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and I suspect may last longer than psychology itself.”  
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# CARE *of the* SOUL

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION  
WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

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*A Guide for Cultivating Depth  
and Sacredness in Everyday Life*

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THOMAS MOORE

*NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *SOUL MATES*

# CARE OF THE SOUL

A GUIDE FOR CULTIVATING  
DEPTH AND SACREDNESS  
IN EVERYDAY LIFE

THOMAS MOORE

HARPER  PERENNIAL

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“There is the depth and originality of Mr. Moore’s observations . . . and a deeply consoling intelligence . . . that should draw many readers.”

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“Many thanks to Thomas Moore for these profound and timely insights. . . . Genuinely inspirational.”

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“Thomas Moore is an authentic example of a new kind of therapist—a doctor of the soul—which in our century has been in short supply.”

—Larry Dossey, M.D., author of *Meaning and Medicine* and  
*Beyond Illness*

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## CARE OF THE SOUL TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER

When I wrote *Care of the Soul*, I was aware that I was resurrecting an old teaching. In Plato's moving description of Socrates's 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." (*Apology*, 30B)

If you were to read that passage from the *Apology* in Greek, you would see that the word used for *soul* is *psyche*, the word found in our words *psychology*, *psychiatry*, and *psychotherapy*. Imagine if we restored the original sense of soul to those fields, how we might deepen them and make the necessary connections between psychology and spirituality. That is just what I have tried to do as I have taught care of the soul to psychiatrists and psychologists for many years. *Care of the Soul* is a manifesto or leaping-off point for that work.

I live and write in New England, and I have also found inspiration from writers from this region such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Emily Dickinson. Throughout their work you will find the word *soul*.

Emerson, for instance, offered the insight that the soul doesn't develop in a straight line but in stages, like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. Imagine your life as a series of initiations, as you go from one life-changing experience to the next. This perspective alone would take away some of the drudgery and sameness you may feel.

Dickinson said that "the soul should always stand ajar," ready to respond to inspirations. Imagine living in such a way that you are always open to possibilities and intuitions. Again, your life would be less mechanical and predictable.



If you really want to become psychologically astute, read these writers before studying the psychologists. Add Walt Whitman to your list, the irrepressible poet who sang hymns to vitality and sensuality in his writing.

Whitman also described the soul again and again in sensual language, saying that the “body electric,” our body in all its sensuality, reveals the soul. Lovingly he describes all the body parts—the curve of the waist, the red jellies, and the bones—and concludes:

*O I say these are not the parts and poems  
of the body only, but of the soul,  
O I say now these are the soul!*

Finally, I base my work on the insights of two psychologists—in the original and proper sense of that term—C. G. Jung and James Hillman. They offer each a lifetime of work, richly rooted in the long history of writings about the soul, and they make it personal and livable and suitably complex. It’s impossible to pigeonhole either of these writers. They combine philosophy, theology, psychology, and art history into a new and unnamed field that our universities and business schools desperately need.

For me *Care of the Soul* was not intended as an easy, quick guide to solving life’s problems but the start of a deep exploration of the soul, which I find largely ignored today by individuals and the society at large. If we neglect our souls, we lose both our humanity and our individuality and risk becoming more like our machines and more absorbed into a crowd mentality. When we do notice the condition of our souls and do something positive, life problems ease and sometimes go away.

I thought I was writing as a serious practical philosopher, someone in love with wisdom, who believed in the power of subtle ideas to make life more effective and satisfying. From the comments I’ve heard over twenty years, I think most readers took me that way, as a serious writer, a theologian exploring the deeply mysterious aspects of human life.

I think of self-help as superficial advice-giving. When I notice a book of mine in a self-help section of a bookstore, I think of all the hours I spent translating ancient texts from Latin and Greek, hunting for a thin slice of wisdom or a single insight. I recall the many times I have read the complicated eighteen volumes of Jung and listened intently during conversations with my old friend Hillman, as we tried to work out some subtle knot in human feeling or behavior.

When I write, I go for insights rather than explanations. To me, it takes time, reflection, and work to arrive at a fresh insight. On paper these insights may not look like much, but I find technical and research writing fairly useless when they fail to offer insight. I say all this to help the reader read this book differently than he or she might handle a typical modern work of psychology. Don't search for proofs; look for insight.

