

Introduction



Allow Me to Present Your Soul

Though your soul may be more mystery to you than familiar reality, you are not a stranger to soul moments. When you smile for no reason, know something for sure without having learned it, or feel peace amid broken pieces, your soul is manifesting itself. Your soul is your hidden reservoir of limitless wisdom, peace, and joy. Your best guide for setting priorities and living at a sustainable pace is your soul. Your soul is the part of you God held last just before releasing your free flight into the world.

Your soul's home disposition is one of peaceful enthusiasm. Your soul's holy inclination is toward inciting high aspirations, but always from a place of deep contentment. Your soul wants to insure that your drive to succeed never runs roughshod over your peace, steadfastly insisting that your serenity be as deep as your ambition is high. Your soul knows and wants you to know that your best offering to the wider world derives from a place of inner peace.

Your soul has a knack for teasing and taunting you with new spaces of possibility in your relationships, vocational pursuits, and, most importantly, your being your freshest, finest, and fullest self in the world.

Your soul smiles as it assists you in cultivating a tenacious curiosity for the new, different, and challenging, for therein lies the impulse for you to explore the divine expanse, within and without, too big for words. Your soul wants you to ponder about the undiscovered terrains you sense but do not yet see. Your soul wants you to know the thrill of a certain kind of wondering that is as fulfilling as knowing. Your soul smiles whenever you are enchanted by mystery.

Your soul is the God-most part of you that has never known and will never know fear. Your soul is God's everlasting laughter in you. Your soul is God's Spirit in your spirit, filled to overflowing with lavish love, grace, and outrageous joy. More than anything else, your soul wants you to know how much you are madly adored by God in the grand hope that you will live *from* acceptance and not *for* acceptance.

Your soul loves you and will never ever lead you astray. This being true, your soul knows too much magnificent truth to be ignored, and is too utterly precious to be denied. I offer *Soul Talk* to you to help you get to know, understand, and value your Sacred Splendor better. You have heard everyone else out; now it is time to listen to your soul. Indeed, your conversation with your soul is the most important conversation of all.

In her wise and beautiful book, *Einstein and the Rabbi: Searching for the Soul*, Rabbi Naomi Levy concludes:

Your soul wants to teach you about your strength. It wants you to believe in your abilities and your gifts.

It wants you to lift up your head with pride and claim your birthright: the life that is yours to experience. Your soul wants you to follow it through times of darkness, through the fog and confusion. Your soul will lead you to heights and to loves and to kindness.

Notable Features of Soul Speech

How do you know when your soul is speaking through your inner voice, and through spiritual nudges, feelings, and sightings? Soul communication comes forth from inside you, and from outside you, through persons, situations, and nature. There are certain primary features of soul speech that stand out for me. Your experience may result in highlighting additional primary qualities.

Distinct

The voice of your soul has its own unique sound. It comes from a place that is of this world, and yet beyond it at the same time. It is a voice that is gentle, but always strongly certain. Though soul voice may remind you of certain persons in your life, especially those with whom you have a special bond, the soul voice will always hold something strangely more in its sound.

Non-Anxious

Even when the message is serious and urgent, your soul will never communicate to create destructive tension within you, though it will,

at times, risk planting seeds of creative tension. The soul sound is filled with peaceful reassurance. Soul voice is calm, always seeming to take your emotional state into deepest consideration. Your soul will never say anything to you that it believes you are truly unable to hear.

Clarity

Though we may muddle the soul's messages with our subsequent fears and doubts, initial soul message-sending is as clear as can be. Soul clarity is rooted in soul certainty. Never unsure about what it says, soul expression is direct and forthright.

Though we may be doubtful about what we hear, the soul is never doubtful about what it says.

Now there is this: Sometimes the soul's clarity is purposefully foggy. My experience is that the soul is intentionally unclear in order to create in you a desire to search further and dig deeper. The soul is not above using mystery to make you curious. Thomas Merton wrote, "Some things are too clear to be understood." Your not fully understanding is nothing to be ashamed of. Searches prompted by the soul telling some and keeping some can lead to some of the greatest discoveries of all.

Lighthearted

There is a space in your soul that has never known fear, and never will. Your soul knows that through it all, all is well. With such blessed assurance, the soul, more than it is known for doing, delightfully risks playfulness and joy. Your soul does not shy away from alluring you

with prodding, nudges, and messages offered in hopes that you can't resist imagining, smiling, and laughing.

