

ANAM CARA

Anam Cara is a phrase that refers to the Celtic concept of the "soul friend" in religion and spirituality.

The term was popularized by Irish author John O'Donohue in his 1997 book *Anam Ćara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*¹ about Celtic spirituality. *Anam* is the Gaelic word for soul and *cara* is the word for friend. In the Celtic tradition "soul friends" are considered an essential and integral part of spiritual development, and there is a beautiful understanding of love and friendship.

In the early Celtic church, a person who acted as a teacher, companion, or spiritual guide was called an anam cara. Someone you trusted to reveal the hidden intimacies of your life. With the anam cara you could share your innermost self, your mind and your heart. This friendship was an act of recognition and belonging. When you had an anam cara, your friendship cut across all convention, morality, and category. You were joined in an ancient and eternal way with the "friend of your soul."

O'Donohue wrote, "If you send out goodness from yourself, or if you share that which is happy or good within you, it will all come back to you multiplied 10,000 times. In the kingdom of love there is no competition; there is no possessiveness or control. The more love you give away, the more love you will have."

He continued, "In this love, you are understood as you are without mask or pretension. The superficial and functional lies and half-truths of social acquaintance fall away, you can be as you really are. Love allows understanding to dawn, and understanding is precious. Where you are understood, you are at home. Understanding nourishes belonging. When you really feel understood, you feel free to release yourself into the trust and shelter of the other person's soul... This art of love discloses the special and sacred identity of the other person. Love is the only light that can truly read the secret signature of the other person's individuality and soul. Love alone is literate in the world of origin; it can decipher identity and destiny."

¹ O'Donohue, John. *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*. HarperCollins, 1998. Amazon link: <https://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/006092943X>