

**The Sum of All Our
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Feb 15, 2009
Syracuse, NY**

My brother Peter loves E-Bay. He finds all kinds of things to sell and it amazes me how much cash one can make when our, no longer to be treasured junk, is viewed by hundreds rather than pawed over by the few who attend the local yard sales. Several years ago he posted his old Buick Century on E-Bay for \$200.00. It still ran, the seats looked exactly like a herd of six year olds had resided on them with a case of corn curls for at least a year. The deep blue paint was flecked all the way back to the primer and it had its share of dings and dents, but it ran, not well, but it would start right up and chug its way down the street, nearly always getting Peter to where he wanted to go. But it was time to bid it adieu so he posted it on E-bay and waited. There were no takers, not a single one. So Pete had an idea and began to take apart his car. First he removed the whole bumper assembly and posted that. Immediately a response brought him \$150.00. Then came the taillights at \$75.00 each, then the steering wheel and directional assembly, the headlights and all other removable parts including the juice stained, crumb laden seats! They all went quickly until there was nothing left but the chassis. I'm not sure what the final total was but in the end the car he could not sell intact was far more valuable when it was sold in pieces.

At the same time that summer a young man named Nathan Wright of Des Moines, Iowa offered up his soul on E-Bay.

By the time the bidding had reached \$5.50 the web site pulled his submission claiming that a soul was an intangible thing and could not be sold. Wright contested their argument claiming that he had packed it into a small glass jar that used to contain fudge, labeled it and even enclosed a photograph.

E-Bay wouldn't budge on their assessment so Wright shifted his "soul" to Yahoo and sold it for \$31.00 plus \$15.00 for shipping and handling. The buyer was a man named Bill Thiederman, a Quaker, who e-mailed Wright back and asked him if his soul had any "special needs or concerns." Thiederman and his wife are planning a trip to Europe and he planed to take the "soul" with him. He intended to send photographs back to Wright so he could see what his soul is doing!

This little controversy struck a cord in me. I remembered reading that the human body, due to its abundance on this planet was worth about \$98.00. With the population increase and the state of the economy I can image it is now worth much less. However, surgically replaceable human body parts are sold on the black market for thousands. We always thought of the human soul as being without form or monetary value .. One would think if we could pry the soul apart from its human container, the true, authentic essence of another human being, it would be worth billions. Yet on Yahoo, a "soul" in a labeled, washed out, fudge jar sold for a mere \$46.00 including shipping and handling! But compared to the going market value of a whole human being, Nathan Wright's immortal soul was, like Peter's car, certainly worth more in pieces than the blue book value of the whole.

There was a time not too long ago, when the human soul, even in joking, would never be put up for sale.

The human soul was that unique and sacred part of us that housed the essence our morals and values, our deep inner selves that encompassed our prejudices and kindnesses, that embodied what we really thought and believed about everything. Fictional stories of the worst that could befall another was the selling of our souls to the devil for fame or power, which meant trading our spot in the celestial wonderland for the boiling caverns of eternal misery. But it was never simply for sale, for giving it up meant the selling out of our whole self. I was intrigued by this story, for it has epitomized the way in which we have come to think about our own worth. We are seldom seen as whole complete people but, more as isolated bits and pieces that are known to those we associate with in each of the components of our existence. Let me explain. One can almost compare the soul dilemma to the evolution of the country doctor of yesterday, into the specialist of today.

In days past the country doctor knew us, as a whole person, in our work lives and home lives, as parents and children as extended families and a part of a close community.

They saw our dark days and our good ones and were very much a part of our lives. They treated all our wounds, maybe in a less than ideal technological fashion, but they cared for all of us and more importantly, they really knew us. Today one does not make one doctors visit. Our primary care physician does not sit down to Sunday dinner with us, or treat the children and the elders, or even know them for that matter. He or she evaluates our segments and for each area of concern we have a specialist whose job it is to see a lung, a heart, a mind or bones, limbs or blood. Granted we live longer and healthier but to do that, our whole tangible being has been categorized as inventory into a mere collection of body parts. In our working lives, that can also apply. Jobs have become so specialized that we become known only for our titles and specialties in that one aspect of our functional living;

not as whole people with other interests and talents, with families and friends. Seldom are we really known anywhere, anymore for who we are and what we have fully become. The human soul as well, like the rest of us has also become just another part, to be picked out from the rest bottled and shipped to Los Angeles! The more I thought about the effect that this interesting phenomenon has had on us, the more our general sense of unrest is beginning to make sense. With so many parts of our lives so fragmented and detached, in every direction, our identity as whole and complete human beings has become seriously if not permanently clouded. There is a story that I remember as a child. It was told by my Sunday school teacher and today I understand why she told it.

