

The Human Spirit at Work Pt.3: the Spiritual Nature of Mission

Let's start with a story that is set in the 12th Century, with a young philosopher investigating the nature of human work.

Several years ago a friend shared with me a story of a sojourner who came upon three individuals working with stone. Curious as to what the workers were doing with the stones, the traveler approached the first worker and asked, "What are you doing with these stones?" Without hesitation the worker quickly responds, "I am a stone cutter and I am cutting stones." Not satisfied with this answer, the traveler approached the second worker and asked, "What are you doing with these stones?" The second worker paused for a moment and then explained, "I am a stone cutter and I am trying to make enough money to support my family." Having two different answers to the same question, the sojourner made his way to the third worker. The would-be philosopher asked the third worker, "What are you doing with these stones?" The third worker stopped what he was doing, bringing his chisel to his side. Deep in thought, the worker slowly gazed toward the traveler and shared, "I am a stone cutter and I am building a cathedral!"

Over the last fifteen to twenty years companies and organisations have placed much energy into developing mission and vision statements; statements which are a clear and succinct representation of the company's purpose for existence. In the 12th century story context "...I am building a cathedral"... a mission which is much larger than the third stone cutter's tradecraft alone. For him, it would be inconceivable to do any task that would not produce the finest cathedral in the land. His is no fuzzy, esoteric or pie in the sky goal - his and his employer's mission are at one; both represent the larger purpose for existence.

The reason for mission is simple. It explains the purpose for existence. It seeks to answer "why am I here?" "Where am I going?" and "Who wants to travel with me?" The road we travel in quest of answers to those questions is a spiritual journey.

Mission and Spiritual Capacity

Companies spend tens of thousands of dollars in the search for a concrete response to mission, and the reason for mission is simple. It explains the purpose for existence. It seeks to answer "why am I here?" "Where am I going?" and "Who wants to travel with me?" The road we travel in quest of answers to those questions is a spiritual journey.

Again, let's be clear on the use of the term *spiritual* as applied to mission. Spiritual is merely our inner world, our capacity or faculty to manifest in our minds **what we think**, in this case about why am I here, where am I going and who wants to travel with me. In spiritual terms, the mission statement becomes the outcome of our capacity to form the mission. This innate spiritual aptitude (**that we think**) enables 'our purpose for existence' to be realised in our minds, and only occurs because we have the inherent ability to create thoughts, ideas, attitudes, missions, visions, etc. No doubt drug trading, people smuggling, corporate crime, or sub-prime mortgage marketing have 'missions'! Like any business, they exist because they have used the spiritual faculty to create questions such as "why am I here?" "where am I going?" and "who wants to travel with me?" within their minds. So we see that *spiritual*, in this context, is not about moral, ethical or religious standpoints. Rather, it is just our innate ability to create images, attitudes, beliefs, etc. consciously or unconsciously, within our minds.

Consciousness: the Spiritual Ability to See 'That We Think'

So let's retrace our steps. The three stone cutters have vastly different ideas of the purpose in their daily toil. Similarly, how they experience their day's work, what they feel about their labour and how they relate to their fellow workers is different. The quality of their work, the creative spirit that is given to their work, the initiatives they take or don't take and the quality of their work relations is determined by **their** mission perspective.

One further factor can be certain; the quality of one's mission perspective will be determined by the quality of one's thinking. Moreover, the quality of our thinking is determined by the degree to which we understand **THAT WE THINK**. Muhammad Ali expresses this point well with "*The man who views the world at 50 the same as he did at 20 has wasted 30 years of his life.*" Such a person has not appreciated the powerful spiritual principles inherent to their experience of daily life. ■ ■