

# I STAND WITH TARA

A Ritual for the Preservation of the Tara-Skryne Valley

October 31st, 2007 - Worldwide

## Pre-Ritual Briefing and Notes

by *Kathryn Price NicDhàna and Raven nic Rhóisín*



### Introduction

This ritual is designed to help protect the sacred Hill of Tara and the surrounding Skryne Valley from the damage of the proposed M3 roadway, currently planned to run through the Valley. The Skryne Valley contains numerous ancient sites of historical, archaeological, and spiritual importance, including Ireland's sacred center of Tara. For background information on the situation, please visit <http://www.tarawatch.org/> and <http://www.hilloftara.info/>. Suggestions for this-world actions to help Tara can be found under the “[Physical Activism](#)” section below.

This ritual is open to any individuals or groups concerned about the Tara preservation efforts and who wish to help. The ritual was written by Celtic Reconstructionists (CRs), and is formatted according to Celtic beliefs and worldviews, but one does not have to be CR to participate. Anyone wishing to help in honor is welcome. We do ask that interested parties follow the format presented here so that efforts can be coordinated harmoniously and in a unified fashion. For more information on Celtic Reconstructionism, please read <http://paganachd.com/faq/>.<sup>1</sup>

For a list of the areas where the ritual will be taking place, see the [Solidarity and Networking](#) section.

### Size

This ritual can be done by individuals or by groups with only minor adaptations to the structure. If you have a number of people who are skilled at leading ritual, and would like to divide up the leadership roles, that's fine, too.

### Language Issues

If you are new to the Irish language, we suggest taking some time before the ritual to practice Irish pronunciation. While we have included some very rough phonetics for some of the key phrases, we recommend listening to actual sound files or reading about how the sounds are made for more accurate results. A helpful pronunciation guide with sound clips is available online at <http://www.daltai.com/key.htm>.<sup>2</sup>

If you're working in a group, we suggest practicing the Irish bits together to determine your group's comfort level with Irish. If the group can't get the hang of it, it's probably better to simplify the phrases to something everyone can say with confidence. Confused, stumbling script-reading may negatively impact your energetic results, so it's best to go with something that can be done strongly and with unity. For instance, you can shorten the Old Irish phrase “**nem nglas, muir mas, talam cé**”. (phonetically: “Nem nlas, Mweer mas, TAH-luhv kay”) to simply “**talam cé**” (phonetically: “TAH-luhv kay”). Most people can handle three syllables. “TAH-luhv kay”. (Really, they can! We tried it on an Irish-impaired friend with amazing success. Now he runs around yelling, “talam cé” like a pro! We can't get him to shut up!)

We use the phrase *Sláinte Mhaith!* (phonetically: “SLAWNTCH-yuh Vah”) often, usually to mark the end of a prayer, or the end of a section of the ritual. Colloquially, this is often translated as “Cheers”. A more complete translation is “Good Health/Strength/Wholeness” - which we feel are good things to affirm - for the land, the spirits and the people.

While many find the use of a Celtic language an important and evocative part of the ritual, those parts may be done in English if you find the Irish too challenging. We have provided translations and substitutions accordingly. For instance, for the three realms, you could have people repeat in English (at the beginning) “Sky, Sea and Sacred Land”. And at the end, “Sea, Sky and Sacred Land”, with everyone repeating “Sacred Land” as people connect with the earth and become centered after the ritual.

### **Script-ish Conventions**

Sections in the ritual meant to be spoken are in **bold**, section headers are underlined and larger, and instructions and guidelines are in normal typeface.

### **FIRE**

This ritual involves fire. Ideally, we'll have outdoor bonfires as well as individual candles or torches for participants. If this is not possible for your location, a central candle or cauldron fire can be substituted. If fire is not permitted at your site at all, participants can visualize lighting the fires at that point in the ritual, and may wish to use a central object to symbolize the signal fire. If a central fire is possible, but it's too windy for individual jar candles, candle lanterns or torches, visualize the individual flames in your heart and hands, and then add that energy to the central fire when it is lit (we go into this in more detail later). We trust that anyone playing with fire, particularly outside, will have more than a nodding acquaintance with fire safety practices.

### **Location**

The ideal location for this ritual is atop a hill. Participants in Ireland will be lighting fires atop the hills surrounding Tara, all across Ireland, and if all goes well, atop Tara herself.

