



## The Soul: Our Sacred Individuality

Who we are is defined by our evolution. When you are getting to know someone, you are getting to know who that person has become through the continuity of his past into the present. Who we are is a result of what we have become and who we are continuing to become – physically, psychologically, mentally, emotionally and, above all, spiritually. Our spiritual evolution, which is the process of growing beyond our personality and into our soul, is the last stage of our development.

Unless we have a proper and holistic vision of the various dimensions that constitute our complete identity, conceptualizing what or who our soul is will only bring more misunderstanding. Sometimes by trying to get to the bottom of things we end up even more confused. In human spiritual traditions there are several misconceptions regarding what the soul is which stem from various conditioned and inherent assumptions. Firstly, we must be aware that most spiritual paths are not paths to soul-realization. In fact, in the main, it is the spiritual movements that *are not* geared towards enlightenment that speak about 'the soul'. Unfortunately, they apply this term in a very shallow way, diminishing its value so that it can appeal to collective consciousness. In its common use, the word soul is used to suggest a continuity of identity that is inherent to each person, upon which their psychological reality is built, or to indicate a more evolved ego that is linked to the heart and its emotional evolution.

Most of the paths to enlightenment that were developed in the Far East are in their essence anti-soul, meaning their objective is to evolve towards impersonality. This is not the same as going beyond personality – it is to attempt to annihilate any sense of individuality. Why was this tendency present more in Asia than anywhere else? If we trace it back, it is likely to have originated in Indian spirituality and later been absorbed into the traditions of other Asian countries. Originally, the tendency to seek the impersonal in Hindu mysticism was rooted in the need for deep devotion to the divine. The natural tendency of the Indian soul is to disappear in god, to lose oneself in higher reality. However, this longing to lose oneself at some point began to change into the wrong kind of self-effacement, one which negates the very value of our own existence.

We can see this development from the Upanishads into Advaita and Buddhism, although Buddhism disconnected itself from the energy of devotion. Originally, the soul (Atman) was accepted as the subject to the realization of the universal self (Brahman). Only afterwards was that duality denied, expressed by the famous words: Atman *is* Brahman

or 'I Am That'. Later on, the concept of Atman was negated altogether in the elucidation that there is only Brahman. Of course, here and there we can find different approaches but this describes the general trend. The reason the soul has been denied in Indian mysticism is the specific constitution of the Indian mind: a mind that chooses devotion as a means of self-forgetting. The Indian self does not want to be present, it wants to be absent. Even in the Indian paths of devotion, which tend to be more dualistic, the idea is to realize god not oneself.

There are other paths to enlightenment that are devotional in nature but are somehow able to embrace the consciousness of the soul. One of them is Sufism. There is a Rumi poem where the devotee knocks at the inner door of the divine and is asked: 'Who is there?' When he answers, 'It is I' the door remains closed; only when he returns with the answer 'It is You', the door opens. This can be easily misinterpreted as a denial of the existence of the soul, but it isn't. What Rumi meant was not that the soul has no reality of her own or that she must relinquish herself to realize god, but rather that god *is* her very existence, her identity being the lower dimension of the supreme I am. After she enters the inner door, she still remains in relationship to the divine as the lover to the beloved. It is this divine duality that constitutes the spirit of the Sufi path – to disappear in god and yet not to disappear. Although common Sufism still has the concept of losing oneself in god or getting intoxicated with god, on the higher level the Sufi path includes going through the process of solidification of our identity, work with consciousness and continuity of awareness. Before one can merge with the divine, one has to acquire a real presence, a higher identity.

There is a similar story in Zen. A monk knocks on his master's door. When he is asked, 'Who is there?' he replies, 'I am not outside!' The master then opens the door. Following a simple logic, the master should have replied in return, 'So there is no need for you to enter!' However this would reflect an incomplete understanding, what in Zen they describe as 'attachment to emptiness'. The paradox of the simultaneous duality and unity of all things cannot be grasped by the linear mind. We are not outside the door and yet the door has to be opened for us to enter. In the sacred relationship between our soul and the divine, we are in the perpetual state of entering the inner door. And then there is a door behind that door: the inner shrine of the beloved is constantly receding into its new depth. If we were to disappear after passing the first threshold of the supreme reality, there would be no one left to enter the door behind the door, where yet another doorway is revealed.

Unlike in India, the tendency towards impersonality in the other Far Eastern countries was not a result of their devotional inclinations but rather of a certain spirit of collectivism that permeated their societies, probably due to the influence of Confucianism. While in western cultures individuality is respected, in Asia it is seen more as a flaw. They have developed a way to assure their collective well-being by working together. This has promoted a natural trend to gravitate towards an impersonal version of spirituality, one which bypasses the realization of our



individuality. They are not looking to become whole but to reach peace. When an Indian mystic inquires 'who am I?' he seeks to conclude that he is the universal self. When a Buddhist enquires 'who am I?' he seeks to negate his existence in order to realize emptiness. The final result is similar but the energy behind these conclusions is very different. In the first, one hopes to transcend oneself through identification with the ultimate reality; in the second, one hopes that the nature of reality will reveal itself through the act of self-negation. In neither case does the enquirer honestly want to meet who they really are. They already have their answer before they have asked the question.

