Food for the Soul
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
University of Virginia
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Course facilitator: Gene Locke, D.Min.

In 1992 Thomas Moore wrote that the “greatest malady of the twentieth century, implicated in all of our troubles and affecting us individually and socially, is ‘loss of soul.’ When soul is neglected, it doesn’t just go away; it appears symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence, and loss of meaning…the root problem is that we have lost our wisdom about the soul…” (Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life). Many would argue that this is even truer in the second decade of the twenty-first century!

This offering is an opportunity to learn to care for the soul by cultivating depth and sacredness in one’s own lived experience, reflected upon and written about, and shared with others in a small group format. We will learn from reflection on our own life narrative and experiences, discussion with one another about personal discoveries, and from engaging various spiritual perspectives and practices.

However one defines “soul”, it is at the very least, according to Moore, the experience of “genuineness and depth midway between understanding and unconsciousness, and its instrument is imagination”. In preparation for “imagining together”, you will be invited to read material relating to specific topics prior to each meeting. The course facilitator will also send, prior to each meeting, a summary of the key themes of the readings and a set of reflection questions. You will be encouraged to keep a journal of reflections on these questions, which by the end of the program will become a meaningful personal life review. In the discussion sessions themselves, you will be invited to share discoveries, insights, and meanings, all in the service of developing a collective wisdom of the group.

The goal of this offering is not to prescribe an individualistic privatism, but to nurture what Moore describes as a “richly elaborated life, connected to society, and nature….not superficially adjusted…but profoundly connected to the communities that claim our hearts.” (italics mine).

The course facilitator will seek to provide a safe and supportive space for participants to cultivate the genuineness, depth, and richness to be found in their own experience and in so doing, to lay claim to the integrity and wisdom available in the later years of life.

Session Topics
1 – Why Care for the Soul?  Body and Soul, Symptoms as the Voice of the Soul, and The Will to Live
Resources: Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life, by Thomas Moore (Chap. 1, 7, 8); Kitchen Table Wisdom, by Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D. (Chap. 1-Life Force) and “Seeing with New Eyes”, a recording by Rachel Naomi Remen.

2- Spirituality for the Second Half of Life, or The Way Up is the Way Down
Failure, “necessary suffering”, and falling into “something” that is much bigger and deeper that is beyond us and larger than us. “Mystery”, a recording by Rachel Naomi Remen.
Resources: Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life”, by Richard Rohr;
Homer, The Odyssey; Thomas Moore, Care of the Soul, Chap.10; Necessary Losses, by Judith Viorst.

3- Doorways to Transformation: What do you do with an epiphany? and
Transformative Practices: Intention, Attention, Repetition, and Guidance
The portals of pain, hitting bottom, and noetic experiences; honoring teachers and mentors; and finding the extraordinary in the ordinary. Essentials for preparing the soil for transformation: equanimity, second naiveté, and beginner’s mind. “Being Whole”, recorded by Rachel Naomi Remen, Care for the Journey.

4- Stories of Wisdom, Stories of Healing

5- Blessed to Be a Blessing

6- Befriending Life, Preparing for Death: Completing the Circle

Gene Locke is a retired Presbyterian minister who served as a pastor, hospital and hospice chaplain, clinical pastoral educator, and pastoral counselor over the course of forty years. He received the Doctor of Ministry degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, and was a Fellow, American Association of Pastoral Counselors; Board Certified Chaplain, Association of Professional Chaplains; and Certified Supervisor, Association for Clinical Pastoral Education.

Reading the following is not required (summaries of key themes will be provided) but will certainly be enriching: Care of the Soul, by Thomas Moore, Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life, by Richard Rohr, Kitchen Table Wisdom and My Grandfather’s Blessings, by Rachel Naomi Remen, The Second Half of Life: Opening the Eight Gates of Wisdom, by Angeles Arrien, A Life of Being, Having, and Doing Enough, by Wayne Muller, and From Age-ing to Sage-ing, by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, and An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith and Learning to Walk in the Dark, by Barbara Brown Taylor.