



Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom

John O'Donohue

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Discover the Celtic Circle of Belonging John O'Donohue, poet, philosopher, and scholar, guides you through the spiritual landscape of the Irish imagination. In Anam Cara, Gaelic for soul friend, the ancient teachings, stories, and blessings of Celtic wisdom provide such profound insights on the universal themes of friendship, solitude, love, and death as: Light is generous The human heart is never completely born Love as ancient recognitionThe body is the angel of the soul Solitude is luminous Beauty likes neglected places The passionate heart never ages To be natural is to be holy Silence is the sister of the divine Death as an invitation to freedom

Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom Details

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From Reader Review Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom for online ebook

Luna Lindsey says

Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom is truly a work of art. Over the past three years, I have been working on discovering myself through self-help books, 12-step programs, religious study, and personal introspection. This book summed up everything I have learned (the hard way) during this time, and presented it in a beautiful package that was invigorating and thought-provoking to read. It was a pure joy. I began reading it in January, and have only just finished it last night, because each sentence was a ponderable morsel. Sometimes I would read a phrase five times over in order to fully grasp and apply its meaning to my life. This is not a 70 mph trip through the McDonald's drive-thru, this is a seven course meal in Vienna, and every bite demands that you hold it in your mouth to savor it.

Anam Cara is one of the best non-fiction books I have ever read. I plan to read it again in a year or so, because I know I will get new things out of it. I am already loaning it to a friend, and have a couple of others in mind I'd like to loan it to. I can't keep this from the ones I love. (Review written May 9th, 1998)

Gearóid says

I found this a very moving and beautiful book to read.
This writer was some philosopher and a really great writer.
There was so much to this book and the Celtic element and
the descriptions of the great scenery and light of the
West of Ireland really made me appreciate my heritage.

There is so much wisdom and understanding of human nature
and how we are losing touch with what is really important
in this modern busy world that was very refreshing to
read.

I can see myself reading this book over and over again
and just picking it up randomly to read different passages.

All in all I was very surprised at how much I was taken
with this book and would recommend to lots of people.

Dayna says

There were parts of this book that really spoke to me. A passage would leap out at me in an almost Biblical way, and I would think, "That was really good." It took me quite a while to get through the whole thing; I read it in fits and starts. It was kind of spooky that a phrase would be exactly what I needed for encouragement or clarity in the exact moment that I happened to pick the book up and read a few pages. Mostly it was just okay. I found myself rereading sentences, wondering if I had gotten lost somewhere.

There were parts that flowed well, but a lot of it rambled on page after page after page after page ... and this is a rather slim volume. I feel like it shouldn't have taken me so long to get through it. There were parts that I loved. So much of it is quotable. But I think that was part of the problem. It reads like a collection of quotes. Some people may read this and get it as a whole but I didn't. So, the parts that I really liked balanced the parts that I found boring, incoherent, or too flowery. It's just okay.

Glenn Murphy says

If you're not spiritual or religious, this book is probably not for you. The *Anam Cara*, or "soul friend" is a Celtic/Christian concept, and that fusion of Celtic mysticism and Christian theology is at the core of O'Donohue's writing.

I wanted to like this book more, but I just couldn't get into O'Donohue's writing style. He tried way too hard to be "poetic", and it just didn't work for me. I also thought that he used too many quotes from other authors, didn't work those quotes into the text very smoothly, and sometimes they just didn't seem to have much to do with what he was talking about. And his "exercises" for the reader could do with a lot more explanation. What does it mean to "just focus on the well at the root of your soul"? There are some thought provoking passages in the book, and O'Donohue does sometimes manage to convey beautiful ideas with beautiful language, but more often I found his prose a bit awkward and sometimes incomprehensible.

Cheri says

"The Celtic understanding of friendship finds its inspiration and culmination in the sublime notion of the *Anam ?ara*. *Anam* is the Gaelic word for soul; *?ara* is the word for friend. So *Anam ?ara* means soul friend."

John O'Donohue doesn't view the word 'friend' as casually as one might use it, and certainly not in this combination. A joining that is ancient and eternal, a place where you belonged.

"Since the birth of the human heart is an ongoing process, love is the continuous birth of creativity within and between us."

