



# TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

June 2021

## Care of the Soul



### Introduction to the Theme

*Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland*

Spirit & Soul. Energy & Essence. In Hebrew, the word *ruach* means “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit.” The fact of our breathing is evidence that we are alive. The Hebrew word *nephesh* means “soul” or “living being.” Some say that the spirit is what we have and the soul is what we are. These two along with mind and heart, are “ingredients” that make us uniquely human.

I cannot make pie crust. The simple ingredients simply do not coalesce as required to actually assume a coherent, pie-like shape under the rolling pin. None-the-less, I did learn how to make bread. It wasn’t easy and, in the end the recipes failed me, but I learned how. The problem for me was always how much

flour to use, which depended on the flour and humidity and other things over which I had no control. Measuring the amount of flour that I was supposed to use was a necessary place to begin. In the end, however, it became for me both a matter of feel as I kneaded the dough and what the surface of the dough looked like after some serious kneading.

Following a recipe, we can make a loaf of bread. But there are other recipes that are even more important. One recipe is how we become human, not by the fact of our birth, but by the fact of how



we grow. A recipe I have in mind is by Roger Bertschausen, the former minister of the Unitarian Universalist congregation in

Appleton, Wisconsin. Roger’s recipe explains his belief about God, but it also culminates in his humanity. He writes,

*(Continued on page 6)*

### Care of the Soul & Deepening Connections

The care of the soul is important work. It is at the heart of self-care. Without it, we are diminished in many ways. M. Scott Peck wrote, “Life is difficult,” and love is “The will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.” The care of the soul is also self-love, not as narcissism but as a means to greater empathy. In this regard then, care of the soul is a means of both deepening connections and caring for community. Thomas Moore writes, “Just as the mind digests ideas and produces intelligence, the soul feeds on life and digests it, creating wisdom and character out of experience.” This wisdom and character is crucial for deepening connections.

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## Wisdom Story

### Becoming Real

*Margery Williams*

The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it.



“What is REAL?” asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Deepening Connections

## Real Dosen't Hurt

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**  
and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"I suppose *you* are real?" said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse might be sensitive. But the Skin Horse only smiled.

"The Boy's Uncle made me Real," he said. "That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."



Source: <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/williams/rabbit/rabbit.html>

## Mapping the Soul

### Care of Souls

David Benner

...The spirituality that has been associated with the rise of interest in the soul ...is also a reaction against religion.... For many of those who are interested in the recovery of the spiritual, the last place they would look to find guidance in this quest would be the church.

...The inner life of persons that is part of the domain of the soul is the meeting point of the psychological and the spiritual. This means that soul care which draws on ...the best insights of modern therapeutic psychology as well as the pre-modern understandings and practices of ...the care ...of persons will never again ...accept the artificial distinction of the psychological and spiritual. A proper understanding of the soul reunites the psychological and the spiritual ...in such a way that ...care touches the deepest levels of people's inner lives.

...It is important to recognize that the nature of the soul defies precise cartography. If maps of the soul eliminate mystery, they also eliminate the soul. We ...need to be prepared, therefore, for definitions that may seem vague and boundaries that appear hazy. As we shall discover, spirit and mystery are closely connected. While not everything that is mysterious is spiritual, the genuinely spiritual always retains an element of mystery. Maps of the soul should not, therefore, be expected to eliminate the mystery that is inevitably a part of the psychospiritual nature of persons.



Our journey toward an understanding of the soul and its care will begin with an exploration of the inner world of persons.

Source: <http://www.drdauidgbenner.ca/care-of-souls/>

## Shell Shaped Soul

### Each Soul a Shell

Mark Nepo

My own time on earth has led me to believe in two powerful instruments that turn experience into love: holding and listening.

...When holding a shell to your ear, you can hear the ocean... [but] you actually hear your own pulsations, the ocean of your blood being played back to you. Yet this fact does not diminish this mystery. It only enhances it. For holding a shell to our ear teaches us how to hear the Whole through the part, and how to find the Universe within us.



...Amazingly, each being has the story of the Universe encoded within them. Each soul is a shell shaped by the currents of the deep. ...Whatever is held and listened to will show us where it lives in the world and in us.

