

My Soul

he asked me to write a poem
about my soul

my soul

I wondered how I could do that
without ample inspiration,
with only the mundane motive of presenting
my soul

I could tell of knowing my soul's songs
but that's not the same thing as writing about
my soul,
or is it?

I have felt my soul's surge of love
time and again, intuitively,

coming forth like a deep wave of the sea
washing through my wanting self
rising in the taste of solitary joy
sitting on the tongue of nature's beauty
laughing in the ear of my listening heart

but how do I write about this ephemeral
glimpse of goodness
that passes like a firefly through a summer's night?

how do I put into words
what I know of this essence, my being,

this eternal foundation
of all that is strong, true and worthy?

I believe
in soul, trust soul, follow soul's movements,
and love soul with all my being

maybe someday
words will show their face, as my soul does,
unexpectedly, lovingly,
but for now I'll simply be with

my soul



LOSS

My soul was free and lean when I arrived at birth, having none of the encumbrances that quickly collected as I began to grow and develop. I soon learned, however, to hang on tightly to who and what I deemed to be of value. Wishes and wants gradually dominated my inner landscape. As much as I have tried to keep what I collected through these desires, life events continually divest me of some part of what I gain and hold tightly.

Now in my later years of life, I look at this process of loss and relinquishment and see its worth for my personal transformation. As I let go of what I hoped would be permanent, layer after layer of attachment is removed. My soul grows leaner and the view of who I truly am becomes clearer. I slowly regain that early freedom my soul had at birth, an ability to live more fully from my core of goodness. Now I can breathe love expansively and hold more lightly what I consider to be of greatest value.

I was well into my forties before I understood my reluctance to accept loss as a part of this refining and freeing

process. When a former farm neighbor, Mrs. Staver, related an early life experience I'd forgotten, I had an "ah ha" moment. My family lived on a farm about a mile and a half from a small country church. Other buildings on the church property included the rectory, a three-room elementary school, and a small country store. Mrs. Staver told me how my family went to church one Sunday and stopped at the store afterward to buy a few items. In their hurry to get home they failed to notice I was missing among the brood of children and drove away without me. Summoning up my seven-year-old independence, I refused a ride from this neighbor and started to walk down the road toward home by myself.

As I thought about this event, my lifetime of goodbyes and losses took on a new perspective. I realized, for the first time, why I found farewells extremely difficult. Every significant goodbye held the secret agenda of being left behind by someone or something. I also discovered the source of my stubborn resiliency and dogged determination to move through challenging situations. Like that young child heading toward home, I managed to keep going on with my life, no matter what kind of loss occurred.

In spite of the clarity that came with knowing the root cause of my struggle with goodbyes, sometimes the truth of impermanence still leaves me wanting to run from them. Impermanence insists that *nothing* remains unchanged—loss is a natural occurrence in the flow of life. This reality implies the necessity and willingness to bid farewell to those who leave, to shed what no longer fits the shape of life, to let fall away those aspects of self that fail to enable

growth, to skim off the details of the persona that keep one tethered to a false security.

My soul's leanness comes about through various sources of impermanence, many of them not of my preference or decision, such as the death of dear ones, changes in my physical demeanor, penetrating questions regarding my cherished beliefs, and upsets in human relationships. I do not want to have someone or something leave me without my choosing. Yet, no matter how much I appreciate a person, situation, or thing, my connection with each one will continually shift and alter. Whether I like it or not, loss is inevitable.

At some point in my personal development I recognized that not everything can be gained or controlled. Nor was control nearly as imperative as I once believed. Certain circumstances will continually chip away at my accumulated personal and spiritual possessions. I've learned that this impermanence is an evolving opportunity for transformation that will persist until the moment of physical death when only the treasure of love remains.

Experience has taught me that when life brings loss, I can either receive this situation openly or else clumsily trip over it by my resistant response. If I refuse to let go, my personal growth slows down. If I yield to the change being asked of me, grief-like emotions may still result, but their shape and quality will not be as severe because less energy is spent on resisting the change.

