

## An Interview With The Soul

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I'd like to open with the idea that there can be many different types of reality. This presentation may simply be the musings of an eccentric artist, but I encourage you to open your mind and connect with the creativity and imagination that everyone possesses. I always love a good analogy and often employ imagination to make sense of what doesn't. Many things that science or logic can't explain can be interpreted through imagination, often taking artistic form. The Soul is one of those things that science cannot explain or even prove its existence. Some skeptics deny the existence of a Soul. Others argue over its definition in an attempt to give solidity to something which is neither definable nor solid. I've come to the conclusion that there is no single definition: only a collection of explanations and a lifetime of exploration.

To be honest, I hesitate to share these stories with you today. For weeks leading up to now, I've debated the choice. I must have written three or four different talks, experimenting with "safer" approaches. I even bought one of those alternative talks today, just in case I lost my nerve last minute. That one is standard—what you would expect to hear and have probably heard many times already. What I will share with you today...this is quite literally from my Soul.

In 1992, Thomas Moore—a prolific writer on psychology and spirituality— published a book called *Care of the Soul*. He discusses an explanation of the human Soul, saying "It is not a *thing*; but a quality or dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart, and personal substance." He goes on to say, "Tradition teaches that Soul lies midway between understanding and unconscious, and that its instrument is neither the mind, nor the body, but imagination."

Ahh...imagination! Many adults would deny that they have the capacity for imagining; associating it with the wide-eyed naivety of childhood and make-believe play. Imaginary friends, for example, are fine for three or four year olds, but adults maintain the expectation that maturity and immersion into reality erases those imaginary friends. An adult who claims to have imaginary friends must be delusional, schizophrenic, or have some other malfunction going on in their brain. But let's consider a situation: What if there were an adult...let's give the adult a name; we'll call them Five. What if Five were to consciously create an imaginary friend because Five is lonely, troubled, and in need of a someone to talk to. The friend is given a name—Atticus—along with a complete personality, backstory, and an imagined appearance. Atticus, though not physically real, somehow manages to comfort Five and help them through the difficulties they are currently facing. ...I'll be honest with you. I am Five and Atticus is real. Or as real as an imaginary friend can be which, to me, is very, very real. I met Atticus one day in September of 2011 when I was walking home from a rather tedious day during my first year of community college.

In researching the Soul for this presentation, I stumbled upon a rather interesting theory. I believe that Atticus, who reflects many attributes of myself including personality, skills, and experiences, is in fact, a representation of part of my Soul. By creating him—an academic and musically inclined imaginary friend—I was able to take a theoretical step outside myself and thereby create a means of coping with overwhelming stress, loneliness and emotional turmoil.

If Atticus represents a part of my soul, then it makes even more sense that, shortly after I met Atticus, I was introduced to the twins: Lyra and Vincent. Vincent reflected the darker aspects of myself including depression and loneliness. Lyra balanced him out with her

stubbornness and comedy, but also tends to be angry and impulsive. They, too, are aspects of myself—of my Soul. Gwendolyn came along in 2012, with her motherly gentleness, artistic creativity, and mild eccentricity. It wasn't until 2014 that she introduced me to Bonnie—a shy child who spent most of her time hiding and never spoke to anyone except Gwen. Now, if you were wondering why I chose Five as the name for the anonymous individual earlier, you have your answer. One Jayne, five imaginary (but very real) friends.

I've chosen to introduce them to you today because I do believe that they are representations of my Soul. Their creation was essential to my survival during a very dark time in my life. Imagination became my tool for learning about myself by *personifying* my strengths and weaknesses; my past struggles and my dreams for the future. It is similar to someone who, seeking self-improvement, visualizes themselves in the future and looks back on the person they were in the past. Or a person struggling to make a difficult decision who considers the possible outcomes, searching their soul for wisdom and experience.

Consulting the Soul is essential when it comes to making difficult decisions. The only difference for me is that I look to stories and symbolism to make that connection to the Soul. For example, in my decision to present this talk today, I found it helpful to consult Atticus—the analytical one, and Gwendolyn—the creative one, for ideas and input. An imaginary meeting, really? Yes, I know it sounds like absolute lunacy. I don't literally hear voices or see specters. Perhaps some of it is mental malfunction. But without being able to unburden myself and go through them to explore different perspectives, the mental chaos of thoughts and ideas would ultimately overwhelm me and make me crazier than I already am. For me, care of the Soul is also care of the mind and vice-versa. My friend, Lyra represents the athletic aspect and is my imaginary running partner, so care of the body also works its way into the equation. Thus the Soul

becomes a place where everything that is important to an individual meets to form the essence of that individual. It is more than personality. It is emotion, rational thought, creativity, past self, and future self. Indeed I would imagine our Souls are also composed of love for each other. In creating Gwendolyn, I based some of her characteristics off my sister to whom I'm very close.

I learned a great deal about care of the Soul from my interactions with imaginary friends. Nobody is perfect, and that includes them. I confess that I was not always a good friend and was often unkind to some of them, particularly Vincent. I blamed him for being unable to control emotion. I wasn't able to own my own harmful behavior until I released him from that blame. Lyra's anger and impulsivity—I had to accept those as my own before I could work on them and until I worked on them, my communication and interactions with others were crippled by borderline personality tendencies. I was ashamed of Bonnie because she represents the inner child who, to me, felt weak and pathetic. Indeed, Bonnie is still afraid because I'm not always able to acknowledge and accept her basic need to be loved.

As I advanced on my journey through years of therapy and self-exploration, I was forced to realize that I was not going to be able to heal until I accepted those parts of myself that I despised. I would not experience change unless I was willing to let my imaginary friends change too. Care of the Soul means being willing to accept sorrow and anger rather than push it aside, hoping it goes away. Care of the Soul involves being open to changes that come our way, however painful or tragic. The Soul is not a static thing, but ever-changing as we ourselves change. This is why harm to the Soul can occur when we are resistant to change. We've all heard that struggle makes us stronger. I would suggest that our response to struggle is directly related to care of the Soul. A mindful and compassionate response will benefit the Soul, planting seeds of wisdom and strength. A reaction of angry retaliation or denial is harmful for the Soul, creating a hard barrier against everything because we can't trust anything. We rebel against

anything perceived as threatening, replacing willingness with stubborn willfulness. I spent many years surrounded by that wall. But I learned the walls needn't be permanent and that that vulnerability, however uncomfortable, leads to a sense of inner peace and self-acceptance.

Care of the Soul doesn't necessarily mean personifying the soul through imaginary friends. Everyone's journey is different, but the development of the Soul is just that: a journey. Although Soul is often associated with religion, it needn't be interpreted as a spiritual entity, but rather as a compilation of an individual's experiences and emotions. A soul is a story. I'd like to close with the words of Rev. Wayne Arnason:

*"It is the great gift and the great curse of many Unitarian Universalists that we are more comfortable with the intellectual path of religious understanding. Yet all of us know that our lives, our values, our sense of being at home in the world have been created not only by our intellectual encounter with the world, but by our experiences of joy at connectedness, of anger at injustices, and of wonder at overwhelming beauty, experiences that can all be wordless and ineffable. Soul is the place where all these experiences meet together with our ideas and our collective unconscious in order to prepare the spiritual feast that is life's greatest gift."*