



Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche

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Since 1980, Jungian psychologist Bill Plotkin has been guiding men and women into the wilderness - the redrock canyons and snow-crested mountains of the American Southwest - but also into the wilds of the soul. He calls this work soulcraft. There-s a great longing in all people - a longing to uncover the secrets and mysteries of our individual lives, to find the unique gift we were born to bring to our communities, and to experience our full membership in the more-than-human world. This journey to soul is a descent into layers of the self much deeper than personality, a journey meant for each one of us, not just for the heroes and heroines of mythology. A modern handbook for the journey, Soulcraft is not an imitation of indigenous ways, but a contemporary nature-based approach born from the landscape of the Southwest, the traditions of Western culture, and the cross-cultural heritage of all humanity. Filled with stories, poems, and guidelines, Soulcraft introduces over 40 practices that facilitate the descent to soul, including dreamwork, wilderness vision fasts, talking across the species boundaries, council, self-designed ceremony, nature-based shadow work, and the arts of romance, storytelling, and soul-infused poetry.

Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche Details

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From Reader Review Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche for online ebook

Eva says

As I read, I learn more about, "an unmet longing for wildness, mystery, and a meaningful engagement with the world." (p. 1)

Sue rempel says

a beautiful guide to continue the journey of following one's soul path... one of the deepest and moving books I've read

Willis Miller says

Life Changing Read.

Tara1275 says

I read this a few years ago (while I was transitioning out of Bastyr College of Naturopathy). I loved the concept of marrying yourself; meaning, acknowledging the divine feminine and masculine in yourself and finding balance & wholeness within.

Bridgett says

I really loved this book about getting to know your soul, soul image, and soul path. There were many useful exercises and I was really inspired.

Kate says

After a four-month journey savouring SoulCraft – reading, contemplating, rereading, questioning, discussing, and rereading again, I closed the cover today, tenderly as if bidding farewell to a much loved friend. I have loved this book.

I facilitate a Spiritual Literacy Group, for a group of international and interfaith women who gather together with the shared intent of cultivating spirit and a soulful dimension to life, through reading and discussing spiritually themed books. We meet twice a month, spending weeks and sometimes several months on any given book. A reference to Bill Plotkin and Soulcraft caught my eye while the group was reading Linda Kavelin Popov's A Pace of Grace – The Virtues of a Sustainable Life. In a chapter entitled Lead with a

Passion, Popov cited Plotkin's use of a quote by Frederick Buechner in Soulcraft: "Our calling is where our deepest gladness and the world's hunger meet." In a chapter What is Your Yes? she refers to Plotkin's groundbreaking work (Soulcraft) saying he "presents a model of the life of the soul that delineates each phase of life from birth to elderhood and the soul tasks that accompany each stage. At times we need the virtues of purposefulness and determination, at other gentleness and detachment. Each of us is here for a purpose and it is our sacred obligation to become mindful enough to discern it." (pg 174) Plotkin's central theme is helping his readers to understand that everyone has a purpose. Then with beautifully crafted prose, he guides us the wayfarer or wanderer on a path to identify, claim and embody our soul's purpose, not only for our self-betterment, but for the service and betterment of the world.

Why did I love Soulcraft?

For one it reacquainted me with profound ideas from authors I have read in the past in a new meaningful light: Joseph Campbell, A Hero with a Thousand Faces and The Masks of God; C.G Jung and his explorations of the unconscious mind, James Hillman and James Hollis. It prompted me to explore indigenous nature-based people's spiritual communion of the human soul with the deeper powers of nature and with a dependency on a universe that provides for both physical and spiritual needs. (I've enrolled in an online course on Native American Spirituality and Religion as a result.)

Reading and contemplating Soulcraft placed me on a new learning curve – intellectually, psychologically as well as spiritually. For a person who has considered themselves a spiritual seeker for more than thirty years, that's exciting. I had never before considered that spiritual development and growth was a dual journey – that of a Descent into darkness and Soul as well as an Ascent to the light and Spirit; which together bring about a connection of ego, soul and spirit and ultimately wholeness.

It opened my eyes to the sanctity and sacred powers of nature, as well as to our dire collective need to escape our soul-squelching twenty-first century saran-wrapped enclaves in order to glean ancient truths and wisdom of nature as treasured by generations of indigenous people. There is another way to live.

