



# JOURNEY TO THE SACRED

*Writing*  
TO AWAKEN



### LESSON 3: SOUL AND SPIRIT

Now that we have explored the nature of disgust, and its relationship to sacredness, I would like us to touch on the difference between soulful and spiritual as manifestations of what we call sacred. Please note: I am not talking here about the soul, per se, in any substantive or religious sense. Rather, we are considering soul and spirit as different metaphors for divine experience. Let me explain.

The desire to leapfrog our own darkness is a major trap for both writers and spiritual seekers. We imagine that there is a shortcut through the mess of our own psyches, failing to recognize that the so-called mess – our conflicts, regrets, disappointments, delusions, confusions, expectations, etc. – are nothing more than the source of our richness and originality.

Soul and spirit are useful terms for describing divergent aspects of the self. Soul refers to the depths of earthly experience, eccentricities, character, and mess. Spirit refers to our transcendent, eternal nature, the oneness we share with all sentient beings (the self that cannot be taken away). If you picture human nature as a cross (+), not in a Christian sense but as the intersection of so-called lower and higher nature, soul is the earthbound self and spirit is the vertical, heaven bound self-reaching beyond the body toward the absolute. Soul attaches; spirit detaches. Spirit ascends; soul descends. Soul loves the past; spirit inclines toward a more perfect future. Both are necessary, complementary aspects of an integrated life and each of us tends toward one orientation or the other. They also overlap in crucial and illuminating ways.

That is why it is interesting to know if you tend to be a soul or spirit type and how this tendency characterizes your life, writing, and practice. Soul types often need a dose of transcendence and spiritual types sometimes require a measure of gritty groundedness. Knowing your type also helps you to choose, and stick to, a wisdom practice that balances your natural inclination with its necessary opposite. How have these concepts shaped and misshapen you? What do you resist in one or the other? Do you celebrate your peculiarities, twists, sub-versions, transgressions, and character (a word, which comes from the Greek root for *etching*), or do you struggle for conformity, selflessness, and so-called perfection? Do you honor your expansive and transcendent spiritual nature? Or do you find that you are always trying to bring yourself back down to earth, afraid to break free, explore, and imagine? What might you do in practical, day-to-day ways to right your own imbalance? What lessons might you want to unlearn in order to enjoy your entire nature, not merely the half you're familiar with or the one condoned by your community or culture?

Contrary to what many spiritual traditions would have us believe, soulful wisdom is as important as transcendent, pristine spirit in the movement toward self-realization. Without proper attention to the soul, our spiritual life becomes arid, inhuman, and perfectionist in a long, futile attempt to rid ourselves of our wonderful, crooked, unique personalities and the sometimes devilish desires that go along with them and can bring so much pleasure. But balance is the key: without proper attention to the spirit, soulful lives can become self-absorbed, narrow, and hedonistic – all earth and no sky.

Please explore the question of soul and spirit this week. How do these

orientations affect how you live and what you find sacred? What does your soul yearn for in its opposite? From where do your resistances arise?