Many thinkers have debated whether we have a soul or not. However, this is not the right question. Right questions are often more important than answers. A wrong question will yield a wrong answer; a right question is a chance to discover the right answer, for it already has the answer hidden in itself. To ask the right question is to demonstrate that one is ready to receive the right answer. Since who we are is defined by our evolution, we can only know ourselves according to what we have become so far. As we walk the spiritual path, we change and the answer to 'who am I?' is changing too. One may argue that our essence is always the same, but this is purely theoretical. Those who are unconscious do not have an essence: theirs is the identity of the mind. Only those who are conscious possess their true and immortal self.

Before we relate properly to the question of the existence or non-existence of our soul, we need to have an adequate definition of what this term actually means. The word soul is not absolute, and its etymological root reflects more its connection to our vital force, the faculty to exist, than to any sense of identity. As we have said, for most people the soul is another name for their ego, or at least for its immortal, continuing aspect. In philosophies which are based on a belief in reincarnation there is an assumption that ego has some inner substance that allows it to travel from one life to another. In Buddhism, which denies the existence of any such substance, they propose instead that that which incarnates is a bundle of psychological constituents bound together by the continuity of memory and evolution. In their view, since ego has no substance, there is no substratum of self beyond the impermanent fluctuations of thoughts and emotions. If we feel that we have a sense of self, this is just an illusion produced by the mind. The moment this illusion is dispelled through awakening, we realize that there is no self and reach liberation. Or do we?

In our teaching, we use the term soul with a very specific meaning in mind. This meaning is not merely our invention or an arbitrary decision: it reflects how this word has been intuited by those people who possess a certain essential sensitivity. Even when not awakened, more mature people already experience a subtle connection to who they really are. It is as if their own soul was connected to them prior to being consciously realized. What we are saying about the soul is nothing really new. Rather we are expressing in a structured way the knowledge that is already present in the heart of each human being. What is new here is the level of clarity we bring, and it is



clarity that liberates. By bringing more understanding into this matter, we support this intuitive knowledge of the soul to blossom into conscious awakening of our complete self.

The soul is our higher being. Until she is realized, she does not yet constitute our identity but is present only as our potential. Prior to our awakening, our identity is based on the sense of me and the psychological structure surrounding it, our personality. Evolution into our soul is a process of individuation, of growing into our true individuality. The root of the term individual is 'indivisible': that which cannot be divided, that which is one and whole. To become an individual is to realize our undivided self. Our individuality can be born only when we become linked to the light of I am. I am is the universal energy, the light of reality, the substance from which the body of the supreme is made. I am is the bedrock of the self upon which our higher identity of the soul can be built; it is the substratum of our individuality. Without having the link to I am, the soul cannot come into existence, she has no solid ground upon which she can *be*. And yet having access to I am is not enough for the soul to awaken. She awakens through merging the light of me, which is the axis of our personal sense of self, with the light of I am. It is the sacred marriage between me and I am that awakens our higher identity. To become our soul is a paradox of remembering who we really are and yet becoming that which we have never been – our new self.

The soul cannot be realized through self-enquiry or contemplation alone. She needs to be awakened in the context of evolution into the states beyond the mind and surrender into universal existence. She does not become awakened by practice or discipline. Even initiation into the light of I am by a spiritual guide is not enough to awaken the soul, unless the seeker has the capacity to recognize his or her true identity. It is not just a new state: it is a meeting. For that reason it is called an awakening: it is to wake-up to the higher definition of who we are. The soul needs to be in the state of meditation in order to contain her existence as the I am of our sacred individuality. Those who sit in meditation and dwell in various states but do not meet their soul are missing the essence of meditation: they miss *who* is in meditation, the one who embodies the condition of pure being. To meditate is to be our soul in her natural unity with the ground of existence.

The soul can be realized on many levels, depending on how deeply we are awakened and the degree of our samadhi in the inner realm. One can realize one's soul on the level of consciousness, heart and being and ultimately through their unity. For the soul to be fully embodied, she must integrate and absorb into herself her human identity; all the layers of me must be merged with the soul. For that to happen, the human has to surrender. Awakening of the soul and the surrender of our human self are mutually dependent: she needs the energy of me to solidify and illuminate her own higher presence. Me and I am are the two dimensions of the soul. I am is her existential foundation and root in the universal reality; me is the power of her illumination and intelligence. I am is her impersonal body of existence, me is her personal face, her eyes



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which look both inwardly and outwardly. I am gravitates towards samadhi, me activates the quality of clarity. It is their intricate integration and unity that allows the transformation of our whole existence, our complete awakening into our higher self.

When we awaken to our soul, we do not only become truly conscious and real: through her birth we actually enter existence. Without possessing our solidified soul-identity, we live on borrowed light. We do not own our existence and if we keep defying our evolutionary purpose over and over again, we can at some point be erased as if we never existed. To become our soul is to become who we really are in the context of eternity – a divine being of light.

Blessings,

Anadi

*\* For a glossary of the terminology used in this teaching and for further resources, you may visit our website [www.anaditeaching.com](http://www.anaditeaching.com)*

