

Spiritual Care

*When Psychoanalysts and Patients Face Existential
Concerns On Living and Dying*

By

**Brigitte Boothe, Eckhard Frick and Klaus
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Introduction

Stay with us, for it is getting dark. (Luke 24:29a)

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide. (Lyte 1847/1883)

Dear reader, dear ladies and gentlemen! We would like to welcome you and wish you a good read. Depending on when you pick up our book, we wish you a good morning, a good day or a good evening!

“Evening is coming”, says St Luke, as does the English hymn by Henry Lyte. It was evening, even for a seven-year-old girl and her grandmother, who had spent an eventful day together. They both look out from the summer garden into the sunlit evening. The grandmother says: “Life goes by as quickly as this day has passed”. The little girl, who had just been cheerful, is deeply upset. She stands still and silent, not daring to say anything, not even to look at her grandmother who doesn’t look at the child either, gazing silently into the distance. She’s sad, my grandma, the child thinks, much sadder than I can imagine. It’s as if the two of them are standing there and have lost everything. But it had just been nice and they had got on well. Full of melancholy, the woman looks at the child, and the child, also moved by melancholy for the first time in her life, looks down at the ground in embarrassment.

Melancholy is not necessarily a favourite emotion. Sure, some people indulge in eerily beautiful nostalgia to prolong and relive a farewell. But melancholy is much more often avoided. And do we understand melancholy at all? What about the grandmother’s melancholy? The day with her granddaughter had made her happy. The end is coming. Together with the child, she experi-

ences a beautiful and peaceful end to the day. Perhaps it will never be like this again, she thinks. Why is this painful for her? Because it is fleeting and because she can't hold on to or keep anything and longs helplessly for it. This is communicated to the child, who in turn feels too weak and helpless to be close to her grandmother. A speechless introspection of the fragility of existence, of boundaries, finiteness and loss which one feels at the mercy of.

Melancholy is a feeling that responds to the hopelessness of a desire and makes the person concerned experience helpless, painful weakness. It would be wise not to allow such things in the first place, a mentor would probably advise. That mentor has in mind the enhancement of human potential in favour of powerful efficiency. Anything that threatens the sense of self – pain, loss and distress, for example – should be dealt with. A wide range of psychological interventions and coping programmes are available. We want to cope in order not to be overwhelmed, but we suspect that we are the ones who are overwhelmed by our limitations, even if we don't want to admit it.

"Evening is coming", says St Luke, in the English hymn as well as in the story of life passing quickly. In the song, the evening is sung with soulfulness; grandmother and granddaughter also experience a glorious summer evening. In autumn, on the approaching evening of the year, the leaves may be falling, but they are glowing golden. Something is running out, but in this finiteness it becomes memorable and precious. The quantitative or chronometric concept of time is about the measurability of fixed temporal units. In the subjective or qualitative experience of time – also sometimes referred to as one's own time – temporality is experienced, for example, as personal history, as a stretching wasteland, agonising standstill, pressing hectic, welcome stillness, fulfilled moment,

moving turbulence, expectation of the future. In the qualitative experience of time, there is the “*kairos*”, the important moment that should not be missed. We should – in Luther’s translation of Ephesians 5:16 – “buy it out”, that is, appropriate it in a currency that could be described as an investment of the soul. Life takes place in temporality; even today we think, sometimes anxiously and fearfully, of the time that may be allotted to us, that still lies ahead of us, that is given to us. Time may slip between our fingers. Sick people anxiously ask the doctor how much time they have left until the end. Sometimes we give ourselves or each other time to realise plans. Or we live in times of waiting, of expectation.

