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## Path to Soulfulness

In his rich and thought-provoking book *Care of the Soul* Thomas Moore provides a guide for cultivating depth and sacredness in everyday life.

Moore writes that “The great malady of modern times implicated in all of our troubles and affecting us individually and socially is loss of soul.” He draws on past wisdom to show that by caring for the soul, we can find relief from distress and discover deep satisfaction and pleasure.

Moore contends that, “When soul is neglected it doesn’t just go away; it appears symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence, and loss of meaning.” He suggests that our temptation is to isolate the symptoms, even attempt to eradicate them, but as he sees it, “the root problem is that we have lost our wisdom about the soul, even our interest in it.”

If this is the case, how do we care for the soul in everyday life?

Taking an interest in the soul is a way of loving it. Self-help books and a stream of magazine articles urge us to follow a simple 10 step program for a buff body, great sex, and financial success. Read all the right books and we’ll finally get it right, we’ll be successful at love.

Life isn’t that simple. Soul is about passion and mystery. Passion is the soul’s essential energy. Love has its work to do in the soul’s territory – in the deep places we are drawn into – full of meaning, belonging, loneliness, and suffering. If we are brave enough to give up expectations of how it’s all supposed to work, there is a deep sense of fulfillment – felt, not necessarily understood, but in that place where we are most human.

Care of the soul is not about problem solving. Its intention is to give ordinary life the depth and value that come with soulfulness. A meaningful life at home and in community is a challenge – it requires courage and imagination. In her book *Fierce Conversations*, Susan Scott describes relationships with colleagues, spouses, and children: “Multiple, competing realities existing simultaneously: this is true *and* this is true *and* this is true.”

And as author Ann Lamott writes, “Reality is unforgivingly complex.

Love of the soul asks for some appreciation of life’s complexity. When we are “knotted up,” Moore says, the suffering we go through is the soul’s territory. Care of the soul is quite different than psychology. “It isn’t about curing, fixing, changing, adjusting or making healthy, and it isn’t about some idea of perfection or even improvement. It doesn’t look to the future for a trouble free existence.”

It’s possible to lose sight of who we are, not realizing that we may be playing a character in a drama of our own making. The cared for soul breathes a deep sigh of relief when we are kind to ourselves – when we are willing to let compassion take the place of distrust and fear.

Each of us has a sacred path to follow to care for our soul. The Native Americans call it the “good red road.” Every path is unique, because each is congruent with who we are. We don’t have to climb mountains or go on meditation retreats to connect with the sacred; we just have to find a place that gives us a feeling of being whole, a water’s edge, an open fire, a symphony, a paint-the-house project, a Spanish class – a way to return to beauty and balance. In the Navajo language, the word for “balance” and the word for “beauty” are the same.

Soul is interested in unique individuals, daring adventures, and fascinating stories. Headline in the Art and Leisure section of the New York Times last Sunday: “Amelia Earhart’s Mystique Takes Wing Again,” atop a review of *Amelia*, a biopic about the celebrated aviatrix opening in theatres across the country, Oct. 23. Several decades after her disappearance into the Atlantic, the young girl from Kansas who loved to fly, who dared to dream the impossible, still captures the imagination of the country. Hilary Swank, who stars as Amelia said, “Amelia found something that she loved, a passion, and went after it. All of us especially women, are the better because of it.”

“Beyond the enigma of how she died,” *Amelia* director Mira Nair said, “I’m hoping people will see themselves in her decision to set aside her fears and live her life to the fullest.”