...Fearful and selfish people cut the cord to those who are broken, not wanting to sit with a friend who can't find tomorrow, not wanting to be saddled with someone who will slow them down, not wanting to face what is broken in themselves. In this lies the challenge of compassion. For when we dare to hold those forced to the ground, dare to hold them close, the truth of holding and listening sings and we are carried into the wisdom of broken bones and how things heal.

...The work of love is tending to small things completely. Such tending opens the mystery. By the large-heartedness of our smallest attention, we enter the ocean of love that carries us all.

Simply and profoundly, the work of love is to love. For in that act, the Universe comes alive.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2265>



# Readings from the Common Bowl



**Day 1:** "Food for the body is not enough. There must be food for the soul."  
Dorothy Day

**Day 2:** "The soul should always stand ajar, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience."  
Emily Dickinson

**Day 3:** "The human soul has still greater need of the ideal than of the real. It is by the real that we exist; it is by the ideal that we live."  
Victor Hugo

**Day 4:** "Memory is the personal journalism of the soul."  
Richard Schickel

**Day 5:** "A genuine odyssey is not about piling up experiences. It is a deeply felt, risky, unpredictable tour of the soul."  
Thomas Moore

**Day 6:** "The human soul is hungry for beauty; we seek it everywhere—in landscape, music, art, clothes, furniture, gardening, companionship, love, religion, and in ourselves."  
John O'Donohue

**Day 7:** "There is an eternal landscape, a geography of the soul; we search for its outlines all our lives."  
Josephine Hart

**Day 8:** "The most powerful weapon on earth is the human soul on fire."  
Ferdinand Foch

**Day 9:** "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul—and sings the tunes without the words—and never stops at all."  
Emily Dickinson

**Day 10:** "To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul."  
Simone Weil

**Day 11:** "Re-examine all that you have been told... dismiss that which insults your soul."  
Walt Whitman

**Day 12:** "I've redefined success as 'fulfilling your soul's purpose.'"  
Jack Canfield

**Day 13:** "It's true about the eyes being the

window to the soul. Your face can be etched with worry, and twisted by ageing, but the eyes tell the true story of who you are."  
Naomie Harris

**Day 14:** "The soul is partly in time and partly in eternity. We might remember the part that resides in eternity when we feel despair over the part that is in life."  
Thomas Moore

**Day 15:** "You have to grow from the inside out. None can teach you; none can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but your own soul."  
Swami Vivekananda

**Day 16:** "Since love grows within you, so beauty grows. For love is the beauty of the soul."  
Saint Augustine

**Day 17:** "It may help us, in those times of trouble, to remember that love is not only about relationship, it is also an affair of the soul."  
Thomas Moore

**Day 18:** "I trust that when people meet,

we meet for a transcendent reason, and that the challenges we face in life are always lessons that serve our soul's growth."  
Marianne Williamson

**Day 19:** "Begin to see yourself as a soul with a body rather than a body with a soul."  
Wayne Dyer

**Day 20:** "Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes."  
Walt Whitman

**Day 21:** "Find out who you are and be that person. That's what your soul was put on this Earth to be. Find that truth, live that truth and everything else will come."  
Ellen DeGeneres

**Day 22:** "...to the soul, the most minute details and the most ordinary activities, carried out with mindfulness and art, have an effect far beyond their apparent insignificance."  
Thomas Moore

**Day 23:** "Age wrinkles the body. Quitting wrinkles the soul."  
Douglas MacArthur

**Day 24:** "The wilderness is healing, a therapy for the soul."  
Nicholas Kristof

**Day 25:** "The soul is stronger than its surroundings."  
William James

**Day 26:** "I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope, For hope would be hope for the wrong thing."  
T. S. Eliot

**Day 27:** "For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?"  
Jesus

**Day 28:** "...you cannot have an impactful life with an impoverished soul."  
John Ortberg

**Day 29:** "How many times do we lose an occasion for soul work by leaping ahead to final solutions without pausing to savor the undertones? ...thus, we lose opportunities to know ourselves for our motives and our secrets."  
Thomas Moore

