

RETIREMENT SPIRITUALITY: RETIRING – NOT EXPIRING!

Recently a good friend who is a Certified Financial Planner (CFP) decided it would be relevant and meaningful to include a workshop on spiritual and psychological aspects of retirement as part of his firm's annual retirement planning seminar. He knew that I enjoyed exploring the notion that truth is one and that a valid psychological truth will be congruent with a valid spiritual truth. I also thought about the fact that so many of us are living longer and what can we do to have a more meaningful life as we age.

LONGEVITY

I remembered that a few years ago my wife and I attended a Smithsonian Seminar on Aging hosted by Dr. Robert Butler, the first head of the National Institute of Health (NIH) Department of Aging. The research panel gave us startling statistics on the increasing number of us who will live into our 80's, 90's and 100's. If we retire in our 50's or 60's, what do we do with 30 or 40 years of retirement? Will golf be enough?

The number and percentage of people age 65 and older will virtually double from year 2000 to 2030. The number grows from 34,991,753 to 71,453,471 and the percentage of the population from 12% to 20%. Centenarians in the United States are estimated to double every decade. How do we retain a satisfying quality of life as we age?

SPIRITUALITY

What is spirituality? How do we become more spiritual? Plus, each of us probably subscribes to a different definition of spirituality. Here we are proposing three main components. The first is that truth is already within each of us. It is ingrained or intrinsic to us. Second we must be still (silence and solitude) to connect with our truth. The third is the spirituality of "the NOW". This means that in each act or interaction we are either positive or negative, kind or unkind. We live totally in awareness enabling a strong and clear sense of choice and freedom and intentionality in what we say and do. What follows are some practical steps to strengthen our retirement spirituality.

PRACTICAL STEPS

Let' begin with the idea that we need to be very selective about what we take in with our five senses. Whatever we take in will stay with us so we need to be aware as to whether we are taking in uplifting material or disgusting, demoralizing, depressing material. Whatever we take in we are stuck with it!

Many of you may know about the federal government volunteer program, the Senior Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), which provides mentoring for novice business owners. Here I am using SCORE as an acronym for outlining some practical steps in achieving a spirituality of retirement. This will be concise.

S in SCORE includes Socialize, reconnect with your Spiritual roots and retain Sexual intimacy if possible. Social research is unanimous about the unhealthiness of social isolation. Sometimes we throw out the baby with the bath water by disconnecting from our spiritual roots, which may have some solid value in them. Having physical touching as long as we live is powerfully enriching. We tend to shrivel up without it.

C in SCORE refers to Community. Be involved! Participate! Contribute! Volunteer! Retired people are making huge contributions to community wellbeing by volunteering. Remember the Prayer of Saint Francis, "It is in giving that we receive." We probably will have to push ourselves to get out of our comfort zone. It is easy to vegetate.

O is for "Outdoors Spirituality." Again research solidly supports that our overall health is enriched by regular exposure to nature. Our souls and bodies are soothed by being in a forest, on an ocean shore, along a creek or river, or high in the mountains. Make time to drink in trees, sky, water, birds, etc. Our spirituality is how we live each moment.

R is for Reflect. Taking the time to reflect entails embracing solitude and silence. Psalm 46 says, "Be still and know that I am God." This can only be understood and absorbed through actual experience. To use a cliché, talk is cheap. To grasp this reality requires mindful management of our electronic stimulation. Our addiction to smart phones, TV, Internet, Facebook or movies constitutes an impenetrable barrier that precludes connecting with our core or true self. We refresh our hearts by making time for reflection, leisure, prayer and recreation.

E is for Exercise, which sparks the production of the neurotransmitters, which elevate our mood. Walking in a nature setting multiplies the benefits of exercise. Of course, the challenge is to make a decision, a commitment to regular exercise. Look better! Feel better! Be healthier!

A CLOSING THOUGHT

We are made for relationship. We are social animals. An ideal forum for developing a spiritual path is membership in a small faith-sharing group. Eight to ten members is the ideal size. The longer the group stays together the greater will be the trust and depth of sharing. My wife and I have been in such a group for over thirty years. It is life giving!

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