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HOW DO WE PUT OUR SPIRITUAL VALUES TO WORK?

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"Living the Question"

A few years ago, the Corporate Innovation Committee at the 3M Corporation invited me to make a presentation on strategic innovation management. At the time, I was in charge of the Innovation Management Program at SRI (Stanford Research Institute) International, an international think tank and consulting firm. At the end of the presentation, the 3M manager who brought me in saw a book in my briefcase as I was packing. It had a faded gold cross on it.

"What are you reading, William?" he asked.

"Oh, its a book about six saints from the 13th to 16th centuries."

That's all I planned to say, being shy to talk about spiritual things with my clients.

"What prompts your interest in that—religious conviction, curiosity, philosophy?"

"Well, to tell the truth, for a few years now I've realized that a major theme in my life and work has been *'How might spirituality, creativity, and business somehow be facets of the same diamond rather than separate subjects?'*"

He responded, "That's amazing. That's exactly what's been on my mind the past six months! Let's get a bite to eat and talk about that."

And so we did. We discussed how spirituality was more than the differing beliefs and practices of organized religions... how creativity encompassed how we expressed our unique individuality as well as how we responded to work challenges... how business included any organization involved in an "exchange of value," whether they be profit enterprises, government, education, or nonprofit institutions. We discussed how we all share in an "original wound" (of the heart) that builds walls between these fundamental parts of our lives and psyches.

As we sensed a kinship and a longing to talk with others about how to heal this "original wound" through our work, the question shifted to: *"How do we put our spiritual values to work?"*

Those two questions, "How might spirituality, creativity, and business somehow be facets of the same diamond?" and "How do we put our spiritual values to work?" are *living questions* for me. They're about the nature of living, and they've taken on their own lives within me, providing insights and "answers-for-now" that continually evolve and get richer.

In fact, *living with the question* has been rich to the extent that I don't settle for any single answer, as if the finality of a conclusion would kill the living process within me. Like nature, the question recycles itself as part of my own revitalization.

Spiritual Values

Many years ago, I made a pilgrimage to India, hoping to find a way to renew my spiritual life, even to revitalize the core values of my Christian heritage. Sitting in an auditorium with thousands of people listening to a teacher named Sathya Sai Baba, I heard words that cracked a hard shell around my heart. In paraphrase he said, "Realize that Divinity resides at the deepest core of your being. The deeper you go within, the closer you come to that Divine center."

Walking out of the auditorium, I was stunned. For so long, I believed that the deeper I went into my own nature—as an Original Sinner of no worth—the *further* I would get from God. His words felt true, as if they came from a long-hidden voice of inner conscience. Perhaps for the first time in my life, I breathed a sigh of real inner peace.

Thus, I began a path of discovering how the spiritual side of ourselves (that naturally exists within us) and spiritual values might naturally emerge in us as they did in the great founders of the world's religions: Jesus, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Mohammed, Krishna. How did their own lives speak their true message? What did they stand for – literally?

We may use different words, but the core values are always there: *inner peace, truth, right-conduct, nonviolence (which I like to call "well-being")*, and, above all, *love*. (When asked which was the greatest commandment, didn't Christ say, "Love"?)

Quite often, the religious institutions that followed these founders did not live up to their examples. For example, how can Protestants and Catholics kill each other in the name of the same Jesus Christ who lived and breathed love?

Yet all of these values – peace, truth, right-action, well-being, and love – have their source in the Divinity that is at our deepest core. The great founders are our examples of the pinnacle of the human merging with the Divine, and they taught that love is an integral part of our being. Putting spiritual values to work can be something that is innately *natural* to us, rather than needing imposed rules.

I trust that there is a natural wisdom hidden by our mistakes, our errors, our "sins." When we're honest with ourselves, we can learn what brings us closer to our spiritual nature and what doesn't. Living with peace, truth, right-action, well-being, and love can become quite natural.

The goal of living as Christ, or Buddha, or the other founders lived is to find our way home to the experience of living – and working – according to these values, such as truth.