While John O'Donohue was a religious man, a poet, a philosopher, a priest, this religious thought shows itself more in the reverence for the world, a belief in the ancient wisdoms ability to offer greatly needed sustenance to those experiencing a hunger in a spiritual sense. In 2000, after writing and publishing this, *Anam ?ara*, and *Eternal Echoes: Exploring our Hunger to Belong*, O'Donohue retired from his priestly ministry and devoted himself to social justice. His feelings about social justice can be clearly felt in this book of Celtic wisdom.

O'Donohue speaks on many things in a reverential way – the colours, the power of nature. Thoughts on Celtic spirituality flow throughout these pages.

"Since the Celts were a nature people, the world of nature was both a presence and a companion. Nature nourished them; it was here that they felt their deepest belonging and affinity."

"When love awakens in your life, in the night of your heart, it is like the dawn breaking within you. Where before there was anonymity, now there is intimacy; where before there was fear, now there is courage; where before in your life there was awkwardness, now there is a rhythm of grace and gracefulness; where before you used to be jagged, now you are elegant and in rhythm with your self. When love awakens in your life is like a rebirth, a new beginning."

"Though the human body is born complete in one moment, the birth of the human heart is an ongoing process."

This past Autumn, I listened to John O'Donohue's "***Beauty: The Invisible Embrace***", which I loved, especially as he is the narrator. I wish this had been available in an audio format, for it made the experience even more lovely, but this was lovely, nevertheless.

Quite a bit of territory is covered in this book, and while there is a sense of spirituality to this, it is not a specific "church" sense.

"It is strange to be here. The mystery never leaves you alone. Behind your image, below your words, above your thoughts, the silence of another world waits."

Moving, beautiful, philosophical, inspirational, with a reverence for the world, and the stories of each of those who inhabit our world.

Gail says

I remember thinking, years ago when I first read (for months) Eckhart Tolle's The Power of Now, thinking, "Oh, so that's what's meant by someone being a *Master*." Tolle writes from an Eastern perspective. So now I have had my first experience with John O'Donohue, and think again: "So here is another *Master*." However, O'Donohue writes from a Celtic spiritual perspective. This book is not a quick read because Mr. O'Donohue is a spiritual master and a philosopher. He considers deeply concepts of time, place, wisdom, hope, death, sense of wonder, joy, mystery, silence and solitude, symbols, fear, and transformation.

In this book, O'Donohue approaches the notion of the soul friend, the Anam Cara. He guides the reader through an exploration of the soul--one's own soul--and how it intersects with oneself, with the world we live in--the natural world, our own bodies, sensory perception, our work in the world, beauty, and finally: death. At the end of each section, he presents an Irish blessing. One concept I found interesting is his premise that the body is IN the soul--rather than the soul being in the body. He writes about the intersection of the energy of our souls with those of others, and with the physical world. Because Celtic spirituality is deeply rooted in the natural world, his writing reminds us how connected we are with the earth, and with each other. He writes, "Landscape is numinous." But landscape isn't just the physical world, but the entire experience of life. John O'Donohue was a Wise Man.

There are many quotes in this book that I've written down; indeed, I started a notebook to go along with my reflections inspired by this book. It will be something I return to often and for a long time. The principles Mr. O'Donohue presents are timeless and transformative.

Kirsten says

This book confounds me. It changed my seeing as I read and I felt like I was inside a poem, with such a heightened awareness, and yet the language is overall simple, abstract, and even perhaps, empty. Somehow O'Donahue transmits pure substance into language, but it's invisible to me how he does it.

Jan Marquart says

This small book by the Celtic priest John O'Donohue is a staple in my bookcase. I've lost three copies, one to mold, one to formaldehyde and one to water damage. I quickly bought another. This book will change your life. It is not a religious dictate. It is far beyond that. I'm going to give you the first few lines and you can decide for yourself:

It is strange to be here. The mystery never leaves you alone. Behind your image, below your words, above your thoughts, the silence of another world awaits.

If you want comfort, insight and inspiration -- pick this book up. I've read it four times.

