

Sermon Feeding the Soul
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The First Unitarian Universalist Society of Middleborough
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What is this thing called the soul?
What's the first thing you think of?
We tend to zero in on whether it's the thing that lasts after we die,
whether we go on after our bodies are dust.
And it's that aspect that makes us doubt that it exists, and yearn for it to exist.
Let's just assume for this morning's sake that the soul *does* exist –
even if it's just an aspect of our living selves.
Let's consider for the moment that the soul is the place where our individuality resides;
where our yearning for complexity and depth resides,
where our yearning for originality lives, and the things that appeal to us.
Let's assume it's the entity behind the masks we wear.

Tom Moore avoids defining the soul.
“Definition is an intellectual enterprise anyway;
the soul prefers to imagine.
We know intuitively that soul has to do with genuineness and depth...
it is tied to life in all its particulars – good food,
satisfying conversation, genuine friends,
and experiences that stay in the memory and touch the heart.
Soul is revealed in attachments, love, and community,
as well as retreat on behalf of inner communing and intimacy.”

Sunsets that demand we stop the car and get out to *see*
Music that gives us chills or makes us weep
The grip of a newborn's fist on our fingers
The feel of the wind as we skim along water
The sudden realizations that wake us in the middle of the night
When these things strike a chord, they're touching our souls.

Our spiritual task is to be awake and aware and present to our souls,
allowing them to be felt, allowing them to teach us, to balance us;
light with shadow and shadow with light.

Let's assume the soul exists, then what is our responsibility to it *here*?
What is our responsibility to each other's shadows?

There's a reason why I ask.
There's a reason why I chose this woman's story out of all the anecdotes in Moore's book.
The reason I ask is that I think sometimes we lose sight of why we gather.
After all, we can be awake and aware and present to our souls at the kitchen table.
And after all, Unitarian Universalism can be a pretty individualistic experience.
Look at our 7 principles, they're more recipes
for autonomous individuals happening to gather together for a greater purpose.
We are presented as grooming our best selves.
What's missing?
We are 'Essentially and beautifully imperfect.'
What's missing is our obligation to grow into community with one another.

To transform, to evolve. To gain perspective more than relief.

To gain acceptance more than invulnerability.

Community is not immunity, immunity from all imperfection and pain.

A community is not a crutch; relying on one another is not a crutch.

Why do we treat it as such?

Being in community means we might reveal our shadow selves,

or have to witness and acknowledge the shadows of others.

Relying on community – making *that* the basis for our soul work, is a scary thought.

What are our obligations to one another in the care of the soul?

What if we treated one another as if our souls were in each other's hands?

What would that be like?

Whoa, what is she saying, that my soul might be in the hands of so-and-so over there?

I mean I like so-and-so don't get me wrong, but – really?

Wait a minute; that means I have to be responsible for someone else's soul!

The bouncy one who wants to cheer me up when I'm wallowing in a good mad?

Or the one who's always trying to get me to do something?

Could we trust enough?

Could we listen enough?

Could we be comfortable enough being caught up in a web of dependency?

Not *interdependency*, *dependency*.

Can we make promises to one another, to hang in there, to listen deeply,

to see the light and the shadow sides of the soul.

Perhaps someday, we can express our intentions in a congregational covenant.

We are called to build a beloved community, we might say,

in which differences are valued,

relationships are collaborative,

and where we are present to one another

in all our diverse, complex, disagreeable, and beautiful humanity.

If we are to make transformation happen in our congregation,

then we must make transformation happen in ourselves.

Let's set the welcome table of covenant,

where our arms will open wide, where

we will be bitter herbs for remembrance,

we will be milk for comfort,

we will be honey for strength,

we will be bread for fortitude.

May it be so.