The "Practical" Side of Spiritual Values

In 1987, Frank Carrubba became the Director of the Hewlett-Packard Laboratory, which conducts all the centralized research and development for this key player in the global electronics industries. Frank conducted a study at the HP labs to find out what the difference was between research teams that did not achieve their goals, teams that did accomplish them, and teams that were extremely successful and consistently far exceeded their goals. His study concluded:

If you looked at those that were truly successful, those that really stood out above and beyond the other teams, we found that those teams had leaders and managers (sometimes the same

person and sometimes not) who treated their customers as they themselves wanted to be treated... that they found in themselves qualities and spirit and truth and they brought it out in their customers. They were people who had no reason to wear a particular mask, because they were always what they were every single hour of the day.

So successful teams... had a relationship with their customer that was a personal relationship, one that allowed people to be all they could be and not worry about struggling day after day trying to represent themselves as being something that they weren't. And that was really special among those people, and it came out clearly.

"They found in themselves qualities and spirit and truth and they brought it out in their customers... (They) had a relationship with their customer that was a personal relationship, one that allowed people to be all they could be and not worry about struggling day after day trying to represent themselves as being something that they weren't..."

When I first heard him report these extraordinary conclusions, I was amazed and yet not amazed. I was surprised to hear it brought out so clearly. Yet, after all, it made perfect sense to me that personal authenticity, caring, and truthfulness would open up a level of communication, and communion, in which extraordinary work could flourish. Another example of applying spiritual values to work comes from Dick Eppel, then general manager of a communication systems division of a major electronics corporation. He took that job with the assignment of turning the division around. He reports:

It was definitely a division in serious trouble, a result of too much success in their marketing activities without enough forethought given to how they were going to execute that success. Clearly one goal had to be to satisfy the customer. And the second thing was to get the people to believe that there was a recovery possible here.

And so we set up a prioritization of what customers we were going to satisfy when, with the goal in mind that we were going to satisfy all customers. We would not take on any more business whatsoever that would jeopardize satisfying our current customers.

Everything had to be credible in the sense that the road map, the vision, the how-you're-going-to-get-there all had to be credible. I was the one who had to say, "No." I was the one who had to say, "Trust me." I was the one who had to say, "Once we get through this, then we are all going to win."

One time, a salesman came to Dick with a potential new customer who wanted a delivery date that he knew they couldn't meet. The salesman wanted an exception to their strategy so he could get the sale. He told me:

I hung tough on not accepting business that we couldn't deliver on. That was a test. I would talk to a customer, look him in the eye, and say, "Do you want me to lie to you?" I used words that had an emotional impact, but there was no ambiguity. They accepted that. It turned out that we could execute good business, deliver on that business, and manage it to a schedule, even though there were threats of going someplace else or walking away from it.

After two years things were significantly improved. Turnover was down. We got the division to break even, or pretty close to break even. Every contract got delivered on. Every contract. The most important piece that we saved has represented about \$13-20 million per year of cash-rich profits ever since.

What did it take for Dick and his division to succeed? He named two primary factors beyond having the right strategy:

One was a sense of positivity and perseverance: positive expectations, positive visualization. The second thing that was going on was that the management team, for one reason or another, amalgamated in a way that was very unique to me. I've always enjoyed working with people, always felt like I had good teams to work with, and the friendship and comradery was there. But in this operation there was one other level that was a bonding beyond friendship and comradery. There was just a sense of caring and a sense of concern. And I even use the words of "a genuine sense of love" between the parties, even though that was never expressed verbally.

Truth telling. Love. Business. They need each other – truth and love enrich business success, and business is a way for love to express itself fully and openly, serving people's needs.

Spiritual Values and Economic Reality

Along with so many others, I was thrilled by the momentous changes of the late 1980s in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. I was also thrilled by Gorbachev's visit to the Pope. Reporters asked Gorbachev if the visit meant that churches in the Soviet Union would be more open. His affirmative reply made headlines.

Yet something else he said was even more noteworthy to me. He added that unless the types of personal values taught by the spiritual traditions were revived in the Soviet people, they would not succeed in rebuilding the economy! Perhaps we in the West have such a hard time associating spiritual values and business, we didn't believe that was the real news.