“Abide with me; fast falls the eventide ...” is a poem by the Anglican priest Henry Lyte, written a few weeks before he died of tuberculosis in Nice. In the song by William Henry Monk, it is familiar to every Briton as an evening and death song, but it is also played at official and sporting events. In his essay “Process and Reality” (1929), the philosopher Whitehead addresses the question of how the enduring essence (the “substance”) and dynamic processes of change relate to each other. Whitehead (1929, 318) interprets the first line of “Abide with me; fast falls the eventide” and writes:

“Here the first line expresses the permanence, “abide”, “me”, and the “Being” addressed; and the second line sets these permanences amid the inescapable flux. Here at length we find formulated the complete problem of metaphysics. Those philosophers who start with the first line have given us the metaphysics of “substance”; and those who start with the second line have developed a metaphysics of “flux”.” (see Brüntrup 2010, 132)

The traditional understanding of the (immortal) soul as an independent substance alongside the measurable body, which is subject to the laws of physics, culminates in the dualism of the two substances as advocated by René Descartes in the 17th century. Most of today's philosophers and scientists reject this Cartesian dualism, and with it the idea of a permanent soul substance that is independent of our physical existence. "Soul" is regarded as a scientifically unsuitable term, although in everyday language "soul" refers to something valuable, indestructible and emotionally meaningful about human beings that we do not want to give up.

In this book, we talk about the soul in the tension described by Whitehead between abiding on the one hand and becoming and passing away on the other. And more importantly, the soul itself speaks, expresses itself in narrative, in the way people deal with becoming and passing away.

So, what is the soul all about? It means receptivity and willingness to resonate, openness to relationships and experience, sensitivity to and the ability to overcome boundaries, to be able to immerse oneself and abandon oneself, and it is also an expression of inalienable individuality. This book deals with this subject in six chapters.

In the first chapter, we begin with an understanding of the soul as an expression and assertion of individuality, specifically in the area of storytelling. We start with a children's story and look at the significance of storytelling in life review. In the second chapter, we deal with the development of a child's emotional life in connection with receptivity and willingness to resonate, openness to relationships and experience, before moving on to old age. Using an example from psychotherapy, we illustrate the experience of loss, grief and new beginnings. The third chapter deals with the self-chosen

end of life, i.e., suicide. People choose suicide when they choose death in fear, distress, bitterness, pain and despair. We talk about these borderline situations by looking at the messages that the deceased left in their farewell letters. It is also about support for relatives, who are usually under a great deal of stress.

The fourth chapter, which focuses entirely on the importance of spiritual care, is particularly important. On the one hand, spiritual care is about what patients need, what they want in terms of attention – including spiritual attention – in terms of contact, dialogue and help, especially in nursing care. On the other hand, it is about the spiritual dimension of caring, of looking after and caring for the soul. These are important qualities such as presence, listening, resonance and attentiveness. We would like to emphasise that doctors must also be open to the spiritual dimension. The spirituality of the helping professions is gradually being discovered as a source of strength, not least with regard to one's own spiritual basis, the connection between one's personal biography and the motivation for a healing profession. Finally, the fifth chapter is designed as a trialogue. We ask what it means today to live in the face of death and transience. How does someone, whose life will soon come to an end due to a serious illness set priorities? What does it mean to look beyond one's own finiteness with regard to one's own life? What does it mean to lead a life that allows spiritual freedom? The sixth chapter is an epilogue – Invitation to *joie de vivre*.

Let us conclude this introduction with a word from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe:

“I pity those who make much ado about the transitory nature of all things and are lost in the contemplation of earthly vanity: are we not here to make the transitory

permanent? This we can do only if we know how to value both." (Goethe 1833/1906, 30 #114)

An important aspect of spiritual care is to make the transient imperishable, the unspeakable sayable, i.e., to make it tangible and perceptible in an interpersonal space. In this way, people can talk seriously (and also humorously) about spiritual topics within a sustainable relationship and bring these topics to life. Like other topics (relationships, family, work, possessions, etc.), the topic of spirituality is relevant in the context of mental and physical health and is therefore also very important in the context of psychotherapy. However, there are often no words for this area of life, which is experienced as intimate and therefore shameful.

We conducted an experimental study of a sample of around 100 psychotherapists (many of whom were still in training) in which we asked the following question: When psychotherapists know that a depressed patient reports a spiritual crisis as the reason for her depression: How important do therapists then consider taking a careful spiritual history? (Reininger et al. 2025).

The psychotherapists in the study were then randomly assigned to one of three conditions: The participants in the first condition read about the patient who gave a spiritual history as the reason for her depression. Participants in the second condition read about a patient who gave a sexual crisis as the reason for her depression. Finally, the participants in the third condition read about a patient who gave a somatic illness as the reason for her depression.

