

FONN(D) MEMORIES...

It's warm again today. And, although I have no computer, a friend has loaned me a lap top. So... now that I've figured out how to work it, I'm in the garden, with the sun... the birds... and a friendly rabbit... writing this to you all.

There is also a little bee-nest in the earth close to my feet... she looks at me nervously and then darts back into her depths. I must take care not to move too much and disturb her.

I am writing because I want to share some of my heart with you. If you don't like heart things, best not to read on. There will be no cerebral profit to be made here today.

So much has changed within the Céile Dé since I first joined the Order. But still we struggle doggedly to preserve our one Rule, the only one we've ever really had – "Listen to and obey the voice of The Christ in the depths of your heart".

The changes in the past years have been all out of necessity, of that I am sure. As an Order, we are in danger of dying of old age. I won't tell you how old I am – but I joined the Order 42 years ago today.

Our one rule has always presented problems. In fact, it is *meant* to – "*delicious trouble*", as I love to call it, (stealing from Plotinus – whom I have to confess I've never read)the delight that any thinking and feeling being takes in the challenge of rising to a task that will stretch him beyond his comfort zone. However, these days, people have such great trouble listening to their hearts. We have all been trained for so long to value the rational above all else and to take refuge in it and live entirely by its laws – even when we don't realise that is what we're doing. The only escape many have from this iron grasp is when their equally unbalanced emotions jump out and take over for a while. Emotions are, of course, in danger of usurping the fashion of the rational in the current trend to "let it all out"... But there is a vast difference between the rational and True Seeing... between emotional purging / binging and True Feeling.

But I'm rambling already... that is not really what I want to talk about today. I want to invite you into a heart space, where I would like to share with you my feelings about some of the more difficult issues facing The Céile Dé today.

Some Stories....

When Fionntulach gave some workshops to introduce the Céile Dé Tradition to the United States recently. She taught some of them a fonn one day. It was the one that, translated into English, chants - "Listen to my Heart... Listen to Your Heart...".

Now... some fonn are very old indeed. But we are always receiving new ones, because ours is a living Tradition. I have a story... I happened to witness the first receiving of that one.

It was many, many years ago, in the Wicklow Mountains in Ireland. I was alone with Lasair Dhe who had recently joined the Order and had been given her name, which means "Flame of God". We had made a makeshift altar – a cross woven out of willow and grasses amongst some rocks and bracken. She was tearful that day, because she loved God very much and the joy of it sometimes it took her that way. I remember she stood up after we had finished doing our

contemplation amongst the bracken and she spread out her arms as the tears washed her face. She began turning slowly... looking sometimes to the sky, sometimes to the sweet, green Earth. Then she let out a full-throated song in Irish, "Listen to my Heart... Listen to Your Heart... Listen to my Heart... Listen to Your Heart..." She was wearing a new linen dress, which had creased very uniformly in large, parallel horizontal folds all the way down her body. I recall at the time thinking that she looked like an ecstatic concertina. I loved her very much in that moment... the way you do when you see someone's True Self shining forth in all it's unselfconscious glory. It is the most intimate thing we can experience with another human being. It is why we want to make love... we hope a mutual shining forth might happen.....

That was the birth of "Listen to my Heart... Listen to Your Heart..." .

Anyway, back to the 21st century... Fionn told me a few days ago that when she was teaching in the States, they told her after she finished singing that this particular fonn wasn't a Céile Dé chant at all. The person telling her this had in fact learnt it a while before – it was a chant taught at a sacred dance workshop somewhere in New York.

It is nice to know the fonn is being used in this way, as well as within our tradition. I hope the people teaching it might like to tell people the story of the day that fonn was born and of the beauty of Lasair Dhe's Spirit as she sang.

When I began to teach Fionntulach, sometime in the 1980's, one of the first chants I taught her was "As we unite, worlds unite". It is in old Gaelic and is traditionally mumbled under the breath repetitively as we move into a trance state. That Samhain, Fionn was moved to put a melody to it and sing it in a more outward, celebratory way, as many people united ceremonially in joy and peace with all the beings of the many worlds.

A few years ago, she shared that fonn with some people from another country, who were very keen to learn it. Two years after that, when she taught the same chant in a workshop in Germany, she was told that it was not a Céile Dé chant, that it had in fact been taught to them by a "Guru" of theirs, who had "channelled" it. She was also told that he had copywritten it.

