

SPARK 094

(Matrix Code: **SPARK094.00** for StartOver.xyz game.)

DISTINCTION: There is no such thing as profit. In a closed system all costs are eventually revealed.

NOTES: The profit motive is presently one of the strongest behavior-shaping forces in Western civilization. If an action appears to be profitable, that action will often be taken – both by individuals and by corporations – regardless of the consequences and even if it makes no sense in any other value system. It may be time to ask the question what is profit really?

Profit is the idea that you can get more out than you put in. The conviction that you can win something for nothing comes from looking at an incomplete picture. Profit looks possible only when part of the equation is missing. When you step back and examine the entire scene profit is revealed as a pyramid scheme where you have to get in early to make your “killing” or you will be one of the stupid suckers who pays for everybody else’s fun. Profit is no more real than a perpetual motion machine. Profit sells itself through sleight-of-hand tricks that disguise hidden costs. In a closed system all costs are eventually revealed. The Earth is a closed system.

Think of a refrigerator. Profit is the view that you can open the refrigerator door to cool down the kitchen. At first glance it appears to work that way. But it does not work that way. When you examine the bigger picture you find that on the back or bottom of a refrigerator is a radiator that gives off heat. Due to inescapable conversion inefficiencies a refrigerator will always generate more heat than coolness. If you leave the refrigerator door open the kitchen gets warmer not cooler. No matter how clever you are you cannot profit without somebody somewhere losing *more* than you win. Profit without a greater cost does not exist.

Did you ever wish that you could win the lottery? Winning the lottery seems like getting a lot almost for free. If you do happen to win the lottery, you win because millions of other people lose. And you win *less* than all the other people pay because the house takes its percentage off the top. If an illegal Malaysian logging company cutting roads through virgin Borneo rainforest buys a tractor from China to replace 100 Indonesian workers, who profits? And what do the 100 Indonesians do?

The game of making profit includes the unspoken strategy of tricking somebody else into paying your hidden costs. For example, if you can outsource work into a third-world economy and replace local expensive labor with cheap foreign labor, this is generally accepted as smart. What could be the hidden cost? Hidden costs can be hard to see at first – that is why they are called “hidden.” They may arise in a completely different arena or even a different time than the “profit” is taken. Gaining profit by taking advantage of cheap third-world labor ignores the fact that there is actually only one world. Cheating your neighbors out of fair wages does not make for peaceful relations with your neighbors. We are starting to see this cost.

If you buy a fast-food hamburger made of beef grown in South America or beef fed on South American soy beans, then you are paying South American farmers to burn more rainforest. In this way you are directly responsible for global warming. If you and I ate somewhere else the fast-food chain would be gone in a month. We live in a responsible universe. Irresponsibility is an illusion.

EXPERIMENTS:

SPARK094.01 The concept of profit is so deeply entwined in conventional Western thinking that extricating yourself from its assumptions can feel quite strange. Fifty years ago this consideration would have seemed fanatical. There would be no apparent value in trying to understand profit more holistically. Today, the impact of pursuing profit is global. By not considering who pays hidden costs we are changing Earth's climate in a way that could quickly devastate civilization as we know it. Pollution, social inequities, radioactive waste, overpopulation, Aids, monoculture, deforestation, electro smog, terrorism and so on all become negligible in comparison to the swift and catastrophic destruction that could arise from global warming. Still, mainstream Western culture gives no sign of letting up its insatiable scramble to maximize profits. Hidden costs can only be ignored until consequence arrives. The fact that society does not call you to change does not decrease your responsibility for promoting the culture's neurosis.

If you would like to do an experiment take a moment to honestly answer these questions: What do you really get by making profit your highest motive? Acceptance? Respect? What is your benefit? Security? Prestige? Comforts? What are you really trying to accomplish? Immortality? If you make a profit, what is the value for you personally? For mankind? For the future of mankind?

If you focus your creative efforts on making profit for its own sake what other experiences are you sacrificing? Intimacy? Community? Stillness? Presence? Is making a profit what you truly want to be doing with the limited time and energy of your life? If not, how much longer will you dedicate yourself to making a profit before you switch to doing what you really want to be doing?

What if the highest value of our culture was not profit? What if the highest value of our culture was beauty, for example? Or singing, or being kind to people, or healing? What difference would there be in your relations? What difference would this make in the decisions of bankers, corporate officers, and political leaders? What would this change in our culture? In our cities? What would this change in your daily life?

These ideas are not so strange. The Massai tribe in Africa traditionally gave the highest value to jumping straight up in the air from standing position for hours on end. In the Hmong hill tribe culture of North Thailand high value was given to hand-sewn needlework with delicate colorful patterns. In France during the last half of the 17th Century formal court dancing had high value. In 18th Century England high value was placed on speaking in rhyming iambic pentameter. These cultures thrived without devoting themselves so thoroughly to profit.

Here is the experiment. Close your eyes for a moment and choose your own highest value, independent of what is chosen for you by our culture. If you had complete freedom of choice, what would you choose for your highest value?

Then plan an experiment of living true to your heart. Commit first, you do not have to know how to actually do it. Plan an action that is a yes for your highest value. Then have a discussion about your new choice tonight with your partner. And tomorrow with a colleague. Could you spend some time tomorrow doing what you really value? What could you do? Who would you do it with? Would they appreciate it if you invited them to do this with you?