Tim says

I'm reading this again. I never stopped reading it. When I got to the end I started all over again, fitting for the Celtic belief in life as a circle. What a fucking beautiful book. Seriously. I want to read it over and over again and glean every last morsel. The author's untimely death in 2008 was a serious loss to us all. But the Celts believe he's not really gone here's still here, just not writing any more books. So many parts of this book I say to myself, "Huh. Wow." I read and reread a passage and say it again. I put the book down and I think about it during the day. I don't think I've ever read a book that affected me like this one.

Anne Hamilton says

If I'd read this book two years ago, I'd have given it six stars. But, as it is, I've only given it half that.

It was while reading Jo-Anne Berthelsen's *Soul Friend*: The story of a shared spiritual journey that I came across the references to *Anam Cara* and thought: 'Just my type of book.' It sounded deep and profound, wise and thoughtful.

And although I've got more than a dozen bookmarks jutting out of pages to mark intriguing thoughts, overall I found the book rather shallow. O'Donohue mentions the thought of Meister Eckhardt: *there is no such thing as a spiritual journey*. Or, if there is, it's only a quarter of an inch long. But many miles deep.

That summed up my reaction to the book. The last two years have been full of fairly deep research for me as I've delved into Hebrew thinking. By comparison, the Celtic spirituality I once thought profound now looks remarkably superficial. The journey I'm on really is very narrow but also very very deep. I didn't realise how far I'd come in that time until I started to think of this book as surface treasure, not deep-mined gems.

Perhaps when this book was first published the material was fresh and novel, but I've seen so much of it before that it looks clichéd. This is not to say I didn't enjoy it - just that my 'Celtic period' is moving into twilight.

Heather says

I meant TEN STARS! Is this the new gorgeous Bible yet? Is it poetry hiding as prose? Is this religion hiding as beauty? Is this a guide on how to live hiding as love? You don't read this book; it reads you. You float on it, you dive into it, you are cleansed by it. I read fast like a fiend and this book I had to eat slowly. Every line is a meditation.

No one I have ever met who has read him is not head over heels. He is our favorite PhD in philosophical theology.

Christen says

It couldn't be more beautifully written.

Jan Höglund says

Introduction

This book is intended to be an oblique mirror where we might come to glimpse the presence, power, and beauty of both inner and outer friendship.[1]

John O'Donohue was born in Ireland and spoke Irish as his native language. *Anam* is the Gaelic word for soul, and *?ara* is the word for friend. So *anam ?ara* means soul friend. In the Celtic tradition, the *anam ?ara* was a person to whom you could reveal the hidden intimacies of your life.[2]

Overview

John O'Donohue writes that friendship is a creative and subversive force.[3] He describes friendship as an act of recognition and belonging.[4] Your forgotten, or neglected, inner wealth begins to reveal itself in the belonging between soul friends. The soul is the house of belonging, and the body is in the soul.[5]

*"Where you are understood,
you are at home."* [6]

John O'Donohue not only explores outer friendship, but also the art of inner friendship. Solitude awakens new creativity within us. And when our inner lives can befriend the outer world of work, new imagination is awakened and great changes can take place.[7] It is, however, very difficult to bring the world of work and the world of soul together.

*"Work [...] should be an arena of
possibility and real expression."* [8]

John O'Donohue contemplates our friendship with the harvest time of life, old age. He even reflects on death as the invisible companion who walks the road of life with us from birth.[9]

Conclusions

The book is a broad and deep reflection on friendship. John O'Donohue takes his inspiration from his Irish heritage. The book is, in essence, an inner conversation with Celtic imagination and its spirituality of friendship.[10] It's a beautifully written book full of wisdom. I will return to the book again and again!

Notes:

- [1] John O'Donohue, *Anam ?ara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World* (Bantam Books, 1997), p15.
- [2] *Ibid.*, p16.
- [3] *Ibid.*, p15.
- [4] *Ibid.*, p16.
- [5] *Ibid.*, p17.
- [6] *Ibid.*, p36.
- [7] *Ibid.*, p17.
- [8] *Ibid.*, p169.
- [9] *Ibid.*, p18.
- [10] *Ibid.*, p19.

Tiffany says

This Irish poet/former Jesuit is quite an amazing human being, may his soul rest in peace.