" A wise old man came across a large box that had been left on the sidewalk in front of his hut. When he opened it, it contained many pieces of a puzzle. The children of the village saw the box and set upon him. They began to grab handfuls of pieces and one by one they ran off. The children took the pieces home to study them as they had never seen a puzzle before and tried different combinations of attaching the pieces to one another, but to no avail, nothing fit together or made any sense.

Finally in desperation the children went back to the wise old man and asked him what to do. "Bring all your pieces to me" he said, "and we will try and put it all together." Slowly the puzzle began to take shape. Each child added their pieces until the puzzle was completed. "There are words on the puzzle ... what does it say" asked the youngest, "what does it mean asked the oldest?" The wise old man smiled and read the words on the finished puzzle, "scatter these pieces away and you will have nothing. Put them together and you will understand that the whole means so much more than the sum of the parts."

The children thought about that and the youngest looked up and said to the wise old man, "If I took just one piece of the puzzle away, it would never be whole would it?" No said the Wiseman, " if I were to take from you your laughter or your sadness, or your love for animals, or your thoughts, you would stop being you and would loose your way." How would I find myself again he asked?" "Ah," said the wise man, by never letting go of your very soul, for that is the part of you that keeps all the pieces of you, very close together." We are the sum of our parts. Keeping them all together is not easy. We are identified in too many ways, in too many categories. We are sliced and diced, examined and judged in our work life, our home life and in our play life for what we can and can't do, whether we are healthy or sick, wealthy or middle class, poor or smart, gay or straight. human soul, all the bits and pieces of who we are all gathered together, cannot be divided in so many diverse ways and still maintain within-us any sense of self truth about who we really are deep down inside. True, technology has done a great deal to make our lives more efficient, but the cost of that impersonal efficiency has left many suffering from modern ailments attributed directly to this splitting up of the of the self. In response Science has in turn developed pharmaceutical remedies that allow us to continue to exist and function in that way.

Never before have so many depended upon medications just to get through each day, to keep the blood pressure down, bad cholesterol in check, emotions even and heartbeats regular, myself included!

This high speed, compartmentalized and fragmented living seems to have slowly dislodged our souls as well. Getting them back intact is only half the battle.

The other half is just in realizing that this is happening to many of us and just how much we have come to miss being treated as whole and complete human beings. Like finding that the pieces of the old mans puzzle can be put back together, but it takes time and an understanding to gather them all up and the patience to put them back together.

I apologize for getting so philosophical, it is not always helpful, but how can one speak of the sale of auto parts and the human soul in the same breath without falling into that trap! However, I was pleased that my brother was clever enough to realize that a car is a thing, an object whose value is convenience as transportation and monetary as it is disassembled and sold. But the human soul, as comical as the sale of soul in a glass jar may be, is symbolic of how fragmented many feel and the soul being the most crucial part of us has suffered from our need to divide all the parts of us into specialized categories A that can be pulled out and put away as our environment changes. Yes we are the sum of our parts True we are made healthy by the miracles that medicine, convenience and efficient technologies have created. We are conversely sickened by having too much of us judged, examined and extracted from the rest.

I would like to close with the words by Thomas Moore

“To the soul, memory is more important than planning, art more compelling than reason, and love more fulfilling than understanding. We know we are well on the way toward soul when we feel attachment to the world and the people around. us and when we live as much from the heart as from the head.

We know soul is being cared for when our pleasures feel deeper than usual, when we can let go of the need to be free of complexity and confusion, and when compassion takes the place of distrust and fear. Soul is interested in the differences among cultures and individuals, and within our- selves it wants to be expressed in uniqueness if not in outright eccentricity.”

By caring for the soul faithfully, every day, we step out of the way and let our full genius emerge.”

So be it

Namaste,

Amen

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