

Branwen

Goddess of Empathy, Healing Love, and Prophecy

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Branwen is a Goddess of two lands, Ireland and Wales. Branwen's tale begins in Wales. It is from Her home there that She agrees to ally Herself to the land of the Green Isle (Ireland) through marriage to King Matholwch. In keeping with Her compassionate, peace-seeking nature, this is a marriage of uniting countries and not one of romantic love.

It is not long until trouble begins to brew. Some say it is the pressure from his people that causes Matholwch to dishonor Branwen due to the actions of Her brother, Efnisien's anger. Some say it is of his own will, but regardless of instigating factors, Matholwch treats Branwen shamefully, casting Her from Queen to work in the kitchens. Here She is treated poorly and beaten regularly.

Although many would see those of peace and love as weak, it is not so and Branwen's character exemplifies this. Through Her abuse She stands strong, maintains what dignity She has, and plans Her escape. Training starlings with crumbs of bread from the kitchen, She teaches them to speak in their song. Once Branwen is satisfied that the birds' new skills are mastered, She sends the starlings on a journey to Wales to tell Her brother Bran of Her poor treatment and enlist His help.

Bran is of course outraged at the abuse of His sister. Amassing the armies of the Isle of Mighty, He crosses the waters to free Her.

To the oracular priests of Ireland a visage appears upon the waves. They see a mountain and forest floating on the water growing ever nearer. They are confused by their visions and hearing of this King Matholwch seeks out Branwen asking of its meaning.¹ Branwen already is well aware of what this vision portends. She tells Matholwch that it is Her brother, the giant Bran, walking beside the ships of Wales as the armies of the Isle of Mighty come to free Her.

Upon their arrival, treaties for Branwen's release are negotiated. Branwen urges both sides for a peaceful resolution so that the land is not destroyed.² But Efnisien in his bitterness stirs anger amongst the men and fighting begins.

A great battle ensues, where warriors and great men seek to trade items of war time glory, but in the end only devastation remains. Ireland is devoid of life, only five pregnant women² who hid in caves¹ are left to repopulate it. The armies of the Isle of Mighty fend no better, for only seven men remain² along with the magickal head of Bran which still has life.

Branwen is freed, but She is devastated by the destruction She feels She is responsible for. Within a matter of days She lies dead too from Her heartbreak.



Starling on the balcony

Branwen's story is filled with sorrow. It is also ripe with the guidance She provides to help us heal our inner selves which in turn helps to heal the world around us.

Let's look first at Branwen as a Goddess of Love. It is Branwen's Love that unites the two lands. *Goddess Alive!* by Michelle Skye elaborates quite beautifully on Branwen's Love saying that it is from Her connection to the land that Branwen's vast love for all arises. Associated with the Waxing Moon, Branwen gives us the gift of hope. Her love is all encompassing, unwavering, and She easily forgives. Branwen teaches us by gently asking us to open just a little more and let another layer of our hard outer shells fall away.¹

Branwen's great heart filled with love, associates Her strongly with the Heart Chakra. In my own work I have found Branwen to be steady and gentle in Her assistance to help us open in love. When opening to Branwen's love, we are healed by Its vast power. Love has the power to heal and Branwen is quite gentle in taking our emotional wounds and wiping our tears away.

More subtly, it is through Branwen's great love that we see Her empathy. So many today, myself included, struggle at times wondering at the purpose of empaths. Overwhelmed, we grow angry at our gift and call it a curse. It is at these times that the Great Empath Branwen is crying with us. She feels our pain as Her own. Filled with compassion, She feels sorrow at our sadness. It is here that Her love greatly heals and teaches us. A purpose of empathy is to grow in love. When we experience the energy of emotions and allow our hearts to open, we can flow through the sorrows around us without being overwhelmed. And yet Branwen does not ask us to open to the maelstrom of the world around us either. She beseeches us to respect our limitations and use our empathic gift of love wisely. Branwen can teach us how to set boundaries healthfully while allowing our love to be expressed freely, shielding us from taking on too much. Master of the intricate layers we each have, She is ever willing to gently help arrange them optimally so that each time we grow a little closer to seeing empathy as a healer's gift and not the curse of the weak society portrays it as.

