

Silent Leaders

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Introduction

We are living through a complicated, dynamic and unstable time in history. Instead of nourishing and sustaining us, our cultural values breed anxiety, discontent, and restlessness. Chronic stress is the baseline state for most people, and our leaders are stretched to the limit. This is reflected in exhaustion, burn-out, and in the nearly impossible dilemma of balancing work and home. Many of our organizations are built on pillars not built to last, and our relationship to time is fundamentally out of balance.

We need leaders in every sector of our society who have the emotional courage and inner clarity to look unflinchingly at the reality of their own lives, and from this point of clarity, examine the institutions that they serve in order to develop a sustainable vision that rebalances and revitalizes. This type of change does not begin with external structures but is initiated from within, because that is the source of innovation and leadership. If we want

our organizations to grow, we must evolve as leaders, finding greater equanimity, balance and vitality in our own lives.

This book speaks to how we can access creativity and innovation more consistently, hone our capacity for vision, sharpen intuition, deepen character, and develop a greater sense of calm. It is an invitation for all of us to awaken our highest potential, and become our best selves.

I wrote this book using the methodology that I explain in this text. I did not plan, strategize, or create an outline. Instead, each time I sat down to write, I dropped into meditation and silence, accessing a quiet voice within.

This narrative, in and of itself, is a meditation, a spiral of sorts, turning in on itself, returning to themes, and then moving back out to reveal another layer. It has been an honor to write.

Chapter 1

*“My dear, here we must run as fast as we can,
just to stay in place. And if you wish to go
anywhere you must run twice as fast as that.”*

— Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

All of existence in the natural world cycles between movement and rest. The in-breath animates the body. The out-breath releases. The sympathetic side of the nervous system stimulates and activates while the parasympathetic allows rest. Many animals and plants hibernate in the winter but then come back with vigor and energy in the early spring. Back and forth, movement and rest, that is the natural cycle. However, most organizations respect only one rhythm, and that rhythm is relentless.

Over the course of my career, I have been highly conscious of the destructive pace of organizational life.

For many of my clients, their days compulsively begin by checking their messages in case something happened while they were sleeping. Meals are eaten mindlessly or not taken at all. Meetings are scheduled back to back, and work/life balance is an inevitable struggle. Conferences are highly orchestrated with the clock serving as the Master of Ceremony. Silence is the Great Enemy. There is a sense that any moment that is not filled with activity is wasted.

When I enter this world, I come away drained and exhausted, knowing in my bones that this unrelenting pace is not good, that something is fundamentally out of balance. Companies run long distance marathons as if they are sprints. How is it possible for the best decisions to be made when an entire senior leadership team is in a state of overdrive?

It is incredibly obvious that we do not see as clearly or problem-solve as easily, get the best out of others or make the best decisions when we are chronically stressed. And yet, when I ask leaders to consider changing their relationship to time and slowing down their pace, many resist the idea with a sense of helplessness that in turn fuels a need to defend the craziness. *This is the pace at which we must work in order to be successful*, they say. Period. End of conversation.

In my experience, senior leaders tend to view the destructive pace of work as a “soft” concern. They see other, more pressing leadership challenges—building

high-performing teams, figuring out the relationship between leadership and strategy, finding and retaining talent, and building an organization that is capable of learning from itself. The importance of downtime, the necessity of creating boundaries between work and home, the need for unstructured hours, and the value of spending time in reflection are considered luxury items in a world that is efficient and pragmatic.

It is not that leaders resist my ideas outright. There is a certain amount of longing for a more forgiving pace. Rather, there is an unspoken sense that what I am asking is simply not within reach, and that I am a bit naive for raising the question. This issue has become much worse as the global economy has ushered in a relationship to time that is completely unhinged.

Globalization has introduced a level of complexity that we have never known before, and the speed at which business is transacted contributes to this. We are moving so fast and with such fury that we have completely lost perspective. Many of us are intolerant, if not downright terrified, of silence.

In the West, many of our leading values are fueled by greed and fear, both of which serve as kindling in our race against time. This pace is outstripping our capacity to keep up. As a result, we see an increase in illness, chronic stress, low-grade depression, ongoing anxiety, disruption of home life, and the loss of spontaneity and joy.

We have become so focused on efficiency and hard work

as a means to achieve an end that we have forgotten that the means is life itself. We wait for a great reward at the end of the tunnel, unaware that this reward is a full-blown illusion. Sometimes a strength must be pushed past its threshold in order to discover its underlying weakness. Driving people relentlessly to get better results no longer serves companies, families, or individuals.

It is clear to me that it is not possible to address the issue of pace by simply coaching clients to better manage the external world—taking vacation time, finding a better system for managing the deluge of email, or setting better boundaries around work and home. Although these things are helpful, they are but small steps against a relentless storm of activity.

The answer is to help leaders find their way to a deeper quiet within so that in the midst of tremendous pressure, they are anchored to a sense of calm. When leaders recognize the value of equanimity within their own lives, they are then in a position to address the insanity that has been normalized around them. We cannot lead what we are not able to live. In this way, a conversation about our relationship to the pace of our organizations is a conversation about our relationship to ourselves.

Most of us make the assumption that the outer world shapes the inner world. We say to ourselves, *I am pretty sure I would be fine if the world would only behave*. But the opposite is true. When we work on our relationship to ourselves, we find greater ease in our relationship to the world around us.

We have all been in the presence of someone who is alert yet peaceful, and, as a result, has tremendous clarity. This catalyzes greater wisdom in others, raising the bar for everyone. We have also been in the presence of a leader whose inner world is tumultuous and murky, creating unrest and contraction among their followers. This is how the interplay of the inner and outer world works.

