

## Chapter 3

# Personality as the Fixation of Soul

“Self,” “soul,” “personality,” “ego,” “Spirit” – all these terms point to different aspects of the flow of living within each singular human being. In this chapter I am going to clarify how I am using these terms. I am especially concerned in this chapter to point out how personality is a fixation of the flow that is the true nature of the soul. Spirit with a capital “S” is my name for the true nature of the soul.

“Self” is the most general of these terms. It can mean anything and everything from our physical body to our deepest inward being. Perhaps the key consideration associated with this term is how we identify who we are. Are we our bodies? Are we our sensations? Are we our desires? Are we our emotions? Are we our thoughts? Or are we something deeper and more inward? What is our true self? What is our authentic self? The term “self” is more of a question than an answer.

“Soul” is a term I stopped using for a time. I needed to drop meanings that were associated with being a ghostly substance that lives on after the body dies and ends up in a terrible place called hell or a wonderful place called heaven. I consented to use the word “soul” when talking about African American soul music, but I never explored deeply how such music was rooted in the deep flow of our authentic humanity. Nevertheless, in the soul-music context, the word “soul” did hold for me some vague meaning of a deeper more inward core that was emotionally open and expressive, a quality of our natural self that could be deeply sad and deeply happy. Such an understanding of “soul” was a good beginning for a fresh use of this word.

I have been further encouraged to reinstate the term “soul” by the teachings of A. H. Almaas in his book, *The Inner Journey Home*. He uses the word “soul” to indicate the natural flow of awareness in the present moment of our living. By “awareness” I mean the consciousness of consciousness that is unique to the human species. Soul is the aware presence that we can experience in the depths of our particular solitary being. So understood, soul is a flowing and impressionable actuality. Like flowing water, it interacts with whatever it touches; the soul is influenced by whatever is being experienced. The soul is the central me whether a soul is despair or a soul its true being. The soul in its true being I am calling “Spirit.” The essential soul, the soul as Spirit Being I have described in the first two chapters as a ramp from here to Eternity with angels moving down and up.

When the soul is being its Spirit Being it is like water that flows freely through all the situations of living, taking them in and actively engaging in them. But this flowing water of the true soul can also become frozen. Frozen water is water that does not flow well anymore. It moves slowly like a glacier or awkwardly like ice cubes. Rigid cubes can make it through some situations but not others. The soul, when flowing well, can flow through all sorts of situations. When rigid, it hangs up on the narrow places of living. Whether rigid or flowing, our soul is an actual presence; it is a palpable quality of our inward life at this moment in time. When we speak of inward experience, we are speaking of experiences of “soul.” This “soul” is more than emotions; it is a sensibility that includes emotions. This “soul” is more than thinking; it is an experiencing of life that includes thinking. This “soul” is more than the superego of internalized critical judgments, yet the soul is that sensitive flow that is affected by these superego judgments. Thus even the judgments of the superego are experiences of the soul. The soul is that core sensibility, that core presence that we can experience as the actual flow of our current inner life.

**“Personality”** is a term I will use to point to a pattern of habits built up by the soul over the years. Each of us “develops” a personality. The personality is developed in dialogue with the experiences we have had. Each experience of living can be summarized and remembered as a little dialogue of encounter and response. These little dialogues are stored in memory, reinforce one another, and become habitual patterns that we apply consciously or unconsciously to our ongoing perceptions of reality. These stored dialogues also include our repertoire of responses that we can play out in our ongoing circumstances. The term “personality” points to the overall pattern of an individual’s patterns of perception and response. We would not want to be without a personality, and we all want that personality to be a functional personality rather than a dysfunctional one. Our personality is our default pattern for living. It is what we normally perceive, think, know, and do. Without a personality we would have no order in our lives, no repertoire of responses, no skills of living, no consciousness of our consciousness. We would still be conscious in the way that an infant is conscious – totally merged with the flow of experience, but that experience would be undifferentiated and unreflected. The infant is conscious without interference from a structured personality, but the infant is not conscious of that consciousness and does not yet have the reflective powers to put that consciousness of consciousness into a realized form of living.

