

An Introduction to 'Opening the Soul Window'

*Practices, Principles and Foundations for Reconnecting with the Soul
Coaching, Mentoring, and Courses with Shayla Wright*

*You see, I want a lot,
Maybe I want it all:
The darkness of each endless fall,
The shimmering light of each ascent
(Rainer Maria Rilke)*

If you don't understand some or a lot of what is written in this Introduction, that's not really a problem. We are exploring a subtle realm here, one that we have not been encouraged to pay much attention to, or value, or develop with a relationship. As you read, just notice what is happening in your heart, in your body, in your energy and your feelings. If the mind feels that it is in deep water, that's true. We are diving down through the surface level of the river of your life, to get in touch with the deeper currents.

Often, in traditional spiritual approaches, we hear a lot about consciousness, spirit, light, the eternal, indestructible, nondual, transcendent aspect of our being. I often call this 'unconditioned presence.' Awakening to this presence, discovering that this is our true nature, and not our small and fragmented personality, is one of the most glorious and liberating things that could ever happen.



That's why it's often very disconcerting to realize that this is not enough. There is another dimension of our being that is also crying out to be recognized, loved and embodied in our human life. This is what I am calling our soul. Spirit, or presence, lives in everything, as everything, and it has no distinctions at all. What spirit is in me, and what it is in you, is exactly the same, no difference at all. It's like light, which is the same, no matter what colour bulb it is shining through. Or like water--even when it turns into ice, fog, steam, mist, or snow--it's still water.

The soul is different. The way the one light expresses itself through you--that's your soul. Your soul and my soul are not the same. Each soul has a very distinct flavour, vibration and quality--you can sometimes feel it when a baby is born. The soul has a direction-- it is

moving, developing, unfolding, over many lifetimes. It is deeply interested in 'this human thing.' The more we recognize our soul, the more we listen to it and follow its intelligence, the more fully human we become. And the more we become ourselves.

Your soul has a trajectory, it's not just lying around in the sun, taking it easy. What it wants may not be what your conditioned personality wants at all. In our culture, we are not very respectful of the soul. We have not been taught to pay attention to it, to listen to it, to follow it. So we are living in a world that is full of people who have abandoned their soul, whose connection with their soul has been broken, or

lost. We have a lot of hidden heartbreak and anger about this, because some part of us knows about this, even if our conscious mind does not.

There is a great, deep longing in the heart to return home to the soul, to discover the unique, creative, alive, fierce, loving nature of our soul. And to live it, to align our human life with it. And we also have fear about connecting with our soul. Many people have expressed this to me recently. "I'm afraid that if I open to my this part of me, if I follow what my soul really wants--it will turn my life upside down."

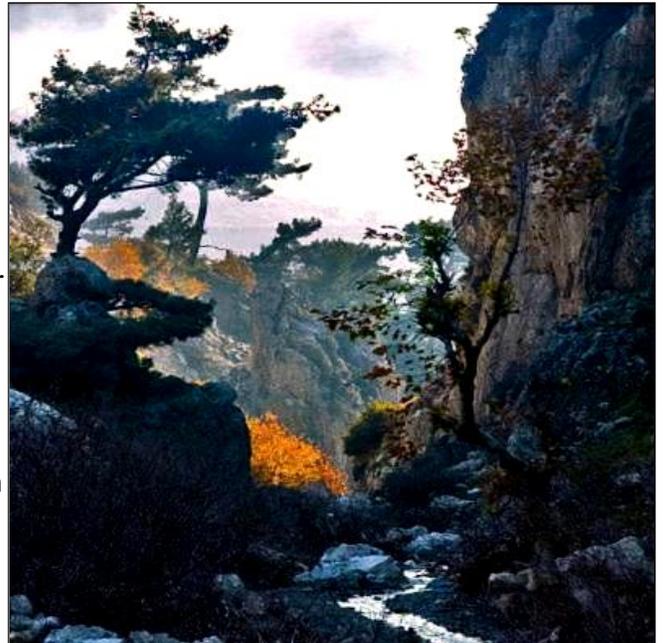
This is possible. And we can take some comfort in the truth that our soul is grounded, and full of life-giving energy, and that living in alignment with it gives us access to capacities that are deeply empowering and liberating. But the soul is not here to make us feel comfortable. The soul really doesn't care about that at all.

How do we do this?

