

The Voice of Soul

by David Findlay

The quiet slog of therapy, no quick fixes, just consistent work through the long months of summer, through the grey toil of winter, through laughter and anger, through sadness and loss, through desire and indifference, love and longing, accusation and criticism, scorn, pleading, pleasing, wheedling and boredom. Across the floor of my consulting room march the scorned armies of the psyche; wounded, denied, rejected and rationalised. One at a time I greet them, one at a time we hear them, listen to their pain, listen to the fragment of truth that they have carried and protected for so long. It is such hard work, such painstaking work. Who can blame those who give up and leave?

Some leave to find a better therapist, some blame me bitterly for not helping, some are determined not to be helped. Some thank me profusely when we both know they have not got what they came for and neither of us have had the courage to face up to it. Some fix up the old ways and trundle off on their way to the next crisis. Some say they'll call in a week or two and never do. Some stay.

And sometimes something miraculous happens; in response to some barely conscious cue, in the midst of some dark moment or breaking some awkward silence I hear my voice drop half an octave, words falling from my lips that strike me as deeply as they appear to strike the person sitting opposite me. We are both captivated by the expression of some simple truth. I know it is not just me that is speaking but that I am speaking on behalf of both of us. I know that without me these words would not be spoken, could not be recognised. They are never fancy, never too far removed from simple common sense and they contain no answers. If I wrote down some examples they would probably seem commonplace and yet at the time of speaking they are pervaded with poignancy and acceptance. They are spoken from heart to heart and they transform the mundane, the difficult, the perplexing into a golden crown of understanding.

Sometimes in the course of therapy a window opens, the casement is the heart and the voice that reaches through it from another realm speaks not just for you, not just for me but for us and infinitely more than us. It has no truck with the psychological theories that say what should happen and when, it cuts across the conventions of therapy and short circuits the linearity of thought. I am sure that every experienced therapist recognises it, but what governs the mute hinges of that window? What graceful hand reaches out and unlocks its catch? I have tried and tried to produce the effect but it is not in my power to do so. I have prayed and pleaded for that gentle breath to envelop us when I felt a client needed it but to no avail, it has its own reasons, its own timing, its own pace.

On other occasions it has demanded access, like some majestic presence pacing impatiently at the door then rushing into the room, bringing with it a timeless ocean of stillness and peace. But it will not come unless it is invited, it seems that the only power my client or I have is to prevent it by ignoring it, misinterpreting it or fearing it. Either one of us can deny the soul, in meditation the soul speaks in privacy but in the context of counselling and therapy it has no interest in the lonely, the isolated or the solitary, it pervades the relationship rather than the individual and in groups it is even more powerful.

There are a great many things that a therapist does or does not do in order to create the right environment for healing and release but these things alone cannot produce the actual healing. That, of course, is the province of the soul, the soul activated by the Creator. Not the image of a dry paper soul that has been promulgated by the old Church, that pious, ethereal figure in white robes that will float back to God once we are dead. No, a soul that is utterly of God, that is all of who I am, filled with dark shadows and flickering lights, a soul that is moist, passionate and eternal. A soul that will wait patiently for centuries and then will dash us time and again on the rocks of despair, tear us from our loved ones and destroy our hopes if that is what it takes to get us to recognise its existence, a soul that will do all this, the most terrible work in creation, because of its love for us.

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The purpose of the soul is not just to teach but also to learn, to learn in all kinds of ways but mainly to learn from the experience of life. Through this to develop qualities that can be expressed back into life and thus once again to enrich and become one with the Creator. Qualities like tolerance, patience, compassion and understanding. Such qualities are not learned from books, nor are they learned from sitting at home. As William Blake says, it is the crooked path that is the path of genius and we learn as much from trespass as we do from walking the straight and narrow path. So while experience unavoidably takes us through joy and pain it is inevitably the pain, the suffering that makes people turn to therapists and counsellors for help. Then the wounding must be understood, healed and transformed into wisdom in the crucible of the heart, and the counsellors who help must be versed in the ways of the soul, they must have passed that way themselves.

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When the soul is ready, when the timing is right and the preparation is carefully done, soul inspires, through the therapist, the necessary words to light the flame under that crucible. The hand that touches the tinder is the voice, not the voice of anger or criticism but a voice surrendered to soul, when tone, inflection, cadence and timing are crafted by the energy of love, what a beautiful instrument it becomes; like a bridge of healing that will span the gulf created by any amount of wounding. But before the tinder can be touched that crucible must be charged, charged with the truth that dwells behind the rationalisations, the defences, the avoidance of the wounding that life brings. The soul responds to the honest, to those who are prepared to move a little closer to their deepest, darkest feelings, their despair, their heartache, the suffering of their deepest truth. In that deepest truth the heart cries into the wilderness and the soul responds.

