

INDIGENOUS & ANCESTRAL TRADITIONS

A Book of Celtic Wisdom

A gathering of Celtic oral tradition and modern Celtic spirituality: triads of the Gael, proverbs and sayings, a memoir-style guide to the "Mist-Filled Path" of Celtic animism and Celtic-Christian mysticism, and a first-person account of contact with the Sidhe and the six exercises said to have come from it.

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Contents

Introduction: The Living Lore

The Threefold Way

Proverbs and Sayings

The Mist-Filled Path

The Sidhe and the Otherworld

The Six Exercises

Closing: Speak Slowly, Think Swiftly, Act Wisely

Introduction: The Living Lore

¹ No single book can encompass the wisdom of the Celts. This was a race that loved language, that held the bard and the poet to be the equals of kings — indeed a race where the rulers went in fear of being satirized by a poet, which was considered the ultimate disgrace. This was also a race without a written language, where the teachings were committed to memory and passed down in an oral tradition that is still very much alive today.

² Caesar suggests in *De Bello Gallico* that the Celtic Druids and bards trained for twenty years, though the truth is probably far closer to twelve years. In that time, each scholar was expected to learn nearly six hundred full-length stories, more than 250 poems, and also the complex laws, philosophies, grammar, history, legends, and genealogies of the tribes and clans, as well as the art of divination, seership, and composition. For not only were the bards expected to preserve the knowledge of the past, they were confidently expected to add to that body of knowledge.

³ The role of Druid and bard, priest and scholar, cleric and storyteller, was often indistinguishable, and time has blurred the lines ever further, with the result that the lore that has survived to this day is often a mixture of the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the commonplace. This was a living lore, used in everyday life, much of it concerned with the land and the lives of the ordinary people, and it remains relevant to this day.

⁴ The following selection of Celtic wisdom, gathered from numerous sources, seeks to reflect the body of knowledge that a bard would most likely have possessed; it is a mixture of folktales and legends, poems and proverbs, triads and blessings. Use them well.

⁵ And always follow the older bard's injunction to the young student: Speak slowly, think swiftly, act wisely.

The Threefold Way

¹ The number three and groupings of three occur everywhere in the Celtic world — the earliest invaders were greeted by the tripartite goddess, Banba, Fodla, and Eriu — and the triskele, the three-horned circle, is a common ornamental device. In Irish mythology, the most famous goddess, the Morrigan, the goddess of war, is also part of a trio with her sisters Badb the Crow and Nemain, whose name signifies panic. Perhaps this tripartite nature is meant to signify the phases of the moon: full, waxing, and waning. Robert Graves suggests that it might be equated with maiden, matron, and crone or virginity, fertility, and death.

² Diogenes tells us that the Druids taught their mysteries in groupings of three. Hilary, the bishop of Poitiers, A.D. 350, and author of *De Trinitate*, was principally responsible for the concept of the Trinity in the Christian tradition, which is at the heart of the Christian faith. Even the tribal system of the Celtic lands was tripartite: priests, warriors, and farmers, each one inextricably interlinked with the other.

³ It should be of no surprise that the concept of triads entered Irish lore. The perfect triad, a single idea with three suggested answers, is central to many of the proverbs and lore of the Celts. And they are all timeless.

⁴ The Three Cauldrons of the Soul

⁵ In the old Irish traditions the soul is perceived as having three parts, represented by three different cauldrons, with three distinct powers or functions that maintain the health of the soul and the soul shrine (the body). If an imbalance or dysfunction is present in one of these cauldrons of the soul, the unified flow of the soul's energy becomes compromised, and we open ourselves to a whole host of things, such as disease, depression, or even psychic attack (what can sometimes simply be the mismanaged energy of others with whom we may come into contact, or to more intentional expressions, such as the "evil eye").

⁶ Essentially, these traditions hold that the soul is formed and fueled by:

⁷ The Cauldron of Warming (life force), located in the belly

⁸ The Cauldron of Vocation (calling), located in the heart or solar plexus

⁹ The Cauldron of Knowledge (wisdom), located in the head

¹⁰ When these cauldrons are in alignment, it is as if all the necessary parts of a transistor radio are in attunement. It has "juice." It is a reliable conduit for the flowing energies of life. In this way, the cauldron of knowledge, the seat of spiritual health, the cauldron of vocation, the seat of psychic health, and the cauldron of warming, the very ground of our physical health, form a potent holistic weave that results in an orb of energy around the body.

¹¹ Irish shaman and scholar Caitlin Matthews, ever the lore-keeper of the primal vision of these pathways, has assisted us greatly in reminding Celtic descendants of this ancient topography of the soul. Hailing originally from a fifteenth-century text in Ireland that describes the spiritual mechanics of poetic inspiration, this primal notion of the soul in the Irish tradition is helpful in considering the phenomenon of soul loss.

¹² Three Things That Make a Fool Wise

¹³ Learning, Application, and Patience.

¹⁴ And there are three things that make a wise man foolish: Quarrelling, Rage, and Drunkenness.

¹⁵ Three Paths to Downfall

¹⁶ To allow one's passions to rule, To be self-indulgent, and To refuse to learn by the example of others or one's own experience.

¹⁷ Three Roads to Greatness

¹⁸ To be wise in word, To be wise in deed, and To be wise enough to control one's own passions.

¹⁹ Three Things From Which One Should Never Stray

²⁰ Belief in oneself, Belief in a higher self, and Belief in the truth.

²¹ Three Candles That Illuminate Every Darkness

²² Truth, Nature, and Knowledge.

²³ Three Things One Should Never Approach

²⁴ A liar, A thief, and A knave.

- ²⁵ Judgement Demands These Three
- ²⁶ Wisdom, Consideration, and Expertise.
- ²⁷ Judgement Can Be Determined Only If These Three Are Present
- ²⁸ Evidence that tells a tale, Witnesses who tell the truth, and the Wisdom to evaluate both.
- ²⁹ The Three Demands of Justice
- ³⁰ Judgement, Appraisal, and Conscience.
- ³¹ Success Stems From Action, and There Are Three Ways to Act
- ³² By thought, By word, and By deed.
- ³³ The Three Habits That Lead to Success
- ³⁴ Patience, Application, and Vision.
- ³⁵ The Three Habits That Lead to Failure
- ³⁶ Laziness, Distraction, and Daydreaming.
- ³⁷ There Are Three Ways to Ensure Excellence in All Things
- ³⁸ To be moderate in thought and behavior, To hold to one's oaths, and To accept one's responsibilities.
- ³⁹ One Should Strive to Emulate These Three Traits in Others
- ⁴⁰ Wisdom in words and deeds, Justice in words and deeds, and Generosity in words and deeds.
- ⁴¹ There Are Three Wonderful Things in This World
- ⁴² To forgive a wrong, To make amends, and To dispense only justice.
- ⁴³ New Life and New Beginnings Come From Three Things
- ⁴⁴ The rounded belly of a woman, The white smoothness of an egg, and A wrong that has been forgiven.
- ⁴⁵ There Are Three Things That Are Better Than Riches
- ⁴⁶ Health, Freedom, and Honor.
- ⁴⁷ There Are Three Needs That Carry No Shame
- ⁴⁸ Love, Thirst, and Happiness.
- ⁴⁹ There Are Three Ways to Love
- ⁵⁰ With the heart, With the mind, and With the soul.
- ⁵¹ There Are Three Sacred Qualities of Love
- ⁵² To save, To shield, and To surround.
- ⁵³ Be Patient and Achieve This Trinity of Blessings
- ⁵⁴ Love, Tranquillity, and Contentment.
- ⁵⁵ Be Careful and These Three Will Be Yours
- ⁵⁶ Respect, Abundance, and Contentment.
- ⁵⁷ At the Heart of Every Friendship One Will Find These Three
- ⁵⁸ Respect, Trust, and Understanding.

- ⁵⁹ This Is the Badge of the Fianna and Should Be the Badge of All Men
- ⁶⁰ Let us always have truth in our hearts, Let us always strive for strength in our hands, and Let us always ensure consistency in our tongues.
- ⁶¹ These Are the Three Sharpest Things in the World
- ⁶² A thorn in the soft part of the foot, The burn of a rope on the palm of the hand, and The word of a fool.
- ⁶³ Three Things All Men Seek More Of
- ⁶⁴ Long life, Unfailing good health, and Abundant wealth.
- ⁶⁵ Three Things All Men Seek Less Of
- ⁶⁶ Sickness, Poverty, and Loneliness.
- ⁶⁷ All Diseases and Illness May Ultimately Be Conquered by These Three
- ⁶⁸ Patience — to endure the illness, Time — for all things come to an end, and the Nature of the illness itself — for some have an allotted span of time and will ultimately run their course.
- ⁶⁹ At the Heart of Every Injustice There Are Three
- ⁷⁰ Lies, Rage, and Greed.
- ⁷¹ Those Who Perpetrate Injustice Share Three Common Traits
- ⁷² They are arrogant, They are liars, and They are cowards.
- ⁷³ Three Aspirations of the Honest Man
- ⁷⁴ To be honest in one's dealings with others, To be honest in one's dealings with one's partner, and To be honest in one's dealings with oneself.
- ⁷⁵ Three Further Aspirations of the Honest Man
- ⁷⁶ To conduct oneself with dignity and pride, To conduct one's business with dignity and pride, and To conclude one's business with oneself and others with dignity and pride.
- ⁷⁷ For Those of Ill Temper Who Learn to Control That Emotion, There Are Three Immediate Results
- ⁷⁸ The respect of others, The strength of character, and The consolation of the temperate.
- ⁷⁹ There Are Three People One Should Never Do Business With
- ⁸⁰ The person too eager, The person too greedy, and The person too desperate.
- ⁸¹ The Three Signs by Which You Will Know the Excellent Physician
- ⁸² That he may examine you painlessly, That he may cure you completely, and That he may leave neither scar nor bruise behind.
- ⁸³ Society Is Founded on These Three
- ⁸⁴ The nature of peace, The nature of justice, and Natural order.
- ⁸⁵ The Three Greatest Gifts of Music and Song
- ⁸⁶ The pleasure it brings the assembly, The pleasure it gives the listener, and The pleasure it brings to the maker.
- ⁸⁷ To Understand a Person, One Must Observe Them
- ⁸⁸ Awake, Asleep, and In action.

- ⁸⁹ Pride Can Strip Us of These Three Things
- ⁹⁰ Time, Money, and Conscience.
- ⁹¹ There Are Three Things That Prey Upon the Weakest
- ⁹² An enemy always attacks the weak, The weak are vulnerable to the lure of money, and Those who suffer the sin of pride are weak.
- ⁹³ It Is Impossible to Fully Recompense
- ⁹⁴ A good parent, A patient teacher, and A loving partner.
- ⁹⁵ The Innermost Thoughts of a Person Can Be Unlocked By
- ⁹⁶ Love, Trust, and Drunkenness.
- ⁹⁷ Be Always Timid and You Will Achieve
- ⁹⁸ Nothing good, Nothing bad, and Nothing.
- ⁹⁹ Three Sorrows of Irish Storytelling
- ¹⁰⁰ The children of Lir are sentenced to thrice three hundred years' enchantment in the form of swans.
- ¹⁰¹ There are three sons of Tuireann, the Celtic version of the quest of Jason and the Argonauts.
- ¹⁰² Deirdre, the tragic heroine of the greatest of the sorrows, flees with her lover, Naoise, and his two brothers.
- ¹⁰³ The Three Rudest Things One Can See in This World
- ¹⁰⁴ A youngster mocking an old man, A hale person mocking an invalid, and A wise man mocking a fool.

Proverbs and Sayings

- ¹ Distinct from the triads of the Gaels are the proverbs and sayings. The majority of these — in one variant or another — would be common to all the Celtic lands, while others would appear in almost identical wording in Irish, Scots Gaelic, Welsh, and Manx, showing either the very close cross-pollination of the cultures or the essential truth of the statements.
- ² Proverbs are single ideas, slices of history, wry observations on life, or perhaps bitterly learned experiences that have been honed through the ages until they can, in a single succinct sentence, express a profound truth.
- ³ On Friendship
- ⁴ There is no lack in this life like the lack of a true friend.
- ⁵ Better a good enemy than a bad friend.
- ⁶ A true friend and a bitter enemy both believe that you are immortal. Live as if you are trying to prove them both correct.
- ⁷ It is far better to be alone than in bad company.
- ⁸ A friend who can be bought is not worth buying.

- ⁹ To be a friend to others, one must first be a friend to oneself. But to be a friend to oneself, one has to know oneself.
- ¹⁰ An abiding friendship is forged in hardship. An abiding friendship will survive hardship.
- ¹¹ A true friend will sit alongside you — and not in your place.
- ¹² A friend's eye is a good mirror. We should try and see ourselves through the eyes of our friends.
- ¹³ Take care: The person who will tell others' faults to you — will tell yours to others.
- ¹⁴ Waste not your time with gossips, liars, and fools, lest you too will become a gossip, a liar, and a fool.
- ¹⁵ Come slowly to friendship and before you make a friend, break bread together more than once.
- ¹⁶ Two see more than one, but three see less than two.
- ¹⁷ Better to bend than to break. Better to break than to crumble.
- ¹⁸ On Character and Generations
- ¹⁹ Lessons learned in hardship will endure; lessons lightly learned are soon forgotten.
- ²⁰ Your son is your son until the day he marries, but your daughter is your daughter until the day you die.
- ²¹ A mother takes the side of her son, while the father sides with the daughter. This is how it has been through the ages; this will not change.
- ²² It is the lot of parents to hold their children's hands for just a brief spell, and carry them for an even shorter spell. But they carry them in their hearts forever.
- ²³ Praise the child and you praise the mother.
- ²⁴ Youth sheds many a skin as it grows. Experience comes through growth, and neither growth nor experience is without tribulation. This is the price of growth.
- ²⁵ Sense does not come before age. There is many a wise youth and an equal number of old fools.
- ²⁶ Even the wise man can make mistakes. The wise man will make his mistake only once, while the fool insists on repeating his mistakes.
- ²⁷ It is always better to be underestimated.
- ²⁸ Show your teeth only when you intend to bite. Never make an idle threat. And never threaten if you are not prepared to carry out the threat.
- ²⁹ Let the children do their own growing; do not shape them into a semblance of the parent.
- ³⁰ If we are without knowledge of our past, then we are without knowledge of ourselves.
- ³¹ Youth has no care where it sets its foot — but make sure the foot is well shod.
- ³² The old cock crows and the young cock learns.
- ³³ The old broom best knows the dirty corners.
- ³⁴ The older the fiddle, the sweeter the tune.
- ³⁵ The wild goose never raised a tame gosling. The wild hound never reared a tame pup.
- ³⁶ Praise the ripe field and not the green corn.
- ³⁷ Chickens should never be counted until they have hatched.

- ³⁸ Don't fry the fish until they have been landed.
- ³⁹ The water is never missed until the well runs dry.
- ⁴⁰ On Secrets
- ⁴¹ There is no secret that is known by three.
- ⁴² The safest secret is known only by one.
- ⁴³ On Speech
- ⁴⁴ There is no bone in the tongue, and yet the same did often break a man's head or cut his throat for him.
- ⁴⁵ The tongue is the sharpest weapon of all.
- ⁴⁶ The sweetest sound comes from a closed mouth.
- ⁴⁷ An open mouth — a closed heart.
- ⁴⁸ Wrath is soothed by silence.
- ⁴⁹ Little said is well said.
- ⁵⁰ Half-said is better than unsaid, and Unsaid is better still.
- ⁵¹ Turn a blind eye in the house of your neighbor.
- ⁵² It is as easy to say a good word as it is to say an ill one.
- ⁵³ Better you say what you are afraid to hear than some say it for you.
- ⁵⁴ Great talk oft leads to little action.
- ⁵⁵ Words have a magical power. They can raise up the spirits or dash them down. They can bring laughter as easily as tears. Spend words like a miser counting coins. Make each word count.
- ⁵⁶ Think swiftly, speak softly, act wisely.
- ⁵⁷ Least said and soonest mended.
- ⁵⁸ A hasty word, hastily spoken, is as difficult to retrieve as a straw in the wind.
- ⁵⁹ A shout is often distorted, a whisper often unheard. The softest words are more easily listened to.
- ⁶⁰ The man who cannot speak cannot listen. The man who always speaks never listens.
- ⁶¹ On Truth and Reputation
- ⁶² There is some protection from one's enemy, but none from the liar. Only an upright reputation and solid friends are proof against lies and half-truths.
- ⁶³ Treachery always returns to its source.
- ⁶⁴ No one remembers when you are in the right; everyone remembers when you are in the wrong.
- ⁶⁵ Ill will never spoke well.
- ⁶⁶ Ill-wishers are usually ill-doers.
- ⁶⁷ Many a friendship has been destroyed by envy. Envy cannot dwell in a noble soul.
- ⁶⁸ He that seeks trouble will usually find it. It would be good not to be with him when it arrives.
- ⁶⁹ A hasty man never wants for woe.
- ⁷⁰ Lie down with dogs and rise up with fleas.

⁷¹ Be aware that the devil often wears the face of an angel. But he will always speak with the tongue of the devil.

⁷² On Practical Wisdom

⁷³ Willful waste and woeful want: two halves of the same coin.

⁷⁴ It is far easier to keep the devil out than to turn him away.

⁷⁵ What the ear has not heard the heart will not worry about.

⁷⁶ One should not get everything one wishes for; something should remain so that there should always be something left to wish for. When there is nothing left to wish for, there is nothing left to live for.

⁷⁷ It is impossible to do good to others without also doing good for oneself.

⁷⁸ Reward is not always immediate. But it will come.

⁷⁹ Nothing good was ever plotted at the bottom of a bottle.

⁸⁰ Nothing empties a pocket quicker than wine.

⁸¹ When the wine is inside, the sense is outside.

⁸² There is many a story in a glass of wine.

⁸³ First the drink, then the story. Make sure to get the story first.

⁸⁴ There is sometimes a bitterness in truth that makes it unpalatable.

⁸⁵ Necessity forges a plan, and necessity knows no law.

⁸⁶ A nation without a language is a nation without a soul. A man without honor is nothing.

⁸⁷ This is the truth of it: There are two sides to every story.

⁸⁸ Be steadfast in time of turmoil. Be valiant in the pursuit of truth. Be cautious in time of trouble.

