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"A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work"

ENGENDERING SPIRITUALITY IN RECOVERY:

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Introduction

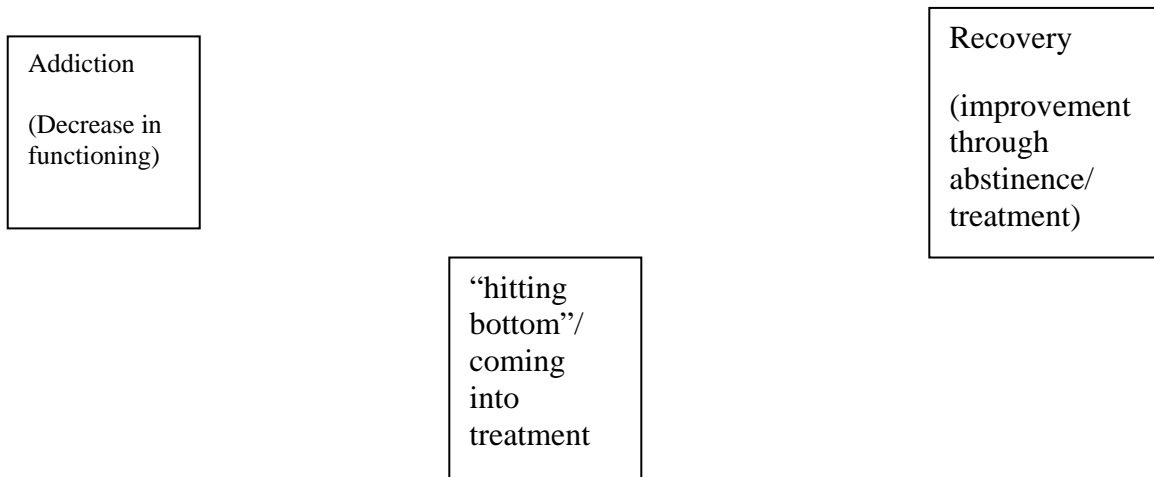
Many of those suffering from addictions are helped through support from community self-help groups which talk about sharing one's "experience, strength and hope." Emphasis is upon a wholistic recovery: body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

Although much of these ideas are fully accepted in the academic community, there seems to be a neglect of the narrative of recovery. This possibly results from seeing person growth as random and not subject to research, or possibly due to a disregard of things unmeasurable. At any rate, many times recovery literature seems to be heavily emphasizing biological and cognitive processes, to the neglect of feelings and spirituality.

Traditional View

Self-help programs talk about addiction and recovery by describing “what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now.” Similarly, in educational groups, we use the tried-and-true recovery curve:

(Recovery – body, mind, spirit)



Modified View

One can emphasize that the left-hand side of the curve is well-known to the abuser of substances – past troubles with family, social interactions, legal status, finances, health, and self-esteem. But one can use the ideas of the program **and** the literature by emphasizing the possibilities of the right side of the curve, aspects of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual recovery.

(Entering Treatment -- Abstinence)

Physical health

The first aspect of recovery is usually an improvement in physical health. One has stopped putting toxins in one’s body, and can begin to heal. Sometimes this is under the care of a medical system, sometimes is it by “detoxing” oneself. In any case, the effects can be felt and seen and remembered. There is, though, an upper limit on this – one can only be so healthy, and then the growth plateaus. The problem sometimes is, however, that one forgets how bad it really was, and can relapse

If one continues to remain abstinent, however, one can begin to improve in one's thinking and feelings.

(Continuing Treatment – Sobriety)

This is a time of changing one's thinking from "stinking thinking." One begins to understand how one's emotional and cognitive processes are intertwined, and how talking things out helps one listen to the problem and how solutions come about with time. Again, there is to some extent a limit to how "well" one can become; and again, this can be taken for granted without remembering how "bad" one really felt before.

If, however, one is blessed enough to maintain this state of physical and emotional well-being, one can begin to fully experience spiritual growth.

(The Rewards of Recovery –Serenity)

One cannot get "enough" spirituality. There is no upper limit on one's spiritual journey. It is intangible, and the progress virtually limitless.

Engendering Spirituality

One, then, can look at a process of change through abstinence (physical), treatment (mental and emotional), and meetings (spiritual). In addition, however, emphasis should be upon finding peace and tranquility in everyday things, of developing love and acceptance, and upon prayer and meditation. In addition to time and effort, some things may have to be learned, or re-learned. Hope, gratitude, honesty, and all those virtues that, due to addiction, one overlooked, forgot, ignored, or possibly just never encountered, have to be emphasized.

At every juncture in working with those in recovery, one must remind them of positive aspects of life. This is done through modeling behavior, choosing words which show empathy and respect, individualizing treatment, demonstrating acceptance and understanding; and well as insisting upon limits and good actions.

One has to look at a "teachable moment" in counseling. When a client is festering over a decision, one can ask "Whose hands are you putting it in?". When one admits to a misdeed, one can give a rewarding comment "That was a good 10th step" as well as a consequence. One can emphasize individual strengths and accomplishments as well as negatives in doing a "searching and moral inventory".

A larger issue may be also in looking to improve an organization to make it more caring, to emphasize values in other counselors, in to teaching those in recovery to reach out and forgive as well as make amends. Every day at every juncture we have an opportunity to improve our own "conscious contact with God."