All participants were asked how important they considered a spiritual, sexual and somatic anamnesis to be. One would actually expect that, depending on the experimental condition, the

cause named as the reason for the depression (spiritual vs. sexual vs. somatic crisis) would be considered most important by the psychotherapists in the corresponding condition. This was indeed the case, although the therapists differed significantly between the conditions with regard to the condition-specific history-taking, namely in the direction that spiritual history was considered to be the least important of the three.

Why are we describing this complicated study design in such an elaborate way? The important point for us here is that (at least this is what this study suggests) even professionals (in this case, psychotherapists) do not find it easy to talk about spirituality for whatever reason, or they consider talking about it to be less important than other issues.

A variety of reasons can be given for this result (e.g. too little training in spiritual care, secular society, avoidance of existential topics, Enlightenment reservations about spirituality and religiosity, own fears and reservations). However, this does not change the main finding of the study: Psychotherapists neglect spiritual issues, even if they are mentioned by patients as the cause of an illness.

In this respect, our book aims to encourage readers to be open and able to talk about spirituality while taking it seriously and not overly seriously at the same time. The tool of spiritual history serves this ability to speak: This most important intervention in spiritual care is also a 'diagnostic' one. When we as doctors, caretakers, psychotherapists etc. ask questions using SPIR (www.spiritualcare.de) / based on FICA (Puchalski & Romer 2000) or similar guidelines:

"In the broadest sense of the word: Are you a believer? What do you draw your strength from?", then we receive information about

the spiritual state of the persons we are supporting, about their preferences, needs and requirements in this regard. Much more important than gathering information, however, is the signalling, the intervention effect of the question. Most patients are surprised when their doctor (proactively) asks about their spirituality on their own initiative. A taboo and private area protected by shame is thus addressed within a therapeutic relationship. By asking proactively, the counsellor encourages the patient to address this intimate area of their life, giving them permission to do so (“green light effect”).

The majority of patients are happy about this. Some will indicate that they have no need to talk about spiritual matters with the nurse, psychoanalyst or doctor. Perhaps because they know this subject is in good hands with the counsellor, perhaps because this area is not (yet) an issue for them. However, patients generally appreciate it when the therapist gives them ‘permission’ with the aforementioned question, the green light: Yes, spiritual, existential, religious questions may be included in the conversation, in the telling of their own story!

Chapter 1

Soul and Storytelling – Life Desires and Life Limits

“The human body is the best picture of the human soul.”
(Wittgenstein 1953/2003, n320)

An elderly woman in a retirement home remembers her life and talks about her enjoyment of her job, which she had fought hard for over many years of labour, coming from a poor rural background in a family with many children. Her husband was often secondary. She becomes serious and sad and speaks movingly about how her recently retired husband suddenly suffered a heart attack and had to be taken to hospital immediately. She wanted to go with him, but the emergency services said it had to be done very quickly, they had to operate straight away. She was told to stay at home and wait for a phone call. “Oh,” says Mrs. Sutter tearfully, “I can still see his face now. He looked at me so desperately, I can’t forget his look, his sad look. I wish we had spent more time together, that I had been closer to him in the last few years. I was able to hold his hand again in hospital. But he didn’t live much longer. It was so sad”. She cries and then smiles: “I often think about it and then my heart is heavy. Now I’ve told you. I feel lighter”.*

Those who suffer physically need emotional support. Those who are in pain are grateful for the sympathy of others. Empathy and

* Verbatim quotations of persons from the spoken word are always taken from transcripts. These quotations have been simplified for the book.

a change of perspective are the prerequisites for human relationships. They become effective when you need help.

If you can tell people what moves your soul, you will even feel better physically. Some stories are sad, distressing or upsetting. But it's good to share them. Older people telling children can be a valuable legacy, something that creates historical awareness.

Biological existence continues according to the laws of progression and regression, whether we like it or not. Everyone has to come to terms with this, especially in crises, but also in connection with old age and transience. The enjoyment and preservation of life go hand in hand with a joyful tolerance of transience, with the acceptance of one's own existence which may be perceived as inadequate, and the inscrutable undergrowth of existence. The life-sustaining, soul-supporting power of storytelling can be documented particularly well in the great tales of world literature.