Our development as a personality is, in the optimal case, attended by the development of an expanding consciousness of consciousness. Having a personality is necessary for our human development, and it is advantageous for practical living. But our personality can also become the locus of a serious distortion: It presents a way of becoming estranged from our true nature. Since the personality is a product of memory, since it is a set of habits well practiced through the past years of our living, the personality is not entirely appropriate for living in the here-and-now flow of actuality. When we identify with our personality, when we limit our view of who we are to our personality, we become a restricted soul. Our true soul, our Spirit, has become trapped in the box of personality.

When we are stuck in the habits of personality, the flowing water of the soul no longer flows freely; it is restrained. The normally flowing waters of the soul have become frozen. The image of “frozen” is not an exact description, for the personality is also dynamic. The personality, like the soul, is a living process, an aliveness in ongoing motion. Awake or asleep, the personality is an ever-operating dynamic. But this operation is machinelike. It is fixated into certain repetitive patterns. It is predictable in how it responds to given situations. It can be characterized. Its patterns can be described. Various psychological systems have delineated the various ways that human beings become personalities. Later in this book I am going to examine nine specific personality types. These nine types, known as the enneagram personality types, comprise a useful topology, an empirical gestalt of the personality types that human beings typically develop. It is helpful for us to understand which personality type we are, for this assists us to see the ways that we are rigid or fixated and thereby separated from the full flow of our authentic soul. Observing our personality can give us guidance for the way back from being limited by personality fixations to rejoining the flowing nature of our true soul.

**“Ego”** is the “me” I think I am. It is helpful to speak of “ego” in first person singular. Usually my ego is an identification with my personality. But I may also identify with a part of my personality. I may be entirely unconscious of other parts of my personality. I may even be minimally aware of my personality and primarily identify with my body. In whatever way I have come to picture myself, this self-constructed self-image

is my ego. We could say that my ego is my image of my soul. But this image of my soul and my actual soul are not the same. The “ego” I think am is typically includes some of the sensibilities and powers of my “soul.” For example, as ego, I can be aware that I am an aware being. I can take in situations and respond to them. But the ego, being only an image of who I am, is not the full reality of who I am. It may be an approximation of who I am, but it is not me. When I think that my ego is me, I have exchanged my real “me” for a self of my own construction.

How does this “image of me” I am calling “ego” come about? A partial understanding of the ego can be intuited by reflecting again on the personality as a building made of thousands of little dialogues that comprise my memory of my previous living. Each of these little dialogues might be pictured as a rod. One end of the rod can be labeled “I” and the other end of the rod can be labeled “other.” Each rod is an “I”-to-“other” dialogue. The “other” may be my mother, a nipple, my crib, a friend, an enemy, my house, my culture, my planet, etc. My personality is a building made out of all these rods. Now, suppose that our ever active mind asks the question “Who am I?” An answer to that question can arise through a gestalt of some of the “I” ends of these remembered rods of dialogue. The ego, being “mind-made” from these remembered dialogues, may be somewhat useful, but it is a misrepresentation of the true soul. Being my ego is a substitute for being my true soul. If I believe that my ego is the true me, I have fallen away from being, in the present moment, the flowing reality of the soul that I actually am. The ego is a fixation, a set image of who I think I am. But this ego is not me in my fullness. My fullness is a ramp from here to Eternity with angels moving down and up upon it. I am a more expansive being than I think I am. When I surrender to being my true soul, I have possibilities and options that the ego does not allow itself to have. The ego, like the personality as a whole, is past oriented. It is stuck in its ruts. The true soul is alive in the living present.

Writers use the words “self,” “soul,” “personality,” and “ego” in different ways. In the most carefully reflected philosophies, these terms tend to slip and slide, flowing into one another. All descriptions of our inner being are clouded by the limitations of words. Nevertheless, the definitions I am giving these words can help us to notice the difference between being the true self that is flowing in a natural manner and being a reduced self that is fixated in a specific fixation.

“**Spirit**” is a word I am using for the soul that is functioning in the flow of its true nature. I am using “Spirit” and “Holy Spirit” interchangeably. This is an important theological assertion. Holy Spirit is just Spirit, and “Spirit” is Holy because it is a ramp from here to Eternity with angels moving down and up upon it. “Spirit,” as the true nature of the soul, includes our awareness of being an awareness that stretches from here to Eternity. Whenever this awareness dawns, all the little dialogues of our lives become parts of this one master dialogue between the Awe-filled Self and the Awesome Other. Each dialogue of our lives is surrounded by this master dialogue. Standing behind each person and each object in our lives is the Holy Other. Existing behind each response to another person or object is our Holy Self. The ordinary is transparent to the Holy Other. The Holy Other moves down the ramp encountering each of us as the Awesome. The Holy Self moves up the ramp as a response of Awe. When Christian Theology uses the term “Holy Spirit,” it is this ongoing response to the Holy Other is that is meant.

