

Although spirit summons us to lofty goals like transformation and transcendence, the soul embraces the life of relatedness in all its messy particulars, claims the bestselling author of *Care of the Soul*.

Care of the Soul in RELATIONSHIPS

By Thomas Moore

*In an excerpt from his new book *Soul Mates: Honoring the Mysteries of Love and Relationship*, psychologist Thomas Moore, author of the best-selling *Care of the Soul*, explores the role of both attachment and distance in the often bewildering realm of intimate relationships. Echoing a distinction drawn by his predecessors, C. G. Jung and James Hillman, Moore suggests that, while our spiritual longings solicit us to pursue freedom, self-improvement, and ultimately transcendence, the soul is attached to life in all its particulars and prefers relatedness to distance. Yet soul, too, as Moore explains, has its own need for solitude.*

When we consider the soul of relationship, unexpected factors come into view. In its deepest nature, the soul involves itself in the stuff of this world, both people and objects. It loves attachments of all kinds—to places, ideas, times, historical figures and periods, things, words, sounds, and settings. If we are going to examine relationship in the soul, we have to take into account the wide range of its loves and inclinations.

Yet even though the soul sinks luxuriantly into its attachments, something in it also moves in a different direction. Something valid and necessary takes flight when it senses deep attachment, and this flight also seems so deeply rooted as to be an honest expression of soul. Our ultimate goal is to find ways to embrace both attachment and resistance to attachment, and the only way to that reconciliation of opposites is to dig deeply

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continued

into the nature of each. As with all matters of soul, it is in honoring its impulses that we find our way best into its mysteries.

Attachment

The soul manifests its innate tendency toward attachment in many ways. One way is a penchant for the past and a resistance to change. A particularly soulful person might turn down a good job offer, for example, because he doesn't want to move from his home town. The soulfulness of this decision is fairly clear: Ties to friends, family, buildings, and a familiar landscape come from the heart, and honoring them may be more important for a soulful life than following exciting ideas and possibilities that are rooted in some other part of our nature.

A radically attached person may lead a sedate life because he seldom likes to leave home; he may even decide not to buy an automobile for that very reason. Many writers and artists have exhibited this soulful ori-

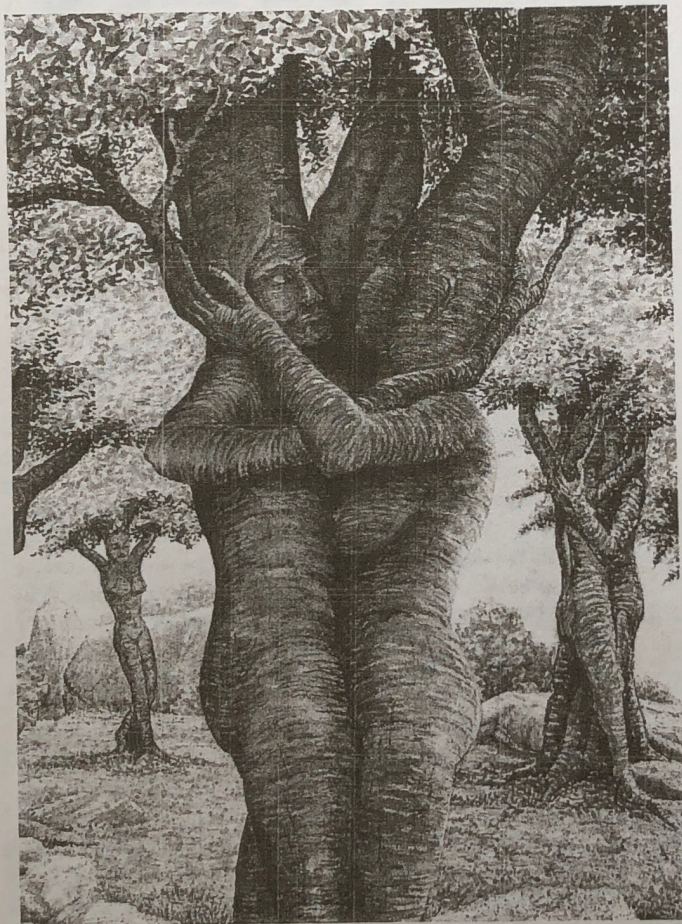
entation away from worldly activity. Emily Dickinson, for example, spent her entire mature life at her family's homestead in Amherst, Massachusetts.