⁸⁹ Be not greedy, but always generous. And if not generous in coin, then be generous in spirit.

⁹⁰ There are things one should remember and forget:

⁹¹ Strive to forget the things that made you sad. And always remember the things that made you glad. Strive to forget the friends that proved untrue. And always remember those who stuck by you. Strive to forget the troubles that have long since passed away. And never forget the blessings that come each day.

⁹² The victorious chieftain knows of his victory — before the battle has begun.

⁹³ A battle is won in the mind before it is fought in the field.

⁹⁴ When the chieftain falls, the battle fails.

⁹⁵ Faith lends substance. Belief is everything.

⁹⁶ On Deeds and Work

⁹⁷ An empty house is better than a difficult tenant.

⁹⁸ Begin with a single handful. Soon you will have the load.

⁹⁹ Every patient becomes his own doctor — but only after he is cured.

¹⁰⁰ Clothes do not make the man; talk does not make the man. Only deeds make the man.

¹⁰¹ The work is done and over. And when the tiredness leaves, the profit remains.

- 102 The proof of the pudding is in the eating.
- 103 There is no satisfaction in a job half-done. Better undone than half-done.
- 104 The work praises the man. Take pride in the work.
- 105 To every cow its calf; to every book its copy. Every created thing is a reflection of its creator.
- 106 A heavy purse only indicates a heavy pocket and not a light heart.
- 107 A closed hand gets a clenched fist. An open hand gets an open hand.
- 108 Stretch out your hand in giving and you will never stretch it out in want.
- 109 Stretch out your hand in friendship and it will never be empty.
- 110 Halving the potato is easy when there is love.
- 111 All things are easier with love.
- 112 To understand the creator, one must first understand created things.
- 113 Follow your heart. It is oft wiser than your head.
- 114 A house is not a home and a home is not a place. It is who you are.
- 115 A man will not be found where he lives, but rather where he loves.
- 116 A man may live upon little, but he cannot live upon nothing at all. And no man can live without dignity and pride.
- 117 There is a place for candlelight: True, it is difficult to read by, but it will also not allow you to see the dust upon the floor.
- 118 Men are like bagpipes — no sound comes from them until they're full.
- 119 Happiness and contentment is the road we travel, and not the destination.
- 120 One pair of shoes with good soles is better than two pairs of good uppers and no soles... especially in the rain.
- 121 There is little point in carrying an umbrella if your shoes need soles.
- 122 A trout in the pot and a bird in the hand are better than the salmon in the river and two birds in the bush.
- 123 It is easier to cure the disease in its early stages. Be ever attentive, be ever vigilant.
- 124 It is always better to thrive late than never do well.
- 125 Postpone till morning, postpone forever.
- 126 The lazy young man and the poor old man: two sides of the same coin.
- 127 Seek always, for by looking for one thing you will surely find another. But never look and you will never find anything.
- 128 Establish the name for rising early, then you may rest abed all day.
- 129 The willing horse carries the heaviest burden. Take a care not to overload the willing horse.
- 130 It is better to strike slow and often than once and hard, it is better to measure twice and cut once. Thus is the work halved. And it is no delay to sharpen the tool while working.
- 131 One look forward is better than two looks behind.
- 132 Eventually, even the smallest of thorns causes festering. Attend to the thorn.

- 133 All tides ebb; except the tide of grace.
- 134 All promises are debts. All debts must be honored.
- 135 Forgetting a debt does not pay it.
- 136 What price honor? What price courage? What price love? There are some things that are beyond price and should not be bought or traded. To trade in honor or courage or love is to cheapen it.
- 137 There is a special pleasure in doing what others have said cannot be done. Seek to prove them wrong by proving yourself to be right.
- 138 In every day there is a moment of time in which a wish, fervently made, will be granted. But that moment is unknown. So consider that every moment in every hour in every day is that moment, and wish fervently.
- 139 Soiled goods are never a bargain.
- 140 The best bargains are to be got from those in debt.
- 141 Let the bargain suit the purpose.
- 142 It is possible to know the price of everything, and to know the value of nothing.
- 143 Speak first and soon surrender.
- 144 We are all wise, until we open our mouths and speak.
- 145 Looking is not seeing, listening is not hearing. Look and see. Listen and hear. Then act.
- 146 He that is ill to himself will be ill to others.
- 147 A man who loves not himself loves no other.
- 148 Remember that we all live in the shadow of others.
- 149 A man who has no respect for himself has no respect for others.
- 150 What the ear has not heard the heart will not worry about.
- 151 It is better to consider what you will be than what you are now or what you have been. Look to the future and remember that it comes soon enough.
- 152 Everything has a price. Be prepared to pay that price. But be aware that some prices are not worth paying.
- 153 What is near to the heart is always near to the mouth.
- 154 A Blessing
- 155 This is for you and yours And for mine and ours. And if mine and ours Ever come across you and yours, I pray that you and yours will do As much for mine and ours As mine and ours have done For you and yours.

The Mist-Filled Path

- ¹ Mist as Threshold
- ² The mist called to me when I was a child. In the early mornings, and sometimes at dusk, I would look out the window into the thick woods behind our Georgia home, and a deep longing would fill

my soul. The Cymru, the Celts of Wales, would say I had been consumed by the spirit of hiraeth, the longing for something my soul had known once upon a time.

³ Just beyond the mossy stone wall, just past the clusters of fern, I would often see the eerie gray-green mist swirling in the trees. It would hang there like a gull in the wind, as if searching for something. It seemed to capture something of my own quest, a deep childhood search for an experience of the mystery of the sacred world.

⁴ Some mornings I went outside to see the mist, up close and personal, and just as I would arrive at its edge, it would suddenly disappear from view, almost as if it had never been there. A strange shadowy afterimage would remain. At other times, I would look on with astonished eyes as the mist changed directions and moved away from me, visibly retreating from my presence. It would glide along the tree line, withdrawing itself from my overly analytical stare. In truth, my precocious and unrefined piercing gaze was exiling me from the teachings of the mist.

⁵ The mist is a beautiful natural power. This old spirit is an ambassador of the in-between. Not entirely water, not entirely air, the mist is a unique dancing marriage of these two elements. In effect, it is a shape-shifting element. At times it nearly resembles a light rain. At other times it is more like a heavy fog. Either way, the mist is a blending or a weave of the moisture of water and the fluidity of air and represents a profound and creative dance of elements that are otherwise thought to be separate. This kind of synthesis is also a quality of the Celtic spirit.

⁶ It is no wonder that mist has come to be associated with the Celtic people, for in virtually every Celtic landscape one encounters certain mist-filled places. From the Orkney Isles in the north of Scotland and the forested glens of Wicklow in Ireland all the way down to the Isle of Man and Cornwall, mist is a prominent presence. It goes without saying that the mist also figures heavily in the lore of the Celtic people as well.

⁷ Mist is also an apt metaphor for the Celtic spiritual traditions, for the mist is not a static and unchanging form. It is not like the other elements of earth, air, fire, and water, which are usually in some fixed form or another. Mist is ever changing, always shifting its form as it moves through the landscape in serpentine fashion. Similarly, the Celtic traditions cannot be pinned down. These traditions enjoy the dialogue that comes with encounter. In the words of Celtic scholar Nigel Campbell Pennick, "Throughout history there is a continuous process whereby culture develops and changes according to the needs and prevailing beliefs of the times. Celtic culture has been through several stages where new influences have been absorbed and reinterpreted according to the Celtic genius."

⁸ The Celtic spiritual road is contextual and always open to wherever the beautiful mystery of the Soul of Life may reveal herself. Because of this there is no unified Celtic tradition. Some Celtic descendants work more with ancient customs and technologies of the sacred that dwell within the fold of rural folkways. These descend from Druidism, a sacred natural philosophy of life whose followers love and revere nature.

⁹ Others consider themselves adherents to an earth-loving contemplative Celtic-Christian mysticism that looks on the Creation as filled to the brim with the effervescent and illuminative influence of a loving, wakeful God. Scholars such as Jean Markale and Peter Berresford Ellis strongly suggest that these streams within the Celtic tradition are kissing cousins, ensured by the good works of certain Celtic sages such as Morgan of Wales (Pelagius) and John Scotus Eriugena (John the Scot).

¹⁰ These days, in the United States especially, many people are unfortunately caught up in the constrictive trap of overdefinition and separatism. Our lack of assurance about mystical reality, and the ongoing realization that we, in the end, cannot define or pin down the unknown, cause some to cling to rigid ways of asserting what is and what is not spiritual, what is and what is not Celtic. We can simply utter the words Celtic spirituality, and those within earshot may assume we are talking about pre-Christian Celtic tradition, shamanism, or Celtic-Christian tradition, depending on their viewpoint. The need to categorize is not as strong among Celtic rural people, be they people of the shore or hill people.

¹¹ Often the spirituality of Celtic descendants in the homelands represents a unique and sophisticated form of spiritual syncretism that may weave elements of the pre-Christian earth-based animistic tradition with facets of a rural folk Christianity, not unlike the Japanese people, who often blend Shinto nature customs, Buddhist prayers, and certain Confucian concepts to form the basis of their daily spirituality. What freedom of spirit! How beautiful to stand on a misty moor and orient oneself to a loving universe rather than to some wrathful conception of predestined darkness (Calvinism). The Celtic spirit does not avoid darkness, or shadows, or struggle, resting in a quiet assurance that even within the darkest of the dark lies a flickering flame of goodness.

¹² The Celtic soul and culture have an incredible propensity for change, adaptation, and innovative spiritual evolution. The fact that a desert tradition, such as Christianity, could be adopted and blended with the mist-filled indigenous tradition speaks to this. The fact that certain cultural traits, customs, and ways of relating to the land could survive the Celtic diaspora (primarily Scots and Irish migrations to North America) and evolve into a unique Appalachian form of earth mysticism is an equal testimony to the resiliency of the Celtic soul.

¹³ Today, as mistwalkers (rather than as sleepwalkers), we continue the journey and dialogue of sacred encounter with the world, even in settings never glimpsed by our ancestors. The deep and abiding Celtic-Christian vision returns in the hearts of practitioners who now sit and share silence with the Buddhists. The natural farseeing wisdom of the Celtic shamanist tradition stirs again and actively discusses nature connection with ecopsychologists and Native Americans. The potent and soul-stirring word power of the Irish bardic tradition raises its head once again in the form of people writing bestsellers and facilitating radical transformation in American corporations. You only need to read the work of modern Celtic vision-poet David Whyte to know this is true. I especially recommend *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity*.

¹⁴ Let there be no doubt: the Celtic soul is alive and well. It beckons us to awaken to our inheritance of aliveness, yet one does not have to be of Celtic descent to benefit from the insights of this ancient tradition. Everyone hails from an earth-honoring tradition if you trace the legacy of the ancestral lines back in time. As a guiding spirit, in essence, the Celtic traditions can serve as a potent model for assisting people of all backgrounds to remember the yearning of their ancestral souls, their own link to the primal source of their ancestral earth wisdom.

¹⁵ So much of our aliveness is rooted in whether we make room for the spirit of joy in our lives, a joy that is connected with ancient, collective ways of loving the earth, but we must actively seek to remember this. If we do not approach nature with love, if we do not embrace our transpersonal and spiritual history with the same mythopoetic and animistic eyes of our ancestors, whoever our ancestors are, we will always stand outside our cultural and spiritual inheritance (which transcends

Cartesian models of time). The Celtic spiritual pathways of animism can be a reliable mentoring spirit for reminding the collective human family of these things, but one of the first steps is to begin reconsidering the Celtic mystical traditions as living, thriving pathways rather than as lost customs.

¹⁶ To speak of a people, a tradition, or a spirituality in the past tense is to unconsciously attempt to keep it quarantined to the past. For the various kinds of animistic Celtic people, time flows in a circle, not in a straight line, and, truly, what goes around can, and does, come around. Celtic spirituality as a soul path of life and as a lived presence invites us to reinvest our lives with a mythopoetic sense, one that is aware of and inspired by our numinous ancestral past but not frozen in it. After all, we live now, and we must apply the same level of fortitude and ingenuity to our present circumstances as the old ones did in their time.

¹⁷ The spirit of the mist, in its ever-widening circle of encounter and blending, invites us into a living, breathing opportunity of opening ourselves, once again, to soul, to heart, to truth, and to whatever patch of earth we live on. When we welcome into our lives this kind of openhearted view, we suddenly find ourselves enveloped in a spirit that is not crippled by fear but that is rooted in the heart and engaged with life.

¹⁸ Like the mist, the Celtic spirit seeks to weave in and out of places, to touch the edges of all things. Perhaps it is pagan, perhaps it is Christian, or perhaps it is even a unique expression of dharma, in the Buddhist sense. Perhaps it is simply a kind of naturally earned knowledge, called *eolas* in Gaelic. Perhaps it is all of these things; perhaps it is none of them. Like the mist, the Celtic spirit defies categorization. It is pure soul and pure mysticism. Be it the healing energy of a tree, a time of silence at a river's edge, or a moment of prayer at the hearth, the heart of the Celtic spirit is about blending with direct experience. It is about an activated awareness of the presence of *Cruithear*, the Great Shaping Power of Life in all things and at all times. And sometimes, just sometimes, a deeply soulful experience can be very simple.

¹⁹ The image of the mist serves as a constant reminder that the Celtic spirit is a blend of things. It is partially a tradition that hails from a legacy of ancestor-based nature mysticism that is at least five thousand years old (and probably much older), while another part of the tradition is fueled by the ancient monasticism and Celtic-Christian wisdom that eco-theologian Matthew Fox has termed "green Christianity" or "Creation spirituality." That which we seek to label as Celtic spirituality is above and beyond all these things.

²⁰ Partially air, partially water, the mist dances, blends, and dwells in collaboration. It is in the spirit of the mist that we are shown the healing that can be found in dialogue: dialogue with nature, dialogue with one another, dialogue with ourselves, dialogue with the rhythms of two people in relationship, dialogue between druid and Christian, dialogue between Catholic and Protestant, dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian. It is through the in-between-ness of the mist and the complex in-between-ness of ourselves as wanderers, exiles, and seekers that we will find our togetherness and come home to ourselves.

²¹ The mist teaches us that the road of life can be a road of peace, awe, and wonder. It whispers to us that our path of seeking comfort in and movement between these worlds is crucial. These sacred realms exist below us and beside us, and they overlap one another. An awareness of these worlds is, in fact, an unbroken holy tradition, what R. J. Stewart calls the "underworld tradition." Truthfully, it is a collective human tradition, one that is anciently steeped in an awareness of a primal land. We

may be in a different land than our ancestors, laboring in different ways than our ancestors labored, but the same dedicated path of deep love for the natural world and the natural wisdom of the spiritual world are our birthright. On this matter, from a Celtic animistic and shamanist perspective, we merely need to open ourselves to the same numinous way of seeing the world and the same patterns and practices that our earth-honoring ancestors knew, be they Celtic, Nordic, African, or Asian. This vision of life, and these ancestral patterns and practices, offer an important antidote to the rampant loss of soul in the world today. They can assist us in rediscovering the sacred shape of the soul.

²² The Land of Sleepwalkers

²³ Our world invites us to become what I call sleepwalkers. Many people, some without even knowing it, have accepted the invitation. When we're not truly alive within our senses, days bleed into days, night after night passes. Too many of us squander our lives, spending them in front of televisions, filling our minds with a crazed habitual raciness that is hard to throw off. I use the word spend on purpose, because the numbered days of our lives are a precious commodity. Where and how we choose to invest our energy and time is of great importance to the soul. Where we choose to place our awareness matters.

²⁴ So many of us have unquestioningly bought the unspoken story that if we plop ourselves down in front of the blinking strobe box we will be magically transformed by its quicksilver images. Allow me to state the obvious. The "good life" portrayed there is not good, nor is it truly life. It is not the kind of living that deepens our relationship to authenticity. It is not the kind of life that brings us into contact with wakeful purpose or wonderment, which are our divine birthright.

²⁵ The rumbling of this subliminal world of thirty-second sound bite commercials, fueled by the promise of instant gratification, sends millions of us on unconscious, often unscrupulous, journeys to the store to obtain more and more things that eventually serve no greater purpose than to clutter our living spaces. This gesture and ritual of accumulation is anchored in an illness within the modern zeitgeist. This illness is one of illusion, thinking that material objects will provide us with the inner satisfaction that, ultimately, can only be gained from valuable, wakeful life experiences.

²⁶ I am not talking about objects that truly help our lives or provide for a deepening and richer experience of our earth walk. Put the right book in the hands of a person at the right time in his or her life, for example, and a transformation occurs. A candle, a framed photograph, a beautiful plant, a rustic desk, a journal — things like these can often provide for an aesthetic and spiritual doorway to an experience of our lives as a thing of beauty. In effect, they can support us in waking up and staying awake. Nonetheless, even these items are not the same as the actual experience of a deepened and awakened life. Owning a meditation cushion, a yoga mat, or a Scottish walking stick does not automatically grant the achievement of wakefulness. They are only tools.

²⁷ Our homes, packed with all the latest gadgetry and accumulations from our travels, combined with the developed landscapes in which we live, begin to mirror quite succinctly the cluttered quality of the interior life of the modern person. As within, so without. Our living spaces, our city spaces, reflect our minds and souls.

²⁸ Eventually we get claustrophobic with all the clutter, all the prized possessions crammed into closets. Suddenly, we cannot wait to travel as quickly as possible away from our homes, away from our cities and towns, to some other region. We grow tired of our possessions because they do not fill the void. They do not make us happy. They did not provide us with the sustained and sustainable

experience of the inspirited life we were longing for in our bones. We see these objects differently from how we saw them when they were bought. We realize they do not, in the end, soothe the deep ache.

²⁹ In time our possessions will go the way of the dinosaur, end up in landfills or yard sales, or get passed on to those less fortunate, granting us the brief feeling that we have been charitable. We then start the cycle again. We go for more objects. But a home filled with clutter is no home at all. In the words of Anthony Lawlor, author of *A Home for the Soul*, "We want our houses and apartments to be warm, nurturing, and beautiful, but they are sometimes areas of chaos and territories of conflict, isolation and confusion. The very places that hold the promise of harmony and revitalization can, instead, be abodes of disorder, friction and loneliness."

