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The Soul in Contemporary Estonian Tradition

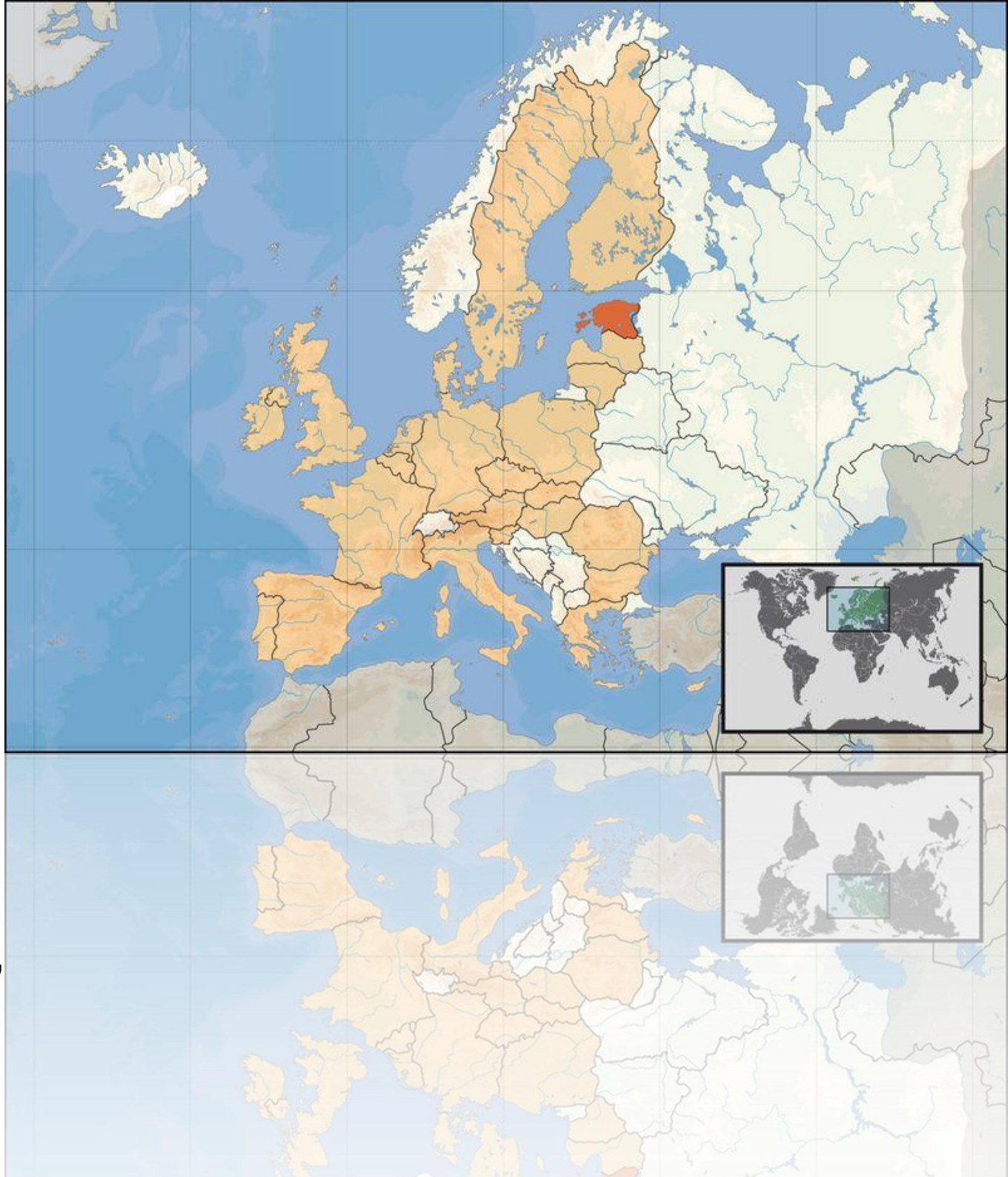
Mare Kõiva, Estonian Literary Museum,

Estonia

Language group
finnicugric, baltic finnish
branch; Christianized 13th
c.,
protestant country from
16th c.



