



by Pip Wilson

LIFE IS A

**I am not interested in SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT
I am interested in whole PERSON DEVELOPMENT.**

► **What I do**, apart from training with executive teams and developmental groups, is conduct group work with young people. They are homeless, classified as having special needs, and have experienced damage from various things including leaning on drugs and alcohol. In reality they are generally young beautiful humans who are lively, full of personality, chemically dependant (legal or illegal), living in hostels funded by the state and trapped in poverty, which imprisons their spirit.

In a very informal setting I lead “life management” experiential training. Some come late and go early. Some participate, some aggravate. Some open up and journey, some throw up a defense, which seems to me to be a skill they have been developing all their lives. We have vivid experiences of self-revelation and ownership of self, followed by reflective learning.

Each week I lead at least three group work sessions like this and in the past twelve months have stretched myself to create at least ninety new starters to add to the ones from several books (see www.pipwilson.com). All these sessions are aimed at the whole person but are also significantly “spiritual” in experience. It is spiritual because we touch the rawness of life. We touch the depth of life.

Let me move to further openness and honesty as I let the introduction pass in the slipstream and move one step further towards the subject.

► **What I believe.**

What I believe - I don't know because I am on a journey and what I click on these keys now, will be different tomorrow. I fumble and stumble to express what I believe and when I do get to it I 'refresh the irritation', so I am living at a point of unease. I desire incompleteness and a constant yearning. I guess it is a little like:

“Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the polystyrene cup; the roots go down and the shoots go up, nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like this”

Robert Fulghum

from *“All I really need to know I learned in Kindergarten”*

But I want to be totally honest with you. All of us have an ethos even though we may not crisply disclose this in training, but, let's face it, it does leak out in our very expressions and non-verbals. I have a belief system – yes. But I believe in not being oppressive

as much as I believe in my developmental spirituality. My “personal ‘Mission Statement’” goes like this and - this will give you a full frontal clue about me - was written in 1995 and still stands because it is life related, not profession or employment related.

**ME - PIP WILSON
MISSION STATEMENT**

*I will be an effective lover.
I will live to love -
modeled on my developing commitment,
understanding and faith in God.*

*I will continue to believe,
behave and affirm that
all individual persons are unique,
special and valuable
- “beautiful human persons”.*

*I will demonstrate that,
verbalise that.*

*I will live to love myself,
family, friends, colleagues
and be active socially and cosmically*

Pip Wilson.

26.03.1995

-I have decided to make my life an act of love-

I am a spiritual person with a Christian flavour with roots down but also walls down.

“Never build walls because you never know what you are walling in or walling out”

John Powell - From *“Why am I afraid to tell you who I am”*

► **In training**

When leading training courses I do not declare this sort of stuff but start where the group is at, or create an experience where we all can be at. I will guide a course or group but not dump my own spirituality or what I believe. I will respond at all times with honesty. I answer questions on my spirituality, but not push or be proactive unless the brief includes this. I also need to be honest and touch and open

THE FLOOR

my considerable library of scars. That in turn will encourage others to disclose the beautiful and, more importantly, the dark side and the ugly in their lives. It is a moment of wonder (spiritual) when a group has reached a point of sharing some hurt or damage and the climate becomes empathetic. We are all then, at the same time, at one level with our hurts and this NOW experience. We can become real with each other because we are touching reality. Maybe it is a normally hidden part of our whole, subconscious, but it is all real.

“The first task of a leader is to help define reality”

Max De Pree - *“Leadership is an Art”*

Yes - a large step forward for participants is when we open up and touch the life issues they have tucked away, possibly behind a chemical haze or a sophisticated respectability. This can be both emotional and spiritual. Both at the same time it seems to me. Only then, when we own the situation, can we step onwards with eyes wide open to make life decisions and step out along the road less traveled.

The Spiritual

► Spiritual things and the emotional life are attached at the hip. All this is awareness and seems to me to be the starting place for growth and development. From then on we can develop skills from our spiritual and emotional awareness. Awareness and raised sensitivity can then proceed. As in this model of development:

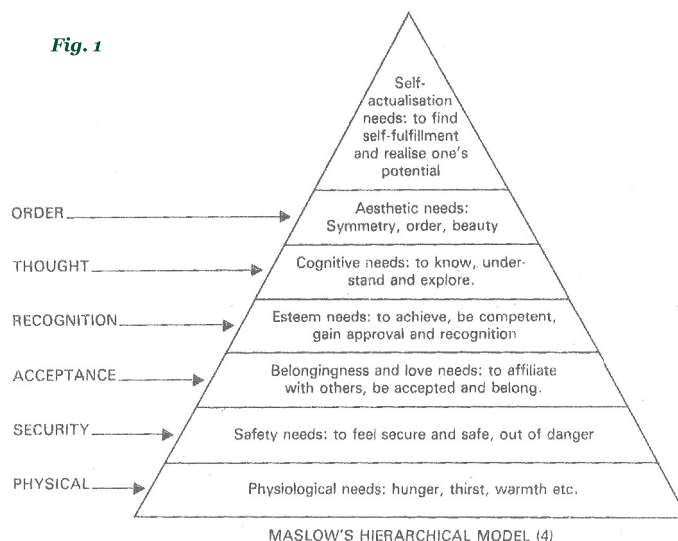
- ① unconsciously - incompetent
- ② consciously - incompetent
- ③ consciously - competent
- ④ unconsciously - competent

