

Listening to our whole self Part I

(from Cynthia Bougeault's "Four Voice Discernment Approach")

Some Basic Definitions

"Nafs" is the Sufi word for "the lower [egoic] passionate soul." It pretty much equates to what Thomas Keating calls "the false self," but I've never really cared for that term because the false self is— well, empirically true, an authentic voice in the discernment process. And like it or not, it has the final say. Unless you get it inside, nothing you decide is going to stay put.

By *Soul* I mean that core sense of my own identity generated through the use of the "faculties," as St. Thomas Aquinas called them: memory, reason, emotion, and will. Soul is the keeper of my meta-narrative, that collection of experiences, preferences, and core yearnings that go to make me "me." Soul is the one who is fascinated by dreamwork, enneagram typing, all those little quizzes on Facebook that threaten to divulge who you *really* are. It's the part of me that tears up seeing a sunset, has mystical experiences, hungers for the infinite, and of course, does soulwork. It's the artist painting the canvas of my life in time. It's the part of me that's haunted by the three-quarters of myself that, like an iceberg, lies beneath the surface. (*Soul is what "I" look like when I construct myself from the outside, using my faculties to "take a picture" of myself and project it into time and space*).

By *Spirit* I mean that deeply interiorized voice of my own highest spiritual reality. A tad impersonal ["detached"], it often feels as if it's coming from *above* me rather than within me. But it sure does know the highest possible outcome in any given situation and what it takes to get there. [just not tied to my will to do that—for that need to bring in heart].

"Heart" is a bit difficult to pin down, largely because it doesn't have an ongoing stable identity. It appears only situationally and usually has to be teased out (more on that in a bit). But when it does appear, its voice is unmistakably clear and resonant. It has a considerable overlap with Soul but there is an entirely different "sound" to it: intimate and personal, yet spacious and fiercely grounded. And it's nearly always surprising. (*Soul is what "I" look like when I construct myself from the outside, using my faculties to "take a picture" of myself and project it into time and space [my homemade self]. Heart-speaking is what "I" sound like when I am expressing myself from the center of my essential beingness.[my deep self; connects heaven and earth!]*)