

The Inner Journey Home - Soul's Realization of the Unity of Reality

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Soul or Self

As we will explore in detail in the following chapters, our study of the soul has illuminated in great detail the nature, [functioning](#) and development of the soul both in terms of the normal development of the self and in terms of the soul's spiritual nature and development. As we understand it, the soul is not separate from what is normally understood as the self, and in fact includes the normal self and its conventional or superficial levels of experience as well as its pure and perfect spiritual ground. Having taken an inquiry-based phenomenological approach to the study of the soul, we have discovered the nature of the human being to be a dynamic, living organism of consciousness, an ever-changing, open, multidimensional field whose experience can come to know and actualize all dimensions of Being.

Self and Soul

In contemporary life, rather than conceiving human beings as fundamentally souls, we conceive of them as what we now call self, and this conventional sense of self is one that is normally not so much in [contact](#) with its soul, that is a self alienated from the soul's inner richness and spiritual depth. The ancient Greek philosophers would have considered such a self to be an alienated or spiritually depraved and unregenerate soul. In our times, the expression we normally use to refer to ourselves, self, refers in actuality to self without reference to soul, without an assumption of spiritual nature.

We are not implying here that contemporary humankind is more alienated from our spiritual depths than people in ancient times. We are discussing only how the classical Western concept of soul has metamorphosed into the modern concept of self. In this book we present an understanding which unifies the ancient, more multidimensional, concept of soul with the understanding of our modern civilization. This unifying vision can support our notion of ourselves as souls and thus present new possibilities for realizing the depth of our potential.

The ancient philosophers whose works we have available to us saw the realization of the truth of one's nature as the normal potential for a human being. Our cultural ancestors referred to themselves as souls, meaning that they had a view of the human being that included a spiritual dimension. Regardless of the degree of embodiment of such inner depth, many individuals lived within the atmosphere of this rich and multidimensional view of humanity.

In that atmosphere, the spiritual-at least the possibility of inner purity and perfection-was always close, not absent or distant as it is in the overall orientation of our secular era.

The Death of Soul in Psychology

Thus our psychology, at least in its main thrust, is bound to have no consideration of soul. It emerged within a current of thought that is philosophically grounded in the separation of the self from the divine, and merely took further the separation of the self from its spiritual essence, within a mentality already grounded in this separation.

...The vision needed for a new psychology must hold the ancient way of understanding soul while at the same time embracing and employing modern understanding and methods of research. Our vision must not separate psychology from spirituality or from science. As we will see, the view that recognizes the true connection of the soul to the [universe](#) can and must embrace scientific knowledge.

Isolation of God and Being

For most of humanity, religion and spirituality are isolated compartments in their lives, if they are relevant at all. It is true that there is an increasing interest in the Western world in spirituality, as is evident in the interest in and proliferation of Eastern schools and gurus and even in shamanic and ancient mystery schools, but it is also true that most of the individuals engaged in such inner paths experience this engagement separate and isolated from the rest of their lives. A central concern of students in many spiritual groups and schools is the question of how to integrate their inner paths with their everyday lives, with their work and relationships, with the fact of living in our modern secular society. Contemporary society seems to lack a context, or a fundamental fabric of holding understanding, in which a spiritual life could be an integral and natural dimension of everyday life.

Soul Without Self

We see, then, that just as psychology has adopted a self with no soul, spirituality has adopted a soul with [no self](#). From the perspective of many spiritual approaches, the spiritual aspect of the human being is seen as quite separate from or even incompatible with the self which is defined as that which leads the primarily bodily life, concerned with enhancing the self and material well-being. Thus most realms of religion and spirituality have developed an imbalance, in which there is a dichotomy between the spiritual and the material, and the material is rejected in favor of the spiritual.

A New Metapsychology

We are developing here a new metapsychology, one that views our overall psychological experience from a ground that does not dichotomize it from the spiritual dimension. Our metapsychology is based on a knowledge of the soul, not only a knowledge of the self, with its ego and its subsystems, or its overt behavior.

...More than any other factor in our modern life, the dissociation of the of soul/self from the divine realm or Being and from the world, terribly impoverishes us. The transformation of our identity from soul to self has indirectly impoverished our world; robbing us of our spiritual

potential, this development left us increasingly identified with and thus dominated by the physical dimension of the self.

Organ of Experience

When we are aware of the soul, we are aware of what we are actually investigating, the actual medium of experience, rather than merely the contents of experience. As we understand the soul, we appreciate what it is that needs to wake up, to recognize and realize its nature, to develop and become refined. We can know directly what it is that goes through the transformation.

...Whenever we do any work on ourselves, or engage in any way in the inner journey, we are invariably working with our soul. There is nothing else to work on. When we can recognize the soul explicitly, our work becomes more exact and to the point. Understanding the soul clarifies what needs to be done and how it can be done.

Knowing the Soul

...Knowing the properties of the soul informs us also of how skillfully to approach what can and cannot be done in a given situation as a seeker confronts certain issues and situations. We are able to understand what methods will work best, and how these methods work. We are able to appreciate the rationale behind various methods of work on self; for example understanding the ground of soul as awareness whose essence can be known to be emptiness helps us to understand how to work with methods which involve space and emptiness. On another level, understanding ego development helps us to understand the particular issues that arise as [ego structures](#) are challenged by meditation and other spiritual practices.

Locus of Experience

What is the soul in the most general sense? First, soul is the locus of our own individual awareness. It is our own self-awareness as a localized phenomenon. This has two meanings, external and internal. To understand the first we need to recognize that pure awareness is nonlocal, nondimensional, beyond time and space, and soul is the expression and manifestation of this awareness in our time-space universe. The soul is awareness, but not simply awareness. It is awareness localized in an environment; it is our individual awareness. It is the locus of our experience of ourselves, the place where we experience ourselves, the location in Reality where we experience the self.

...To understand the soul as [locus of experience](#) is important for the direct experience and development of the soul. Without this understanding we simply remain in the normal experience of the ego. In this egoic experience there is the experiencer and there is what we experience; the locus is not perceived. Thus, to perceive the locus of experience is to begin to recognize the soul.

Agent of Experience

In recognizing the soul we recognize the real self that we intuitively know is at the center of all experience, and the agent of all functioning. Our [intuition](#) transforms into a direct perception of

what we have sensed to be not only the site of all inner experiences and perceptions, but also the agent of all experience, perception and action. The soul is the experiencer, the perceiver, the observer, the doer, the thinker, the chooser, the responder, the enjoyer, the sufferer, etc. and the inner site of all of these.

...Discerning this sensitivity, we discriminate the field that is the soul, and begin to appreciate the primordial characteristic of the soul, the phenomenological nonduality of its experience. When we recognize that the soul is the experiencer, what is experienced, and the field of experience, we understand why it is called in some traditions the "organ of experience."

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