**Day 30:** "Beauty awakens the soul to act."  
Dante Alighieri

**Day 31:** "Here's the deal. The human soul doesn't want to be advised or fixed or saved. It simply wants to be witnessed — to be seen, heard and companioned exactly as it is. ...As Mary Oliver has written, 'This is the first, the wildest and the wisest thing I know: that the soul exists and is built entirely out of attentiveness.'"  
Parker Palmer





## Care of the Soul

Rev. Wayne Arnason

...The soul is a messy thing for Unitarian Universalists. We are burdened by whatever childhood definitions or images of soul we have had imposed upon us or picked up by osmosis. We are handicapped by a vacuum of contemporary reflection on the soul by any scholars, theologians, or scientists that we trust, precisely because the word itself carries so much baggage. We are intimidated by the possibility that we will be greeted by other Unitarian Universalists with the chilly reception I received ...when I dared to suggest in my paper on *Science and Religion* that the soul might be an idea worth considering.

The burden of childhood definition we carry when it comes to the word "soul" is in the speculation about whether there is a material entity that is the essence of life.

...Some believers in the soul aren't interested in proving that a soul has a material existence. They may in fact believe that the soul is a non-material entity that does exist, and that leaves the body upon death and goes on to heaven or hell.

Some believers in the soul aren't sure about the heaven or hell part, and don't want to restrict the soul to humans or even to conscious beings. They see the soul as the life spark that comes from God and animates all of life—and of course, some people don't believe in the soul at all, except as a superstition or a metaphor from literature and poetry. It is to poetry that we will often first turn in any meditation towards a common understanding of the soul. Mary Oliver captures all the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in the word "soul" in



her poem *Some Questions You Might Ask*. [She wrote,] Is the soul solid, like iron? / Or is it tender and breakable, like / the wings of a moth in

the beak of an owl? / Who has it, and who doesn't? / ...One question leads to another. ..."

These [questions] ...touch us and stir our sense of mystery. They remind us how little we know of the world that is around us. Perhaps it is all right that there are some things about which we know little but a name. The Sufis tell a tale about a man who had married a wife much younger than him. One day, his most faithful servant approached him and said: "Your new wife is acting suspi-

ciously. She has brought a huge chest that once belonged to your grandmother into her room. It once contained only a few embroideries, but I believe there may well be much more inside it today than that. She has sent me away and forbidden me to look inside it."

The man went to his wife's room, and found her sitting beside the chest. "Will you show me what is in this?" he asked.

"Because of your servant's suspicions, or because you do not trust me?" she replied.

"Wouldn't it be easier to just open it without thinking about all these undertones?" her husband asked.

"I do not think that is possible."

"Give me the key," he said. She held it up. "Dismiss your servant and I will give it to you," she demanded.

The servant was dismissed, and the woman handed over the key to her husband. Then she, too, left the room, obviously troubled.

The old man thought about the chest for a long time. Then he called four gardeners from his estate. Together, they carried the chest, unopened, to a distant part of the grounds, and they buried it. The matter was never referred to again.

Perhaps our conversation about the soul should be like that. Why speculate about something that can't be proven, and even if, somehow, we could obtain the key to the box of knowledge that would tell us everything about the soul, maybe it would be better to just leave it buried and unopened.

...[The] book, *Care of the Soul*, by a former Catholic monk and current psychotherapist named Thomas Moore ...encouraged me to dig up my soul box once again and look inside.

... "Soul is not a thing," says Moore, "but a quality or dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart, and personal substance. I do not use the word here as an object of religious belief or as something to do with immortality...."

...He goes on: "Care of the soul begins with observance of how the soul manifests itself and how it operates. We can't care for the soul unless we are familiar with its ways. Observance is a word from ritual and religion. It means to watch out for, but also to honor and keep, as in the observance of a holiday. The *serv* in *observance* originally referred to tending sheep. Observing the soul, we keep an eye on its sheep, on whatever is wandering and grazing—the latest addiction, a striking dream, or a troubling mood."