Working with empathy in our age is a learning process and Branwen's tale shows us that She too knows what it is like to be overwhelmed with emotion. In the end of Her myth She dies from the heartache of the devastation. This can speak to us metaphorically. Death from heartbreak is akin to the inner numbness from internalizing too much of everyday life or even disaster around us. This portion of the myth also reflects the societal inflicted guilt associated with the actions of others. We do not hear of Efnisien feeling bad for instigating and spurring on the rage and destruction, it is Branwen taking on the blame.

This too could connect Branwen to an old Irish and Welsh tradition that can be associated with modern interpretations of Shamanism, that of Sin Eater³. She also works with an animal ally, Starling, which is another Shamanic practice. It is strange that while certainly saddened, it seems that none of the men after the battle are recorded in the myth as showing signs of the stress from the ordeal they just went through. One could surmise that Branwen is also a Goddess of Shamanism, in that using Her empathy

She took on the energetical impact of the disaster and transmuted⁵ the energy. Thus the symbolic death as all things must die to be reborn anew. Due to the magnitude of this transmutation⁵ it would seem that Branwen is a Master of Shamanic abilities.

Finally we come to Branwen's gift of Prophecy. It is Branwen who is able to discern the vision of Ireland's Oracular priests when they themselves are not.¹ When the leaders of the two countries come together, Branwen urges for peace. Not just for peace's sake, but so that it does not destroy the land.² It would seem that She has already foreseen that this will not only be a bloody battle, but that it will almost completely eliminate the peoples of both lands and that they will be united no more.

'The Energy of Branwen' by Aisling



~* Prayer for Branwen's Assistance *~

(especially helpful for empaths, healers, and all visionaries)

Blessed Goddess of Love Divine

Show me how to heal with my empathy

Help me be fully in my power lest the feelings overwhelm me.

For centered and whole, I can share Your healing Love abundantly.

Blessed Goddess of Radiant Beauty

Open my eyes so I may always see the splendor before me

So that I may know that in everything there is beauty.

For in seeing beauty, I feel joy and add to the beauty around me.

Blessed Goddess of Will so Strong

*Guide me to face my challenges creatively
And to see the ways to their resolution clearly
For in seeking new ways, I bring the essence of change to our society.*

)O(A Healing Ceremony with Branwen)O(

Prepare for and start the ritual in your normal manner. If you would like to use crystals for this healing, Rose Quartz would be highly appropriate, or your favorite pink, red and/or green crystals would work too as these all correspond to the heart chakra. Candle colors would be the same, with the addition of white to the list of possibilities. For incense, Rose in the form fresh flowers, oil, sticks or powered blossoms would work nicely.

After smudging/cleansing yourself, ask Branwen to allow you to be a vessel through which to transmit Her healing Love. Speak from your heart or create an invocation that resonates for you such as:

*Goddess Branwen,
I ask you to send Your healing Love through me now
So that name may be healed fully.*

Allow yourself to be open to receive Her Love and letting it flow through you. The energy will resonate strongly in the heart chakra. Breathing deeply will allow the chakra to open more fully so that the energy may flow more freely.⁴

Take a few moments to feel this unconditional love, let it grow and flow through you. Then place your hands lightly on the shoulders of the person you are seeking to heal and let Branwen's Love flow through you into the other person. If you are performing this healing for yourself, lightly and lovingly place your hands over your heart chakra and let Branwen's healing Love circuit through you.

When you feel it is time to be done, it is. Offer thanks to Branwen. If you are using incense this would be a good time to use a bit more in an offering of thanks to Her. Express your thanks to Branwen using your own words or:

*Blessed Branwen,
Thank you for your gift of unconditional Love and the healing it brings.
May I always remember the power of Love and express it wholeheartedly.
With gratitude and blessings, in the Highest Good of All, SO MOTE IT BE!*

...and so it is.

End the ritual in your normal way and ground well afterwards. As with any energetic healing, make sure to consume extra water throughout the day and take it easy. This is true whether you were giving or receiving the healing. Branwen has great love for Mother Earth and all Her inhabitants. Feel free to heal plants, animals, the water, air, land and all things with Her love.

Thank you for sharing in the gift of Love.

- ¹ Goddess Alive! : Inviting Celtic & Norse Goddesses Into Your Life by Michelle Skye
- ² Celtic Heritage by Alan and Brinley Rees
- ³ The Sin Eater's Last confessions by Ross Haven
- ⁴ Motherpeace: A Way to the Goddess Through Myth, Art, and Tarot by Vicki Noble
- ⁵ Medicine for the Earth by Sandra Ingerman