But there is a deeper and more profound dimension to this interplay and it is this: That the highest form of leadership emanates from our capacity to go inward, and not only tolerate but actually evoke silence. Silence is the great master, the great teacher, the fountainhead of all wisdom.

Yet there is an innate resistance to cultivating a relationship to this hidden place because we know, at some level, that there is an entry price to pay. When most of us are quiet even for a few minutes, we feel anxious and impatient. We start looking for something to do or we seek out a problem to solve. To turn inward requires that we develop some tolerance for sitting through this impatience in order to find our way to the stillness beyond it.

This natural resistance is, in part, the wall that I hit when I encourage people to slow down. Even though a relentless pace creates a certain level of suffering, it also keeps us preoccupied with the surface of our lives. We often resist the inner journey because we are afraid of negative emotions that surface when we are quiet. We are afraid of the problems that arise in our mind that we

feel compelled to face and solve. Most importantly, we are afraid of the prospect of taking full responsibility for our lives.

What if our discontent actually emanates from within us? What if the world around us is largely a creation of our own projections? What if our leadership is challenging not because of the unruly nature of other people, but rather because of our own limitations? Deep down we know that if we face these truths, we will be handed an invitation to initiate change. This is a sobering realization.

But there is a hidden gem at the heart of this struggle. As we reach our personal threshold, no longer able to ignore the suffering that stems from our race against time, we are more willing to do the inner work that is necessary to find equanimity and balance. This creates the possibility of awakening our greatest potential. Although the work of going inward and taking responsibility for oneself is sometimes arduous, it is also liberating. When we do this type of work, we step into our highest capacity as a leader.

We need people who can lead from a place of wisdom, not reaction, and from the wide lens of compassion. We cannot solve the problems we face using the same method that created them. Reaching a place of wisdom means accessing a deeper substratum that lies within us. The cultivation of self-awareness within the context of a deeper silence opens a portal to this substratum.

Knowledge comes from the intellect. Wisdom arises from immediate apprehension or direct perception,

available only in the present and informed by the context of that moment.

To access wisdom more consistently, three significant pieces of inner work are necessary: stabilizing our relationship to the present moment, developing a state of mind that is both relaxed and alert, and working through the aspects of our identity that are in the way. We don't "create" wisdom. Instead, we uncover it. At the heart of the inner journey is the return to this creative stream.

When we work through the layers of identity that block our access to wisdom, we discover the ways in which all humans are the same. We recognize the universality of our desire for happiness, self-worth, a sense of purpose, and love. We realize that everyone struggles with insecurity, fear, shame, and anger. This inevitably guides us to a deep and abiding humility, born out of an understanding of our own true nature. With this as a point of departure, we find the doorway to a leadership that is truly transformative.

The crisis of stress that threatens many individuals and organizations has the potential to fuel our resolve to begin—or deepen—this journey. A balanced and peaceful mind is the key to a happy life, relaxing our relationship to the world around us. Once we achieve this as a baseline, disturbances that do arise come and go relatively quickly. We begin to live with a greater sense of ease and with more joy. This is the pearl embedded in the oyster shell that we can find if we change our insane relationship to time.

Chapter 2

*You go from village to village on your horse
asking everyone, "Has anyone seen my horse?"*

— Rumi

My cat's name is Rah. He appeared one day on our windowsill insisting, through his incessant howl, that we open the door. He never left. Like most felines, he saunters around with little or no anxiety, except when he hunts. He is an incredible hunter, capable of jumping six feet into the air to pick off a hummingbird. His state changes quickly—one minute his body is relaxed, open, and fluid. Suddenly, his eyes narrow and his body grows taut and still. He focuses intensely until he pounces. Once the hunt is over his gaze softens, and he returns to a relaxed state.

The ideal default state for living and working is one in which we are relaxed, open, and alert, like Rah when he

is not hunting. When this is so, our gaze is soft, attention is diffuse, and our focus is wide open, accessing peripheral vision. When needed, we can adopt a sense of urgency, narrowing our gaze and focusing our attention. Ideally, once a sense of urgency is over, we return to a relaxed and present frame of mind.

Most leaders are in the state of the hunt all of the time—a condition of urgency and tension. When this is the case, the body is continually bathed in adrenaline and cortisol. There is an increase in heart and respiratory rates, an engagement of the fight/flight response, and a suppression of the systems in the body that are not needed for emergency such as immune and digestive function. The eyes are tense, the attention stream is narrow, and peripheral vision is minimized. This is helpful for certain kinds of tasks such as Rah's hunt, when proofreading a text, or in the midst of a crisis. But if this is our baseline state throughout the day, then we are in a chronic state of stress.

Stress is not innately negative, and, in fact, often stimulates creativity and pushes us to a higher level of performance. However, peak performance is reached and sustained through a pattern of increased stress followed by a return to a relaxed and open state. This is beautifully illustrated by the method for building muscle in which weight lifting is paired with a day of rest. Working and living in a chronic state of stress is like bench pressing all the time. It is addictive, takes a toll on our health,

and makes it less likely that we can act from our highest intentions.

As authors Les Fehmi and Jim Robbins describe in their book *The Open Focus Brain*, “Evolution provided humans with this narrow beam of attention to respond, in the short run, to urgent or important external situations. There’s nothing inherently wrong with it; in fact, one reason it is overused is precisely because it is so helpful and allows us, in the short run, to accomplish so much. What’s wrong is our near-complete dependence on it and addiction to it.”

How we attend to the world is so fundamental that most of us never consider it. We simply pay attention in a relatively mindless and habitual way. Yet the quality of our attention shapes our relationship to the world, ourselves, and those we love.

