

## SOUL AGE: WHAT IT IS—AND ISN'T How We Evolve

By Shepherd Hoodwin

Souls experiencing all of life on the physical plane never have to seek spiritual growth. They can, and most do, go through the whole cycle in the waking sleep.  
—Michael, *Messages from Michael* by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro

Soul age is the most popular part of the Michael teachings other than the seven roles (soul types), but it is also the most misunderstood, overrated, and one of the hardest to correctly identify. It is commonly mistaken as a measure of spiritual advancement, but in fact it is just one factor of many. As the quote above shows, it's possible to complete the physical plane without ever awakening.

Soul ages are the developmental steps each soul goes through, mainly on the physical plane: *infant, baby, young, mature, and old*. Our perspective becomes larger at each stage, but not necessarily more accurate. Accuracy depends on how much we are in the positive poles of our various soul and personality characteristics. The positive pole is a trait's true or love-based manifestation. The negative pole is its distortion or constriction by fear.

The soul ages themselves have poles:

### INFANT

- + Innocence
- Aversion

### BABY

- + Acculturation
- Rigidity

### YOUNG

- + Accomplishment
- Self-Centeredness

### MATURE

- + Resonance
- Subjectivity

### OLD

- + Inclusiveness
- Undirectedness

Infant souls focus on lessons about *survival*; baby souls, on *structure*; young souls, on *success*; mature souls, on *relationships*, and old souls, on *context*. Infant, baby, and young souls become increasingly focused on the outer world. Once those stages are somewhat handled, the soul turns a corner and starts working more on the inner world, going deeper into self (mature) and higher into a more philosophical overview of life (old), like old folks on their rocking chair 😊.

That's not to say that only older souls explore the self; it's just that it becomes more of a focus then. Sages (one of the seven roles) seek insight from their first lifetime—they have a philosophical bent at all soul ages. (Sage is the number five role, and old is the number five soul age, so there is a correlation.) Similarly, priests always seek the higher good as they interpret it; kings always seek mastery of both self and world. Etc.

Michael teachings traits refer to specialties or emphases. They are not cut-and-dried delineations, exclusive categories that only those with those traits care about. Mature souls focus on relationships but relationships are an intrinsic part of being human; we all have them and care about them. It's just that mature souls tend to delve deeper into them (and into all things, since that is the stage when one digs deeper into meaning). Similarly, sages specialize in music, and artisans, in art, but art and music are part of being human, and those of all roles can excel in them if they wish, bringing their unique tools to bear on them.

In the New Age community, when someone says that a person is an old soul (especially a young person), she means that she sees depth, stillness, and wisdom in his eyes, that he seems to have risen above the fray of human craziness. However, in the Michael teachings, it only refers to a stage of development. In fact, most terms used in the Michael teachings have narrower definitions than in common usage. Someone at any soul age can have stillness and wisdom.

Knowing our soul age tells us what our lessons are about, but not how successfully we're achieving them. It's similar to physical age: old people have had more experience in this lifetime than young people, but they have not necessarily harvested their experiences for wisdom. There's a saying that one can have fifty years of experience, or one year of experience fifty times. Young people and young souls can be wiser and more evolved than old people and old souls, depending on the choices they've made and how awake and motivated by love they are. There are old people who apparently have learned little from their years and keep repeating the same mistakes; the same is true of some old souls.

Conversely, in the New Age community, calling someone a young soul suggests a lack of evolution. Again, it doesn't mean that in the Michael teachings. It's true that young souls have not yet been through the mature and old cycles, but anyone can choose to look within and align with the eternal at any time, and there is no requirement that older souls do that. Michael is fond of saying that "all is choice."

Another good analogy is college: one person may be a freshman with an A average, and another, a senior with a C average. The senior is more advanced in one sense, but not in others. People are complex.

Just as college seniors might socialize with sophomores, souls of different ages can be close to one another. In one channeling session that I did, Michael described an old soul father and his young soul son as being the best of friends on a soul level. There are many successful relationships among people of different soul ages.

The Michael teachings were originally dictated to a small group of friends in the 1970s who understood how those terms were being used. Many of the original terms were accurately descriptive in the sense that they zeroed in on traits well, but some of them also have strongly negative connotations in some contexts. For that reason, many channels have chosen alternatives.