Beside the protestant
state church a number
of other protestant
movements emerged,
brethrens and in mid-
19th c particularly in the
outlying regions,
orthodoxy.

Since early 20th century,
Estonia has been
increasingly secularised.



G. Lakoff's categorisations indicate that different peoples systematise things into classes and subclasses in fairly different ways. At the same time, researchers of cognitive linguistics claim that no matter how complex the linguistic manner in which certain categories or distances are presented, movement in space is processed universally and with equal speed.

Psychological studies have also revealed that stereotypes actually have a function, that we use them to aid cognitive processing: under pressure of time or information load their activation is automatic, it saves time to base our decisions on stereotypes, not detailed analysis of all available information.



In 2010, at an ethnobotanical conference, a linguistics doctoral student presented an overview of questionnaire results concerning the CATEGORISATION of what is alive and what is not, what is up and down, etc. Since I was at the time involved with the topic of human and animal thinking and communication, I was intrigued enough to conduct a repeat survey on the topics of soul, body, spirit.

Method - sources

In 2011 and 2012 I asked, using the library inner network, what their readers thought of soul, body and spirit. The questions were easy: do humans have a soul? Do body and soul belong together? What is the moment that a human gains a soul? What becomes of the soul after death? Cremation? Does soul have shape, dimensions, weight? One or several souls? Can the soul leave the body while the human is alive? What is a spirit? Can you differentiate soul and spirit? Have you met the soul of a person / a revenant?

What about animals and birds? Do they have a soul? How many? A spirit? A revenant? Any difference between pets, domesticated and wild animals?




Plants? Are there other elements, object, beings which have a soul? Do objects and edifices made by human hands possess a soul, spirit or other supernatural quality? I did not touch the topics of *nimihiing* name sould, *unehing* sleep soul, *siirdhing* transition-soul and many other subkinds to rule out fantasies.



I got back 176 answers, 12 of them are especially long, they consists of narratives, long descriptions of personal experiences, narratives about communication with souls. Age: 18-72, most of them in the age from 35-45.





Wilhelm Wundt who gave much attention to the point that the animistic soul was pluralistic. There are two main germs - *the body-soul (Körperseele)* and *the free-soul (Freiseele)*. The former is connected with the organism, the latter is capable of departing from the body and returning to it (Wundt 1920, 79 etc.)

The pluralism of souls was developed further by Ernst Arbman. He noticed that the body-soul itself wasn't unitary, it could be divided in life-souls and the ego-soul. The former ones sustain physical, the latter one psychic functions. The second important addition is that in some cases the ego-soul can overtake the functions of the free-soul. It means that the free-soul can act as a body-soul which has taken the form outside the body (Arbman 1927, 166, 123).

Matthias Johann Eisen – 1919, 1926

Oskar Loorits – 1928, 1929, 1932, 1949-1952

Uku Masing – 1030ies, as manuscript from 1950ies

Ivar Paulson – 1958 – Seelenforstellungen der NordEurasieschen Völker.

