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Dreaming With The Ancestors
By Teresa MacColl, MA

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In Irish myth, the Salmon is the oldest and wisest of all the animals, and it was said that any person who ate the Salmon of Wisdom would gain the gift of prophecy… they would be able to see their future. By seeking and working with the Salmon of Wisdom, we can gain an understanding that is rooted deep in the collective awareness of all humanity. By remembering the dreams and stories of our ancestors, we can remember our ancestor’s future, and reclaim a more balanced, holistic, and ecologically sustainable world.

My name is Teresa Rae MacColl, and my tribes are Celtic from Ireland and Scotland, Teutonic, and Anglo-Saxon. I am a graduate of Dr. Apela Colorado’s Indigenous Mind (IM) Master’s Program at Naropa University, where I chose to research my Celtic Indigenous roots or rather my roots chose me, that’s how the ancestors work.

When I first met Apela, she called me “Fish Girl”, and she said to me “I’ve waited years for a Fish Person to come along!” I had been working with white sturgeon in the fisheries department at UC Davis at the time, designing fish ladders for sturgeon. Apela is from Wisconsin and her tribe, the Oneida, have a deep reverential connection to the sturgeon. So Apela too is a “Fish Person”.

After working in the sciences most of my adult life, where one is trained to not talk about or have feelings or emotions connected to the animals they work with, I had finally found a teacher
and mentor who I knew loved and cared about fish and ecology in a very deep spiritual, ancestral, and traditional way, and I knew I was on the right path. So began my training as an indigenous scientist.

Indigenous science is a holistic discipline that considers nature to be alive and intelligent. Unlike western science, the data collected from indigenous science are not used to control the forces of nature. Instead, the data shows ways and means of accommodating nature.

Students conduct research using the critical distinctions that indigenous scientists rely upon (please see list below). This research offers a unique opportunity for students to encounter their ancestors and their whole self with the support of mind, body and spirit.

1. The indigenous scientist is an integral part of the research process and there is a defined process for insuring this integrity.

2. All of nature is considered to be intelligent and alive, thus an active research partner.

3. The purpose of indigenous science is to maintain balance.

4. Compared to western time/space notions, indigenous science collapses time and space with the result that our fields of inquiry and participation extend into and overlap with past and present.

5. Indigenous science is concerned with relationships, we try to understand and complete our relationships with all living things.

6. Indigenous science is holistic, drawing on all the senses including the spiritual and psychic.

7. The end point of an indigenous scientific process is a known and recognized place. This point of balance, referred to by my own tribe as the Great Peace, is both peaceful and electrifyingly alive. In the joy of exact balance, creativity occurs, which is why we can think of our way of knowing as a life science.

8. When we reach the moment/place of balance we do not believe that we have transcended -- we say that we are normal! Always we remain embodied in the natural world.

9. Humor is a critical ingredient of all truth seeking, even in the most powerful rituals. This is true because humor balances gravity.¹

Indigenous Mind is a masters program where students study and research their own indigenous tribal ancestors earth-based spiritual traditions within a Western Academic framework.

¹ Colorado
Students individually and collectively go through a deep decolonization and ancestral remembrance process. This is especially important for those of us who are of European ancestry, who are more removed and disconnected from our indigenous roots, or even having awareness that we have indigenous ancestors. Students spend time with traditional native elders and learn what it means to remember who they are in an indigenous tradition, and make an ancestral journey to the land of their ancestors. The quest is to access earth-based spirituality, remember the traditional ways of ones own genealogical ancestors without appropriating from other cultures, healing both the wounded masculine and feminine, maintaining balance, and promoting inter-tribal healing and understanding.

In 1855 Chief Seattle warned the white settlers of America that “when the secret corners of the forest are heavy with the scent of many men”, it would signal “the end of living and the beginning of survival.” Those American settlers had forgotten their own native tradition in favor of a religion that taught man he must “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish in the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen.I.26). This view of the natural environment denied there is any spirit in nature.