I remember her standing in the woods that Samhain, her hair full of dried leaves as she sang into the firelight and into the people's hearts. She had been very nervous before she began. But the power of the ancestors that lives in the words came into her, and she sang with a voice I had never heard in her before. These days that voice is becoming more often than not her usual singing voice. In fact, it is beginning to seep into her talking voice also. It is the communal voice of all the Céile Dé who no longer have voices... One of the many benefits of giving oneself to one path is that it eventually gives us something back that is more - way more - than the sum of its constituent parts. But that can take many years of fidelity. No matter how long, surely? Time is immaterial when you are in love.

Some of our fonn have movements that fit to them. Such as the beautiful practice we call "St Kessog's Prayer"... a walking meditation to bless the Earth beneath our feet. It may appear on the surface that these movements are simply graceful expressions of the words they accompany. Not so...they are a powerful way of releasing and shifting energy around the body to help facilitate inner change. We have other visualisation practices that have the same effect. No Céile Dé would ever teach these practices without assuring the pupil that they can contact them at any time if they have any powerful experiences they need help with. Sometimes these practices can put you in a very strange world for a period of time, as long-

blocked energies are released, you may experience hitherto unknown anger or depression, dissociation or even fear. Be assured, if you have learnt these practices from a member of the Céile Dé, you can always speak to us about it... Indeed it probably means that you are making progress...but this progress must be guided and monitored. That is why in our regular groups, we always offer one to one teaching for anyone who requests it...

I have heard that some people who have attended Céile Dé workshops are teaching these practices to others as part of their own workshops before the ink is even dry on their notepaper.

What am I trying to say here? I may not be making any *sense*. But can your hearts hear me? How is an ancient tradition, almost on death's door, to survive and be protected in a world that takes little pieces of it, re-packages and re-labels it and sells it on far more professionally than we are ever likely to do?

In truth, all we can do is what we already do... All we have ever done since we began.... We ask people who are learning the tradition to look silently into their hearts and range around there for the answer. In my day (now I really sound old!) the culture was different and the answer was taken as read. It was never even mentioned to an anruth (novice) that they should not take it upon themselves to teach what they learn, out of context, to others. No Céile Dé, who had not been taught how to teach, ever taught anyone else a single thing.

Today, in the hope that the tradition will survive, we are teaching it to many more people (not just prospective Order members as it was until only a few years ago). So far... I for one *think* that I am glad of this. It is too beautiful a tradition, to be kept by only the very few... and far too precious for me to sit back and let it die.

But what is the nature of the chance we are taking? Are we helping it or are we dealing the final death blow by freely giving it to people who no longer think like their ancestors did about precious pearls?

For the last five years or so, Fionntualch, the current head of the Order and our main teacher, has gambled on the hope that, through time, practising the tradition itself may unlock people's innate understanding of the sweet and delicate nature of this teaching. But many of us are now asking, "Was she wrong to do so?" Personally, I hope like mad that she was not wrong. Because if she was, she and we will have to recede once more into the mists of Western Scotland and Ireland and hope that The Great Mystery will provide us with another way to go forward.

We will do so if we have to.

But many of you are intuitively in harmony with the Old Ways. Many of you understand that there has always to be a careful balance between "Give freely" and "Hold and Protect".

Perhaps we can continue with this risky undertaking for just a little bit longer, in the hope that more of you will give yourselves fully enough to the Way in order to enter into the Soul of it... Then there is no need to ask, "What is the right thing to do?" because you will simply know.

Yes...it is possible to live from the heart... and to obey the Christ within. But first you have to realise, amongst many other things, that you cannot own the Tradition, you can only serve it.

You can carve it up and give or sell bits of it if you insist, but at the very best, you are selling people a broken dream... at the very worst, you are helping to destroy yet another of the worlds beautiful treasures... forever.

None of this makes any *rational* sense, of course.

But enough of this fatalism... Let me finish with the picture I had in my head when I first began.

Lasair Dhe spins, her arms outstretched, in the golden light of an August evening, high in the green, green hills around Glendalough. She has been set free by the path she has willingly allowed to bind her. Her heart is breaking. She sings to the Truth as it quickens the blood in her veins. I watch. I want to join her...but I know it is my head wanting – my heart knows it is her moment alone. I am content to watch her being born again as the blackbirds sing all around in the oak woods below.

I think then of Saint Kevin of Glendalough, in whose outstretched, praying hand a blackbird made her nest... and I think of how he stayed there, motionless, until the fledglings flew the nest. I resolve to be as motionless as I can while my fledgling, my anruth, Lasair Dhe tests her wonderful wings again and again.

She has suffered many growing pains over the years. But the tradition held her in its hand while she fed eagerly from God-The-Mother's golden beak. As indeed it did for me and countless others.

My heart both breaks and sings a silent fonn of gratitude as she soars from the nest.

"Mar a bha... mar a tha...mar a bhitheas...gu bragh..."

- Iosa
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