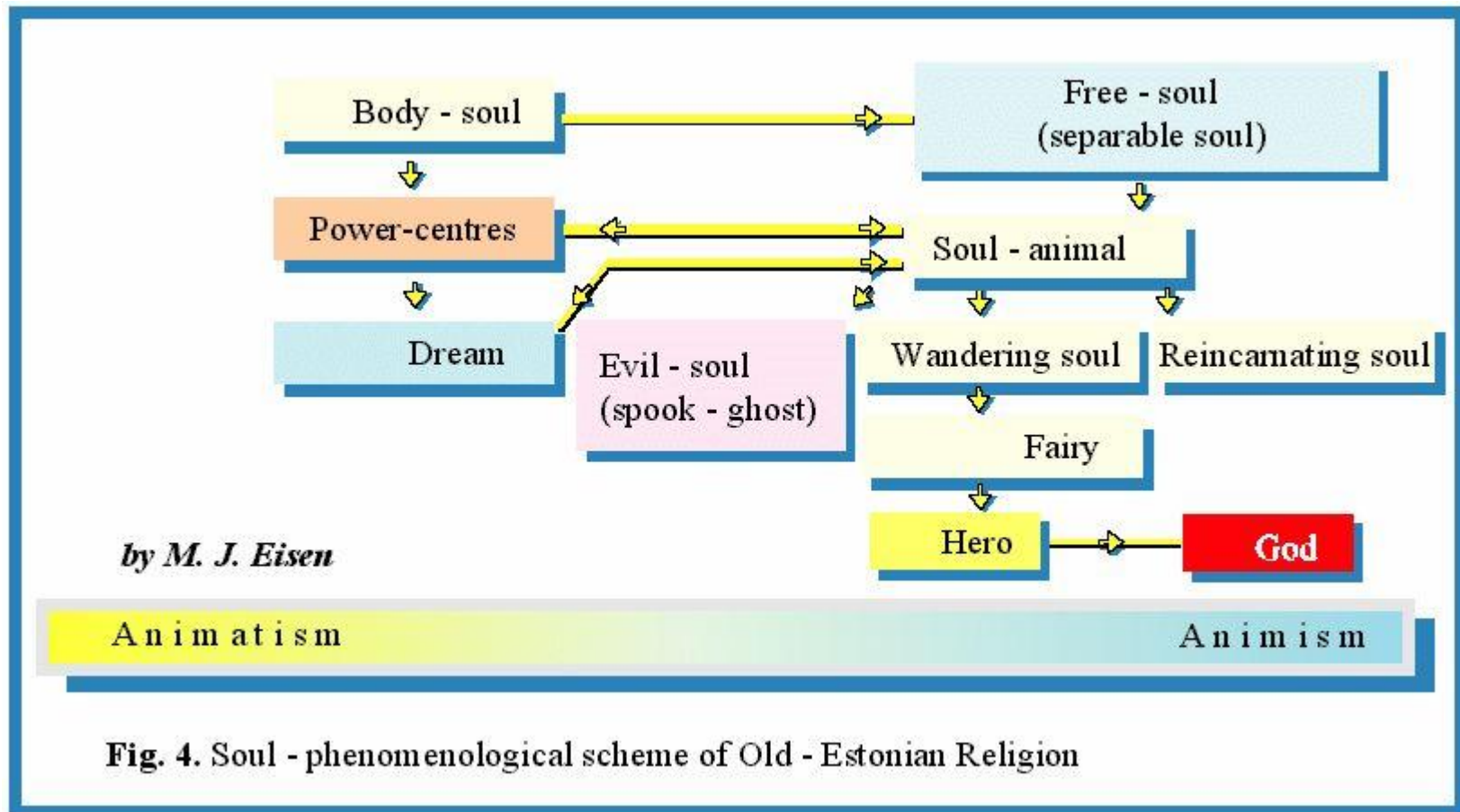
Tarmo Kulmar - 1990ies

Pluralistic conseption of soul

Human being consists of body and soul (spirit/mind), life force, life power, power of soul.

Soul: body soul and free soul.





Tarmo Kulmar's figure

Matthias Johann Eisen; compilation, anthology, description of the sources. The *body-soul* and *power-centres*. The latter ones are connected with the free-soul which could leave the body as a *soul-animal* and appear in *dreams* (Eisen 1926).

