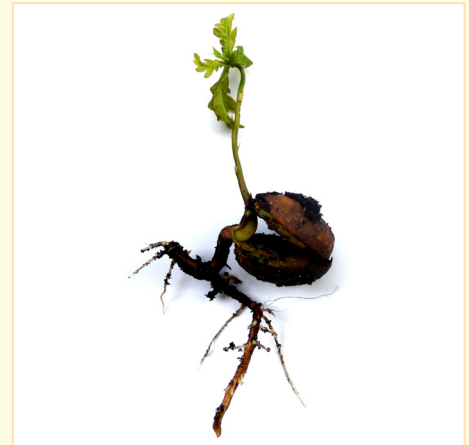


Soul Work

By Jerry Patchen, ITP Houston member

Being from Texas, my heroes have always been Cowboys, until I met Michael Murphy. Although 15 years ago, the encounter is indelibly etched in my memory. My hero, Michael, came to Houston to visit and inspire the ITP group that Linda and I had joined. Visiting in Lydia Dugan's home, I sat next to Michael on a sofa. We exchanged pleasantries and Michael casually remarked to me, "I recommend you read *Soul Code* by James Hillman." I followed Michael's advice. Although I meandered many times from the wisdom embedded in *Soul Code*, it has been a bright light on my path and a rudder to steer life's sometime rocky shoals.



From the acorn springs the mighty oak is an analogy that Hillman uses for *Soul Code*. The acorn theory asserts that each of our lives is formed by a unique image. It is an image that is the essence of our individual life, and calls it to a destiny. He writes, "The concept of this individualized soul-image has a long, complicated history; its appearance in cultures is diverse and widespread and the names for it are legion. . . . In the language of Plato and Plotinus, we each embody our own idea. This idea, this image does not tolerate too much straying. . . . For centuries we have searched for the right term for this 'call'. The Romans named it your genius (from genie denoting a spiritual presence or protective spirit); the Greeks, your daimon (a super natural being of a nature between Gods and humans); and the Christians, your guardian angel. The Neoplatonists referred to an imaginal body, the ochema, that carried you like a vehicle, as your personal bearer or support." Other names are vocation (Latin: vocare "to call"), calling, dharma (Sanskrit), and sacred duty. Today we may use the terms heart, spirit and soul.

Our contemporary psychology and psychiatry rejects the concept of a guardian angel, and the idea that we may be loved by this guiding providence that sometimes helps us in situations of distress. We all have such a presence, but we may have lost contact with it many years ago. It is a force that drives us to find what fulfills us.

There are many examples of exceptional individuals that answered their sacred calling in an extraordinary way. Michael Murphy is an impressive example of that phenomenon. In 1950, while enrolled in the pre-med program at Stanford, Michael synchronistically and mistakenly wandered into a lecture by Frederic Spiegelberg, whose declaration, "Atman is Brahman" lit a fire in his soul. Less than a year later, Michael, a popular campus class officer and super fraternity dude, was meditating at Lake Lagunitas at Stanford, and had a life changing transcendent experience. He dropped out of pre-med, resigned from his fraternity and followed his *Soul Code*. After serving in the U.S. Army and spending 18 months at the Sri Aurobindo ashram, Michael at age 32 in 1962, and



his classmate Dick Price, founded Esalen Institute in Big Sur. Esalen was, and remains, the spear-point of the human potential movement and continues to dynamically push beyond the limits of human achievement.

Soul work is exemplified by Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor, 161 to 180 CE. He could have enjoyed voluptuous companionship, gorged on wine and delicacies and elevated status. Instead he chose to be out in the field, cold and shivering on the freezing Donau, to face the Hun who wanted to kill him. Every

day was a battle. He had the same fears and lethargic impulses we have. Yet, he rose in the morning, as recorded in his journal:

“At day’s first light, have in readiness, against disinclination to leave your bed, the thought that “I am rising for the work of man.” Must I grumble at setting out to do what I was born for, and for the sake of which I have been brought into the world? Is this the purpose of my creation, to lie here under the blankets and keep myself warm? “Ah, but it is a great deal more pleasant!” Was it for pleasure, then, that you were born and not for work?”

Jungian scholar, James Hollis writes in *Living An Examined Life*, “Whatever health and wholeness is, it surely involves aligning our outer choices with our inner reality. When the path we are on is right for our souls, the energy is there. When what we are doing is wrong for us, we can temporarily mobilize energy in service to goals, and often we must; but in time such forced mobilization leads to irritability, anger, burnout, and symptoms of all kinds.”

Hollis continues, “Living our personal authority will not spare us from conflict, from suffering, from marginalization, or even from martyrdom. Many whom we most admire in history lived wretched lives, but we venerate them because something truthful was served through them. They lived their calling in the way in which we all are called.” Notable examples include Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gandhi.

“How do we know what is right for us? Well, the body knows, our deepest feeling knows, and the psyche knows, and each expresses its opinion, even as we learned early in life to evade these continuous messages from our own depths. So, the recovery effort must typically begin with the experience of inner discord, outer conflict, and sometimes heartache and loss.” (James Hollis, *supra*)

Hillman’s Soul Code model inspired Thomas Moore’s book entitled *Care of the Soul*. This book resurrected an old teaching, “In Plato’s moving description of Socrates’ defense, when he was accused of misleading the youth and failing to observe the proper religious rituals, the esteemed teacher says that the most important thing we can do in life is work for the well-being of our souls: ‘I do nothing other than urge young and old to care not just for their persons and property, but more so for the well-being of their souls.’”

Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, insisted “Every man has a vocation to be someone: but he must understand clearly that in order to fulfill this vocation he can only be one person: himself.” Live your own story. What if you die and someone else’s life passes before you? Be true to your soul journey. Steven Cope in his remarkable book, *The Great Work of Your Life: A Guide for the Journey to Your True Calling*, uses the *Bhagavad Gita* as a model for finding and following your calling:

“First: Discern your dharma. ‘Look to your own duty,’ says Krishna. ‘Do not tremble before it.’ Discern, name, and then embrace your own dharma.

Then: Do it full out! Knowing your dharma, do it with every fiber of your being. Bring everything you’ve got to it. Commit yourself utterly. In this way you can live an authentically passionate life, and you can transform desire itself into a bonfire of light.

Next: Let go of the outcome. ‘Relinquish the fruits of your actions,’ says Krishna. Success and failure in the eyes of the world are not your concern. ‘It is better to fail at your own dharma than to succeed at the dharma of someone else,’ he says.

Finally: Turn your actions over to God. ‘Dedicate your actions to me,’ says Krishna. All true vocation arises in the stream of love that flows between the individual soul and the divine soul. All true dharma is a movement of the soul back to its Ground.”

Follow your soul calling! No task brings greater dignity and purpose to our life.