Storytelling and empathy

"And when man falls silent in his agony, a god gave me to say how I suffer". A familiar saying; the young poet Torquato Tasso has to endure severe disappointment at the end of Goethe's drama of the same name (Goethe 1790/1827, 5th act, 5th scene). However, his soul's sorrow finds expression in language – a divine gift. In our everyday lives, we too do not have to fall silent in our suffering; we can confide in others by telling stories, and not only in our suffering. What moves, touches, outrages, worries or amuses us in our deepest souls can find expression in storytelling. The everyday life is a feeling of life, a personal space of experience. What happens touches and moves feelings and emotions. We are not alone in

this. This is how we find resonance and give resonance. We put ourselves in the other person's shoes and vice versa.

However, it is not only by telling, but also by acting that we empathise with the other person. For example, we say: "I'll draw the curtain, the sun is blinding you", because we realise that it is unpleasant to be blinded. "Let grandma sleep," says the mother to her little daughter. "She's still tired from the journey". The shy new colleague standing unnoticed on the sidelines at the company party breathes a sigh of relief and becomes lively as soon as a smiling person approaches him with interest. In everyday life, we have no problem empathising with what another person is experiencing. The royal road to the life of the soul does not lie in observing and registering. It does not involve creating distance between the scientific data collector and the test person in the laboratory. The royal road to the life of the soul lies in creating community.

What it is like to be afraid, angry, happy, ashamed, etc. forms a pattern in our lives (a "pattern in the tapestry of life", as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein said (1953/2003)). Everyone knows the feeling of fear, because others are afraid with us, and because we are afraid with others. We can communicate about what it is like to be afraid by talking about it, by embedding figures of fear in stories. Because storytelling creates a "what it is like" community. We attribute emotional impulses to individuals and respond to what they express. Like them, we are receptive and expressive, we resonate and live in "how-it-is stories". We all know the dramaturgy of disgust, fear, anger, joy – and everything else. We visualise this through storytelling. You could say that "how-it-is-stories" are the building blocks of empathy, sympathy and compassion.

In storytelling, we have a rich language of experience at our disposal. We express ourselves and are receptive to what moves the storyteller. What's more, language is used effectively, entertainingly, dramatically and in such a handy form that the stories are not easily forgotten and can be retold.

The tenner in the biscuit tin

Young people talk about old people – old people talk about young people. One example:

I love visiting my great-grandma. There's always something to laugh about with her. We play games together, even on the computer. Sometimes she lets me rummage around in the attic. There are still some of her exercise books; we once read one of her essays and laughed our heads off. And I never get enough of her cakes. On Sunday, she talked about the old days. Then I had to leave and she took the tin of biscuits off the shelf and said:

"Come on, here's a tenner". – "But you already gave me a tenner at lunchtime today!" She laughed and said:

"Yes, I know, I just wanted to put you to the test". And I said: "Well, of course you can say that afterwards". And then we both laughed and she nudged me: "Now get out of here, old smart arse".

Children in Zurich were asked to write stories about old people. The ten-year-old author just quoted was one of them. He confidently visits his great-grandmother in her inviting and interesting home. He savours it. Because no child-eating witch lives in this crispy little house. On the contrary, the great-grandmother gives the dear great-grandson a tenner from her treasure chest without

argument. She is a generous giver. When she reaches into the box again to give the child a gift of money, she tells a charming fib. She just wanted to test his honesty, says the old woman with a laugh. And the boy laughs and lets it slip that he thinks forgetfulness is more likely.

Lip service to love

“Do you like me or do you just want to profit?” – unlike prominent parental authorities in world literature, this old woman did not ask her great-grandson this question. King Lear is such a prominent parental authority; he wants to know whether he is loved and by whom most of all. Shakespeare’s tragedy “King Lear” was probably first performed at the English court on 26 December 1606. The old king wants to enjoy his old age in peace and free from the duties of the office of ruler, in the friendly care of the daughter who loves him most. Which of his three daughters loves him best? He believes the calculating flatterers, bequeaths everything to them and rejects Cordelia, the youngest, who has expressed her sincere love in simple words. Now the old king is at the mercy of his heartless daughters for better or worse. He realises his mistake too late. Power and money bring the heiresses no long-term success; on the contrary, they fight each other to the death. Cordelia tries to help her desperate father, but is unable to do anything and ends up dead herself as a result of an evil plot.

