

PREFACE
TO
THE AUTHORS GUILD
BACKINPRINT EDITION

The time has come...

This book first appeared twenty years ago. Since then we have witnessed a devastating disintegration in the life of our country. As a society, we have grown more sophisticated, but as a *people* we have become violent and vindictive. Outwardly, we see this in assaults on property and people in places and ways we never saw it before (increasingly in the name of religion, and, alas, sometimes at the hand of our own government); but we can see it inwardly too, there in the decay of what we once stood for and liked to believe we would always uphold: *the significance of human life, and the worth and dignity of every individual.*

Why is this happening to us? What has brought it about? Why do we let it go un-resisted? When did we stop being a people and become...just people instead?

It is as if we were awakened by howling winds to find the island we live on being flailed by its first typhoon. Scrambling with the other inhabitants to higher ground for safety, we breathlessly turn around with them there to look back at a fury none of us has ever seen before.

Huddled in stony silence and pelted by rains we no longer feel, we all watch numbly as gigantic chunks of shore—our homes among them—start to crumble now and tumble into the sea.

And where are our leaders? Busy with “bigger things” or with their careers. Too many of our elected officials? Answering charges or trying to avoid them. Our churches? Silent or bickering among themselves. Our intellectuals? Reading, or writing for publication. Our artists? Cashing in on success or trying to stay alive. Our scientists? Seeking more grants while researching their specialty. Our philosophers? We don’t grow them anymore. Our teachers? Caught between students on the one front and parents or administrators on the other. Our homeless? Impaled in agonizing anonymity by the systemic poverty and injustice of a nation that is culturally deprived. Our elderly? Forgotten, or fast becoming so. Our enemies—known and unknown? Waiting...and taking note. And where does this leave our country? Adrift.

If all this seems farfetched, consider this: the earliest signs of a culture’s decline are usually found in its language: first, key words and concepts are lost; and next, the realities to which they point. And once the core notions of a people start to unravel, the very fabric of their culture begins to fray and fall apart. When we lose our words, we begin to lose our way.

Over the last hundred years, there has been a pronounced and steady decline among us in the meaningful use of the words ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’. One of the leading popular authors in this arena—a seemingly benevolent man but avowed medievalist—admits he does not define *soul* or use the word with precision; and, he effectually ignores *spirit* altogether. Thus, ironically, his intriguing books only magnify our current malaise all the more, and point up the confusing muddle that awaits any who try to use either of these words today. With the loss of soul and spirit, of course, comes the evaporation of true *identity*...and, eventually, the erosion of all genuine *community* as well.

Perhaps it is too late now to do anything about all this. Many believe so. Then again, perhaps it isn't. But this much is clear: the time has surely come for some of us to make a try.

*...to reclaim our bodies, recover our souls,
and re-enter the world.*

Every age presents its challenges, some of which may even become a cry of the times. "To recover the soul" could well become one of ours. 'Soul,' an ancient word, is found in the Bible of course, but Plato used it too, and Aristotle even more—as countless others have on down the course of Western Civilization. But it was at the start of the 20th Century, when psychology (the so-called "science of the soul") was being born, that the word underwent a drastic change, emptying it of most of what it had meant for 2500 years.

Why does this matter? Because 'soul' is the one word we have to connect us to the entirety of our lived experience. 'Life' is a big enough word, to be sure, but it is far too general; while both 'self' and 'person' remain blandly vague and unspecific. Ask yourself: Is my life a basic unity, a whole made of itself more than anything else, or is it made up of other things that are? The answer you give will be the meaning you live...or the lack of it. A life is either a whole or it isn't; it's either one thing or many. But any whole for which we have no word is one that will soon get lost...or break in two.

To lose touch with our soul is to lose our grasp on life itself. It is to fall out of touch with who we are and with what things mean. For a soul is not something you "have" but the someone you *are*; it is the very stuff of a life—with all its twists and turns; ups and downs; beginnings, endings, and spans in between; in all its events and accidentalities—irreducible, irreplaceable, and unrepeatable. To put it in another way: *your soul is what your being is becoming*. It can never be lost, really (for where else can it go but where you are?)...it can only not be found.

