

THE SCIENCE OF THE SOUL

by Corinne McLaughlin

Our Essence and True Identity

Each of us has experienced moments of heartfelt kindness, of courageous daring, of steady strength, of deep inner peace. These are fleeting experiences of our soul—our deepest essence, our highest self—who we truly are. When we experience an expanded sense of oneness with all life, when we forgive someone who has harmed us, when we inspire others with clear insight, when we courageously do what is right--but not popular--these are expressions of our soul. For the soul embodies not just loving compassion, but also purposeful will and wise intelligence. Balanced love, light and will are the signatures of the soul.

The soul is essentially energy, and to study the soul is to study the science of energy.. In the Ageless Wisdom of East and West—which is often called the "golden thread" which connects the inner teachings of the world's religions -- there is a science of soul development, with detailed theories and techniques for integrating the soul with the personality.

We are essentially spiritual beings having a human experience, rather than the other way around. Although we might initially say that we "have" a soul, it is more actually more accurate to say that we are a soul who "has" a personality, and this self-centered personality is our instrument of expression in the world. Until our personality is more purified and invokes the soul's help, it tries to run the show and often creates a mess.

Although some popular modern writers primarily see the soul as our deep unconscious, or as some fragile thing that our personalities need to care for or we'll lose, the truth is actually quite the opposite: it is our soul which cares for our personality—if it is invited.

The soul is referred to in the Christian tradition as "the Christ within, the inner divinity" in each person. The realm of the soul is called "the kingdom of God." In the Jewish tradition, the soul is sometimes referred to as "the vital principle." In the Hindu tradition, it's called the "Atma" or "Self." In the Buddhist tradition, it is "the Buddha Mind," "the mind of enlightenment (bodhichitta)." In ancient Greece, the temple of the Oracle at Delphi proclaimed, "Man, know thyself, and thou wilt know the universe and the gods." As we know our soul, the microcosm, so we will understand the macrocosm.

We know that the human body is the endpoint of the evolution of physical forms. But evolution doesn't end with the perfection of forms. Consciousness continues to evolve. Soul expression is essentially the next evolutionary step in consciousness for humanity. Poets and songwriters have eternally written about the longing for the soul as if it were a distant love. But the soul is closer than our heartbeat. Today, modern science is beginning to prove the existence of the soul and its survival after the death of the body.

The Link Between Spirit and Matter

According to the Ageless Wisdom, the soul is essentially the connecting link or relationship between spirit and matter—between spirit and our human personality. The soul is the mediating or bridging principle of *consciousness*. It is the attractive force that holds all forms together so that the life of God may express through them. The soul is technically a unit of light colored by a particular ray vibration. The soul is anchored in two places in the body: what's called the "consciousness thread" is anchored in the top of the head, and the "life thread" is anchored in the heart. We can sense the presence of the soul most easily in our hearts or at the top of our heads.

In the soul's experience, all of life is connected to each other in a seamless web. The soul reveals that we are not separate from each other or from all life, whether visible and invisible. To experience the soul is to experience a deep sense of oneness with all that is—a profound sense of inspiration and joy.

The soul is essentially the observer or witness, the higher part of us that watches our personality life with detachment. The soul, working with the Law of Karma, or cause and effect, draws to us experiences and lessons for our spiritual growth as we are ready for them. Crisis such as an illness or accident may be a calling card from our soul, suggesting we need to do some deep reflection on our life, our purpose and where we are heading.

Qualities of the Soul

The soul expresses "the good, the beautiful and the true." The only difference between a saint or master and the rest of us is that a saint or master expresses his/her soul all the time, while most of us express our soul only occasionally.

Being in soul consciousness is experiencing a sense of timelessness, of being in the eternal now. This is what the Christians call "practicing the presence of God." We feel expansive and liberated-- the sense of pure being, without having to do anything to gain the approval of others. In soul consciousness, we often help and heal others just through the quality of being that we radiate—the quality of joy, grace and inner peace.

Our soul is aware of the Divine Plan for humanity, and strives to contribute to that larger purpose. For example, our soul realizes that peace on earth is part of this Plan, so we find a way to resolve personal conflicts and conflicts in our family and local community and eventually among the community of nations. Since the Plan includes the full expression and self-realization of everyone on earth, we commit ourselves to helping others grow and develop spiritually.

The soul is the source of the clearest and best guidance for our lives, and through meditation and prayer we can ask our soul for help in making important decisions.

The cause of all our restless searching is actually the soul within us, as it constantly pushes us towards spiritual growth. Once we've fulfilled a desire or achieved something, we soon are restless again, as the soul pushes us towards our next step in spiritual growth and development.