C. G. Jung said that the soul itself is fundamentally oriented toward life, while the search for meaning or the quest for higher consciousness has some other root. The soul *finds its home in the ordinary* details of everyday life and does not in itself have an urgent need for understanding or achievement. James Hillman, Jung's unorthodox follower, picks up on Jung's distinction between soul and spirit, saying that soul resides in the valleys of life and not on the peaks of intellectual, spiritual, or technological efforts.

In his essay on this theme, "Peaks and Vales," Hillman writes that the soul is the psyche's actual life, including "the present mess it is in, its discontent, dishonesties, and thrilling illusions." Something in us—tradition calls this spirit—wants to transcend these messy conditions of actual life to find some blissful, or at least brighter, experience or an expression of meaning that will take us away intellectually from the quagmire of actual existence. When the soul does rise above the conditions of ordinary life into meaning and healing, it hovers closely and floats; it doesn't soar. Its mode of reflection is reverie rather than intellectual analysis, and its process of healing takes place amid the everyday flux of mood, the ups and downs of emotions, and the certain knowledge that there is no ultimate healing—death is an eternal presence for the soul.

By definition, the soul is attached to life in all its particulars. It prefers relatedness to distancing. From the point of view of the soul, meaningfulness and value rise directly out of experience, or from the images and memories that issue modestly and immediately out of ordinary life. The soul's intelligence may not arrive through rational analysis but through a long period of rumination, and its goal may not be brilliant understanding and unassailable truth, but rather profound insight and abiding wisdom.

This penchant of the soul for the complications of life plays a role in personal relationships. Relatedness means staying in life, even when it becomes complicated and when meaning and clarity are elusive. It means living with the particular individuals who come into our lives, and not only with our ideals and images of the perfect mate or the perfect family. On the other hand, honoring the particular in our lives also means making the separations, divorces, and endings that the soul requires. The soul is always attached to what is ac-



tually happening, not necessarily to what could be or will be.

Dreams—which have much to teach us about the nature of the soul—sometimes portray our many ways of being attached to the past. They may take us back to places we once visited or lived long ago. A dreamer may begin telling his dream saying: “I was in the bedroom of the house where I grew up, and some of my favorite dolls were gathered around me.” People will sometimes say: “I’ve tried to put this divorce behind me, but in spite of my wishes I find myself dreaming of my former husband.” The soul is inclined toward the past rather

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than the future, toward attachment to people, places, and events rather than detachment, and so it is not quick to move on. In outer life, we may leave a person or a place, but in memory and dream the soul clings to these former attachments.

Care of the soul requires that we respect these apparently natural, if paradoxical, tendencies. If our dreams keep us attached to people we’d rather let go of, then we could take the lead of these dreams and ease up on our spirited desire for change, giving a place to our sometimes painful and disturbing memories. If we run singlemindedly counter to these attachments, then we are in danger of losing a degree of soulfulness. Liberation acquired at the cost of soul’s desire may prove to be a questionable achievement.

Rather than come up with new understandings and new and improved ways of doing things, the soul prefers to get what it can gradually, taking its nourishment from what already is present. Like a cow chewing its cud, like grapes slowly fermenting into wine, like tobacco ripening into flavor, the past gives the soul its fodder, its stuff, the source of its particular kind of understanding and progress. Insight and change blossom from the soul like a flower coming into bloom after a long period of incubation. The soul’s fertility is slow and organic, in comparison to the more spirited ways in which we pursue insight and transformation. Ralph Waldo Emerson said that the soul does not advance in a straight line, but by an “ascension of state,” like the movement “from egg to worm to fly.”