### **Timing**

For maximum coordination, we'd like participants to do the ritual on Samhain, October 31st. In Ireland, they'll be lighting the fires at 8:00 PM Irish time. Check your timezone for the local equivalent. For those confused by the time difference and the movement of Irish Summer Time, here's a shortcut: on Samhain night, the sun sets in Ireland at 12:55 PM Eastern Daylight Time, and the fires will be lit in Ireland at 3:00 PM EDT. If you're doing your ritual earlier or later, you can

also mentally key in with the lighting in Ireland at this time, visualizing your connection to all those who are lighting the fires, and lighting a small flame if possible.

If this date or time is not possible for you, earlier is fine... just imagine your signal fire being one of the first in a chain sparking a blazing chain of light and strength flowing towards Tara. The ritual can also be done later that night, or after the 31st, as an ongoing effort to continue and strengthen the protection.

There may also be a webcast of the event happening. Keep an eye on <http://tarawatch.org/>, this site (<http://paganachd.com/tara>) and the message board at <http://www.paganachd.com/community.html> for updates.

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## Ritual Outline

1. Opening Statement
2. Initial Offerings
  - Ancestors
  - Déithe (Deities)
  - Nature Spirits
3. Sacred Space
  - Saining
  - Three Realms
  - The Center
4. Introduce Yourself (threefold)
5. Lighting Signal Fires for Tara
6. Invoking the Land of Ireland
7. Deity or Deities  
(optional bits)
8. Closing
9. Aftermath and Winding Down

### Opening Statement

This can be as simple or complex as you want. Basically, welcome folks and make sure everyone knows why you're there. Since everyone should have read or at least discussed the points in this introduction beforehand, the opening statement can probably be brief.

### Offerings

Here you will be making appropriate offerings to the local spirits, and your deities and ancestors. More offerings can be made later in the ritual, but these initial offerings are for establishing a mood of hospitality, and making an initial, friendly and reciprocal connection with the spirits. Traditional, seasonal offerings are apples or cider, hazelnuts, rowan berries, oats, cream, butter and baked

goods, etc. For more on how to make offerings, see <http://paganachd.com/faq/ritual.html#offerings>.<sup>3</sup> and for suggestions on dealing with land spirits who may not be in harmony with a Celtic approach, see [KILLYOUANDEATYOU!](http://paganachd.com/articles/killyouandeatyou.html) (<http://paganachd.com/articles/killyouandeatyou.html>), a CR guide to determining how the land where you find yourself might feel about you.

If your local spirits are not interested in participating in this ritual, but are willing to stand aside and let you proceed, the offerings you make to them will be those of establishing a treaty of non-interference. When you make the offerings, ask that the spirits be at peace with you and not interfere with your work. Agree not to interfere with them, as well. If you are energetically perceptive and used to interacting with the spirits, you may be able to tell pretty easily if the offerings are accepted. If you are not certain, you may need to do some divination before proceeding, to be sure. If the land doesn't want to be linked, and assuming you've received no dire omens to leave the area, and the energy and divination is otherwise favorable for doing the ritual itself, proceed with the ritual with the participants connecting themselves and the fire to Tara, but not doing anything to connect the two lands.

We advise that, if at all possible, you spend some time at the ritual site ahead of time, so the opinions of the spirits, for good or ill, are not a surprise to you on the night (or day) of the working. (Again, see [KILLYOUANDEATYOU!](http://paganachd.com/articles/killyouandeatyou.html))

## Sacred Space

- Saining with fire and/or water.

Saining is an initial step in many Celtic rituals. The idea is to purify and bless those present, as well as the space in which the ritual will be performed. It is a time when the distractions of daily life are set aside as we prepare ourselves and our site for spiritual work. The practice survives in recent Scottish folklore as “saining” - to purify, bless or consecrate. In Scotland, and amongst many Celtic Reconstructionists, saining has usually been done with the smoke of burning juniper branches, either thrown on a fire or carried, smouldering, throughout the home and byre.

It is also traditional to sain with blessed water, with charms and incantations, or with a combination of all of the above. For this ritual we have indicated saining with smoke, but you can use whatever method works best for you. If using juniper, be aware that the branches are resinous and will spark. If you are doing the ritual inside, or are worried about getting sparks near your face, it may be best if you grind them up beforehand to ensure more even burning. If you are burning juniper in a container, we recommend making sure the container is fireproof, and putting a layer of earth or sand in the bottom to avoid burning your hands. If fire is not safe in your location, we suggest sprinkling water on participants and around the space. Water from a holy well or sacred river is ideal for this purpose. Those who work with the sacred trees of the [crann ogham](#) might use Birch for cleansing, either putting some form of birch in the water, or breathing its name in and out with the nine breaths, or just holding its energy in your mind.

“Sain” is derived from the Early Irish word *sén*, so it's probable that the ancient Irish ancestors had a similar practice of ritual purification. As we prepare our space tonight for the sacred work we do, focus mindfully on cleaning, clearing, and blessing yourselves, your site, and the work.