A sense of urgency is highly valued in most organizations, something that leaders aspire to and try to evoke in those they lead. However, we do not have to be in a chronic state of stress in order to have a sense of urgency. We can work with purpose and efficiency while maintaining a baseline state of alert relaxation.

In a July 2014 article in *The New York Times*, author K. Murphy described our culture this way: “Ask people at a social gathering how they are and the stock answer is ‘super busy,’ ‘crazy busy’ or ‘insanely busy.’ Nobody is just ‘fine’ anymore. When people aren’t super busy at work,

they are crazy busy exercising, entertaining or taking their kids to Chinese lessons. Or maybe they are insanely busy playing fantasy football, tracing their genealogy or churning their own butter. And if there is ever a still moment for reflective thought—say, while waiting in line at the grocery store or sitting in traffic—out comes the mobile device.”

One of the most prominent features of the Western world is our addiction to activity. This has become so ubiquitous that most of us take the speed at which we are living and its progeny—stress—for granted. At some level, we know it isn’t “good for us” and yet, like most addictions, most of us have to hit the proverbial wall before we have any motivation to slow down.

Many of us refuse to address the rapid pace of our lives because we assume that it is a critical component of our success. We associate working hard with a relentless pace. We assume that the alternative is to be unproductive, unmotivated, and, well, uninteresting. After all, aren’t we the sum of our activities?

Many of us build our identity around all that we do. At first glance, this seems rational enough but in truth, there is no relationship between complexity and pace, hard work and stress. Nor does constant activity deliver us into the hands of what we are often striving for—fulfillment, self-worth, and a sense that our life has been well lived. It is hard to know this, however, when our entire culture appears to be on steroids.

In *Passage Meditation* the writer Eknath Easwaran describes his arrival in the United States from India this way: “When I came to America on the Fulbright exchange program many years ago, my friends warned me about the pace of life I would find here. I had never been out of India and was used to the leisurely gait of the village, so I listened politely but without much understanding.

“I sailed the Atlantic and arrived in New York City—I just couldn’t believe my eyes! As I stepped from the harbor into the city, I saw people with briefcases and bulky shopping bags scurrying along the sidewalks. Men were pushing huge racks of clothes on wheels and dragging carts of food through the streets, and everyone seemed to be in a terrible hurry.

“A few days later I experienced a freeway for the first time, and again I was stunned. The cars tore by, and for a moment I thought there must be a race in progress. I couldn’t imagine why all those people were going sixty or seventy miles per hour. I had to admit, sadly, that my friends in India certainly knew what they were talking about.

“I then made my first decision in this country: no one is going to make me run. I will walk, I said to myself, at the same old bullock-cart pace of three miles per hour—in an emergency, four. I will keep the sensible and life-prolonging pace that prevails in rural areas around the world.

“People say that modern life has grown so complicated,

so busy, so crowded that we have to hurry even to survive. We need not accept that idea. It is quite possible to live in the midst of a highly developed technological society and keep an easy, relaxed pace while doing a lot of hard work.”

So how do we do this? How do we work hard while remaining relaxed and quiet within?

For most of us, the world is the puppeteer and we are the puppet. We rely on the external world to bring us a sense of inner contentment. If we are engaged in an activity we enjoy, we are happy. If someone reacts to us with irrational anger, we feel distress. We assume that the font of our well-being comes from the world around us despite evidence to the contrary. We all know people who have a seemingly charmed life with access to extraordinary resources and endless pleasure but are not content. We have also met people who have difficult lives and access to almost no resources at all who are full of gratitude and genuinely happy.

In his brilliant work *Ethics in a New Millennium*, the Dalai Lama postulates that the most basic truth which binds all humans together is our shared wish to be happy and to avoid suffering. He notes that this desire knows no bounds and that everything that we do, both as individuals and at the level of society, can be understood in terms of this fundamental aspiration. It is in our nature to search for happiness, a longing within the heart of every human being. Our addiction to activity is, in part, a misguided effort to meet this longing.

Changing our relationship to time begins with questioning our assumption that it is the world around us that fuels our content or discontent. For most of us, our internal world is background and the world around us is foreground. We take our internal states for granted, assuming that they are driven by what is happening to us externally. *Am I stressed out? Of course, because the world is demanding so much from me. Am I angry? Yes, because that car just cut me off.*

While most of us nod our head in agreement when we hear the notion that “happiness is found within,” we actually don’t buy this. And it keeps us on the treadmill, running toward some future happiness, and chasing empty values such as the pursuit of wealth, power, pleasure or upward mobility.

Change begins with our willingness to question this most basic assumption. It is not necessary to buy into the belief that the reverse is true, that the way we experience the external world is primarily dependent upon our inner world. But we do have to be willing to suspend our disbelief that this is so.

When we begin to question this assumption, a profound shift takes place—it becomes possible to take full responsibility for our lives. If my well-being is dependent upon my marriage or my job or my ability to access resources or whether or not I am feeling creative or the happiness of my children then I will be intently focused on these things, happy when things are going well, and distressed when

they are not. But if my happiness is not determined by any of these things but rather comes from within, then I am suddenly in the driver’s seat, no longer tossed around by the fluky external world.

Turning my attention inward, I discover that irritation, anger, frustration, boredom, sadness or chronic stress is not created by the world around me. The world may put certain demands or restraints on me, but that does not determine my reaction to it. You do not *make* me mad. You may provoke the anger that is within me, but that is altogether different.

I once found myself in conflict with my husband in a way that demonstrates this point. We were in the midst of a renovation and had ordered some furniture to be delivered close to our completion date. The project was taking longer than we anticipated, and that date was pushed back.