Most people of European ancestry believe their culture is rooted in Christianity, and are unaware of the tens of thousands of years of pre-Christian heritage and spirituality preceding the last two millennia of Christian experience. Christianity is relatively recent, and before it was the pre-dominant religion in Western Europe, most people practiced a spirituality that wasn’t expressed in sacred texts, but which arose out of the experience of being sensitive to the land and sky – to the
changing seasons, to the power of the hills and rivers, to the mystery of the stars, and the
movements of the sun and moon.²

To the ancient Celts, the realms of the Otherworld were in full view all the time, which
included the ancestors, the deities, and the sidhe or faeries. In the Scottish Highlands, you find the
“two sights” or *an da shealladh* in Gaelic, also known as the “second sight”, which denotes the
capacity to see both the normal waking world (ordinary reality) and the world of spirit and energy
that is intertwined and connected to this one. We find the two sights among certain individuals,
who are the dream-seers and the vision-seers.³

When St. Patrick came to Ireland in AD 432, he spent nearly 30 years traveling throughout
the countryside bringing Christianity to the local people and establishing churches and monastic
foundations upon many Druidic sacred sites. He was not the first one to bring Christianity to
Ireland, but he was the one to abolish the pagan rites of the Druids at Tara. Supposedly, first he got
rid of the snakes, and then he got rid of the dragons. There *were* no snakes in Ireland. The Celts
used the serpent imagery as a symbol of the universal life energy, a positive symbol of the goddess.
So this legend of St. Patrick ridding the land of snakes and dragons was about the conversion of the
pagan priests and the killing of the goddess, the feminine. St. Patrick also banned different forms of

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² Carr-Gomm, 4-11.
³ MacEowen, 253
divination as “giving offerings to the demons”, which included the dream-seers and the vision seers.⁴

⁴ Concannon, 150-51.
"Your dreams are your doorways" –
- Auntie Poepoe, Hawaiian elder

Much of our post-modern world does not have elders or intact cultures to link the modern and dissociative way of studying our dreams, with the ancient integrated ways of our ancestors. So in the IM program, we are attempting to reclaim what our indigenous ancestors did, and that is to use our dreams as guides, and to connect with our ancestors, and dream tribally.

Students learn how to understand and interpret dream messages from the ancestors and the spiritual world, and are taught by elders how dreams work on multiple levels to impart messages and understandings for today, and simultaneously reconstitute tribal ways. Tools for understanding dreams as guides in the waking world, particularly in their propensity for cross-cultural understanding and healing, are also provided. Dreams are one way the ancestors “speak” to us.

Our ancestors used to dream together as a tribal group, and they would share their collective dreams with the community. As we re-create a tribal dream community, we are able to gather up and perceive patterns and large writ ancestral communications that may come only to a group, and may be too much for a single person, or perhaps the dream is unifying people towards something that involves a group. We can perceive a collective Gestalt.\(^5\) In our IM tribal dream community, we collect and record our dreams together in a “dream database”, where we can look at our dreams collectively and track different patterns and themes in relation to the phases and signs of the moon. Working with dreams using indigenous protocol has enabled us to bring back the sacred art of tribal dreaming.

“\textit{It's time to make your dreams come true.}”
- Mr. Hale Makua, Hawaiian elder

\(^5\) A structure, configuration, or pattern of physical, biological, or psychological phenomena so integrated as to constitute a functional unit with properties not derivable by summation of its parts (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gestalt).
IM Dream Data:

Those of us that are the “Dreamers” started dreaming with and for each other or what I like to call “dream weaving”, and the collective dreams give a more informed story of what the dream messages were communicating to us. Ancestral information would come through the dreams of others as well our own individual dreams. Working with the community, one let’s go of their attachment to the dreams, because sometimes we are being “dreamed through”. The other message that comes through is that Mother Earth needs healing, and through our collective dream research we find that our ancestors used this dream information such as this to help maintain balance and harmony.

