

BEYOND BELIEFS – Part I

Straightforward questions deserve straightforward answers. The following questions are often asked of people whose work is based on the Principles of Mind, Consciousness and Thought as discovered and taught by Sydney Banks.

Question: Is the concept of innate mental health emerging from an understanding of the principles of Mind, Consciousness and Thought contrary to religious teachings?

Answer: No.

Question: Isn't the "spiritual nature of life" referenced in literature about the Three Principles, a "religious teaching", and aren't the principles "religious doctrine"?

Answer: No.

Question: Why not?

This is the broader answer to the first question: Is it contrary?

All religious teachings hold out the hope that all people, regardless of the state they are in at any given time, could find the capacity to improve their state. The concept of innate health is that wholeness and salubrity are intrinsic, always accessible qualities. These ideas are not contrary to each other.

I know of no religious teachings in the world that would be undermined or contradicted by the statement that there are discoverable primary laws at work in the universe – principles. The idea of a lawful universe greater than our knowledge of it does not interfere with religious teachings. Both great scientists and great theologians have written and spoken of this idea as the ground on which scientific inquiry and religious study actually can stand together.

This is the broader answer to the second question: Is it a religious teaching?

The idea that there is a spiritual dimension to life is not a religious teaching. It is an observation that there are aspects of being alive that are beyond our intellectual or secular knowledge. For example, we "know" the primary difference between the cadaver and the medical examiner. One is dead; one is alive. We know that the breath of life no longer informs the body of the cadaver, so it is no longer spirited, animated, engaged in life. We know that the medical examiner *is* informed by the breath of life. We acknowledge that difference as observable truth not subject to argument. We know, too, that the medical

examiner will one day be a cadaver and another medical examiner will be alive in the presence of that cadaver. The fact that there is a dynamic process which sustains life itself, even as individual parts of life as we know it arise and die, is the spiritual dimension of life – that which is clearly true, but invisible and immeasurable.

“Principles” are not in the same realm as doctrine. Doctrine is a body of thought, a certain set of teachings. Principles are first causes, sources, universal laws. Principles explain; doctrines describe.

It is possible to create doctrine around principles – for example, one could say that teaching of surgery is based on the principles of Anatomy. One would not, however, call the principles of Anatomy the teaching of surgery.

Principles in and of themselves are not doctrine. The principle of gravity, or the principles of thermodynamics are not doctrine. The reason is that they are not organized into a system of teaching that asks adherents to accept certain guidelines, or follow any special practices. They are simply explanatory statements of how things work. What we do with those explanations becomes doctrine.

The principles of Mind, Consciousness and Thought point to the source of experience, the laws governing the nature of our changing experience. They invite inquiry, but they are not a doctrinal system. All the doctrine, or teaching, that has arisen around these principles has taken the form of a wide variety of services in the realm of well-being.

Another way to express the difference between principles and doctrine is this. A principle is a discoverable and immutable original source of something observable. A principle is true whether or not it has been discovered, defined, examined or considered. The ability to make a fire, for example, is evidence of the First Principle of Thermodynamics. The cave men who found that they could create fire from friction did not know that principle. Nonetheless, it was true and they were observing it in operation. It remained to be discovered.

Until the discovery of the principles of thermodynamics, mankind created much “doctrine” around the idea of fire. Doctrine can be based on principles, or not. Doctrine is conceived, expressed and believed. As people change their minds, learn, or discover deeper principles, they can express doctrine differently. If the doctrine is based on principles, the core understanding will not change, even if the doctrine changes.

In the case of the principles of Mind, Consciousness and Thought, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of “practices” based on the core understanding of those principles. These practices are undertaken in business, in education, in counseling, in community improvement, in law and justice, in medicine, in family development and parenting, in public health. Over the years, the practices have grown, changed and developed, and they

continue to do so as people see things more clearly, or find more effective means of offering service and as new people become interested and see new ideas. The principles remain the same, even as doctrine evolves around them.

It is the work of organizations dedicated to this work to encourage deeper and deeper exploration and discovery of principles, and to examine the effectiveness of a huge array of current and yet-to-be conceived practices that derive from these principles. This is a scientific approach to the study of the promotion of human well-being and the alleviation of human suffering.

One could say, in that sense, Principle-based practitioners stand on common ground with religious people everywhere because of the shared hope to improve the quality of life and to help people find peace of mind and happiness, and the shared faith that there is a reliable universal resiliency in people that includes everyone in that hope.

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