

## AN ARGUMENT FOR REDISCOVERY

Money would not exist without spirit. That is, money first occurred as a concept, which is itself a manifestation of human spiritual capacity. Money was generated out of a perceived need to materialize value through physical things, large and small, and as an evolutionary step to replace those things with a more convenient and portable form of value holder. Conceiving of money was a deep venture into social contracts and agreement making. At a later and critical part of its advent, money established equivalence and constancy in a moving world of goods and services, the economic lifeblood of creation and destruction. Based on this line of reasoning, money is a spiritual phenomenon in that the quantitative value it holds arises as a result of agreements; further, in economic terms, it represents all the work and intelligence applied to transforming human and natural resources on a global scale. Add to that another layer. What we call the value itself is essentially spiritual; that is, it remains unmeasured and invisible until it makes an appearance or reappearance at the moment of a transaction.

To understand this phenomenon, one has to peer deeply into economic processes, to see past the material to the field of human intentions, needs, capacities, and service, which are the energetic pulses—the push and pull of economic life. Money is thus a threshold, a

two-way gateway from the material to the spiritual and back again. If one can experience this threshold, and the reciprocal dynamic on either side of it, then one could say that money is a foundation for spiritual experience uniquely suited to our postmodern era.

Here is a historical example. From the US perspective, the postmodern period for money began in 1971 when then President Richard M. Nixon eliminated the gold standard as a baseline for the US dollar. From that point on, all US money became fiat currency—namely it was no longer based on the value of anything physical; rather, its face value was based on the full faith of and in the US government, which issues it as legal tender. Because money was untethered from any referent commodity, it became essentially spiritual in nature—that is, its value resides in the trust integral to all the interdependent economic activity of human beings.

One aspect of the threshold experience with money arises when we are able to release the notion of money as a commodity or thing itself, and instead see through it the circulation of human intentions as expressed in economic activity. Were enough individuals able to go through this transformation, I believe we would no longer be able to live either morally or ethically with the money system as it is currently constructed.

### *Why does this matter?*

It matters because without this reframing of money value as non-material, we can easily step into the egoistic and materialist trap-pings of life. The transformative work is for each of us to overcome our lower ego, and through this process find a healthier relationship to material matter. Ideally this would be a relationship in which materialism serves rather than rules. For example, the world of commerce has worked assiduously to bind our identity to things, to define us through our consumption. Instead of the fear of never enough, we could actually move in trust and the recognition of others in our economic activities.

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It matters because by binding ourselves to a materialistic worldview, we lose sight of the interconnectedness of experience, interdependence in economic life, and a flexibility of soul needed to navigate between our authentic inner voice and our conditioned public voice. If each of us is to understand how we stand in economic life, we first have to understand how each piece of money reflects some aspect of our economic being, that while the money object (whether paper or coin), is a thing that we might use as we wish, it and we are embedded in a global energetic field of value produced by human activity. It is not that I control the coin, but rather that I experience humility in it as part of a larger community. From this perspective, I am its steward; it is a placeholder for all the world's natural and human resources.

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We are currently using up the commonwealth (our natural and human resources) to produce private wealth. This is another framing of inequality, which is driven by a kind of pure materialism. Accumulation of private wealth is materialism's measure of success—at least in the short term. We are dehumanizing work, denaturing land, and monetizing capital, all in the extreme.

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In the process of using up our natural resources for the sake of profit and excessive inequality of wealth—that is, dividing our world into winners and losers—we are also hardening our hearts to those who suffer under this reality. This process leads to a kind of sclerosis, and is actually a path of dying. Those who tell themselves they are winners because they have accumulated and retained so much money are compromising economic life for all of humankind. No matter who one is or where one lives, over time no one is immune from environmental toxins, or the presence and pressure of human suffering.

*Why does this matter?*

Simply put, because of my children and grandchildren—and your children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. The choices we make around money are no different than the choices we make around values and life questions. We can be led in those choices by our inherited or environmentally cultivated assumptions about money and power, money and self-worth. Or, we can make choices that reach beyond the current money story, that do not accept the assumptions that measure and weigh money as a success indicator and an end in itself. I am constantly reminded of a comment made during a deep group conversation about money. One of the participants, who has spent over twenty years working in Hospice and has accompanied many, many people through their life's end, said the following: "In all the time I have spent with those at the end of their life, no one has ever said that they wished they had made more money." What could be a more cogent argument for transforming our relationship to money—to find the spirit in it and rediscover our humanity through it.

## MORE ON THE INTERSECTION OF MONEY AND SPIRIT

As I write about the intersection of money and spirit, I realize I have been conditioned throughout my biography to consider them as discrete, and it is thus a challenge and transformative indiscretion to speak of a connection. I do not think it would be fair to characterize money and spirit as being in opposition, though they often are. Such a polarity would dishonor the genius that devised money in the first place. Let me make a bold statement: Money is an inspired invention to account for and store value in order to free up enterprising people to serve each other and communities in the realm of economics.

As a device, money circulates so that individuals (and organizations) have the resources to bring their particular capacities into the economy for the overall wellbeing of the community (however one might want to define that). One result is that people's material needs are met, but that is only the tangible part of an economy. One might say the spirit of money lives on, not in the objects that denote it, such as paper bills and coins, but rather in how it passes hands, with what understanding and agreements, and through what transactional rituals.

When I look at my economic self, I imagine that my personal inspiration—what motivates me—adds value to the circulation of

money, because of my intention of service. It is also an essential part of my process to be as sure as possible that the other party's needs are met. This requires an additional reflective, evaluative, loop-closing step in the transaction process—all of which might come under the descriptive heading of reciprocity. This transactional process goes beyond any document commemorating the agreement to a living recognition of each other and the value of the relationship. In other words, through our transactions we become part of each other's stories. This is a radically different construction of a transaction than we are conditioned to understand. And, the speed at which I am able to transact, to get done what I need, helps to perpetuate this old conditioning in which the power of money subjugates rather than frees us.

The question remains: How might we reclaim the spiritual in money (and in ourselves) at the intersection of the two? Let me recount a brief interlude I had with my son recently when he asked me for some money. As I gave him the bills, he asked if there were any strings attached. Before I launched into the whole derivation of the expression from the world of marionettes, I found myself saying, "The money has no strings attached; it is the string." This was met by the usual look of consternation. What I meant by the statement is that as money circulates; it carries with it intentions, agreements (hopefully), and a glimmer of the history of human consciousness. This string image is about what connects rather than controls or, in the case of marionettes, manipulates us. This is a picture of interdependence. Of course, one can attach "strings" to money in the form of expectations or demands, but this comes with an obligation to make those expectations transparent and for the agreements to be accepted from a place of equality. Even if we create our own currencies and exchange systems, we will never escape the necessity of multilateral agreements as a basis for circulation. Without those agreements, money holds its power in an oppressive way.

Reclaiming what is human in money and making interdependence more visible can begin with reflecting on how I can use my money in a way that increases value for all parties to the transactions. Sharing my reflections with those of others who have an interest in transforming how we work with money will help to define the intersection of money and spirit; that is, the intangible intentional aspects of transactions will then be enlivened alongside the ones traditionally quantified. Engaging in this process of increasing consciousness is worth the effort. To renegotiate one's relationship with money makes it possible to see the spirit in it.