The best example of that is Michael originally calling the ordinal inspiration role *slave*. The problem with telling a person that he's a slave is obvious, and some people objected right away. Michael suggested *server* as an alternative early on, which some people still object to, and other alternatives have been explored. However, outside of Yarbrow's group, most Michael channels go with *server*. Similarly, *retardation* became *reevaluation*, *rejection* became *discrimination*, and so on. However, the names of the soul ages mostly have not been changed.

Telling someone that he's a young soul, or worse, a baby soul, takes a lot of explaining. Some channels have come up with alternatives that are scarcely different, such as referring to baby souls as *toddler* souls. After not coming up with anything better, I asked Michael if I could simply refer to the ages as first stage, second stage, etc., not unlike what we already do with the seven levels of each soul age (e.g., first-level old, second-level old, etc.). The members of the Michael entity who work with me on charts didn't like the idea because at least the current terms contain some built-in descriptions, whereas numbers would have to be explained from scratch. They suggested just educating people about their true meaning. I'm not convinced that we've yet found the best solution, but it's hard to change terms that people have grown used to.

Among Michael students, being characterized an old soul is seen as a compliment, and a young soul, as an insult. This is a misuse of the teachings, although the early channelings do seem more complimentary toward the old soul, despite a statement that each age has its pluses and minuses. The fact is that every Michael teachings trait is neutral, other than the chief obstacle, which by definition is a false fear and therefore negative. The other traits only become positive or negative through how they are used. In the positive poles, they are our set of gifts; in the negative, they are our Achilles heels. One could say that those who are physically young are characterized by vitality in the positive pole, and can be self-involved in the negative. Similarly, young souls can also possess a vitality in the positive pole that can be lacking in later soul ages, but can be self-centered and short-sighted in the negative. There are always pluses and minuses.

In the positive poles, we act from unconditional love to some degree; we are in clarity. In our negative poles, we act from fear, which distorts. This is not referring to the kind of fear that one might properly feel in a moment when confronted with a threat to one's physical survival. Negative poles spring from the chronic false psychological fears that comprise what is commonly known as "the ego." They distort our perceptions, such as believing, "If someone criticizes me, I could die. Therefore, I must create defense mechanisms to protect myself." Or, "I need to amass a huge amount of money and lock it away so that I will be safe."

It's true that the older the soul, the more depth and seasoning that tends to develop, but since "all is choice," there's no guarantee. A young soul who has worked hard to develop self-awareness can have more depth than an old soul who hasn't. Older souls have had more layers of experience, but how much of that has been converted into understanding varies. In addition, there is the matter of previous grand cycles, which means planetary experiences before being on Earth. A young soul with twelve previous cycles may display greater depth than an old soul with four; each grand cycle adds complexity to the core self, which we refer to in the Michael teachings as the *spark of the Tao*.

In my book *Journey of Your Soul*, there is a section in the chapter on soul ages called "Older is Not Better." Throughout my decades of channeling, I have endeavored to get this point across, but the community largely continues to use soul age to explain good and bad behavior, when it isn't suited for that. Each soul age has different positive and negative poles, and good and bad behaviors tend to look different in them, but human behavior is complex—motivations can come from many different sources. A serial killer might be a frightened infant soul who doesn't know better, but he could also be a mentally ill and/or heavily damaged older soul. And infant souls can be guileless and beautiful. A mature soul can be a drama queen due to what arises as one plumbs the depths of self, but there isn't a particular lack of drama in the other soul ages, either, especially around relationships. "You-done-me-wrong" country songs come to mind. Soul age is more subtle than most assume.

I've channeled over ten thousand Michael Reading charts since 1986. Over half have been of mature souls, with old souls coming in second, but young souls have accounted for over 10%. My young soul clients are usually late young and are often inspiration-axis roles (priest and server), since they tend to advance spiritually more quickly, but there are those of other roles, too. Very few have been baby souls, and none so far have been infant. Probably the majority have not been people requesting their own chart, but asking for other people's charts. Some people order a lot of charts to better understand their family, friends, and/or co-workers. Still, this gives a sense of the audience for the Michael teachings.