³⁰ We are not at home in our homes, because we are not at home in ourselves. We are not at home among the living things of the earth. We are not satisfied or content. We are not at home in our minds. We are not at peace. If we look at our habits in the land of the sleepwalkers we see that, for some, the substance of true intimacy in relationships has been stripped from our vocabulary. The experience of personal human contact has been replaced by the less tangible, less complicated, less challenging and, therefore, less honest world of virtual chat rooms. We come and go from our homes and apartments, often with no real sense of who our neighbors are. Slowly but surely this reality begins to set itself up within our families and marriages, and our relatives and spouses become strangers to us, emotionally and spiritually.

³¹ A true association or fluency with the inner face of the soul is missing. Intimacy can be read as "into-me-see." It must start with our being willing to look deeply within, into the realm of both our untapped creativity and our shadows that hide in the corners. Intimacy is the human heart opened up to the world declaring fearlessly, "I invite you to see into me."

³² In the world of the sleepwalkers intimacy is all too often replaced by anonymity. Many people let years pass without letting others know them deeply. They are just as homeless in their inner lives as people living in cardboard boxes on the street. We have become exiles from one another, exiles from the lives we yearn to live; we have become disenfranchised from our dreams, strangers to our own inner faces, wandering like hungry ghosts for some sense of belonging.

³³ Ultimately this is an exile that we all share. It is a common wound, for it is a collective exile from an enlightened society that we all know is possible. We all share the hope of this potential, this endowment of peace and ease, but for now we simply keep going, some of us half asleep. The seeds of a society rooted in illumination and wakefulness rest deep inside us. These seeds sleep beneath our own sleeping. They are the seeds of longing shared by all our ancestors.

³⁴ Like the quickening seeds that tremble at the time of Imbolg (pronounced em-olk), the tremor of spring in Celtic tradition, we ourselves stir. These seeds twitch just beneath a frosty layer of earth and slowly move in their casings. In time they set their root and begin an upward pilgrimage to the gleaming sun. It is our time to set our root and wake up.

³⁵ Setting Our Root

³⁶ Something begins to happen to us when we accept an invitation other than that offered in the land of sleepwalking described above. We take a deep and life-affirming breath. We slowly move from a life of exile and wandering to the life of seeking. In this holy seeking the ordinary becomes holy

again, magical. Sleepwalkers begin to wake up. People in pain begin to find solutions. People racked with stress find ways to return to solace. People who feel outside life suddenly experience the blessing of homecoming, punctuated by the realization that there is no such thing as loneliness when one has the powers of the universe flowing through him or her.

³⁷ Equally as powerful is when people who have set their root and have begun to wake up begin to extend their energy and presence into the world as a means of fostering wakefulness in others. Suddenly a person who felt cut off from others and from the beauty of life becomes an ambassador of this beauty, a shaper of it. Within this beauty lies a deep peace that is, we might say, a central hearthstone of the Celtic tradition.

³⁸ The Celtic spiritual traditions are rooted in peace. Prayers, rituals, daily acts, and orientations focus on fostering peace. In essence, the Celtic spiritual path aims to facilitate three conditions: an opening within the human heart, a sheltering sense of solace in the world for those who struggle, and an ongoing sensual celebration of the beauty of life. These guideposts lie at the heart of the many soul-maintenance practices that are performed in these very old traditions.

³⁹ Living a life that fosters these conditions of soul maintenance is what I mean here by setting our root. It is about changing our reality from one of discord to one of harmony. As trembling seeds of a hopeful future we choose to set our root in what some Celtic theologians called "goodness, love, and yearning." This process becomes the path. It becomes a way of changing self and the world.

⁴⁰ This kind of waking up is noticeable, visceral. People begin dedicating their lives to transforming themselves and the world. People living in city apartments suddenly start saying "hello," extending themselves and the range of possibilities for human connection and the human condition. They join one another in instant communities on front porches, and suddenly the air becomes pierced with astonishing questions such as, "How is it with your soul?"

⁴¹ Individuals step out onto the streets and reach out to those living a life of struggle — the hungry, the displaced, the grieving — and ask, "What can I do to help?" People who have felt displaced from the holy landscape of the natural world enter back into the Green World and find themselves embraced. People in relationships who have fallen asleep, who have forgotten each other, suddenly remember with immense clarity the preciousness of the person with whom they share a home. They embrace and ask, "Where have you been? Where have I been?"

⁴² Being willing to entertain such questions as, "How is it with my soul?" requires us to slow down a bit. The willingness to orient our lives to such questions demands that we slow down a lot. If we are to truly set our roots in such soil we must aspire to create sanctuaries of stillness in our lives. We must find our places of resurrection, as it is spoken of in the Celtic-Christian tradition. We must rediscover our ancient "house of memory."

⁴³ Imagine giving yourself a potent gift. I will describe it to you as a practice.

⁴⁴ Practice: Setting Your Root

⁴⁵ Clear out a room in your home. Put some things in storage. Better yet, sell or donate them. Set aside a space specifically for consecrating a brief retreat that will focus on setting your root. Make this space a place to honor the ancient rhythms. Make it a place where you can be without distraction.

⁴⁶ Now choose a day over the course of a weekend. In our busy lives finding such time has become difficult, yet it is possible and merely requires a commitment. Plan in advance. Set aside a Saturday,

perhaps, with the full knowledge that this day is your day. Ask friends or family to support you in this endeavor.

⁴⁷ Upon entering the room for what will be an entire day, dawn to dusk, watch what happens to your mind. There will be no e-mail, no World Wide Web, no television, no telephone, no dinner dates, no ritualized habits. There will be no movies, no coffee, no cigarettes, no alcohol — just the quiet edges of your soul being still, the tremor of your mind engaged in reclaiming your place in a more ancient rhythm. When we remove ourselves from the unnatural rhythms of the world, the more ancient rhythm of our earth selves returns. This is nature's healing power on us and within us. For we are part of nature.

⁴⁸ Once you've made room, the questions come. For some people so do the fears, doubts, and worries. Stay with the questions that arise. Stay with the fears. Stay with the boredom, for undoubtedly your mind will continue to spin. Your mind will say, "But I could have taken a trip this weekend. I should have done some yard work. I should really do my taxes." Think of these things as a cold wind and turn yourself, instead, toward the warm, sweet sheltering spirit of silence.

⁴⁹ Stay with your questions, and think of this act as "warming your earth." It is like the sun thawing the frosty ground. Chew on the questions, the doubts, and the fears. Feel them to be what they really are — the necessary magnetism of moistness and warmth to activate the seeds of wakefulness within you. Where a moist chill meets warmth the luminescence of mist is born. The mist is the threshold, the guardian of the in-between where vision is received. Within the mist of liminal time and space we are able to plant the seeds of a new life.

⁵⁰ Remember that the seed is you, and me, and the soulful life we long for.

⁵¹ When you are ready to set your root, stand and face the four directions, starting with the east, the direction of the new rising sun. Move in a clockwise fashion, what is called *deiseil*, or sunwise, in the old Gaelic tradition. Announce out loud what you are setting your root in.

⁵² Perhaps you are setting your root in waking up, in remembering sacred world, in coming back to your senses. Perhaps you're setting it in healing, in cultivating gentleness with yourself, in fostering a sense of true self-respect. Perhaps you are throwing off the shackles of a self-absorbed, materialistic life and are now setting your root in a life of kindness and service to others. In any case, speak this commitment, the new root of your life. Speak it out loud. Speak it to everything: to your ancestors. To the earth and sky. To the unseen world.

⁵³ When you have set your root, know this. Everything in your life from the time of your stated commitment forward becomes like the seed sending its shoot toward the sun. Your root is set. The seed that is your heart is now committed to being open. It is time to begin. Having set your root you are now looking for the sun, which is the same as a wakeful life. Feel the sun on your brow. Let the solar power, the Great Wheel of Light, pull you.

⁵⁴ When you are ready, slowly enter back into connection with others dear to you. Like the young sapling that emerges from the ground into the light of day, greet the world. But, also like a young sapling, you must take great care. In facing the world again remember that the world does not know or understand what kind of soil you have emerged from; people will not necessarily know that you have undergone a change. What do you notice in facing the world again?

⁵⁵ You have spent an entire day in this process. You have announced your new root, your commitment, to the powers of life, but now you must share it with your community, with your family of blood and spirit. Ask for their support in assisting you to live a life rooted in this new energy.

⁵⁶ The Mist-Filled Path awaits you.

⁵⁷ NOTE: Once you have performed this daylong practice, you can expand it into a full weekend. Or perhaps, if you are at a significant crossroads in your life, you would be served by doing this practice for a full week.

⁵⁸ Reclaiming Our Holy Senses

⁵⁹ Many of you, upon reading the suggestions above, will recoil at the notion of both the stark surroundings and the extended solitude. For we have been conditioned to fear both. Many of us have been conditioned to fear ourselves, including the deeper call of our life passions. Certain schools, churches, and even families create distrust of our primal knowing and intuition. In light of such an inheritance it is no wonder that most of us have grown up not trusting ourselves, not knowing who we really are, and not knowing how to create the life we want. We sense something more, but the chasm between here and there feels as wide as a galaxy.

⁶⁰ In a culture that measures worth by how much we own or by what we "do," it is a radical act to investigate who we truly are beyond our property values or professional titles. Equally as radical is the act of inviting extended moments of silence to recover our more ancient senses. It is precisely from these recovered holy senses that we are granted potential methods and solutions for dealing with the undeniable pains that grip our souls today.

⁶¹ Senses, much like muscles, can become atrophied over time without exercise and use. This is especially true of our ancestral, primal, and spiritual senses. According to Basque mystic and anthropologist Angeles Arrien, the Basque people have mapped out 137 senses, far above and beyond the more well-known 5 senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch — 137 senses that are possible for us to use and access, nearly all of which can only be cultivated by giving ourselves over to a slower, more ancient earth rhythm.

⁶² The modern pace does not allow for such slowness and silence. Meditation or contemplation is often perceived as lifeless inactivity. Many people fear that slowing down will cause them to miss something, and yet it is our society's velocity that is causing us to miss something very important. Besides the attrition of what I call our otherworldly senses, we have also lost the ability to have a moment-to-moment awareness of our passage through life.

⁶³ On many occasions I have heard people remark that they feel "out of place," "out of sorts," "depressed," or "bored" when a true moment of quiet descends on them. This is how fundamentally exiled we are from the natural texture of our own silence. As modern people we don't know what to do with this great teacher of teachers. She can be an uncomfortable teacher and guide. Yet great power and healing wait in the folds of silence and solitude.

⁶⁴ Mirroring the creation of the universe, all great things have come forth from the ancient weave of silence. It is a part of us we must welcome home, yet in the land of the sleepwalkers, silence is avoided at all costs. For many there is only collapse at the end of the day from all the effort expended to avoid looking, to avoid feeling, to avoid authentic contact, to avoid admitting our misery or

suffering. All too often yet another day devoid of freedom and true awareness awaits on the other side of a stirring, dreamless night.

⁶⁵ Another path exists, however. Oddly enough, it is already beneath our feet and is accessible in this very moment. It says:

⁶⁶ Don't go back to sleep. You must ask for what you really want. The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. People are going back and forth across the doorsill where two worlds touch. The door is round and open. Don't go back to sleep.

⁶⁷ — Jalal-ud-Din Rumi

⁶⁸ The Purpose of This Path

⁶⁹ This book is not an anthropological thesis about the Celtic world. It is not an archaeological treatise on the Iron Age Celts, or even — specifically — a scholarly or historical exploration of Celtic religions and culture. Scholars and historians with far more ability than I have, have already given the world an immense gift in the form of their works. My intention here is not to reinvent the wheel but rather to articulate how we may truly live in the spirit of the wheel, an ancient symbol used in the druidic traditions of Ireland, the shamanic traditions worldwide, and even in the Celtic-Christian tradition of earth-honoring mysticism. This sacred wheel is the cycle of our days, the circle of our horizon, the Celtic wheel of living.

⁷⁰ The central aim of this path is to articulate a way of seeing the world and a possible way for being in it that re-enlivens a relationship to that which is holy. I have come to call this the Mist-Filled Path, mist being a teacher or tutelary spirit for me in my childhood. It is an invitation into a slower, more ancient earth rhythm as it has been worked with in the living streams of perennial Celtic spirituality, animism, druidic philosophy, shamanism, and mysticism. It is a particular kind of orientation, one that looks to restore the ancient dialogue between the human being and the sacred world.

⁷¹ A portion of this path involves descriptions and accounts of experiences that fall within the domain of the transpersonal, the paranormal, and the shamanic. These experiences are shared not only to illuminate the themes and principles we are working with but also to normalize the nonordinary, the otherworldly, and the transpersonal dimensions of human experience, all strands of human experience that our world has largely lost. Some of these experiences involve spirits, ancestors, nature, and other presences not so easily defined, but these are not supernatural; these things are simply natural. My personal experiences are rooted in my own journey of waking up to my life that occurred through a deep depression, a near-fatal illness, and a unique cellular initiation into the realms of Celtic mysticism. I have come to refer to this process as "ancestral transmission."

⁷² Other aspects of this path include visionary exercises, meditations, and other reflections. My only instructions regarding these practices, other than those contained in the actual description of them, is to open yourself to the spirit or concept that is being explored and see how it resonates with your life path. These small "stopping places" on the path are designed to foster a process of deepening with the themes of this path. These guiding themes are undoubtedly anchored in the life-affirming spirituality of ancient Celtic ancestors, yet they have been discerned as ways to apply these themes to the here and now — the life each of us has and the world that each of us faces, whatever our ancestral background.

⁷³ From a Celtic perspective, the sacred world is vast. It includes our ancestors, the spirit world, the world of nature, the human world, and the rich inner world of each person as expressed through dreams. The sacred world, as it is worked with in Celtic tradition, is replete with thresholds of opportunity, renewal, and healing. The flow of this path is designed to mirror these thresholds, and yet as Esther de Waal has said of the Celtic spiritual path, it is not necessarily one that follows a "clear-cut pattern of having some end and goal in view so that the purpose can be clearly established and then followed. For the really significant journey is the interior journey."

⁷⁴ Thus this path may feel to the traveler a bit like the flowing cords of Celtic knot work one sees in both pre-Christian and post-Christian Celtic art. We will weave back in on themes at times in service of remembrance and deepening. At times it may feel as if we have doubled back onto familiar ground. This flowing weave represents the nature of holy dialogue in Celtic tradition, which encounters the sacred world once via the journey or quest and a second time via pilgrimage and remembrance.

⁷⁵ The Mist-Filled Path as a spiritual vision is characterized by communion and holy contact with what we will call here the in-between, those thresholds of numinosity and liminality, or in Rumi's words, those luminous places "where two worlds touch." Opening ourselves to this kind of contact, encounter, and dialogue with life, as well as having a willingness to hang out with the unknown, are all characteristic of the Celtic spirit. These same qualities are ones I hope that you will feel supported in cultivating.

⁷⁶ The Mist-Filled Path is not about sequined magical robes, long-lost priesthoods, or stereotyped media notions of Celts, druids, shamans, and mystics. Though undoubtedly influenced by the ancient legacy of the druidic tradition, with its love of nature and emphasis on merging with the sacred, this path is more generally about our collective human tradition of making life holy. It is about finding true magic in every moment by reclaiming a view and experience of the sacred world that is already around and within us. It is about welcoming the influence of this sacred world and orienting ourselves to the sacred questions in our hearts.

⁷⁷ This is a revisioning, from a Celtic perspective, of the invitation that all the contemplative and shamanic traditions have extended to us over time. It is an invitation to slow down and to ask important questions, such as: What uncharted roads in the landscape of your soul await you? How are you a conduit for healing energies that our world is in such dire need of? What is your calling?

⁷⁸ Our questions speak quite profoundly about the quest we are on. Whether or not we ever receive an answer, just posing certain questions about our lives is a process of soft illumination into the shaded domains of our inner world. The nature and quality of our inner worlds shape the malleable outer world in which we all live. As John Perkins, author of such books as *Psychonavigation* and *The Spirit of the Shuar*, has so often said, "The world is as we dream it."

⁷⁹ Friends, this is such important work. We underestimate our power as shapers of the world. We also underestimate the power of the world to shape us in ways that are unholy. This path is about this holy way of shaping and being shaped. It is about aiming our consciousness at the right places and realizing that the questions we hold in our hearts are like hands on clay.

⁸⁰ The haphazard and frenetic pace of our lives makes asking important questions like these difficult. Actively observing extended periods of silence to sit with these pivotal questions becomes almost an act of anarchy against the ego and our consumerist conditioning. In following this path we place

ourselves firmly in the flow of an ancient legacy of people who have grappled with the "questing" questions, who have risen to challenge sleepwalking of any form. The Mist-Filled Path is about stepping in among them. As Buddha said, "Make of yourselves a lamp."

⁸¹ The Celtic spiritual traditions originate in this same ancient legacy. From the druidic tradition of wise men and wise women to the followers of Christ in the Celtic world, the Celtic spiritual pathways are a multifaceted emerald that gleams with the light of an intelligent and sentient Creation. To make of ourselves a lamp in this sometimes-dark world we must ally ourselves with this holy light of Creation. The Celtic way is steeped in this process of alliance. It is a brightly woven cloak of wisdom and experience that is one of the precious antidotes to the spiritual pain of our era, what visionary Irish poet and mystic William Butler Yeats called "an outworn heart in a time outworn."

⁸² This path comes from my own heart, from one who has been a sleepwalker, who has struggled, who was "raked across the coals" of initiation, so to speak, and now walks a path of learning from the sacred world, endeavoring to listen deeply for the instructions from the sacred world and the many worlds in-between. These common-sense yet profound instructions are timeless. They are the perennial roots of the Celtic traditions, and they are about the heart that has announced, I am not going back to sleep. I will feel, I will sense, I agree to shape and to be shaped by my life.

⁸³ This strand of primal Celtic wisdom is about coming by a fresh vision and looking out onto the landscape of the earth and of our lives and whispering, prayerfully, "Yes. I appreciate life and my place within it. I stand in the heart of my life." In this way, the Mist-Filled Path, when practiced authentically, is a path that bursts the heart open and causes us to truly remember our place "in the family of things," as poet Mary Oliver puts it. On such a path, as I say in one of my own poems, "all people are the Chosen Ones, all the earth our Holy Land."