Integrating the Physical, Emotional and Mental Bodies

According to the Ageless Wisdom, each human is a multi-dimensional being with layered levels of simultaneous functioning in the physical and spiritual worlds. Our personality is a composite of three different interpenetrating bodies, composed of various types of energy: the physical/etheric body, the emotional body and the lower mental body. When these three are integrated together and moving in the same direction, they create a unique personality which then can be integrated with the soul. If our personality isn't integrated--if the emotions are going in one direction and the mind or the body in another direction-- then our personality is divided and the soul cannot work effectively through the personality as its instrument.

Our personality dies with our body, but our soul is timeless. It soon reincarnates into a new body, bringing with it the strengths and weaknesses developed by the personality in previous lives, as well as new lessons for the personality to learn, as it works towards integration.

The Limited Personality

When the personality is integrated, but not illumined by the light of the soul, it can be very unhappy. The darkness of a self-centered personality often weaves such a smothering veil over our eyes that we see only the material world of physical forms. We constantly desire more and more of everything to fill that gnawing, empty space inside us. Our ego-driven personality can be like a black hole, an insatiable black hole that obsessively consumes everything in its path to fill its emptiness. Our personality is always grasping—things, people, experiences.

But fortunately, we are more than this gnawing hole—we are in essence the soul, the creator and generator of light and joy. The renewal of interest in the inner life of the soul is the necessary antidote to the toxic consumerist materialism that has poisoned so many people's lives.

Until a personality has exhausted its obsession with running the show, the soul isn't given the space to express itself. The personality can be very threatened by the soul, because the personality has controlled a person's life for so long and doesn't want to give up control. There is always a stage in the process of spiritual development where a battle for control is waged between the soul and the personality. One minute, a person may be expressing the altruism of their soul, and the next minute, retreat to a cynical self-centeredness.

This battle goes back and forth, until a person has clearly experienced the difference between personality separateness and soul unity, and is drawn to regular spiritual practices, such as meditation, study and service. The personality then cooperates with the soul and the two begin to work together. The personality eventually becomes soul-infused and the soul's instrument of expression in the world.

The Struggle Between Personality and Soul

How can we tell the difference between when we're in expanded soul consciousness and when we're in a more limited personality consciousness? The first sign of the presence of the soul in a person is the spirit of service and the sense of responsibility for oneself and for others. A soul-infused person doesn't play the victim, but rather works to change his or her consciousness to create better experiences and outcomes.

The ego-centered personality only thinks of itself and its own needs—"looking out for number one." The soul is identified with others and is group conscious. When we are in soul consciousness, we experience our greatest joy in serving others. The soul is by nature group conscious and fundamentally concerned with what is occurring for the whole, not just for ourselves as individuals. In our deepest essence we are one with the whole. The outstanding characteristic of the soul is the urge to service.

The personality feels separate; the soul experiences a sense of connection to everyone and everything and is identified with the whole. The personality is always taking, it's primarily a consumer. The soul is a creator. The personality acquires; the soul shares.

The personality is obsessed with competing; the soul cooperates. The personality expresses self-will; the soul expresses God's will. The personality is often aimless, obsessed with its latest desires. The soul has a clear sense of meaning and purpose.

How to Invoke the Soul

Inner work and practice can help us build what's called the Rainbow Bridge (or "antahkaranah" in the Eastern teachings) between our personality and soul. A regular practice of meditation can help us reflect on, and identify with, the qualities of the soul.

We can begin our meditation by visualizing the emotional energy in our solar plexus center rising up to the heart with each breath we take, and being transmuted into universal love. From the heart, we can visualize the energy moving up the head, where we dedicate this energy in service to others. Then as we exhale, we visualize it being radiated out through the throat. This sequence is visualized several times, and then we affirm ourselves as the soul and its qualities of love, light and will.

We can visualize the Master in the Heart—an image of our own soul, either as a symbol, such as a star or a flame, or personified as the Presence of God within.

We can also experience soul consciousness by honoring it in others. The Hindu practice of the "Namaste" greeting of bowing to the Divinity in people, helps remind us that we all contain this Divine spark.

We can dialogue with our soul in a daily evening review, looking back over our thoughts and actions, beginning with the most recent hour and looking back until the beginning of the day. We can honestly examine our motives for doing something and work to purify them. In difficult relationships or situations, we can ask ourselves, "What is the lesson I am learning in this? What do I need to see more clearly? How can I develop more detachment from this? "

We can "act as if" we are already embodying the soul, as this acting will help it become a reality. We can practice harmlessness in thought, word, and deed, as this simple awareness is a most powerful practice.

We can focus on thinking positively, as energy follows thought. Look for the good, the beautiful and the true in everything. Look into the essence of things, not just their outer form. The Agni Yoga teachings suggest, "Behold as under a magnifying glass the good, and belittle the signs of evil tenfold, lest thou remain as before."

In realizing we are in essence the soul, the Divine light within, our purpose and work becomes clearer—to shine light into the world and to relieve suffering, darkness and ignorance. By radiating the light of love, illumination and purpose, we help create a new heaven on earth.

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