

The Paragon Advisor

Money and the Soul

by George D. Kinder, CFP®, RLP®, President and Founder of the Kinder Institute of Life Planning

One of my earliest experiences of the disjointed relationship between money and soul was on Sundays during the offering at the local Presbyterian church I attended as a child. To me, the rustling of fellow churchgoers and the soft fall of dollars did not sound like the whisper of God. The clink of purses opening and of coins and keys did not sound like God's music, nor did feet shuffling in the pews and aisles sound like the footsteps of God.

In fact, I recall my terror mounting as those footsteps came closer. This was my moment of judgment and I was found wanting. I remember three specific occasions: on one I had nothing in my pocket to give and my parents gave me nothing from theirs. In shame, my face felt hot and red as I passed the basket to my younger brother who also had nothing to give. Another time, my mother snuck a coin to me from her purse. But whose coin was this? Who was really giving? I felt unseen and unrecognized. On another occasion, I had a dime of my own in my pocket, but coins were hard to come by in the corner of Appalachia where I grew up, and I gave more from the fear of the consequences of not giving than from any sense of generosity. I was not convinced the

money would go to Jesus or I might have given all that I had in my youthful devotion. Already I was asking: what does money have to do with my soul?

For most of us, there is an ancient narcissistic wound between our souls and money, a sense that we've never been recognized. Even now, in all the impersonal ways that money touches us when we feel that what we receive for our efforts can never reflect our true worth, that what we give in dollars can never genuinely express the spirit of our generosity, we revisit this old wound. I believe that the existential dilemma of humanity is expressed in our relationship to money: how do we express the deep nature of our being in a world represented by dollar bills?

Neglected Values and Pathway to Maturity

There is a pastoral nature to our work as financial planners. On its deepest level, our task is to reconcile the true nature of our clients (their souls) with the world of money--the world we live in.

I have a client, respected in his profession and making a satisfactory income, who recently acknowledged to me that he felt as if his professional life was a series of denials of all the values

Is It Time for a Change? Come find out about our belief in the three C's:
Culture, Commitment and Coaching.
Find out more: IsItTimeForAChange.com

www.USWealthCompanies.com | 139 Wood Road | Braintree, MA 02184

Tel: (781) 849-9200 | Fax: (781) 849-0677

© Copyright 2008 U.S. Wealth Management, Inc. All rights reserved.

he held dear. For years I have seen this man's stress and agony and felt the heaviness of the family responsibilities he carries. I don't know whether I'll be able to convince him to break away from his workaholic routine, but for the first time I have brought him to look more deeply at his values and his goals and to share his feelings more openly. He has agreed to put aside time so we can redesign his financial plan to better serve those neglected values.

I shared with my professional client a model of maturity that I have developed over my 25 years of working with clients. I call it the Seven Stages of Money Maturity©. Those seven stages - Innocence, Pain, Knowledge, Understanding, Vigor, Vision and Aloha - fit into three phases of life: Childhood, Adulthood and, finally, Maturity.

Childhood: Innocence and Pain

Innocence and Pain are first experienced in childhood. In Innocence, we are born with no knowledge or understanding of money. Our thoughts about money are filled with naiveté. In the Pain of adolescence we learn the facts of life around money, like the fact that we have to work for a living, that there are social differences between us and others due entirely to money. We suffer envy, jealousy, shame, humiliation and greed. In childhood we seek to escape pain by retreating to innocence and fantasy rather than learning the rewards of confronting the pain and doing the hard work of adulthood.

Adulthood: Knowledge, Understanding and Vigor

In adulthood we acquire Knowledge, Understanding and Vigor. There is a deep level and a practical level to Knowledge. Practical knowledge encompasses budgets, investment choices, retirement vehicles and all the professional skills we

use as planners. The deep level of Knowledge is primarily about freedom. Freedom that money can provide us with the means to pursue our dreams and that this kind of freedom is attainable through hard work, saving and investing. Deep knowledge has to do with balance, moral integrity, fairness and relationship, and it includes an understanding of the gift-giving nature of human endeavor.

Understanding is the place where we genuinely come to terms with the Pain of money that we first felt in childhood. It involves patience and perspective and the willingness to own the demons we tend to project onto others. Understanding is where we learn to tolerate unpleasant feelings and to confront difficult issues of self-esteem. By acknowledging and confronting our own demons, we develop humility about human experience that enables a deep and abiding compassion for others.

Vigor is where we really learn to express ourselves around money, whether it is by being a savvy consumer, in taking on powerful financial forces or just working harder for what we want and believe in.

Maturity: Vision and Aloha

Vision and Aloha comprise the third phase of our lives: maturity. It is through Vision that a genuinely socially responsible person is born. In Vision, there is no obstruction between what one wants to accomplish and what is done. Vision is the place where we see what we want to do in our communities and how to accomplish it through our acquired Knowledge, Understanding and Vigor.

Aloha is something simpler. It is simple human kindness around money. It is the capacity to put another person at ease, regardless of the economic differences between us. It is the place of the men-

tor and the friend. It is a place of humility where we look at each incidental or difficult encounter as an opportunity to learn from another person. Meister Eckhard speaks to this when he says, “Only the hand that erases can write the true thing.”

Learning never stops

You may wonder exactly where in this hierarchy of maturity you fit. It's important to understand that it looks more hierarchical than it really is because, in fact, we each carry all seven of the stages inside of us all the time. For most of us, life wouldn't be interesting if there weren't always something new to learn. Learning is born from Pain and Innocence and grows into Knowledge, Understanding and Vigor. Every new learning experience thus expands our capacity for Vision and Aloha.

Adulthood is where we really do the work. Childhood, where we experience Pain and Innocence, is the existential human condition into which we are born. In Maturity, Vision and Aloha are the natural consequences of the hard work of Adulthood. It is very difficult in the world of money to develop Vision and Aloha without considerable personal development in the areas of Knowledge (the head), Understanding (the heart), and Vigor (the energy of the body) around money.

George Kinder, CFP®, RLP®, has been a thought-leader in the financial services industry for over twenty years. The author of three books, including *The Seven Stages of Money Maturity: Understanding the Spirit and Value of Money in Your Life* (Dell, 2000) and *Lighting the Torch: The Kinder Method of Life Planning* (FPA Press, 2006), Kinder is widely acknowledged as one of the “fathers” of the financial life planning movement. The Kinder Institute is the global leader in training and credentialing Registered Life Planners®. Learn more at www.kinderinstitute.com.