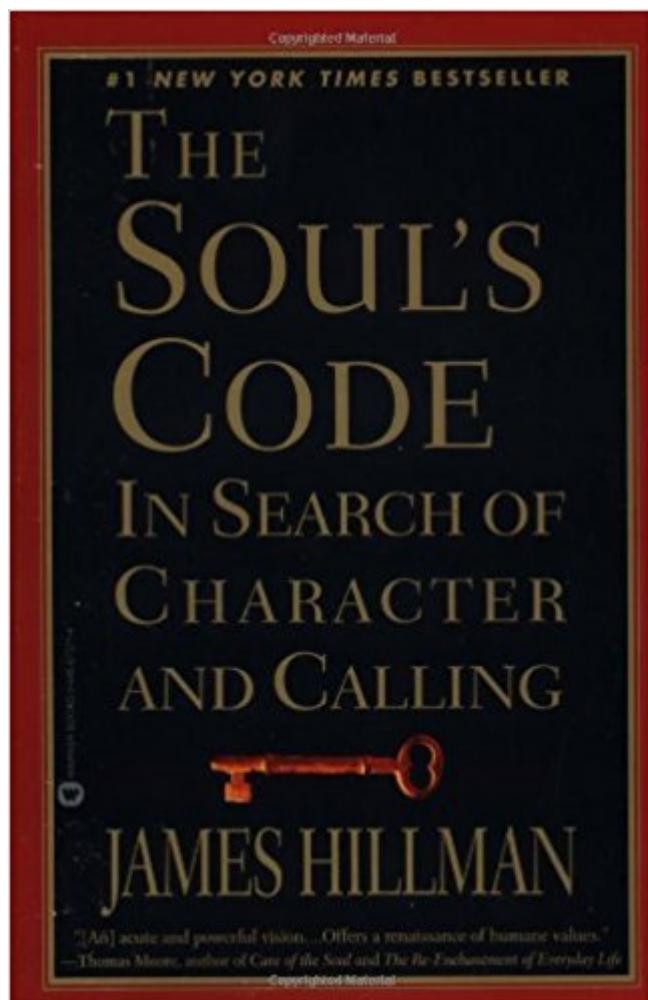


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The Soul's Code: In Search Of Character And Calling



Synopsis

Some call it "genius". Others have named it "spirit", "daimon", and even "guardian angel". But while philosophers and psychologists from Plato to Jung emphasized the fundamental essence of our individuality, our modern culture refuses to accept that a unique, formed soul is within us from birth, shaping as much as it is shaped. Now in this extraordinary bestseller, James Hillman presents a brilliant new vision of our selves not defined by family relationships or the mentality of victimization. Drawing on the biographies of such disparate people as Ella Fitzgerald and Mohandas K. Gandhi, James Hillman argues that character is fate and shows how the soul, if given the opportunity, can assert itself even at an early age. The result is a reasoned and powerful road map to understanding our true nature and discovering an eye-opening array of choices -- from the way we raise our children to our career paths to our social and personal commitments to achieving excellence in our time.

Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Grand Central Publishing (October 1, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0446673714

ISBN-13: 978-0446673716

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (105 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #39,858 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 inÂ Books > Religion & Spirituality > New Age & Spirituality > Theosophy #240 inÂ Books > Religion & Spirituality > New Age & Spirituality > New Thought #2095 inÂ Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Psychology & Counseling

Customer Reviews

Like other Hillman books I have read, The Soul's Code seems best read as a myth rather than a statement of metaphysical reality. The myth either resonates or not. The Soul's Code thesis that human beings are born with a daimon - an encoded destiny - is best judged as an artistic work of imagination rather than an assertion of objective truth. I found Soul's Code well worth reading for its many provocative and creative ideas but less resonant than several other Hillman works such as Re-Visioning Psychology in which Hillman sets forth his vision of the human psyche as essentially

plural, and the essay Peaks and Vales, which draws a fascinating distinction between spirit and soul. I can't quite reconcile Hillman's notion of a destiny (which seems psychologically monotheistic) with his image of the polytheistic personality, which I understand to be one of the bedrock assumptions of archetypal psychology. If the human psyche contains many persons, it would seem that the pursuit of a destiny would require repression of the many selves and inflation. I enjoyed Hillman's challenges to psychotherapy, which I believe has a huge power shadow. I agree that the fantasy that parenting is the source of all adult misery should be rejected. I believe, however, that Hillman may have misrepresented family system therapy as promoting this view. In my experience, the goal of family system therapy is to establish an adult to adult relationship that includes the capacity to know one's parents in their complexity. Parental wounds become only one element in a much larger and more paradoxical story. I also found it interesting that Hillman seems to disagree with his friend and colleague Robert Bly by questioning the notion that the "absent father" is a fundamental source of male woundedness.

"The Soul's Code" starts with an interesting idea, the Acorn Theory, where an individual's talents lies as dormant and inevitable as the oak tree inside an acorn. Those essential qualities of one's talents are fed and nurtured throughout one's life, and while the final size, shape and appearance of a tree are determined by many factors, the acorn will grow into an oak as long as it is able to grow. Not a pine tree, not a rose bush, not a ficus, but an oak. And while this theory applied to humans is an interesting and somewhat far-fetched one, it does have a certain appeal, explaining why some people have an almost preternatural gift for art, music, writing, speech and so on. Basically, their acorns were allowed to grow into what they were destined to be, unfettered and unrestrained. But maintaining this theory is a bit of a magic act, requiring some sleights-of -hand and diversions to keep the audience from picking up on those telling signs that something else is going on. Hillman tries to come up with a grand theory that can explain genius, but contradicts himself on some points along the way. The biggest one I found, or the one that bothered me the most, anyway, explained violent and destructive acts. In Chapter 10, "The Bad Seed, " he uses as examples both Adolf Hitler and a woman named Mary Bell, who, at 10 years of age, strangled to death two boys, aged four and three, in two separate incidents. In both of these people, says Hillman, a lifetime of indicators showed that these were evil acorns leading to evil oaks. Hmm, interesting, except that in every other example and anecdote he related in the preceding chapters, people would become violent when their true talents were not allowed to take shape.

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