The insanity of homelessness and unemployment

The San Francisco Bay Area in California, USA is an area renowned for its beauty. Every year thousands of tourists visit the area to enjoy the breathtaking vistas. Any visitor is sure to notice the incredible natural beauty of the area. For a long time, it has been so. Now, however, a visitor is sure to notice something else: Homeless people. Hundreds of homeless people living in filthy soggy plastic and cardboard dwellings beside the highway, under bridges, behind billboards, in ditches, on sidewalks, everywhere and anywhere. Visitors hurry past while we who live here wonder what to do. How and why is this happening?

We are told that the problem is a result of growing poverty. That more and more Americans are falling into poverty. That practically everyone is one or two paychecks away from homelessness. The politicians and leaders say that something must be done to alleviate poverty. They declare a "WAR ON POVERTY".

Yet the problem persists and more people join the ranks of the homeless every day. I wondered what indeed could be done about it? How could one fight this war against poverty? Is it really as simple as giving people money, free housing, and free food? The solution seems obvious and yet elusive at the same time. As I pondered the issue, I stumbled upon a lecture wherein the speaker was describing his understanding of poverty. He started by saying that the first time he heard the word 'poverty' was when he was 9 years old, growing up in Thailand. It was a word completely foreign to him as it did not exist in his native language. In his language, there was only word to describe the ravages of want. That word was 'Suffering'. If a person was hungry and had no food, he was said to be suffering from lack of food, and his suffering was addressed by helping him find food. If a person had no shelter, he was said to be suffering from lack of shelter, and this kind of suffering was addressed by helping him create a shelter. Every kind of suffering was addressed by a solution directly related to the issue at hand. The nature of the language drew

attention to the direct cause of the suffering, and an exact pathway for those who felt the immediate and compelling need to alleviate the suffering of a fellow human being.

But at 9 years old, the speaker was confronted with this new concept of Poverty. A concept in which Poverty meant the absence of money. Therefore, a person who had no money was said to be poor. And a poor person had to find a way to get more money to get out of being poor. With such a concept, it means that all efforts would be put towards helping "the poor" get more money, in the belief that this would alleviate their suffering.

To achieve this, millions of people leave their homes and farms in small towns and villages across the world and move to big cities where they are told they can find money. And they indeed do find money. They have more money than before but they also have greater suffering. In the cities, they no longer have the ability to provide anything for themselves without money. Worse yet, they are beholden to others if they wish to have money. They cannot eat without money. They have no shelter without money. They can do absolutely nothing without money. So, money becomes their cruel task master and they must become enslaved by it. Most soon forget that there was a time when they could eat what they grew on a small patch of earth or put up a dignified, if simple, shelter to live in. They could bathe in a river and breathe fresh air. They could forage for food in a forest or fish in a stream. They could pick wild flowers and eat wild fruit. In short, they could live a life worthy of a human being without any money. But this new concept of poverty dictates that they must have money, so they remain enslaved.

As the lecture went on, I came to understand that true poverty is the inability to provide for oneself from the abundance of the earth, i.e. the loss of the skills and knowledge necessary to grow our own food, create our own shelter and provide for life's essential needs. These basic skills which are systematically being stripped away from all of mankind are the true riches which we already have and desperately need to hold on to. These are the riches that ensure that we are

never at the mercy of others who may abuse their power over us. These are the riches which keep us connected to nature and its bounties. They serve to remind us how truly blessed we are. These are the riches that cause us to fall to our knees in gratitude to the All Wise Creator for His boundless gifts to us.

Soon the lecture was over, and a song came on the radio. The singer was a socially conscious young man who, in denouncing the ills of society, was singing about the plight of people who are homeless and dying because they are unemployed.

Unemployed! I marveled at the insanity of it. How did we human beings become so blind? I imagined one undergoing a review of their life upon departing this earth after a long period of degraded homelessness. The question being asked of the spirit was this:

So, are you saying that there was not a single patch of the entire earth upon which you could have grown food, put up a simple shelter and lived in dignity?

I thought about my own life. I too live here in the city. I am employed. I have enough money and I am not homeless. Yet I realize that I too am enslaved by this concept of poverty. I too have voluntarily given up, or allowed my God given riches to be stolen from me. At that thought, I made a commitment to myself to spare no effort in regaining the skills and knowledge that I have lost and to release myself from the slavery of poverty.

Are you also enslaved? You too can free yourself when you are ready. Let us give thanks to the Almighty Creator who allows us to learn from so many different channels. 'All Creation bears a witness of His Love'

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Credits:
Jon Jandai – Lecturer
Stevie Wonder - quote