Care of the soul then is an observance and honoring of the signposts, the scenery, the obstacles and companions of your inner journey. ...The soul feeds on the life around it. "To the soul, the ordinary is sacred, and the everyday is the primary source of religion." For this reason, any community that is concerned with soul must recognize the connection between soul, daily life, and spirituality. The soul needs a vivid spiritual life that keeps it connected to the outside world,

- ◆ a spiritual life that does not smother the soul in rote that is trying to pass for meaningful ritual,
- ◆ a spiritual life that offers an articulated world view and a sense of relatedness to the whole, [and]
- ◆ a spiritual life that balances a sense of transcendence with the immanence of traditions and values that have been part of a family for generations.

Source: <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermon/183453.shtml>



### The Soul of the Child

Michael Gurian

Our children are under profound stress and pressure today.

...Our civilization feeds, shelters, and clothes the bodies of our children better than ever, but sacrifices their souls. ...

Here are ten things ...to better advocate for and protect ... children:

1. Increase bonding and attachment in the family. ...
2. Bring the extended family back into the raising of children. ...
3. Insist on revision of daycare and school culture to fit the requirements of child bonding and attachment. ...
4. Change corporate culture to fit child bonding needs. ...
5. Control a child's media use ... before the age of fourteen.
6. Increase the time children spend in the natural world by at least double.
7. ...Increase the time children spend in ...understanding the mysteries of life, experiencing joy, and a sense of belonging.
8. Understand the potential toxicity of a child's daily schedule. If he or she is running ...from activity to activity ...he or she will ...need down time.
9. Understand and act against the toxicity of contemporary diet and nutrition. Junk food in large quantities is ...causing stress....
10. Work toward families ...that are driven by a holistic approach to child development: care for the whole soul of the child.

Source: no longer online

### Nurturing Your Child's Soul

Kathy Slattengren, M. Ed.

What does your child's soul need? One need is for your children to be seen and heard from their deepest selves.

How can you help your child feel seen and heard? Some things ...include:

- ◆ Giving ...your undivided attention for at least a few minutes every day
- ◆ Encouraging them to have their own opinions and ideas...
- ◆ Showing respect for their bodies
- ◆ Treating them with kindness

- ◆ Allowing them to grow and change without trying to hold them back
- ◆ Seeking forgiveness and providing forgiveness

When you hold space for your children to share their thoughts and feelings, they deepen their ...authentic selves. It's like ...holding a mirror up so that they can see their inner beauty.

Nurturing your children's souls involves encouraging them to develop a strong moral ground.... This includes...:

- ◆ Having the courage to do what is right even when it's difficult
- ◆ Treating others with respect
- ◆ Showing compassion to others
- ◆ Being kind to all living creatures
- ◆ Taking care of the environment

When your children follow their values..., they will ...best use their talents.

Source: <https://www.pricelessparenting.com/documents/nurturing-your-childs-soul>

### A Butterfly Mom

Annie Burnside

Is success primarily about status, financial gain, and intellectual achievement stemming from a 'survival of the fittest' paradigm? ...Success is much more about a child's metamorphosis from a beautiful, divine caterpillar – perfect already in every way despite any outward appearances to the contrary – into a conscious global citizen who knows their own heart. ... Such children radiate a love of self and others. Fostering authenticity, which involves being liberated to live one's soul purpose, is the ultimate gift a butterfly mom offers her child.

Source: *From Role to Soul* by Annie Burnside

### Family Activity:

#### Self-Care as Soul Care

Self-care involves paying attention to our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. We do this by tuning-in, listening, and responding. Invite your children into a discussion about how they can care for themselves, care for others, and invite others care for them in simple and special ways. Then talk about how to practice self-care and family-care.

### The Soul's Dark Night

Rev. Nancy Palmer Jones

...When ...Saint John of the Cross pens ...*Dark Night of the Soul* in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, ...he doesn't see darkness as the source of "quiet calm," or of "comfort and caressing." ...No, he sees the dark night as the site of the ultimate spiritual struggle, a time of utter desolation, alienation, abandonment. As F. Scott Fitzgerald writes ..., "In a real dark night of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning." ...From Mother Teresa of



Calcutta, whose "dark night" lasted 45 years, to heavy metal songs, ...we use the term "dark night of the soul" to describe the most difficult birth of all: the passage through a kind of "death" – the despair of the spirit – to hope and faith in life just as it is.

