



# ANAS AIG AN TAIRSEACH

*'Advice at the Threshold'*

The spiritual work of the Céile Dé tradition can be challenging; but usually to our false selves who mostly do not want to serve God. The practices call forth and encourage that which is truest in us whilst also bringing into our field of awareness beliefs, habits and conditioned reactions of which we were previously unaware, that have kept us from the very state of Oneness we desire.

The process is sometimes likened to a serpent who wraps herself around her egg, tighter and tighter, so that eventually the egg begins to crack and the life within can be born. The teachings, when applied, are like the serpent; the illusory self is like the eggshell; what is inside the egg is our true Self, waiting to be given life. If we are locked into the drama of our illusory selves we will be unable to

connect strongly and consistently enough with our deeper, truer Selves – so when the spiritual life begins, like the serpent, to exert pressure on the shell, we *'crack up'*.

For all of us, this process is going to be challenging and painful to some degree; we need to have attained certain levels of self-possession, self-sufficiency and self-respect (all perfect terms for what is required!) before we can approach such work. In Céile Dé the term used to describe this state of readiness is *Conn*. It is similar in meaning to the German word, *vernünftig* and describes a well-balanced and capable person who is generally able to cope in life. However, for anyone who may be struggling with conditions such as feelings of inadequacy, chronic depression or indeed states from the other end of the ego spectrum, there may be suffering rather than growth at the hands of transformative practices. Those who are unable to see beyond the walls of the state into which they are locked will interpret all experience from the perspective of their state and react accordingly. When inner work begins to dissolve those barriers, as it must, we all go through a stage of feeling as though, "I don't know who I am anymore". That process can be too much for a wounded soul who is already traumatised, who may need to build or even re-build his fortress for a while, so that he can rest and heal... This is not the time to challenge what to him is the fabric of his existence.

For this reason the Céile Dé tradition has always advised that there must be a careful discerning process when standing at the threshold of a path that will at times exert a particular kind of deliberate pressure on all of us who walk it – a pressure that may seem too great for those seeking - and perhaps even needing for a while - ego-affirming, 'healing' relationships.

None of this can be fully appreciated in theory. It is very likely that when we are new to real inner work we will not be capable of discerning the difference between *Anam Chairdeas* - soul-centred relationship and what we call *Bith* - the world created by illusory ideas and the relationships that unconsciously support them. The following questions might be a useful first step to help a seeker measure the extent of their current enthrallment by *Bith*...

*In the course of what would be a typical week for you, would you say that you are very likely to experience one or more of the following? :-*

- *hurt feelings*
- *feel offended or insulted*
- *lose your temper*
- *act or react on impulse and regret it soon afterwards*
- *complain about your lot*
- *blame others for your inner state*

All is not lost... If you recognise any of the above as noticeable patterns in the structure of your being - and yet you feel a particular kind of inner excitement, as if by simply seeing and owning it, you sense that you have in some way taken a step towards the lessening of the grip *Bith* has on you, then you may be ready to make a change, cross the threshold and begin the process of what we call *Etla*; the gradual withdrawal from identification with the False Self. However, if you feel the unswerving, overwhelming urge to justify why you often 'have to' or 'couldn't help but' function from one or more of the above states, then you are likely to struggle with any path that expects you to give up believing in their reality.

This process of discernment and the ability to survive the ongoing work of little-self witnessing is vital for us all as we walk towards inner change; because we cannot travel very far whilst still carrying the above heavy baggage with us. If you cannot let it go yet, it would be best to seek therapy with someone whose skill lies in mending; the heart needs to be healthy before it can be broken once again – broken this time into becoming a Servant of God.

What I have said here confuses some people; they say, "but surely spirituality is about healing... and isn't a Christ-centred path always inclusive rather than exclusive?" I can only reply that even Christ said that there were certain teachings he reserved only for some (*Matthew 13:10–17*). Remember also that until this millennium Céile Dé was solely a monastic path and it is still the norm today for monastic traditions to assess their postulants' psychological well being as they approach the threshold; this is no more a mark of exclusion that it would be to gently dissuade someone with a broken leg from taking part in a marathon.

Somewhere there is the right path for each of us. To find it, we must dedicate ourselves as best we can to embodying what we know to be our deepest sense of Selfhood *in our best and truest moments*... We must give it all we can from our current state of self-knowledge and have faith that it will attract to us what we require to grow as human beings. As we grow, we are also shown where we need to be next... and next ... and next.. until there is nowhere left to go.