Young souls tend to be more outwardly focused—that's where their lessons most lie. Therefore, they are not as *likely* to seek outside the mainstream, but there is nothing to stop them from doing so if they choose. (It might be more common for younger souls in India to seek because that is part of their culture, whereas Western culture is more externally oriented and materialistic.) Those drawn to spirituality and metaphysics can be as expert, clear, and deep as

anyone else who puts in the work. The fact that they are consciously seeking at a relatively young soul age might suggest that they are particularly remarkable souls. In any case, the stereotypes of young souls do not apply to them, yet they can be painted with the same brush, or other Michael students may assume that there has been a mistake on their chart if they do show spiritual competence. This is a simplistic way of using the teachings.

I was commiserating with another Michael channel about the mild dread we feel when we channel someone as being young because we will probably be challenged about it. I usually double-check with Michael: “Are you *sure*?” We know what they’re going to say: “How could I be young—I’m so spiritual? I’m not a selfish materialist like Donald Trump!” Despite my having written extensively on this issue, there is usually a need to educate clients on what soul age is—and isn’t. That’s partly why I’m writing this article—I can just give them this!

Of course, errors can occur with any channeling. In fact, there is no source in the universe that is 100% accurate all the time—we’re all evolving. However, most of the objections to soul age come from an incomplete understanding of it. The same is true of the other traits, as well, but in my experience, the one people most often disagree with on their chart is soul age. Many assume that a young soul cannot be spiritual or have deep understanding, and that is simply untrue. In addition, some people object to being channeled as mature—they are certain that they’re old—because they view mature souls as being less advanced or invariably caught up in emotional drama. Others disagree with being channeled as old because they feel that they don’t have their act together and assume that old souls necessarily do. A few people feel that being designated as old puts too much pressure on them to live up to a standard they can’t meet. All of these attitudes freight soul age with more meanings than it has.

The original Michael channelings starting in 1973 that are the foundation of the teachings often taught through extreme examples (not necessarily negative ones). For example, in the first Michael book, *Messages from Michael*, Michael says:

Mature souls make fine chefs: they enjoy precision cooking and gourmet dining. Their hollandaise sauce does not curdle—it would not dare. Wine fetishes are at their height in this cycle. A mature soul would never serve a zinfandel with lobster. An old soul would not hesitate a moment, if Zinfandel happened to be its favorite wine.

Certainly, there are mature souls who fit this description, especially those who care a great deal about wine or who are gourmets in general, but the majority do not. (Let’s have a show of hands of mature souls reading this who would drink Zinfandel with whatever they wanted to. Most of you? That’s what I thought.) As I wrote in [\*Journey of Your Soul\*](#), the words *always* and *never* are rarely true. People are complicated, and the use of those words can render almost any text incorrect, although they do make for a dramatic flourish. There are, of course, mature souls who do serve Zinfandel with lobster, and old soul gourmets who do not.

*Messages from Michael* also says, “Last-cycle old kings are vagabonds and hoboes.” That is a negative pole manifestation of old soul, *undirectedness*, and another example of hyperbole—obviously, not all seventh-level old kings are vagabonds.

These kinds of generalizations pepper most of the Michael books and web sites. The stereotypes are correct maybe 60% of the time (sometimes a lot less). They can be useful for teaching purposes, but they cause a lot of problems for those who fall into the other 40%. To really learn the teachings, it is necessary to understand the underlying forces that *may* lead to the behaviors that have become known as stereotypes, but may not. A more subtle understanding is needed. Assuming that certain behaviors automatically indicate certain traits is a rookie student mistake—it’s not that cut-and-dried. Any description you read about any Michael teachings trait is an example of how that trait *can* manifest but that it doesn’t necessarily look that way, even if the word *always* is used. The more reading you do, the more you find that various authors and channels sometimes describe traits quite differently. All of the descriptions can contain valuable truths. It’s like the famous Indian parable of the blind men and the elephant, who all accurately described parts of it. From Wikipedia:

Each blind man feels a different part of the elephant body, but only one part, such as the side or the tusk. They then describe the elephant based on their partial experience and their descriptions are in complete disagreement on what an elephant is. In some versions, they come to suspect that the other person is dishonest and they come to blows. The moral of the parable is that humans have a tendency to project their partial experiences as the whole truth, ignore other people's partial experiences, and one should consider that one may be partially right and may have partial information.

