

## Personality, Psyche and Soul

The river itself is really just the river and that is enough. It is a place I go to explore landscapes. The more I explore, the more I see the intense connection between it and myself, between the inner and outer, between the



river and my soul, psyche and personality. I did not begin going to the river to find that connection. Originally, I went because it felt good. I found solace there during what was a difficult time. I went to the river because I found it fascinating. I continue to go because it is increasingly fascinating

for what I learn about it, myself and others. And increasingly because of how much I see the connections between all things through these times of exploration. At times, the river becomes the ground for reflection, a place of

metaphor, a stimulator of images, analogies, connections and comparisons. So the river becomes the ground for discussing the relationship between the phenomena of soul, personality and psyche.

The image that comes to me is the interwoven currents in a river. Currents roll through the river. Sometimes they are distinguishable and sometimes not. As I observed the current of the river one of the first things I came to understand is that the idea of a current is really a misnomer. There is no one current. At any given spot the river has several currents. The flow of water downstream is an intricate interlacing of many different movements. At times currents flow at different speeds, perhaps temperatures, and I imagine levels of pollutants. If you observe a river, you see how differently things flow even in the places that are close together.

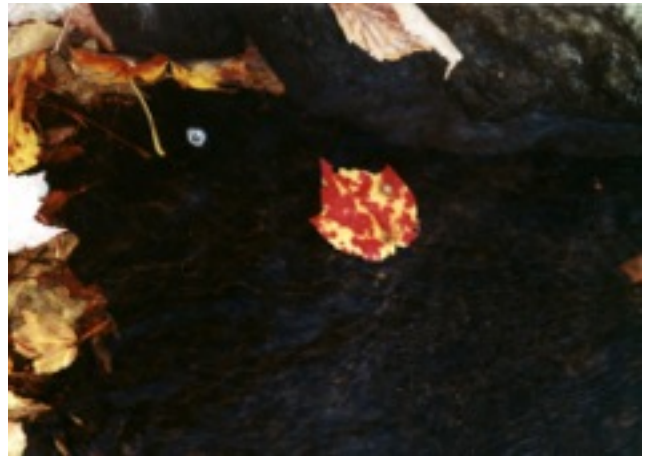
The water enters the pool pictured here and flows mostly to the right, but then there seems to be a different current to the left that is slower and curls back into the main flow at the top. If I had simply thought about the flow of current I would think it is possible to be different and changeable, but the way the current flows in circles is a surprise. That the water leaves the main flow is understandable and predicable. But it flows downstream for a few feet and then circles upstream where it again merges with the faster current. A bit further down the river as one emerges from the pool it all



and there is a surge of water.

Deep within this pool, the flow is different still. I have watched sticks and leaves flow in the current. Their

course bends, twists and swirls around. Sometimes a newly fallen leaf stays on the surface and flows with the current following each eddy. Other times the leaf will sink below the surface adding an entirely new dimension to the process. For it not only goes right, left, forward and around in circles, but then flows in a new range, up and down, over and under. The leaf will float toward the surface and then be gripped by another current and dive back down. Beneath the surface there are other currents and forces at work that



are barely detectable on the surface. Water that looks like it is headed in one direction on the surface may swirl around below the surface and move in a very different direction below. Currents flow in a three dimensional pattern.

There are pockets where the current changes. Large rocks in the middle create significant changes in the flow. Behind them there is a quiet pocket of water, a still place where fish often rest. A half-mile down the river there is another large pool. The river widens here and the current slows to almost standing. The right side is up to the base of a very steep hill. It is so steep that walking through it is treacherous at best; impossible at worst. Though I have tried several times, I have never been able to walk through this part. Because of the terrain, that the river bends at this point and the tall pine trees, this side is almost always in the shade. The pool is slow, deep, usually dark and rarely explored. I have never seen anyone wade through that side of the pool. Resting on the bottom are years of undisturbed debris, silt, leaves, sticks and trash all slowly decaying. This provides a place where fish live and feed. At the edge of the pool, just before the pace picks up with a small falls there is an offshoot, a place where the river branches off for about a hundred feet. At the beginning it looks quiet promising. In other places the river splits and divides for a short time and then rejoins, creating an island. This time the offshoot abruptly stops. It is unclear why. Perhaps there is ledge close to the surface that could not be eroded. At the end of this offshoot the flow slows down. There is a dead end. But in the main part of the river it continues flowing.

