

SECRETS OF APPRECIATING LIFE



Despite the ever-growing amount of information we have about human nature, the soul is still impossible to define in pragmatic terms and still remains an enigma.

Unlike the brain, the soul has no physical or material reality. Yet it governs our values, relatedness and personal substance. Lose touch with your soul and the effects can be debilitating...even devastating.

For example, many people who are in perfect physical health and have attained wealth and fame feel a deep sense of unease when they neglect their souls.

Not knowing how to care for your soul leaves you at a serious disadvantage, since painful experiences are unavoidable. Confronting them and learning from them are the ways to nurture the soul.

Most of us recognize that some of the more simple aspects of life are particularly satisfying. That is why we refer to them as "food for the soul" and "music that is good for the soul."

But every aspect of life—family, love, work...even dark aspects like jealousy, depression and illness—can provide spiritual food for the soul if we approach them in a receptive way.

FAMILY AND THE SOUL

Many people today who regard themselves as self-sufficient have lost the im-

portant truth, which was taught by traditional societies, that we must honor our families.

Honoring the family helps the soul because the family is a source of religious awareness. A family forces you to realize that you did not create yourself...that you have a unique place in the world. Within your family, you can be who you really are and learn to appreciate the individuality of others.

To help family appreciation: Don't expect too much from your family. Try to appreciate each member's unique qualities. If you are miserable and feel it's because of the way you were treated by your family when you were young, try a different perspective. Ask yourself, *Where did my good qualities come from?* It's highly likely that your family had a great deal to do with them.

LOVE AND THE SOUL

Many people have unrealistic expectations of love—within the family, with spouses, with friends. Love isn't perfect and eternal. It passes through different stages...and often ends.

To satisfy your soul, a loving relationship must honor the other person's soul as well. That means recognizing who the other person really is...and allowing that

person to change. You must pay attention and allow the relationship to develop.

For soul-satisfying relationships: Spend time together...write letters to each other...visit friends together. When you talk to each other, don't just talk about work—talk about what's in your heart.

WORK AND THE SOUL

Work is a major part of life. Few things satisfy the soul more than a fulfilling vocation. But if the work you do conflicts with your soul—because of your sense of ethics or aesthetics—it may make you very unhappy, no matter how much you earn.

If you are in that position, look into a career change. If a change isn't immediately feasible, don't despair. Look around...for years, if necessary. And meanwhile, even though you are unhappy in your current work situation, practice other ways to care for your soul.

To help your soul if you are unhappy at work: First, acknowledge your situation. Then, make the best of it by putting more effort into areas that *do* satisfy your soul...family, friendships, hobbies, sports, travel, etc.

SOUL AND THE DARKER SIDE OF LIFE

Anyone who thinks that life's only goal is happiness will be troubled. The less-pleasant parts of life cannot be avoided.

If you reflect on your unhappy experiences, you will find that they offer their own gifts...and contribute to the development of your soul. *These experiences include...*

• **Jealousy**, which comes with intense relationships. It teaches that relationships are demanding...and deepens your understanding of both the self and the relationship.

• **Depression**, which deepens the personality, leaving you better able to cope with future problems. People who have only seen the sunny side of life may be overwhelmed when something bad happens...those who have gone through depression look at the world in a more realistic, accepting way.

• **Illness**, which forces you to reflect on your own mortality and teaches that you are not as strong or as independent as you thought.

To benefit from troubles: When you suffer physical, social or economic setbacks, see what you can learn from the experiences. Acknowledge your human frailties...don't be afraid to ask others for

help. You will gain a richer perspective on friendship and the meaning of life.

THE ART OF LIFE

Modern society pursues functionality and efficiency at all costs, but the human soul craves beauty. Much of the unhappiness in today's world comes from a neglect of the beauty of life in favor of acquiring things and getting results quickly.

Since schools don't often teach the arts, your soul is starved of the imaginative diet it needs. You can make up this deficiency by striving to bring beauty into your life.

To feed your soul in everyday life: Even if you don't consider yourself artistic, you can use your imagination to enrich the way you live.

When you decorate your home, for example, don't settle for someone else's taste...even if it's advice from a high-priced interior decorator. Your home should express your feelings and imagination. Think about the location, the furnishings and the decorations, so they satisfy you emotionally and express your soul's individuality.

By living in a way that cares for your soul faithfully every day, you can let your individual genius emerge and discover in full measure who you really are. ■

