

Young Souls, Old Souls: Part Two

by Bill Herbst

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In Part One, I discussed the qualities of souls through the simplest possible division — either young souls or old souls. Part Two continues that discussion and culminates in why such a perspective might be meaningful and perhaps even helpful in better navigating the difficult circumstances for humanity that are now unfolding and will likely intensify over the coming years.

In the world of this commentary, what I'm calling old and young souls do not correspond to anything like simple good and evil. Young souls are not inherently immoral or devoid of conscience, and old souls are not invariably high-minded or gentle. But moral conscience in a young soul is fragile and not well-developed, so the ego of the embodied human is more easily influenced by social pressure to conform and the groupthink of other people's assumptions about right and wrong. The young soul often rationalizes questionable behavior by seeing it as socially acceptable.

In other words, an old soul has a definite path established by long experience and will do everything possible to remain on that path, while a young soul is discovering the world anew and can often lose its way or, just as frequently, be led astray. In general, young souls are more sensitive to the experience of acceptance and belonging (at least among their immediate peers) — tribal identity is extremely attractive to young souls. By contrast, old souls participate in groups and appreciate like-minded support, but they are more secure in their individuality. To use a sports metaphor, young souls are drawn to team sports, while old souls prefer individual sports. Taken further, young souls are focused on winning and moving up in the hierarchy of stardom on the team; old souls enjoy winning, too, of course (who doesn't?), but their primary focus is on mastering the game and playing well.

Readers may notice in the story I'm telling at least some correspondence between young and old souls and the principles of masculinity and femininity. Though not accurate in every dimension, some parallels can be seen. I want to state directly, however, that I'm not suggesting that women as a biological gender are old souls, with men mostly young souls. Not so in my experience. In my story, biology is not destiny. That said, I do feel that the eternal feminine and

the eternal masculine (the *yin* and *yang* of the Tao) do indeed correlate roughly with old souls and young souls.

This is relevant because humanity has struggled with gender since the beginnings of civilization. Civilization enshrined ownership and possession, which are qualities well-suited to masculine acquisitiveness, even when that urge is wrong-headed, such as in war, conquest, and domination of others. As a result, we've been stuck in a long and painful imbalance. Women have been treasured and coveted by men, put on pedestals, but also reduced to objects — dolls to be used for male gratification, often abused, and too frequently tossed aside. This tragic misunderstanding between the masculine and feminine in our world is a significant reason that humanity now finds itself on the edge of catastrophe, if not outright extinction. The memes of civilization favor adolescent masculinity, which has its place like everything else in this world, but which has not served humanity well.

The solution is not as easy as allowing more women wearing business suits and acting like men into corporate boardrooms. No, we've tried that over the past 40 years, and it doesn't fundamentally change anything. We need women to represent and express the feminine, not to adopt or express an ersatz version of masculinity. That means promoting inclusion and cooperation (feminine values) rather than exclusion and competition (masculine values). Our species is unlikely to resolve its predicaments and move forward harmoniously until we rebalance the gender scales and rethink the balance of masculine and feminine qualities within each of us and within civilization as a whole.

The most significant theme of the commentary is this: *The majority of human beings who aspire to wealth, status, or power are young souls.* Not all, by any means, but most. Civilization extols these experiences and rewards them with fame, privilege, and recognition. Young souls seek (and need) the trappings of material and social success, because their embodied lives don't contain those qualities within, at least not in great measure or with a secure foundation. To rise in the material world by ambition and will (and often at any cost) is characteristic of young souls. They tend not to approach their lives with an awareness of or appreciation for irony or paradox, although they will almost certainly encounter both of those along the way and probably be surprised to discover them. But that's a natural part of the soul's journey toward knowledge and wisdom. Young souls are also willing to pay any price to get whatever they want, and if that price includes more suffering by others, so be it. Integrity is not their strong suit.

Old souls are looking for something else besides wealth, status, and power. Their lives may pass through such experiences, but they don't necessarily seek them out, except as such experiences are required to achieve a larger purpose. In other words, old souls accept the mantle of power when its offered or required, but more out of responsibility than desire. As a general rule, old souls are more

interested in understanding the laws *behind* manifestation than in the physical *fact* of manifestation itself. Having already amassed much experience, perhaps through a range of life-forms, they have already witnessed and learned a central but difficult Catch-22 within embodied behavior, namely, the blowback of unintended consequences. They've learned that manifestation that comes to pass through personal or collective action is more complicated than it seems. Old souls understand in their bones that simply going after what one wants may or may not result in achieving the goal or winning the prize — sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't — but headlong pursuit of desires will almost certainly lead to the unintended by-product of negative repercussions. In war, this is called collateral damage. In regular life, I'd call it unnecessary suffering.

