up a space to reconnect with a deeper reality. Here in the stillness and the silence that unfolded, as they dropped into that deep place within themselves this allowed them to experience the deeper realities of the natural world. Some people may have sensed a greater level of the majesty within a tree, a flower, a river or a mountain. Some may have even seen into the essence of what they observed. However what they were looking at had not changed, but by them being intensely present to the moment and to what they were observing a temporary parting of the veils of perception occurred, allowing them to glimpse a truer reality. This is a possibility spoken of by William Blake who said

“ If the doors of perception were cleansed,

everything would appear to man (humans) as it is

infinite

for man has closed himself up

till he sees all things through “narrow chinks in his cavern“ “ (1)

In such a space, the person might for the first time ever really know themselves as a part of the living earth and reclaim their sense of belonging.

This sense of belonging might form the ground where one could begin to reflect on the reality of their current lifestyle and begin to question its viability and sustainability. Before the arrival of Corvid 19, many Western people accepted that being time poor was an inevitable aspect of modern lifestyles. When the lockdown happened many people were able to pause and to slow down sufficiently to review their choices and even redefine their priorities. Within the time and space afforded by the lockdown some people had the courage to ask important questions, ones that might lead to radical changes in how they live their lives.

The earth and its systems recovered much of their pristine nature through these imposed lifestyle restrictions. This poses serious questions that need to be considered as we re-enter into fuller participation in the world. Perhaps as a result of this experience in 2020, together with the endless reports and warnings about climate change, we will embrace the opportunity and make a commitment to live in greater harmony with the earth and its vital systems. If we make this choice it will make new demands on all of us ?

We may find guidance for this journey by revisiting the wisdom of an earlier time.

The Celtic spiritual tradition of this country, in both the Pre Christian and the Celtic expressions, has always been deeply ecological. For these Celtic people the immanence of God is reflected in the unity of the natural and the spiritual worlds resulting in an intimacy between humanity, the natural world and divinity. The animals ,plants ,fish , birds ,insects ,the water ,the air ,the earth itself and all realms of the universe were understood to be embodiments of Divinity. For these people life was never divided into secular and sacred aspects and there was no separation between spirit and matter, the material world actually emerged from the spiritual world,

Fr .Sean ‘O Duinn expresses this beautifully in the following passage

“Fundamentally, all is one and behind this unceasing procession of forms is “Dia na nDul“ – the God of the elements, earth, fire, water, air , a she was known to the Irish Celts. God was present, immanent in the kaleidoscope of Life” (2)

In such a sacramental world it was believed that every atom of the created universe contained a spark of divine energy and was therefore sacred. The importance of these fundamental beliefs in the creation of the cosmology which underpinned societies in earlier times is in sharp contrast with the cosmology, or lack of it, on which our present society is created.

Over the years of studying the wisdom held in many ancient cultures including the Irish culture, I noticed how certain beliefs, insights and practises were passed down the ancestral lines into the present times. While the outward expression of a belief or practise may have changed over time as they mingled with new waves of people and cultures arriving in Ireland yet they remained true to their essence. In earlier times the earth was recognised as a living sentient and inherently sacred being and widely considered to be our home and our mother. As 21st Century people searching for more gracious ways to live on planet earth and create greater harmony with all life, we may find a wonderful resonance with the insights and wisdom of earlier societies.

Perhaps we are entering a time when the perennial philosophy that inspired great Celtic and pre-Celtic teachers, peoples and cultures will, through a mingling with modern scientific and ecological thinking, find a new and relevant expression. This may lead us to recover our deep and intimate connection with the natural world, teach us how to live in greater harmony with all life, returning vitality to the earth, re-enchantment to the world and joy to the human heart.

Thomas Berry in *Dream of the Earth* challenges us to reconsider the current distorted view of human importance "Our fulfilment is not in our isolated human grandeur, but in our intimacy with the larger earth community, for this is also the larger dimension of our being, our human destiny is integral with the destiny of the earth" (3)

Within the traditions of this country the door to knowledge and wisdom was accessed through questioning. So in that tradition, I invite you, the reader to reflect:

1. What are the wellsprings deep within our souls from which we can draw insight, inspiration and courage as we embrace the dreams and challenges of the 21st Century?
2. What is it that if embraced by us will allow us to experience a sense of wholeness and belonging?
3. And, what one simple practice will support you to feel more connected to mother earth?

References

- 1 William Blake the marriage of heaven and hell
- 2 Fr. Sean O Duinn **Where three Streams Meet** Columba Press
- 3 Thomas Berry **The Dream of The Earth** Sierra Publications 1988

All quoted in **Ever Ancient Ever New** Dolores Whelan 2011

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