

The problems of addiction and co-addiction from a spiritual perspective

Thoughts expressed at the American Clergy Leadership Conference on April 29, 2006
in Billings, Montana

When I first read the agenda for today's conference some weeks ago, I became acutely aware of a voice filled with loving concern, anguished desire, and helpless urgency. Feelings I have known since early childhood and throughout most of my life.

I was born in Germany 2 years before the end of WW II and even though I was very young I remember the bombs, the alarms, the destruction, the fear and anguish around me, and the desperate hunger for food during the years that followed. But I remember also that as a child, four or five years old, I walked around our village, sometimes for hours, visiting adult neighbors, watching them working in their houses and gardens and cheering them up with kind words that were born in my heart after seeing them in their condition. I was an old and troubled child! And growing up in what most everyone would consider a loving family, deeply rooted in faith and prayer. All concerns and every gratitude was brought before God and we had anguished and fiery discussions about God, faith, scripture, healing and prayer. My mother assured us that regular prayer was needed and that it was answered in most mysterious ways telling us examples that left us openmouthed with hearts on fire.

Still, the suffering in the world got to me and I numbed out when I became a teenager. Not with drugs but with denial. I so badly wanted to belong and be part of everyone, so I headed for the world with my own philosophies, self-righteousness, fears and judgments so easy to come by when young. Eventually, life got to me anyway; made me I enter my own hells and led me onto Love's threshing ground.

Why am I sharing this with you?

I want you to know that the views I express here are not based on academic explorations but on experience and revelations gained during my own journey and on experiences gained when being trusted by others as guide on their journey. I have come a long way to be standing here with a spiritual perspective on anything. And that perspective may be challenging.

Spiritual perspective rests securely in spiritual Truth. That is:

Life is eternal, imperishable, invulnerable, holy, whole, and healthy.

Life IS. Truth IS, Wisdom IS, and ITs inherent qualities are Joy and Peace everlasting.

When eternal Life is fully realized (awakened) in Man, Man is Christ consciousness.

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From a spiritual perspective **we are all addicted! We are addicted as long as and to the degree that we have not surrendered to that *Life eternal* within which is the Source of our Being.**

From a spiritual perspective it is not discerned whether I or you are addicted to drugs, alcohol, medication, food, people, beliefs, concepts, the repetitious fulfillment of desires, attitudes, books, chocolate, candy, TV, Sex, shopping, helping, insincere niceties, harmony at all cost or any other avenue or “gods” we may use to get away from what we are feeling. From the spiritual perspective addiction is about things and ideas being used solely for the purpose of denial, defense, false safety, and their becoming preoccupations and substitutes, artificial remedies for need, lack and unhappiness.

Addictions are the result of flight from feelings, aided by our human mind telling us there is a way to feel better, we can make it so and all we need to do or have is so-and-so or such-and-such. Some of us flee forward – in which case our addictions are more of the grabbing kind, including becoming busybodies in arranging other people’s lives, others of us flee backward and become addicted to self-righteousness grudges, judgments, anger, refusal to forgive, and depression.

However, from a spiritual perspective, addiction is not considered a problem but a symptom, the consequence of misunderstandings, ignorance and illusion and the choices based on them. The impact of the choices vary, of course, and I am far from denying that great suffering is experienced with substance abuse not only for what we usually call “the addicted” but also for his or her immediate surrounding of friends, family, and for society as a whole who shares in the burden. Though while this appears to be less obvious I am certain that this holds true for all other addictive patterns as well, including that of the obsessive “helper”, an addiction not easily recognized but just as detrimental (i.e. the coaholic). All our addictions have consequences for our own mental, emotional, and physical health and will, therefore, affect everyone else.

Humanity is as **One Body** and whatever we do or don’t do affects everyone and all. Also, if one of us awakens, becomes whole and healthy, all others will have gained as well.

I found it interesting to learn that the word addiction has its root in the Latin verb *addicere* – meaning: to give up or over, dedicate, devote to, or surrender to. I am certain that it is easy for us to see how addiction implies *handing over* or *surrender to*, but the ***dedicated or devoted to*** implies a much greater involvement on our part. It speaks of some kind of sanction or

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appreciation, a hidden justification and admiration of which we may not be aware. We may make what we are addicted to our god, our source of happiness, fearlessness, seeming security and false peace.