The path of the wanderer, collective unconscious, a second cocoon and second adulthood, sacred wound, loyal soldiers, soul initiation, ego centric and soul centric relationships and more-than-human-world are all part of a liturgy of terms and concepts in Soulcraft that stimulates, baffles, releases, broadens, illuminates and ultimately enlightens.

While reading Popov's A Pace of Grace, mentioned earlier, our Spiritual Literacy Group was introduced to Popov's Virtue Cards and the concept of a virtue pick – a pack of cards which describes in detail a particular virtue, what that virtue looks like, and how it is practiced. A virtue pick is a random selecting of a virtue card, followed by discussion on how it might apply to a person/group. Our pick for the last session discussing Soulcraft was the virtue of initiative:

Initiative is originality and creativity in action. When we have initiative, we boldly express new ideas, discover a new method, or find a different way to solve a problem... We accept responsibility as an engaging opportunity to apply our own ideas. We spring to challenge with enthusiasm. We call on discernment to forge a new way. We use our creativity to bring something new in the world. We initiate, we dare to be original.

Among Plotkin's parting instructions is: "You must now speak your vision into the world." "You must learn to act on what the soul has revealed to you." "You must create ways to act on what you received. A vision without a task is just a dream."

Meaghan says

I would give this 3.5 stars if I could. My advice regarding this book is to read its pages with an open mind and take away from it whatever resonates with you.

Jason Mulligan says

Powerful perspective changer. I thoroughly enjoyed it and will need to revisit this book frequently.

Aaron Hoopes says

Absolutely fantastic book on the process of crafting the soul and putting to rest all of the habits and behaviors that no longer serve us.

Teri P says

I am enjoying this book. Recommended for a guide to initiation. Finished this book. I am not in complete agreement with this author's explanation of soul. However, I found it very worthwhile read. The book lays out basic components to initiation, which is helpful. He is obviously influenced by James Hillman, which is a great source of reading about the nature of soul.

Aimie says

A distillation of 20 years of 'work' in these varied disciplines...an incredible inquiry of spirit, earth and self.

Avonlea Rose says

Plotkin is an eco-therapist and wilderness guide, who writes about what he terms the "soul," and the art of engaging and understanding it. He explains that encounters with our soul provide us with our life's purpose, and help us to live in harmony with nature. I had picked up the book anticipating more of a guide book about what one does to achieve "Soul Crafting," particularly as the book is set up this way; however, it turned out to be more of an expose on the experience.

I was completely interested and hooked in at the beginning of this book; but I felt my interest in it dwindling as I went along. My initial reaction to this book was that the best way I could relate my experience of this

book is that it is rather like entering a thrift shop: with many things that are not so appealing about it, yet, if you persevere, there are some gems hidden amongst it. At the end of the book, however, I was left wondering if those few gems were good enough to merit the rest of it.. and my final answer is no.

Plotkin can be incredibly long-winded and often redundant. He is particularly keen on providing endless examples and anecdotes, even if they aren't interesting for the reader, such as his use of his dream about Blue and Red. Another thing about Plotkin is that he likes coining his own phrases and repeating them often (such as "Second Cocoon") which I find to be an irksome, and somewhat distracting, habit. In some instances, it can leave the reader at a loss as to what Plotkin is even trying to get at; such as in Plotkin's list of events where we might have encountered our soul (on page 317), which includes "a dark night of the soul." Just what is "a dark night of the soul," Mr. Plotkin? However, Plotkin nonetheless has a smooth and pleasant narrative that is poetic and rich with imagery, which will likely appeal to many readers.

I did enjoy a number of Plotkin's ideas; however - a warning to the reader - some of his other ideas do get quite out-there. He fancies talking about feeding bodies to vultures, for instance, and, in another, smearing shit on oneself in order to re-enact a dream. Another thing here- I had hoped Plotkin would provide more evidence to support his ideas (being his occupation as a psychologist), but he doesn't seem really interested in that and instead draws primarily on anecdotal evidence and other non-academic works. He goes on a few great leaps and bounds, asserting several times, for instance, that we are reincarnated souls. Perhaps I could and should have expected this from a book that is ultimately a book on spirituality.

