

# CARE OF THE SOUL

by Terri Gerber, M.S.W.

Do you ever find yourself yearning or longing for something that you can not quite name? A need from deep within that can manifest itself in a number of ways: possibly in restlessness, dissatisfaction, tiredness or tears? We might call it depleted, depression, something missing, loss of magic.

This may be the voice of the soul. It may be time to tune in and listen to what it is saying. Life can be lived in many ways and on many levels. When we begin to address the care of the soul, we are opening up to deeper, more meaningful ways of living each day. As Thomas Moore's book, *Care of the Soul*, suggests, by caring for the soul, we can cultivate depth and sacredness in everyday life. When we bring the needs of the soul into our daily routine, we move into a state of mind that connects us to life's mysteries and life's magic. We can cultivate a curiosity about our own psyches. We can discover some of the unconscious messages that are being expressed, sometimes in a dramatic way like in a food addiction. We can learn what these messages have to tell us about the way we are living our lives.

Care of the soul does not cure anything. As Dr. Moore points out, it does not mean "the end of trouble." But instead, care has the sense of on-going attention. "It appreciates the mystery of human suffering and does not offer the illusion of a problem-free life." In caring for the soul, we can look upon our lives and include soulful thinking and soulful activities.

Observance and ritual are soul work. In observance, according to Moore, "we keep an eye on the latest addiction, a striking dream, or a troubling mood." We can use that symptom to lead us to what we need to do or learn. This could include grief work, job hunting, relationship repair. In ritual, we can take daily activities and elevate them to a sacred plane. For example, eating. Eating fast food is very symbolic. "It is about taking in food without substance, without imagination, without soul. Culturally, we have a plastic esophagus, suited perhaps to fast food and fast living, but not conducive to soul, which thrives only when life is taken in in a long, slow process of digestion and absorption."

Here are 10 of Moore's suggestions for practicing "care of the soul", summarized by Caren Goldman.

1. **Nourish and educate your imagination.** The mind thinks; the soul imagines. Reading, listening to stories, exposing yourself to all the arts is soul work.
2. **Respond to what asks to be dealt with.** Take what is most pressing at the moment. It can be as complicated as a relationship or as simple as a door falling off a hinge. Soul is affected by the small detail and decisions of everyday life.
3. **Listen to your heart.** Avoid having superficial, ready-made explanations for what is going on in our lives. The soul is poetic. Simple explanations of our pain can keep the soul from flourishing.
4. **Learn to live with complexity.** Ask yourself, "How do I distance myself from the problems and challenges in my life? Is it by not using my talents and gifts? By not being

able to live with uncertainty? By avoiding paradox and mystery?" The point is to "feel" existence.

5. **Live an individual life.** Be willing to go against the grain of the establishment. This might mean becoming more eccentric. Care of the soul may result in an individual "I" that you may never have planned for.

6. **Choose work that suits the soul, as well as the budget.** Explore the soul values of your workplace. What is its spirit? Am I being treated as a person here? Is there a feeling of community? Are there any moral or ethical problems? It is not possible to care for the soul while violating one's own moral sensibility.

7. **Be of service to others.** The soul exists beyond your personal circumstances and conceptions. Soul work includes attachment to family, community, and the world.

8. **Learn that the soul speaks through simple things.** Home furnishings, architecture, mountains and lakes, boarded-up houses and crime-ridden streets. Soul is in everything around you. There is no separation between the individual soul and the world's soul.

9. **Know your own mythology.** The collection of stories from our lives, the deep patterns, our memories, reflections and dreams are all rich with imagination and soul. As we express these artfully, we are making life more soulful.

10. **Be exposed to spirituality in a soulful way.** The emphasis is on images and stories instead of high spiritual achievement. Different spiritual traditions can teach us how to make ritual part of everyday life.

*Moore, Thomas. Care of the Soul, Harper Perennial, New York, 1992*

*Goldman, Caren, "Ten Ways to Care for the Soul," Yoga Journal, May/June 1993*