- Three Realms:

We're connecting with the Three Realms of the Celts, the earth (*talam*), the sky (*nem*), and the sea (*muir*). These three realms are ever present. They are the physical and cosmological model of the world the ancient Celts inhabited, and which we inhabit today. The ancestors swore their oaths by the Three Realms, and acknowledging and connecting with the realms at the beginning of a Celtic ritual is a way to center yourself before beginning magical work. For this working, we'll repeat in Old Irish: "muir mas, nem nglas, talam cé" – "the beautiful sea, the blue sky, the present earth". This phrasing is from "The Poems of Blathmac Son of Cú Brettan", cited in "Irish Perceptions of the Cosmos", here: <http://www.celt.dias.ie/publications/celtica/c23/c23-174.pdf>. We will be slightly varying the order of the names of the realms at different points in the ritual. In the beginning we will chant "nem nglas, muir mas, talam cé" - sky, sea, then land. At the end we will reverse the flow of the cycle of energy, and chant "muir mas, nem nglas, talam cé" - sea, sky, then land. We will always begin and end with the land. We will often be repeating things three, five or nine times. These were, and still are, sacred numbers to the Celts, and three threes of repetition will especially aid in connection. Throughout the ritual, we have tried to echo threes and nines whenever possible.

Different people have different methods for opening up energetically and connecting to the realms around them. If movement enhances the experience for you, you may want to use physical gestures along with the words: for example, reaching down to the earth, raising hands to the sky, reaching out to your sides, then pulling the energy up from the earth again and ending with your hands over your heart. Experiment with this, and see what best helps you connect.

- Opening to the Center: Call to Tara

After we connect with the Three Realms we'll see the center opening, the mystical and metaphysical center at Tara, where burns the fire or symbol of fire at the center of our ritual space. We'll chant "Tara" while we open to the mystical center of all. If it turns into a wordless or freeform chant, that's fine. At some points you can keep chanting softly while the Ritual Leader speaks another part over the simple chanting. Again, see what works best with the energy and flow of the ritual (just make sure that the Ritual Leader doesn't get drowned out with your enthusiasm!). Continue until the chant dies down naturally or the Ritual Leader brings it to a close.

Here, we address Tara herself, she who is the land, she who is an ancestor, she who is a goddess. We call her by her many historical names and poetic titles, and introduce ourselves accordingly. The poetic bits in this section are derived from the Metrical Dindsenchas, an Old Irish poetic description of the names of places and natural features in Ireland. While this is being recited, focus on reaching out and connecting to Tara, her long and proud history, and her role as the center of Ireland, seat of kings and queens and home of the land. You can either use the short version that is in the ritual script, or the longer version, [here](#).

## Introduce yourself (threefold) and Lighting the Signal Fires For Tara

At this point, you should state who you are, so the land will recognize you. Keeping in mind the importance of threes in Irish tradition, structure it so that there are three parts to it. You'll want to include your name, and perhaps your ancestry (daughter of, granddaughter of, great-granddaughter

of). If you're working with a group or tradition, you may want to make one of those parts the name of the group or tradition that you hail from. You may also wish to include a reference to where you are, particularly if you're standing for a place as well as for yourself. Using the geographical name of your region is fine, but so is using a mystical name for your area if you've been given that by the land spirits where you are or know it from local tradition. End your introduction with "I stand with Tara".

Sample introductions:

"I am Raven nic Rhóisín O'Callaghan, wild goose daughter of Connaught. I stand with Tara."

"I am Kathryn NicDhàna of clan McMarra, daughter of the line of Áine. I stand with Tara."

"I am John William, son of Charles Andrew, son of John Charles. I stand with Tara."

"I am Maureen Kennedy, priestess of the Hazel Grove, of the Smoky Mountains. I stand with Tara."

"I am Elisha Jackson, daughter of Amelia Moore, the lines of many ancestors come together in me. I stand with Tara."

"I am Paul, son of Paul, son of the line of rabbis and scholars. I stand with Tara."

"I am \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_." (light individual flame) "I stand with Tara."

For groups, the ritual leader begins with their intro to set the tone and structure. "I stand with Tara" is the signal for the next person to give their intro. Go around the circle in a sunwise direction, ending each brief intro with the lighting of the individual flame, and then saying "I stand with Tara". Emphasize the threefold nature of the introduction to minimize people going on and on about themselves. (grin) If you are outside and it's windy, lighting individual candles will only work if you have votive candles or lanterns, and even that may not be enough. If that is the case, as you listen to the others speak and then speak yourself, see the fire growing strong in your heart. Hold the fire of your heart, the fire of your ancestors, in your cupped hands. When you can see it shining before you, say "I stand with Tara." Then, when the ritual leader goes to light the central fire, walk to the fire as a group, turn your hands to the flame, and see the fire of your hearts joining with the physical flame and helping it grow strong and bright.

