

Spiritual Soup

By Kurt Venables

Christmas Spirit



It's now late December, and like everyone else, my wife and I are busy rushing around getting ready for the holidays. Yet amid all the bustle, sometimes a seemingly ordinary event can stop time and cause an important spiritual truth to crystallize in your mind. This happened to me not once but twice recently; must be the season.

Samantha and Blaine had their Christmas play last weekend. Samantha played a star/angel. Blaine played a shepherd. Samantha's part was to talk with the other stars/angels about what to get Jesus for Christmas- Not a tie, she said, they get him that every year. Blaine was to just stand with the other shepherds and sing songs. He did pretty well but had a little trouble standing still for most of it. Then he had to go to the bathroom in the middle of "If You Could Only Imagine". Not sure if those two things were related.

While I was sitting in the audience watching the kids sing, time just kind of froze, and I was struck with a deep feeling of gratitude as I realized anew the important things in life, like family, and how blessed I am. We all wish for true happiness, but to achieve it, we must be very wise about what will bring us happiness. In order to be truly happy, a person must fulfill his or her basic needs. We have a variety of needs, physical needs, such as the need to eat and sleep, and emotional needs. The greatest emotional need is goodness, the need for light in your heart. Goodness is the essence of humanity. We cannot be happy unless we open our hearts to the light and allow it grow within.

Yet so many look to materialism for happiness. Ironically, this is especially true during the holiday season. Unfortunately, driving a big SUV is not a basic emotional need, nor is owning a big house. People expend enormous resources to acquire these things and then wonder why these things don't make them happy. We have to be very wise about what is truly important in life. This is one great spiritual concept that is particularly appropriate to remember this time of year. Another struck me at the Y recently during one of those moments.

I was at the YMCA, changing into my gym clothes, when three kids about 8 years old (third grade) came in to change into their trunks for swimming. Each was trying to outdo the other, and their conversation went something like this: The first proudly proclaimed, "I can read at a fourth grade level." The second said, "I was tested, and I can read at a fifth grade level." The third said, "I'm reading at a seventh grade level." So far, this is as expected. Then one said, "I'm dyslexic, and I can write at only a second grade level." Another said, "I can write at only a first grade level." Finally, the third said, "My writing is at about a kindergarten level." Well, this had me busting up inside, though I tried not to let them see me laughing. Then, time kind of

froze, and I realized anew another great spiritual truth.

It's expected for kids to act this way, of course, but what's sad is that so many *parents* act in an identical manner. I'll explain if we can go back to the SUV's- why do people spent so much time and energy pursuing things that won't really make them happy? Because materialism is in our culture (it's a highly regarded cultural value), and people in our culture are almost obsessed with how they look to others. So they go to extraordinary lengths to put up a front, whether it makes any sense or not.

Spirituality is of enormous benefit to people. It gives us Light, which is the life of humanity. But it can also impose burdens, which we must bear. Sometimes, we must stand up and do the right thing, even if everyone else is off in left field doing ridiculous things, even if others do not appreciate or recognize our efforts. Sometimes, we must stand up, perhaps alone, and do the right thing, even if we must endure derision and detriment to ourselves. Spirituality is our life. Sometimes, however, we are called to sacrifice, and we must bear this burden. In doing so, we also set a powerful example for others. This is the great spiritual concept that struck me at the Y, and one that is particularly apt at Christmas.

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