Play – Give – Take

King Lear listens to lip service and is taken advantage of. The great-grandmother is forgetful, but the great-grandson does not

take advantage of her generosity. And he, in turn, has material for a humorous story. Everything is mentioned, directly and indirectly, that is important for our journey into the time of the soul in life between the generations. The child brings playfulness and openness to experience into the house. The old woman joins in and a cheerful soulmate relationship develops. Great-grandmother's home is a precious place for the little visitor, a refuge and a historical space, not a cosy little house with a Hansel and Gretel trap. Future and past are at play, with the old treasures in the attic and in the computer game.

And while we're on the subject of play: Play and playfulness are alive in the togetherness of the two; in play – also in narrative play – they overcome the differences in their horizons of experience. Playtime is free time, rules serve pleasure. The playing mind is free and inventive. The biscuit note scene also becomes a game, here it depends on the fairness of the young player. The great-grandson is not just the child who likes to go to the generous, funny great-grandmother, but someone who recognises and understands age and weakness. Those who are old and weak become defenceless and, like King Lear, run the risk of suffering harm and being neglected. As long as he has something to give, we may pay attention to him. But when does he need us? Our protection, our care, our service? In intergenerational relationships, parents, grandparents and great-grandparents are initially the holders of power and knowledge, strength and possessions. When that is over, the younger generation is expected to adapt to the demands of the older generation in need. Although the witch in the fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel" has sweet temptations in store, she eats children. However, the image of deadly greed is not only reflected

in the old woman; it is also an image of the young's fear of the old's demands for overbearing attention.

Loneliness and freedom, loss and preservation, fading life and new life: In the children's stories, this is what occupies the old people in their deepest souls. And as in the tragedy of King Lear, it is very important in the children's stories that old people have something to leave behind at the end of their lives. An inheritance has to be distributed, an estate bequeathed, a handover prepared. It is about ownership, passing on and departure on the part of the giver, appreciation, thanks and care on the part of the receiver. Tangible conflicts arise here. In world literature and fairy tales, they are depicted in marvellous variations – just think of the stingy old men, the ungrateful sons and daughters or the fate of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) who squanders his inheritance but can count himself lucky that his father, to whom he returns penniless, is still strong, rich and willing to reconcile. An impressive and generous fatherly authority.

Give me support

Quite different is a fragile grandmother figure, frail, lonely and whimsical. She is not doing well in the following children's story:

An old woman lives in our street, she is wobbly on her feet and dresses very strangely, very colourful. She's out and about with her dog, then she talks to him, but she also talks to herself. And the children are always calling witch, witch, and have already put a scarecrow in her little garden. She was really excited, distraught and didn't know what to do.

A child of the grandchildren's generation wrote this story of mockery and teasing.

The following report comes from a grandmother who, although not ridiculed, is nevertheless reprimanded. Gerda Gross, over eighty years old and living in a retirement home, also tells a story about her grandchild. They have lined up together in front of the Christmas tree in her daughter's family home and are singing. The little granddaughter warns: "Grandma, you're singing so wrong. You'd better not sing along". The grandmother tells this with a smile. But she often hears in the old people's home that she can't do something, that she has weaknesses and shortcomings and that others feel superior to her. She would have loved to continue living in her old home after her husband's death. But the children and her sister said: "Now, what are we going to do with you?" – "All right, I said, if I have to go to a home, then only to this one, where I am now. I liked it here and the people were nice".

In the phrase "What are we going to do with you?", Mrs. Gross becomes a residual inventory to be disposed of, to be assigned a purpose, possibly to be disposed of. Mrs. Gross is the object of heteronomy. But at least it is the home of her choice. Her decision has two advantages: Proximity to familiar surroundings and friendliness of the new contact persons in the home. Help and affection are assured, as is contact with her family. Mrs. Gross was therefore able to say "yes" with a certain amount of relief. However, she expects to be ridiculed, lectured, ripped off or treated like an underage child. Even a grandchild tells her, as mentioned above, that she should stop singing. Mrs. Gross is often anxious, tense and worried in contact with others and has to deal with her grief and worries on her own. Mrs. Gross lives in such a way that she cultivates relationships and endeavours to avoid showing her own

vulnerability and insecurities as much as possible. She turns to a fatherly God, whose love and protection is good for her soul, with little prayers that she has known since childhood. For her, God is a helper who works from an invisible distance and can perhaps be touched and moved.