One last thing about "Soulcraft," and which annoyed me, was the reckless manner that Plotkin uses to endorse many "soulcraft techniques" that could be dangerous. For instance, he goes on at great length about the benefits of fasting; but, never once does he seem obliged to forewarn anyone that fasting may not be for everyone, or that it may be advisable to see a doctor before fasting for long lengths of time. He devotes much of the book to writing about adventuring in the wilds and going on vision quests; but he barely touches on the practical concerns of such an endeavor, or provide recommendations for developing practical skills before embarking on these adventures and quests. Maybe Plotkin hopes that everyone will seek out Animas Valley Institute for help adventuring in the wilderness. Or perhaps Plotkin simply does not care about the reader's safety, as he often writes that danger and dances with death are required for "encounters with the soul." On page 37, he tells us about the Dagara people who undertake initiation rituals where "the small risk of death is preferable to the living death of an uninitiated life." Perhaps for some, but I question the ethics of composing a book that encourages people to endanger themselves.

Although I didn't enjoy this book myself, perhaps if you are a patient reader and are especially interested in nature-based spirituality and eco-psychology (I see this book possibly appealing to the hippiest of hippies), then this book may be worth your time and provide a starting point for getting in touch with "true self" and "finding more meaningful ways to exist in the world". I, however, would still suggest that you most definitely want to explore other books on the topic, and seek out more complete resources. Plotkin does provide some of his own suggestions at the back of his book.

Yet I wouldn't recommend it. In summary, it started as a reasonable read with some interesting ideas, but was lacking in constraint, focus, and a certain je ne sais quoi that would have kept me more engaged. It didn't help that, along the way, it just got way way too out there for my personal tastes with far more bad than good. It would be more suiting to name this one "Soul Crap."

Nick Z says

Transformational! I'm seeking to meet others who incorporate soulcraft practices into their daily lives.

Erin Drake says

Soulcraft masterfully explores the deep and mystical connections between the human psyche, soul, and nature and does it using simple, eloquent language to describe richly nuanced ideas about spirituality, wholeness, initiation, and truth. Although the entirety of Bill Plotkin's inspired work is magical, radical, and thought-provoking, I found the sections that describe the ceremonial opportunities provided by our transition into adulthood the most fascinating and, to use an en vogue term, relevant.

The authors' descriptions of soul and spirit are critical to understanding his message. He describes spirit as ethereal, upperworld, a recognition of Oneness, and a transcendence of ego and attachment. Uncovering one's soul requires that we search inward, downward, into our own dark depths. Plotkin explains, "Our spiritual growth is meant to go in both directions, toward the fertile darkness and the glorious light; each of us having the opportunity to bridge earth and heaven – through the trunks of our middleworld lives" (p. 34).

Having defined these key terms, Soulcraft asserts the following: 1) each of us embodies a unique soul that holds within it our life's purpose, the framework of which is service to others 2) an initiation is necessary to become a true adult and to recognize and live this purpose 3) violence in all its forms is permeating our post industrial society more and more because we no longer value or practice formal initiation into adulthood 4) we must, therefore, discover/explore/invent new rites of passage that address our unique, modern needs 5) these new ways of initiation, if implemented will save us from destroying ourselves.

Plotkin's soul initiation process utilizes many of same elements found in traditional rites of passage in most nature-based societies. He divides the experience into three main parts – severance, soul encounter, and return. It begins with an initial "call to adventure", leaving home, a period of wandering, facing challenges both internal and external, solitude in some form, manifesting activities, soul encountered, truth revealed, obstacles overcome, a return to community, sharing knowledge gained and offering of new insights. The author makes another important observation that resounds throughout his text. Plotkin asserts that to live with soul, to manifest our truest natures, we must engage in sacred service. "Our sacred work is what nature-based traditions call our giveaway to our people and place" (2003, p. 39), Plotkin explains. He believes that the chronic despair and emptiness experienced by so many in the western world is due in large part to the fact that we are not connected to our communities through benevolent work. We grieve this absence of involvement with something outside ourselves because it goes against the true, interconnected nature of humanity. But all is not lost. Plotkin suggests that "by consciously honoring our grief – the absence of vision and sacred work – we take our first steps toward soul discovery and personal fulfillment. We begin the return to our true nature" (2003, p. 41). Soulcraft affirms with great wisdom and profound clarity that soul initiation and encounter are not only possible in this world but also essential to our healthy survival.

Nick says

Plotkin's premise is that we must each discover our purpose on this planet, not just by "ascending" into the spiritual realm, but by "descending" into the realm of the soul, which is where our uniqueness lies. To do so, he suggests a radical life disruption involving nature, things like vision quests, mountaintop fasts, and group rituals (much of which he offers in his own practice). I'm not ready to sign up yet, but his cosmology is fascinating. My key reservation is the length of the examples. I'm not nearly as interested in his clients' lives as he seems to be.

