

## Spiritus Contra Spiritum

By

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As a Psychiatrist and a psychoanalyst, I have been involved in treatment of individuals with Addictions for over thirty years. Addiction comes in many forms; one could be addicted to alcohol, drugs, food, sex, gambling, work, pornography or a dysfunctional relationship. Addiction wrecks havoc on the mind, body, soul and relationships and compromises our capacity to love, work, play, be creative and spiritually engaged. It clouds the lens with which we look at ourselves, others, world and the future. It distorts our thinking, clouds our feelings and muddies our relationships.

There are three levels of Recovery from an addiction. The first step is to get DRY. This involves detoxification of the individual from the acute and chemical aspects of the addiction. Often, this is the most dramatic but also medically the most manageable phase of the treatment. Depending upon the drug of abuse, it may take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks. The second phase of recovery is to get SOBER. This involves exploring the stinking thinking and the cognitive and character flaws that fuel the fire of addictions. The twelve step program is an excellent paradigm to attend to these underlying issues that feed the addiction and provides the twelve steps to heal these problems in our thinking and relationships with

ourselves, others, the world and the Higher Power or the ABSOLUTE or the SPIRIT as we understand it. The third and the most profound stage of recovery is the Spiritual Recovery. This entails an exploration of the meaning and the mystery of our addiction and understanding its guidance to decipher our spiritual purpose and calling in this lifetime. When an addict gets into the groove of his or her recovery, they often discover that their addiction is often a bridge to their spiritual purpose.

Carl Jung<sup>1</sup> in his communication with Bill W. suggested that that craving for the Spirits in the bottle is a lower manifestation of an alcoholic's thirst for union with the Higher Spirit or God; hence his dictum – Spiritus Contra Spiritum. The Latin term Spiritus connotes both a poison and the divine Spirit! Hence the treatment for addiction to the Spirit in a bottle is engaging the Spirit in one's own nature and engaging the Spirit in the Universe.

In my treatment of addictions, I have found that this is often the most profound step in true and enduring recovery. One way of engaging the Spirit in our nature is to explore what aspect of our true nature or Spirit we are denying. A lamb does not hunt and a lion does not eat grass. As the saying goes, "Unto thyself be true." Unless an addict explores and honors their authentic nature, their addiction would linger. The process of uncovering one's true nature is a significant focus of long term therapy.

I once treated a surgeon who was addicted to drugs. Once he was dry and sober, we continued to explore the discontent in his life in spite of professional success. He and I discovered together that while he was an excellent surgeon, his true passion was in working creatively with Sculpting. He came from a distinguished family of

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Jung's letter to Bill W., Grapevine; January 30, 1961 – published by the permission of the Jung estate

physicians and he was expected to pursue medical career by a loving but dominating father. Over time he gradually tended to his interest in Sculpting and later become a professional sculptor with consider success and satisfaction. He still practices Medicine part time but has made room for his creative Spirit. He continues his recovery.

Another individual Robert was a womanizer. This was his true nature. However, he was also very devoted to his wife and family and this conflict played out in his several addictions. How was he to reconcile his true nature as a womanizer and his fidelity? With help of his recovery program and therapy he found the “Middle Way.” He sublimated his addiction to women by becoming a fierce advocate of women’s rights in his chosen profession. Now he could be close to women and serve them rather than exploit them. He had found a way to honor his true nature (love of women) without jeopardizing his love of his wife and family and at the same time to serve his true nature, his community and do God’s work.

Jenny had struggled with food addiction for many years. She worked in a corporate environment as a mid level executive and felt burnt out in her work. Her father was a successful businessman and Jenny felt an inner compulsion to join the business universe after her MBA training to please her father. But her soul was elsewhere. Jenny loved children and always wanted to a teacher. After much soul searching and guided by her dreams and synchronistic events and with help of her therapy, Jenny decided to make a major change in her life from the comfort and security of her father’s business universe to her cherished goal to be a teacher. Though stressful and challenging, this transition has engaged her Spirit and she feels much more connected with life. Her food addiction is in remission. She feels fulfilled, not by food but her life Spirit.

These issues of identifying one's true nature and honoring one's life and creative Spirit is one way to connect with the Spirit in the Universe. When we embody and live out our true Spirit, Uno Corporalis – than we establish a communion with our own nature-our Spirit– Uno Spiritualis. When we connect these dots of our authentic nature with our lived life, than our individual Spirit gets aligned with the World Spirit – Unus Mundus. In Hindu philosophy, this is an alignment of the Soul with the Spirit, of Atman with the Brahmana. Such an alignment of individual Spirit with the World Spirit or Higher Power leads to a sense of renewal, restoration and rejuvenation of the mind, body and Spirit and is conducive to an enduring health and recovery.

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