It was said that Socrates didn't have students, but only friends and companions. That is my ideal. Early on I was encouraged to create training programs, but I felt that to be true to soul, I should keep the friendship model. You can do the same. You don't have to treat everyone you meet as a literal friend, but you can bring the spirit of friendship into all your relationships—at work, in the extended family, and among neighbors. You will be following the example of the great teacher of soul, Socrates, and doing something concrete to introduce soul into your life.

To repeat, I'm not saying that every time we encounter a person in business or health we should try to be a real friend. I'm suggesting the spirit of friendship in small quantities, just enough to transform the interaction into one that is more human and less mechanical.

Interestingly, one word for care that Plato put into Socrates's mouth was the Greek *therapeia*, which means either "care" or "service." Socrates says that it's like the care you'd give a horse on a farm: you feed it, brush it down, exercise it, give it water, and clean its stall. That's the model for therapy of the soul. It's an everyday attention to specific needs, not a cure or repair after things have fallen apart.

I have been a therapist in the Plato/Socrates style for well over thirty years, and I have considerable devotion to the idea. I think all of us could benefit from this kind of therapy at some time in our lives. But I also see it happening outside any formal arrangement. Any time you are caring for your soul, you are being the therapist to yourself. The word *psychotherapy* consists of two Greek words: *psyche* (soul) and *therapy* (care). By definition, psychotherapy is care of the soul. When you serve your soul, you are being therapeutic in this deep, Platonic sense.

Today, when I lecture about care of the soul—and I still give talks and courses directly from the book—I often list certain things that the soul needs: a sense of home, deep friendship and casual friendliness, a poetic and metaphorical appreciation for words and images, attention to night dreams, the fine arts, an intimate relationship with the natural world, acquaintance with animals, memory in the form of storytelling or keeping old buildings and objects that have meaning. We can do many more things to care for the soul such as reconciling our sexuality and spirituality, caring for children, finding work that we love, incorporating play and fun in everything we do, dealing effectively with loss and failure and inadequacies. The shadow is an important aspect of the soul.

I continue to accent the difference between soul and spirit, another ancient idea but one that I learned most clearly from James Hillman. Spirit directs your attention to the cosmos and the planet, to huge ideas and vast adventures, to prayer and meditation and other spiritual practices, to a worldview and philosophy of life. Spirit expands your heart and mind, gives you vision and courage, and eventually leaves you with a strong sense of meaning and purpose.

Soul is more intimate, deep, and concrete. You care for your soul by keeping up your house, learning how to cook, playing sports or games, being around children, getting to know and love the region where you live. Soul allows you to become attached to the world, which is kind of love. When the soul stirs, you feel things, both love and anger, and you have strong desires

and even fears. You live life fully, instead of skirting it with intellectualism or excessive moralistic worries.

In the best situations it isn't easy to distinguish soul from spirit because both play important roles in everything we do. But making the distinction gives the deep soul its due. Spirit inspires, while soul delves deep into the complexities of an issue. Spirit likes to have a planning meeting; soul likes to have a long and deep conversation. Spirit sets goals; soul plods along, going deeper all the way. Spirit prefers detachment, while the soul sinks into its attachments to places, people, and home. The two dimensions are both important and valuable. You don't need to balance them, because balance is too perfect, a spirit idea in the first place. It's enough to give to each what it wants and needs in the moment.

### *Caring for Your Soul Can Be Challenging*

Often the needs of the soul go against the easy flow of life or the comfort of the person and the people around him. A woman may have a marriage and family that in many ways she cherishes, and yet she discovers that her soul needs a divorce. A man may have spent years developing his career with many sacrifices and much effort and then learn that his soul needs an entirely different job. I've known men and women mature in their years who discover that their sexual needs are worthy of their attention, after a lifetime believing that sex should be either tightly controlled or ignored.

Once you decide to care for your soul, you may be heading toward upsetting changes and upheavals. Creating a more soulful life can take a long time, especially when the soul has been ignored or suppressed for many years. Yet, once you discover that you have a soul and that nothing is more precious, you may willingly remain in an unsettled state of transformation in spite of temptations to pull out. Life may never be the same again, because the needs of life and those of the soul don't always coincide.