Below are examples of storytelling through the dreams, and “dream weaving” with other students, connected to the ancestors and the land of the ancestors. This first dream I had is an example of one of many dreams I had that was connected to someone else, their ancestors, and the land of their ancestors. I was being “dreamed through”, and “seeing” ancestral information for someone else (this is how my Celtic ancestors dreamed, they had dreams of prophecy or the “second sight”) but also there was a message and work for me in the dream. What we are also finding is that we are becoming a global tribal dream community, and that ultimately the dreams and the “work” transcends space and time. For me personally, I know the dreams I have are connected to healing Mother Earth, which is not separate from healing and finding balance in the masculine and feminine within ourselves.

On May 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2005, I had this dream:

“Teaching in Mindanao”

I was outside in the sun, near the water. I watched a video I was also in the process of making, to show the students I was teaching. I saw a very old Crow whose eyes might have fallen
out of its socket. But he gave me some wise advice. In the video, two women biologists were walking through the water and saying how they were here because it was absolutely gorgeous!

Later in the dream, a package arrived from “Mindanao”°, and I wasn’t sure if that’s where I was, or where it came from. The name seemed very important. Then, I was sitting in a lobby somewhere, it was the end of my first day of teaching, I was writing up our “lessons”, and the other teacher arrived. I was falling asleep; I think I showed her the video.

Three years after having this dream, in February of 2008, I was in Maui teaching at an IM residency. Grace Nono, a musician who is bringing back traditional indigenous Filipino songs and chants, attended the residency. Grace is from the Island of Mindanao, and “coincidentally” is starting a cultural arts school in Mindanao, which includes film and ecology. After sharing the dream with Grace, she said to me “You dreamed it, it’s going to happen”, and she invited me to come to Mindanao and teach about fish and ecology as an indigenous scientist.

The next three dreams are examples of our “community tribal dreaming”, or dream weaving. The dreams collectively tell a different story than they do individually.

On May 29th, 2007, my friend Venus had this dream about me:

1. **Venus’s Dream of Teresa Teaching an Aspect of Philippine Mythology**

   “Teresa is standing in front of a group of people lecturing or giving some kind of presentation. Apela is in the background observing. I am also part of the group of people listening to her talk. She is describing elements of Celtic culture. After awhile, she looks over to me for “permission” to make a link to a Philippine tribal god and "mythological" being called "Diwata".

   I am thinking to myself that she should elaborate and only focus on her "Celtic" ancestry. Without really offering a complete "yes" or "go" signal, Teresa does not hesitate to make a connection or reference to the Philippine God named Diwata. I am a little annoyed, but when I hear her describe who "Diwata" is, I am startled by Teresa's understanding of a god that is not from her "ancestry." She specifically says, "'Di' means _____, and 'wata' means _____ (words I can not recall now). I think to myself in the dream, "Wow, I need to pay attention to this. Spirit is bringing into awareness something important here." Then, unfortunately, I am awakend by my alarm clock at 7am. End of dream.

   This is the first dream I can recall where I dreamt of a god from the Philippines. Speaking of Diwata is sacred, and it took a Celt to name this being in my dream! Wow. Inter-cultural ties maybe between the two lands? I wonder.

   This is really one of those dreams that bring a sacred message which I am now thankful to be aware of. Interesting how this kind of dream is coming at a time when I am diving deeper into the "mythology" and creation stories of the different tribes in the Philippines. FYI, "diwata" also refers to Faeries or Nymphs.

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° Mindanao is the southern-most island in the Philippines.
On May 31st, 2007, I had this dream (I did not know of the similar dream Venus had three nights prior).

2. My Dream of Me Teaching an Aspect of Philippine Mythology

“I'm sitting in a class room, and the teacher directs a question to the one Filipina student in the classroom (the rest of the students are of European ancestry, I think). The teacher is speaking Tagalog, and the student she directs the question to says she doesn't understand, doesn't even speak Tagalog.

I suddenly answer the question in great detail, as if I'm speaking in tongues, or something is speaking through me. I understand the language, and the word(s) the teacher spoke. It has to do with the myths and creation stories and deities of the Philippines. I tell everyone about this, and seemed somewhat shocked and surprised that no one knows this story, I thought people would know about this.”