Accepting impermanence and entering into it without reluctance, self-pity, or gritty opposition comes about through recognizing the value and prerequisite of loss to deepen and strengthen my spirit. Letting go leads to inner

freedom and harmony. Life becomes less of a potholed quandary and more a source of evenly placed contentment when I accept the loss of inner and outer treasures.

Eventually expanded insight comes when relinquishment is accepted. After each difficult loss and gradual acquiescence I am no longer quite as hindered by a need for ultimate security. Freed from another bit of inner encumbrance, my vision grows further beyond self to steadily embrace the larger world with care and compassion.

I see this in my own life as well as in others, particularly friends and those whom I serve as a spiritual companion. Each of us, in our own way, knows intuitively that we must enter fully into this process of loss and resultant growth if we are to mature. If we are open to the inevitability of relinquishment and give ourselves to what it requires of us, there will come a time when the uneven patterns of our existence become valuable sources of personal transformation.

A significant portion of my adult years has been spent absorbing this reality. I've given an even longer time to acknowledging the benefit of saying "yes" to what must be. Many of the poems in this section reflect this struggle in my life and in the lives of others I have known.

Finally I have come to understand that when I approach loss as my teacher, rather than my enemy, then it is that "the heart limps to the front door, tugs at the long-shut opening to the soul, and listens ("The Creaks and Cries of a Heart," p. 82). Then it is that I hear the deep resonance of peace that dwells within me.

My Soul Feels Lean

My soul feels lean,
trim, sparse,
excess and clutter
left behind,
desire and clutching
set aside.

And for the sake of what,
of what value
is this thinning,
weaning, letting go?

Only for the sake
of a clear eye,
an open mind,
an emptied heart.

All this, yes,
to enter
unencumbered
into oneness
with the One

where nothing
is everything.

Is Anything Left?

At the end of life
we look back and ponder,
look at what we thought we had
and realize it was so little.

We thought we knew, but now
we know we knew nothing.
We felt we were in charge
of the pieces of our life,
but now we see those pieces
strewn every which way.

We believed we had love
forever, but now that love
appears lost to us.
We hoped for a world
to give us happiness,
and now all that plenty
we aimed for spills
like water through an empty
sieve.

Is there anything left
as death nears?
Is there a morsel or two
in what we once held
as the fullness of life?

Not much. Not much left.

We go as we come,
from a safe womb
into unfamiliar terrain

where all we can bring
is our purified love
and empty, surrendered self.

You Wonder

You wonder
why you take those daily
steps, pushing
to get your work done,
to conform to a schedule
beyond accomplishment.

You wonder
when you end each day
with the discomfort
of not making the mark,
leaving much undone, unsaid,
unloved, unresolved.

You wonder
how you could miss
those moments of friendship,
those invitations to compassion,
those connections to a world
not of your making.

You wonder
if you could live life differently,
more in tune with your true self,
more in step with your deepest desires,
more in love with cosmic beauty,
more in sync with the world's desolate.

You wonder,
but then you continue forward
on the same old trek of dull
repetition, karmic garbage,
and sludgy unawareness.

Goodbye to Summer

Impermanence, transformation,
seasonal change, goodbyes.
Call it by whatever name,
its bound to leave a crusty mark
on my reluctant spirit.

The time has come to end
my light-filled summertime
when I floated on emerald wings.
Now I stand here by the patio door
looking out at naked trees.

Overnight, determined rain pressed
nearly every leaf to the ground.
Only a landscape of emptiness remains
where once there lived contented fullness.

I take a deep breath, give a sigh
of resignation, gather my precious
remembrance of those succulent months
while my memory takes one last, grateful look
at summer's dewy dawns.

Now is the time to yield, to enter
the next turning, accept the stark contrast
of barrenness in place of fullness.

As I turn away from the emptied trees
I take my generous basket of summer

with me, trusting it has stored
enough to see me through
until the time of melting snow.