There are several lists online and in books that describe each of the thirty-five soul age levels. There is truth in each description, but they vary quite a bit. That is the nature of truth. Those who see one description of their soul age that doesn’t seem to fit tend to reject the channeling, but another description might fit better. Understanding the underlying forces of each level makes self-validation easier.

In the Michael teachings, many traits come in groups of seven, and each of them resonates with one of the numbers between one and seven. Understanding the qualities of each number helps you understand the traits it resonates with. Below is a list of the positive and negative poles of each number, followed by the role with which each resonates.

- 1 + Purpose, – Simplicity, SERVER
- 2 + Stability, – Balance, ARTISAN
- 3 + Enterprise, – Versatility, WARRIOR
- 4 + Consolidation, – Achievement, SCHOLAR
- 5 + Expansion, – Adventure, SAGE
- 6 + Harmony, – Connection, PRIEST
- 7 + Inculcation, – Eclecticism, KING

A shortcut is to say, for example, that mature is the scholar soul age because it is fourth, and has, like scholar, a consolidating nature. The sixth level resonates with priest and has a harmonizing nature. So a soul at sixth-level mature is harmonizing their consolidation: tying up the loose ends they have generated with others during all the internal integrating and strengthening they've been doing throughout their mature soul cycle. That can look a lot of different ways. For some, that includes difficult karmic paybacks, which is why sixth mature is generally known as being the most difficult level. However, those who didn't generate much karma have sixth-mature lifetimes that are less harsh.

Baby soul is the second (artisan) soul age, and it is about learning structure. Since structure is fairly new to the soul at this point, baby souls tend to be more rigid in their negative poles because their understanding of it is relatively simple. Like toddlers, they are prone to have lessons about following rules (or not). As a result, Michael students often tend to dismiss anyone with rigid political and/or religious beliefs as necessarily being baby souls. They *may* be baby souls (or may be manifesting at the baby soul age, at least in the area of some beliefs). However, any less-conscious person can be rigid in her beliefs—that doesn't make her a baby soul. So, yes, baby souls tend to be more rigid, but that doesn't mean that every rigid person is a baby soul. In fact, most of us are rigid in some ways.

To say that most of those who adhere to conservative political ideologies are baby or young souls is not correct. Younger souls are, on average, slightly more conservative than older souls, but according to my channeling of Michael, the correlation isn't as strong as one might assume.

The soul is not the same as the personality; personality can choose to be largely disconnected from the soul, no matter how old the soul is. Even people who are old souls can cling to rigid and regressive political or religious beliefs. Maybe they have not released their childhood imprinting (and possibly never will in this lifetime). Perhaps they belong to a community they value and don't want to lose by disagreeing with their peers. Or maybe they are simply stuck or comfortable where they are. The obstacle of stubbornness, a fear of change, or the negative pole of the goal of flow, *inertia*, could be factors, along with many other possibilities. Often, souls are more accomplished than their personality reveals.

Plato said that "An unexamined life is not worth living." We all have pockets of unexamined thoughts and feelings. Some of them may be fiercely protected by impenetrable defense mechanisms. This is especially true of those who never successfully completed their fourth internal (midlife) monad. This is the life stage in which the soul seeks to dispose of imprinting that is getting in the way of manifesting its true overleaves and completing its life task. I know an old priest who is still repressively struggling to be a good Catholic. This will probably fall by the wayside if he completes his fourth internal monad in the positive pole. Two-thirds of people never accomplish that, which explains a great deal about our world. The personality often resists essence tooth and nail.

The awakening person undertakes to bring unexamined false beliefs into the light, one at a time, not just for self but for humanity, not just for this lifetime but for all our past lifetimes as

well. We bleed into one another—we share a mass consciousness. It is only during this current time that we have such advanced, effective, and widely available tools for bringing awareness into our deep unconscious, healing old trauma and clearing energies. So we each have a large backlog of “stuff” we haven’t yet dealt with, both personal and collective, reaching back millennia.