The currents within currents in the river is similar to the interplay between personality, psyche and soul. They are all parts of the river of Being, at times distinguishable and at times seemingly merged. They flow, weaving in and out of one another.

In some places the river flows out of a pool into rapids noisily tumbling over rocks and shoreline. In these places it is forceful, fast and full of commotion, like most

personalities. Certain qualities, talents, interests, responses to situations, and ways of dealing with the world emerge from personal history. These constitute personality. Personality has the



important role of consolidating information and using it to navigate through day to day life. Personality is composed of the processes that deal with day to day survival amidst fears, anxieties and struggles. Personality works at succeeding in the world.

Some spiritual disciplines make the mistake of trying to negate the personality. This is unfortunate since there is nothing inherently wrong with the personality. It is simply important to recognize that it is limited.

Further down the river the water flows into a deeper pool where it is quiet and slow yet powerful in a different way. In these places the movement of the water may be barely perceptible. The pool is similar to the psyche which contains aspects of life which seem to arise from outside of individual history and life-time. This includes the collective unconscious, dreams, altered states of consciousness, transpersonal qualities (including love,



compassion and mercy), and past lives. Sometimes the psyche is thought of as being dark and foreboding. But just as the deep pools of a river supply important nutrients to the whole river, the pools of the psyche contain great

treasures. Treasures made available to those who are willing to slowly, cautiously, reverently wade into the less accessible areas.

There is also another layer to the process. The river continually flows, through rapids and deep pools. There is an ongoing flow. And although the river is constantly changing, the presence of the flow is very consistent. For human beings there is a constant flow connecting the personality and the psyche. The soul flows as the deepest, most consistent current from source to destination. The soul holds all of the currents, all the processes of decay

and rebirth, of erosion and feeding of nearby vegetation, all the beginnings and endings. The soul holds a magnificent paradox. On the one hand, the soul is that which is most fully, completely and totally individual and personal. It is the unique essence of any person. On the other hand, the soul is that which is most divine, universal and cosmic within the person. The soul takes a different view of life than the personality. It is able to experience from the perspective of an entire lifetime. Soul ensures there is flow beyond day to day struggles with fear, control and anxiety toward trust, freedom and thriving.

Reducing a river to biology, chemistry, or physics is similar to reducing a person to biology, behavior or personality. A river is more than rainfall, drought, water pressure, or the size of its watershed. It is these things and certainly these things are important to any river. But a river is so much more. The physical qualities of a river reveal two or at best three dimensions of a multi-dimensional reality. A person is more than genetics, behavior, biology and personality. A person is all of this, and certainly it is all very important, but like the river, there is more to the multi-dimensional reality of a person. The multi-dimensional qualities of a person are especially most obvious when the soul is seen clearly.

To further clarify the phenomena in more specific ways I will continue by using several stories from my own life. The first story concerns my

interest in working with grieving and terminally ill people and the association of this interest with my personality. This interest has clear antecedents in my personal history which although unclear when I began the work, were also crucial in the formation of this life long interest.

I grew up with the very clear understanding that I was an only child. I did not know why I had no siblings, but I did know I liked it that way. Other friends had to share their rooms with urchins called “little brothers.” Or they had to share bathrooms with sisters who spent far more than their fair share of morning time in them getting ready for school. My friends’ houses were always noisy, with kids running around and parents yelling to be heard above the television. I didn’t like visiting most of them. I never understood how anyone could tolerate it. In my family’s house my room was my own. I was proud of it and very protective of my territory. Our house was quiet and calm. Being an only child seemed like a good thing. It was part of what I thought was special and unique about me.