Life, it seems to me, is a cycle of discovery, awareness and skill development until, as Mr Maslow would say in his hierarchical model of needs, we reach “self-actualisation”. I love the opportunity to have a group involved in placing themselves on a graphical version of this Maslow model. Most youngsters who are living in hostels, place themselves at the second and third level in the needs hierarchy. (Figure 1)

Level 2: Safety needs: to feel secure and safe, out of danger.

Level 3: Belongingness and love needs: to affiliate with others, be accepted and belong.

Fig. 1



“I love the concept of us not being: a human being but a human becoming.”

It seems to me that we are all on a spiritual journey once we get past the Maslow “level one” stage of being in need of the basic food, clothing, shelter. We are then on an everlasting journey of “emotional intelligence” and “spiritual intelligence” which strides down the road less traveled towards us becoming humanly whole - which is a goal we will never reach. But isn't it good to journey?

► Soul Food

I have met the author of “Anam Cara” (Soul Friend), John O'Donohue. We have had a cigar and beer together - and talked “spiritual food”. His books are highly recommended on this whole subject. I could fill this space with his quotes of wonder. On this subject he says that *“the human journey is a continuous act of transfiguration when you love you open up your life to another”*.

The word “spiritual” comes from the Latin “spiritus”, I understand, and that means “breath”. We are talking about the non-physical here and the soul being our “moral and emotional identity” as quoted by the Oxford English Dictionary. So here we are lumping “spiritual” with “soul” and “love” and “moral” and “breath” and “emotional” and it seems to me, all the vital things of life that we cannot touch or box up and give to someone for a birthday present.



► **Spirituality in Culture.**

“Just looking” I often say in a shop as I salivate amongst the shelves of hi-fi I cannot afford to buy.

“Just Looking” could be a strap-line for the contemporary shop for spirituality. This is what it seems to me to be - from the leaning towers of pipwilson.com. Shopping is ridiculed as being as basic as, and cheaper than, the lowest form of “soap-opera” on TV. Yet shopping is more than shopping for objects, it’s about “meaning” to so many. “Who I am” is about image, status in society, attractiveness, sex appeal and a picture frame for our personality.

We have the ‘just looking’ humans all around us. We also have the “dwellers”, those who have found a place, and the “seekers”. Dwellers and Seekers are one step on from the ‘just lookers’ but maybe not.

The Dwellers could belong to the “*solid spirituality*” and the seekers belong to the “*liquid spirituality*”. The “*solid*” belong, maybe, to an established church, synagogue or other group of dwellers who are into “spiritual experiences”.

The liquid people, like liquid itself, seek out the lowest level and every nook and cranny. They move around and seek out with fluidity. They will find their needs met on the Internet, among a group of friends, a workplace meditation time, a fitness class with a liquid spiritual content and more. “I am spiritual but not religious” is often expressed.

In the UK, according to an article in Third Sector magazine (www.thirdsector.co.uk), many Christian organisations are in financial crisis, haemorrhaging supporters (along with their giving and legacies) and beginning to feel like a little Dutch boy trying to plug the flow with his finger. The Church of England, for instance, says it lost 100,000 worshippers between 2000 and 2002. CMS’s Mission Movement Director Canon Chris Neal has commented:

“The real issue is the Church’s inability to make meaningful connections with contemporary culture. This means that the Church is left with an ageing and declining membership, struggling to maintain historic structures and institutions, and is failing to release its creativity and imagination.”

The “solid spirituality” venues are becoming less appealing to the fast moving younger members of our culture and yet there is a need to belong. Maybe the training experience, with spiritual opportunity experiences, will encourage participants to become more than “just looking” and become more liquid in their “seeking”? The human need for meditation, prayer, wonder, - beyond the physical but clearly spiritual development, will be met differently in the future. Maybe assisted by supermarket or workplace chapels or quiet meditation places?

► **If God is a DJ.**

Some years ago the dance music band “Faithless” created and performed a dance hit called “God is a DJ”. More recently “Pink” has had a Europe-wide hit with a same-titled pop song which goes like this:

*“If God is a DJ
life is the dance floor
love is the rhythm
you are the music”*

hmmm is added by me. Is it not interesting that there are many references to spiritual things in modern art forms?