The path to the soul is a descent. We go down, into the body, into the feelings, into the earth, into the elements, into our dreams, into the hidden places in our psyche, into the unknown.

This is not a safe, or predictable path. It's slow, and organic, like a plant growing. It requires courage, commitment, persistence, and love. We need to have what I sometimes call 'a fire in the belly,' a feeling that we can't really go on living without this connection to our soul.

I have some beautiful and powerful practices that help to awaken the recognition of this vast being who lives in you. We work with guided meditations, with contemplations and with inquiries that allow you to listen deeply, and to open your heart, mind and body to new possibilities. You can explore your life through this perspective, learn how to track backwards, so that you can recognize certain moments, particular insights, meetings and realizations, as moments when your soul was trying to reveal itself to you.



It's difficult to describe these practices on paper—they are deeply experiential, and each person receives something unique and often quite surprising from engaging in them.

Foundations

The foundation for soul work lies in discovering how to open to an intimate relationship with your soul. And the soul lives in the body. The soul is connected to nature, to the earth. So this relationship begins with learning to fully inhabit and ground the body, to open the base of the body, so that we awaken the energy in the belly, hips, and legs. As the energy moves down from the head and upper body into the base, we are able to connect with very different parts of our own being, and with the earth itself. Grounding is one of our foundations, and we return to it again and again, dropping from the mind into the body, and listening to the energy and wisdom that lives here.

Core Principles

The primary core principle of soul work is that our soul has always been with us, from the beginning of our life. And perhaps, long before that. And not only has it been here, our soul has been trying to reach us, speak to us, and touch us. It's not only that we want to have a connection with our soul, our soul wants to connect with us. This is not a one way street, it's a mutual thing. How wonderful. You are not chasing something that does not really care for you. Your soul is far from indifferent.



*From somewhere
a calm musical note arrives.
You balance it on your tongue,
a single ripe grape,
till your whole body glistens.
In the space between breaths
you apply it to any wound
and the wound heals.*

*Soon the nights will lengthen,
you will lean into the year
humming like a saw.
You will fill the lamps with kerosene,
knowing somewhere a line breaks,
a city goes black,
people dig for candles in the bottom drawer.
You will be ready. You will use the song like a match.
It will fill your rooms
opening rooms of its own
so you sing, I did not know
my house was this large.*

~ Naomi Shihab Nye

The Integrity of the Soul

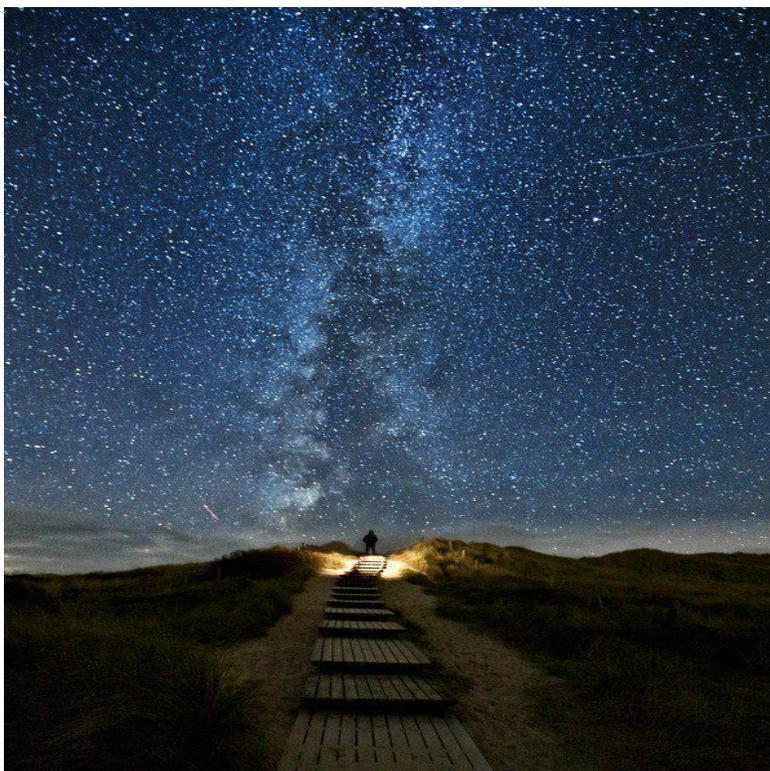
As you go more deeply into this kind of inquiry, you begin to discover what really matters to your soul, what the direction of your life is, what the most important thing is, for you.