“**Awe**,” as I defined this term in *The Call of the Awe*, is the Spirit quality or true nature of the soul. The true nature of the soul is Awe before the Awesome Wholeness of Being. Awe is a flow. Awe is the flow of dread, fascination, and courage that attends the soul

as the soul opts to stand at attention before the Awesome and allow itself to be filled with Awe. Awe has many aspects, each difficult to describe, yet clear as day to the person experiencing the Awe. These many aspects of Awe have been pointed to with words like: "trust," "love," "freedom," "tranquility," "bliss," "joy," "strength," "autonomy," "allurement," "merging," "enlightenment," "realization," "nirvana," and so on. All the angels described earlier are symbolic expressions of such states of Awe.

**"Spirit realization,"** in good Christian theology, means more fully becoming who we essentially are. Spirit realization means a journey through time from being the fixated habits of personality and ego toward being our full Spirit being. Spirit realization implies movement from initial experiences of Spirit toward fuller awareness of and embodiment of Spirit, the true nature of our soul, our essential self.

**"Religion"** is a human creation, a mode of inward description and a set of nurturing practices that explore the various aspects of Awe experiences. There are many valid and useful religious traditions. Religion is not to be confused with Spirit. Religion is a specific, finite, personal, and social process. "Religion," properly defined, is a human method for accessing and living Spirit. Religion is sometimes defined as a way of making sense of things or of completing our worldview. But the drive for a meaningful view of the world is not what primarily characterizes the presence of religion in human cultures. Religion occurs in society as an aid to the quest for Spirit. Perhaps religion can be likened to a booster rocket. When we are in Spirit orbit, the booster rocket can drop away. Religion may also function as a method for integrating Spirit into creatively living the ordinary round of life. Religion can be a return vehicle from the orbit of Spirit realization. But for all its usefulness, religion does not make sense of life. Indeed, life does not make sense. Life, actual life, full Reality only makes Awe.

Religion participates with language and art in the quest for meaning, but the meanings created by these symbol-using processes of the human mind are temporal meanings. All such meanings are finite, vulnerable to being superseded by more expansive meanings. "The final meaning of it all" always was and remains a forbidden fruit. Religion at its best acknowledges this. Religion at its best acknowledges that all meaning produced by the human quest for meaning is part of the realm of passing things. In such acknowledgments, religion is something more than a participant in the quest for meaning. Religion is an acknowledgment of the presence of wonder, mystery, Awe. Religion is a servant of the soul. Religion and awareness of soul came into being together.

It is possible to express this awareness of soul with a story, a myth, a speculation about the origin of this uniquely human form of consciousness. Let us imagine a group of pre-human, upright-walking primates circling around the dead body of a fallen companion. This pre-ritual had been done before, but on this particular day one member in the circle realized that this circular motion of the group stood for something. Language and art with which to explore this did not yet exist, so this one awakening member of the circle had only this circular movement as her or his symbolic form. This symbolic form added no meaning to life, for the quest for meaning along with language and art had not yet evolved. This circular movement all by itself became a symbolic form that stood for the experience of wonder before the actuality of death. Ritual was born, and ritual, according to my speculative story, was the first symbolic form to come into being. Ritual preceded language and art. Only later did language emerge from ritual and enrich ritual with words, story, and myth. Only later did art emerge from ritual and enrich ritual with icons, drawings, paintings, sculpture, and architecture. This is my myth: a ritual of religion was the first emergence of the

symbol-using mind that enabled an ancient society of upright-walking primates to become human beings. On that day an awareness of awareness happened. On that day Awe or wonder, the awareness of mystery, came into being. On that day soul became aware of being soul. On that day, religion was born. On that day a living being on this planet was Awed, stood before the Awesome, and was filled with Awe.

An important corollary to this origin myth is the need for a myth that expresses the initial fall and the repeated fall of humanity into an identification with personality rather than soul. The myth of Adam and Eve was, I believe, written to do this job. But we need to examine that myth carefully to discover its original intent. The following quotation is, I passionately believe, a misunderstanding of the Adam and Eve myth. Its author, Lloyd Geering, is a prominent contemporary Christian theologian. His misunderstanding of this myth is, therefore, a significant indication of the depth of the issue we are exploring.