And that's not all. The witch from "Hansel and Gretel" and Mrs. Gross both feel insecure in the world, they don't get along well, are fearful and helpless, and find that people often treat them with little empathy. Mrs. Gross painfully feels the limits of her freedom of movement, her ability to orientate herself, her practical skills and the limits of understanding of certain people. She needs support and finds it in prayer. She turns to the God of her childhood by praying and becoming a child in need of protection and trust. A child whose pleas are heard, even if the person addressed remains invisible. She trusts that she will be heard. That comforts her.

A gift and no thanks

Edita Rubinova also tells the story of a granddaughter. What she has to tell is sad and painful. However, she wants to remain calm, kind, and conciliatory, wants to repay evil with good; this peaceful attitude is important to her. Even when her son's ex-wife becomes a real challenge, demanding everything from her. On the one hand, she suffers with the children who are suffering from the separation of their parents; on the other hand, she suffers from the children who reject her:

For example, the girl no longer speaks to me at all. She looks at me as if I'm an evil ghost. It's a disaster for me, of course, but there's nothing I can do. She comes to see her father once a month, and she is full of rejection and offence towards him too. But there is a

famous rabbi who was asked what to do with an unruly child. He said: "Love twice as much, you have to love a child like that twice as much". And that's what I do when she comes. Then I always say: "Never mind. I love you. I'm glad you're here, thank you for coming". Last year, when it was her birthday, I wanted to go shopping with her because she didn't want what I was bringing. So I said: "We'll go together". She said no, she didn't have time to go with me. Okay. This year I gave her money in an envelope. I sent it to her. But she didn't say anything when she saw me. I asked:

"Have you been able to buy anything from my present?" Because she was wearing a very nice necklace. I said: "That's nice". And she replied, yes, she had got it for her birthday. Then I said: "Were you able to buy anything from my present?" She said: "I don't know, I got so many presents, I don't know". You have to educate yourself to put up with that.

Despite all her self-education, the child's rejection and coldness hurt a lot. But, says the old lady, you have to overcome mental challenges: I'm not well, physically. But I'm doing what I can, I'm trying. Fortunately, I have someone to help me with the cleaning. My son does the shopping; yes, of course, it's a man's shopping. He doesn't bring what I would have bought, but I can manage, okay! Because you have to be able to break habits somehow. And I can. I don't allow myself to complain and sink into worry. You could do that very quickly, you could quickly end up being unhappy. I don't want that. I train myself not to be unhappy.

There can be emotional closeness between the generations, but also emotional coldness, as we saw in the examples above. Children can be compassionate and empathetic, but also hurtful and only concerned with their own advantage.

Older people struggle with the decline in strength and endeavour to find strength of soul in the face of insults, losses and impositions.

What are we actually talking about when we talk about the soul?

The word soul is quite common in everyday life. The soul appears in numerous idioms or references that are made to the soul. You are involved in an activity with body and soul. Children have cardboard and coloured pencils in front of them and draw for all they're worth. Or they are practising their role as a robber for the school play. They are completely in the flow, as they say today. An adult practises the piano, immerses herself in the piece, forgetting time and space. She too is in the flow – or simply: With body and soul. It may be similar for a dancer in rehearsal or an engineer in self-forgetful tinkering. Jacob Levy Moreno founded the soul-play “Psychodrama”, and invited people to play as God plays in his creation. He calls this invitation “Godplaying” and resumes: “I played God and infected others to play with me” (Moreno 1947/2012, 17).

The engineers, the dancers, the young artists give themselves completely to their task, their activity, and find fulfilment in it. With body and soul – it's not just about concentration, discipline, practising, effort, perseverance and work. Rather, the piano player, the dancer, the playing child are fully committed to something. This soulful connection to the world – there's no other way to put it – is considered valuable in professional circles today, in psychology and philosophy.