However, I neglected to call the furniture company to let them know that we needed to reschedule. When I received notice that the furniture was on its way, I realized my mistake and shared this with my husband. He became unusually angry, anticipating the challenges that this would bring in its wake. The strength of his reaction seemed larger than the crime. I was hurt, and felt angry in return.

For a short while, both of us huffed around with feelings of self-righteousness. Later in the day, I had a chance to quiet my mind, and turned my attention within where I found my familiar overreaction toward anything I

perceive as unjust. The intensity of my husband's reaction did not seem fair. So I sat and stared at this for awhile.

I then discovered that underneath that sense of injustice was shame because an oversight on my part would create hardship for my husband. And underneath the shame? Pride. His anger hurt my pride. So I sat and looked at my pride for a bit, not knowing what to do about it. And after I had sat with this for a while longer, I eventually lost interest. By shifting my attention from my husband to me, I had refrained from nursing any further negativity, softened my ill feelings toward my husband, and, inadvertently, strengthened humility.

This is the starting point, the recognition that by addressing our inner world, we are eventually nourished by it. When we begin to live like this, we discover true freedom.

As author Don Riso writes in *Understanding the Enneagram*, "We are like prisoners in an unguarded cell. No one confines us against our will, and we have heard that the key that will release us is also locked inside. If we could find the key, we could open the door. This is not a meaningless metaphor: we are prisoners of our ego, enchained by our fears, restricted in our freedom, suffering from our condition. No one prevents us from searching for the key that would free us. We must, however, know where to look for it and be willing to use it once we have found it."

This is how we can begin to address chronic stress, and its common side effects of anxiety and low-grade

depression. Instead of seeking a solution solely in the external world, we turn our attention inward where, instead of resisting these chronic conditions, we simply bring them into our field of awareness where we can eventually let them go, because where we place our attention actually supports the process of change.

The highest form of leadership works in sync with human nature. To harness the power of human nature, leaders must be willing to delve into their own. We can look at the unsustainable pace of our organizations as an invitation to bring a greater sense of equanimity to our leadership, allowing for greater clarity in all that we do. This begins with self-inquiry, a willingness to set aside time in order to bring the inner world into the foreground while allowing the outer world to recede.

This inquiry does not mean analyzing why we are the way we are (although insights of this kind may arise) but rather involves bringing our awareness to our habits of mind, attention, and emotion. As opposed to striving towards equanimity, which, paradoxically, increases our sense of internal pressure, we pull our attention off the external world to go within ourselves in order to see what we may find.

The key to our freedom is, indeed, found within, and when we take full responsibility for our life, placing our attention on our inner world, we eventually align more consistently with the highest virtues of humanity—humility, generosity, compassion, courage, equanimity, joy, innocence, and true service.

In the face of the demands on our lives, many of us question whether we can afford the luxury of introspection. For some, turning inward feels self-indulgent, stealing time and attention away from those for whom we are responsible. However, the great paradox of going within is that it eventually leads us back out into the world with a much deeper capacity for true service.

How is this so?

In our search for happiness, most of us are preoccupied with our own well-being. *Am I going to get the window seat on the plane? Is that other car going to beat me to that prime parking space? Will there still be chocolate chip cookies when I reach the end of the buffet line?* This is a primary source of suffering as nothing is more painful than living within the confines of our self-preoccupation. The cranky, congested, miserable quality of Scrooge (before the Christmas ghosts appear) in *A Christmas Carol* is the archetype of what happens when a life turns in on itself, becoming fundamentally self-serving.

An orientation to service is at the center of any leadership worth its salt. A core leadership competency centers around our ability to put the good of our organization above our individual needs. This is a significant part of the trust upon which good leadership is built. We can identify leaders who are driven by greed or self-serving ambition by the extensive damage they leave in their wake. We do not trust leaders who are fundamentally self-serving. We can

also identify leaders whom we implicitly trust, because we sense that their highest intent is for a larger good.

However, leadership is on a continuum, and most of us are not primarily self-serving nor consistently in service of something beyond ourselves. While we may intend to serve our organizations selflessly and with relative objectivity, there are inevitably times when our ego creeps in, deflecting our attention from those around us, from our organization's mission, or from a higher truth because we are drawn toward something that has to do with our own well-being.

For example, all of us have witnessed meetings in which something is being passionately debated. However, everyone is aware that the conversation that is underway is not in service of a search for truth but rather is a power struggle between two people. Or we have had the experience of not respecting another person, and having this impede our ability to objectively receive his or her point or view. Or we have made a decision that has not actually served the larger good because it was based upon a deep sense of loyalty to another person.

The ego is subtle and often hidden. Even when it is our true intent to serve our organization, our desire for well-being is a powerful drive, often usurping our ability to live up to our highest values.

Paradoxically, when we free ourselves from the constraint of our very human preoccupation with our own well-being, we actually suffer less. As Scrooge discovers

in his journey from greed and selfishness to generosity and gratitude, serving others brings us the happiness that we long for.

In order to serve with greater purity, we need to develop moment-to-moment self-awareness, facing those parts of ourselves that we wish were not so. Existence is dual in nature—light defines dark, good defines evil, love defines hate—and we carry this duality within us.

It is often easier to see the darker side of human nature in others or in the world around us because it is painful to face this in ourselves. For this reason, inner work requires a certain kind of courage. When we go deep enough within, we discover this unsettling duality. This exposes the way that all humans are the same, giving birth to a genuine humility.

True service is essentially the outward expression of an inner reorientation. As we work with our potent inner world, we develop the capacity to witness the subtle and slippery quality of our ego. We learn that all of our thoughts and actions, no matter how seemingly insignificant, have an impact on the world around us. We discover the multiple permutations of fear, anger, and shame within ourselves, which allows us to recognize how these emotions both impact and drive the people around us. This recognition opens up the possibility for true compassion. We discover the myth of the Highly Objective Organization that attempts to purge itself of the messiness of human emotion by pretending that they don't exist.

