

Thoughts on Addiction and a Contemplative Life

Richard Simonelli

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous says that alcohol is “cunning, baffling and powerful” in its cause of the disease of alcoholism. I think we can go even further to say that the addictions phenomenon itself is also a profound *mystery*, in addition to a destructive force needing healing and cure. Addictions are a mystery because in addition to being one of the human foibles, they are also a message carrier for human life as a whole when they reach the epidemic proportions of mass addiction we see worldwide today. Recovery movements certainly address the first part of this insight: addictions are a destructive force needing healing and cure through the hard work of problem solving and social action. But the same movements consistently avoid looking deeper into the causes of mass addictions and their role as message carriers for wellbeing and the very survival of humankind. What message is being carried? This focus is dismissed as being too “philosophical,” speculative or opinionated, and of no use in the face of stopping an addictions pandemic. Yet, it is now widely known that dominant privilege of any kind creates blind spots in our ability to respond to a crisis. Here are a few thoughts on the message-carrying aspect of the problem we all face together. These few words to follow are neither scientific nor scholarly pronouncements – they are simply words to the wise.

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May I share some thoughts about *connection* being an opposite or antidote to addiction? Or maybe say it this way: individuals realizing their real connectedness or interconnectedness in life may help heal mass addiction.

The lack of connectedness can also be called separation. So connection and separation are really two different values or principles for individuals or whole societies. And I think it is true that pervasive separation as a value in a society or culture will result in many different unhealthy and dysfunctional mass behaviors, especially addiction or an addictions epidemic.

Using different language, separation may also be called duality or dualism. Dualism is a belief in the principle of a binary split going through reality as a defacto truth and value. On the other hand, the value or reality of interconnectedness is that of the whole, of unity, or union. Individuals can feel the reality of oneness even if an apparent split seems to be a "common sense" take on reality.

Indigenous cultures worldwide, as well as traditional Eastern societies, value and live through wholeness and unity rather than through duality and separation as the fundamental reality. But Western Civilization and Euro-centric cultures have always held a belief in intrinsic separation or split in how reality functions and is understood. In fact, the West believes in duality or separation as a fundamental mark of existence. In my opinion, this is the deepest source or cause of our addictions epidemic.

I think we can "get away with" a dualistic worldview, such as the West values and is rooted in, only until globalization pushes people, places and things into the intimate contact we have now. Then, I think the fundamental inaccuracy of dualism and separation – turning away from oneness and wholeness – begins to sicken societies. Mass addiction is one of the ways culture expresses unbalanced dualism, and sickens.

But the main point is that the Western Way, which is so prevalent now through the computer, globalization, selfish capitalism and numerous other Western institutions, causes the addictions epidemic. This is so because of its belief in a worldview of dualism or fundamental separation. In other words, "the system is giving back exactly what it was designed to give" – a painful outcome arising from a separative worldview. A dualistic worldview is fundamentally inaccurate and misleading. Reality reflects that back in the form of addictions epidemics and the chronic disease epidemics as we see on planet earth now.

Focusing on *connection* as an antidote to addiction is a way of healing. But first, why is disconnection so prevalent now? Because on the whole, humans have abandoned contemplation and contemplative lives.

Nondual contemplation, or living a holistic contemplative life, addresses the deep roots of our addictions epidemic. It is a deeper and simpler approach to wellbeing than the endless activity of a healing process because a person finds the fundamental, cosmic and sacred Connection, or nonduality, inside oneself. Such a life can certainly be lived in community. Yet for some of us, at least, the first fundamental discovery of authentic connectedness, and any

needed renewal, is found within oneself and apart from community. Then it is integrated back into ordinary community. This is a discovery, renewal and integration process that builds community. Without such direct discovery, people try to mimic that which quenches the thirst of dualism and separation by using all sorts of group process and hyper activity, including the computer social networks as well as regular use of alcohol and other legalized drugs.

A sensitive, aware, and loving life – a contemplative life – may go by different names in different societies or cultures. Here is one example. For some of the indigenous people of North America it is called *walking the Red Road*. This denotes a balance between physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of life. Since the indigenous worldview is a holistic understanding of the world, an *Indigenous science* offers a balanced approach to knowledge. A balanced system of knowledge is less likely to bring chaos to its parent society because it places knowledge in service to the community. Western culture and Western science by contrast tend to place knowledge on a very high, disconnected pedestal where it often fails to serve the community.

The addictions epidemic is one result of a loss of core spirituality as well as a loss of authentic meaning and love in our lives. Spread throughout society worldwide, it arises from the anti-contemplative way of life we've all created together. It arises from materialism, consumerism, and the dominance of Western science and technology everywhere. I think the way of healing, the way back, is to learn to live as whole people in whole cultures. What is a loving, contemplative life? Discovering, and living what such a life might be for individuals and communities alike is a primary way of healing the addictions epidemic. Beyond healing addictions, it is our way forward in sustainability and survival.

Richard Simonelli, 4-15-16

Three Quotations

“Modern science – that is, the science which has developed since the Renaissance – is intrinsically defective both in its principles and in its methods. It is defective in principle because it looks upon the material world as an independent reality, and it is defective in its methods because it treats the material world as though it obeyed mechanical laws, which are independent of the law of the Spirit. But in reality the material world is a part – and an inferior part – of a greater whole. ...Goethe was one of the few in modern times who was able to conceive of {a whole science}. So he wrote, ‘Perhaps there was the possibility of another method, one which would not tackle nature merely by dissecting and particularizing, but show her at work, and alive, manifesting herself in her wholeness, in every single part of her being.’ This is a vision of an integral science, which has yet to be realized. What is the reason that modern society has lost this principle of integration?”

Bede Griffiths, 1976. *Return to the Center*, Templegate, Springfield Illinois, pp. 94-95

“It is when you have a crisis that you have to change. A crisis means that you approach the problem with extraordinary completeness. It is really important that the problem be viewed, not on a particular level, but profoundly, intimately, and with an integrated approach, for in that alone is there a solution. ...the thing that brings about integration is love... It’s only love that sees, and nothing else.”

J. Krishnamurti

“I can live close to the plants, the weeds, the flowers that I use as medicine. The Great Spirit has seen to it that man can survive in this way, can live as he is meant to live. So I and my wife are dwelling in a little cabin – no electricity, no tap water no plumbing, no road – that’s what I am doing now. This is how I wish to remain, an Indian, all the days of my life. This does not mean that I want to shut myself off. Somehow many people find their way to my cabin. I like this. I want to be in communication, reach out to people. This is what we want. This simple log cabin knows peace. That’s how we want to be for the rest of our lives. I want to exist apart from the modern world, get out, way out in the sticks, and live much closer to nature, even, than we are – impart a little of our Indian way, the Spirit’s way, to them.”

[Pete Catches, Oglala Lakota, in *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, John Fire Lame Deer, 1972, p.139-141]