But it is also a rare and endangered commodity. Doesn't the reality of life today look different? Permanent employment, permanent

distraction are the order of the day. Living with body and soul is difficult. But can't we sometimes relax and unwind? Here, too, we are thinking of body and soul, because the idiom uses a verb for physical movement, but it is not the legs that are dangling. The soul should be able to relax in a cosy and friendly atmosphere:

"I hear the noise of the village, even;
Here is the People's proper Heaven;
Here high and low contented see!
Here I am Man, — dare man to be!" (Goethe 1808/1883, 39)

It's completely different when something is weighing heavily on my mind: Someone is carrying a burden around. It weighs him down. The figurative language again uses the language of the body. And doesn't someone who is carrying a burden of the soul really look bent over and weighed down? Mental burdens are often about an omission, misbehaviour or guilt. These can weigh heavily on your soul and you can't wilfully push the burden aside. You are caught in a dark spell; perhaps forgiveness can one day lift the burden from your soul. A person seeking counselling may say to their therapist: I couldn't cope with it emotionally, or: It hurt me emotionally or burdened me emotionally. Mental here means sensitivity, sensibility or vulnerability; as with guilt and misbehaviour, someone is affected by suffering that cannot be pushed aside or changed through action. Here too, the complainant is caught in a spell. The soul appears as a being that lacks strength, that is wounded, that has a heavy burden to carry.

Sometimes the word soul is used to attribute a certain characteristic to a person, such as a simple mind: Then one speaks somewhat condescendingly of a good soul. Such an unworldly being – this good soul – goes through life with overly naive trust, uncritical

friendliness and without malice. A loyal soul does not receive much respect either, but perhaps it is thanked for the simple faithful loyalty it has shown to someone whom others have rejected and abandoned. But there are certainly black souls, even if they tend to speak jokingly. “You made that up in your black soul again”, you might laughingly say to a friend who is having a joke with you. Today, lost or unredeemed souls are preferably spoken of in the areas of horror and mystery or, at best, in traditional church contexts.

“I don’t want to sell my soul!” said a young woman who had the prospect of a job offer. Her impression was that she could have made a career there, but only at the price of merciless self-sacrifice.

“I will not be bent!” means something similar. A defiant young person might say this when reproached for disrespectful behaviour on a worthy occasion. But if you don’t want to be bent, you especially don’t want to be gagged by convention. Those who don’t sell their souls, on the other hand, are aiming for something moral. They do not enslave themselves, do not exploit themselves, do not make themselves the stooge of a system. Which, by the way, is easier said than done. For example, when it comes to corruption and financial scandals, it can be said:

“They have sold their souls”. It is then said that certain people in the financial world are throwing all scruples overboard for the sake of money. A sense of responsibility is unknown, they have nothing in mind but profit, that is the moral judgement. “The moral man loves his soul, the common man his property”, Confucius is believed to have said.

Soul is receptivity

In the examples chosen so far, there is a common thread that will preoccupy us throughout the book: Soul is receptivity. The soul brings us into a deep and serious relationship with people and things; the soul allows us to respond to the impressions and phenomena we encounter with sensation and feeling, wonder and understanding, acting and looking. One could say that human individuals are gifted with soul. Soul is a gift. Soul is also a way of dealing with boundaries. Those who do not want to sell their soul do not allow themselves to be restricted by taking advantage. Those who let their soul dangle enjoy a time of delicious comfort without tension. The good soul, in its naive willingness to trust, does not know the wise reservation of the experienced sceptic who maintains boundaries when you want something from him. In a soulful relationship with the world, one is fully attuned to the matter, surrenders to it, does not block oneself. If, on the other hand, something weighs heavily on your soul, you are restricted and unfree in your thoughts and actions. It is the same for someone whose soul is darkened. Those who talk about what is a burden and a pleasure, devotion or temptation, open up boundaries by entering into a relationship.

It is therefore all the more remarkable that in a psychological, social-scientific or biological context, the soul as a descriptive or explanatory concept currently has no particular, let alone systematic, significance. The traditional religious references, the traditional links with a doctrine of virtue, the ideas of an incorporeal, supposed inwardness are questionable for an evolutionary, brain and psychophysiological, but also action-theoretical or social-psychological approach.