The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once said we are more afraid of the truth than death. But this does not have to be so. Once we commit ourselves to this kind of inner work, we eventually get stronger. The truth about ourselves ultimately becomes liberating, even when frightening, and in the process we loosen the grip of the self-serving ego. This brings us closer to true service and, in turn, true happiness.

Given the state of our organizations, and the need for a leadership that can find creative solutions to the inordinate pressures bearing down on them, we cannot afford to view inner work as a luxury item. Naval-gazing for its own sake may be a form of self-indulgence. Naval-gazing for the sake of leading and serving others with greater purity and more consistency is a pathway to a better world.

Chapter 3

“Humanity without clarity is like having a field but not plowing it. Clarity without courage is like having sprouts but not weeding. Courage without humanity is like knowing how to reap but not how to sow.”

— Thomas Cleary, *Zen Lessons: The Art of Leadership*

Several years ago, I visited a monastery that stood outside of time. To get there, I drove for several hours on a bumpy single lane highway through untouched wilderness. Turning down a deeply rutted road, I drove for another fifteen miles into exquisite beauty. When I stepped out of my car, the silence was deafening because it was so vast.

I made my way up to the main building and found a small gift shop. Sitting on a stool in the corner of the

shop was a petite old man with crystal clear, intelligent, humorous eyes. He watched me with kindness as I moved about the store, welcoming me without saying a word.

Eventually, I walked over and spoke to him, and he immediately broke out into a smile that took over his face. His countenance was so kind and humble that it left a lasting impression on me. In my mind’s eye, he became a reference point for that rare combination of presence and humility, alertness and tranquility. His mind was sharp and clear, and he was centered in the kindness of his heart.

A decade ago, I had a similar experience with a senior corporate leader. He had contacted my business partner and I to talk about the development of one of his people. When we arrived for our meeting, he was prompt but not rushed. The atmosphere in his office was relaxed and focused. His demeanor was kind and humble. He had the rare capacity to not only listen but to also receive. We spoke for an hour, and in that time he never referenced himself. Despite the relaxed pace of our meeting, we ended precisely on the hour, having covered all ground needed to move forward. He was so humble that it was easy to overlook how extraordinary he was. He was living evidence that it is possible to work in a corporate environment and maintain a sense of calm, genuine humility, and efficiency.

Humility is the mother of tranquility. We are humble when there is no longer anything within us that we need to defend, having accepted and integrated all the parts of ourselves.

Defensiveness is the mother of anxiety. It sometimes appears in the form of arrogance, which is a compensation for insecurity. It may show up as a tendency to skate on the surface of our lives with addiction, habits which are numbing, blame, and deflection. It may appear as an unwillingness to be vulnerable, an inability to admit mistakes or acknowledge personal weakness, or a tendency to bully others.

Sometimes defensiveness shows up in a passive way, such as an unwillingness to engage in life, a tendency to see oneself as a victim, or exhibiting an underlying anger at existence itself cloaked in the guise of cynicism. At the heart of our defensiveness is an intolerance of negative emotion, a desire to keep our hard-won sense of identity intact, and a fear of change, the unknown, and our own dark nature.

Maintaining a frenetic pace is also a defensive distraction, although this can be difficult to recognize nowadays because it is so ubiquitous. We know this because when we go inward and begin to quiet the mind we usually hit the first line of defense, a warning bell in the guise of restlessness, boredom, anxiety, or uneasiness. When discomfort arises we tend to pop back up to the surface because it is our natural inclination to pull away from any kind of negativity. This is why stillness can be so intolerable. So we turn back to the world for comfort, searching for some form of distraction, assuming that we feel uncomfortable because we have left the trough of good things in the outer world.

Driven by our innate desire for happiness, why would we go inward to face this discomfort? This is the heart of our conundrum. We so long for inner peace and a lasting sense of happiness. But in order to achieve this we have to go to the source of true happiness. At the gateway stands our dual nature. This means we have to learn to stand in the face of whatever arises, both the good and the bad, turning toward uncomfortable feelings instead of running from them, an act that often seems counter-intuitive and requires courage.

My work with Sara, a senior leader in a management consulting firm, illustrates this point. Recently, she found herself at the gateway of this duality, and had the courage to not turn away. Sara is a gifted executive, with high intelligence and a font of creativity which colors her sense of humor. Her commitment to her company is extraordinary, paid at the price of an eighty-hour work week, and unrelenting stress. Her output is so high, she will have to be replaced by multiple people. A significant portion of our work together has centered around helping her develop greater equanimity so that she can more directly observe defensive behaviors that significantly impact her work life.

Sara is brilliant with clients, gracing them with her high social intelligence and impeccable service. She is also at their mercy, suffering under the expectation that she be available on demand.

One of her clients is particularly toxic, representing a

dysfunctional company with a culture of blame. When problems arise that are beyond the purview of Sara, she is often scapegoated, and because she is an outside consultant, she is expected to respond to this with humility.

Criticism of any kind is difficult for Sara. Part of her motivation for working so hard comes from a desire to avoid criticism at all costs. When she finds herself in the midst of this kind of maelstrom, receiving criticism that is unwarranted, she becomes visibly distraught, rehearsing what has happened over and over again, and obsessing over the injustice of it. She vents to her colleagues, expressing vitriol and aggression, often drawing her CEO into her tempestuous storm. Both of them wind up exhausted, temporarily drained of precious creative energy.

