



## Spirituality lies at the heart of every person, recovery

A small circle of men listened attentively as their counselor at a mission in St. Paul announced their assignment. Their faces might have belonged to anyone--professionals with post-graduate degrees or homeless individuals who constantly struggle. But they were late-stage, chronic alcoholics, the kind who huddle beneath city bridges in the December cold or who simply revolve through local detox centers and shelters. All were searching for a reason to hope.

A week earlier, the counselor had asked each of them to write a prayer. Everyone managed to come up with something, except one. The counselor asked if he had written something, and the man shook his head and stared dismally at the floor. Years on the street immersed in alcohol and gloom had left him isolated, estranged from everyone, especially a divine power.

Days later, after hours of talking, listening and searching, the group assembled again and the counselor asked the man if he brought his prayer. "Yes," he said, to everyone's surprise. He then recited his prayer:

*"Whoever made me, keep me safe."*

It was a powerful prayer, strong in its simplicity and in what it revealed about the person who said it. It confirmed that at the core of every human being burns a spirit searching for healing and connection with a source of strength and goodness beyond ones self.

Most addiction treatment programs support the belief that recovery from addiction involves making peace with one's spiritual self. Yet spirituality is an illusive term, essential for becoming whole and human, though extremely difficult to define. The spirit is a vital element of our humanity. Spirit translated from the Latin word *spiritus* refers to breath. It is basic to human kind.

Spirituality could be called the essence that moves us toward a sense of connectedness with the universe or God, with others, and with our self. Framed as questions, a spiritual journey would ask: Where do I find meaning and purpose in life? How do I bond with others? Who am I?

Treatment professionals have long known that addiction affects every part of a person--physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual.

"The addiction recovery process is a paradigm of what spirituality is all about," said Damian McElrath, a spiritual care specialist at Hazelden in Center City, Minn. "The addictive personality wages warfare against our true selves. As our good self struggles and succumbs, the addictive self emerges victorious. Recovery is the dying of the addictive self and the development of a new or revitalized human spirit."

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous help recovering persons let go of their addictive selves. The program recognizes the spiritual task as cultivating relationships through simplicity, honesty, trust and humility.

It is with spirit that we find strength and identity through community and fellowship with others. We discover power that comes from something larger than our self. We feel a source of wisdom that can guide us as we grow and change.

A spirituality for today could be called a spirituality of companionship--friend accompanying friend, helping, sharing, daring, celebrating, grieving. It invites the deepest forms of human healing. It shatters our illusions of having it "all together," of having control or attaining personal perfection. A spirituality

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for today says that upon discovering our unique nature, we also find that we are one.

Perhaps when the holiday festivities are over, when the last note has been sung and the last candle burned, the message remaining is as simple as the homeless mans six-word prayer. It is a message of simplicity and humility. To be humble means to be in touch with the earth and all who inhabit it--to be reconciled and made whole.

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Alive & Free is a health column that provides information to help prevent substance abuse problems and address such problems. It is created by Hazelden, a nonprofit agency based in Center City, Minn., that offers a wide range of information and services on addiction. For more resources, [email](#) or call Hazelden at 800-257-7810 (outside the US 651-213-4200).