When I was about twelve years old this understanding came crashing down. I was going for a walk in the neighborhood with my first ‘girlfriend.’ For some reason we stopped at my house. Today, I can hardly imagine what brought me to do this. Like most adolescents I was very secretive and rarely let my parents into what was happening between me and any of my friends. And the idea of bringing a girl in the house now seems completely out of



character. The only sense I can make of doing this was that I wanted to get my new shirt pocket-sized transistor radio. These radios were a new fad as wildly popular as ‘boom boxes’ are today and were a significant status symbol. We came into the house and I went into another room for about two minutes. Within that period of time my mother began talking to the girlfriend about a part of our family history never revealed to me. My mother had two daughters who died in childbirth! One was born before me and one after me. Within two months of the second loss my father moved to this country from Canada. Mother and I joined him several months later. The births and deaths that were never spoken of in my presence before that day, were opened up with a twelve year-old girl whom my mother knew for two minutes.

I tried several times to bring the topic up. I brought the girl back to the house. I brought other girls to the house. I did anything and everything I could to rekindle the conversation. It never worked. When I brought it up directly mother responded, “There are some things one just doesn’t talk about.”

Unresolved and unacknowledged grief is a fog that has always hung over my family. From the moment I began doing therapy I have wanted to work with grieving and terminally ill people. Initially, I was totally unaware of the connection between this interest and my own life history. The births and deaths of two sisters had been put neatly away in some unconscious

corner of my personality. I simply began pursuing my way through the fog. I was seeking what had been left behind. I wanted to retrieve my history from the confines of my personal unconscious. Although I was unaware of it, the interest grew out of my own history and was a very deep and central part of my personality.

The second phenomenon to be explored is the psyche. The psyche is in many ways more difficult to describe than the personality or the soul. It is more illusive, often hidden and avoided. The psyche is like that part of the river that rests in the shadows. It is often difficult to reach. It contains layers of sediment which seem slippery, mushy and dangerous. The psyche in a human being is at the intersection of the flow of energies from an individual's life history, and species tendencies, and universals. It holds the unconscious of the individual; all those experiences which make up who we are even though they are not specifically remembered. The psyche contains qualities inherent to being human with some of the deepest currents flowing slowly through a person's life. In a river one could easily get the feeling that wading into a deep section of this pool would involve the risk of getting



stuck in layers of decaying leaves, mud and sediment. As I have tried to wade into this area I quickly retreat, with an image of a boot being sucked off in the mud and having to swim for shore. Then I would have to limp home with only one boot. The psyche in a person is like that. It can be sticky. When people are dealing with issues from the psyche they are often afraid they will get overwhelmed or damaged in some way.

The psyche holds many shadows. It holds those aspects of our selves that we don't like and can't accept. It holds the 'muddy' parts of our selves. For example, many spiritual people bury their anger deep within the pools of their psyche thinking they can exile it there and prevent its return. It is, however, important to recognize that the pool and the debris decaying there contain important nutrients that enrich the entire river. It is not just mud and

danger. The river would not be healthy without the processes that form the



sediment. The psyche of people also contains rich nutrients that feeds the person. Banished anger, when brought into the light can become passionate commitment to justice and equality. The psyche also contains energies of creativity, love, and compassion.

Within my own life, the psyche is most clearly revealed in my relationship with the country of Scotland, which is never very far from my awareness. My wife, whose family are McLeods, dragged me there for our first visit in 1989. I went mostly to humor her and to see something different, though I, frankly, thought it would be rather dull. Much to my surprise, from the moment I set foot on Scotland's soil, my sense of who I

am changed. I immediately felt a connection to a place I had never been before. It was long before the movies, *Braveheart* or *Rob Roy*, and I had never read anything about the country. Having a name like Graham Campbell, people occasionally asked me if I was from Scotland. I usually said I was an American and shrugged off the question. But, when I landed in Scotland, the sense of connection with unknown ancestors was immediate. I walked the battlefield at Culloden where the English finally defeated the rebellious Scots and I could feel the pain and horror of the slaughter as though I had been there the day of the battle. It is important to state that this was not an intellectual sense. I have never read a history of the battle. It was more of a kinesthetic connection. Later in the trip, I walked on the Isle of Skye and sensed that this was home as I have never experienced it before or since. Before these experiences, I had considered reincarnation as a sort of interesting fairy tale and little more. But my sense in Scotland was that I had been there before. This is an example of the psyche holding consciousness from multiple generations. Within my psyche this was held, deep within important pools of consciousness into which I had never waded.