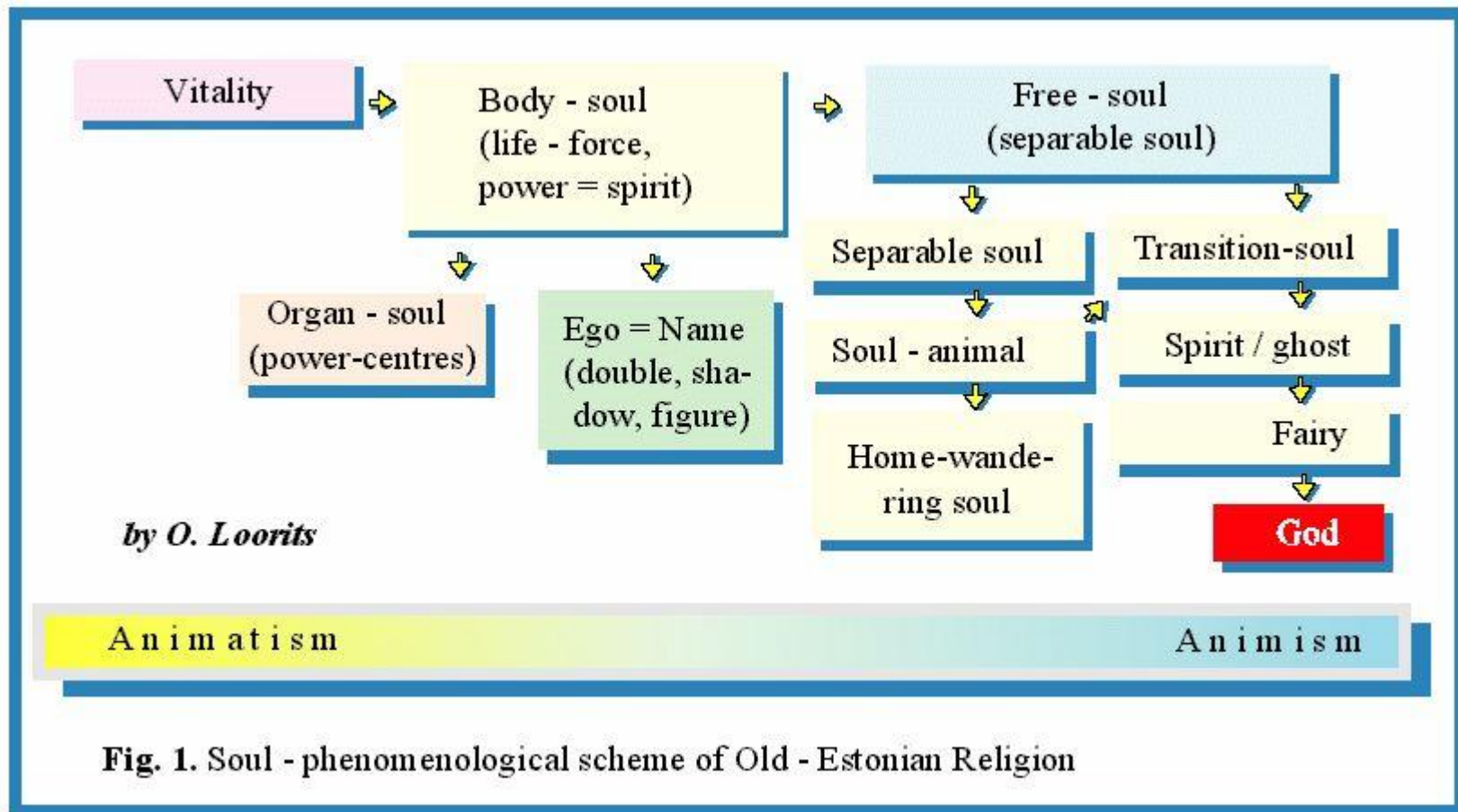



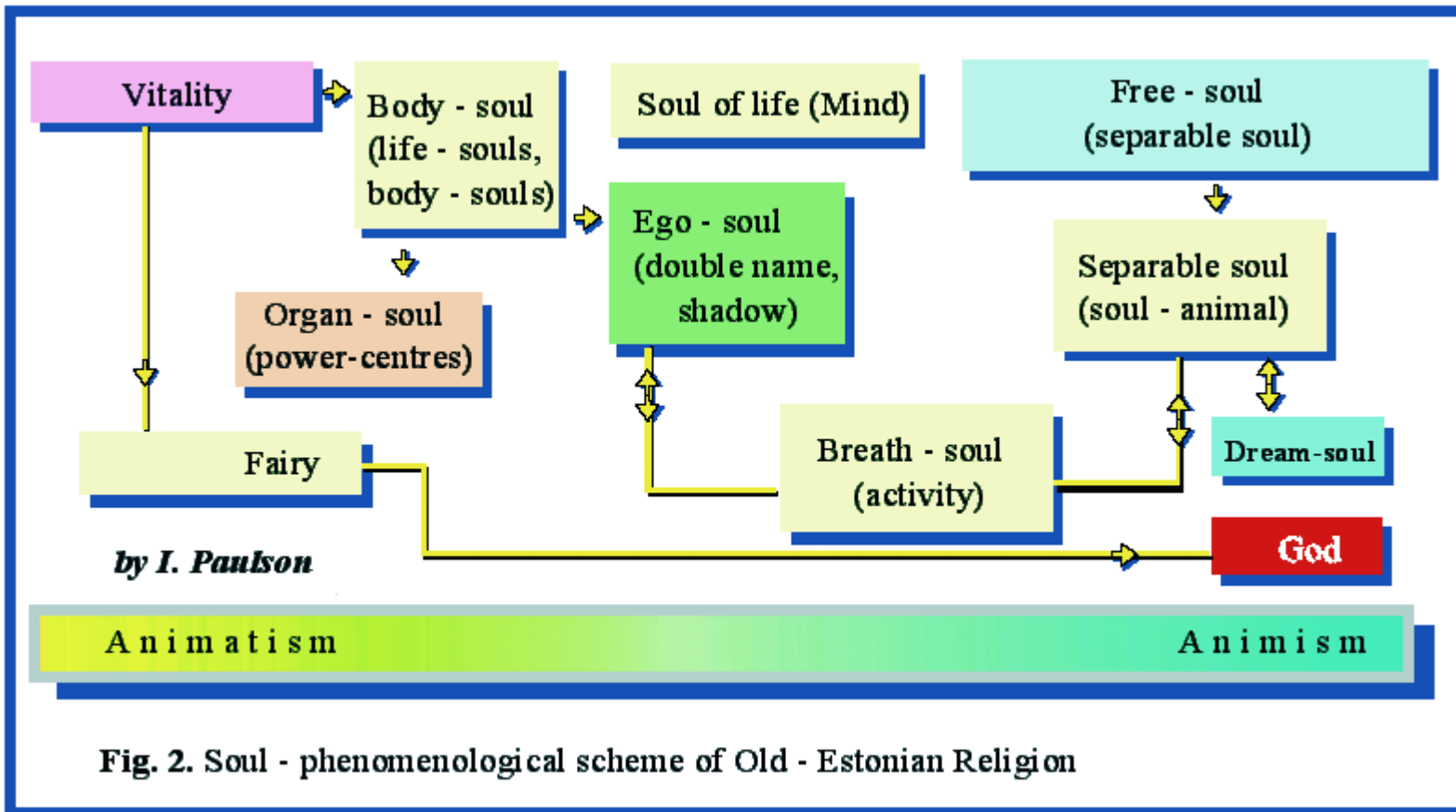
Figure by T. Kulmar

Body soul: the *life-force* (*elujõud*) which leaves the body when a human being dies. It is moving and acting in the body, it has a physical manner. It can also be called *organ-soul* and it is located in the heart, lungs, kidneys, genitals, blood, secretions, hair, nails, spittle and teeth.



The *ego*, *shadow*, *double*, *figure*, *name* are the other are the component of the body-soul. One's double follows oneself as a shadow; ego is connected with the word *character* which reflects the nature of a person; under the word shadow a *protector* is meant, the soul of a dead person lived on as a shadow; figure also serves as an analogue to the shadow-soul (Loorits 1949:153-218). The name was an attribute of individuality connected with a great amount of taboos. All in all the ego formed an *ego-soul*.

The free-soul: *separable-soul (irdhing)* - a soul can on some occasion leave the body for a while as a *soul-animal* (insect, butterfly, bird, mouse, snake). Soul of a dead person that leaves the body as a soul-animal may appear as *spook-ghost (home-wandering soul - kodukäija, mardus)*. The second stage of the free-soul is the *transition-soul (siirdhing)*, which consists to enliven a new body.





