



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

1.25 FEET IN SOCIETY; HEAD IN THE FOREST

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WE ONCE MET Philip Budin, a man who had been so successful in his investment business that he retired at the age of 30. For 10 years he focused on meditating and spiritual consciousness, then he and his wife decided to travel around the world on their sailboat:

Everything was arranged for us to travel around the world for the next 5 or 10 or 20 years, if not the rest of our life. The sailboat was stocked, the food was on board, the crew was picked out.

Three weeks before their voyage began, a friend asked him to travel to India to be godparent to his son and also to see his spiritual teacher, whom he calls "Swami"... this trip dramatically changed Philip's life:

Swami asked me what I was doing. I gave him a great 'spiritual' speech, and at the end he said to me, "No! Go back to work. Keep your feet in society and your head in the forest." Now I didn't like that answer. To me it didn't seem spiritual to go back to work, and it wasn't something I wanted to do. He repeated this about nine times, and each time I sank a little lower down onto the floor until I just surrendered and said, "Okay, what do you want me to do?" He said, "Don't worry, I will help you." So I went back to work, doing the same things I had done – except I had a new basis to operate from, and that was equanimity.

As we began to write this article about the fourth goal of life, *moksha* – spiritual liberation and fulfilment – we readily thought of this story. It's common to think that in order to be spiritually fulfilled, we must renounce our worldly life, especially work associated with business. Yet, just as Philip Budin learned, this world, and even our work, is the perfect arena for that fulfilment, as described by the 13th century Jewish mystic Moses de Leon:

The purpose of the soul entering this body is to display her powers and actions in this world, for she needs an instrument. Thereby she perfects herself above and below, attaining a higher state by being fulfilled in all dimensions.

But what is spiritual liberation and how can our work support us in attaining it? Different spiritual texts describe it in different ways; the Buddha speaks of liberation in this way:

Cut down the whole forest of selfish desires, not just one tree only. Cut down the whole forest and you will be on your way to liberation.

This is echoed in the words of the Paramahansa Upanishad, which gives us a detailed picture of this state of liberation:

What is the state of the illumined man? He has renounced all selfish attachments... He lives his life for the welfare of all... He faces heat and cold, pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour with equal calm... Free from the sway of doubt and false knowledge, he lives united with the Lord of Love... Entering the unitive state, he attains the goals of evolution.

Is it possible to be liberated while in this life? Mother Teresa gave us a very practical answer that applies directly to our day-to-day work:

We all long for heaven where God is, but we have it in our power to be in heaven with Him at this very moment. But being happy with Him now means: loving as He loves, helping as He helps, giving as he gives, serving as He serves, being with Him 24 hours, touching Him in his distressing disguise.

Sathya Sai Baba puts spiritual liberation into perspective and shows us how to balance it with the other three goals of life:

Spiritual liberation (moksha) is the goal that must dominate all the activities of life. That is to say, man must earn wealth through righteous means and desire above all for spiritual liberation. Analyse the four goals of life and realise that moksha is the goal, the culmination. Start craving for that... Seek that which, when secured, all else is secured.

So, ask yourself: “What perspectives about work do I need to shift so I can see it as an opportunity for spiritual liberation?”

This article is an excerpt from the book, *Put Your Spirituality to Work: The Basics*. To download the full book of articles, as well as additional book chapters, articles, workbooks, and research on the subject of “spirituality and human values for leadership and work”, visit our website: www.globaldharma.org