



A guide to soul-making  
a free e-book by Steve Thorp

# soul-making

Soul-making is about recognising the limits of the self  
(and therefore the imperative of connection and collective responses)  
AND the uniqueness carried in each of us.

It is about both belonging and freedom:  
a belonging going beyond family, community, culture, tribe and nation,  
a freedom that recognises our responsibility to all these layers of  
human community AND to the natural world from which we evolved.

# A guide to 21st Century soul making



*This introduction to soul-making includes a short essay providing some background to the **21soul** task and vision, together with some soul basic soul-making activities to get you started. You can find out more about soul-making on my website: [www.21soul.co.uk](http://www.21soul.co.uk) and go deeper into soul-making by joining the **21soul e-course**: a 10 module learning and development programme for creative soul-making in challenging times.*

## Making soul - a 21st century imperative

This century could be one of the most important for humans living on this planet. There have no doubt been crucial periods before in our evolution and cultural development, but now is undoubtedly a big one. This time, perhaps for the first time, the decisions we make (or turn from) will have a direct impact on the survivability of our species, and the habitability of the earth (for humans at least) in millennia to come.

How do we prepare for this challenge? It is so large that many people turn away from it, or worse, deny it. Perhaps we hope that if we carry on as normal, perhaps global warming, major climate change, peak oil and resource depletion will go away? Of course this is nonsense, but to get under the skin on why we deny or ignore these problems, we have to understand the psychology of 21st century life.

Global human culture has become fragmented and broken; fault lines of belief, tribalism, nationalism, politics and poverty separate us from each other. And most of us have long been separated - excluded - from the land, and

this has had a devastating effect on the psychological wholeness of successive generations of peoples subjected to the industrialisation and commercialisation of their natural habitats.

This isn't the place to analyse these seismic cultural and social forces; but rather reflect on ways we might gently but firmly prepare ourselves for the tasks to come. What we first have to acknowledge is that we can't solve the problems with the same psychology that created them.

The task that 21soul (and other integral models) hopes to take on is that of 21st century soul-making. This recognises that our happiness and fulfilment as individuals is wholly tied up with the wider connections we have with our world, and the impact that human activity has upon it.

It recognises that partial, narrow responses are no longer enough. What are required, in Ken Wilber's words are practices that have both 'depth and span'. It is understandable why many people go down narrow paths, of course. Our social world is full of initiatives, movements

and ideas that we hope will change the world and make us happy.

If we learn to meditate deeply, we are told, we can reach levels of spiritual enlightenment. If we do therapy, we are promised, we can free ourselves of the pain of the insecure attachments that made us happy in the past. If we go back to nature and re-wild ourselves – we can somehow live lives that will be more in tune with the world. We can practice yoga, or engage as social and ecological activists, or do a vision quest or the Hoffman Process, or join eco-communities, or create commentaries through our art or writing – and so on.

We cannot meditate away our social habits; we cannot change the shallow preoccupations of our politics with psychotherapy; we cannot re-connect with our ecological selves by focussing narrowly on the social problems of humans; we cannot create new futures for humans and non-humans on our planet by retreating into the bunkers of ecological primitivism.

## Making soul - a 21st century imperative continued



The point about all of these things is that, important as they might be as isolated activities and practices, they lack breadth (or span as Wilber calls it). Soul-making is about ALL these aspects of our selves in the world – the social, ecological and historical; an integral psychology of mind, body of soul.

Soul-making is about recognising the limits of the self (and therefore the imperative of connection and collective responses) AND the uniqueness carried in each of us. It is about both belonging and freedom: a belonging that goes beyond family, community, culture, tribe and nation, and a freedom that recognises our responsibility to all these layers of human community AND to the natural world from which we evolved.

An integral position to soul-making is one that never settles for one-dimensional solutions. There is no point in evangelising about specific practices, beliefs and approaches, because there will be truth of a kind in ALL ways of seeing. Integral soul-making is always 'and-and', not 'either-or'.

However this doesn't mean that anything goes. Some things have a truth (or are nearer to a truth) than others. Science gives us approximations to truth in the arena of how the world 'works' – these theories are not a matter of belief, but of evidence. If the mass of evidence indicates in one direction, then it is unlikely that the opposite view will be true, no matter how much we might passionately believe in it.

On the other hand, there is a truth in experience too. If I feel anger or sadness, or experience transcendence, then

this is a subjective truth of mine, that has a fundamental effect on my experience of myself. Yet, experience cannot be relied upon to provide more universal shared truths that will help us to develop collectively, as well as individually, in order to face to problems the 21st Century faces us with.

Soul making is not about happiness or spiritual enlightenment; it is about our deepening connection with the world is a number of dimensions. However we **can** feel happy and enlightened as a result of practices we undertake: Happiness is always a bi-product of our wholehearted engagement, and enlightenment can emerge from practices that open us up to the deeper phenomenology and mystery of the world, and to the higher potentials contained within each of us in the 'acorn' James Hillman so beautifully described for us.