As I am involved exploring this river I experience my soul as being involved in four interrelated ways.

First, when I am exploring the river, part of me that guides the explorations. The soul stands within the process and yet, somehow,

simultaneously stands apart from the process enough to guide the seeing. Soul allows seeing to be more than a process of my eyes reacting to changes in size, shape and color around me. Seeing from the soul is more than the process which psychologists research under the rubric of perception. What I am referring to is more akin to what Don Juan taught Carlos Castaneda about seeing. In *Tales of Power*, Castaneda says:

“Over the years of our association I had developed a notion that what meant by ‘seeing’ was an intuitive grasp of things, or the capacity to understand something at once, or perhaps the ability to see through human interactions and discover covert meanings and motives.”

As I walk, stroll, mosey, plod, trudge and hike through the river’s environment, my soul guides the seeing into life. My soul guides me not only to see nature but it enables me to encounter “the nature of the nature” around me. Because of it, I see more than chemicals, biology, physics or geography. It permits me to see more than pretty scenes. I see these things. And they are wonderful. But I see so much more. The soul allows me to see the ‘nonordinary’ in the midst of the so-called ordinary. Through the lens of the soul I see the ways in which all things are deeply interwoven in a vast intricate web which creates the nest in which we live.

Secondly, the soul is not only the place from which I see, but it also provides constancy to the seeing. When I explore, there is observation of an

ever changing river. Although there is constant change around me and often within me, it is my sense that there is a constant place of stillness within me; that is the soul. The presence of that place never changes. In this sense the soul is similar to what Arthur Deikman calls “The Observing Self” in his book *The Observing Self: Mysticism and Psychotherapy*. For him this is an “observing center of human existence.” The soul is a center that cannot be reduced to thinking, feeling or sensation though it includes, uses and benefits from all three.

Thirdly, the soul reminds me of the incredible, marvelous depth of what I am seeing. The soul is the realm of ‘more than.’ It is the arena that contains mystery. The soul is the field that has resisted the reductionism of science, mathematics, research, dualism, and isolation. It sees the sacred in all things. The soul knows that all things are sacred. A powerful statement about this sacredness is made by Richard Nelson in *The River Within*.

I have often thought of the forest as a living cathedral, but this might diminish what it truly is. If I have understood Koyukon teachings (a Northwestern Native American tribe), the forest is not merely an expression or representation of sacredness, nor a place to invoke the sacred; the forest is sacredness itself. Nature is not merely created by God; nature is God. Whoever moves within the forest can partake directly of sacredness, experience sacredness with his entire body, breathe sacredness and contain it within himself, drink the sacred water as a living communion, bury his feet in sacredness, touch the branch and feel the sacredness, open his eyes and witness the burning beauty of sacredness.

That is a rather remarkable and startling statement. The divine is present in everything. The soul tells me that the sacred is found within the ordinary, common, mundane, average surroundings of the earth. The soul takes these aspects of the planet and acknowledges that they are all sacred. The living light of Divinity shines in all of it. A common ordinary tree is divine when seen through the lens of the soul. The soul reminds me of the original nature of creation. The soul knows that the eternal is experienced in the matter of creation. Exploring the river through the consciousness of the soul, I can directly experience the sacred with my whole being.

As I investigate the Quinapoxet River, I discover a multitude of universes beyond the ordinary, objective reality described by science and social convention. And as I encounter the 'more than' in the river I discover it within myself.

Fourth, the soul calls me again and again to seek. I think I was born with a congenitally restless spirit. Since early childhood there has always been a yearning deep within for more. For most of my life, I did not know for what I was yearning; I just knew I easily got bored with ordinary activity. Sports, television, most social situations, holidays, school, shopping, board games, balancing the checkbook are all essentially excruciating activities for me. My soul calls me to different activities. My soul insists that I get on my feet and explore the river. My soul keeps wanting me to look under one more



log or around one more bend in the river. I am restless if I am not exploring, searching and seeking. My soul is the source of this restlessness.