In addition to accomplished souls with resistant personalities, there are also older souls who are simply not that evolved—they have gone through the earlier stages without having developed much unconditional love, like students who do the minimum to pass a class and don’t have mastery of the subject. Like people, a soul can be old but not wise.

Due to knowing about soul ages, Michael students tend to be more forgiving of those whose beliefs are different, figuring that they’re younger souls and therefore need different things or are incapable of understanding the older soul’s perspective. Acceptance of differences is positive, but those we’re forgiving may not, in fact, be younger souls than we are.

Soul age is just one factor in a person’s beliefs. What we believe and are willing to believe has to do with our temperament, background, and the core beliefs we have formed over many lifetimes. Our core beliefs attract surface beliefs that resonate with them; they are like an operating system that will only run compatible programs. Our particular brand of hardened fears might form a core belief that we live in a hostile universe, for instance. That attracts false political, religious, and other beliefs that resonate with it. Until examined, they keep us stuck in repetitive patterns. Since all is choice, people cannot be compelled to examine and let go of false beliefs even beyond their final lifetime. These can be deeply embedded in the soul and not just be a problem of temporary false personality.

We’re all entitled to our opinions, and people whose beliefs are largely love-based can disagree. However, beliefs that spring from hardened fear or anger are, by definition, untrue, because fear and anger (two sides of one coin) distort perceptions. Love is the core truth of our universe. I’m not suggesting that we try to correct other people’s beliefs, which is futile. And if we’re centered in love, that includes accepting others the way they are. I’m suggesting that we measure our own beliefs against the yardstick of love, and work to change those that aren’t love-based.

Carla Rueckert channeled an entity called Ra who taught the concept of *service to others* (STO) vs. *service to self* (STS). It is a way of describing acting from our true selves altruistically vs. acting from false ego. I don’t like those terms because I think that true service to others is also service to self—in most cases, they do not contradict one another. Win-win is a higher paradigm than self-sacrifice when it is unnecessary. It is only shortsightedness that thinks that greed and selfishness serve self—they do not. In any case, STO correlates to the positive poles of the Michael teachings traits, and STS, with the negative poles.

There are a lot of old souls on the spiritual path who are fine people and good examples of STO. They are more in their positive poles, since that is usually the result of being on a conscious



spiritual path. Therefore, in the Michael community, we are more likely to run into positive examples of old souls. As a result, we tend to assume that the older the soul, the more one is on a conscious spiritual path and is dispensing with false ego. It ain't necessarily so. We are seeing more of the old souls who will graduate from the physical plane with an A average (not that anyone else is grading us, but meaning those who have been conscientious workers throughout many lifetimes) and fewer of those who will squeak by with a C average, since they would not tend to seek out spiritual teachings.

The older the soul, the more likely a person is to seek consciously because our focus naturally expands as we go along. However, it is not correct to say that those who seek are necessarily old, or that those who are old necessarily seek. It is also not the case that those who are old are necessarily wonderful, positive, and spiritual, or that wonderful, positive, and spiritual people are necessarily old. It would be hoped that older souls would have more to offer, but old souls can be as screwed up as anyone else. Those of any soul age can have a chip on their shoulder, vote for negative candidates, etc., because any soul age can be in its negative poles. Those with more experience potentially have more tools to bring to healing themselves, but they have to be motivated to use them. That can mean facing deep pain that many go to great measures to avoid feeling.

When we don't understand that those of any soul age can be negative, we tend to assume that our more negative family members and friends cannot be old souls. Abraham Maslow said that "if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." If we only see spiritual advancement in terms of soul age, we will describe every behavior in those terms. An important part of the growth of consciousness is separating out various factors that we have previously lumped together. A more expansive consciousness sees more of the individual threads in the tapestry of life, knowing that a lot of seemingly contradictory elements can coexist. Our more negative family members and friends can, in fact, be any soul age.

There are some people whose basic tendency is to be open to looking at themselves in the mirror, who take responsibility for their actions and examine their motivations. These are the people who are more likely to grow consciously rather than through the school of hard knocks. They are vulnerable enough to receive constructive criticism. They are likely to approach a spiritual path or religion with rigorous self-honesty and not just intellectually. They have high integrity and tend more toward STO.