Let us take the biblical myth of Adam and Eve. It can be read at different levels. It contains a remarkable number of insights, some of which have been lost sight of or ignored because of the way traditional Christian doctrine interpreted the myth as the fall. It has been too little noticed, for example, that it depicts God as telling an untruth. The myth relates how God solemnly warned the couple not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because on the day they did so they would die. It was the wily serpent who revealed the truth. He said they would not die but their eyes would be opened and they would “be like God, knowing good and evil.” As the story proceeds we are left to realize for ourselves that it was not God but the serpent who was speaking the truth. They did not die on the day they ate the fruit – and their eyes were certainly opened! The serpent implied that it was out of divine self-interest that God had placed the prohibition, not wishing his human creatures to become like himself. This implication is even confirmed by the narrator who, at the end of the story, rather surprisingly interprets the divine plan as unfolding something like this. It was bad enough for humans to have become like God by having gained the knowledge of good and evil: it would be even worse if they were to eat from the tree of life and become immortal like God. So God found it necessary to expel them from the Garden of Eden to protect the uniqueness of his own immortality!<sup>1</sup>

In the next paragraph Geering points out that the philosopher Hegel saw the myth as about the transition from the animal state to the human state and that Hegel thought the myth should be referred to as a “rise” not a “fall.”

But in the context of the Bible, this myth is about a fall. And the God figure is telling the truth. An ultimate valid knowledge of good and evil is a forbidden fruit. It has always been a forbidden fruit; it is still a forbidden fruit; and it always will be a forbidden fruit. The human being is finite. The human being is not like God, knowing good and evil. Our knowledge is fragmentary, temporal, passing. Humanity is not “like God” if the word “God” points to the Infinite.

Furthermore, this story is not about the transition from the animal state to the human state. Adam and Eve are already human beings who talk and think and even dialogue with one another, God, and snakes. This myth is about the fall from human authenticity into a lie. And what is this lie? The great and primal lie told by the snake is that we can have certainty, lasting certainty, the full meaning of life, knowledge that lasts forever. This may be the longing of every anxious self, but it is not the truth of the soul. To eat this lie is to crawl into a box of our own making. To eat this lie is to identify with our personality rather than our soul. To eat this lie is to die as our full soul

<sup>1</sup> Lloyd Geering, *Tomorrow's God* (Polebridge Press: 2000) page 60

and thus become a sham person. To eat this lie is to worship human creations of meaning instead of the “meaningless,” mysterious, unknown and unknowable Infinite Reality that the Bible names “God.” Paradoxically, this unknowable God is known by the soul. The soul knows God as the far end of its own being. The soul is those angels of Awe sent by the Awesome to our finite space/time coordinate. The soul knows itself, and in knowing itself knows God. But this is a different sort of knowing than the knowing of the mind. The soul knows itself and God as a direct experience, the sort of experience that precedes thinking about it. And this knowing adds nothing to our quest for meaning. It is even a kind of frustration of our quest for meaning in that it is an acknowledgment that Reality is meaningless to the human mind. Yet this awareness does not negate the quest for meaning, it merely puts it in its place. And its place is right along side our quest for security, for pleasure, for love, for achievement, for power, for all the other temporal drives of our finite existence. These drives are not evil. And their frustration is not evil. Evil or sin, according to this ancient Genesis myth, is something else entirely. Sin is human consciousness lying about the state of things, lying about our finitude, confusing ourselves about a Final Truth we know but do not wish to know. A primary aspect of this Truth is this: an ultimately valid knowledge of good and evil is forbidden to the human species. We live our lives with fragmentary knowledge of what is valuable and what is not. All our modes of evaluation are subject to upending. All our decisions are made in the twilight of ambiguity that is spread over all real world choices.

With this understanding of the fall, it is safe to say that we have all fallen. We have all eaten certainty that was not certain and pretended that it was. The Adam and Eve story is not only a myth about the first fall in the life of humanity, it is also a myth about falling as a dynamic in every age of history and in every human life. But falling is not the whole story of the Bible, and it is not the whole story of our individual lives or of the life of our human cultures. In the next two chapters, I will speak of the restoration of the Spirit flow of the soul – a movement back from our fall, a movement toward the truth and away from the lie of personality identification.