The core of our work together has been to address Sara's tendency to take blame personally, and to teach her to refrain from absorbing, magnifying, and passing on her client's toxicity to others, including her CEO.

Sara is aware that her client's blame is a way of protecting himself from his toxic culture, one that does not tolerate error, and as a consequence, breeds a lack of responsibility. Although knowing this is helpful, Sara's intellectual awareness is not enough. The repeated admonition from her CEO to "not take things so personally" has not helped either. Sometimes the mind has one perspective while our emotions have another.

Sara's work has been to turn toward her felt experience of blame while it is occurring, observing her inner world

without acting upon her feelings of aggression. If distraction is an expression of defense, presence—the opposite of distraction—is its antidote. For Sara, this means sitting with powerful feelings without resorting to her normal escape route of anger and aggression.

Through Sara's willingness to remain present in the face of discomfort, she discovered that she assumes that any negativity coming toward her is fueled by a desire to hurt her. This triggers anxiety, creating pressure in her chest that constricts her breathing, a feeling so horrendous that she tries to rise out of it, similar to a drowning person attempting to tread water.

She quickly shifts to anger, an emotion that she finds more tolerable. Fear has a quality of groundlessness while anger is solid and self-righteous. Venting her anger helps to both ground her fear, and release the constriction in her chest.

Underneath her fear is a global free-floating sense of self-blame, a vague feeling that something about her is fundamentally wrong. By standing directly in her experience while refraining from using the release valve of her anger, eventually Sara will no longer need to defend against this constellation of feelings, and the panic in her chest will subside. In turn, she will be lighter, less preoccupied with her inner world, and more available to her clients and colleagues.

Sara's story illustrates the difference between self-knowledge and self-awareness. Self-knowledge is an

ability to name patterns in our behavior, emotional loops that we can't quite escape or a worldview that helps to shape and define our experience. It is largely an intellectual process, and it shows up as an ability to self-report. *When I feel insecure I talk too much.* This kind of knowledge is helpful but it is limited in its ability to create lasting change. I have met dozens of leaders who were aware of their leadership limitations throughout their careers but were never able to do anything about them.

For lasting change to occur, we must develop self-awareness, an ability to remain fully present in the moment no matter what is happening around us or arising within us. This includes an awareness of our felt experience as well as an ability to bear witness to our thoughts. True strength might be understood as the capacity to stand in our experience no matter what is happening. Self-awareness rests on the bedrock of true strength.

Sara came to me with self-knowledge. She was aware that she takes things personally, and that she lashes out in response. In order to change, she needed to strengthen her self-awareness, tracking not only the outer world, but also her inner world. In order to do so, she needed to slow down.

Gazing out of the window of a high-speed train, it is impossible to detect contour and nuance because everything is a blur. Similarly, when we are inwardly moving at a hundred miles per hour, barely breathing, our self-awareness is compromised. As a result, we develop a dependence on forces of habit in order to interact with the world. Some

habits are positive. Others create limitation or, at times, wreak havoc. Habits provide a kind of scaffolding to which we tend to cling, providing predicability, security, and a sense of identity. Over time, they dull spontaneity, originality, and joy.

Our habits are often what we defend, and this sometimes shows up as a justification for a troubling character trait. *Yes, I have been told over and over again that I can be a bull in the china shop. But, hey, at least I am willing to make a decision, and to tell it like it is.*

This takes us to the heart of the challenge of slowing down. Chronic stress dulls our relationship to ourselves. To reconnect, we need the courage to face ourselves as we really are.

Presence is the opposite of distraction. When we slow down, we are naturally more sensitive to the people around us and the interplay among them, the beauty of nature, the play of light. We tune in with greater nuance to the actual state that we are in. We become more aware of a fuller range of emotion, and the rise and fall of our thoughts. We become less tolerant of stress because we begin to experience it more intimately instead of numbing ourselves against it. We gauge with more accuracy the degree to which we are actualizing our highest intent, aligning ourselves more fully with our values. We see the world around us with more clarity, and, as a result, develop greater vision.

It is true that moving deep into the present has its

challenges. But it also brings us directly into the heart of what many of us long for—a more vibrant connection to life itself with a greater sense of spaciousness and spontaneity, free of the constrictions created by the forces of habit. This is of great benefit to leaders as they navigate a time in history that begs for a broader, deeper, and more integrated perspective, a time when paradigm shifts are critical.

Our inner world shapes our outer world. When we deepen our relationship to ourselves, we see the world in a new light. Greater harmony within allows us to see the potential for greater harmony outside of ourselves. As we navigate change, we detect the lines of least resistance, thus working more effectively with the forces around us.

In *The I Ching, or, Book of Changes* Richard Wilhelm and Cary Baynes note that: “When a man has thus become calm, he may turn to the outside world. He no longer sees in it the struggle and tumult of individual beings, and therefore he has that true peace of mind which is needed for understanding the great laws of the universe and for acting in harmony with them. Whoever acts from these deep levels makes no mistakes.”

Chapter 4

“So the question is no longer, how do I get from here to there? The question is, How do I get from here to here? How do I experience the fact that, instead of having to get there for something, it’s right here and now? This is it; this is the other shore.”

— Jeff Bridges and Bernie Glassman,
Dude and the Zen Master

A while back, I made several consecutive trips to the Big Island, Hawaii, saturating my winter-starved body and mind with the beauty of the tropics. I would arrive in the small outdoor airport, my feet would land on the dark volcanic soil, and my body would take this as an immediate cue to begin to let down.

Beauty was everywhere—in lush, dense jungle speckled

with multiple hues of green, and the bold color of tropical fruit and flowers contrasted with the expansiveness of a sparkling, turquoise, ocean-meeting sky. I longed to absorb this beauty so that I could take it home with me, packed in each and every cell.