Examining oneself objectively is not the same as beating oneself up or engaging in endless analysis. It is simply seeing one's mistakes as quickly and clearly as possible, and making an effort to do better. It is no different in life itself than in learning a musical instrument or training for a sport. Obviously, we grow more when we consciously work to do better.

The majority of people are generally not open in this way. They assume that their thoughts, feelings, and actions are correct, and are unwilling to examine them, so they tend to repeat their mistakes. They defend their wounds and conditioned beliefs on autopilot, and often see problems as being other people's fault. They primarily "grow through pain" rather than joy.

They are willfully unconscious and more likely to be in STS. They may be nice enough, decent people, especially when not challenged. They may often try to do the right thing as they understand it. However, people who believe everything they think and feel without question are not awakening. They are in what Michael referred to as “the waking sleep.”

Although there can be a stronger push from the soul to search and awaken during the old cycle, many still do not. It is possible and not uncommon to complete the physical plane while being primarily in STS. Souls are not required to look at their “stuff,” even at seventh-level old, although it is encouraged and guides are always available to help with this. All is choice, and all experiences are valid and bring valuable lessons to the Tao, including those about what not to do. The Earth school is a self-directed curriculum, and the universe doesn’t coerce. There are seventh-level old souls who harbor deep wells of unresolved anger, for instance, that they have chosen not to face yet, and maybe never will. There is no requirement that they do so. If they graduate the physical plane with a C average and that’s good enough for them, then so be it. They completed their coursework, just not very thoroughly or at a very high level. That doesn’t mean that their incarnations were wasted; they had experiences, and experience is what it’s all about. They no doubt learned something from them and are bringing knowledge to the Tao, as we all do.

Michael teaches that growth comes through essence contact. That refers to our personality becoming consciously connected with our own essence, and also to connecting with the essence of others. Essence contact can only occur in our positive poles because it requires undefended openness.

Each soul age level can take several lifetimes to complete and requires completing all the internal monads (life passages) of that level in their positive poles. These include birth, the “terrible twos,” leaving the nest around the age of eighteen, the aforementioned midlife monad, life review around retirement, decline, and death. Therefore, no one is going to “cycle off” (complete) the physical plane if they are always in their negative poles, but very few people are—even Hitler loved dogs and was a vegetarian out of concern for animal suffering. There is almost always some positivity in at least some lifetimes. Michael has seen people complete the physical plane with an average of as little as 30%. It is very rare for souls to “flunk out” of the physical plane and be “recycled.” They have to be totally hardened and screwed up for that to happen. If they have any motivation to heal and grow, they can have as many shots at it as they desire. Almost all souls will experience an increase of consciousness as they move through the physical plane “school,” but how much is largely the result of their choices.

A lovely man asked Michael about his difficult relationship with his rejecting father, a seventh-level old scholar. Overleaves didn’t really explain it, although his father has dominance, power, and arrogance. In fact, there are several similarities in their charts, allowing them to mirror one another. Michael said that his father is unusual in that over many lifetimes he has veered from being very positive to very negative, whereas most people hug the middle more. He embodies the archetype of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. An example is one lifetime in which he was rich, converted to Christianity, and gave most of his possessions to the poor. In another, he was a

sadistic inquisitor. Michael said that he averaged about 40% positivity. The client's average is much higher; he has conscience, self-awareness, and the ability to feel remorse, which his father mostly doesn't, even on a soul level, even at seventh old.

Highly negative people are often psychically attuned to people's weaknesses so that they can exploit them. They can teach us a lot by pushing our buttons, although it's not fun. This client had had many lifetimes of wanting and often not receiving a father's approval, reflecting his lack of self-approval. His father in this lifetime senses that weakness and gets cruel pleasure out of jerking him around, giving and withdrawing it. He chose this father in part to release his need for approval from others and to understand that other people's behavior has much more to do with their own issues than with him. His father can also benefit from the relationship by having a son similar to him in many ways who shows him what love looks like should he care to raise his vibration. The fact that his son is a little younger in soul age is immaterial.

Having a high vibration means that one's energy is clean and beautiful, resonating freely without a lot of obstructions, not weighed down by unresolved karma and stored anger or fear. Young souls with many lifetimes of excellent inner work will likely have a beautiful, refined vibration. Old souls who create a lot of karma are no doubt learning a lot but haven't developed a very high vibration.