Another difference between getting life in order and caring for your soul is that we usually like to keep life stable, while the soul is dynamic. It seems always to be ushering in new forms of vitality. You sense this deep energy in new desires and old longings that you've never fully satisfied.

I have known several professional women who were good at their jobs in the health field and yet struck me as being somewhat superficial in their way of working. Yet there was the slightest indication of being dissatisfied, which I took as a potential opening toward a more soulful life. Each of them wanted to start therapy with me, and I could see the different ways in which one person might resist the change that I felt was promising, while another would just let go and let change happen. In one, the soul was like a faint light that could grow brighter, and in another the soul was in the forefront ready to transform her existence. In every case, however, the process was unsettling and even threatening. When the soul moves, important structures of life may topple.

I don't have to educate a person in the nature and ways of the soul. Once I mention the word and talk about it briefly, people recognize what they already know. They even know intuitively that nothing is more important and that they have a tendency to ignore it. This has been an unexpected discovery for me since the publication of *Care of the Soul*: I don't have to teach; I have to remind.

When you encounter a person who has a soul, you sense that he or she has really lived and is complicated and deep. Individuality and character, the feeling of being made of real stuff and a degree of lovability all signal the presence of soul. I often tell my psychiatrist students, "If you meet a person of stellar intellect and achievement, you may admire him, but you may not have dinner with him." Wanting to share a meal is a sign of soul.

But how do you foster these subtle and indefinable qualities? How do you help a person develop soul, when it is so difficult to pin down? How do you make a soulful life for yourself? How do you do therapy when the goal isn't necessarily a smooth-functioning life but character and personality, lovability and appreciation for the beautiful and the meaningful?

You have to depart from current values of social adjustment, perfect health, and visible success. You focus instead on the more ordinary and intimate matters of marriage, children, home, personal history, and nature. You try to shed the modern tendency toward facts and literal understanding and become more poetic, interested in story and open to metaphor. You make your effort to be more human rather than perfect and right. You talk long into the night, enjoying insights, rather than taking a course to acquire more information. Care of the soul has its own methods that tend to be intimate, ordinary, and deeply felt.

### *Anima Mundi, The Soul of the World*

Some people hear the word *soul* and think *me*. For them soul is a deeper version of a self. But there is a paradox at work here: soul is deeper, less known, and more autonomous than the self. And yet, that deep well we sense inside us is also a rich source of identity. A person with soul is a true individual, but that individuality pours out of a deep place that the person doesn't fully know or understand. A soulful person trusts his intuitions and other forms of inner guidance, knowing that a stronger sense of self abides there.

Throughout the history of the soul we also hear about a larger soul of which ours is a part. Start with family, which has its own soul, and a marriage, a neighborhood, a region, a nation. You could talk about the soul of the planet and even the soul of the universe. The ancients who wrote in Latin called it *anima mundi*, the soul of the world.

Understandably, when people hear of soul, they want to know about the state of their soul first. Will it help me feel better about my life? But to fully grasp the implications for your own soul, you have to make the big leap from in here to out there. You have to think about the souls of other people and the soul of the planet and universe. Paradoxically, to fully feed your soul, you

have to take care of the large soul. The only way to nurture your life is to reach out beyond it.

Many people begin the process of seeing the greater soul by thinking of their children's souls. Parents frequently ask me how to care for the souls of their kids. The main lesson I give is to allow the child to grow up as an individual. Don't put too much of your own expectation, values, and experiences on to them. Let children be children. The mushrooming of their personalities will be a sign that their soul is ripening well and will soon bloom. Other recommendations are fairly obvious: time for play, expressions of love, varied experiences, time in nature, being with other children, helping them develop their own spiritualities. These are all matters of soul and can be fostered.

If you read writers of the distant past on *anima mundi*, you get more abstract philosophy than a livable set of ideas. I learned mainly from James Hillman and Robert Sardello to see the soul of the world in particular objects and situations. For example, a house may have a palpable soul if it is beautiful in some ways, has a personality and presence, has a visible history, shows interest beyond functionality, and has a degree of complexity. You can love such a house and miss it when you're away or if it's torn down. This kind of love is a sign that soul is present.