When first arriving, I was able to soak in the beauty of the island in a way that nourished. But I could only receive it in doses. Inevitably, I would hit a threshold, and when this happened, I felt like I was looking at the landscape through a piece of glass, unable to completely let it in. I always found this disconcerting. It left me feeling limited and small, as I could sense the possibility of a deeper merging but could not reach it. What I know now is that I was, in part, coming up against the limits of my capacity to be fully present.

There was a period of time when I assumed that I could find a deeper sense of presence by pulling my mind off the past and the future to focus on what was right in front of me. I would experiment with this, using my breath as an anchor because the breath is ever present—never ahead or behind. I would steady my attention on the rise and fall of my breath, and then take in the world around me, escorting my mind back whenever it wandered.

Inevitably, I would think, what is the big deal? The present moment wasn’t necessarily more compelling than remembrances from the past or dreams of the future. Frankly, I wasn’t convinced that the work of strengthening my relationship to the present was worth the effort.

In the drop-dead beauty of the Big Island, I began to realize that there might be something more to the moment than my anemic experiments revealed. To assume that my cursory attempts at “presence” were indicative of what this state actually means is similar to assuming that looking at a picture of a warm bath is the same as being immersed in one. I realized that I couldn’t conceive of greater presence. It was something I could experience only through consistent dedication and effort.

Many of us live for those times when we are vibrantly connected to ourselves, and, hence, to life itself. We go on vacation not only to unwind but because a change of scenery creates a sense of immediacy. We often choose to visit places of great beauty, as beauty imposes itself upon us, demanding our attention.

This is also the appeal of activities where the stakes are high if we are not fully present such as rock climbing, surfing, or skiing. We are called to turn ourselves over, entering into a reciprocal, spontaneous, and fluid communion with each and every moment. We let go, and in so doing, the world flows toward us, no longer impeded by the demands of our will or the tyranny of our desire to control. Our response? We expand. We feel joy. We feel connected to something larger than ourselves.

Most leaders do not think about their relationship to the moment because it is not viewed as having intrinsic value. The present is overshadowed by what has been learned from the past, an obsession with planning, the

demands of the will, and expectations of the future. If our decisions are primarily informed by past experience or by an imagined future, we lose the wisdom embedded in our present context, bypassing the possibility of true innovation. Learning is truncated. We do not feel connected to something larger than ourselves and we miss the opportunity to tap into our creative stream because this stream is found only in the moment. Instead, we impose our worldview, and as a result, make decisions that are informed only by what we already know.

In 2015, Hans Taparia and Pamela Koch posted an article in the *The New York Times* entitled “A Seismic Shift in How People Eat.” It was accompanied by a photograph of a carrot placed inside of a hot dog bun with a streak of yellow mustard down the middle. The article notes that eating habits are changing, and as a consequence, iconic food brands are losing market share.

In response, these companies are making changes. For example, General Mills is removing all artificial colors and flavors from its cereals. Large purveyors of chicken, such as Perdue and Tyson, are limiting the use of antibiotics.

While these changes are positive—given the crisis of health and environment in our nation as it relates to food—they are, in the end, a rearrangement of the deck chairs on the Titanic. *The New York Times* article concurred, noting that, “Food companies are moving in the right direction, but it won’t be enough to save them.

If they are to survive changes in eating habits, they need a fundamental shift in their approach.”

How would presence support a “fundamental shift in approach” in a leadership moment such as this? These are industries whose basic paradigm is not sustainable. This is a stomach-dropping phenomenon, not only for the industry but for all of us.

We begin with emotional courage, a willingness to unabashedly face reality as it is, tolerating the inevitable vulnerability that arises by doing so. Once we set this intention, we can begin to truly listen, cultivating complete receptivity. To listen with receptivity means releasing all agendas, simply attending to what is.

Presence begins with this breath, this moment, as we simultaneously tune in to both our inner and outer worlds. In the outer world, we face the relevant circles of context. What is transpiring within my department, company, industry, nation, and the world at large? What is the impact of the monoculture of food upon our environment and health, and what are the threats to these systems?

These questions interact with our inner world as we pay attention to our emotional landscape, and the contours and shadows of our worldview. Radical questions like this arouse fear and insecurity, a feeling of being small in the face of complex, global problems. If anxiety goes unnoticed, like background music that we no longer consciously register, then we can be certain that our decisions will be made on the basis of that fear. As a result, the

outcome will be small and contracted—the opposite of visionary thinking. But when we take note of our fear, we are no longer a slave to its influence. We can tip our hat to it and choose to sidestep it.

Similarly, if we are aware of the influence of subtle belief systems—such as the notion that our food system is impervious to threat or that science will heroically sweep in at the last minute to save us from ourselves—we can monitor these presuppositions, increasing the likelihood of genuine openness in the face of the questions that we raise.

Releasing the dictates of the past and our desire to control the future, we are in a position to dance more freely with the questions themselves because we have opened up both the cognitive and creative space to imagine differently. Instead of contracting, we expand. Similar to the skier who allows the slopes to inform her run, we let go. We refrain from trying to control the outcome, a desire that virtually always stems from fear.

Through receptivity, we listen in a way that allows the questions themselves to inform a solution. We listen without searching for confirmation of what we already know. Linear, intellectual problem-solving converges with creativity. It becomes possible to avoid the trap of solving a problem by the same paradigm that created it.

The depth of our presence in any given moment dictates the depth of our receptivity. When we are present, we aren't imposing anything on the moment. We aren't strategizing

for something different or angling for how we might be served or demanding that the situation make us feel a particular way. We show up and allow the world in. When we are preoccupied with our opinions, desires, plans, hopes or fears, then the demands of our will overshadow and obstruct our capacity to see what is right in front of us.