Soul-work, therefore, demands patience and loyalty, virtues not in vogue in our fast-changing times. The

soul asks that we live through our attachments, rather than try to make swift, clean breaks. It may seem wise, at the end of a divorce or when we’ve been fired from a job, to “get the past behind us” and “start a new life.” But the soul may need more reflection on that painful past, and there may be untouched fertile material in past events. Anyway, the soul may keep us tied to yesterday’s traumas through tenacious memories and recurring dreams.

It is possible to see our complaints about feeling stuck, or of not being able to get past the latest trauma, as the work of the soul binding us to our given existence. We tend to suffer soul’s movements and feel its inferiority. It doesn’t propel, like spirit; rather, it feels the impact of events. It is easily stung and disturbed. The spirited side enjoys power, strength, well-being, and superiority. The soul, given to the pleasures of actual earthly existence, suffers its intimacies, to the extent that attachment often feels like bondage. Parents may like the emotional closeness they feel with their children, but they are also, sometimes frustratingly, tied to them. We may go to great extremes in order to have a solid romantic relationship with another person, but then we are also caught in an emotional bond and may begin to feel a contrary desire for freedom to relate to others.

Again, because we live in a world that prizes freedom, uncomfortable feelings of bondage could be seen as an invitation to deeper attachment. A psychological symptom always points in the direction of both what the soul needs and what we are defending against. Our discomfort may come in part from our resistance. If we feel negatively about attachment and about being tied to the past, to our lives, and to our own particular fate, then we probably haven’t refined our ways of being attached. They may need education and instruction so that they can be more subtle and better articulated and realized.

Attachment, of course, is not always problematic. There may be profound pleasure in longing for the past and in indulging in memories. When the soul stirs in us, we may be pulled, for example, to visit an old, familiar neighborhood or friends of another time in life. But attachment to people, things, and places can also feel like a burden. It’s a nuisance to carry useless things around with us as we move from state to state and house to house. It takes care, attention, and time to write the letters and make the phone calls that sustain attachments. Care of the soul can be demanding, requiring a decision that the needs of the

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continued

soul are as important as the more future-oriented things that claim our attention.

Every day we feel the soul's minor or major discomforts, but because we habitually overlook these signals of soul pain, we may fail to respond. Just as some people can't perceive colors or musical tones, so we may be soul-blind and soul-deaf. The soul's yearnings simply don't get through to consciousness; or if they do, we try to numb ourselves to them with medications, frenzied activities, or other palliatives. From the highest, transcendent, and progressive place of our aims and desires, the soul may appear regressive. The resulting alienation within our very hearts bears its own painful, melancholic loneliness.

A first step, then, in tending to the soul in our relationships is to understand and honor the soul's particular mode of being. It may help to realize, as tradition has taught for centuries, that there are two pulls in us, one upward toward transcendence, ambition, success, progress, intellectual clarity, and cosmic consciousness, and another downward, into individual, vernacular life. The first is obviously magnetically inspiring, while the latter is much more quietly and subtly satisfying, its challenges pedestrian and its opportunities less than inspiring. Yet soul lives in this pregnant ordinariness. It is always attached to life in an involving, complicating way, unlike the upward movement which aims toward a streamlined, unfettered route toward some imagined goal.

As we work through difficult family relationships, struggle with the demands of marriage, apply ourselves to the job we're doing, become settled into the geographic region fate has chosen for us, and continually sort through the personality issues that never seem to change or improve—in all these areas we are gathering the stuff of the soul. The soul wants to be attached, involved, and even stuck, because it is through such intimacies that it is nourished, initiated, and deepened.

