

Science of the Soul

By Roger Marsh, Integral Leadership facilitator and GLEE co-coordinator

What is the soul? When we ask this at ITP workshops we get, as you would expect, a variety of answers. If there is commonality in those answers it is that the soul is a deeper aspect of ones' self and is somewhat more mysterious than our other more familiar aspects of body, mind, and heart. Because it is deeper and more mysterious, it is more challenging to study and understand. However, the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS, www.noetic.org) has been using science to explore areas of human experience, you could say, illuminates at least some aspects of what we might consider soul.



In the words of IONS “We hypothesize that everything is interconnected, and that embodying that awareness reveals information and energy not limited by space and time, which can create breakthroughs in transformation, innovation and well being. What we have learned over time is that science can reveal deeper understanding of our seemingly coincidental, subjective experiences. Through iterative research that builds on past findings, we are able to illuminate the mechanisms of what is essentially ineffable, in a way that can make these experiences of awe, creativity, intuition, healing, and more regularly accessible and applicable.” Pretty cool, yes?

In this statement are some key distinctions that for me point towards the experience of soul: 1) interconnectivity, 2) not limited by space and time, 3) embodiment, 4) transformation, and 5) the ineffable. I'm sure that IONS has wisely gone to great lengths to avoid polarizing words like soul. Pretty much everyone can agree we have a body, a mind and a heart, but things get more slippery when it comes to soul. We have to find our ways of communicating so that we come together (commune) rather than split apart. Science is a great tool in this respect. As stated by Dawson Church in his book *Mind to Matter*, “Science has become the contemporary language of mysticism.” On the other hand, here with ITP, I appreciate our freedom to explore words and concepts like soul and honor the experience and belief systems of each person as his or her own authority.

I found IONS before I found ITP. It's an amazing group of people with a deep appreciation for the value of science to illuminate the ineffable. In fact, it was at an IONS Community Group meeting where 15 years ago three strangers came to present Integral Transformative Practice. Those strangers were Barry Robbins (ITPI VP), Pam Kramer (ITPI President) and the late Stan Savage (Community ITP Marin member). What I saw then in ITP, and still do, was a comprehensive pathway to further integrate and embody the knowledge I was gaining and bring it alive in my life. It's nice to know and see that ITP International and IONS have continued building and strengthening their relationship over the years in various ways.

For the ITP practitioner IONS is a wonderful complement. Seeing the science of our experiences, or potential experiences, not only validates the experience, it can greatly enhance our understanding of how things work, strengthen our practice and support our ongoing transformation and evolution. Some of the studies IONS is currently engaged in include:

- Exceptional Healer Pilot Study – this represents a first step in developing a standardized set of subjective and objective measures to a) characterize that subtle energy healing therapies are effective and b) to provide clues regarding the underlying mechanisms that lead to pain alleviation.
- Physiological Examination of Full Trance Channeling - this study's objective is to evaluate neurophysiological measures in full-trance channels before, during and after channeling sessions to localize brain areas/networks and identify physiological systems important in the process of going from a baseline state to a channeling state and back again. This study is defining and creating a Noetic Signature Inventory providing more understanding of mechanisms for accessing information and energy not limited by space and time.
- IONSX – A five-year multidisciplinary effort to reliably and robustly demonstrate the influence of intention on physical systems. IONSX aims to create pragmatic applications of phenomena suggesting that consciousness is fundamental, and in the process, help advance the scientific paradigm beyond an exclusively materialistic stance.

This is just a sampling of the extraordinary research being done by IONS. With these examples you can begin to see how their areas of study can directly inform our integral transformative practice, and just maybe, provide greater clarity into this deeper and more mysterious aspect of ourselves some call the soul.