So, when we go through our own dark night of the soul, what is it that we need from others? When we know [others] ... are walking that lonely road, what can we offer, as their spiritual companions?

...Elizabeth Tarbox puts it this way: "None of us ever really walks in another's shoes or knows the innermost rooms of a person's heart. None of us truly knows the lonely places of another's journey or the causes of the lines around another's eyes. Therefore, let us be gentle with one another. Let us listen more than we speak and accept more than we judge. Let our open, outstretched hands reach and touch that we may walk along together for a little while in friendship and in trust."

Source: No longer online

## The Purpose of Life is to Grow a Soul

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction**

"So, to recap, here's the recipe for my belief about God:

### Ingredients

- 1 cup agnosticism
- ½ cup Emerson's Oversoul
- ½ cup of Hindu view of God
- ½ cup process theology
- 1 teaspoon liberation theology (for leavening)
- 1 tablespoon Star Wars' "Force"
- ¼ teaspoon forgiveness
- ½ teaspoon gratitude
- ½ teaspoon joy

### Directions

1. Combine Emerson's Oversoul and the Hindu view of God in a small bowl and mix.
2. Combine all ingredients (including the Oversoul/Hindu mixture) together in large bowl and mix.
3. Spread batter evenly into container—namely, me (i.e., Roger Bertschausen).
4. Bake in an oven preheated to 98.6 degrees for 45 years and 356 days.
5. Let cool and enjoy!

I love his recipe for its creativity, but also for its broader implications about the making of each of us. As you think about your own life to this point, what are the ingredients that have shaped your life and how have they been combined over time to result in who you are in this moment? Perhaps, as important, what additional ingredients will you seek going forward and how will you combine them in your life as you continue to grow and change.

Unitarian minister A. Powell Davies said that "the purpose of life is to grow a soul." To say this is to suggest that at birth there are many ways in which we can express our humanity as we grow and some of these involve the essence of who we are. Do we literally have a soul? I really don't know, but the word is so evocative of our unique essence and potential. Like the snowflake, each one of us

is one of a kind existing in this moment of time. And because the idea of reincarnation is beyond anything I can imagine, we were never before and will never be again. I use the word soul as a metaphor for the essence of our being.

So how do we grow? Anaïs Nin said it best: "We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly. We grow partially. We are relative. We are mature in one realm, childish in another. The past, present, and future mingle and pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present. We are made up of layers, cells, constellations."

Some of the ways in which we grow can involve transformation, like bread-making this is a process of second order change. For many, becoming a parent is the quintessential experience of transformation. When we adopted our first daughter, LinsiAn, the earthquake of emotion that I experienced made it clear that so much in my life had changed in an instant. During the first night that she spent with us in the hotel room in China, I kept getting up, going over to her crib, and listening carefully to make sure that she was still breathing. The fact that she had already been sleeping and breathing each night for two years was irrelevant because now I was responsible for her.

As I think about both of my daughters and what I am trying to do as a parent, there is no question that I am helping them to grow a soul. School is essential for the development of their intellectual capacity and the expansion of their base of knowledge, but there is so much more to becoming a human being: empathy, compassion, reverence for life, courage, the ability to forgive, love, self-esteem, a sense of fairness, and a commitment to justice. The list goes on and on. All of this is soul work, which helps to make us ever more human. Part of my role is to help them take on responsibility for themselves as they grow. This is what it means to become an adult, but it does not mean that the work of growing a soul is finished. In our religious tradition, this is a lifelong process.

## Surprised by Soul

### What is soul?

Tom Rapsas

According to the dictionary, [soul is] ... "a person's moral or emotional nature, their sense of identity"—but in reality, we know it's something that's indefinable. A soul can't be seen or touched, it can only be perceived within, and even then, its presence is often fleeting.