The Flight from Attachment

The soul is a complicated field of paradoxes and contradictions, and so we need now to examine the other side of what we have been saying. It would be a mistake to honor attachment as the only inclination of the soul in relationships. As strong as the yearning for attachment is, there is obviously something else in us that yearns for solitude, freedom, and detachment. Our examination of relationship must include both sides of

this spectrum and embrace the tension that may exist as we try to give attention to each.

One of the most beautiful of classical myths, the story of Daphne and Apollo, speaks to this theme. In the myth, Daphne is a lovely young woman who likes to run through the woods hunting. As Ovid says in his telling of the tale, she is a true daughter of Diana—she has no desire for relationship. But she attracts the attention of the great god Apollo, who immediately falls in love with her. He pursues her, but she runs away. This flight of the young nymphlike woman away from the great Apollo is the key image in the story and may help us gain insight into dreams of flight and those

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times in our lives when we find ourselves anxiously running away from attachment.

Apollo tries to seduce Daphne away from her flight, telling her that he is not her enemy, that he has accomplished great things, and that he is no dunce: He can speak oracles, he invented music, and he is the archetypal physician. But she is unresponsive to his appeal and continues to run. An interesting detail is that Daphne in flight becomes even more alluring to Apollo. There is something attractive about running away from intimacy, not only to the person doing the running but also to the pursuer.

When it looks as though Apollo might finally catch up with her, just as he is literally breathing down her neck, she calls out to her father, the river god Peneus, for help. Then, as her prayer is answered, she is gradually transformed into a tree. In the laconic poetic translation by Charles Boer: "Heavy numbness seizes limbs, soft breasts enclose in bark, hair in leaf, arms branch, feet (so swift) root; head, a treetop."

Daphne, as we have said, is one of the faces of Diana, usually identified with the Greek virgin goddess Artemis, who lives deep in the woods, away from civilized life. As a hymn to the goddess by the Greek poet Callimachus puts it: "Seldom it is that Artemis goes to town." Daphne shares the great goddess's mobility, spirit of adventure, solitary ways, exclusive femininity and virginity, chaste beauty, and tendency to retreat from human contact.

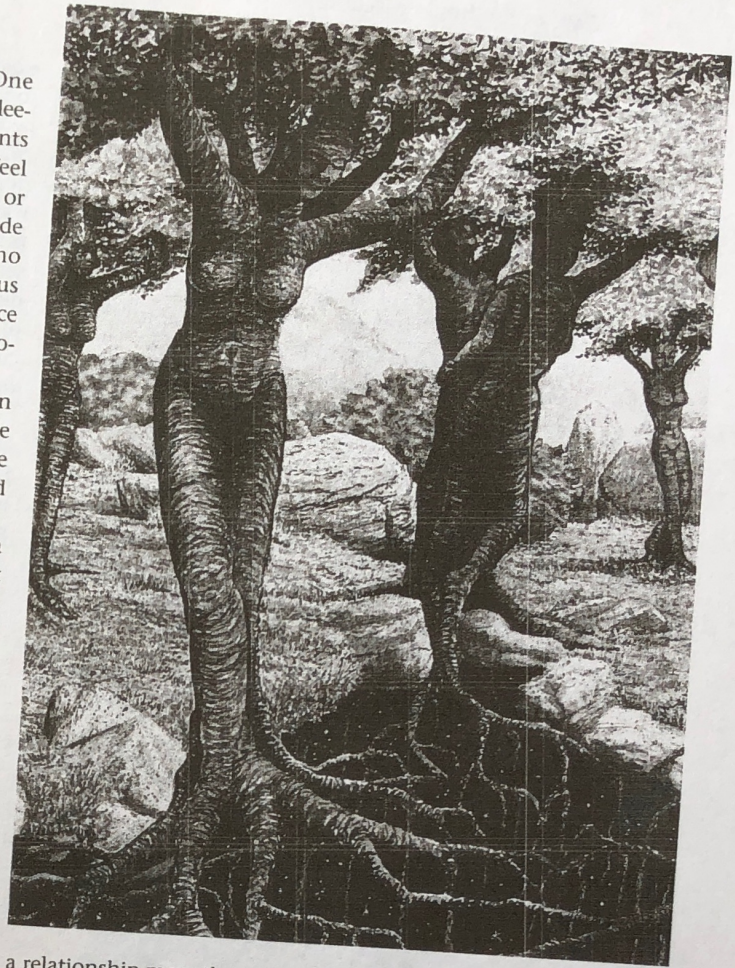
The story speaks to many dimensions of life. One way to look at it is to see Daphne as the virgin soul fleeing from the spirit of cultural, Apollonic achievements of intellect, art, and even healing. Often we may feel that something in us doesn't want to be understood or healed. We don't want to go to the doctor. We decide against taking a class. We're tired of the friend who always tries to change us, give us advice, or figure us out. These feelings, sometimes dismissed as resistance or defense, may be Daphne sensitivities, honest emotions keeping the soul intact.