The human soul is found in one place only: in human experiencing. That is its realm and where it abides. And that, *human experience*, is not—nor can it ever be—the exclusive specialty of any academic discipline, profession, or field of study. For by definition it includes all of these and more. So, when it comes to human experience, either everyone is an expert or no one is.

Today, if the two are to remain relevant, we must relate them both to human experience in a fresh way. By re-exploring experience, we can re-experience the world—and this alone holds any promise for a modern renaissance in which we humans can truly begin to reclaim our bodies, recover our souls, and re-enter the world.

This book is for those ready to set out on this venture, and to take an honest unflinching look at all they enact and embody* in order to discern who and what they truly are. Other classic pursuits, so useful in their customary spheres—religion, therapy (which, however it may be described, is *always* built on a fix-it model), growth and support groups, mysto-metaphysical methods, sciento-numerological systems, and so on—will not serve us here. To use a chisel for a screwdriver never works well and usually ends up damaging the chisel. Though open to anyone, this book is not for everyone. Those it is for will know who they are because they can “feel it in their bones.”

Those looking for therapy or training should seek that in other books, and not return to this one until their aims have changed. For the purpose here is not to fix, train, or save your soul, but rather...to help you find it.

(Those interested in pursuing this further are invited to investigate SOULQUEST under my web site at the Authors Guild, or to go directly to www.generuyle.com.)

* Is it any wonder that our many problems with the environment persist, when our most immediate environment, the human body, remains so foreign to us?

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The ills from which we are suffering have had their seat in the very foundations of human thought. But today something is happening to the whole structure of human consciousness. A fresh kind of life is starting... The task before us now, if we would not perish, is to build the earth.

—Teilhard de Chardin

OPENING THE BOOK

Every beginning brings something to an end.

Life, books, the sense we make of things... What's it all about?



JUST BETWEEN US

PUTTING THIS BOOK IN ITS PLACE

A book is just ink, paper, and dried glue until someone comes along, picks it up, opens it, and starts to read. Then an amazing thing happens which even today we are not able to explain or fully understand. For as the eye moves along to take in what it sees, what are nothing more than marks on a page are transformed wondrously into *words*. Each word starts to stir like a little Pinocchio that can act on its own to speak, shout, soothe, sing, sting or startle. Now the book, a lifeless lump before, can “say something.” When it does, the door to a whole new realm is opened, and in that moment we enter into the world of what things mean.

All of this happens in an instant. It is part of something greater which we are doing all the time. We *make sense* out of life every minute, and we live the sense that we make. But we rarely notice this or pay it any attention. For instance, you are doing it right now as you read this very sentence; yet do you notice it, or would you if your attention had not been called to it? Probably not. Most likely you would have gone on the way most of us do, focusing on whatever was before us at the moment (or on what we happened to “feel” or “have on our mind”), and on what we took it all to mean, aware only of the end product—taking that as

something simply *there* rather than as something we ourselves brought into being.

So...in reading these first few lines, and in *noticing what you have done*, you have just managed to bring to the surface your own participation in one of the most important human acts of all. (The only other acts that can rival it are birth and death, our coming into and passing out of existence; yet this act alone connects those two with all that happens in between.) And why is our *making sense* so important? Well, since your life is real, what you do with it also becomes real. The sense you have made of the book's few opening lines has now become a part of what has truly happened in all existence. Thus, in doing this you have already made, regardless of how brief or tiny it seems to be, a piece of reality for all eternity.

WHAT IT IS ABOUT AND WHAT IT IS FOR

What this book is about, therefore, is not in these pages. It is in you. The book is about your own experiencing, about what you are doing with your life, and about what you are making out of what you are. It is about "doing your stuff," as we say when we have in mind those who are finding and using that which is theirs to do.

Thus, *you* are the book's main character, its central figure, the one around whom everything in it revolves. "But," you may say, "you don't even know me." True, and you do not know me either. Still, that does not keep either of us from sensing and being aware of that basic aliveness, so uniquely stamped in each of us, which is going on in us both right now (as it is in every other human being on earth too). We do not need to know each other, though, to know what it is and that it is there.