Challenging

As lighthearted as it can be, your soul will dare to ask questions designed to grow you. That being the case, the soul will utter things you may not want to hear, but need to hear in order to become better. Because the soul has your transformation in mind, it is more than willing to present truth that may first trouble you on the way to setting you free.

Patient

Nowhere is the soul's patience more evident than in its abiding willingness to repeat itself over and over again. With lavish grace, your soul will never make you feel guilty for not having heard something well the first, fourteenth, or fortieth time. Embedded within such patience is a relentless insistence that should not be underestimated or ignored.

The soul knows how ignorant we can innocently be, and sometimes deliberately choose to be. So the soul will keep seeking to arouse us with the same wisdom presented in different ways that we may eventually see the light.

Yet, soul tenacity is not beyond wounding. It is possible for soul patience to be strained. When this happens, our souls become restless. Feeling denied and diminished, your soul may cry out. Just because your soul is patient and persevering, doesn't mean it can't

know deep suffering and rage. When your soul cries out, it is time to listen like never before.

Divine

There are those who believe that the voice of the soul and the voice of God are one. I will leave this for you to decide. I can say from my own experience of my soul offering some of the most compelling expressions of love, grace, and mercy I have known, that soul and God often speak as one. The soul will never offer you wisdom unauthorized by God. That it is divine also explains why the soul is so self-assured and non-defensive. It has nothing to prove; its presence is relaxed peaceful confidence. The soul's proximity to God is evidenced by the peace of God it exudes.

Connection, Clarity, and Peaceful Confidence

Early in her writing career, esteemed author, Alice Walker, was told that she had to make major revisions to an article before it could be published. "You have to do this," explained the publisher. Walker responded, "The only thing I have to do is save my soul." This was an instance of courageous soul-speak on behalf of itself.

Walker's experience points to three essential benefits of being in touch with your soul: 1. Divine Connection. 2. Clarity of Vision. 3. Peaceful Confidence.

Your soul connects you to your Source. Remembering and reclaiming your divinity is your greatest way to bless yourself. Sacred rootedness inspires clearer vision about who you really are and what

you really want. A sense of God-ness and sureness of direction gives rise to confident peace empowering us to stand up and stand out.

Walker's connection, clarity, and peaceful confidence helped her to fend off being willfully ignorant of dehumanizing charades surrounding her, specifically: the lie that creative integrity needed to be compromised to achieve success. It is easy to be taken in and undone by limiting thoughts and perspectives that diminish us. Heeding the calls of the soul cultivating connection, clarity, and confidence within, insures that we will be loyal to that which is highest and royal inside of us.

Perennial Calls of Every Human Soul

While each of us will develop our unique way of relating with our soul, and hear many messages along the way, I believe there are three matters that every soul raises over and over again: *Authenticity*, *Freedom*, and *Transformation*. Authenticity is about you exploring and enjoying being who you deeply are. Freedom has to do with you living in the world as openly and nimbly as possible while maintaining a partnership with the dynamic flow of life. When we are one with life's flow, we have a comparable appreciation for both security and surprise. Transformation is inhabiting and expanding your growing edges as a way of life. In the words of the Jazz composer and pianist Edward "Duke" Ellington, our best offering is always "the next one." John O'Donohue writes ever so beautifully in *Anam Cara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World*:

The human heart is never completely born. It is being birthed in every experience of your life. Everything

*that happens to you has the potential to deepen you.
It brings to birth within you new territories of the
heart.*

Being deeply who we are, in lighthearted relationship with the creative and challenging ebbs and flows of life, ever open and receptive to changes that grow us, brings overflowing joy to the soul.

Your soul will never say anything to diminish your commitments to personal authenticity, freedom, and transformation. On the contrary, it will find multiple ways to fan the fire under such sacred flames, allowing your light to shine and inspire for all the universe to see and celebrate. I have come to see personal authenticity, freedom, and transformation mattering most of all, above anything I can ever produce or acquire. My soul's witness along these lines is always beautiful liberating wisdom.

