

More than Money

Exploring the personal, political, and spiritual impact of wealth in our lives

ISSUE NUMBER 7

MONEY AND SPIRIT



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Coming in the Next Issues:

To Spend or Not to Spend Summer '95

Submissions welcome by
June 1, 1995

Money and Children Fall '95

Submissions welcome by
August 1, 1995



Seeking a Spiritual Compass

"How can two confused agnostics possibly write a publication about spirituality?" That's how we felt at the start: galvanized by the centrality and depth of the topic—and dubiously qualified to tackle it. (We tried persuading more religiously inclined friends to oversee the issue, but with no luck.) Thus began the most daunting and engrossing journey we've had yet with *More than Money*, exploring territory that for us had been largely uncharted.

As always, we began by asking wealthy friends and acquaintances about their experience: "Has your money helped your spiritual development or gotten in the way? Have you used your wealth to express your spiritual values?" We wanted to learn the nitty-gritty of what people do and feel, and how they seek to resolve tensions between their spirituality and their wealth.

We were moved by the passion of people of different faiths, as they expressed both strongly felt beliefs and intense inner questioning. Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, and others shared their stories and spiritual struggles with us, and we greatly appreciate their honesty and vision. Only a few could be included in these sixteen pages. Clearly, one or two people from a tradition cannot fully represent the depth of wisdom

within that religion nor the wider community of people practicing that faith.

We apologize to those whose beliefs we may have left out or misinterpreted; our goal was not to presume any representative sample of religious and spiritual thinking about money, but rather, to put forth a stimulating variety of perspectives.

As we delved into the literature, we were struck by how judgmental and contradictory the cultural messages are about money and spirit. On the one hand, Biblical sayings like, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" and "Love of money is the root of all evil" permeate society.

On the other hand, notions that wealth is a reward from God or that spiritual purity leads to riches are also bandied about, by televangelists and "prosperity consciousness" leaders alike. We asked ourselves, "What elements of truth do we see in each? How might we reconcile seemingly opposite views?" We decided not to include organized religion's relationship to money (a huge subject in itself), but to focus on inspirational models, practical guidance, and useful resources for people with wealth struggling to align their money with spiritual values.



The Relationship Between Money and Spirit

Money and spirit seem to have a tumultuous relationship, sometimes going hand-in-hand, other times appearing fiercely at odds or in painful separation. The following sampling of voices, personal and cultural, reveal some of the range of feelings and positions people hold about the relationship of money to the spiritual life. Some clearly feel their wealth is a barrier to God; others experience their use of wealth as God's love in action. All the people we interviewed are searching to find a relationship to money that honors their spiritual beliefs.

Finally Walking My Talk

I have been blessed with a potent way for my wealth to serve the spiritual world. It started four years ago at Sotheby's auction house. I bid \$39,050 for three ceremonial "masks." I knew these were sacred objects to the Hopi and Navajo nations, and I returned them to their home.

"I feel called to transform money into the currency of spirit."

The outpouring of support for this action led to my founding the American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation, a public foundation which, by facilitating the return of spiritual objects, enables American Indians to continue or reactivate their spiritual ceremonies. The Foundation also gives non-natives a powerful way to connect to the spiritual lives and powers of indigenous people. That one act set people and events into motion which have transformed my life. To be "walking my talk"—that is, taking what I have felt in my heart for years and turning it into actions in the world, is fulfilling beyond measure.

I am aware of the contrast between my material world and the Native world, and I grapple with my own addictions—to comfort, to jewelry or a weekly manicure... I have learned to live with and sometimes laugh at all my anxieties and internal contradictions. ("Oh no, what if my money someday disappears? Will my life be ruined? or will I be freed to be more spiritual?")

Now that I have a vehicle to serve the world, I feel more relaxed. In the larger scheme of things, money—or pain and guilt about it—is not that important. I also recognize these feelings as part of who I am—I don't need to get rid of them or be "pure" in order to serve. I am thankful to have money to do the work I feel called to do: transforming money into the currency of spirit.

— Elizabeth Sackler

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Issue # 7
Spring 1995

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Gathering Stories

Because people rarely share their personal money stories, it can be quite an adventure to gather the vignettes for *More than Money*. We often interview several dozen people for each issue, as we don't know in advance whose stories will be most potent. We synthesize a 30-60 minute discussion into a vignette, review it word-by-word with the interviewee, and revise it until he or she gives approval. We do the same for submissions.

Even with this careful process many people feel keenly vulnerable sharing their stories. Compared to the fluid process of living, words are stark and static; a vignette is like cutting out a single frame from a motion picture. "Is this really me? Will others judge me? Can I change my mind and feelings even if this is in print?" Even under complete anonymity, some people cannot shake these feelings and they decide not to print their story. Those who go ahead often feel strengthened by having a chance to reflect on their experience, by making their personal struggles and insights useful to others, and by the very act of breaking the silence about money.

We don't expect you to like or agree with all the viewpoints here—we don't—but we ask you to treat each story tenderly as a gift from the heart, sometimes offered with trepidation, and always with courage. •