⁸⁴ Mist as a Trickster–Teacher

⁸⁵ Although we sometimes can call or sing exiled soul parts home, many times it is we who are living in a state of exile, not pieces of our souls. We are the ones who feel hidden from the soul of life, from the Soul of the World. We begin to have the sneaking suspicion that we are the part of our ancient soul's memory that has forgotten our place in the grand scheme of things.

⁸⁶ In cases like these, sometimes the spirits, or sometimes the forces within nature (such as the faery folk, as perceived of in Celtic seership), will conspire to "trick" us through synchronicity, dreams, or outward events. Then it is almost as if we stumble into a process of learning a path that will lead us home. This path, at once illuminative yet seemingly hidden, is a road marked by a distinctive vibration. Its energy is of primal forces inhabiting a primal landscape that yearn for us to remember.

⁸⁷ My initial experience of the mist was like this. It played tricks on me. It attempted to reveal a deeper phenomenon that was all around me but to which I was, in effect, blind. I did not have the eyes with which to perceive the teachings of the mist when I first encountered them. Nonetheless, the mist got my attention in various ways, alerting me to the fact that to find the sacred within life I must cultivate the proper eyes with which to see the world. Cultivating sacred eyes is what Celtic spirituality holds as a silent wish for each of us.

⁸⁸ In time I experienced a gradual settling in my evolving childhood mysticism. It was a settling of my striving. This settling informed me that the sacred was all around me, and that, in addition to

developing the proper eyes with which to see, I must also cultivate the proper feet with which to walk the path. One gains the proper eyes and proper feet, I have found, by slowing down. A verse from the rediscovered Gospel of Thomas comes to mind, which states: "His followers said to him, 'When will the kingdom come?' He replied, 'It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, Look, here it is, or Look, there it is. Rather the Father's kingdom is spread out upon the earth, and people do not see it'"

⁸⁹ As a little boy I came to associate the mist with special times that I would take for myself. Though at the time I was too young to have a working concept of spirituality or spiritual practice, at the mere age of six I was becoming aware of the delicious sensation of experiencing the Soul of Place. I would curl up for hours in one of my sitting places in the forest behind our house. A large oak tree behind me, an old holly tree beside me, I would be quiet, I would be still, and, with a soft gaze, I would watch the unfettered flow of a patch of ground that grew to love me. I was developing the soft eyes of my ancestors.

⁹⁰ Several years later I would have a conversation with an Anishinabe (Ojibway) man from Canada, and I would hear him speak about the necessity of hunting or walking in nature with a soft gaze. He explained:

⁹¹ The Four-Leggeds and the Winged Ones live to a different rhythm. Theirs is the rhythm of soft eyes and soft feet; Two-Leggeds have hard eyes and hard feet. When most humans go into the forest they enter with so much of the world on them that any possibility of feeling the sacred is removed. When we go into the forest we must become soft like the animal people and the tree people.

⁹² This rhythm of softness is something the mist taught me in the woods of Georgia. I sometimes think back on these childhood experiences and find myself laughing with delight at the name still held for the forested area where we lived: Druid Hills. Many of the trees are now gone, owing to the incessant influence of development. The old house is now gone. The landscape of this mysterious place of childhood awakening has now been taken over by tacky-tacky houses that seemed to go up over night. Nonetheless, the old oak still stands tall there, along with the holly and the stone I used to sit on, and those magical druid hills remain a reliquary of spiritual memory for me.

⁹³ The Shimmering Peace of Things

⁹⁴ During my times of walking the Mist-Filled Path as a child, I was always filled with a blend of awe and the jitters. A sense of expectancy pulsed with each heartbeat, with each moving shadow in the shaded wood, as if at any moment a door might open up beside me. This amazing energy had an uncanny presence. When I look back on those times, with the eyes I have now, I see that the holiness of my childhood in nature was inseparably linked to the trees. I loved them, I love them now, and through them ancient unseen doors open.

⁹⁵ We Celts are lovers of trees. In fact, the religion of our primal ancestors is one truly rooted in the mysticism of the trees. From old Celtic tales that speak of First Man being an alder tree, and First Woman being a rowan tree, to the ancient Roman accounts of the druids in the groves of old Gaul, trees play a central role in the ancient Celtic way of seeing. As world-renowned Celtic scholar and poet Jean Markale shares, "The yew is a sacred tree in Ireland. It is the druidic tree, the preeminent magic tree." As a descendant of the clan MacEwen, a Scottish clan with Irish roots, I contemplate the origins of our name in this light. In Gaelic the name MacEoghainn translates as "son of the yew tree."

I discovered these threads of etymology later in life, but my relationship with the trees is one that hails from a mist-filled childhood.

⁹⁶ On one day in particular when I was out in the trees, something happened. I had a sudden and shocking remembrance of the trees as guardians, allies, and as conduits for activating memory. Images flashed in my mind. The images were hauntingly familiar, achingly so. Like in Carl Jung's formative childhood mystical experience of merging with a stone he was sitting on, in that moment the trees suddenly told me that they were my ancient home, that I had known them intimately before, and that one day I would live among them again.

⁹⁷ I was deeply stirred, and in the midst of this experience I realized that the spirit of the mist did not retreat from my presence that day. It moved in around me, encompassing me like a cool blanket. Slowly I began to feel at one with the forest, at one with the mist, and at one with myself in a way I never had before. I was suddenly self-aware, profoundly conscious that life is a path that we walk from the time of birth to the time of death. It was an old memory returned.

⁹⁸ I wept with an emotion I can only describe as a feeling of being accepted by the sacred world. Woven within this moment of reawakening was a familiarity with something extremely old that stood just on the periphery of my awareness. Though it felt like a person, I saw no one. I imagined the face of an old man. I did not have words to put to this flow of experiences, but as a good Scots brother of mine says in one of his poems, "I felt watched and watching."

⁹⁹ The mist is an ancient initiator and sacred reminder in the Celtic traditions. In the old tales of Britain, just beyond the mist lies the realm of Avalon. Likewise, in the primal Irish tradition we learn of the once-lost tale called the Tain and how this eclipsed strand of the tradition was rekindled, remembered, and bestowed on a single poet who sat, fasting, for three days and nights on the hillside grave of a great bard. This young poet, for these three days and nights, was completely enveloped within a mist.

¹⁰⁰ A similar process stirred for me in my childhood, of having old things awakened within me. I was shown that the very fabric of reality shifts and changes in what the Celtic tradition thinks of as "thin places," or threshold places. Thin places are potent doorways within our sacred world, which includes the natural world (and aspects of the human world) and also domains that permeate and lie beneath our world. It is where the ordinary and non-ordinary come to rest in each other's arms. These places might be in-between places or particular in-between times, such as twilight. Celtic thin places are crossroads where the world of the spirits and the world of the embodied mingle. It is where the realms of human and faery touch. It is where living descendants and the ancestors commune. It is where the unseen and the seen share one ground.

¹⁰¹ Once I learned to slow down, quiet my mind, and surrender myself to the thin places and the mist-filled spaces, something ancient would draw close to me. This practice was always part of my childhood, yet things would often occur in ways I did not fully understand and could not articulate. I just knew that these mist times felt familiar and that they fed me in ways that nothing else did.

¹⁰² In my childhood I developed certain skills and leanings, such as the ability to enter into deep meditative states and otherworldly states of consciousness. In the contemporary milieu such states are spoken of as trance, nonordinary reality, or SSC (shamanic state of consciousness), to use anthropologist-cum-shaman Michael Harner's term. In the fold of these holy times I was shown that I was living in two worlds: the modern world, a world that has become exiled from the rich green

realms of nature, and the mist-filled spirit world, inhabited by wise spirits, great beings, and luminescent people that love us and yearn for us to know and have goodness. A third world, the world of nature, served as an intermediary between the modern world and the world of the spirits.

¹⁰³ As children, many of us were fluent in the language of these worlds. Perhaps you have a lingering childhood memory of being aware of thin places or presences that occupied the borderlands of consciousness. Now, when I watch children, it appears that they still have passports to travel back and forth across these borderlands between the mechanistic and the animistic. Moments after helping an adult program the VCR, a child can be just as swiftly in touch with beings of light in the forest just behind their home. Known as "walking between the worlds" in the Scottish traditions and as "walking with the spirits" in other traditions, I think of this phenomenon as having mist consciousness. It is the ability to flow and pass backward and forward at will, to move from the complexity of modernity to the profundity of a sacred world still dripping with the dew and mist of a continually renewing earth.

¹⁰⁴ Mist consciousness is what stirred within my soul that day that the mist enveloped me. As it embraced me, I felt not only that I belong in the forest but also that I belong to her. After this experience of being at one with the mist-filled forest I would step from the supposed comfort and security of our home as often as I could to commune with these powers. In doing so I became aligned with the peacefulness of the place, what the old Scottish and Irish traditions speak of as *sitchain* (a state of peace), or becoming an *sith* (pronounced *ahn-shee*), as Celtic mystic Tom Cowan speaks of it.

¹⁰⁵ It is no accident that in the Irish and Scottish traditions peace (*sith*) is the same word used to speak about the faery people. These beings, spoken of anciently as the *Sith* (*shee*), are also called the "people of peace," the "quiet folk," or the "shining ones." Sometimes they are spoken of as the "people of the hills" or mounds. Some old people today still believe that the spirits of the dead go to join the shining ones either below the earth, "in the hill," or in a parallel world only a hairbreadth away from this one.

¹⁰⁶ There is no uniformity to such cosmologies, as evidenced by the wide-ranging cataloging of Celtic beliefs in W. Y. Evans-Wentz's *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries*. A classic work as meticulous in scholarship as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which he also translated, Evans-Wentz discovered not one Celtic tradition but innumerable strands of belief and practice with differing cosmologies depending on local tradition and custom.

¹⁰⁷ Traveling to Cornwall, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, the Isle of Man, and Brittany, Evans-Wentz found a vast range of faery and ancestral beliefs that were not homogenized. In certain areas of the Celtic world, faery beings and ancestors have merged into a unified realm that continues to be related to and communed with through a variety of practices. In other areas, such as Brittany, the old spiritual mysticism of the druids continues to survive as an undercurrent in certain death cosmologies, even among old people who still hold that certain great ancestors are reborn as souls in newborns — a belief not unlike that governing the Tibetan lama system.

¹⁰⁸ In becoming an *sith* we align ourselves with what I call the shimmering peace of a place. We open ourselves to its mysteries, not in some romanticized Tinker Bell way but in an authentic dialogue with the holy energies, with the spirits. By entering into such a dialogue with the spirit of peace in a place we are able to experience firsthand the results of inner transformation. We begin to

take on and embody the essence of a place of power. Indeed, over time we can become so profoundly merged with a place and identified with its energy that we become part of its spirit, its voice.

¹⁰⁹ There are many ways of becoming an sith, of becoming the peace: Engaging in deep meditative states within the natural world. Hillwalking and going on pilgrimage. Making ablutions in a stream or spring. Sleeping on the side of an ancestral cairn (ancient burial places of actual ancestors) or a faery hill (sacred mounds considered to be special "fey" or faery places). Sitting in a tree. Doing a prayer fast (or what many Native American shamans call a vision quest). Communing with the mist created within a sweat lodge (ceremonial sauna), be it Nordic, Finnish, Celtic, or Native American. All these are ways of entering sitchain (a state of peace).

¹¹⁰ The emphasis on peace within the Celtic spiritual traditions is not always obvious. An old Irish proverb states, "The peacemaker is never in the way." In other words, in any natural setting and within any human circumstance the peacemaker, one who has become an sith, is someone you want around. Their presence promotes harmony and healing. Their essence engenders trust and instills a sense of the spirit of peace in a place.

¹¹¹ Fostering peace and forming deep bonds to the peace of a place are touchstones of the Celtic spiritual traditions. The Celtic road of life is about sourcing our lives deeply in this discipline of encouraging and engendering peace rather than discord. In making it a central aim to become attuned to the guiding spirit of peace, in effect, we are able to become peacemakers. It is by taking time to commune with the mist that we are able to cultivate this path of peace and peacemaking.

¹¹² I was always astonished at the things I experienced in the peace of these mist-filled states of consciousness. Within the spiritscape of my childhood, when the mist would draw near to our home, my otherworldly senses would take over. I was keenly aware that just beyond the wood beams and mortar that formed the old walls of our house were "high-traffic" areas where presences of various kinds moved beside our home. Some of these presences were not complete with their time on this earth, disembodied spirits who had passed from earthly life but who were still working out unfinished business. Other presences seemed to be more of this earth than anything else. I look back now and perceive them to be the "fey," the faery folk, as well as other nature spirits of various kinds.

¹¹³ On more than one occasion I encountered spirits inside that old house. Usually they were just passing through — here one minute, gone the next. Sometimes they seemed to linger. As a child I was often intrigued by their presence, curious about what their stories must be, but seeing them was not always a pleasant process. More than a few times I saw rather frightening energies or spirits move through the house. They seemed lost and sometimes filled with grief and rage. On nights when these more frightening presences were around, I would force myself to stay awake all night long, keeping myself in bed for fear of encountering them, often resulting in my wetting the bed.

¹¹⁴ On one misty winter night I got up and tumbled from my bed. As I emerged from my room into the hallway near the living room I saw the spirit of a girl standing by the fireplace. To my astonishment, however, I was not the only one seeing the ghost. My maternal grandmother, Nonnie, who was visiting us for Christmas asked, "Do you see her?" I replied, "Yep." Moments later the spirit was gone, but something priceless happened for me in that moment. It was the first time I remember an adult validating the invisible world and its ability to make itself known. Over time I realized that my Nonnie, like other women on the maternal side of my family, had a real propensity for seeing

spirits and for "feeling the chill." It was in our blood, inherited, no doubt, from our Scots-Irish ancestors.

¹¹⁵ For myself, I learned at a young age that when the mist descends upon us, the veil that ordinarily separates the unseen world from the visible world is drawn back, fostering a fluency of movement between the two worlds. The mist becomes a visible cloak that conceals that which is ordinarily seen, while another invisible cloak is removed, making that which is usually invisible visible. Although in the Celtic conception of the "sight," it usually occurs at random, beyond the actual control of the seer, I have personally come to associate the presence of the mist with the conditions of otherworldly sight. It is as if the presence of the mist makes these states of consciousness all the more accessible, somehow ushering in the parameters typical of "thin times," opening up the thin spaces necessary for authentic otherworld contact.

¹¹⁶ It would not be until much later on in my life that I would comprehend more clearly what had happened for me back then. The visionary dispensation of my Celtic ancestors was at work within my childhood spirituality. It was a presence that slowly evolved, mostly without my being fully conscious of it or having an inherited vocabulary for understanding it. A somewhat unconscious process of committing to a lifetime path of mysticism and learning was initiated in those trees in Georgia. It was unconscious in the sense that it simply became a leaning of mine, and I did not consider it as anything very formal. I knew the spirits and these various other presences existed. I made note of that. The natural world was also holy to me. I made note of that too. This knowledge was always part of me.

¹¹⁷ My formative mysticism as a young lad would later involve the forests of my native Mississippi (once we had moved back there), the hills of North Carolina in my later youth, the birch woods of northern Wisconsin, and, eventually, the Scottish Highlands. I feel that I also have a standing appointment in Wales and Ireland, where I still have not been, yet which served as ancestral source grounds for some of my later experiences.

¹¹⁸ The Spirit of Longing

¹¹⁹ Tell me, men of learning, what is Longing made from?

¹²⁰ In the ancient days of the early Celtic Church, an extraordinary group of individuals embraced a life of being shaped. Monks exiled themselves from their homelands to travel in other lands and preach, and it was said that they took on the mantle of white martyrdom. Others, though they did not exile themselves from their homelands, entered into the uncharted wilds of the natural world and surrendered their lives to the ancient rhythms there. This is called the green martyrdom. The white and green martyrdoms, as opposed to the red martyrdom of actually being killed (dying for God), was a life of wandering, of perpetual exile of living in nature, of seeking closeness to God, the Creator. Such a lifestyle was a profound act, because it was a choice of removing oneself, permanently, from the human community to enter into a deep communion with the sacred.

¹²¹ Kevin of Glendalough, who was a green martyr for a time, is one such figure found in the Celtic-Christian inheritance. Born sometime near the middle of the sixth century, Kevin was a child of Leinster, in Ireland. Around the age of seven he entered a monastery. A precociously wise boy, Kevin received a vision as a novice monk that eventually sent him into the forests near the Wicklow Mountains. During this time he turned his back on human companionship and lived as a wild man, deep in the trees and caves. Even today there is a cave in southeast Ireland called "Kevin's Bed." A

number of amazing things took place during Kevin's green martyrdom, almost all of which speak to his intimacy and connection with animals.

¹²² Some tales suggest that he carried on daily conversations with a blackbird. Irish oral tradition speaks of other animal companions, such as a wolf and a deer, that would draw near to him. In another story we hear that Kevin had a custom of making ablutions in cold water. He would stand in a lake and read from "a most precious book of holy words." One day the cold numbed Kevin's hands so much that he dropped his book into the water, where it immediately sank into the depths.

¹²³ Kevin was heartbroken over the loss of this special book, which some say was a gift from a wise teacher. His eyes filled with tears, and he lifted a sudden prayer. When Kevin opened his eyes he noticed that an otter was swimming in front of him, with his precious book in its mouth. Kevin took it from the otter and looked inside. Not a drop of the ink had been smudged, not a line was unreadable. Kevin wept with joy, and throughout the rest of his days, even after he went on to establish the great monastery at Glendalough, it is said that Saint Kevin prevented the killing of otters.

¹²⁴ Many modern people, on hearing such a story, would immediately consider it just a quaint fairy tale. Through the lens of primal Celtic tradition, however, we see it in a different light. We see that if we lean toward life willing to give ourselves over to being shaped, as the many druids, Celtic shaman-poets, and saints have done over time, that life also leans back toward us, as in the example of the otter helping Kevin.

¹²⁵ A contemporary example is the story of Linda Kohanov, author of *The Tao of Equus*. A horse trainer and equine-facilitated therapy practitioner (someone who fuses psychotherapeutic work with clients and horse riding), Kohanov is a person, like Saint Kevin, who has leaned toward the sacred shapes of life and experienced the sacred shapes of life leaning back toward her. Instead of an otter or a blackbird, the sacred shapes of life that have leaned back toward Linda have names like Rasa. They are particularly sacred animals to the Celts: horses.