In a more general sense, Daphne is the virginal in flight from the marital. She is the solitary trying to evade the relational. She is nature protected from culture. She is the untouched preferring to be transformed backward into nature, rather than forward into human culture.

Daphne's resistance can also be seen as a flight from soul. It is precisely her lovely spiritual posture that can make the turbulent tendencies of attachment appear unattractive. People sometimes flock to personal growth groups to find their way out of entangled relationships, instead of deeper into them. Something virginal and Daphne-like runs away from engagement and begs to be preserved from it.

Our resistance to attachment might come from that place in us that wants our lives to be clear and ordered, morally clean, and unfettered. Our thoughts, like the branches of Daphne in her self-preserved state, might reach heavenward, indicating our desire to avoid the entanglements of life. Daphne's becoming a skyward branching tree reveals her inherent spirituality, which in the case of Artemis is seen in her tall stature. Daphne's branches share the same spirit that places spires and steeples on churches, though these point heavenward rather than branch—a significant difference. The figure of Daphne is a particularly subtle blend of spirit and soul: Her branching arms stretch upward in the direction of purity and transcendence, while the many points of her branches and leaves suggest the multiple perspectives of the soul, softening and deflecting her rising spirit.

This is a gentle resistance to the soul and its attachments, the Daphne reach toward the uncluttered sky; nevertheless, it is an effective defense against the soul's labyrinthine nature. Life spoils our innocence and our psychological virginity. Relationship and attachment hold down that spirit that would like to roam the woods of this world in playful hunting. Taking the role of Apollo, people sometimes say that they enjoy the pursuit in



a relationship more than the relationship itself, while others, following Daphne, seem to indulge in the flight.

Daphne's story also reveals that relationship may be more than the effort of two individuals to blend their lives together. On a far deeper level, it may also be the eternal struggle to reconcile nothing less than heaven and earth—the upward yearning for simplicity, order, meaning, and freedom with the downward need for complexity, change, moodiness, rootedness, and attachment. Daphne may escape Apollo, but she still gives up her free life, becoming a creature rooted in the earth and subject to its climate.

There is no need to take sides in this contest between worldly life and self-preservation. Yet we always speak from one place at a time, so that it is precisely in the paradoxes and contradictions that arise when we include both dimensions sympathetically that the deepest insights of the story come to the surface, and our theme gathers some necessary complexity. The same is true in our most concrete relationships: There is always a tension and a dialectic—a shifting back and forth—between concrete life and mental work on it, between

living our loves and understanding them, between the desire for intimacy and the wish for solitude, between the soul of attachment and the spirit of detachment.