In Western society and in our country in particular, people seek instant gratification, instant solutions, instant fixes, and instant relief. We in America hold not only the record on dollars spent for medicine but also the record for the amount of medication taken per person.¹ These facts may not mean much to you - depending, of course, on whether or not you are part of the ratio, but what I find exasperating and quite worrisome for the future of our lives and that of our children is the amount of mind- and mood-altering drugs given to children today, Valium given even as early as infancy. Of 11 Million prescriptions written for the drug Ritalin each year (a drug given to children diagnosed with ADHD), 80% were written for children. Psychotropic medication given to pre-school children 2 to 4 years old tripled over a five-year span. The vast majority of these children are given this mind- and mood-altering medication by their doctors not only with their parents consent but also often upon their request. Valium is here an exception as it can be bought en mass and “on special” on the Internet. What are we doing? I will not go further into statistical details here; anyone can check them on the Internet, they are available. I do not need statistics to know from my work in institutions, years of therapy practice and from the people I encounter daily that much of our society is drugged, often to the hilt, and our so-called “health-system” has become a disease-management-system. Since years now, our children are growing up in the belief that for every pain - be it physical, mental, or emotional - there is a pharmaceutical remedy, mostly and most easily administered in drugs.

I am not saying - and I want to make sure you do not misunderstand me - I am not saying that medication will not sooth, remove symptoms, temporarily relieve, bring patterns apparently under control or assure us of pain-free-times. What I am saying is that hardly ever is the cause of affliction found, addressed or brought back into order. Only symptoms are being diagnosed, treated, suppressed and perhaps removed and in the process also organs replaced or removed. But while a symptom speaks of a cause it is not the cause and ought never to be confused. Do not ever underestimate **that**, which causes your symptoms; **it is always, and I personally am certain of that, it is always** an expression of an antagonism between divine order and man-

¹ This average must be even higher if you take people off like me. I have not taken ANY medication since 1986

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made disorder and if suppressed will always find ways to manifest again or somewhere else, inviting only more trouble, as long as you do not and until you do listen to its message.

So, if it is true that we are running away from feelings. What are we running from and why? It starts early. When we as human beings come into the physical world as individual expressions of the divine we generally lose our memory of where we came from and the knowingness of belonging and refuge. Due to a commonly distorted welcome – and here it does not matter whether we are a wanted and loved or unwanted and unloved child – we lose our connection but not our sensitivity and are confronted by what the world is made of. Overwhelmed by physical and emotional impressions, the experience of life sooner or later becomes meaningless and nightmarish. Nightmarish, because we very early become aware of and feel the turmoil humanity is in, feel the tremendous fear (and lie) on which is based most of human behavior and activity and do not learn to respond wholesome unless we encounter adults who are healthy and whole, that is conscious. Because of the lack of consciousness around us, we will from early on in our lives look for anything or anyone to hold onto in order to get away from feeling what we feel: afraid, lonely, abandoned, helpless, and unloved and more than anything hopeless. Unless we wake up, we will not be able to help. Who of us can give answers to this or fill that? Despite all of what the world has to offer, suffering will increase until we look for its cause, wake up and recognize our true Being.

I carry this as an unfaltering certainty in my heart.

- a) Man's suffering is due only to his sense of separation from his Spiritual Source (whatever name we give It) and the consequences this creates.
- b) The end of suffering lies in overcoming this sense of separation.

I am also certain that there is only one solution to anything we may consider a problem and that is: to remember the Source and reconnect and be guided by it continuously every moment of our life.

I am totally aware, however, that if this was as easy as it sounds, all man's suffering would be over in the twinkle of an eye. How can such certainty be gained, though? I found mine on a journey that was not only difficult, but also very painful. And I would not even attempt to suggest that there was any easy road or shortcut to be found. Crisis is usually the one element

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necessary which makes a human being look for something other than he/she has known so far and I mean a crisis that looks like the end of the rope. It was only then that I turned.

May we all overcome our fear of what we long for most and surrender to the all-consuming power of Life, Love and the Divine Reality that lies beyond our limited perception and awareness.

May our day be blessed.