Almost exactly a year later, Venus and I were invited by Professor Lenny Stroebel8 to present at the I-Hotel Manilatown Center on a panel titled: “Ancestral Healing: Biracial Identity Confusion Among Filipino-Anglo Americans”. I spoke about decolonizing my white identity, and reclaiming my Celtic indigenous ancestry. I also spoke about connecting to the ancestors through my dreams, including the “waking” dream, and healing the earth. After our panel Leny wrote this about the event in her blog Kathang-Pinay on June 22nd, 2008 –

“Felecia Perez, Teresa MacColl, Jodie Olympia, Venus Herbito -- panelists at MHF's forum on Ancestral Healing -- shared their stories of decolonization and in doing so also professed their faith in Bathala and invoked the babaylan’s spirit in their quest for ancestral healing.

Over the years they have created rituals for reconnecting with ancestral roots, for tapping into babaylan-inspired energy. Most of these rituals were received through dreams and other signposts along the way.

Each of their stories tonight is anchored in the soul's call for wholeness. Each story is a "working through" within the framework of a History that requires unraveling and detangling - so that the story can flow and one can begin to see clearly the babaylan path that has always been there, beckoning.

Perhaps our decolonization process is our initiation ritual for us moderns. An invisible/visible community that holds us together, calls us and connects us in serendipitous ways through our dreams, books, mentors, mentors, family, and friends.”

On July 14th, 2007, Erin, (another Celt) had this dream:

3. Erin’s Celtic-Filipino Connection Dream

“Canoing down street with Venus. Venus is canoing. Venus holds a symbol that connects Celtic and Filipino cultures. It has a Y in it. Teresa and B are preparing presentations. Venus was very excited about this symbol that she held. Apela told Teresa to use a catalog for her presentation. When we enter Venus's room, we begin

8 Cultural Studies professor at Sonoma State University.
9 Babaylan is a term identifying an indigenous Filipino religious leader, who functions as a healer, a shaman, a seer and a community "miracle-worker" (or a combination of any of those). Although the role and function of a babaylan is open to both sexes, most babaylans from the pre-hispanic era are female (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babaylan).
10 Stroebel
going over our presentations. The Celtic part of the symbol is familiar to me. Venus is very excited. T and V and I were tying together Filipino and Celtic culture. I start telling Venus I dreamed we were canoing down a street in a traditional Filipino canoe. V is not surprised and does not react much. Y shape and Y sound in it. That was the Celtic part. The word Yggdrasil is in my head.”

The theme that kept coming up for us is a “Celtic-Filipino” connection (I would often make jokes about there being a Celtic-Filipino Faery-Portal!). Our dreams work together to support the validity of our “dream data” in what is known as “triangulation”. Triangulation is an approach to data analysis that synthesizes data from multiple sources, how we as indigenous scientists come to know our data is “true”. This triangulation seems to carry messages not just for each individual, but for the community as a whole, and guides us on our path.

Conclusion

There is a responsibility for us as Dreamers to learn how to work with our dreams, understand the stories and messages being spoken through them, when and how to share with others (and when not to share), and what actions to take as a result of honoring the dreams. Bringing back these ancient tribal dream ways of our ancestors is a great responsibility, and not an easy task living in this modern Western world that does not validate listening to the ancestors through our dreams.

Here is advice I received from Ilarion Merculief (Aleut) on dream protocol:

1. Don’t be attached
2. Watch, be a witness
3. Ego… be careful of it
4. Don’t get in the way of someone else’s path/process
5. Look at what it is you are afraid of
6. What you fear, face it
7. Don’t act from fear, act from love
8. Integrate the emotions
In this Western world we have largely lost our connection to the feminine as divine. This imbalance enables us to turn a blind eye to the destruction of the planet. The same can be said regarding our bodies. By connecting with and moving through the deeper issues/energies that are hidden through the colonization of our bodies, our dreams, our ancestors, and the environment, we can regain balance in our own bodies, and become more empowered to re-connect with and heal the larger ecological body, and participate in co-creating positive and sustainable physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, ecological, and ancestral well-being.


Merculieff, Illarion: *The Value and Use of Traditional Knowledge and Wisdom: Partnerships for the Bering Sea.*

Stroebel, Leny: *Kathang-Pinay* (http://kathang-pinay.blogspot.com/)