¹²⁶ Linda shares with us the profound dimensions of the relationship attainable between horse and human, an ancient relationship undoubtedly known, cherished, and cultivated by our horse-riding ancestors. From her shamanic dreams and her direct physical encounter with horses through riding, to the profound dimensions of subtle emotional healing and clairsentient communication from the spirit of the horses, she offers us an example of the kind of holy dialogue between living things that no doubt was known by the old shamans, druids, and horse-whisperers. *The Tao of Equus*, in effect, is a shamanic account of the potential alliance between the human and animal realm, and within this mutual alliance we clearly see a potent healing and shaping consciousness at work.

¹²⁷ In this encounter with the sacred world we meet the many shapers of life and, in turn, learn that we too are shapers. As shapers we direct energy. As I have said, it matters a great deal where we choose to place our awareness, because where we choose to place it often shapes reality. Are you overly negative? Gossipy? A skeptic? Are you always seeing the faults in others and yourself? Are you unable to suspend the trap of the one-dimensional literalist mind for the millisecond required for an experience of the ineffable hand of the Great Mystery shaping your life?

¹²⁸ We shape ourselves by the thoughts we hold in our minds. Modern allopathic medicine is just now beginning to catch up with the ancient traditions of shamanic energy medicine that have always worked from the premise that many physical diseases originate in the mind. The mind that is

contorted begins to contort the body. And the mind that is contorted begins to contort nature by destroying it.

¹²⁹ We also shape one another by our actions, by what we choose to say to one another as well as by what we do not say to one another.

¹³⁰ People of the Shapes, Children of the Mist

¹³¹ Celtic spirituality is a courageous path because it is about agreeing to be shaped by the powers of life. It takes courage (from the French *coeur*, "heart") to open oneself to life in such a deep and powerful way that we surrender to the life-affirming shaping powers of the universe. Ultimately, it takes trust.

¹³² There are many kinds of water people. There are ice people, such as the Inuit. There are rain people, such as some of the tribes of the Amazon, like the Jivaro. There are also river people and loch people. Many of the ancient Scandinavian tribes, such as the Norse and the Danes, for instance, are undoubtedly people of the sea, the Vikings traveling as far as North America and the Middle East.

¹³³ In contemplating my own ancestors, I have arrived at the conclusion that Celtic people are not only a people of the water but also, and even more so, we are the consummate children of the mist.

¹³⁴ Children of the mist is a term often used by Scottish historians to refer to a very specific Highland clan, namely the MacGregors. The MacGregors earned this appellation in part because they were victims of the expansion of the Clan Campbell, who ousted the MacGregors from their ancestral lands. After they became dispossessed of their lands, it is said that the MacGregors lived largely from raiding the lands of others, thus earning them an even more precarious position in the history of the Scottish Highlands.

¹³⁵ We learn from Highland oral tradition passed down into written history today that, under stress as an outlaw clan, in 1603 there was a significant battle between the MacGregors and a clan from the shores of Loch Lomond known as the Colquhouns. On a tree-lined field at Glen Fruin we are told that the battle was rather one-sided, with a vast majority of the Colquhoun men being slain. The MacGregor surname was then officially proscribed, making it illegal to bear it.

¹³⁶ Many members of the Clan MacGregor intentionally hid themselves within other clans for safety. Some MacGregors assumed other surnames, such as Grant, White, and Black, while some historians suggest that certain Scottish surnames, such as Greer, represent a process of Anglicizing the name for protection. Because this particular group of Scottish families was forced to live on the run, to hide and cloak themselves, they were eventually labeled with the appellation "children of the mist." In time this term came to be used to denote any of the clans or people who were caught in between, wandering homeless or on the run. Historical accounts speak of some of the MacEwens living such an existence when they became known in Scottish clan lore as a "broken" clan (a clan dispossessed of its hereditary lands and its chief).

¹³⁷ In the final analysis, the majority of Scottish Highlanders became children of the mist during the Highland Clearances of the latter half of the 1700s. It was during this time when many of the Highland chiefs turned their backs on their own clans because of economic conditions imposed by the British Crown, forcibly evicting, removing, and relocating many ancient families to Ireland, North America, or Australia. An ancient way of life came to an end during the Clearances, as well as

during the Irish Potato Famine, one hundred years after the Highland Clearances, when hundreds of thousands of Irish families were both starved and evicted from their homes by the British.

¹³⁸ These events ushered in an enormous Celtic diaspora, with hundreds of thousands of people forced onto ships bound for "some unknown shore." Many did not make it, either because of disease on the ships (resulting in the nickname "coffin ships") or because the ships never actually made it. During the Famine forty-nine ships, with hundreds of travelers, were lost at sea between 1847 and 1853 — a birth by water and a death by water.

¹³⁹ These displacements uprooted an ancient people from lands that they loved and from waters that they communed with, and exacted immense cultural soul wounds, the effects of which are still felt today, consciously and unconsciously. The spiritual legacy of the Celtic people runs backward through time, to the time of the saints and the Celtic-Christian Church, to the time of the druids, and with these forced relocations a severance from the land that held these memories took place. In the words of Elizabeth Sutherland, a Scottish writer from Ross: "The Gael has inherited a talent for poetry, a knowledge of natural lore, and an affinity with and deep respect for the physical world. This strong, abiding love for a countryside peopled with rock, wells and mountains all with personalities of their own was one of the reasons why the Gael suffered so deeply during the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century evictions."

¹⁴⁰ For many Americans it is a vast stretch of the imagination to contemplate cultures and people who have a history that goes back more than our country's mere 225 years. Nevertheless, the Celtic people, and the living descendants of these cultures today, actually hail from lineages that can be traced back at least six thousand years and probably much further when we consider the research into the Indo-European cultural tree, of which the Celtic cultures are but one branch. The people that we think of as the living descendants of the ancient Celts are the Irish, the Scots, the Manx, the Welsh, the Bretons, the Cornish, and certain groups of the Galician people of northwestern Spain, and yet it must be mentioned that there never was a unified or distinct "Celtic" people.

¹⁴¹ Celtic presence, traceable now through archaeological and linguistic sources, is now well documented in parts of Turkey, the steppes of Russia, northern Italy, the Swiss Alps, present-day Austria and Germany, as well as in Spain. Some scholars, and even Sarangerel, a shaman of the Buryat-Mongolian tradition, have said that the ancestors of certain branches of the Celts may have possibly originated with the Dilling people on the western edge of Lake Baikal, not far from the Sayan Mountains (in Asia south of Russia). Westerners are sometimes criticized for studying and practicing shamanism, and told that they are "stealing" traditions from tribal groups, when it may well be that many of us actually hail from a part of the world considered the cradle of shamanism.

¹⁴² Other interesting pieces begin to bubble to the surface as we peer through the mist of Celtic history. In contemplating a more far-reaching transpersonal history of the Celtic people we slowly realize that the wanderers among the ancient Celtic ancestors have consistently been in a process of entering into dialogue with others, experiencing a cross-fertilization of ideas and integrating those elements that fit with their sensibilities. Here are just a few points worthy of consideration:

¹⁴³ The bagpipes, stereotypically considered a Scottish instrument, actually originated in the Middle East, most probably in Syria or Egypt, and expressions of this ancient instrument are also used in Northumbria, Brittany, Ireland, England, and even in Galicia.

¹⁴⁴ The ancient Indo-European ancestors of the Celts experienced a cross-fertilization of ideas with the Brahmins of India, leading some to suggest that the pantheons of Hinduism may have influenced aspects of the pre-Christian pantheons of the old Irish tradition.

¹⁴⁵ As far-fetched as it may seem, some theorists and folklorists have suggested that Ireland may have experienced Buddhist missionaries at one point in its history.

¹⁴⁶ There is a ninth-century Celtic cross in Ireland that bears the Arabic inscription: "Bismillah, er-Rahman, er-Raheem," the first line of the Qur'an and a common prayer phrase in the mystical practices of the Sufis. For many, including Celtic musician Loreena McKennit, an ancient relationship between the mysticism of the Celts and the mysticism of the Sufis is not an outlandish thing to consider. One can easily hear echoes and strains of Middle Eastern musical note structures within Celtic music.

¹⁴⁷ The land we call Ireland today has not always been the indigenous home to the modern-day Irish; the land we call Scotland is an amalgam of different cultural influences such as Gaelic, Norse, Pictish, and Norman; and the entire Celtic world is dotted with standing stones (such as Callanish and Stonehenge) and burial cairns that are pre-Celtic in origin.

¹⁴⁸ The fact of the matter is the primal ancestors of the modern Irish (the Milesians) actually migrated from northwestern Spain, what is known today as Galicia, or what the Romans called Celt-Iberia. The Galician people are, in essence, the cousins to the Irish who stayed behind and kept their villages, while many of the Irish today are descendants of the immigrants who left present-day Spain and migrated to Ireland. A poignant celebration of these ancestral connections, a veritable "coming together of cousins," can be seen in the glorious recording project entitled *The Road to Santiago*, with the Chieftains and Galician piper Carlos Nuñez.

¹⁴⁹ Of course I am oversimplifying here, for there were pre-Celtic predecessors in all of the now-Celtic countries, and there were successive waves of cultural migration from continental Europe to these places over the course of many generations. The point here is to expand our affixed perceptions of history to encompass a wider view, a wider view of our ancestors, if you are of Celtic descent, as wanderers; a wider view of the Celtic people in particular as seekers; a wider view that affords us the understanding that, as children of the mist, we Celts have always been migrating. We are a wandering, searching people by nature.

¹⁵⁰ Sometimes this wandering was born of the spirit of exploration and voyaging, as in the case of Saint Brendan the Navigator, or Sir Henry Sinclair and members of Clan Gunn from Caithness, Scotland, who landed in the "New World" almost one hundred years before Christopher Columbus. At other times this wandering sprang forth from necessity, as in the case of the Highland Clearances and the Famine. In all cases, we have always been like the mist, slowly moving across the landscape, perpetually in-between and always seeking for that place we can call home. An ancient spirit drives the perpetual search of the Celtic soul. This ancient spirit is the spirit of longing.

¹⁵¹ The Shaping Power of the Elements

¹⁵² Many indigenous people believe that different cultures and tribes on the planet have been shaped by a particular element. There are "fire people" and "earth people." There are "people of the sand" and "people of the ice." Sometimes we hear this in the names for certain tribes. The Sami of Finland, Norway, and Sweden, for instance, are sometimes referred to as the "people of the sun and wind."

Likewise, certain Scottish clans in the Highlands and islands, such as the MacCodrums, originally from the isle of North Uist, are spoken of in the oral traditions as "people of the sea." The belief is that they are descendants of the union of a man and a selkie woman, a seal woman who could take human form.

¹⁵³ A unique perspective is offered to us in the teachings of the Dagara (West African) shaman, Malidoma Somé:

¹⁵⁴ Different cultures represent the profound influence of certain elements. Take Western culture, for instance. Western culture is a Fire culture. Its emphasis has been on fire-power. It is a culture that has harnessed fire in ways never seen before, and sometimes in very destructive ways. But a problem arises when a culture becomes imbalanced and does not have equal parts water, mineral and nature to balance out the fire. Witches, for instance, are Nature people in Dagara cosmology. The nature people preserve the knowledge of nature and teach the knowledge of nature. They are often the holders of the knowledge involving the healing power of plants. The time of the witch burnings in Europe and America represents the beginning of the imbalance in Western culture. It is the time when fire was used to overpower nature and it has been the same ever since.

¹⁵⁵ Celtic people, at their very core, are a water people. Within the various expressions of Celtic culture and spirituality there are hill people, shore people, and island people, but in each expression there is a deep and abiding orientation to the holiness of water. Something of the spirit of water has gotten right down into our soul, into our bones. Water has shaped us.

¹⁵⁶ The water of Celtic lands is a penetrating force, and its presence is felt in a number of ways. It has shaped not only the people but also the daily rhythm of life. The ebb and flow of tides, the coming in and moving out of strong storms, the presence of healing springs gurgling up from holy ground — all shape the lives of the water people. The water's edge is also a shaping feature for many Celtic people. Ireland, the Isle of Man, and the Inner and Outer Hebrides of Scotland are completely surrounded by water. The people of western Wales, Brittany, and Cornwall are people of the shore. We hear of the "bonny, bonny banks of Loch Lomond" and the shores of Nova Scotia, where Gaelic culture, music, and language survive today in full force.

¹⁵⁷ In the Scottish Highlands a number of places are forever shaped by the legacy of water. One such place is the area of Loch Awe and Ben Cruachan. Now converted into a power generator inside of the mountain for the Scottish Power Company, Ben Cruachan is the home of a powerful hag spirit known as Cailleach Bheur. As Highland oral traditions tell us, at the top of Ben Cruachan was once an ancient well of youth. Cailleach Bheur is the guardian of these waters. In addition to placing a capstone over the well to keep the water contained, it is said that she maintained her beauty by taking regular sacred ritual baths in its waters.

¹⁵⁸ One day Cailleach Bheur fell asleep on a long walk and forgot to replace the capstone. When she returned she discovered that throughout the night the waters had run from the well, flooding the lands below the mountain, thus creating Loch Awe, still there today. It is said that she then turned into a powerful hag. Even today Cailleach Bheur is considered a powerful old woman tutelary spirit. She is experienced in different ways by different people. Some have felt her atop Ben Nevis. Others report her presence in the mountains of the Glencoe Valley and near Ballachulish. Hillwalkers dare not tread on certain parts of Ben Cruachan for fear that the hag will let loose with thunderbolts and hail, for she is sometimes referred to as the "witch of storms."

¹⁵⁹ The late great F. Marian McNeill, author and Scottish folklorist, states: "Many a mountain has its Cailleach (hag). The Cailleach nan Cruachan, for example, dwelt on the summit of Ben Cruachan. 'When anything ruffles her temper, she gathers a handful of whirlwinds and descends in a tempest, steps across Loch Etive at a stride, lashing it into fury, and prevents all passage at Connel Ferry.'"

¹⁶⁰ Other features of Celtic lands hold the presence of water. Holy wells and healing springs dot the Celtic landscape and serve as a testament to the importance of water in the Celtic spiritual consciousness. Some of these wells and springs are still very active and worked with by Celtic pilgrims from all over the world. We leave offerings and prayer flags ("clooties") and sometimes even seek healing in the attributes of the waters. These places are alive with power, alive with presence, and something of this presence leaves an indelible mark on the soul of the visitor.

¹⁶¹ The fact that a pre-Christian Celtic form of baptism (water blessing, purification, and initiation) existed is intriguing. Even the name of this ancient druidic rite, *baisteadh geinnleidh*, which translates as "the rain wedge of protection," speaks of our most ancient relationship with the spirit of water.

¹⁶² Meditation: Communion with the Spirit of Water

¹⁶³ Place a small cloth on a table, perhaps a piece of tartan or some kind of altar cloth. It can be a cloth place mat, a hand towel, or piece of Irish lace. Whatever you have will work.

¹⁶⁴ Get a small bowl, preferably earthen or pottery, but, again, if all you have is a metal bowl or a glass bowl, use it. It does not need to be a big bowl, just large enough to put your hands in. When I travel I use a rather small earthen bowl made by my mother's hands. It is blue-gray, tan, and speckled and reminds me of the western view over the water, from the woods below Dunollie Castle, in Oban. You may also want to use a similar bowl that connects you to lineage or family.

¹⁶⁵ Fill the bowl about halfway with lukewarm water. It can be tap water from the sink, or it can be from a bottle of mountain spring water at room temperature. I have, on occasion, brought sacred waters back from Scotland to use. Do not overfill the bowl, leaving a few inches from the surface of the water to the top of the bowl.

¹⁶⁶ Now drizzle a bit of salt or sea salt into the water. Salt is a sustaining force, and in the medicine traditions of the Gaelic people it is frequently used to purify the home. In the old days each young couple moving into a new home would be given a "flitting box" or a "salt box" for such purposes. Salt is the power of life. It can be used as a shamanic tool for banishing negative energies or evil spirits. In this meditation our purpose is merely to acknowledge our ancient source in the salt tides of the sea.

¹⁶⁷ When you have added the salt to the water your bowl is ready to use.

¹⁶⁸ Take just a few moments to clear your mind. Hold your hands up in the Druidic Prayer Posture to simply set the space and acknowledge the influence of the sacred. Take three slow and deep breaths, letting go of any extraneous thoughts or concerns. See the three cauldrons filling up with life force, first in the belly, then in the heart, then in the head.

¹⁶⁹ Now, slowly place your hands into the bowl of water.

¹⁷⁰ Feel the water on your skin. Become aware of your heartbeat. Take another three deep breaths.

¹⁷¹ As you breathe, allow yourself, in your visioning eye, to envision the moon. Be aware that the saltwater that your hands are resting in is, in essence, the same basic makeup of the salt-water in the oceans and seas.

¹⁷² Take three more breaths.

¹⁷³ Be aware with every breath you inhale and exhale that a similar salt solution as the ocean percolates, traveling up and down our spines as we breathe. Just as the planet's surface is mostly water, we too are made up mostly of water. Be aware that the salt tides of the sea are pulled by the force of the moon, and that we too are affected by the powerful medicine of the moon.

¹⁷⁴ We do not stand outside the influence of the powers of the universe.

¹⁷⁵ Take three more breaths, filling each of your cauldrons.

¹⁷⁶ Allow yourself to remember when you, as a precious embryo within your mother, floated in a watery world of nourishment.

¹⁷⁷ Now feel the ties that connect you with water-filled places in the natural world that hold meaning for you. Perhaps you have a favorite stream, spring, or loch. Maybe you have been to a place like the Isle of Iona, and the water in your bowl facilitates a remembrance of a pleasant time you had. Perhaps your spirit longs for that most holy of places where the waves of the ocean collide with the shore.

¹⁷⁸ Slowly move your hands around inside the bowl, allowing your skin to inform you of all the various sensations connected with the water: the roughness of residual salt granules, the smoothness of water, the cool or warmth of it. You are not a stranger here.

¹⁷⁹ Take just a moment to contemplate:

¹⁸⁰ What does it mean to be a person of the water? How did my ancestors view water? What was their relationship to water? Are there places in my life where I need to call forth the flowing energy of water?