Spirituality and Detachment

Not surprisingly, the literature of spirituality usually counsels a life of detachment. For example, the Christian mystic Teresa of Avila, counseling her nuns, who have "abandoned all worldly things and possessions" in order to live the contemplative life, says, "There is no doubt that if a person perseveres in this nakedness and detachment from all worldly things, he will reach his goal." The spirit of detachment makes sense from a spiritual point of view. It's important to clear the decks and be free of everyday worldly concerns in order to explore fully the realm of the spirit. The world can easily distract from this higher endeavor. But the soul has an equal task and commitment, to find the treasures and explore the ins and outs of life by being attached. Just as there is spiritual practice in search of the highest and most refined reaches of human potential, so there is soul practice in pursuit of the juices and nutrients of life's entanglements.

When its own necessary practices are neglected, the soul may react by presenting difficult problems tuned

exactly to what has been slighted. If a person decides to forego an ordinary sexual life on behalf of spiritual dedication, for example, it is possible that sex will become a preoccupation and may find modes of expression that are unusually compulsive and perhaps in some way distorted. I remember once leading a retreat for priests. I told them at the beginning that I'd like to set aside two hours on the third day of the retreat to discuss sex. To my surprise, during a break on the first day several priests came to me and asked that we discuss sex for a whole day, or maybe for the whole retreat, they considered it such a grave problem.

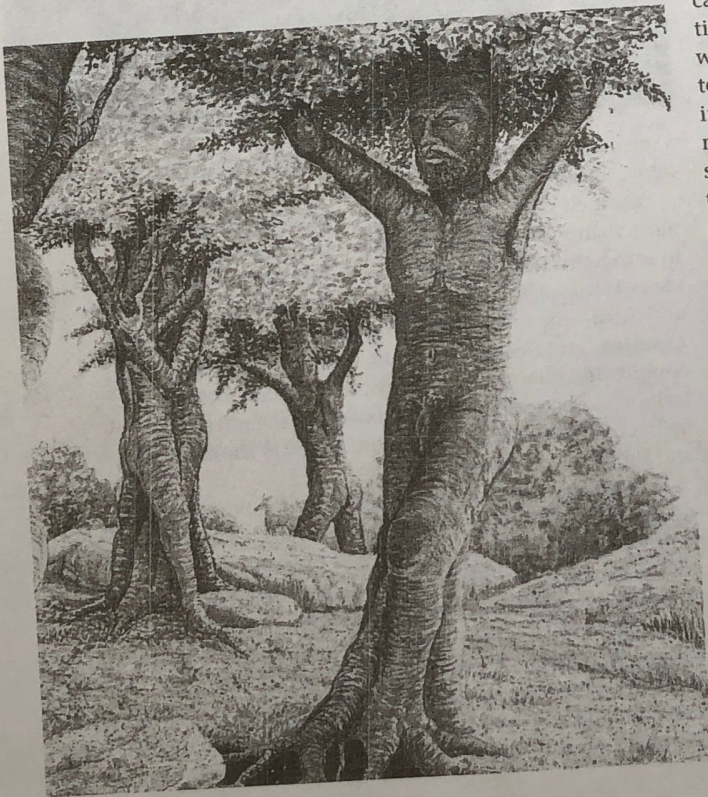
On the other hand, a solid spiritual life, including an attitude of detachment, can be extremely soulful. Daphne's escape can make a great deal of sense and even can be seen as leading to a fully realized life. Many people find fulfillment in the single life, and some feel drawn to a life of dedication to special causes, to social action, or to a spiritual vision. Some callings in life demand a degree of detachment, whether for travel, reasons of time, or the necessary solitariness of the job.

Closeness and Distance in Relationship

We can apply these twin principles of attachment and freedom to our relationships, discovering that our involvement with people may be most soulful when we can live fully amid the tension of these two inclinations. If we have strong desires to have a family, live with another person, or join a community but find, after these desires have been satisfied, that we are drawn in exactly the opposite direction, then we might remember that this complexity is simply the way of the soul. We may have to look for concrete ways to give life to both sides of the spectrum, enjoying both our intimacies and our solitude.