Our lives come in a diversity of sizes, shapes, shades, and situations. For example, you may just now be getting ready to choose a career and make that all-important decision about what you primarily intend to do

with your life. On the other hand, you may be in the middle of the increasingly common change of moving from one career to another. Or perhaps neither is the case, because you have had a satisfying career for several years and plan to continue to ride it right on up to retirement. Regardless of what your present situation may be though, or mine, as we get up in the morning and as we sleep through the night, from our very first breath to our very last, we humans are all involved in the same thing. We take hold of the stuff of life, and then we each in our own way *mold and shape it into what we are*. That is what this book is about, making a life.

But what is it for? Perhaps you know exactly what you most want to do with your life. Or, maybe you do not yet have the slightest idea. What have you mainly given your life to so far? To preparation and getting ready? If so, for what? Or instead, has it been given to accomplishing and achieving? If that is so, how is it all going? To whom do you or have you ever given much of yourself? To several people, a few, none at all? What is the path you are traveling at present or the direction you are moving in now? Is it the one you will choose for the rest of your life?

Those who honestly know and care about you, and these seldom make more than a handful, may contribute significantly to your answering these questions genuinely. Outside this small social sphere, advice is offered, free and not so free, by the “expert” and the “experienced.” The shortcomings in this are not that these people do not know what they are talking about (many of them know a great deal, though there is always an abundant supply of the other kind), but rather that they know little or nothing about who they are talking to. Advice is mostly offered by people who do not know us well, and whom we do not know well enough to determine whether they even follow it themselves. The surest way to find lasting and worthwhile answers to such questions is to make use of what you have learned by now of who you are and who you are not.

This all brings us back to where we started—with you. The working premise that runs throughout this book, and upon which its whole venture is based, is: *you know more about your life than anyone else does and are thus the one to decide what to do with it and where to go from here.*

(If this strikes you as too self-centered and you would prefer something more objective, try noticing how much of what passes for “objectivity” is really only someone else’s subjectivity.) *But therein lies the rub!* Because most of us find it extremely difficult to acquire a true understanding of ourselves, to lift it up and bring it out, so we can then use it to make our way further. This is a book to help you do that. It is a tool, nothing more; not an end in itself, but something to be used for something else. Like any tool, it is only a thing to do something with. So, now that you know exactly what this book is about and precisely what it is for, we have truly managed to “put it in its place”—and you can plainly see why it is something that is...just between us.

MAKING SOMETHING OF IT

If it turns out that this small book helps you catch a glimpse here and there of the special configuration of life that is your own, and which is as abidingly unique as your fingerprint, then the credit will be yours and so too will be the discovery. However, if anything in these pages should go against what you have learned from life, then do not hesitate to leave these words behind. Let us part company at that point as you heed the more important voice of your own experience.

Remember to always remain true to that movement of life within you which you sense is your own, *and let nothing undercut your trust in your own ability to read it.* For that is your birthright as a human being. Without it there is no way for anyone to know what his or her life is or what it means. Without that, one is lost. It is not anything that can be taken from you, but it can be let go of and given away. And if that has ever happened to you, you know it; or if it ever does, something in you will. Then your first act must be to reclaim and regain it, which can be done by risking once again to choose and use that which brings you life. For this is the fundamental human activity through which life reaches us once more, and enables us to get on with that which is certainly our grandest task: *making a life.*

A human life does not just happen, nor does it unfold automatically. It is made—step by step, and piece by piece. From our first moment to our very last, we make sense of every moment we live, which we experience as impulses, sensations, urges, notions, hunches, feelings, thoughts, imaginings, memories, musings, wishings, worryings, and wonderings of every kind. Whether these remain vague and fleeting or move on into words and deeds, it is the rendering into sense of just such things as these that, when added together, come to comprise in all its uniqueness and entirety, the life lived by someone like you or me.

Making Sense

The sense man makes
in turn makes man.
To turn to what
one can't understand,
is better than to turn it
into what one can.