Theoretically, if you compare two people who have both been consistently doing a lot of good work on themselves, all things being equal (which they never are), the older soul of the two will have a higher vibration due to the additional layers of development. It's like having a more resonant musical instrument to play. In reality, however, there are many contributing elements to our vibration and soul evolution.

Soul age is a linear (male), one-dimensional concept—progression along a line. The second dimension of our evolution is the breadth of experience, and the third, the depth. Some souls choose to have far more lifetimes than others, not necessarily because they are "slow learners." They may simply have wider interests on the physical plane and want to explore issues from more angles, in more places, with more people, giving them a greater breadth of experience. They might be learning lessons very thoroughly, just as some students do far more reading for a class than others do—perhaps they are more curious. Other souls do just the basics on the physical plane but are active in learning and growing between lives on the astral plane. Still others choose to do the minimum on both—and there's nothing wrong with that. That is where they are, and they are contributing to the whole in their own way.

People who have lived a more sheltered, less challenging life often display less depth because their life hasn't required it. It's the same with souls over many lifetimes: some play it safer and therefore meet fewer challenges, although Earth is generally a difficult planet. Those who have been through the wringer, maybe through ignorance, but who have taken advantage of the lessons of their experiences, develop more depth. Michael once spoke about the spiritual awakenings that some people had before death in the gas chambers during the Holocaust, realizing the transitory, illusory nature of the world. The most advanced among us, however,

grow through joy. They have intense learning experiences of the happy variety by making more conscious, well-considered choices that “follow their bliss,” as Joseph Campbell put it. None of us grow through joy all the time, but we can do so more often as we awaken.

Comparing spiritual advancement is tricky for several reasons. For one thing, different souls develop different areas of expertise. Priests are naturally attracted to all forms of religious and spiritual practice from their first lifetime, so it is natural that they can develop faster in this area, especially those who have devoted a lot of time to meditation and contemplation. However, that is not better than other forms of development. Furthermore, going faster is not the soul’s goal. It is painful to be blocked, but being too much in a hurry to grow has hazards, too. The point is to have the experiences that most interest the soul, on behalf of the Tao, at a pace that can be most thoroughly and effectively assimilated.

Younger warriors may spend a lot of time fighting wars and other battles, but they are learning things that priests maybe never will. Those experiences are just as valuable to the Tao as the spiritual/religious practices of the priest. Our vibration is a matter of whether we are in our positive or negative poles, not the experiences themselves. It’s true that war is generally a low-vibration, coarse experience, but a warrior who fights nobly and honorably is generating a higher vibration than a zealous priest who rams her beliefs down other people’s throats.

No soul is expert in all areas of life when “graduating” the physical plane. If a person graduates with a Ph.D. in anthropology, you still would not want her doing heart surgery on you. She has learned the subjects that interest her, and has no doubt picked up some other things along the way, too. But she obviously does not know everything. We need everybody’s knowledge to make up a complete whole. Not even guides or teachers who have completed the physical plane and even higher planes know everything or have easy access to all knowledge. No one is always right.

Michael charts depict various forces operating on both a soul and personality level in an individual. Advanced Michael students look at how the traits interact and what they add up to. Soul age is just one trait out of many. Those with a trait that appears stereotypical usually have other chart traits reinforcing it. Conversely, those without reinforcing traits can be harder to spot. For example, a sage with no overleaves on the expression axis and most of them on the inspiration axis might suggest more a server or priest. One has to look more carefully to see the true role in such a case.

To be properly understood, soul age must be viewed in light of the whole Michael chart and the whole person. Looking at soul age or any other trait as an isolated element is like saying in astrology, “Someone must be a Libra because of x, y, or z,” not considering the rest of the astrological chart’s many other influences. Someone with a Scorpio sun sign but several planets in Libra might look on the surface like a Libra. Similarly, an ambitious mature soul with several traits reminiscent of young souls, such as aggression or power mode, moving center, and/or warrior casting might strike one as being a young soul.