Unsung Gifts of Soul Talk

Alongside the deep peace, wisdom, and joy generated by soul talk are some fabulous unsung gifts:

Sensitivity to the Sacred

Patient attention cultivated in frequent soul talk helps you notice and appreciate the witness of the Spirit evident all the time. For example, many of us share the experience of feeling unusually blessed by a stranger's glance. Amid a throng of people, a lone smile in the distance can warm your heart. A blessing need not be directed toward

us to be caught by us. Observing children at play can make your soul smile. Listening to someone's gentle tones with another can soften your heart. We are surrounded by small brilliant witnesses of glory. Attending to your soul's glory equips you to catch the rest of the glory all around us all the time.

Soul Friendship

Resist believing that your soulful conversation is just for you. Your ongoing deepening dialogue with yourself about what matters most readies you for conversations with others about what matters most. Your soul talk practice will deepen and enhance your dialogue with others. Personal soulful conversation increases your capacity to have genuinely soulful relationships. Such relationships should not be overlooked. In *Edge of Wonder*, Victoria Erikson offers:

Some people open up new worlds within us. Don't always assume there will be many more to come, as a great understanding between two beings is often rare.

Be sure to nurture and fiercely appreciate these beautiful friendships and connections. You already know who they are.

A soul friendship is one in which you are invited to share deepest wanderings and longings. It is characterized by the purest honesty, sharing, and reverence. A soul friend, more than anyone else, as said

to me once, “holds that which is tender and sacred in you in holy embrace.”

Soul friendships are impossible without an abiding commitment to one’s own soul awareness and honesty. Without such, we are simply not outfitted to engage, embrace, and encourage others in the deep places. Having the courage to know yourself fully inspires and empowers you to know others fully.

Peace Overflow

A guest speaker was once accorded the following expression of gratitude:

Thank you for embodying a deep peace that brings out the depths in others and gives them permission to be fully themselves and to shine. What a blessing.

Inner peace is usually thought of in terms of benefiting the bearer of such splendid serenity. Yet inner peace has significant social potency. Think of those persons you know who exhibit a sustained calmness. They are not oblivious to it all; they just seem to have a rootedness about them enabling them to bear it all without breaking.

The soul is your reservoir of deep peace. The more you are at home with your soul, the more you are at home with your deep peace. Bearers of deep peace bestow peace without their even being aware of it. And not only peace, but wisdom, freedom, and grace for persons to be who they are without fear. Soulful peace offers invisible yet undeniable grace to others “to be fully themselves and to shine.”

Justifying Soul Talk Time

How do you justify devoting time alone in an activity that does not immediately involve serving others, focusing on something that is not instantly measurable in terms of our cultural deities: acquisition and production? Spending time in the slow soft spaces of soul talk will challenge our addictions to speed, stimulation, and busyness. The worthiness of soul talk is precisely in its offering what we remain hungry for, in spite of our feasting on hurried and overloaded living: *deeper meaning in life.*

In recent years, I have developed a deeper appreciation for children's books. I try to read several of them each month. Such secret treasures are often dripping with insight, offering words and images pulling you into an experience that can remain with you long after the reading is over. Beatrice Alemagna's children's book, *On A Magical Do-Nothing Day*, tells the story of a little girl who goes outside in the rain on a day that feels as boring as it is dreary. Things go from bad to worse when she accidentally drops her portable video game device in a pond. She laments:

Without my game, I had nothing to do.

The rain felt like rocks were hitting me

I was a small tree trapped outside in a hurricane.

But then something magical happens. She follows four snails down a path, coming upon a muddy place:

I bent down and dug my fingers into the mud where a thousand seeds and pellets, kernels, grains, roots, and berries touched my fingers and hands. An underground world full of treasures that I could feel.

Time with your soul will be like surveying an underground world full of treasures that you never knew were there. Any justification that you need for spending time alone and away investigating this world will come from your discoveries, and their revolutionizing impact on your more empowered and enchanted personhood going forward.

The 7 Soul Talk Steps

The method offered in *Soul Talk* for maintaining a continual dialogue with your soul includes the following seven steps:

1. Be Still.
2. Lay Burdens Down.
3. Listen Deeply.
4. Don't Run Away.
5. Be Honest.
6. Be Gentle.
7. Welcome New Truth.

My soul talk moments are usually early in the morning, and are about 5 to 20 minutes long. The steps I share with you, based on my own

soul talk experience, need not occur in chronological order. For example, it is not uncommon for me to hear a new truth first, choose to not run away, and instead move to a place of stillness to continue listening deeply in the stillness. This example is just the reverse of the steps as presented. While I render the steps in a certain order, that order is not etched in stone. Be free to engage your soul in the way that seems most natural for you. Use my steps as a guide. Look to manifest their expression in the way that seems most genuine to you at the time. You may across time develop a preferred sequence of steps, even choosing to add or to subtract from the ones I offer. The point of it all is to make soul talk a vital part of your everyday life in one way or another.