¹⁸¹ Now go pee and then drink two glasses of water. These are such common things we all do, yet these commonplace things can remind us, just like a morning shower or an evening ritual bath, that the spirit of water moves around and through us. We are the water.

¹⁸² Walking the Time Line of the Soul

¹⁸³ Essentially, these traditions hold that the soul is formed and fueled by the cauldron of warming (life force), located in the belly, the cauldron of vocation (calling), located in the heart or solar plexus, and the cauldron of knowledge (wisdom), located in the head. When these cauldrons are in alignment, it is as if all the necessary parts of a transistor radio are in attunement. It has "juice." It is a reliable conduit for the flowing energies of life. In this way, the cauldron of knowledge, the seat of spiritual health, the cauldron of vocation, the seat of psychic health, and the cauldron of warming, the very ground of our physical health, form a potent holistic weave that results in an orb of energy around the body.

¹⁸⁴ In the following practice I invite you to take some time to scan your soul. This practice, which I call Walking the Time Line of the Soul, will allow you to become aware of whether or not you have total access to your soul's energy. It is built around a traditional prayer posture known anciently in the Celtic world. The posture itself appears on a variety of Celtic artifacts, such as the well-known

Gundestrup cauldron. Considered widely to be of pre-Christian druidic origin, this posture was also used by Celtic-Christian monks in certain parts of Ireland for prayer practices. An integral part of the Celtic-Christian Rule of Tallaght, the posture was believed to invoke protection. For our purposes I will simply refer to it as the Druidic Prayer Posture.

¹⁸⁵ Trance postures such as this are a universal tradition, part of our shared heritage as humans. They are our inherited legacy of using the body as a direct means of altering consciousness. The Druidic Prayer Posture is simple. Raise your arms out to your sides to shoulder height, forming a T. Bend your elbows, palms facing forward, fingers pointing to the sky. Each of your arms will form something of an L shape out to your sides. This is a good posture for centering, for showing reverence to a tree or shrine, or even for greeting another person in a sacred manner. Traditionally, in the Rule of Tallaght of the old Celtic Church, the monks would assume this posture and would face each of the four directions, hinting at the druidic undercurrent within this Christian meditative practice.

¹⁸⁶ The Walking the Time Line of the Soul practice is also meant to help you become aware of your past. Before beginning the practice allow yourself to choose a direction that you associate with your past. In the Irish movie *The Secret of Roan Inish*, there is a scene in which the grandmother announces, "The past is in the west, the future is in the east." You may want to use this notion of the past dwelling in the west as a guiding template for this and other spiritual work. It speaks to the cyclical nature of all things as perceived of in the Celtic spiritual traditions.

¹⁸⁷ Finally, you may want to have someone read this practice to you, slowly, giving you a few extended moments for each phase of the process. You can also record your own voice on a tape if you prefer. Additionally, you may also want to listen to *Origins*, track 5, "The Face in the Fire," by Steve Roach (available from the Timeroom or www.steveroach.com) to accentuate this practice. I find that Steve Roach's music is particularly effective in facilitating the states of consciousness necessary for the inner work discussed in this book.

¹⁸⁸ Practice: Walking the Time Line of the Soul

¹⁸⁹ Stand upright, facing whatever direction you feel drawn to when thinking about your past.

¹⁹⁰ When you have selected the direction, take three breaths, with your hands hanging straight down at your sides, and face in that direction. Look into this direction and see your past floating off on a distant horizon. Take three more breaths and visualize the first breath as filling a cauldron in your belly. See your second breath as filling the cauldron in your heart. See the third breath filling the cauldron in your head.

¹⁹¹ Now assume the Druidic Prayer Posture.

¹⁹² Feel this posture fully, making note of how it feels. Hold this posture for a few moments as a simple means of showing reverence for the road you have walked in your life. When you are ready for the work of this exercise, simply turn and face in the opposite direction, the direction of your future.

¹⁹³ Take three more breaths, keeping your head and spine in comfortable alignment. Make note of how this posture opens your chest, opens your heart, and opens you to the universe. Now take three more breaths, and on the third exhalation slowly lower your arms to your sides again. You will not move from this position, so allow yourself to become anchored energetically.

¹⁹⁴ Now imagine a golden light descending on you from the heavens, while an emerald green light slowly ascends from the earth through your legs and up your spine. See these two energies meeting and blending, first in the area of your belly, then in the area of your heart, and then in the area of your head. Take three more deep and slow breaths.

¹⁹⁵ Take a moment to become aware of your soul. See all the way back in time to when you were an embryo, floating within the watery world of your mother's womb. See this time as existing along a time line that begins somewhere behind you. Standing with your back to your past, see your past as a field of energy and memory existing as a station in time that runs toward you in the form of a thin cord of light. Pay attention to any images or sensations that come to you as you remember your formative time in the womb.

¹⁹⁶ Now see the actual moment of your birth. Whether it was an easy birth or a hard one, you were brought into the world as one of the many holy shapes of life. The light that lights the world is a light inside you. See yourself as the newborn that you were and welcome yourself into the fold of this greening life of power and beauty.

¹⁹⁷ Slowly move yourself along the time line now. Move forward in your memory to the time when you finally mastered the art of walking. It has taken you a while on your pilgrimage from the way of crawling to the way of walking. Stand there for just a moment and feel what it is like to be up on your legs and feet for the first time. Take three more breaths.

¹⁹⁸ Now take a few moments to simply be aware of the thin cord of light that flows from your childhood self to who you are now as an adult. Take a few moments to shift your perspective. See your childhood self. Now see your adult self. Now shift back to your childhood self. Shift back to your adult self. Look at the space in between. What do you notice? Simply make note of it. Take three more breaths, filling the cauldron of your belly, the cauldron of your heart, the cauldron of your head.

¹⁹⁹ From the time of your childhood self to now you have encountered many things, met many people, and taken many developmental steps in your life. Some of these life experiences have been profoundly nourishing to your soul. Other experiences may not have been healthy for you, while some experiences may have been traumatic.

²⁰⁰ Allow your consciousness to slowly move forward on the time line from the time of your childhood, walking to your adult self now. As you slowly move forward, allow yourself to become aware of any points along the line where the thin cord of light may have been threatened. When you reach these points along the time line, simply bring awareness to them. You might choose to "see" your hands slowly "touching up" or reweaving the cord at these places that were a challenge to your soul. If you experience a charge of memory at different points along the time line, there is probably unfinished business there, issues or wounds that are incomplete and need resolution. Simply make note of this. It will be something to return to in time.

²⁰¹ When you have reached the present in the time line, take three more deep breaths, one breath filling the cauldron of your belly, one filling the cauldron of your heart, and one filling the cauldron of your head, and then turn around, facing the direction of your past. Scan backward along the time line.

²⁰² Allow yourself to become aware of whether you have full access to your soul's energy. Let your mind, your visioning eye, slowly discern whether a part of your soul may have been left somewhere along this time line that has been the road of your life. Become aware of the time in life when this soul part may have been hidden by your soul or perhaps even taken from you. It sometimes presents itself as a feeling of gaps in the line or pockets of memory that feel particularly stirred and need attention.

²⁰³ Send a conscious prayer or message to any soul parts that have been hidden that it is safe for them to return: Standing in the Druidic Prayer Posture, again with your arms raised upward, take three more breaths and seid (Scots Gaelic, "blow") outward, strongly on the last breath, sending out your breath with power as a way to seal this work. See this sealing breath in your visioning eye as a visible breath, as if you were blowing a column of mist, light, or fog to your missing soul parts. Blowing outward like this is a way of activating, consecrating, and sealing with sacred breath. You have made a Mist-Filled Path for your missing soul parts to use on their journey home to you.

²⁰⁴ In the next few weeks you may notice certain things coming to you. You may notice sensations and memories from the past. You may feel that you have more access to your energy than ever before. You may notice emotions such as grief, anger, or joy. You may feel profoundly enlivened. If strong emotions arise from this process, that's good. It means that the force of these emotions was already there, awaiting release. Release is cleansing and makes space in the interior world for healing. Note that you can reinitiate this process of calling the soul parts home whenever you feel the need.

²⁰⁵ Many people can experience spontaneous soul retrieval simply by extending energy to those exiled soul parts and inviting them back. However, depending on the circumstances under which a soul loss has occurred, it may be necessary to seek the counsel, guidance, and shamanic services of someone who can facilitate the soul-retrieval process with you. In other words, if you find that despite your efforts you are still haunted by a trauma in your life, or that you are lacking energy or find it impossible to concentrate, you may need a formal soul retrieval with a seasoned practitioner. Such an individual can be one who practices within a specific cultural tradition, such as Larry Peters, a Westerner authentically initiated as a Tibetan shaman, or someone who practices core-shamanism, such as Sandra Ingerman, author of *Soul Retrieval: Mending the Fragmented Self*.

²⁰⁶ People of the Shapes

²⁰⁷ I am certain that the water, the water of the seas and of the lakes and of mist and rain, has all but made the Irish after its image. — William Butler Yeats

²⁰⁸ I remember receiving a kernel of wisdom from my mother once when I was a little boy, living in Mississippi. I was in a rather foul mood one day. I looked at my shoes and said, "I don't like my shoes." A little while later I had made my sixth or seventh attempt to paint a picture and what my hand had created did not match my inner vision. I grew very frustrated and said, "I don't like this picture!" Not long after this I looked out of the window at the rain falling on the road and declared, "I don't like this day; it is too rainy!"

²⁰⁹ Very gently, my mother took my sour demeanor as an opportunity to assist me in shifting my perspective. She asked me, "Frank, what do you like?"

²¹⁰ I responded, "I like Mr. Green Jeans. I like my Lincoln Logs. I like Rocky (our beagle). I like you and Da."

²¹¹ "Very good. Now, what do you notice after saying all of the things you like?"

²¹² I pondered her question a moment and responded, "I feel better, Ma. I feel better," smiling, surprised at this interesting discovery.

²¹³ "Good. Try to remember this. If you pay attention to the things you like you will look for the good things instead of always looking out for something else you do not like."

²¹⁴ I went back to my painting, and I have preferred rainy days ever since.

²¹⁵ Great inventions have come about via our shaping powers. Financial ruin has taken place because of the influence of shaping. Whole countries and nations we never have imagined would change have fallen apart overnight, shifting irrevocably to new forms. These have been the product of lone individuals and collective groups, all in the process of shaping and being shaped.

²¹⁶ In addition to having the power to shape — both others and ourselves — we also have the power to be shaped. Though we may resist it, we are all shaped, whether we like it or not. Even in the act of resisting something, we are being shaped by it. We were shaped by our mother's womb and our father's seed. We have been shaped by language, by the media, and by the spirit of the times in which we were born. We have also been shaped by innumerable forces we will never fully comprehend. One of these forces is the actual building blocks of Creation: the elements.

The Sidhe and the Otherworld

¹ The Call to Ireland

² The phone was ringing as I came in from the rainy streets of Oxford. I dropped my bag and hurried to pick up. "Hello, John? This is Keith — Keith Harris. From Dublin. I think I've got something that might interest you." I ran through the address book in my head and came up with a match. Keith Harris was an archaeologist working for the Irish Heritage Board. His specific responsibility was ancient monuments. "Hello, Keith. Good to hear from you. What's up?" "It's a new site. Just west of Dungarrow. We've been digging there for the past year. Found a few interesting things. Thought you might like to come and do a piece on it."

³ I make a living from the study of ancient history and traditions, especially as these have to do with the native lands of Britain and Ireland. I have taught these things in Britain and the United States, and have written numerous books about them. This has led to some friendships with archaeologists who keep an open mind on such matters. Keith was one such, and more than once had brought me in to look at some intriguing sites. I thought hard, trying to remember anything I had heard about places in the area Keith had named. "It's good of you to think of me," I said at last. "What can you tell me about this place?" "Nothing right now. I'd rather wait till you get here." "Sounds mysterious." "Not really. I just don't want to commit myself till I'm sure. Are you interested?" "When would you want me to come out?" "No special rush. As soon as it's convenient." I looked at the calendar, which was, truth to tell, somewhat bare at the moment. The day was the 6th of July, 1998. "OK. I'll be there on Friday." "Great. I'll meet you at the airport. See you in three days."

⁴ He rang off and I put the phone down. An hour later, sitting at my desk, I found myself thinking about the call, wondering just what there was at this newly discovered site. A strange feeling came over me as I did so. It was a kind I had felt before. Some people would call it a "psychic prickle." I sometimes get it when I visit certain ancient sites. It is as though the people who had lived there once were trying to speak to me. Sometimes I even believed I heard voices, but generally I kept quiet about this for obvious reasons. I had a "name" as an expert on historical themes. Suggesting that I have psychic contact with people who have been dead for several hundred years is not a good idea in my line of work, and this has made me hesitate a good deal before publishing this account. But the "prickle" was there — like a cold finger across the nape of my neck. I knew then that something was going to happen in Ireland. I had no idea then just what an enormous and irrevocable change it was going to make to my life.

⁵ Three days later I got off the plane at Dublin airport and was met by Keith Harris. He shook my hand warmly. "Welcome to Ireland, John." Keith looked more like a farmer than an archaeologist. He was short and stockily built with a face reddened by days spent in the open. He was about sixty years of age but looked younger, his bright blue eyes still full of youthful enthusiasm. "Sorry about all the mystification," he said as we walked to his battered old car. "It's just that there's something about the site at Gortnasheen that's, well, different."

⁶ That was the first time I heard the name. Even then, before I had seen the place, I once again felt the "prickle" of a feeling I could not account for with any usual reason. I said nothing at the time, preferring to wait and allow events to unfold. After this one remark Keith studiously avoided the topic of his latest dig, preferring, as we drove out of the sprawl of Dublin and into the rich green land to the west, to confine himself to general topics such as what I had been doing since we had last met (at a very dull party honoring a very dull colleague, we decided) almost three years before. Of his own activities he spoke only of the excavations at other interesting sites currently being carried on.

⁷ The drive from Dublin to the site took a little over two hours. The landscape through which we traveled was mostly low lying, a richly undulating carpet of green. It had been grey and overcast when I arrived, but as we motored west the sky began to clear and soon a watery sun emerged. Keith commented on the fact that this was the first day it had stopped raining for nearly a week ("It's not made our work any easier!") then fell silent as we drove the last few miles to the small village of Dungarrow, the nearest habitation to the site of the dig. Once there, Keith checked me into the local pub and suggested we both get something to eat before going on to the site. I felt a sudden reluctance on his part, as though, having brought me this far, he was beginning to wonder if he had done the right thing. Over a plate of fish and chips and a pint of the best ale, I decided to tackle the subject head on. "Tell me about the site," I ventured. Keith took another sip of beer, then set the glass down on the table, perhaps just a bit too firmly. "If you don't mind, I'd rather not say anything until you've seen the place," he said at last. As he did so I thought his cheeks grew even redder than usual, and he was definitely reluctant to look at me. "Good grief, what have you got there, buried treasure?" I asked lightly. "What! No, nothing like that," Keith said. Finally, he did meet my eyes. "Look. I'm really sorry about all this. You must think I've lost it. It's just that...." he hesitated, then finished in a rush. "Well, it's a feeling, nothing I can really explain. I just don't want to feed in any preconceived ideas...."

⁸ It was on the tip of my tongue to say that all the mystery was doing just that, but I decided instead to keep silent. We finished our lunch without further discussion, then got back into Keith's car and drove away from the village, following the winding road until it became a track and, when even that petered out, a rutted field. Finally, when I thought that either my body or Keith's ancient vehicle was going to give up the ghost, we came to a stop. Keith sat for a moment before he turned off the engine. Then he turned to me, his face serious. "Look, I'm not at all sure why I brought you here," he blurted. "The truth is — and I know it's going to sound daft — I dreamed about you three nights in a row. I'd been trying to think of the best person to come and look at what we found here, and quite honestly your name wasn't on the list. But after those dreams I started to think about something you said to me ages ago — how some of these old sites seemed more alive than others. At the time I didn't really understand what you meant — in fact, I probably thought you were a bit mad. But there's something about this place ... well, you'll see for yourself in a moment..."

⁹ He trailed off, looking at me with more than a touch of desperation. "Let's go then," I said, opening my door, not wanting to commit myself to anything more. "You can tell me about the site as we go." I had already peered out of the window across the field and could see nothing. Keith produced two pairs of Wellington boots and we set off across the soft earth of the field. "Most of what we've found inside is neolithic, dating from around 2000 BC," said Keith, with evident relief to be talking about familiar territory. "But there's also later material, from about 200 BC, the time of the Celts. The current theory is that the site was in use for around eight hundred years after that. But it's definitely much older, at a guess I'd say as much as four thousand years." "So, we're looking at a Stone Age site? One that was used by the Celts some time after that?" Keith nodded. "The real question is, used for what?" he added. I stopped in mid stride. "You mean, you don't know?" It was such an odd statement from a leading archaeologist. Normally they were so full of ideas and opinions as to the purpose of any site they were working on. Keith hesitated before he answered. "It's not as simple as that. On the face of it it's a straightforward enough site. What concerns me are the differences from the norm. But look, here we are, I'll leave it to you to decide what you think."

¹⁰ We turned into another field, passing through a hedge. There before us was what looked like a scattered pile of boulders, ranging in size from massive to head sized. To the casual eye they appeared to be no more than that, but I had visited enough such sites to recognize the unmistakable signs of human construction. In fact the stones were not as scattered as they first appeared. Rather they seemed to erupt from the ground, in places still half buried, while others had fallen sideways out of what I now saw was a roughly oblong mound. As we walked around it, I saw the indications of the archaeological work that had been going on there: areas of turf stripped back, a long trench about two feet wide and six feet deep running off at right angles to the mound. Then we came round to what I knew to be the western end of the mound, and I saw that between two particularly massive stones was a low, oblong space opening into darkness. This was clearly the entrance. It had been roped off and a roughly written sign hung from the line. The sign read:

¹¹ PRIVATE PROPERTY KEEP OUT

¹² Keith stepped forward and lifted the rope out of the way. "What I want you to see is inside," he said. "You'll find a torch on the ledge just inside." As I stood in front of the entrance to the mound the feeling I had experienced twice before returned — only this time it was twice as strong. At that moment had a figure from any period of time but the present stepped out of the mound, I would not

have been at all surprised. The sense of timeless energy emanating from the dark hole was such that I actually thought I could not move at all. Then, just as suddenly as it had come, the feeling passed. Crouching down, I peered into the hole. A waft of cold air struck my face — something that might have struck me as odd if I had been thinking about it — normally such sites were not very deep or extensive underground and the chances of air being trapped inside were slight. But, I confess that I was not thinking about such things at all. I felt a rising tide of excitement as I inched forward into the darkness, feeling rough stone on all sides and fumbling for the ledge and the torch. I found them easily enough and in a moment the wide, golden beam of the torchlight stabbed through the darkness. It showed me a narrow passage, walled and roofed with huge stone slabs. Ahead lay a second opening, and once again I caught a whiff of cool damp air issuing from within. There was insufficient room to stand, and I was forced to crawl through into the chamber beyond.