In my life I have had to make friends with this soul quality. This restlessness easily degenerates into chronic unhappiness and cynical dissatisfaction with everything. It can be mistaken for depression. It can feel like a sense of inadequacy and incompleteness. Over the years I have come to understand that the soul seeks from its place of completeness, knowing there is so much more to creation that it wishes to discover and experience. Once I came to understand this I have recognized that the restlessness of the soul is a gift.

Finally, I will summarize the discussion of soul, psyche and personality with a story about a trip to a sacred place in Scotland.

During the summer of 1999 I visited the isle of Iona off the coast of Scotland. I was captured by my psyche throughout this trip, feeling the connections to the land and the people. I expected the highlight of the trip to be a stay on Iona. It is an island with a reputation of being a powerful, mystical place where St. Columba first brought Christianity to Scotland from Ireland. From the time we arrived in Scotland until the day I was to arrive on Iona, I thought about and day dreamed of this moment. As I disembarked off the ferry from Oban my every sense was on edge. I wanted to take everything in. I had great plans to indulge my psyche and its perceptions.

Iona is also a place where some of the oldest rocks on earth protrude into the surface. I intended to sit on some of those rocks and simply breathe in what that felt like.

But there was a problem. We were in the middle of a drenching rainstorm. As is typical of Scotland, the clouds were supplying a river from the sky. It was a monsoon worthy of any Asian country. My personality reacted with typical discouragement, crabbiness and anger. I began to work up a pretty good snit. My jeans were soaking wet. My jacket proved anything but waterproof. And no matter how many times I tried to dry them, my glasses were covered with water. I couldn't see anything. Worse yet, looking through wet glasses was giving me a headache. I was holding my head down seeing no more than three feet in front of me. I was feeling cheated and internally whining quite loudly to myself, "I travel several thousand miles to come to this place and I arrive in a monsoon. This is just so typical of my luck." I wished I was home in my warm, dry bed. If I was home I would have known better than to go out in a storm like this. At that point the very gentle, merciful voice of my soul came into my awareness and said, "Graham, it is only water. If you're going to spend time in Scotland you'll encounter lots of it. St. Columba probably got wet often." My personality calmed down. It then evaluated the situation and recognized that I would neither rust nor melt. I relaxed. I was able to embrace where I was

and what I was doing in a much more accepting way. I even felt a sense of identity with the early pilgrims on this island and the hardships they endured.

Another part of this story involves a picture of a famous cross outside of the monastery which had been there since the mid-sixth century. On my way up the island when I was still quite angry, I took several pictures over the course of about thirty minutes. I was trying to focus the camera, keep the lens dry and restrain myself from shouting at people, “Get the hell out of my way.” All of these pictures were out of focus, distorted and lopsided. After my soul helped me come to terms with the rain, I returned to the same spot and took one more picture. This one was taken in thirty seconds. An enlargement hangs in my office.



Like the currents of a river; soul, psyche and personality flow together. They flow through life weaving a tapestry. At times they appear distinguishable and at other times they seem to merge into a whole. Most people go through life with their personality dominant. This is not necessarily a bad thing. In normal, waking consciousness, it is quite adequate. That is the arena of its talent. But for some other people, the products of the psyche slowly emerge. When this happens the personality has to bend, stretch and twist to accommodate the process. The ego usually doesn't want to go beyond itself, so sometimes, this is difficult. Artistic creations, writing, symbolism often emerge from the psyche. For other people, the soul emerges more clearly. The soul challenges the person to more fulfillment, to see more and to explore the depths of life. The soul in some people brings a restlessness calling them to deeper flowing.

Each time I enter the river I wonder if I am entering **its** personality, psyche or soul. Each time I enter, I wonder if I am entering with **my** personality, psyche or soul. The river is more than a metaphor for the process. It leads me to discover the essence of what I seek.