Role of Spirituality in Global Human Society: Spirituality, Society and Contemporary Culture

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ABSTRACT

This paper shows the scientific research suggests connections between religion, spirituality, and both mental and physical health. The findings are particularly strong in patients with severe or chronic illnesses who are having stressful psychological and social changes, as well as existential struggles related to meaning and purpose.

Keywords -- Psychological, Social, UNESCO

I. INTRODUCTION

“Whatever sphere of human mind you may select for your special study, whether it be language, or religion, or mythology or philosophy, whether it be laws or customs, primitive art or primitive science, everywhere you have to go to India. Whether you like it or not because some of the most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India and in India only”

Max Muller

A growing body of scientific research suggests connections between religion, spirituality, and both mental and physical health. The findings are particularly strong in patients with severe or chronic illnesses who are having stressful psychological and social changes, as well as existential struggles related to meaning and purpose. Recent studies indicate that religious beliefs influence medical decisions, such as the use of chemotherapy and other life-saving treatments, and at times may conflict with medical care. Religious beliefs and practices are common among patients seeking medical care, and even those who indicate that they are not religious often identify themselves as being spiritual in some way. Spirituality is more individualistic and self-determined, whereas religion typically involves connections to a community with shared beliefs and rituals.

The reason why physicians are being asked to inquire about and support patient spirituality is because doing so is part of whole person health care. Simply treating a medical diagnosis or a disease, without considering the person with the disease, is no longer acceptable. Patients are individuals with life stories, emotional reactions to illness, and social and family relationships that affect and are affected by illness.

They are also people struggling with the meaning and purpose of their lives, confronting potentially dramatic changes in quality of life, independence, and well-being, changes that may bring them face to face with their own mortality. For many patients, these issues are mixed with existential and spiritual concerns, concerns that can have a direct impact on the acceptance of medical care and the recovery process.

As hooks (2000) contends, “spiritual life is...about commitment to a way of thinking and behaving that honors principles of inter-being and interconnectedness” (p.77). Accordingly, the more aware a person is of the sanctity of the web of life, the more prosocial the person may become. Such a person “broadens one’s concept of self, increases the role of morality and strengthens the individual sense of responsibility towards the world” (Dorn, 2002, p. 6). And this sense of responsibility is likely to move people to take action for peace and social justice. The life stories of Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., W.E.B. Du Bois, Rosa Parks, Mother Teresa, and many other peace activists are examples of how the inner cultivation of personal spirituality can lead to leadership for social change. For example, Gandhi led India to independence as a spiritual tenant of non-violence (ahinsa) and through truth’s insistent call (satyagraha) (Dorn, 2002). Martin Luther King, Jr. led the non-violence movement with the spirit of agape (Radhakrishnan, 2002). And Du Bois committed his life to peace and the emancipation of African-Americans, women, the poor and the people of the Third World because he felt a “sacred obligation” towards humanity (Hopkins, 1996). In addition to these world figures, many grassroots leaders also endorse the importance of
spirituality in their activities. Studying the lives of female adult educators for social change, Tisdell (2002) found that the spiritual commitments of her study’s participants required that they actively work for social change. Lerner (2000) concluded that some activists required a balance between outer work (i.e. working for benefiting society) and inner work (i.e. practice of meditation and the experience of mystery). And Daloz et al. (1996) reported that more than eighty percent of their sample of community activists indicated that spirituality or religion “played an important role in the formation of commitment” to their activism (p. 141). Spirituality also includes an “active life force” or “high levels of positive life energy” that affect the state of human physiology (Harung, 1999; Owen, 2000). According to Harung (1999), shifting to higher stages of psychological development (i.e. becoming more spiritual) involves improvements in the way one’s neurophysiological machinery functions. In other words, higher states of consciousness refine our nervous system. He further states that “only in this way can our full potential develop, and only with fully developed potential can one enjoy sustainable peak performance and happiness” (p.62). Stacks (2000) also contends that this positive life energy increases one’s own creativity and gives rise to one’s compassion toward others. In this way, positive life energy enhances one’s well-being and becomes a source of action for others, further fostering leadership for social change.

Eastern philosophy teaches that reason and intelligent judgment can be easily swept away by impulses from self-centered egoism and distorted perception (Stacks, 2000). Since consciousness determines the quality of one’s thoughts and behaviors, the higher one’s level of consciousness, the greater one’s capacity to meet the demands of today’s world becomes (Reams, 2002). Therefore, in order to control one’s own egoism and work for the common good, leaders must develop a higher level of consciousness on moral and ethical planes. To work for social change – a battle against the immoral and unethical forces – a higher self is required.

II. CONCLUSION

Overall, the argument that leadership for social change requires the inner cultivation of spiritual elements is best indicated by the famous passage of the constitution of the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization): “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defense of peace must be constructed.” Thus, what we need is to foster as many future leaders as possible who have developed a deeper sense of spirituality through achieving this higher consciousness and interconnectedness to our global society.

REFERENCES