¹³ Gortnasheen

¹⁴ In order for you to understand what happened next, what I saw and felt, I have to take a moment to say something about what I expected from such a place as this. Over a good part of Western Europe there are a large number of ancient megalithic sites. These date from Stone Age to Iron Age, that is, anything from around 4500 BC to 1500 BC and both earlier and later. They include the great stone circles or "henges" like Avebury and Stonehenge in Berkshire, or Brodgar in the Orkneys and Callanish in the Hebrides. In addition, there are the great hill figures like the Long Man of Wilmington in Sussex or the White Horse carved out of the chalk of the Marlborough Downs. There are also numberless grave sites, many dating from ancient times but reused in later ages — some for actual burial, others for ritual purposes. Thus, sites such as Waylands Smithy in Wiltshire, or the justly famous Newgrange in Ireland, despite being extensively excavated and written about, remain as mysterious to us today as they perhaps always were. Many of these places stand as silent testimony to astonishing feats of engineering, the moving of vast stones and the unerring accuracy with which they were sited. Often the sheer size and impenetrability of the mindset that built them makes them seem daunting. And, of course, they have prompted an equally bewildering number of theories that attempt to "explain" their use and function. Everything from landing markers for alien space craft to complex astronomical observatories have been put forward over the past few years, and though some of these ideas have found partial acceptance among the academic community, most have not. In effect, we know as little about the real uses of these vast monuments as we do about the workings of the large percentage of our brains that appear never to be used at all.

¹⁵ This, then, was the background I had in my mind as I entered the site at Gortnasheen. Keith would probably have termed it a "passage grave" and we could both have listed at least a hundred of these scattered throughout Ireland, Britain and Western Europe. I had been inside a good number of them over the years. I knew what to expect — nothing too dramatic. I knew what I would probably find: a small stone chamber, perhaps with a few carvings or graffiti left by later visitors, perhaps a few scattered bones. The person who carved them was widely acknowledged. This gives an idea of what I was expecting: a stone chamber of maybe six to eight feet long and two or three feet wide, perhaps a carving or two, maybe (depending on the stage of Keith's work) a few scattered bones.

¹⁶ I pushed myself forward down the narrow passage, half crawling, half stooping, until I found the floor sloping away. At the same time the ceiling rose sharply, until I was able to stand up. I swung the torch around and had my first surprise of the day. The chamber must have measured some ten feet in

length, and the roof was at least seven feet above me, allowing for the decline in the floor, which placed half the structure below ground level. Then, as I flashed the torch round, I had my second surprise — one of such magnitude that I gasped aloud. I have mentioned that there were often carvings found on the walls within such sites, but these are normally numbered in dozens. Here, wherever I looked, there were carvings covering the walls in a riot of spiraling, twisting designs, some interlinked, others standing alone. I must confess that I felt more than a little weak at the knees at that moment, and sat down rather more quickly than I had intended on the packed earth floor. From this vantage point I saw that the carvings continued right up into the roof where a corbelled dome, as fine as any piece of church architecture undertaken several millennia after this one had been created. Then, as I swung the torch, my attention was drawn to a single glyph, larger than the rest, which dominated the eastern end of the chamber. For a moment I thought it actually glowed, and then realized that it must have been lined with crystals, which caught and threw back the light. (This was true. Later examination showed that hundreds of tiny rock crystals had been embedded in the rock to emphasize the importance of the carving.) As I stared at the carving I felt again that strange prickling sensation — this time as strongly as I have ever felt it. I could not have said what it was, but the feeling remained nonetheless. I got up slowly and went across to examine the carving more closely. Slowly, I traced it with my fingers like someone reading braille. It was not an especially complex shape, a spiral of five coils with a perpendicular line extending from the uppermost outer edge through the centre and down below it. It seemed somehow familiar, and as I discovered later, it was one of several such glyphs that have been discovered at ancient sites in Ireland, Britain and (curiously) in the United States. I stood there for a few moments more, trying to assemble my scattered thoughts and pin down exactly what it was that had made me feel strange a moment before. But, try as I might, I could not recapture the feeling, and it was also borne in upon me that Keith was waiting outside to hear my reaction. Not without some reluctance, I crouched down and once again shuffled through the passageway. Outside the light seemed bright, though the day remained overcast. I found Keith hovering expectantly, his face an open question. "You're right," I said. "It's astonishing, unique even. I've seen almost nothing as fine as this for years." His face lit up at once and he began to talk faster than I had ever heard him. I don't remember exactly what it was he said — details of the discovery by a local man, his own excitement when he broke through the entrance and found what lay within, telling me that I must see the plans he had already made of the site. We made our way back to his car and drove the few miles back to Dungarrow. I think I was mostly silent as we went, and no matter how I tried, I could not forget what I had seen, especially the larger spiral carving that had glowed back at me as though lit with its own fire. I remember looking through Keith's detailed drawings, making all the right noises, asking all the right questions. But, in reality, I wanted to be on my own, to consider what I had seen without interruption. Finally, I decided to retire for the night.

¹⁷ That evening, I wrote no more than two or three sentences. My mind was elsewhere, thinking of everything I had ever read about sites of the kind I had just visited and especially of ancient glyphs like the one that had so deeply affected me. Eventually I went to bed, though I could not sleep at first, lying for what seemed ages in the darkness, staring at the ceiling. Eventually I did drift off, and it was some time after this that I had one of the most powerful and disturbing dreams of my life. Reading it back now, it seems bizarre, and I will not be at all surprised if most of the people who read this account will think the author mad. And yet the dream, strange though it was, is nothing to what was to follow. I dreamed that I was back under the mound of Gortnasheen, which seemed as if lit by

flickering candlelight. I stood before the glyph, which glowed as though lit from within, unable to tear my eyes from its shape. Then slowly I became aware of a figure, standing off to one side. At first it was only dim and shadowy, but slowly it took on a more solid appearance — as a tall man dressed in archaic clothing of brown and green. He had long hair bound loosely with a circlet of silver. He had fine, delicate features that would have seemed feminine but for the strength of the jaw and the intense black eyes that stared back at me from beneath arched brows. It was, by any terms, one of the most beautiful faces I had ever seen. "Who are you?" I heard myself ask. "My name is of no importance," he replied. "I have come to you as a representative of my people." "Who are your people?" "We are the Sidhe." (pronounced Shee) "The Sidhe?" "An ancient race in this land. It is many hundreds of years since I walked above the earth." "Why have you come?" "Because the time is right. Because I have things to say that should be heard by our people. Before it is too late." "I don't understand," I said. "You will," he replied. "Go to the chamber again. Look at the carving. I shall come to..." The dream dissolved before I could hear more.

¹⁸ I woke in bed and staring at the fading pattern of the glyph that seemed to have burned itself into my mind. I turned on the bedside light and looked at the clock. It was barely half past three and I had been asleep no more than two hours. The dream seemed so real that I could not get it out of my head. Finally, I took out my notebook and wrote down everything I could remember. The last words of my strange visitor, his injunction to go to the chamber and look at the carving again, made me uneasy, though I could not say why. In particular, the name he had spoken, the Sidhe, as being the race he represented, seemed familiar, though I could not remember exactly where I had heard it before. The whole episode seemed crazy. Indeed, looking at what I have written here, it still seems so. Yet everything that followed stems from this, from my first visit to Gortnasheen and the dream that night. The battered old notebook is in front of me now, with the description of the dream written in rather shaky handwriting. I still question it, as often as I question all that followed; but the need to write it is stronger, and the message seems as imperative to me now as when I first heard it. I lay down again and after a while drifted off into a sound and dreamless sleep. In the morning I reread what I had written and tried to dismiss the whole thing. But the truth was, taken together with the feelings I had experienced from the moment Keith Harris had phoned me, the visit to the mound at Gortnasheen, and then the dream, it all seemed somehow connected. In fact, the more I thought about the whole thing, the more certain I became that there was something in all this that I needed to fathom. I washed and dressed and went downstairs in search of breakfast. I found Keith already ensconced over a plate of bacon, eggs and tomato and after ordering the same, exchanged a few pleasantries. Finally, having exhausted the topic of the weather, we fell silent for a while. At last, Keith could stand it no longer. "And....?" "Well, I'm going to need to do a bit of reading and research before I can write about it." "But you will write something?" He seemed oddly disappointed, as though expecting me to say something else. "I think so. Tell me..." I added, for the sake of something to say, "Do you happen to know what the name of the site means?" "Gortnasheen? Well, a fair translation would be Place of the Fairies." "The fairies?" "Yes. You know, not those little tinselly-winged folk you read about in children's books — the real fairy race, the descendants of the Celtic gods. The Sidhe."

¹⁹ The word went through me like a hot knife, followed by a flood of images and thoughts. How could I have forgotten! I had read enough volumes of Celtic folklore and legend to know that Ireland was full of stories of the fairy people, who were nothing like the usual images invoked by the name. These fairies were tall and bright and powerful — very like gods indeed — and the old Gaelic name

for them was Sidhe. They were a far cry from the mischievous dancers in circles beloved of the Victorians. No Tinkerbells these folk, with their powerful magic and unforgettable beauty and nobility. I remembered they were said to wear shoes of bronze, and to possess vast treasure-houses stuffed with gold and jewels. Sometimes wandering people would accidentally stumble into one of their houses, which looked like mounds of earth on the outside but were huge and full of wonders within. And time stretched and slipped for such visitors, so that when they returned hundreds of years had passed, though to them it seemed only a few. Suddenly my dream made sense — or at least, a kind of crazy sense. My mouth must have been hanging open for a while, or maybe my silence worried him, because Keith interrupted the flow of thoughts by asking me if I was OK. "Oh. Yes," I said, "Just thinking." I made an effort to focus. "I'd like to go and take another look at the site. Maybe spend a bit of time there on my own. If that's OK?" "Of course," Keith said. He seemed relieved. "I have to go into Dublin this morning. Why don't I let you off at the site and pick you up later? You'll have at least a few hours." So it was agreed, and I went to gather my things.

²⁰ I watched him go and turned to look at the mound. What on earth was I doing here? Then I remembered the dream, and my strange visitor's injunction to me to return to the place. Well, I had done so. What would happen next I had no idea, but I knew that I had to go inside the mound if I wanted to find out. Crawling in through the narrow entranceway, I again found the torch set back in the niche. With it were two candles and a box of matches that I decided to take with me. Part of me, I now realize, was already determined to recreate the scene of my dream, right down to the flickering candlelight. Once inside I lit both candles and set them on the ground on either side of the (as I found I now thought of it) Great Glyph. Then I turned off the torch and sat in front of it, feeling faintly ridiculous. What happened next I am still unsure about, though in retrospect it is obvious enough. Perhaps I fell asleep. Perhaps I dreamed. But whatever the truth (and ultimately it remains unimportant), I found myself facing a shadowy figure that gradually became clearer until I looked again into the eyes of the figure from my dream. This time he seemed more solid somehow, as though my familiarity with his form gave it greater definition. I saw that his long hair had a silvery tinge to it — though his face was unlined. But to apportion an age in years to this being was and is meaningless. He was both old and young, ageless and timeless as all such messengers must be.

²¹ Neither then nor later did I feel any fear in his presence. This may seem strange, since most of us (myself included) are not used to talking with beings from another place. But from the first, the presence of my visitor and the dialogues I had with him seemed absolutely natural. I never once felt under any kind of threat. To the contrary, there was a great feeling of friendship and companionship that always issued from his presence. I make this response in answer to all who ask: how did you know you could trust this being?

²² "A flash of a smile split his serious face. 'That is what we hoped,' he said."

²³ "Who are you?" I asked. "I am one of the Sidhe, those whom you call the fairy race." "Are you real?" "That all depends on what you mean by real." "Can I touch you?" "If it will make it easier for you to believe in me." I reached out with my not altogether steady fingers and touched one slender hand where it rested at his waist. What did I feel? I still find it hard to relate. It was as though I touched something that was both present and not present, solid and yet not solid. His "flesh" — if flesh it was — seemed cool to the touch, and somehow insubstantial. Yet it was undoubtedly real, at least as I understood it. I saw what he meant by a consideration of "what I meant by real." This was

something wholly new to me. I had no criteria by which to measure it. I withdrew my hand, trying not to do so too quickly, struggling with my thoughts and impressions. When in doubt, I thought, ask a question. "Why have you chosen to speak to me?" "Because it is time to do so. Because you will listen. Because we have much to tell our race while you can still hear us." "Not many people can these days," I said. "That is true, and it makes what we have to tell you all the more urgent." "What shall I call you?" I asked. "Names are too powerful to be given so easily. I would not call you by our name, yet we are speaking, are we not?" I nodded. "Very well then, let us just say that I am of the Sidhe and you are of the human kind. That is sufficient to enable us to talk, is it not?" "Of course," I said. "But — how shall we do this?" "I suggest that I speak and you listen," replied my visitor, with a hint of a smile. "May I take notes?" "If you so desire."

²⁴ And so he began what was to be the first of many conversations — or perhaps monologues would be a better word, since I seldom spoke except to ask for clarifying questions. I seldom wrote down anything as I was too caught up in the words and thoughts that issued from the lips of my communicator. I simply forgot, entranced by the message from one world to another. But I seldom forgot what he said, and indeed found it easy to recall everything with a sharpness of memory that was quite foreign to me. Nor did it seem appropriate to record any of his words electronically. Indeed, I once tried to do so but without success. Though I murmured his words into the microphone somewhat like a translator, the tape that emerged was blank. At the end of that first encounter within the mound, I asked if we would continue our discussions, and if so, how. I knew that I could not always return to the site, the future of which was, as with all such excavations, uncertain. By way of answer my visitor from the Sidhe told me to take a tracing of the Glyph, and later to make a fair copy. Once I had done this, I need only fix it to a wall and sit before it in contemplation and he would be able to make contact with me. When it came to the writing of this book, and the possibility of its publication, I was for a time uncertain about reproducing the Glyph. But my communicator assured me that the more who saw it, the more there would be who might experience for themselves the power of the Sidhe. To this end I have included brief instructions at the end of this book to assist those who might feel moved to do so, to enter this strange and wonderful dialogue for themselves.

²⁵ In the weeks that followed I was in almost daily contact with the representative of the Sidhe. What follows is a record, largely from accounts written at high speed at the end of each conversation, beginning with that first time at Gortnasheen. I believe them to be largely accurate, though I may occasionally have used words that might convey a slightly different emphasis from that which my visitor actually used. What emerged still seems to me astonishing. It is my hope that others may find it as enlightening and inspiring as I have, even though they may never have the grace to hear the measured words of the Sidhe from the lips of one of their race.

²⁶ Beginnings

²⁷ "We are an ancient people. We were here long before our kind walked on this earth. We remember everything and have seen everything that took place here for many thousands of our years. We ourselves do not measure time as you do, so that for us time passes slowly. We do not speak of our origins to anyone not of our race; but it is certain that we emerged from the earth as you yourselves did, though much sooner in the history of the world."

²⁸ "For a long time we were alone, save for the creatures who shared the world with us. In that time we lived above the earth, under the sun and moon and stars, which we loved to look upon. We

dreamed and sang and told stories of the first days. We seldom mated and even less often gave birth, for we were and are a long lived people and our numbers remained constant for many hundreds of our years."

²⁹ "Then one day we became aware of the Newcomers, strange people who lived mostly in caves or holes scraped from the earth. They were large and slow of movement and wit, and, as we slowly learned, could be both savage and cruel. They hunted the great creatures with whom we shared the land, and on one occasion they hunted us — bringing the first death to our people in many ages."

³⁰ "At first our leaders were of a mind to drive them out, even to kill them (yes, we knew then, as now, how to wage the wars of your race, even to the stage of killing). But others spoke of moving from the places where these Newcomers dwelled into places where they would not come. And of erecting barriers they might not cross. This policy won, and so we began a pattern of hiding that has become second nature to us. Few of your race have seen us since that time, though we have continued to live side by side with humankind. We have watched you grow and seen that you have changed very little since the time of the Newcomers. Still you love to kill and drive each other out of places you believe to be yours. You have destroyed many places and many species have been driven to extinction or to its verge. And so we have hidden ourselves ever deeper and further away from you."

³¹ "To begin with we lived in the wildest places, far from the territory of the Newcomers. But gradually they hunted further and further and we were forced to withdraw ever deeper into the land. At last we went below the earth, making caverns for ourselves, lit by strange suns and moons. We became to you the people of the Hollow Hills, the Dwellers Beneath the Mounds, the Fairy people, the little Dark Ones, as you called us. But always we were the Sidhe."

³² "So seldom were we seen that we became part of your mythology. Things that you did not understand or could not fully see you banished to the dark corners of your minds, calling us bogies or bogeymen, making us into fearful things to frighten naughty children. But all the time we watched, we changed but little, and always we waited for a sign that you might change also, that you might be willing to see us, to speak with us."

³³ "Some of your wise men and women have spoken of us. Those who spoke of our existence have been laughed at and made to feel foolish, so that they tell silent. You should know that this will happen to you also. But, there are some who will listen, some who will hear what we have to say. Thus I have chosen to speak with you, believing that you will listen and that others will listen to you. Record all that I have to say and let others read it. Perhaps there will be time to change the course of our history and avert the disaster that is coming upon you."

³⁴ "I do not say these things in order to frighten you into belief. The world will go on anyway. The question is whether it does so with or without our kind. There are those among us who believe you should be allowed to perish, but others, myself among them, believe otherwise. We believe that a new era may be about to dawn, in which the people of the Sidhe will come forth again and be seen by all. If that is to happen, you must be prepared for it, and thus I speak to you of our history and the message we would bring to you all."

