

Celtic Wheel of Being

By George Lakey,
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The ancient Celts developed a rich culture which has never been completely suppressed, despite efforts dating from the Roman Empire. Once spread over much of Europe, Celtic influence remains strongest in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, and comes down to us today in stories like the King Arthur legends, in poetry and song, and beautiful drawings which expressed a universe alive with energy. Celtic spirituality was rooted in kinship with land and nature, respect for life and the Great Mother, and magic, which unites and harmonizes. Their reverence for the land and other species provides a model for people who are today searching for deep connection with their environment.

The Celts' experience of patterns of energy is reflected in their Wheel of Being, which unites the four directions in the harmony of spirit. The four directions correspond to seasons, also: East = spring, South = summer, West = autumn, North = winter. Each direction is connected to certain symbols; for simplicity I've chosen one for each direction:

East: the **forge** where the blacksmith creates, where new things are "wrought".
South: the **staff** with which sheep (and people) are guided along and brought together.
West: the **cup** or **cauldron** where things are held, brewed, stewed.
North: the **stone** which is a place of authority or decision.

For the Celts, when the basic patterns of energy were in harmony, all went well. When they were out of harmony, troubles arose. The patterns of energy acknowledged differences: the cold winter (North) is very different from the hot summer (South). These differences are not to make value judgments about, however, and be attached to one so as to slight another. The point is to accept the Wheel of Being, to honor the differences and to experience the unity as well.

For us moderns this ancient worldview provides a profound basis for teamwork, for authentic community, for diversity-friendly organizational life. It may be especially appropriate for Europeans and their descendants, who are challenged by Native Americans and others to re-discover our own roots, to find pride in our own ancient and non-patriarchal spirituality, to assert our own authentically reverent relationship to the land.

Celts used a sacred stone for acknowledging the authority of a king for example, the Stone of Scone where ancient Scottish kings were crowned, which was seized and taken to Westminster by the English.

EAST: creative, inventive, has fire of inspiration

Visionary who sees the big picture
Very idea-oriented, focus on future thought
Insight into mission and purpose
Likes to experiment, explore
Can lose focus on tasks and not follow through
May become easily overwhelmed, lose track of time
Tends to be highly enthusiastic early on, then burn out

SOUTH: hearthfire, fertility, bringing together

Innocence & trust in others based on vulnerability and openness
Allows others to feel important in determining direction of what's happening
Value-driven regarding all aspects of personal / professional life
Uses relationships to accomplish tasks
Supportive, nurturing, feeling-based
Has trouble saying "no" to requests
Internalizes difficulty and assumes blame
Prone to disappointment when relationship is seen as secondary to task
Difficulty confronting, dealing with anger

WEST: learning, judgement, information

Weighs all sides of issues
Uses data analysis and logic
Seen as practical and thorough in task situations
Introspective, self-analytical
Can become stubborn and entrenched in position
Can be indecisive, collect unnecessary data, mired in details
May appear cold, withdrawn

NORTH: warrior, open to struggle, decisive

Assertive, active
Likes to be in control of relationship and steer course of events
Quick to act, expresses sense of urgency for others to act now
Enjoys challenge of difficult situations and people
Can get defensive quickly, argue, try to out-expert you
Can lose patience, pushes for decision before it's time
May get autocratic, want things their way, ride roughshod over people

The information about Celtic culture is drawn by George Lakey from R.J. Stewart's book Celtic Gods Celtic Goddesses (London: Blandford, 1990), especially pages 14-15, 25,-29, 96, 130. With thanks to David Baum and Morgan Henderson