On the one hand, we know exactly what we mean when we talk about the soul. On the other hand, psychology and other sciences are unsure whether they should use the term “soul”.

Soul home in the whole world

We come back to Edita Rubinova, the Jewish lady who is so painfully distant from her granddaughter. Mrs. Rubinova is the only child of a liberal Jewish couple. The family lived in Poland, both parents worked in academic professions and were far removed from Jewish religious practice. However, the girl was able to familiarise herself with both religious-Jewish and church-Catholic life in the wider family circle. When the Second World War broke out, the child was eleven years old. Her school education was interrupted and she was never able to catch up, nor was she able to complete vocational training. The girl survived the Warsaw ghetto in hiding, constantly on the run and with a false passport, together with her mother who, in helpless panic, was dependent on her daughter's commitment, protection and care. Her grandparents, her aunt and her father were murdered by the National Socialists. The search for a home and homelessness remained Mrs. Rubinova's theme throughout her life.

Today, she wavers between moving into a retirement home or staying in her own small household. Spiritual reading is part of her everyday life. At first glance, she is alone in the world, almost isolated, but at second glance, she is actively and intensively connected with the world. Her contacts are primarily and mainly electronic; she communicates on the Internet. She cultivates Jewish customs, for example lighting the Shabbat candles on Friday evenings. She is also interested in many spiritual practices such as

yoga, meditation and the Dalai Lama's peace work. This is home for her, a home of the soul for a woman who was unable to realise integration and a career, a middle-class family and social comfort in life after the war experience.

Life makes sense when peaceful coexistence in prosperous relationships is possible. This requires a religious stance that leaves denominational ties behind and cultivates an attitude of reconciliation and accommodation. It is not about personal matters, but about major religious, moral, social and political issues, also in connection with the situation of Israel. The spiritual reference is a defining and supporting moment in Edita Rubinova's life; she interprets and justifies the world by reflecting on the big questions. This gives her the courage to go on living and a certain perspective of hope. In doing so, she takes inspiration from various religious and spiritual orientations and integrates them into her individual cosmos. She sees herself as a mediator, ambassador and evoker of an attitude of practised peace, which is made possible by the willingness to repay evil with good, not to let evil affect her and to meet others with positive expectations. It is about positive expectations that become effective and transform the other person. Mrs. Rubinova has created a niche, a situation of splendid isolation, in which she uses the electronic media to cultivate contacts on a religious and intellectual level at her own pace and to lead a life in which reflection, a connection with the transcendent and the invocation of an attitude that promotes life and peace can unfold. She says in the interview:

"I have a few special friends with whom I discuss what we're reading – I'm interested in all kinds of things, even the esoteric. I'm open to all beliefs; it's about really believing in something. The only thing that really matters to me is that someone is following

this path, and that we're heading in the same direction. In my opinion, it doesn't matter what rituals, chants, prayers, habits or traditions we follow. The main thing is that you engage with it, that you don't just live like a robot, completely soulless, because you live so soullessly, as if you were just a technical device. Then you don't even think that you might not be able to do anything bad, because you're just a good robot".

The wisdom of the soul: Realising boundaries

Mrs. Rubinova talks about what makes people human, for example what distinguishes them from a robot or a computer. The biologist, philosopher and sociologist Helmuth Plessner no longer defines the soul through the contrast to the material and physical, but through the way in which individuals actively create boundaries and deal with them. Life is determined by the confrontation with boundaries, initially in the way in which we physically or rather bodily occupy space, how we demarcate ourselves. The organ between inside and outside is the throat, in Hebrew *nəfəsh*. This word is rendered as *psychē* by the Greek translators of the Hebrew Bible. The English translations say soul, life or being. The definitive limit of life is given with dying and death, but one is already confronted with limits in many situations before dying. The soul is the ability to deal with the boundary, either to accept this boundary, to resist it or to create boundaries. In this sense, we are, in Plessner's words, living beings that realise boundaries. Our skin is a sensitive boundary to the inside and outside and at the same time a contact organ. Skin is receptivity and resonance, just like the other senses: Taste, smell, hearing, the sense of balance and the perception of certain stimuli from inside the body. They allow a relationship to the self and the world to develop before