As with people, you may discover the soul of an object through your relationship with it. You find out if it has any depth and if you can work up some real feeling for it. A few weeks after my mother died, my father came to me and handed me something small. "Here it is," he said without any introduction. "I want you to have it." "It" was her wedding ring that she wore every day for over sixty-four years. Do you think that ring had any power of soul in it? Eventually I gave it to my daughter, who was unusually close to her grandmother.

Some objects seem to be full of soul because they symbolize something precious, like the ring that was such an intimate part of my mother's marriage. Other objects might be associated with memories: an electric drill

my father used, a round oak table my grandmother gave me, boxes and cards that my artist wife gave me over the years.

I like to think that we can give soul to things by making them by hand, with positive intentions and taking care to make them beautiful. I once made a wood wardrobe for my daughter when she was a child, and now she still uses it and carts it from place to place when she moves. We could even ensoul things that we make in factories and for big business, if we kept deep values of beauty, tradition, and spirituality in mind.

## *The Soul of Medicine*

Just a few weeks after publishing *Care of the Soul* I got a call from a cancer center a thousand miles from me, asking if I'd come and speak to the staff. It was my first indication that my work had something to offer to medicine. I went to that oncology center and discovered that many doctors and nurses hadn't worked out how to deal with the deaths of their patients and were also angry and frustrated to know that many patients were resorting to "alternative" healing methods that were not approved by the medical establishment. Talking through these issues and applying the principle of care of the soul seemed to help.

Soon afterward, I was invited to speak at a medical conference at Sloan-Kettering in New York, and then, over the years, to many conferences and centers, including NYU Cancer Center and the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. I became interested in helping healthcare workers develop a solid caring attitude toward themselves and to regard their patients as whole persons—body, soul, and spirit. I also explored ways to bring soul to the physical environment of hospitals and medical offices. I was able to apply many fruitful ideas from my studies at Syracuse University in Renaissance healing arts.

To get more soul into the healing environment of a medical center I recommend learning from churches and temples how to make an entrance



that serves to initiate patients and families out of the ordinary world into a special healing place. Thick, tall doors and images that suggest gradual approach and entry, or gargoyles to offer challenge, or winding paths—any of these simple devices would help guide a person into a place of healing. Then, because healing is so primal, I suggest big rocks, flowing water, impressive textiles, raw wood, iron and other metals well placed and strongly felt. I found all of these elements in a few unusual hospitals, and the effect was what I expected. You could feel the atmosphere of healing in them.

Thoughtful sound design that includes elements designed for peace and quiet are appropriate for healing, and traditional images of healers can transform the space from functional to spiritually rich. In my own therapy room I have images of Jesus, Buddha, Asklepios, Virgin Mary, Artemis, Quan Yin, and Zen Buddhism. I'm not just trying to be inclusive but to draw on any spiritual tradition I know and love that offers insight into healing.

## *Psychotherapy as Care of the Soul*

In the twenty-five years since the appearance of *Care of the Soul* I have been offering private consultations that I refer to as “psychotherapy,” but I mean it in the Platonic sense—service to or care of the soul. The main difference between psychotherapy in the usual sense and mine is the emphasis on matters of soul rather than managing a person's life and resolving problems and emotional tensions. It isn't that I don't want to help a person navigate the knots we all get into in relationships, dealing with past trauma, and finding purpose. It's more that I want to honor what is presented and let it offer the potential good it holds. I don't want to be a problem-solver of emotions.

By definition my job is to bring a constant and sensitive intelligence to wounds of the soul and various blockages it runs into. I focus on depth of soul rather than the surface of life, though the soul usually shows itself in ordinary situations. People also tend to neglect their souls until some

problem emerges, like a difficulty in marriage or emotional urgency like depression or jealousy or loss.

I begin by having the intention to care for a person's soul rather than simply solve problems. I notice how a person's deep soul may be moving in a certain direction, asking for certain kinds of attention, while the person's conscious and heroic mind moves toward different goals. Commonly, a person might feel sad and wish for a taste of happiness. Clearly, the deep soul has reason to be sad, and instead of looking for routes to happiness, I explore the needs of the soul to be sad. Finding the reasons for the deep soul sadness might eventually lead to a happier life, but maybe not. In the end the sadness may be incurable but made more livable.