It is located in a place so deep inside us, it can often be forgotten as we go about our busy lives. Then, in a quiet moment, or when we are immersed in or exposed to certain activities, the soul surprises us and makes itself known.

It can be stirred to life by a book we are reading, by a piece of music we are listening to, even by a small act of kindness that catches us off-guard. It can be awoken by something as simple as watering our houseplants or looking out the window on



a winter day and seeing a woodpecker land on the branch of a slumbering tree.

The notion of living a soulful life is at odds with our disposable society. It is the opposite of reality TV programs and manufactured pop music and gossipy discourse. The things that touch the soul are often deeper and have more meaning, and may involve retreating from the world as much as participating in it.

...Thomas Moore writes: ... "To the soul, memory is more important than planning, art more compelling than reason, and love more fulfilling than understanding ... the most minute details and the most ordinary activities, carried out with mindfulness and art, have an effect far beyond their apparent insignificance."

Source: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/wakeupcall/2016/02/thomas-moore-aretha-franklin-and-the-meaning-of-soul/>



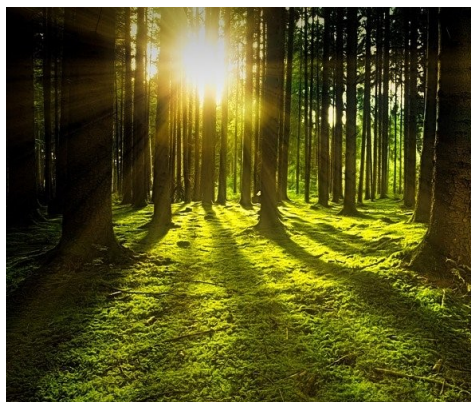
## Reclaim the Sacred

### Meaning and the Song of the Soul

Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee

Meaning is what calls from the depths of the soul.

It is the song that sings us into life. Whether we have a meaningful life depends upon whether we can hear this song, this primal music of the sacred. The “sacred” is not something primarily religious or even spiritual. It is not a quality we need to learn or to develop. It belongs to the primary nature of all that is. ...It was as natural as sunlight, as necessary as breathing. It is a fundamental recognition of the wonder, beauty and divine nature of the world. And from this sense of the sacred, real meaning is born....



Sadly, today so much of life is covered in distractions, in the addictions of consumerism. The soul’s music is not easy to hear amidst life’s constant clamor, and wonder and mystery have become more and more inaccessible. As a culture we seem to have lost the thread that connects the worlds together: the inner world from which meaning is born, and the outer world where we spend our days. The stories of the soul are no longer told, instead our dreams have become the desires of materialism. Even spirituality is often sold in the marketplace....

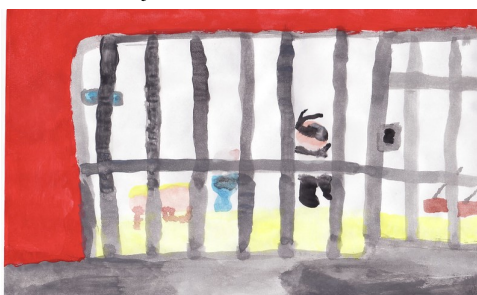
To find meaning we have to reclaim our sense of the sacred, something our culture appears to have overlooked or forgotten. The sacred is an essential quality of life. It connects us to our own soul and the divine that is the source of all that exists.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2337>

## Two Souls, One Love

### Soul to Soul

Paula D’Arcy



I began volunteering as a counselor in that prison, and this same woman came to see me several times. The sessions were always the same. Few words would be spoken. We simply sat together. But in that sitting, a sense of caring grew. I learned that she had lost two children in a single accident and had no money to bury them properly. She committed a crime in order to pay for their caskets. She looked through me as she told me that story.

I was painfully aware that we were two souls thrown together by chance in a god-forsaken, rundown room in a federal prison. Even the room’s single plant was fighting for life. Without speaking, our hearts knew one another’s capacity for pain. The spirit within me looked at her without judgment. I knew that life was hard. Very hard. I knew that pain had long tentacles and that I was looking at a soul for whom pain had exceeded the limit she could bear. I saw her, and there was no longer any choice. In that seeing came Love.