I work with Robert Kegan's levels of adult development. Understanding how you grow and evolve as an adult allows you to see where you are now, and what is required to move to the next level of development. The way we evolve is directly connected to the life of our soul. Our soul is a moving force that supports our growth and development. As we move up through the different levels of development, we expand our basic sense of self, and are able to access more and more direct contact with our soul. We develop capacities for deep authenticity, far beyond what it means to be authentic on the personality level. This is what I call the integrity of your soul. Your soul has its own values, its own nature, its own natural and true way of being. Discovering this integrity is like finding your own north star.

Loving the Dark - a new form of intelligence

The dimension of the soul is full of mystery. Engaging in soul work allows us to learn a lot about deep listening, about prayer, and about working with our subtle energy. We learn to attune to fields of subtle energy, and receive information from them. We engage in practices that open and develop channels of receptivity and recognition in the body and mind. Voice dialogue, guided inquiry, contemplative writing, and prayer are all aspects of this work. We practice individually, and in dyads and small groups.

We discover that we don't need to know as much as we thought we did. We can let go into the unknown, and allow the intelligence of our soul to emerge, bit by bit. The soul does not speak to us through the logical rational mind. We have to learn the language of sensation, of feeling, of image, intuition and symbol.



Shadow Work

Quite often, we encounter grief, when we realize how much we have abandoned our soul, and for how long. This grief is painful, and we can't avoid it. It has a cleansing and healing quality. Or we might feel a lot of anger at the ways in which we were taught to betray our deeper nature. All of these feelings can arise, and we are asked to meet them, to open to them, to say yes to all of our experience, to embrace every bit of who we are.

Learning to embrace our deep feelings and emotions is a crucial aspect of re-connecting with our soul. The ways in which we have turned away from the depths of our own feelings are very connected to the ways in which we have turned away from our soul. These ways are often multi-generational, ancestral and cultural. We have a lot of fear in our culture, in our families, about deep and strong feelings. Shadow work invites us to turn around, and walk back into the places in ourselves that we have turned away from, to learn how to stand as an adult in these places, a presence that can hold all of it with kindness.

We realize we are being called to become fully human, to fall in love with who we are in all our of human frailty, tenderness and brokenness. The nature of our descent allows us to connect with a depth of compassion and kindness that slowly and gently releases our shame, and all the ways we have given up on ourselves, turned against ourselves. This deep love, this relationship with our soul, re-organizes the way we live, from the inside out.

The Healing Time

*Finally on my way to yes
I bump into
all the places
where I said no
to my life
all the untended wounds
the red and purple scars
those hieroglyphs of pain
carved into my skin, my bones,
those coded messages
that send me down
the wrong street
again and again
where I find them
the old wounds
the old misdirections
and I lift them
one by one
close to my heart
and I say holy
holy.*

Pesha Joyce Gertler



Intimacy and Communication

We also explore what it is to listen from our soul, and to speak with the voice of our soul. As we begin to touch into these possibilities, we discover an intimacy, a way of knowing another human being that is deeply fulfilling, healing and surprising. We know them through an 'I-Thou' connection, instead of an 'I-It'. They are no longer an object. We meet them face to face, we are able to receive the fullness, depth and mystery of who they are, new in each moment, and ancient at the same time.

Soul work is not really the opposite of spiritual work—it is a compliment, a necessary polarity. We need them both.

Creating a New Culture

Everything is radically okay in the realm of spirit—it doesn't really want or need to change anything. The soul, however, is all about dynamism, change and transformation. The way we have treated the earth is a direct reflection of a profound disconnection with soul, with the full embodiment of our deepest nature. The numbness, despair and apathy that pervade our post-modern culture arise from soul loss as well. The soul invites us to fully participate with life, and to discover radical new ways of being with each other.

To awaken to the possibility of a culture in which we honour and respect the connection with soul is a sacred thing in itself. This work calls you in that direction, asks you to feel the aliveness, the integrity, and the beauty that is wanting to express itself through you, as you.

References

*'You see I want a lot,
Maybe I want it all'*

The Book of Hours, by Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Robert Bly

*'From somewhere
a calm musical note arrives.'*

The Song by Naomi Shihab Nye

The Healing Time

Pesha Joyce Gertler, Cross Currents; "Claiming the Spirit Within," (Beacon Press Anthology)