³⁵ Fragmentation and Reconnection

³⁶ "Once every part of your being was whole, each part related to the other, head to heart, heart to hand, hand to mind, mind to soul. But, as time passed, you have separated these things, these aspects of yourselves, into many small packages. Many now do not even acknowledge the presence of Spirit within everything, even within your own selves. Despite the evidence that is daily given to you, you still turn away from such things as trivial or of little use. Yet, the gift of Spirit is a great one, for it not only connects you to everything else, it connects you to yourselves."

³⁷ "How many of your kind are weary and listless? How many feel that they are spending their time fruitlessly and without reason? We see many thousands who daily give away the gift of life in order to acquire more and more possessions, without any real understanding of why they do so. They have become like machines, enacting the same movements every day without understanding or feeling. This is due in part to the loss of Spirit, this state of unconnectedness that you have created for yourselves."

³⁸ "Acknowledging the presence of Spirit does not require the kind of belief you are referring to. To those like ourselves who have been here longer than many, your systems of belief are all as one. Many of the teachers you most revere have spoken of these things, but they can still be seen as existing outside specific doctrines."

³⁹ "Spirit is that which animates everything. When you see a tree or a fish, or a bird, it has life. If you choose to see life as a series of reflexes, then of course you will not be able to perceive the actions of Spirit in all things. Yet it is this presence that tells us that a thing has life. It is not the ability to think, or even to create, those actions by which you set so great a store that defines what is alive. The humblest creature contributes to the whole, though it may never speak, or form a thought, or create anything other than more of its own kind. It has life. It possesses Spirit. In this it is no different from any one of our kind, or from any stone or tree or river. All possess life, and all possess Spirit. Life is Spirit, and Spirit is life. Surely this is simple enough to understand!"

⁴⁰ "You must seek to become reconnected to everything and to end the separation you have created for yourselves."

⁴¹ "The answer is too complex to give in a single moment. There are many things you can do to bring about a reconnection. Begin by noticing the world around you. Try truly looking. Try seeing past the surface of things to the level of Spirit."

⁴² "At the moment when you go out into nature you see only the surface of things. Trees, grass, water, plants. Yet the reality of these things is far greater. Once you knew this. You can discover it again if you truly wish. Next time you are outside look around you. Try to see beyond the surface into the true nature of the things you see. Though you may find it difficult to do so at first, in time you will begin to see more and more. If you continue long enough and deeply enough you will even begin to communicate with the spirit within the things you are observing. In truth you will cease to be observers at all and become part of the thing you are looking at."

⁴³ "This is what the ancient bards of this land meant when they spoke of having 'been' a thing. This was more than a poetic image, but a very real truth. To truly know a thing is to become one with it. Just as to become one with it is to truly know it."

⁴⁴ "When you do this you will begin to understand the true nature of things and your own relationship to them. Perhaps then, when plants and rocks and animals are no longer soulless things,

you will cease to treat them as such, cease to take them and use them as you have now for so many of your ages. If you are truly ready to enter a new era then you must discover how to make such changes to the way you view things. Only when you have done so will you be truly liberated from the narrow place in which you have put yourselves."

⁴⁵ "At present you are just as much prisoners as if you were truly locked up within stone walls. The walls of your prison are not ones that you can see with your eyes, but they can still be recognized. Once you have done that you can begin to deal with the way you have taken the first steps towards acknowledging the reality of our relationship to everything. Once that has happened then other realizations will follow. Remember, you are part of the divine whole. Only when you recognize this will you begin to move forward, and to become what you are destined to be."

⁴⁶ The Importance of Ancestors

⁴⁷ "There is another matter, not unconnected to this question that I would speak of. This concerns the importance of the ancestors in your lives and in your future. This may seem surprising to you, since for your kind the ancestors are in the past and have no influence on your lives beyond that of recollection and memory."

⁴⁸ "Yet the ancient people of these lands believed that the influence of the ancestors became stronger as time passed, and this is true now also. By ancestors I do not simply mean the fathers and mothers, or the grandparents of each individual. Rather I refer to the ancient wise ones who hold the memory of your race and kind, and much wisdom besides."

⁴⁹ "Think of it thus: that there is a great storehouse of ancestral knowledge that is available for you to access whenever it is needed. Much that I have told you is already known to your ancestors and could have been accessed at any time in the past ages. Not all the ancestors have known incarnation as you would understand it; rather they are present in the Otherworld as nodes of energy around which have grown a shell of wisdom and understanding generated by your living spiritual being."

⁵⁰ "If each and every one of your kind has learned something from the experience of incarnation then all of this knowledge has been stored in the essence of the ancestors. There is indeed much deep teaching regarding this subject, which I will speak of again, but for the moment let yourself become accustomed to the thought that there are those in the Otherworld to whom you have access simply by tuning in to the possibility of their presence."

⁵¹ "And, on the matter of your children, you might well place them in the care of their ancestral guardians."

⁵² "You mean, like guardian angels?" I asked.

⁵³ "Indeed, that would be as close as you could come to understanding this mystery at the moment. If each child is possessed of a guardian from among the ancestors — and let me say again that this does not need to be one of their own bloodline — then they will become more open to an understanding of the presence of Spirit in all things, and will be protected to some extent from the destructiveness of the age into which they are born."

⁵⁴ "For you also, whatever your age or generation, an understanding of the gifts offered to you by the ancestors is important. Think of them as channels for an ancient wisdom that transcends any specific belief or teaching. This is the most simple and yet the most profound wisdom of all. From them you

may learn much, and like we of the Sidhe they are part of a continuing movement towards reunification of Spirit in all."

⁵⁵ The Note of Perfection

⁵⁶ "There are many things of which I have already spoken: Inner stillness, greater attention to everything around you and within you. A sense of communion with the natural world and the ancient harmony of our selves. These are all a part of the way in which primal harmony can be restored."

⁵⁷ "You are used to thinking back to a period of great disharmony, of chaos, from which you believe all life emerged; but already there are those among you — scientists and thinkers — who are beginning to recognize the essential unity of all things. Once this is understood by more of your kind, a change will take place and you will begin to feel reconnected to the universe and to each other and to both the visible and invisible worlds around you. This will bring greater balance and a real sense of life that will banish the greyness and dullness you feel."

⁵⁸ "We never lost sight of this deep harmony of all living things, which are linked by the presence of Spirit in whatever way that may manifest. These things of which I speak are given to you in order that you may once again become aware of the true unity of all things of yourselves and the worlds around you, at things both seen with your eyes and things seen by your spirit."

⁵⁹ "What more clear indication of the way you have relegated spiritual matters to a level of disbelief or scorn than the response received by many of your greatest visionaries in recent times. Even now, when the world around you teems with energy and when more and more of your race are enabled to see these things with the eyes of the Spirit, there is constant mockery of such things. Be aware that you, too, will receive such a response if you choose to share these words with others. But if only a few listen and understand what we are saying, that will have justified this communication. Whether this will be enough to bring about the change we hope to see is another matter. But we are hopeful."

⁶⁰ "Each day you should spend time considering your own note, the sound that would represent you if all things were seen as music. When you can utter that note perfectly, then you yourself will be perfect. It does not matter if at first the note sounds crude or even dissonant — in time it will change and you will hear the sound as it was meant to be heard. When all beings utter their note perfectly, then all of creation will once again be perfect."

⁶¹ "This is the second of the teachings we would offer you."

⁶² On Love

⁶³ "Certainly, it is true that our species have intermingled from time to time. In part this is because both our species are subject to the same kind of laws that result in a meeting of kind with kind. We, too, know the pangs of love and have been drawn to your species on occasion. We believe very strongly that one of the reasons for our existence here in this place is to learn about love, which we believe is a very misunderstood feeling. It is very needful that we learn to love wholeheartedly, both as individuals and as a race."

⁶⁴ "We have seen so much hatred in your world, so much suffering caused by misguided affection or the denial of love. Yet we have been judged by you to be passionless, cold, reserved. This is far from the truth. Many of my people have shared love for ages without stinting. Among humankind it seems that love has become so fragmented into so many different channels that it has become weakened. You spoke of a contact and that indeed is one of the central aspects of love. It establishes a bond that

is deeper than words, a bond that should endure and be honored despite the tests that it must undergo."

⁶⁵ "Do not think that because we are of another kind we do not experience these things in ways very much the same as you. The purpose of love is to transcend the nature of human or Sidhe, to enable us to restore the damaged fibers of creation by presenting a harmonious image before the rest of creation."

⁶⁶ "This is one of the things I referred to when I said that it was believed by many among us that there is a time coming when there will be greater communication between our two races. This may well be one of the means by which certain aspects of the disharmony within creation will be healed."

⁶⁷ The Great Glyph

⁶⁸ It was made clear to me from the start that the use of the Great Glyph was not for me alone. Others could use it and were to be encouraged to do so. As with the rest of the Sidhe material, I was hesitant at first regarding the validity of offering this method of communication to the world. But again and again, my communicator assured me that no harm would come to those who used it, while knowledge of the kind I had myself received would be offered to those who sought such gifts with a true desire for self-fulfillment.

⁶⁹ "To those who approach these matters simply from idle curiosity or with uncertain motives, nothing will come of their use of the Glyph," my communicator stated when I asked about this.

⁷⁰ Here, then, appears the Glyph exactly as I copied it from the chamber of Gortnasheen (redrawn for this book). It is suggested that you photocopy it or cut out the one on the page, perhaps blowing it up if necessary, and pin it to a wall where you can see it easily from a comfortable chair. If you desire you might light two candles, placing one on either side of the picture. Then, seating yourself in your chair, study the Glyph for a while, allowing it to sink into your mind while stilling your thoughts. When you feel ready and sufficiently relaxed, close your eyes and follow wherever the Glyph leads. This may take a few attempts before you get anything, but persevere, especially if you are unused to meditation. It is a good idea to have a pen and paper ready to write down anything that comes to you. It is also worthwhile stating here that whatever you see or hear may bear little resemblance to my own communications. My understanding of the Sidhe's words give me to believe that each and every person perceives and understands things differently. So, if you find yourself speaking to a being who looks and sounds different from the being described by me, don't think this is an indication of failure. Keep working with the images that arise and follow where they lead.

⁷¹ Opening to Awareness

⁷² So much of what my visitor had to say was concerned with new ways of looking, of really seeing. Implicit is the understanding that if we take the trouble to look past the surface of things, we shall see a great deal more. Such, at least, was my own experience when walking in a London park. Among the many statements, not really exercises in themselves, that my visitor made to me, the one that follows seems a perfect introduction to the second exercise.

⁷³ "At the moment when you go out into nature, you see only the surface of things. Trees, grass, water, plants. Yet the reality of these things is far greater. Once you knew this. You can discover it again if you truly wish. Next time you are outside, look around you. Try to see beyond the surface into the true nature of the things before you. Though you may find it difficult to do so at first, in time

you will begin to see more and more. If you continue long enough and deeply enough you will even begin to communicate with the spirit within the things you are observing. In truth, you will cease to be observers at all, and become part of the thing you are looking at."

⁷⁴ "Begin by making yourself as calm and still as possible, then imagine that you are unwrapping layers of understanding that are no longer of use to you — slowly become aware of your eyes, of what they truly see. Try to focus upon things — begin with the natural world. Try to see beyond the surface of the earth and be aware of what is happening there. Give some time to this every day for a period of your weeks — perhaps six or eight. At the end of this time you will have begun to accustom your thoughts to operating in this way. After some time, the process will become second nature to you and you will see more with each day that passes."

⁷⁵ Paying Attention

⁷⁶ There is no doubt that everything my visitor from the Sidhe had to say related in one way or another to observing and attending to the world around us. In this third instruction — hardly an exercise so much as an instruction to see everything in a particular way — this theme, when I followed it, came to the forefront and brought with it a deep sense of belonging to the universe.

⁷⁷ "Pay attention to everything around you: to the flight of birds, the movement of clouds, and the dance of leaves in the air. Listen to the song of the wind, the murmur of the river, the sounds made by insects in the grass, bees on the wing, the chatter of crows and the barking of dogs. Wherever you are and wherever you go, listen and look — and remember. For in these things lies the pattern of all creation, of which you are a part. When you can hear the sound of a butterfly opening its wings, then you can hear the sounds of your own immortal being."

⁷⁸ Dream Journeys

⁷⁹ The Sidhe several times spoke of the need for us to train our minds to enter states of being in which we could see more clearly. One of these was what he called, "Dreaming Awake," in which the sleeper (or maybe the day-dreamer?) programmed himself or herself to visit a certain place. The accompanying image of the cave is one that I have already found to be extremely powerful, as described in the preceding chapters.

⁸⁰ "When you prepare yourself for sleep, imagine for a moment that you are in a great cavern, larger than that at the place where we first met, and that there are many exits from this place. All is lit with gentle light that illumines everything so that there are no shadows. Choose one of the exits from the cavern and follow the passageway beyond wherever it leads as you sink into sleep. In many instances, you will see glyphs carved at the entrance to these tunnels — they are intended as pointers of where you may choose to go and indicators of the place to which each tunnel may lead. We have used these ways for many ages to begin our own journeys."

⁸¹ Companions on the Journey

⁸² The final exercise given to me by the Sidhe seemed, in its own way, to hold out a promise of more discoveries. If, as my visitor has said, there are truly others out there who are willing to help us on our own journey, then an exciting future lies before us.

⁸³ "Sit down and begin to attune yourself to the Web, either by way of the Glyph or by whatever method of inner attunement you are used to. Soon you will become aware that there are those present who are not quite within sight but who wish to become manifest. They can only do so through the

shifting of your consciousness in the way that I have already spoken to you about. As your awareness shifts, so the beings will become more solid seeming (though in fact they are like air to you, which has taken form as have I for a brief time)."

⁸⁴ "Sometimes they may appear like animals, at others like beings you consider to be mythical. But you will recognize them from their intent, which will be felt in your consciousness like a gentle heat that passes between you. These beings mean only good towards you, and may not lie if asked their purpose. With them you may travel to many places within the Otherworld, which is, as you measure space, almost without limit. Once you are aware of these beings you may begin the process of exploring — as your nature will dictate to you — and in uncovering more of the hidden links between ourselves and the Web."

⁸⁵ Each of these six exercises has a great deal to offer, especially if followed for a period of several weeks. Slowly and steadily, you will begin to feel changes within you. Of one thing I am certain: the world will become a very different place to you as the mysterious and beautiful teachings of the Sidhe are revealed.

The Six Exercises

¹ Exercise 1: The Great Glyph

² Pin the Glyph to a wall where you can see it easily from a comfortable chair. If you desire, light two candles, placing one on either side of the picture. Then, seating yourself in your chair, study the Glyph for a while, allowing it to sink into your mind while stilling your thoughts. When you feel ready and sufficiently relaxed, close your eyes and follow wherever the Glyph leads. This may take a few attempts before you get anything, but persevere, especially if you are unused to meditation. It is a good idea to have a pen and paper ready to write down anything that comes to you.

³ Whatever you see or hear may bear little resemblance to another person's communications. Each and every person perceives and understands things differently. If you find yourself speaking to a being who looks and sounds different from the being described by another, do not think this is an indication of failure. Keep working with the images that arise and follow where they lead.

⁴ Exercise 2: Opening to Awareness

⁵ Begin by making yourself as calm and still as possible, then imagine that you are unwrapping layers of understanding that are no longer of use to you — slowly become aware of your eyes, of what they truly see. Try to focus upon things — begin with the natural world. Try to see beyond the surface of the earth and be aware of what is happening there. Give some time to this every day for a period of your weeks — perhaps six or eight. At the end of this time you will have begun to accustom your thoughts to operating in this way. After some time, the process will become second nature to you and you will see more with each day that passes.

⁶ Exercise 3: Paying Attention

⁷ Pay attention to everything around you: to the flight of birds, the movement of clouds, and the dance of leaves in the air. Listen to the song of the wind, the murmur of the river, the sounds made by insects in the grass, bees on the wing, the chatter of crows and the barking of dogs. Wherever you are and wherever you go, listen and look — and remember. For in these things lies the pattern of all

creation, of which you are a part. When you can hear the sound of a butterfly opening its wings, then you can hear the sounds of your own immortal being.

⁸ Exercise 4: Dream Journeys

⁹ When you prepare yourself for sleep, imagine for a moment that you are in a great cavern, larger than that at the place where we first met, and that there are many exits from this place. All is lit with gentle light that illumines everything so that there are no shadows. Choose one of the exits from the cavern and follow the passageway beyond wherever it leads as you sink into sleep. In many instances, you will see glyphs carved at the entrance to these tunnels — they are intended as pointers of where you may choose to go and indicators of the place to which each tunnel may lead. We have used these ways for many ages to begin our own journeys.

¹⁰ Exercise 5: The Note of Perfection

¹¹ Each day you should spend time considering your own note, the sound that would represent you if all things were seen as music. When you can utter that note perfectly, then you yourself will be perfect. It does not matter if at first the note sounds crude or even dissonant — in time it will change and you will hear the sound as it was meant to be heard. When all beings utter their note perfectly, then all of creation will once again be perfect.

¹² Exercise 6: Companions on the Journey

¹³ Sit down and begin to attune yourself to the Web, either by way of the Glyph or by whatever method of inner attunement you are used to. Soon you will become aware that there are those present who are not quite within sight but who wish to become manifest. They can only do so through the shifting of your consciousness in the way that has been described. As your awareness shifts, so the beings will become more solid seeming (though in fact they are like air to you, which has taken form for a brief time).

¹⁴ Sometimes they may appear like animals, at others like beings you consider to be mythical. But you will recognize them from their intent, which will be felt in your consciousness like a gentle heat that passes between you. These beings mean only good towards you, and may not lie if asked their purpose. With them you may travel to many places within the Otherworld, which is, as you measure space, almost without limit. Once you are aware of these beings you may begin the process of exploring — as your nature will dictate to you — and in uncovering more of the hidden links between ourselves and the Web.

Closing: Speak Slowly, Think Swiftly, Act Wisely

¹ And always follow the older bard's injunction to the young student: Speak slowly, think swiftly, act wisely.

² May the road always rise to meet you, May the wind be always at your back, May the sun shine warm upon your face, May the rain fall soft upon your back, And until we meet again, May the Good Lord hold you soft in the hollow of His hand.