

Spiritual Soup

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Bambi, Thumper, and the Inextricable Link between Spiritual Wellness and Mental Health



As I was looking out the window into the backyard the other day, I saw a little deer and a rabbit having a nice lunch on our lawn. I called my little girl, Samantha, to look, and she said, “Awww, it’s Bambi and Thumper.” We live out in the country, so it’s not unusual to see deer, rabbits, and a host of other wildlife in and around our yard. But the animals do seem to like our backyard particularly. It’s surrounded by thick woods on 3 sides and, due to the way water drains in our yard, is always filled with lush, green grass. Also, it’s very quiet, and a little stream runs across our property, back just a bit in the woods. The animals enjoy our yard because it basically is their natural habitat.

The idea of natural habitat lies behind the inextricable link between spiritual wellness and mental health. I believe that humans evolved living in tight-knit cooperative groups. Within these groups, although some assumed leadership roles, all were basically equal. None had substantially more than others. All were valued and loved for who they were, and the basic mode of interaction was cooperation. I’m not saying that at any point in the past, humans lived some perfect, idyllic existence, but the social structure was basically akin to a tight-knit group of family and friends. Strong feelings of goodness, which evoke cooperative behaviors, evolved as the norm within the groups. Selfish, angry, and vengeful feelings and behaviors evolved as a way of responding to selfish acts by individuals or other groups. These

two classes of feelings and behaviors, goodness and selfishness, form the basis of our concepts of good and evil. I believe that during most of human evolution, however, selfish interactions, at least within the group, were relatively minor or isolated (War between groups occurred with varying frequency). The norm was cooperation, driven by feelings of goodness. In a very real sense, then, cooperation and goodness is our natural habitat, and these feelings evolved to evoke happiness in order to encourage people to live in this way.

The sole goal of the rational mind is to plan actions so as to achieve happiness. The emotions represent needs that define what will make us happy. Emotion defines rationality. The emotional mind is a collection of needs (something like Freud’s Id), such as hunger, thirst, sex drive, the higher emotional need for a mate, the need for children, and the need for friends. The most important higher need (beyond the physical needs) is the spiritual need for pure goodness within the heart. Goodness is the essence of humanity. We need to feel love towards others without bounds, and we need to feel loved, or at least, worthy of love. I define spiritual wholeness as opening the heart to the pure goodness within, which I call the Light. I know from long introspection that cultivating feelings of

pure goodness brings joy. In fact, without the Light, without spiritual wellness, one cannot be truly happy. The above is an evolutionary explanation of why this observed association is true. I will not speculate here on additional supernatural explanations. In addition, I believe that mental health issues, by which I refer mainly to problems with depression, are tightly linked to levels of happiness. If a person is basically unhappy, even in the best of times, the inevitable trials of life will push that person into episodes of depression. Thus, happiness and mental health are tightly interwoven with spiritual wholeness.

For better or worse, the world today is very different from that in which our forebears evolved. Our society is writhing with maladies that afflict the spirit. I have noted four primary afflictions which I call the Four Horsemen; they are: Close-mindedness and Misplaced Values, Selfishness, Arrogance, and Negativity and Stress. Our culture is permeated by “know it all” close-mindedness, materialism, selfishness and arrogance, self-deception, negativity, and stress. Four pillars, which I call the Quartet of Angels, form the

foundation of spiritual wholeness. They are the antithesis of the Four Horsemen and the cure; they are: Truth, Love, Humility, and Optimism. Cultivating these thoughts and feelings and overcoming the limitations represented by the Four Horsemen are the objectives of the spiritual journey, with the ultimate goal of freeing the Light to shine bright within our hearts. While I fully accept the reality of hormonal and neurochemical imbalances, I truly believe that a large portion of the mental health issues involving depression in our society are the result of spiritual discord. I also believe, however, that we are entering a new Age of Light, in which a fuller understanding of spirituality is taking place, and that strong forces for good do exist in our world. Bambi and Thumper represent our primeval needs, the goodness which is the essence of humanity. We must work to strengthen the forces for good so that Bambi and Thumper can graze in our backyards, so that we bring the Light, our “natural habitat”, more fully into our modern world.

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