Young is the warrior-level soul age because warrior is the number three role and young is the third soul age. Therefore, young soul warriors are quintessential, and all young souls resonate a bit with the warrior role. It's subtle but one can learn to pick that up. It is strongest at third-level young. Similarly, the infant vibration (server) is strongest at first-level infant; the baby (artisan), at second baby; the mature (scholar), at 4th mature; and the old (sage), at 5th old. The sixth (priest) and seventh (king) soul ages are usually experienced on the astral and causal planes, respectively.

What would a stereotypical young soul look like? How about a third-level young warrior with a warrior essence twin, king casting, in dominance, power, and impatience? I know someone with this profile, and she is extremely formidable—and stereotypical, in that she is materialistic and expert at “keeping up with the Joneses” (although those with this profile wouldn't necessarily be). On the other hand, any young priest in her positive poles will likely look less stereotypical in this regard because her concern is still with the higher good, as she defines it, although she may be motivated to attain a high position in her church (or wherever she is working) for the lessons that would bring.

As mentioned, soul and personality are two different things. Even an old soul with a highly damaged personality (including those with mental illness or other major limitations) and/or someone imprinted to be far different than her true self may not look much like her chart on the surface. You'd have to dig deeper to find it—it's the damage or imprinting that stands out. On the other hand, a damaged person may look like his chart but be mostly in his negative poles.

Currently, Donald Trump represents for many the worst stereotype of young soul kings, but he's a damaged person, and one sees his narcissistic personality disorder as much as his soul age and role—they should not be lumped together. John F. Kennedy was also a young king, and in many ways was a beautiful, positive man. About a third of the world's population are young souls, but a third of the people you know probably do not fit the negative stereotype of greed and short-sightedness. And those who do may not be young souls. I know mature souls who are materialistic and young souls who are not. I know one young soul who is an easy-going hippie with a generous heart; she even has a chief obstacle of greed, but it doesn't fixate on money or material goods. People have many layers, and we can't generalize too much.

Let's say that you were channeled as third-level mature, but you had thought you were a second-level old. How can you validate your true soul age? With any Michael chart trait, there are many litmus tests that can help you zero in on what is true.

For example, both mature and old souls have lessons about the inner world, but mature souls are more concerned with relationships to other individuals (two dimensions: me and you), whereas old souls are more oriented toward how those relationships fit into the larger universe (three dimensions: you, me, and context). That's a subtle distinction not necessarily easy to discern about oneself, especially when there are so many other factors—if you're a sage of any

soul age, you already tend to look at things philosophically—but it is one thing to consider. You might ask loved ones which they think is more characteristic of you.

If you're at the second level of any soul age, there is duality: you're half in and half out. Since it's the artisan level, you are building the structure of that perspective. If you're at the third level, you're all the way in that soul age and working hard (warrior) to internalize it. (At fourth level, you've comfortably landed in that soul age and teach its perspective, since four is the scholar level.)

If you've been given channeled information that you don't agree with or understand, your first step might be to contact the channel and explore it with them.

This is a love universe. It's about the exploration and advancement of the experience of *agape*, or unconditional love. None of us will achieve that in its totality; the goal is to get as close to it as possible. Our experiences on this difficult planet are designed to rub off our rough edges and polish us to as fine a luster as we choose to allow. An open heart (the opposite of defensiveness, the biggest block to growth) is the key. It is in our enlightened self-interest to do this work, because it offers our greatest chance of happiness and fulfillment. There is no real happiness in STS, no joy in darkness.

Some people are looking for "instant enlightenment" or quick fixes for their problems, but doing a little work each day, engaging with the issues of life as they arise, works best. It's the classic tale of the slow, steady tortoise beating the impulsive, irregular hare. We awaken by reason of the daily work we do. We are not required to awaken or to even study spirituality; we will still grow. But consciously doing the work makes the process more pleasant and efficient. That's one of the best reasons to be on a spiritual path. That is true service to Self, with a capital S.

The old soul cycle isn't the final step on our path by a long shot. It is merely the last of five stages on the physical plane, and the physical plane is only the first of seven planes. So all of us are just getting started, regardless of our soul age! There are always those far more advanced than the most advanced among humanity, both on higher planes of Earth and elsewhere in the cosmos, but the universe is not a competition. Everyone's path is beautiful and valued.