

Souls on Hold

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With Halloween and the Day of all Souls having passed this week, it seems only appropriate to dive into what we mean when we talk about the soul. Every gathering, we open by asking “How is it with your soul?” which I, and perhaps many of us, typically answer much as we would the questions “So how is life *really?*” or “How have you been *really* feeling?” However, I’ve felt drawn to unpack this word more seriously after our group discussed how many of us, presently or in the past, have felt like we’ve “put our souls on hold.”

I think I’ve always answered the question “How is it with your soul” by trying to attend to my deeper emotional state after the ups and downs of the day, like discerning the elevation after walking over hilly ground. Yet, this isn’t in keeping with my usual definition of the soul: that unchanging piece of me that is a glowing seed of the holy. It is both small enough to be contained within me and infinitely huge, like the universe before the Big Bang when everything was compressed into the area the size of the head of a pin. My soul doesn’t shrivel up when times get tough or blister when I feel angry. It just is, ever constant. But if it’s unchanging, then what’s the point in asking “How is it with your soul?”

I’ve been puzzling over this and didn’t come up with any ideas until Halloween, which I celebrated in the chapel by lighting candles, dancing, singing, and praying. For a week or so I’d been feeling a vague sense that there was something stuck within me, waiting to be dislodged. As I whirled around through the archways of the chapel with my purple bed sheet wings, it occurred to me that this feeling had arisen from feeling out of touch with my soul, my inner piece of the holy.

Maybe what I’m really answering when asked “How is it with your soul?” is “How is your relationship with your soul and its relationship with the world?” Have I, through spiritual practice, connected to my soul? Or did my mind push the soul in a corner, dump a bunch of discarded memories and unwanted feelings on top, and put that soul on hold? And how about beyond myself. Is my piece of the holy weaving itself into the broader fabric of the holy?

This reflection and further conversations with group members have led me to tweak my current definition of the soul. Rather than thinking of it as an *unchanging* piece of the holy, I'd like to think of it as an *abiding* piece of the holy. I want to think of it as powerful and dependable enough that my human failings are too insignificant to squash its holiness. I want to think of myself as whole and holy even and especially at those times I feel most broken. But I think it is also important to acknowledge the work it takes to build a healthy relationship with the soul and to build connections between my piece of the holy and those of other people and the Earth.

Of course, building these connections is not easy. How do we dust off those souls that have been on hold for weeks, or months, or even years? How do we initiate cycles of deep listening and communal healing that draw others in, no matter where they're at? How do we build a beloved community that makes a point of connecting with our own souls and others' every day?