The little room became a place of communion. There was no bread, and wine was forbidden. There was darkness and brokenness, and also immeasurable light. I can’t describe all that we glimpsed. I can only say that we were looking from a different place, deep within each of us.

Everything is identified with Love, a Love that flows through everything, filling everything. We just can’t see it.

Only from the place of spirit does Love become visible. Everything else is desire.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/quotes/quotations/view/25439/spiritual-quotation>

## Being not Doing

### How Is Your Heart Doing?

Omid Safi

In many Muslim cultures, when you want to ask them how they’re doing, you ask: in Arabic, *Kayf haal-ik?* or, in Persian, *Haal-e shomaa chetoreh?* How is your *haal*?

What is this *haal* that you inquire about? It is the transient state of one’s heart. In reality, we ask, “How is your heart doing at this very moment, at this breath?”

...Examine your own heart, explore your soul, and then tell me something about your heart and your soul.

Tell me you remember you are still a human being, not just a human doing. ...Be a healing conversation, one filled with grace and presence.

...Tell me something about your heart, and awaken my heart. Help me remember that I too

am a full and complete human being, a human being who also craves a human touch.

...I don’t have any magical solutions. All I know is that we are losing the ability to live a truly human life.

...W. B. Yeats once wrote, “It takes more courage to examine the dark corners of your own soul than it does for a soldier to fight on a battlefield.”

How exactly are we supposed to examine the dark corners of our soul when we are so busy? How are we supposed to live the examined life?

...Let us insist on a type of human-to-human connection where when one of us responds by saying, “I am just so busy,” we can follow up by saying, “I know, love. We all are. But I want to know how your heart is doing.”

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2164>



## Small Group Discussion Guide

### Theme for Discussion Care of the Soul

**Preparation prior to Gathering:** (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** "There is nothing neutral about the soul. It is the seat and the source of life. Either we respond to what the soul presents in its fantasies and desires, or we suffer from this neglect of ourselves. The power of the soul can hurl a person into ecstasy or into depression. It can be creative or destructive, gentle or aggressive. Power incubates within the soul and then makes its influential move into life as the expression of soul. If there is no soulfulness, then there is no true power, and if there is no power, then there can be no true soulfulness." *Thomas Moore*

**Chalice Lighting** (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story:** Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

**Reading:** "We can return now to one of Plato's expressions for care of the soul, *techné tou biou*, the craft of life. Care of the soul requires craft (*techné*)—skill, attention, and art. To live with a high degree of artfulness means to attend to the small things that keep the soul engaged in whatever we are doing, and it is the very heart of soul-making." *Thomas Moore*

**Living the Questions:** Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. What profound experiences of wonder, awe, and beauty have you had?
2. Do you agree that the soul is something beyond the state of the physical that is difficult to define? Is there a source for it? How would you describe it?
3. What nourishes your soul? What diminishes your soul?
4. Have you felt something inside you that caused you to wonder whether we are more than the sum of our parts?
5. Is there anything mysterious about the idea of a soul? How is thinking about "soul" metaphorically helpful in building character?
6. Some people seem to have some strength or power that we might call character, personality, or soul? Where do you think it comes from?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing Chalice** (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

**Closing Words** Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

## Reconnecting with Soul

### The River of the Soul

*L. Robert Keck*

Religion is manifested in a culture through institutional forms and traditions on the surface landscape.... Spirituality ... is all-pervasive. It is the underground river which nourishes the entire landscape. Spirituality is that which emerges from our soul. It both stimulates our questions regarding meaning and purpose and guides us toward answers. The spirituality that is the organic outcome of the deep soul-level value system precedes and informs all religions on the surface....

Religion, if it is doing its job, gives ... access to the underground river of soul. ... The root of the word religion is *religare* which means "to bind back," or "to re-connect." Religion, if it is true to the name, assists us in re-connecting with our soul. If an old institution is to tap into the new soul-river, it must be courageous enough to dig a new well. If religious institutions are not up to that transformative task, they will eventually fail ...and ...die.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/14234>

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