When all individuals have spoken, RL says, "We are \_\_\_\_\_" (Name of group).

If it's not an ongoing group, use a name decided on by participants before ritual, such as, "the people of the Hilltowns" or "the Celtic Pagans of the Connecticut River Valley" or something as simple as "friends of Tara." For established or more formal groups, this can also be threefold, such as: "We are Nigheanan nan Cailleachan (group name), of Pàganachd Bhandia (tradition), of the Quinntukqt River Valley (location), We stand with Tara!"

The group identity is done as a call and response, three times:

RL: "We are (name of group)."

Group: "We stand with Tara."

(Repeat 3x)

## Invoking the land of Ireland

In this phase of the ritual, we will honor the long ribbon of Irish history. We invoke the land as the Milesian bard Amergin did on arrival, lauding it for its beautiful natural features, praising its

strength and fruitfulness, and gathering it to ourselves and ourselves to it in close communion. This is an abbreviated and slightly altered version of Amergin's invocation of the Land of Ireland. If you know and prefer one of the longer versions, you may use one of those instead. You can find an English-language rendition of the invocation at <http://www.bartleby.com/250/48.html>, and the original Old Irish text may be found at <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/online/G800011A/text001.html>. Here's a list of the changes we made to the original invocation: Conquerors and chiefs have been cut, as they didn't appear in some manuscripts and did not mesh well with the purpose of tonight's working. Similarly, the "wives of Bres" have been cut. "Sons of Mil" has been changed to "descendants of Mil", and the three names of the queens that Amergin met (the three names of Ireland Herself) have been added to the invocation in the order that Amergin encountered them on his journey.

## Deities, Ancestors, Spirits:

If you have a strong connection with any Celtic deities, particularly deities connected with sovereignty, protection of the people, preservation of the natural or cultural worlds, hearthfires or signal fires, this would be a good time to open to them and ask their aid. If you don't have a particular deity you'd like to invite, many of the ritual participants are asking the blessings of Brigid (*Bride*), in her capacities as hearth goddess, fire goddess, and protector of Ireland. Celtic Christians who are participating with more explicitly Christian rituals will also be praying to her as a saint who watches over Ireland. The way we address her in Irish is in the vocative case - "*A Bhríde*" (phonetically "Ah Vreezh" or "Ah Vreejh")

## Optional Bits

- Connecting your locality with Tara:

If you have an established relationship with the land where you live, or the land where you are performing the ritual, and it's given its blessing for you to connect your locality with Tara for the purposes of this ritual, now is a good time to do that, according to the tenets of your relationship with the land. If you're interested in this sort of work but are not sure what to do or if your land might be amenable, again, please consult [KILLYOUANDEATYOU!](#), as mentioned above. Those wishing to attempt the optional extension here should pay particular attention to the offerings to the land spirits at the beginning of the ritual, and the results of that exchange. You should also be certain that the land where you are is a strong place that will **strengthen** and **help protect** Tara, rather than do anything to drain her. You may want to consider including a clause to the effect that if anything happens to your local site to make it a liability, rather than drain Tara that link will be broken.

If your offerings to the local spirits are well received, your divination has gone well, and you haven't encountered any "back off" messages like those described in the [KILLYOUANDEATYOU!](#) article, engage your local spirits according to their preferences (if you're doing this section, we trust you to know what those are!), reach out to Tara, make sure that the energy in both places is harmonious, and bring them together energetically, gently at first. If everything seems to still be harmonious, strengthen the bond until it can stand on its own, shining and strong. At the end of this phase, wrap up with a statement of "(Place name) stands with Tara!". This could be the name of the specific place you stand, the name of your town, the name of a prominent local geographic feature, or even the name of your state. For example:

“Symphony Woods stands with Tara!”  
“Seattle stands with Tara!”  
“The Blue Mountains stand with Tara!”  
“Colorado stands with Tara!”  
“\_\_\_\_\_ stands with Tara!”