But then, even in the Soviet Union, such a topic was new. During my trip to Moscow in 1988, some of my best conversations with people were on the question, "With all the turmoil and changes, what deep cultural values can the Soviet people call upon to stabilize their feelings and their choices? What can keep them from being swept up into the free-enterprise opportunity for greed and special interests?"

Those questions were often met with silence at first – as if they were ideas that were brand new, or perhaps old and dusty from disuse. But invariably, delight and soberness followed in thoughtful dialogue. One person who had been to the West quite often said, "In Russia, when someone asks, 'How are you?' they mean it. They'll stop for as long as it takes to really hear how you are. This is not so very much in the West, I find. This sincere caring is something we need to tap into."

Later, Vaclav Havel said in his inaugural address as President of Czechoslovakia, "We have been lied to a great deal, and I don't presume you elected me to lie to you more. We are a morally ill country." He went on to say that unless the people of Czechoslovakia learned to be truthful, open, and respectful with each other, they would never succeed in rebuilding the economy and country.

This was an extension of what Havel wrote in the late 1970s:

If a better economic and political model is to be created, then perhaps more than ever before it must derive from profound existential and moral changes in society. This is not something that can be designed and introduced like a new car. If it is to be more than just a new variation on

the old degeneration, it must above all be an expression of life in the process of transforming itself. A better system will not automatically ensure a better life. In fact, the opposite is now true: only by creating a better life can a better system be developed.

We in the West are in the same boat. It's just easier to see in the black-and-white need for renewal of the Eastern European countries. We face the same need, the same calling. Our powers to affect the environment and the well-being of people all over the planet make this spiritual renewal absolutely critical to our economic and social health.

We've been playing in the stagnant airs of inquiry about what produces innovation and business growth. How can we lift ourselves up and breathe in fresh insight, to "in-spire" our businesses and societies in this age of economic and social transformation?

In October 1990, I gave a speech at a large gathering of managers and consultants from Eastern and Western Europe on "Strategic Management and Innovation." The conference, in Prague, Czechoslovakia, had been planned since 1988, well before the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe made this gathering auspiciously well-timed. As I listened to other speakers, two messages struck me deeply.

The first was from Alan Mintzberg, a professor of management at McGill University in Canada. He echoed words I'd first heard from Willis Harman twenty years ago, but they were in a new context. He said that the events in Eastern Europe in 1989 demonstrated to everyone that centrally planned economies don't work: they don't foster initiative, innovation, or productivity. However, he added that when we look at many prime examples of "free enterprise giants," they've actually functioned as centrally planned economies operating as a corporation (instead of country) – and that they don't foster initiative, innovation, or productivity either! That's why these long-established "giants" are becoming less competitive in the global market.

His caution to the Eastern Europeans was sobering: as they import Western management practices, "watch out for what you import." Many practices may seem familiar, and that's a big problem for both sides.

The second message that stayed with me was from Professor Stanislav Adamec, advisor to Havel, who spoke of the need to "improve the spiritual potential of thinking, working, and overall lifestyle. . . to lead people to the courage they need to excel and to work deliberately and purposefully."

He added that "the absence of truth about the conditions of life is a direct threat to economic and social development" and that "confidence and trust were important to build a world without frontiers of violence."

This emphasis on spiritual potential, on truthfulness, trust, and respect points to the core values that have been taught by the holy books throughout the ages. As Gorbachev said, unless we revitalize these values in ourselves and others, we cannot prosper in the years ahead. And perhaps the lack of those values is what has generated the "centrally planned, centrally controlled" mentality we have employed, whether in Eastern Europe, Western corporations, or anywhere.

An appreciation of deep, cultural values and a conscious development of those values is essential to any healthy business growth. At their very deepest, these cultural values usually reflect the core values of the region's spiritual traditions.

How we put our spiritual values to work can make a huge difference to our own quality of life, and that also is the foundation for each organization in our society to become prosperous, successful, and healthy.

That certainly was the message from Frank Carrubba, and Dick Eppel as well. And it leads me to conclude with a slight evolution to the "living question" of this chapter:

"How well do we put our spiritual values to work?"