Body souls: The ego-soul can take over the functions of the free-soul as a *breath-soul*, and it can leave the body as a *soul-animal* or as a *dream*. Connections between the free-soul and the body-soul - a kind of *soul of life* (*eluvaim*), the *mind* (*meel*) (Paulson 1958:208,

The free-soul appears outside the human body and it is relative autonomy in relations with the body. Free-soul as a separable-soul can appear as a soul-animal as well as a dream-soul. In some occasion even the ego-soul belonging to the body-soul and acting as an active breath-soul can be a separable soul.






According to the **contemporary questionnaire**,

attitudes towards the soul have changed. Soul is close to breathing (*hing, hingamine*), a person is soulful (*hingeline*), animals have a soul, but plants are rather alive beings. „Perhaps plants have a soul, too, why not, if the old Estonian believed that souls go to live in trees.“

Spirit is becoming fused with spirituality – well, they do say “the spirit(uality) of Tartu or Tallinn“, usually as denoting the nature of the town or the generalisation that Tartu is the spiritual city, the university town, while Tallinn is the town of economy and money.




„The old people believed that everything has a soul, that every house, forest, and animal, tree, has a spirit. Or a soul. I am not sure about myself. Probably I have a soul, it travels during dreams.“



Spirit – the responses indicate that this is used as a synonym for ghost, revenant, doppelgänger, free soul.

In early 20th century, doppelgängers were seen as an omen of death or a death-predicting being – in North Estonia called also *mardus*, *marras*; in Saaremaa island *külmking* “cold shoe”. Both could manifest either as anthropomorphisms or shadows.

In a survey in the 1930s, responses included specific belief narratives. The wider generalisation is – a living person who is met or talked to and who actually is at the time at another location. Meeting a doppelgänger denotes death.






Seeing a double.

One morning when the pupils reached the school they saw the teacher step inside the door. When the first class began the teacher didn't come in the room, but the pupils had seen him entering the schoolhouse. Soon the school director appeared and announced that the teacher is sick. After lessons when the pupils were in the getting dressed and getting ready to go home, they saw the teacher stand on the doorstep, arms crossed. The next day, the director told the pupils that the teacher who was meant to give them the first class the previous day, he is dead.

ERA I 2, 744 (7) < Tartu city – Elmar Kippasto (1928/9)



If a person who is known to be elsewhere is seen in a ship, then that person is said to die.


ERA I 2, 857 (6) < Pilistvere parish(1928/9)

Once the mother of a sick child was sitting by the open window. Suddenly a bird flew in from the window, straight under the bed of the sick child. They started looking for the bird, but there was no trace of it. That night the child died.

ERA I 2, 923 (1) < Pärnu city – P. Mihkelson (1928/9)


2011: „If someone sees a friend and acquaintance and knows himself that the friend is in Paris – who can he be back in this city – this means that the friend is soon to die.

Meeting oneself: „If a person sees his double, he is said to be killed in the near future.“



2011 - ... soon after my mother had died, I was sitting sadly by the window, sitting and thinking and suddenly a bird flew straight onto a tree branch, looked at me and I knew - this is my mother, she came to check how I was doing, can I cope. This was a relief for me.

...(suicide, husband)... For a week, a small yellow-bellied bird hung behind me window on the tree. I thought this was the soul of my husband, he is saying farewell as a bird, this is his soul.





Cremation

in 1932 – the old Estonians did it as well.

This is liberation of the soul in the purest form, the soul gets to go straight to where it is meant to go.

In 2011- custom of Old Estonians, a good custom.

“I do not have to disintegrate in the ground. “

„I will get a place where I would like to be; I will certainly have myself taken to my house garden, either the ashes buried or scattered, because then I am always home, my soul is at home.

... but my eternal soul burns away, this is like a final decision and this is not right “



Conclusions

Universal beliefs weakened:

When falling stars are the souls of dead people, that a new star appearing in the sky is a new person – are much weaker in the year 2011.

The falling of a star is seen as an opportunity to make a wish.

Human beings have one soul – common belief

Karma, reincarnation, rebirth - after the death as different person or animal, bird, as mental being.

Animal soul – stronger, animals more equal with humans.

However, the New Age movements and seminars influenced seriously part of population. Important influence has mausk – Earth believers. After recent sociological study 20% of population are supporting mausk and their leaders.

