



Apostolic Guardian Church of Grace and Blessing

Invocation and Evocation - St Patrick's Breastplate -

By Alys

The passage which came to mind during this discussion took some finding as did the complete text, which is far too long for this article. It comes from a Hymn called *St Patrick's Breastplate* and the music for this particular portion is very, very old indeed.

*Christ be with me,
Christ within me,
Christ behind me,
Christ beside me,
Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ in quiet,
Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger*

The whole of *The Breastplate* is well worth studying for it uses some very old formulae indeed, and looks as if it might well mark a transition point. It is the same style as the older Celtic binding, but it has some interesting differences, which nevertheless need

not concern us for the time being. It was said that St Patrick was taught by Druids. The text certainly indicates a certain amount of 'pagan' influence, if nothing else.

The core of the evocation is ninefold, ('*Christ be with me - Christ to win me*', and '*Christ beneath me - Christ in Danger*') with a three fold invocation interspersed.

The idea is that when chanting such a spell one directs one's attention to the place indicated within it; not so much as to feel it for that breaks the rhythm of the song, but certainly enough to stir the place in one's physical being. It might be done accompanied by breathing - for example, inhaling, being aware of one's back, 'Christ behind me' and so on. One could equally well chose one of the major Life centres of the body; the belly for one's own comfort zone, for example, beginning to spread one's awareness of the protection from there. Or again, from slightly above the brow of one's head in what has become known in some circles as the 'I am' centre. Which ever you choose, choose

deliberately, and direct your words with consciousness. The whole idea is that these forces are not, (or are not to remain) outside yourself.

Compare it for example with this:

I mantle myself in the covering of creatures;

stillness of owl,

perception of eagle,

humility of wren,

speed of horse,

strength of bear,

courtesy of deer,

repose of serpent,

silence of mouse,

courage of salmon.

Nine creatures about me

To clothe and protect me,

on the ways that I walk.

Which in my book is paired with:

Sovereign of the Earth,

Compassionate Queen of the Planet,

Keeper of the Universe,

In your mystery I rise.

There are many of these ninefold protections, all serving to transform the way we walk in the world in our daily lives. The nine powers of the gifting ones, the constellations, the virtues of the trees and so on. This may recall for us the Ancient Legends of the Ninefold muses for example, or the Furies, each of whom was herself an aspect of one of the Triple Goddesses.

According to Caitlin Matthews in her *Celtic Devotional* (Godsfield Press, 1996) Each of the Celtic Seasons has its own special form of this 'Protection of the Pathway and the Soul'.

They are:

Samhain The Breastplate of Wisdom

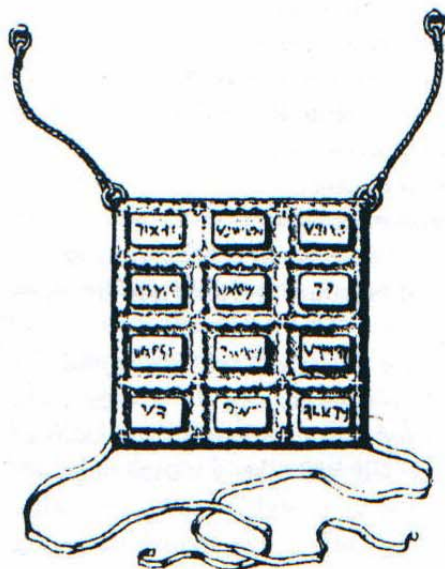
Imbolc The Encircling of Help

Beltane The Cincture (or Belt) of Protection

Lughnasadh The Cloak of Covering

Such an invocation is more than a matter of a few swift well remembered words, it is a placing of awareness and imagination into the being invoked and evoking these qualities within ourselves. It is a calling of the nine qualities of nine aspects of creation and a planting of them within us. It includes the veneration of many threefold aspects of the universe. The threefold, multiplied by itself.

Saint Patrick's Breastplate falls into this pattern extremely easily, though I have quoted but one part of it. However, whether because of the exigencies of the music, or because there was some hidden meaning in the



changes *The Breastplate* tends to be sixfold rather than ninefold in form.

There are, to begin with six verses, each one elaborating the previous ones in six different ways.

Here is verse three:

*I bind unto myself today
The virtues of the starlit heaven,
The glorious sun's life giving ray,
The whiteness of the moon at even,
The flashing of the lightning free,
The whirling wind's tempestuous
shocks,
The stable earth,
The deep salt sea around the old
eternal rocks.*

So, though it is evidently not entirely bound itself by the 'Rules' of the Celtic Protection of the Pathway and the Soul, nevertheless it shows at least one way in which the tradition was passed on and used in the new Theurgic formulae of the Christian Church. While there is some doubt as to the historical existence of Saint Patrick whose autobiography was not found until four hundred years after his life, *The Breastplate* itself seems to be good place to begin to resolve the question of Theurgy as both invocation and evocation. The book of Leinster said that he was the son of the Goddess Macha who gave birth to the Shamrock God. *The Breastplate* itself begins:

*I bind unto myself today
The strong name of the Trinity
By invocation of the same
The Three in One and One in Three.*

Though there is no possible doubt that the bulk of the *Breastplate* was very

much given to invoking aspects of the history of the Lord Jesus, Saint Patrick himself was associated with the sanctity of the Shamrock which had previously indicated a very different Trinity from that usually envisaged by those who sing the old song.

More than anything else however, I would see this invocation, as I see the invocations of Protection of the Path, as patterns. We look out on the dying years of the twentieth century, at a world which is not always filled with the light of sun and moon and the comfort of rock. It is our task, I think, to find the ninefold protections which will speak against the pollution of the mind, which will invoke the magic of electronic communication. Come to think of it, it is our task to consider this world in which we live, and to invoke those things which we value, whatever they may be.

I sit for a long while, looking at the tree outside my window and at the city beyond. I am thinking of politicians and I find myself wishing for straightness. Someone to speak clearly of what is.

*Clean words
The hands that help
Gentle thoughts*

*The healing life
Laughter of kindness
The listening presence
Moments of sharing
Food that sustains
Quiet in the core.*

Line by line, with many pauses and no poetry I come up with nine

Protections for my Path this day. Not in any order or theme. Today, I do not live in such a world. I cannot think what Threefold Deity I would invoke.

*Lord of gentleness?
Lady of generosity?
Soul of freedom?*

Perhaps. In the end, what you make of the Invocation is your business according to your insight. Part of your own path.

