



## **Soul and Psychotherapy** **By Boris Matthews, PhD**

Recently a younger colleague wrote me about the agency in which she had previously been practicing. I was not surprised by what she said because her experience was, unfortunately, typical of a lot of places that offer “psychotherapy.” A couple of years ago, she wrote, she left a large therapy practice in part because of the rigid requirements driven by insurance company regulations. “I often felt apologetic about using the client's valuable therapy time to complete a form, label someone with a diagnosis . . . and introduce behavioral checklists that were often superficial at best and insulting at worst. If I dared to mention something like the nature of a client's dreams in a quarterly review . . . my chart would get kicked back for 'corrections.’” That environment did not foster transforming or even long-term results for my clients.” That approach based on the sickness model, behavioral change, and pharmaceutical intervention has little to do with the soul or with ultimate healing.

People seek psychotherapy for several reasons: they have suffered an emotional loss or wound; their life has lost its zest; they experience an anxiety and emptiness that nothing seems to fill. In a word, “soul” has disappeared from their life. The kind of treatment my younger colleague described will not restore soul to their life.

Everything we do in psychotherapy has to aim at restoring soul. Restoring the soul leads to ultimate healing. Soul is no quaint theological notion, but a vital experience and loss of soul is living death.

In the light of 20th Century brain science, we have come to see that idea and experience of soul is crucial for physical and emotional health. “Loss of soul” is an experience well known to indigenous peoples and to many, perhaps most, of our contemporaries. From the Bible we know the famous question about losing the soul: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). When I use the word “soul” I mean two things: one is the individual's capacity to experience with feeling and emotion. The other refers to that quality in something or someone else that arouses emotion and sentiment. These two go together. The person who has lost soul is typically attracted to or fantasizes another person who appears to “have” or “be” a soul.

Another analytical psychologist colleague, J.R. Haule, situates the experience of loss of soul in our cultural history: “In the past six or seven hundred years, we have undergone a consciousness-shift of 180 degrees. Formerly soul was our primary reality. Now we have only a body and a rational ego. The material conditions of our lives have improved immeasurably, but we've lost the . . . transcendent scope that belongs to the reality of soul. In a situation like this, it is often the depressives among us who are the most realistic regarding the impoverishment of our human existence.”

Haule eloquently discusses the experience of soul, as well as the “soul-less-ness” of depression and the necessity of soul-to-soul experience in therapy: '[S]oul has an affinity for communion with other souls. . . . [The person in touch with soul] can “see” that the soul is missing from his patient only because, in his altered state of consciousness, he has “become” his own soul. And traveling *as* soul, he is able to find and restore the lost soul through establishing a soul-to-soul connection. . . .'

So very many people in our society have lost soul, but often they have not gained the world in exchange. The therapist's task is to help clear away the debris of conditioning that blocks access to soul. The client's task demands a fidelity to the essence of what nature (or the Universe, or God) designed the client to become. This is a demanding task and it takes persistent work over an extended period of time. The “reward” for the effort comes as one's consciousness rests in the soul more and more often. The experience of soul is evidence that one is living one's authentic life.

(You can find J.R. Haule's complete article by clicking on this link:  
<http://www.jrhaule.net/depSoulLoss.html> .)

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