Unit Nine:Spiritual and Psychological Inventory

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HW420: Creating Wellness

Introduction

A spiritual and psychological inventory allows an individual to assess where they are now and develop a plan for the future that brings him or her closer to their goals. The writers of A Disciple’s Spiritual Life Inventory state that a spiritual inventory, “is unscientific, yet it can be a vital aid in thinking about and evaluating your spiritual life and growth.” (Prayer Today, 2004) It is a form of reflection that asks the individual to assess their current position against where they want and should be regarding their practices and habits. There are many ways to conduct the inventory to include a self-assessment.  Another technique that one pastor used was spiritual inventory visits. (Bubna, 1988) Bubna took the time to visit his congregation at their homes and conduct one-on-one inventories to bring them back into the folds of the congregation. The inventory is about spiritual awareness, which is “the process by which we begin to explore our being to become whole and reunite our spirits with our physical bodies in a commonality of purpose.” (Lawrence, n.d.) Others conduct a spiritual and psychological inventory each night before they go to bed to ensure their daily actions remain in-line with their beliefs.

My Inventory

My inventory consists of twelve questions designed to determine a person’s spiritual and psychological quality of life using three domains—being, belonging, and becoming. Being defines “who one is”, belonging refers to “how one fits into his or her environment”, and becoming relates to “the purposeful activities carried out to achieve personal goals, hopes, and wishes.” (GDRC, n.d.) Below is my inventory. I will ask each participant to rate themselves on a scale of one to ten, with one being never and ten being always. I encourage individuals to use the inventory in many ways. Initially and periodically, schedule a sabbatical. Using a journal, record the answers to each question. In the areas with the lowest score, develop a plan to improve. Next, use the questions daily in two respects. First, use the inventory as a daily morning affirmation. Then, use the questions as a nightly reflection.

1. I have a divine purpose for my life. (Being) As each person defines their purpose, this is an interesting question. A writer asserts that many people believe that their purpose in life is to be a doctor, a lawyer, a farmer, etc. The actual aim of all things is to become one with God. That "oneness" people refer to addresses the, “‘experiencing God within us and all around us and not identifying with our five senses, mind and intellect.”  (Spiritual Science Research Foundation, n.d.)

2.      I am a good person. (Being) How one feels about themselves correlates in how they treat others. Susanna M. Halonen (Love Yourself Before You Love Others, 2015), a writer for Psychology Today states,“If you try to run away from being self-compassionate by throwing compassion to anyone and everyone but you, you will exhaust yourself.” Believing one is a good person reflects forgiving oneself for hurting others or making poor decisions in the past. We must realize that within each of us there is good and bad. It is a part of our nature; so, must be accepted. We make mistakes. We cause pain to others. We cause pain to ourselves. But, we always have an opportunity to make amends. Steve Taylor Ph.D. put it best when he said,**“**Human nature is infinitely more complex than this, of course. In human beings, ‘Good’ and ‘evil’ are fluid. People can be a combination of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ qualities.” (Taylor, 2013)

3.      I have hope for the future. (Being) Hope is a powerful emotion that people call on when the chips are down. Barbara L Fredrickson (Fredickson, 2009) asserts that “Hope is not your typical form of positivity. Most positive emotions arise when we feel safe and satiated. Hope is the exception. It comes into play when our circumstances are dire – things are not going well or at least there’s considerable uncertainty about how things will turn out. Hope arises in those moments when fear, hopelessness or despair seem just as likely.” It is a quintessentially human trait that has enabled humanity to make it through the darkest of time.

4.      I live according to my value system. (Being) Living and acting according to a set of values, beliefs and norms (even in time of adversity) leads one toward spirituality as well. Being congruent in word and deed is important to the psyche and the human spirit. Carl Rogers, famed psychologist believed that the self-actualization that Maslow spoke of is achieved only when a person’s actual self is consistent with their actual behaviors and actions.  (McLeod, 2014) Thus, spirituality stems from thoughts, words, and deeds. I equate this to doing the right things for the right reasons.

5.      I give of myself to help others. (Belonging) Helping others along the path is spiritually uplifting for all involved. An article in Spirituality and Health by Alisa Bowman (Bowman, 2013) states, “Countless studies show that helping others boosts levels of happiness-producing brain chemicals, providing a powerful rush of emotional coziness known as “helper’s high.” Altruism, “the belief in or practice of disinterested and selfless concern for the wellbeing of others,” helps us feel good and can even change our mood and perspective on life events.