I am not suggesting here that suffering be pursued as a required part of developing spiritually, but our attitude to suffering is a very important part of that development. We create a hundred times more suffering through avoidance of feeling than feeling itself, but fortunately the soul is not as hard a taskmaster.

As soon as we accept the simple thing that we have been avoiding and acknowledge the need, we are made whole, the soul pours salve onto our wounds in abundance.

The lessons of life cannot be learned by the soul alone though, neither can they be rendered into understanding by the personality alone. Depth and wisdom are learned from the interaction of soul and self at the instigation of the Creator, but to do this we must understand our childhood and what our defences protect. Defences are not just the way we deal with childhood pain, they are the way that we distance ourselves from accepting the journey of our soul, a soul which has unerringly plotted a course through those experiences for the benefit of our learning. Defences are the way we distance ourselves from the soul's agenda with all its implications: That we are not as free and powerful as we thought we were, that actions have consequences, that we are limited, that life is not only terribly short but is also designed to confront us with having to accept many things that are uncomfortable and disagreeable, that ultimately we defy the will of the Creator at our mortal peril.

Just as psychological theory suggests that someone outside the self is a necessary part of recapitulating childhood and building ego strength so, I believe that the process I have described is the soul's way of ensuring that its voice is reflected in the therapeutic relationship. It is not just possible for the soul of one person to speak directly to the soul of another, it is desirable, even necessary. That voice cannot be rehearsed or planned, it is always spontaneous, always from beyond the conscious mind and spoken through the heart. It cannot be contrived. It imposes nothing and is instantly recognisable as the voice of true authority. It speaks from the collective understanding and wisdom of both therapist and client and requires only the genuine acknowledgement of need in order to be heard. It is my belief that such moments are activated by the Creator answering the cries of humanity. It is this voice, often spoken in the first instance through the therapist, that enables people to

recognise the truth of their own hearts because in what is spoken and the way that it is spoken it they recognise the voice of their own soul.

What then is the role of the therapist?

The first thing is to recognise this simple reality: That it is not the therapist that heals, we and our clients are subject to far greater forces than we may think we are, even we sophisticated Psychosynthesis practitioners. We are subject to the movements and the mysteries of the soul and the soul has its own agenda. The role of the therapist is to stand under that energy, the energy of soul and help the client understand it and accept it. The role of the therapist is to ask him or her self what it is that prevents them listening, from hearing the cue and from speaking spontaneously, hardly knowing what will be said, allowing the hand of soul to reach through their heart and touch the heart of another. Fear is the greatest enemy of Soul, fear in service of survival. It is the devil that has plagued me as I have written this essay; I think that those who read it will be better educated than I, they will have heard it all before, they will criticise, ridicule, find my style too adjectival or rhetorical, ignore what I have to say. I fear that I will expose what is most precious in me to what is most barbaric in them. It is ironic that the same voice that can be the means of such healing has in the past been the agent of such terrible destruction that I hardly dare speak of what I care most about. Stick to the rules, stick to the code of ethics, read the books, get it perfect, join the BAC, quote from Jung but whatever you do, don't risk yourself.

Of course my audience is me, perhaps all that criticism and misunderstanding once came from my parents, my peers, my teachers or society itself but now it is in me and I see it in you. It is I who shackle my heart in the cold iron of criticism, what a terrible tragedy to be both jailer and jailed. But it is not surprising, especially in this day and age. A thousand years ago people feared the sword, pestilence and famine, but now it is the word that leaves people trembling in fear. We see it every day, a wrong word to the wrong reporter and a life and career are destroyed overnight. But I did write, and now you are reading what I have written, and if you have got this far then I imagine you have found at least some of it agreeable. Perhaps the hand that guides you is guiding me too, and there is more that binds us than separates us. The African in her tribe, the white man at his computer, the yellow people at their work and the red folk guarding the land. What we all have in common, prior to gender, prior to race, prior to wealth and health, is a heart. A heart, a soul and if we allow it, the capacity to feel and be touched deeply by what we see and experience. And when we touch one another perhaps it is the hand of God that stirs our hearts. Few are better placed than therapists and counsellors to realise this, to participate in and witness the most wonderful of transformations, the kiss of God gently awakening the souls of slumbering children and whispering; "You belong to me".