I have used these Pink words with different groups of various ages and the minds spark. Life is a dance floor and we can choose to dance or watch, or lean on the bar, be sick in the toilets, plug the ears, be spiritual or not!

This song, these lyrics, connects to the contemporary culture I live and work in. The exploration of the dance floor or “the road less traveled” is exciting because it is developmental.

I like another line in the song:

“Get your ass on the dance floor”

Tools used in Training, which includes Spiritual Awareness.

The work I do with teams and groups, who may or may not brief me to work on the spiritual development issues, includes the use of various tools. These are about the whole person, not just about the spiritual development of an individual, team or a community. They can be used to encourage developmental steps by all, wherever they may be on that journey.

Music

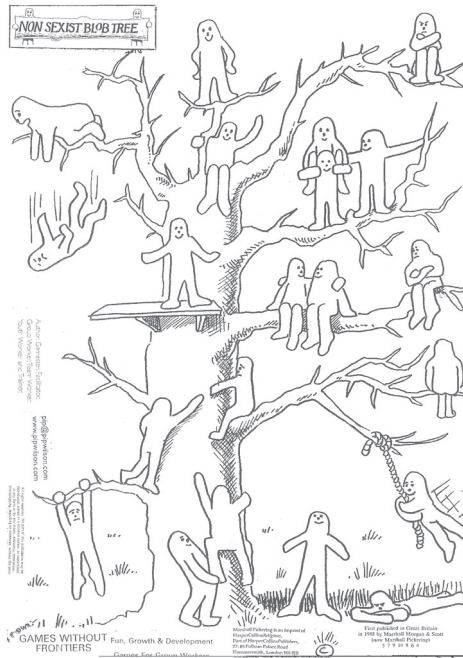
- 1 I always use music in all sessions.- to help set a climate, ease the environment during the assembly/nervy time.
- 2 When people go into buzz groups or small task groups.
- 3 To help create a climate of trust at particular moments when group members may need some inspiration or mood adjustment.
- 4 To help re-enforce a time of reflection. The music or lyrics “say” something which encourages the reflective practice.
- 5 Indicate the group discussion is over and it is now time to return to the full conference plenary time.

Blobs

The Non-Sexist Blob Tree (*Figure 2*) is one of many non-word-based, non-linear tools. These were devised when I worked with non-readers some years ago but are also great with international groups because anyone can read them. They can be used for:

1. Ice-breakers
2. Self-revelation
3. Fun
4. Role and status awareness.
5. Team awareness and teamwork generally.
6. Vision setting and goal identification and many more.

Fig. 2



Stories

Many of them are in a printed form and can be used with different purposes.

1. Awareness related to personal feelings.
2. Focus on values and ethos.
3. Affirmation.
4. Specific elements of spiritual awareness.

Story Example:

STARFISH

As the old man walked along the beach at dawn, he noticed a young woman ahead of him picking up starfish and flinging them into the sea. Finally, catching up with the young woman, he asked her why she was doing this. The answer was that the stranded starfish would die if left until the morning sun.

“But the beach goes on for miles and there are millions of starfish”, said the man.

“How can your effort make any difference?”

The young woman looked at the starfish in her hand.

She threw it to safety in the waves and said,

“It makes a difference to this one”

Exercises and Games.

Many exercises can fulfill a number of purposes and indeed can be used to encourage the self-determined building of a value base. Again I refer to the many exercises in a number of my books that can be used for:

1. Awareness raising.
2. Observation, examination and listening awareness and skills.
3. Contact making.
4. Relationship building.
5. Various intervention strategies.
6. Forming concepts, ideas, ground rules and principles.
7. Testing good practice, ensuring it is earthed and a positive action.
8. Specific awareness raising regarding mission, faith or commitment to a cause.
9. Communication awareness raising and skill development.

Many more, including DVD/Video, photographs, cartoons, cardboard, children’s toys and everyday domestic items.

▶ Conclusion

Your aim?

My advice?

I do not have any advice.

I have **NO** advice.

You know the context you are working in - or will research to discover it. You know what is comfortable for you and the participants. You will want to be non-oppressive. You will not wish to abstain from the spiritual element of development.

As for me, I need to belong but also seek.

I like the line “I don’t want to live within the sound of chapel bell - I want to live within a yard of hell”

It seems to me that to live in the comfort zone is the place where freedom does not reside - because it IS comfortable. Working and living at stretch will be an encounter with the spiritual and for me - that is good.

And we see models of this all around us

« *A caterpillar looks nothing like a butterfly but one develops from the other* »

This is development,

▶ This is wonder,

▶ This is spiritual,

▶ This is not about being a “human being”

▶ - it is about a “human becoming”

This encourages me to journey on down the road

▶ less traveled

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