This is where James Hillman's important teaching on the many-sided nature of the psyche, what he calls "psychological polytheism," comes into play. You may discover the basis for an unshakable sadness and for that reason feel that you can acknowledge it and contain it, while living a generally happy life.

I try not to be obsessed with finding the cause of a person's suffering. That can turn into a mental hunt that becomes far too heroic. Instead, I rely on relaxed storytelling in an atmosphere of acceptance and appreciation. I listen carefully and almost always find myself loving the person's soul as it tries to be revealed. At the same time I feel empathy for the struggles people are going through as they feel their lives and hearts torn apart in their soul's birth.

It's my job to empathize with the painful work ahead, but I feel no need myself to do this work with anyone. If they leave early in the process, I figure they will find another way. In the same fashion, I don't think about ending and closure. The work keeps going on in various forms. If clients decide to end this form of therapy, I don't want to make a big thing of it but rather show with my support for their decision that there is no end to care of the soul. Therapy in the larger sense goes on. This is where a spiritual point of view, free of ego needs and similar to the detachment of the Zen master, plays a role.

We all tend to think about ourselves through the filters of our complexes. If you are desperate to feel free and unfettered, the way you describe your situation will be colored, often quite thoroughly, by that complex. Usually I can glimpse the complexes at work through the stories and the way a person presents himself, but the best and clearest manifestation is in dreams. I rely on dreams for direction and signs of just where the person is at the moment. Some people in therapy with me see the work as dream work applied to daily life. My approach is largely a matter of hearing underlying narratives and images in the stories people tell, linking these subterranean themes to the themes that appear in the dreams.

A common example is the theme of construction. As the person tells stories of childhood and earlier experiences, I may notice that they are trying to create a different way of life. It could be a new career, a new way of relating, or a different sense of self. They are trying to construct a life and a personality. In the dreams I may see houses being built. This person may not have come to me for help in constructing a new life. He may have come complaining of depression or lack of purpose. If I focus on lightening the depression—a bad idea for many reasons—I may overlook the precise needs of the soul. The dreams don't indicate depression. They show the need for construction and renewal.

I often see a contrast between conscious intention and wish on the one hand, and the deeper movement of the soul on the other. I acknowledge the conscious desire but focus on indications from the soul. This is psychotherapy as care of the soul, not trying to make life better.

## *Spirituality with Soul*

A person's religious and spiritual background, or lack of it, is rich material for the soul work. Spiritual health and well-being are as important as physical and emotional health, and very often conflicts in the soul play out in a person's religious and spiritual practice. Spiritual emotions can be

deeply disturbing: anxiety about meaning, guilt, fear of death, concern about afterlife, existential loneliness, and uncertainty. As a therapist, I see these matters of a piece with the deeper soul issues, and I practice the kind of therapy that quite naturally deals with spiritual issues as well as problems in love, money, work, family, and sexuality.

In my doctoral studies at Syracuse University I redefined religion for myself. I see profound value in the many structures and traditions, but the essence of religious experience is our recognition of the infinite mysteries that abound in life like those surrounding love, death, illness, meaning, work, and home. This vision opens up into a way of life based on a sensitive ethical response to the world. Respect for the mysterious is, to me, the heart of religion.

Because of this different use of the word *religion*, my work is sometimes misunderstood. People hear the word *religion* and think: creed, organization, dogma, moral persuasion. I hear the same word and think: depth of meaning and heartfelt expression. It's clear to me that the era of competition among the formal religions is over. Now we have to honor their uniqueness while deriving as much insight and inspiration possible from them for ourselves and our communities. I'd like to see the churches and temples filled once again, now not with members necessarily, but with people seeking spiritual direction and nurturance. The traditions are precious resources for our individual spiritual lives.

This more subtle and complex approach to religion blends soul and spirit in a creative way. Ritual, images, an emphasis on story, a community of real individuals, solidarity with global concerns—these themes can give spiritual practice the depth that soul offers. If the very notion of spirituality seems too vague and weightless, this new and deep appreciation for the elements of religion, freed from worry about belonging to an organization, could restore a much needed religious sensibility in society.

*Soul Care*