Sometimes the matter presents itself as a questioning of our own natures: Am I the kind of person who should get married, or do I need to live alone? Should I get a job in a large corporation, or should I be self-employed? Should I attach myself to some school of thought, or should I find my own way intellectually?

The best answer to questions like these is intellectually and emotionally to hold both sides at once. Out of being attached and separate at the same time. Just as it is difficult in reading the story of Daphne and Apollo not to side with one or the other, so in life it is not easy to give assent to the attractions of both intimacy and solitude. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke's famous



solution to relationship is for each person to protect the solitude of the other. His emphasis is clearly on solitude; yet two people in a relationship might just as well protect the other's capacity for intimacy.

In everyday life there are always opportunities to honor both separateness and togetherness. Often one person in a relationship feels one emotion more than the other. In his essay on marriage, Jung describes one partner as the "contained" and the other as the "container." Maybe the best way to tend these two needs is to

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notice where the anxiety is. In matters of soul it is advisable never to compensate or try to escape but instead to tend better the very thing that is causing trouble. A person in a marriage who is longing for freedom, finding marriage too limiting and confining, might best avoid the temptation to flee and instead work at reimagining marriage and partnership. His notion of marriage is likely too limited and therefore painful in the living of it.

Many people seem to live the pain of togetherness and fantasize the joys of separateness; or, vice versa, they live a life of solitude and fill their heads with alluring images of intimacy. Bouncing back and forth between these two valid claims on the heart can be a frustrating, endless struggle that never bears fruit and never settles down.

In the end, the only answer, as in all matters of soul, is a polytheistic one. Honor both gods, Daphne and Apollo. Pursue and run away. Be lustful and chaste. Wholeheartedly link up with someone else, but just as passionately find your own way. It's too bad that our language doesn't have more words, like "bittersweet," that convey the oxymorons and contradictions not only of language but of life itself. We need help in imagining these complexities that invite soul and that offer a way out of the divisions and dualisms that keep life anxious and unsettled.

I'm not suggesting, by the way, a balance of individuality and togetherness. Balance is a perfectionist ideal, never to be found in actual life. Rather, the soul's complexity is achieved over time, through error and

extreme. There may be only rare moments, quickly fading, in which the desired amalgam appears to be within reach. Most of the time we feel the unwelcome tug of one side or the other. That, I believe, is as it should be. We are guided by our emotions, by pain, by the feeling of going wrong. The point is to enter the mysterious complexity of the soul's polytheistic structures, and not to arrive at some static point of perfect balance.

For some people Daphne is not only a presence to be dealt with, she is a defining figure, setting the tone of a life and a personality. Such a person, who is both graced and challenged to live a life dominated by the Daphne style, may have to struggle with many Apollo figures within and without and may discover that flight is a way of life. For this person, the struggle against attachment and being civilized can be a unique way of establishing soulfulness, of working out profound and competing demands on the heart. A flight from the world, from civilization, or from marriage may be seen superficially as a failure to be social or normal. But, having a sympathetic appreciation for the myth, we could understand that such flights and struggles can be manifestations of a soul's passionate response to its own nature and destiny. The same struggle may be lived out in the effort to be both intimately connected with another and at the same time preserve one's integrity and individuality.

For the rest of us, a strong dose of individuality can be the best quality to bring to a relationship. That nymph in your heart who runs away at the first sign of love, sex, and commitment might be doing an important service to the soul, which needs flight as much as it needs embrace. On the other hand, the proud spirit that rushes into relationship at the first twitch of eros is also important to the soul. Without Apollo's impetuous desire, there may be no intimacy.

In a relationship all we can do is follow the lead of our emotions and images. An abstract, comprehensive understanding is both impossible and undesirable. In matters of the heart, we may have no choice but to allow other forces and factors beyond our intentional selves to work out the debates, the incongruities, and the contradictions, as we bring hope and desire to new love and affection.

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