6.      I am open to others opinions even when they are not in sync with my own. (Belonging) When we are so entrenched in our thoughts and feelings, it is often difficult to accept that others may not see it our way. Throughout history disagreements have resulted in wars, estrangement, and, divorces.  The Dali Lama (The Good Read, n.d.) said, “People take different roads seeking fulfillment and happiness. Just because they are not on your road doesn’t mean they’ve gotten lost.” Accepting this is easier said than done; yet, one on a spiritual journey must embrace this fact to reduce tension and allow focus.

7.      I refrain from ill-thoughts or feeling against others. (Belonging) When you hate someone else, it builds rancor in yourself. It forms a barrier to one's spirituality, which one cannot overcome until he or she has forgiven the other person. That is one of the reasons the twelve step process requires people to forgive others. Not only should one ask for forgiveness of those they have harmed, but also learn to forgive oneself to get spiritual maturity.

8.      I speak up for social injustice. (Belonging) Ignoring social injustice is like cancer for the soul. One cannot claim spiritual enlightenment and accept discrimination, poverty, hunger, and abuse as a fact of life for others. Recognizing their humanity allows your humanity to grow. Knowing that each of us has the spirit of God within forces us to stand up when people treat others unjustly. It makes us strong and put deeds to our words.

9.      I engage in spiritual practices. (Becoming) If the intent is to be closer to God, one must engage in practices toward that end. There are as many ways to practice spirituality as there are people on the planet. One could go to a church, synagogue, or mosque to pray or meditate in the quiet of their home. Others could cultivate a flower bed or plant a tree. The simple act of refraining from saying an ill word to another is in itself a spiritual practice. The key is not what the individual does, but rather the deed itself. Taking action that aligns with one’s divine purpose helps one along the path toward experiencing God within and around them.

10.      I overcome problems in my path. (Becoming) This question gets to the helplessness and hopelessness question. Feeling powerless in the face of obstacles can lead one to depression, fear, and anxiety. All these emotions psychologically zap the human spirit and move it further away from spiritual growth.

11.  I practice gratitude. (Becoming) Much has been said about gratitude lately. In this fast-paced world where people are always striving to do, have or get more, gratitude can often be difficult to master. In a spiritual sense, it is thankful for who you are and what you have now. Reverend Flower A. Newhouse (Newhouse, 1967) said in a speech, “Giving thanks is an absolute spiritual necessity for us. The constant rhythm of gratitude causes the circulation of the powers of the Soul and the Adonai to seep into and penetrate our personality selves.” It opens us and allows us to accept the divine.

12.  If I put my mind to something, I can achieve it.  (Becoming) Believing in one’s innate abilities is critical to spiritual and psychological fitness. It displays an internal locus of control, the belief that you control your destiny. I have added this question because I believe one must first believe in themselves before they can believe in others. I placed it in the becoming category, as it shows that you think that you can continue to transform yourself and become better than you are already.

My Interview

I interviewed a financially stable, 48-year old female single parent of adult children, who retired recently. Below are her answers to the inventory questions and some follow-on feedback about the survey in general.

During the exit interview she stated that the questions asked in the inventory were relevant, but difficult to answer because they made you think about her life and character. She felt that a survey like this one was done best face-to-face or by telephone, as opposed to in written format. The toughest question for her to answer was number ten because she felt if she were honest it would reveal that she often gave up on things before she completed them. She expressed to me that she becomes annoyed with people quickly. What I noticed from our discussion is that she has very high expectations of both herself and others.

            Based on her survey answers and feedback, I would help her develop a spiritual and psychological health development plan that focused on improving in the area of belonging. Her development plan would include first forgiving herself for her imperfections, which would give her permission to forgive others.  Forgiveness would open her aperture and allow more positive things to happen to her and through her. I would not change the inventory as it stands because it was useful in starting the conversation. I would not use it alone but as a starting point for a more in-depth discussion. One more area I would discuss with her is Question twelve, as she struggled with it. Recent events have taken a toll on her self-esteem and confidence; however, she is aware that her current inability to address problems is not congruent with her value system. Conducting the spiritual and psychological inventory was a healthy way of introspecting. The key is to get people to answer it as honestly as possible.

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