**21soul** offers an approach to soul-making that speaks to the intuition of wholeness in each of us. It recognises that seeking depth (and developmental height!) is important, but that breadth or span is equally crucial.

The integral task it takes on is that of weaving and crafting a number of strands – those of character, experience, connection, existence and creativity – across three dimensions of the self, that give us breadth. These three are the **social self** of relationship and human connection, the **ecological self** that is embedded in the world we evolved to live in, and the **soul self** of original calling and character.

Only from a broad foundation of all three, can the true development of our selves in the world take place. And

only this ongoing development throughout our adult life will prepare us to bring our piece – as activists, leaders, artists and healers – to the bigger puzzle that faces us as humans living in this 21st century.

There's a picture of the future to be constructed from these pieces of hope, soul and joy. It may not emerge in the ways we hope, fear or even imagine – but we will need to bring our WHOLE selves to bear on this future.

In the meantime, we owe it to ourselves to live our lives with soul – with a sense of curiosity, courage and connection, that does not flinch from the troubling realities of our world, and does not pretend we can continue to paddle around in the shallows of ordinary life -carrying on as normal when there are big questions to be answered.

We are humans. We are animals. We have big minds and souls, and it is time to re-mind ourselves – to remember what it is like being human – and what it could be. This is what soul-making is really about!

*A version of this article was first published on my blog - [www.21soul.me.uk](http://www.21soul.me.uk) - in February 2014. Pieces on soul-making, creativity and development are posted regularly.*

If you'd like to explore some of the themes in this article, then contact me about the **21soul e-course**. You can find a prospectus for the course at [www.21soul.co.uk](http://www.21soul.co.uk) and if you click on the subscribe button, you'll be sent a link to a free e-book on soul-making: **Back to Life – Soul Manifestos and Pieces of Joy**, described by one reader as: 'amazing, extraordinary, powerful, necessary and deeply inspiring'.

# Getting started – soul making activities



*In the 21soul e-course, there is a comprehensive range of activities that can support individuals in deep, broad soul-making.*

*Soul-making is personal development which enables people to sustain themselves as engaged activists, leaders, artists, healers and entrepreneurs.*

*It is about recognising the wider contexts we find our selves in, developing our broader 'selves' in ways that are creative and appropriate, and doing things that make a difference. Soul-making is about the artist (or leader or healer or entrepreneur) as activist.*

*These questions and activities are taken from the first module of the 21soul e-course and offer ways of starting your soul-making inquiry. Start by recording your responses to these questions in a journal, and responding to them in art and poetic forms if you wish. If you'd like a soul conversation about any of the issues raised by these questions and activities, get in touch at: [steve@21soul.co.uk](mailto:steve@21soul.co.uk)*

## ***In my general experiencing and view of my self:***

*What assumptions do I make about the origins of my happiness or unhappiness?*

*What assumptions do I make about what is normal and abnormal?*

*What assumptions do I make about what is functional and dysfunctional?*

*How do I experience my 'self'? How do I describe 'me'?*

*How do I experience my 'self' in my mind? How do I experience my 'self' in my body?*

*What would others say about me: my strengths, virtues and character?*

*What would they say about my weaknesses and what holds me back?*

*Have a conversation with a friend you trust to give you gentle, honest feedback on this.*

## ***In the realm of my social self:***

*how do I reflect on my relationships, emotional habits and ways of loving?*

*When I think about people who love me and who I love - how do we love each other?*

*When I think about people who are difficult for me, what makes them difficult?*

*When I relate in a group, community or culture, what are my patterns?*

*How do I become active and included, and how do I hold back and feel more isolated?*

*What do I DO in response to these energies?*

## ***In the realm of my soul self:***

*what do I know – intuitively – about my ways of being?*

*When I am down to the core of me, who is there?*

*When I think about my calling or vocation where does this take me?*

*Do I spend enough time doing the things that sustain this element of 'me'?*

*Do I spend enough time being the person that I want to be?*

*How do I appear in the world? What makes me shine? What makes me flow?*

*When do I experience wonder, energy and peace?*

*When do I experience despair, grief and shadow?*

## ***In the realm of my ecological self:***

*How do I experience 'me' in the world?*

*In what places do I feel whole and sustained?*

*In what places do I feel depleted and disconnected?*

*How do the places in which I live and work feel?*

*Do I feel embedded within them or disconnected from them?*

*How do I feel in the 'wild', and how do I feel connected with nature?*

*What are my relationships with other life forms - real and imaginary?*

*To what extent do these relationships feel flat and habitual or sustaining and creative?*

# to the soul

*Your gift is welcome to me;  
your continuity is true, from one scene to the next.*

*My life is spent following the thread  
through the dark passageways until the day is visible ahead,*

*a growing light-ball,  
and the thread discarded as I reach the surface*

*and emerge into the world,  
watched from above by the circling buzzard.*

*The film of my life,  
the drama with an audience of one, is scripted by you.*

*Did you write a part for yourself,  
or will you always trust me to intepret your works?*



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