Showing Your Soul to Yourself: Chronicling Your Soul Talk

I have journaled since leaving my first pastorate in 1984. Founding and leading Beacon Light Baptist Church in my home of New Orleans, LA was such an exciting and fulfilling that I wanted to make sure I remembered as much of it as possible. My journaling practice expanded over the years, as I began to appreciate how much it helped to keep me awake to my life. More than helping me to stay in the know about my life, journaling helps me to stay in charge of my life. Deliberately recording experiences and explorations that matter makes me more deliberate about not just responding to life, but intentionally and thoughtfully creating life. I now maintain several journals, one exclusively devoted to my soul talk dialogue. Journaling helps me to show my soul to myself.

Whether you choose to use the accompanying *Soul Talk Journal* or not, I strongly encourage you to take some moments to record highlights from your soul talk sessions. My habit is to jot a word or phrase during the session itself. Often but not always, I then take a moment to summarize any messages, images, ideas, and impressions that may have surfaced during the session. Doing so helps me to stay alert for recurring themes. It is important for me to note guidance that I am led to put into practice in some way.

Tracking inner dialogue sessions also increases my confidence in soul talk as I observe specific instances in which it made a difference.

As you journal, here are three tips for you to consider. First, experiment writing with your non-dominant hand. Most of us have less control over our non-dominant hand when writing. This can lead to writing that is not over-thought and less contrived. Using your non-dominant hand may make it easier for you to unlock the hidden wisdom of your soul. Second, pay careful attention to writing that surprises you in some way. Notice what seems to be written more *through* you than *by* you. Ponder what you write, but had not intended to. These words may offer to you what the beloved Howard Thurman referred to as “the growing edge.” Third, don’t just write, doodle. Let yourself sketch images as well as write words. Sometimes the soul can effectively say in an image, what you may need hundreds of words to accurately express.

Journaling your soul talk conversations helps you to keep such vital dialogue as a priority in your life. For Anne Morrow Lindbergh, chronicling living enlivened living:

I must write it all out at any cost. Writing is thinking. It is more than living, for me it is conscious living.

Perhaps journaling will become for you what it has become for me and so many others: *A soul-growth necessity.*

Have Fun!

In the movie *Patch Adams*, a young unorthodox physician in training is almost dismissed from medical school for displaying “excessive happiness.” In the the movie *The Color Purple*, Sophia laments, “I know what it feels like to want to sing and have it beaten out of you.” Both Patch Adams and Sophia are opposed by the enemies of delight. Your soul never was or ever will be counted among the enemies of delight.

Your soul is aware of the pitfall of being so focused on order and tradition that we fail to appreciate God’s appetite for divine lunacy and sacred surprise.

Your soul talks should not be heavy hearted affairs. Though there will be times of engaging deep brokenness, the natural inclination of the soul is toward joyful lightheartedness. So don’t be afraid to laugh and smile with your soul. Don’t be shocked by surprising questions, whimsical answers, and the soul seeming silly at times. To live with soul is to hear the rhythms of new possibilities and not be afraid to *play* along.

Finally, you will find poetry at the end of each chapter. I hope these brief entries are as much blessing to you as the prose contained here. Poetry has a way of opening me up and expanding me in ways prose does not. I hope the same for you, and for your soul to say things to you in the spaciousness surrounding the poetry that I have not said in this book, that your soul wants you to hear.

Soul Glee



There is
a deep
soul glee
that does
not make
a sound
lest it
start laughing
and never stop.

Soul Wish



More than
anything else,
your soul
wishes you
fierce freedom
for exploration
and enchantment.

All Yearning Lost



Once when I went within
seeking for what my soul wanted,
I found plush grass
and fell upon all yearning lost.
And my soul said, "That."

Soul Settle Down



Settle down
in your soul
to restore
your peace,
regulate
your pace,
and reset
your priorities.