I bought this CD because I thought his voice would make this book more palatable. I read it about 15 years ago and found it syrupy, and in the intervening years I have changed a lot so I assumed my reading of it would be different and the richness would be more palatable, and yet there was still something slightly saccharine to me about it.

A brilliant man who quotes from Hegel, Meister Eckhardt, Wittgenstein, RD Laing, and pretty much every other (male) philosopher ever heard of, Mr. O'Donohoe's still manages to sound like a priest ... as loving as he is he equally sounds reproving. I wonder why.

Yes, a beautiful, spiritually uplifting book, but something felt lacking, and I can only think it is the feminine principle that once was so important in Ireland. Or maybe not. It's possible I can't truly appreciate this beautifully spoken celebration of Celtic wisdom and mysticism.

This morning I was listening to Caroline Casey's latest radio show, and I saw the parallels--she is a speaker and story teller (of Irish descent) who exhorts us to rise to a better place, as does Mr O'Donohoe. They both come to us with deep love of language and an appreciation for the world in all its ridiculousness and power But Ms. Casey sounds fresh, and she makes my mind giggle, and want to be more synergistic in my life and vocation, whereas my appreciation of Mr. O'Donohoe is cooler and from a distance. I do not feel moved, and there's very little giggling at all.

Stephanie says

This is one of the best books and best written books I've ever read. Two months after I met the author, he died in his sleep at age 53 while on holiday with his fiance in Avignon. The whole world cried when John died. There was no one like him and there never will be again. John had a brilliant mind that was married to a wide open heart.

Heidi says

It would be hard to describe all the different ways this book impacted me. O'Donahue's style took a little getting used to; it's radio-esque, with short sentences and seeming pauses for effect, and because of that some his deeper points were a bit difficult to follow.

But his notes on friendship and the role of a person's soul and the intensely careful care it needs are so important that I had many moments of needing to stop and think. It was a helpful book to read in the middle of grief, especially as he deals with the idea of true friendship and what it means to guard oneself and one's loved ones closely against the destruction carelessness can cause.

"Anam Cara" means "soul friend", and any reader will find him or herself wishing and looking for just that by the time John O'Donahue's book finishes.

Lynda says

This is not a book one reads just to check off a list. It is a book of very deep reflections, invoking the reader to slow down, be mindful. It is a book about the human soul, love, spirit, wisdom, relationships and more. I refer to this book several times a week, just to re-read a few pages or a chapter. It's always on the table, next to the sofa, for quick reference and solace.

--lynda

Todd says

Catholic Scholar John O'Donohue has a warm sense of humor and an incredibly lyrical prose style. He looks at the pre-Christian Celtic tradition and breathes a new life into spiritual awareness. This is a great book for people struggling to create a working spirituality for their lives and it offers amazing insights into our relationships with the sensual world, the world of soul and our interpersonal relationships.

Sharon says

Anam Cara, the words translate to 'Soul Friend' in Gaelic. O'Donohue is absolutely brilliant in his delivery. The depth, variety, history and beauty of this book is like no other I've experienced. Philosophy, spirituality,

poetry through landscape of imagination reinforces my belief that everyone is born an artist. For me, it blew open new pathways to examine my inner self. I've read it 3 times and have yet to capture every nuance, each reading brings forth additional richness to consider in both worldly and alternative projections. Excellent, a multi-faceted work of literary art.

Angie says

This is one of the most beautiful books I own. It came into my life very mysteriously soon after it was first published. It has gracefully woven itself into my experience ever since, gently guiding and holding me in my darkest days. It is difficult to rationally explain or review; I can only describe what it feels like when I read it. It's akin to peering into the depths of an illumined manuscript, or being inside a poem (as another reviewer here so eloquently states). I feel how hungry I am and drink the poetry like nectar. Below are a selection of chapter titles, which speak powerfully for themselves:

The Human Heart Is Never Completely Born

The Soul As Divine Echo

The Wellspring Of Love Within

The Eye Is Like The Dawn

To Be Natural Is To Be Holy

Beauty Likes Neglected Places

The Soul As Temple Of Memory

Old Age And The Twilight Treasures

I never tire of this book; it's a constant companion that deepens with repeated reading. I feel so blessed to have crossed paths with John O'Donohue before he left this earth, even if it was only in the form of his writing. May his shining soul rest in peace.