- Settling of the Manor at Tara

This is one of the optional sections, depending on how long and structured you want your ritual to be. One of the historical texts about Tara, the Settling of the Manor at Tara, described how Tara was the seat of the kings, the unifying center of Ireland. You can read the full text here:

<http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/ctexts/tara.html>. Some of us will be using it as a way to pull together concepts from all over Ireland with a central focus on Tara. Those doing so will honor all five provinces of the island. This is also a place for people from the different regions of Ireland, or those with ancestors from a given region of Ireland, to honor and call upon that connection in support of the work. In the version we've posted [here](#), we've snipped the list of place names from the other provinces a bit because it got really long, but thought it important to leave in the ones for Meath and Tara, as the center and focus of the ritual.

## Closing

At this point you want to make any final offerings, ground the energy, get everyone back into a normal sense of reality, and bring a sense of closure to the ritual experience. Some people will stay in a fairly normal state of mind during this ritual, so won't need to “come back” from anywhere, but others may trance out very deeply. As Samhain is such a mystical time (and the energy of Samhain will be there even if you do the ritual the night of the 30th or the 1st), it's possible some people will still feel more open than usual when things are done. Just make sure everyone can speak and walk and function before you let them head home. The next section should help with that.

## Aftermath and Winding Down: Ancestor and Harvest Feast

After the ritual, those not keeping vigil at the Tara signal fires may wish to share a feast with the Ancestors and spirits. Samhain is a traditional time of year for this, and this is an appropriate time to make final offerings and to share the bounty of harvest with them. This may be a somewhat less formal and solemn occasion than the preceding ritual, though for some CR sub-traditions it is a subdued affair. We suggest traditional foods such as apples and apple cider, hazelnuts, roasted pork or venison (for the carnivores), and perhaps even the more recent Irish classic, soda bread. (An entertaining and informative history of Irish soda bread may be found at <http://www.sodabread.us/>, and more general Irish cooking tips and links to recipe sources on their “Irish Cooking” page.) You can find more ideas about other activities and themes for the feast such as games or divination at <http://www.paganachd.com/faq/ritual.html#samhain>.<sup>4</sup>

## Physical Activism

This can be done as follow-up, or as a pre-ritual intent-setter. Here are some this-world things to do to support Tara and the activists fighting to save her.

- Send money to the fund for an independent archaeological survey of the site (<http://www.hilloftara.info/>)



- Sign the online petition to save Tara (<http://www.petitiononline.com/hilltara>)
- Write letters to Irish government officials (addresses here: [http://globalartscollective.org/acf/act\\_now.htm](http://globalartscollective.org/acf/act_now.htm) with guidelines on how to write a good letter here: [http://globalartscollective.org/acf/sample\\_letter.htm](http://globalartscollective.org/acf/sample_letter.htm). However, please note that John Gormley is now Minister for the Environment, not Dick Roche.)
- Write polite letters to Irish and Irish-American (or Irish-Canadian, etc.) newspapers about the issue.
- Send supplies and letters of support to protesters on-site. Tarapixie seems to be doing most of the coordinating on the ground. Reach her and her crew via <http://www.tarapixie.net/>. Cell phone numbers for the protesters on-site: 086 1758 557 and 086 1537 146. If you're calling from outside Ireland, you will need to look up your international calling code to key in before the number; the prefix will vary from country to country, and you may need to experiment a bit. For example, in America, the code you need to dial is 011 + 353 + number, and then you drop the first digit from the Ireland number. To call from America dial 011 353 86 1758 557 or 011 353 86 1537 146.

## Networking and Solidarity

We are compiling a list of those who will be participating in this ritual. Thus far we have groups and individuals in nine countries and fourteen US states committed to participating.

- **Countries:** Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Netherlands, Germany, Brazil, Portugal, Canada and the United States
- **US States:** California, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and Washington

The Irish coordinators we're working with have so far received fire-lighting pledges from four countries and nineteen areas of Ireland:

- **Areas of Ireland:** Antrim, Armagh, Cork, Down, Dublin, Galway, Kerry, Kildare, Laois, Leitrim, Mayo, Meath, Monaghan, Offaly, Roscommon, Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford, and West Meath
- **Countries:** Canada, the US, Wales and New Zealand

If you would like to sign and show your support, please e-mail us your name, location, and/or the name of your group, to the address on this website.





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## Notes

1. Or, in hardcopy: *The CR FAQ - An Introduction to Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism* by NicDhàna, Laurie, Vermeers, ní Dhoireann and other members of the CR community. (2007 River House Publishing) ISBN: 978-0-6151-5800-6
2. The pronunciation guide and glossary, pp.157-188 in *The CR FAQ* book, can also assist with this.
3. For how to do offerings, pp.107-110 in *The Book*
4. For more suggestions on what do to for Samhain, pp.97-98 in *The Book* ;-)

We would also like to thank Ingrid Houwers of [Graywolf Crafts](#) for her lovely drawing, "[Tara's Dancers](#)"

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