Unlike unfettered free-market capitalism (which is a philosophy that many young souls love and believe in fervently), old souls are more wary of reducing life to "*Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead.*" All too often, that approach to problem-solving leads to even more vexing predicaments. Old souls know that achieving positive results occurs best when actions have been considered in light of love and compassion, and confirmed in all their possible ramifications, or at least all that could be foreseen. This requires immense patience (which young souls often lack) and an ability to consider many, many variables beyond just the quickest, most direct path toward fulfillment of one's desires. The shortest distance between two points may be a straight line, but that often requires shutting out large sectors of reality. Old souls may do less than young souls, and it may take them longer to act, but they usually get better results.

For many people, especially those who are young souls, life on earth, as part of humanity, and within modern civilization are all hunky dory, and often downright thrilling. They love being embodied here on the earth, in part because they accept the "cosmic advertising" of how wonderful it will be, and they may not realize how much suffering will occur. Young souls approach their lives fueled by vitality and passion, focusing on what they want and ignoring the less pleasant consequences of their own actions or the repercussions of our collective behavior. Young souls revel in the pleasures of embodied life and try to avoid the pain. Sometimes this means denying the suffering in the world, although more typically it means ignoring it until the hard fact of suffering cannot be ignored. Even then, however, young souls return to the pursuit of pleasure as quickly as they can.

Old souls bring to the table a more refined and encompassing perspective. They see both the inherent ecstasy and agony in the world of manifestation. While they understand (or are coming to understand) that pain, decay, and death cannot be eliminated, they are less likely to inadvertently add to the burden of suffering in the world through ignorance or passion. Their happiness is based less on what they achieve in the material realm than on the underlying joy of consciousness itself.

As we move deeper into the 21st century, we are confronted more dramatically by the consequences of our actions as a species and as a civilization. All empires rise and fall, and modern techno-industrial societies are empires that rose like rockets but are now approaching rapid decline. That this slow-motion collapse will be accompanied by terrible suffering, quite probably on a massive scale, is not merely possible but all too likely. How do we move through it without succumbing to anger, rage, and hatred for those in power who ignored all the warning signs and went blissfully ahead feathering their own nests? Can we choose compassion instead? To me, that's the spiritual challenge of our times, and it's both daunting and difficult.

By and large, the elites in the world — those in power — who own so much, whose wealth is almost inconceivable, and who make policy (economic, political, and social, and in every country in the world) are made up of young souls. Are there no old souls in corporate boardrooms or the lofty offices of government? Of course there are. Old souls are everywhere, but — with 7.5 billion human beings alive on the planet today — the ratio of young to old souls has changed. The percentage of young souls walking around in bodies is larger today than in humanity's past, and with that change has come a dramatic acceleration in creativity (through the industrial and technological revolutions), but also an accompanying increase in the amount of unnecessary suffering in the world.

Young souls are in charge at this point, and they're stomping around the world in their seven-league boots, leaving in their wake chaos and calamity for themselves and others, of which they may be unaware, or — in some cases — just do not care about.

Perhaps the young souls who rule will come to their senses over the years ahead, so that civilization doesn't collapse or careen over the cliff into disaster. So far, it's not looking like anything so positive will occur. Too many of those in power are still busily milking the status quo for all it's worth (sometimes because they don't see any viable alternatives, since going along to get along is a young-soul hallmark), but often doing so with an enthusiasm and false certainty that civilization can sustain what is clearly unsustainable. Young souls believe in the magic of their own propaganda. Old souls believe in actual solutions that allow more love and compassion to illuminate our world.

In fairness, it's quite possible that the simple dynamic I've presented here — that of young souls and old souls — is artificial. Perhaps the consciousness within each human being is composed of young-soul facets and old-soul facets. Viewed from that perspective, we are all responsible for what's being created, whether peaceful and loving or chaotic and tragic. Even if that's true, however, the point of my story remains the same:

How are those of us who see what is being wrought on the planet and in human civilization to keep from succumbing to powerfully negative emotions of our own

— anger, blame, and hatred toward those who embody the forces of destruction, whether they do so intentionally or merely because of limited awareness of the repercussions? Such emotions (rage, blame, hatred) do little other than make us miserable and add to the increasing burden of suffering. Instead, how do we choose compassion for all beings — young souls, old souls, or anywhere in between? One way might be to recognize that a world run by young souls is not designed to be peaceful and loving. That's not a moral lesson, but a pragmatic one. Compassion is not the *right* thing to feel, it's simply the *best* thing to feel, for the practical reason that it does not add to our individual and collective suffering.

I offer this commentary not as the Truth, but rather as a device, almost a trick, or a lens through which to examine the world, in the hope that seeing people as young or old souls might help us avoid negative judgments and stay centered in compassion.