

LLF Book Summary The Theft of the Spirit

I. The Theft of the Spirit

Carl A. Hammerschlag, M.D.
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II. Summary

With the progression towards high tech and high speed communications, we are losing important aspects of our humanity. When we base our value system on material worth, we place our dreams in danger. Carl Hammerschlag describes several stories which depict acts of the human spirit.

Through his use of traditional native American rites, traditions, and the science of psychoneuroimmunology**, he shows us that the meaning in life is not to be found in our immersion in technology and dependence on things. It's time we dig inside of ourselves to rediscover why life is worth living.

When humans are put in situations that are 'out of their control' – often it is when their spirit that carries them through. The spirit is not a thing that can be acutely described, but more of an idea of the potential of what any human can become through believing in their dreams and listening to their one's inner voices. Its about taking your current situation in life what ever that may be and making the best of it. Its not mere optimism- looking at the glass half full. It's saying to hell with the glass- there is a world of possibility out there- I am not going to try to confine the wonderous possibilities into such a confined space. Its truly analyzing the meaning behind living every day. Its focusing on each moment and making that moment count.

III. Themes (Main Points)

Rituals invest or life with meaning- Dr. Hammerschlag states that rituals help to guide us through difficult times in our lives by anchoring us in our spritual truths. Rituals broaden our perspective and at the same time allow us the opportunity to reflect. Rituals set aside the time for open thought and expression (pg 26-7).

There is more to what we know than what we see/what we think we know does not often prove true – 86, 105, 115 Many times, you hear only what you think/or want to hear. Lose what you know, or rather, what you think you know to be certain. The quote on page 105 says it best "If you have to be sure about what you are experiencing in the moment, you'll always subordinate the reality of the present to the reality of the past."

Human potential- Dr. Hammerschlag is inherently posing the question of finding meaning in life and tapping in to the human potential. The story about the blind man hiking the Appalachian Trail. What many people think is impossible, humans have accomplished. "Most of us minimize our choices by accepting somebody else's definition of what's possible or probable. The result is that other people's probabilities become out only possibilities.

The secret of life is sneakers- keep moving, keep active, set goals and achieve them, keep following your dreams. Your immune system is directly affected by movement and your attitude- the more you move, the more you regulate your system, the healthier you are. If you have a depressed outlook, you are more susceptible to disease, if you have a positive outlook, you are less susceptible to disease.

Control/Will to survive/Overcoming obstacles- The world is bigger than ourselves. We like to think that we have everything in our control. When we lose this sense of control- what do we have left to carry us through? Our spirit, our will- the drive to survive no matter what obstacles are thrown your way. Many stories talk about these topics including the story on pg 31 about the parents speaking about their unborn blind child.

IV. LLF Integrating Themes:

- Potential/Skills/Competencies/Capacities
- spiritual base
- Holistic
- Introspection/Discovery/Reflection
- Balance
- Empowerment
- cultural/history/wisdom carrying value of stories
- Synergy
- Circumstance, self-determined or God/fate

V. Quotes

"A culture that upholds material wealth and technology as its only sustaining values worships death and stagnation. A culture that allows violence, materialism, and technology to determine its priorities devalues life and the spirit, and leaves no room for mystery, dreams, and growth (pg 21)."

"Without any cultural or political guides who inspire trust, our perceptions of reality are created by sales professionals (pg 25)."

"Most of us look at what we already know, although what is most important to look at is what we often choose not to see (pg 29)."

"It is in the pursuing of our dreams, of being something more than what we are, that we are reminded of the power in our spirit (pg 34)."

"Take the journey- it doesn't matter what you experience- only that you confront your reality (pg 45)."

"The safety of the known, which only leads to boredom, stifles the experience of life (pg 50)."

"Most of us scale down our dreams to the size of our fears until our vision becomes so tunneled we see darkness everywhere (pg 100)."

"When we subordinate what's right to 'the rules' we show disdain for humanity (pg 122)."

"If you discard your garbage, a tree can grow through it (pg 131)."

"What we truly know is only what we experience in the moment (pg 158)."

VI. What I've Learned/My thoughts

I think what Dr. Hammerschlag is trying to tell us is that humans have for centuries survived- their spirit has carried them through. But the age of convenience is robbing us of the strength to tap into the human potential. We rely on things to put meaning in our lives, we require pills to cure us of our ills. I found this book humbling- reading the stories help to put my life in perspective- reading after a day at work where maybe things didn't go so well- you feel so silly for getting down about something when you read about others who have had it so much worse. The book made me think of Viktor Frankl's Man's search for Meaning- which is actually mentioned in the book. The book also made me pull out a book called Black Elk Speaks. It is a book about the Oglala Sioux in the late 1800s, when their society was destroyed by the 'Wasichu's.' Both stories help to elucidate the points made by Hammerschlag about the human spirit. I highly recommend both books for further reading on the subject.

****mind/body as an integrated circuit**