As an artifact of the industrial revolution, leadership has emphasized determination, decisiveness, and action. We reward leaders when they are driven, resolute, ambitious, and focused. When in service of the highest good, these attributes are, indeed, great strengths.

However, when this is how we approach hard questions or long-term vision, then we simply repeat and recycle what we already know. In the highest form of leadership, a state of receptivity comes first, showing up as innocence and openness, a willingness to lower our guard to let the world in. It requires the honor of our full attention.

We often think of receptivity as ineffectual and soft. Nothing could be further from the truth. It takes tremendous strength to embrace the vulnerability that inevitably accompanies a receptive state. How much easier it is to defend our hard-won point of view.

Opening our minds and hearts, and allowing the world around us to affect us requires the strength to withstand continual growth and change. It calls forth from us a genuine humility. This is not for the weak at heart.

When receptivity is paired with decisiveness, leaders

are able to access a broad internal repertoire—a capacity to be reflective and decisive, humble and self-confident, process-oriented and results-oriented, introspective and action-oriented, intuitive and rational, emotionally available and analytical, flexible and resolute, playful and driven. When we master opposing characteristics, we gain a more interesting, paradoxical, and subtle range of responses to the world.

Chapter 5

“Proceed as the way opens”

— Quaker axiom

We have established that developing an awareness of the dance between the inner and outer world helps us to see the actual filter through which we perceive reality, the filter of our very selves. Awakening this interplay requires quieting the mind.

As the mind calms down, we find a level of awareness that is simply observing, often referred to as mindfulness, pure consciousness or pure awareness.

In this state, thoughts stream through our head, and emotions rise and fall like waves on the surface of the ocean. At the same time, we can watch these thoughts and feelings as they occur. As human beings, we have a unique capacity to hold both states of consciousness

simultaneously. This is nothing short of extraordinary.

The part of us that is simply aware is never in the past and never in the future. It is always—and only—in the present moment. When we slow down and quiet the mind, we strengthen our relationship to this part of ourselves, gifting ourselves with breathing room between thought and action.

We do this by coming into the present moment over and over again, watching our thoughts and emotions as they occur. Over time, we become less identified with the mind stream, and the rise and fall of our feelings. Instead, we rest in a place that demands nothing from us. This is the ground of our being and the source of true wisdom.

As we relax into the part of ourselves that is simply here and aware and alive, we eventually dive so deeply into the moment that we experience its eternal nature or timelessness. We develop a quiet sense of joy at the very fact of being alive. Why? Because we are beginning to awaken to the unfolding of life itself. This moment rises and falls, and is utterly and uniquely itself. No other moment is quite like it because every cycle of breath is a cycle of death and birth.

Living within the constraints of our mind and habitual emotions, we eventually become bored. No wonder, as we are caught in a repetitive loop, gazing at the world through the prison of our own perception! When we awaken to pure consciousness, we find a sense of immediacy, spontaneity, and joy.

As the mind quiets, we discover that awareness does not emanate from the mind but rather exists beyond it. For most Westerners, this represents a radical shift in paradigm because rational materialism assumes that consciousness is a product of our brain. To suggest that consciousness exists beyond the chattering mind is a departure from our materialistic point of view. This is something that we can know only through direct experience. It is a perspective that cannot be proven by rational thought because pure awareness is beyond the comprehension of the mind.

Trying to understand consciousness through the portal of the mind is analogous to a jellyfish trying to solve math problems. A simpler organism cannot comprehend that which is beyond the limits of its organs of perception. Pure awareness cannot be reduced to linear, analytic thought and, therefore, cannot be translated into language.

There is mystery inherent in this dimension of ourselves, a dimension that is often implied through art and poetry. Yet despite this, our relationship to this part of ourselves can be quite empirical. We can cultivate silence as a core practice in our decision-making and see what happens.

When my daughter was in third grade, I had the pleasure of watching a creative little boy shift the paradigm of an art assignment. He, along with his classmates, was given scraps of paper to paint and paste onto a large sheet

of paper. His classmates dutifully worked within the confines of their page.

However, this child asked for a pair of scissors. He began by reshaping his rectangular paper. As he glued his fragments of paper onto his redesigned template, none stayed within the margins—curlicues, concentric circles, and folded accordions spilled over the edges, redefining the boundaries. What began as two-dimensional became three. It was a paradigm shift in motion.

We are living in a time in history in which we are surrounded by core systems that are not sustainable, leaning on cultural pillars that weren't built to last. We need leaders who are capable of seeing the future in fresh and innovative ways, who are hopeful and creative and can step out of the present paradigm. Quieting the mind brings us to the heart of this core truth—the recognition that innovation, vision, and creativity all rise from the still point within.

In the book *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* Peter Senge et al. notes that: "Every profound innovation is based on an inward-bound journey, on going to a deeper place where knowing comes to the surface. This inward-bound journey lies at the heart of all creativity, whether in the arts, in business, or in science. Many scientists and inventors, like artists and entrepreneurs, live in a paradoxical state of great confidence and profound humility—knowing that their choices and actions matter and feeling guided by forces beyond their making."

Innovative people often describe the sensation of being seized by a creative act. This doesn't negate the hard work that is a huge part of the success of anything well done. But it does suggest there is a knowledge that is accessed *within us* that is distinct from knowledge that is created *by us*.

In Elizabeth Gilbert's 2009 classic TED talk on creativity, she observed that in ancient Greece and Rome, people were viewed as "having a genius" versus being one. When we refer to someone as a genius, we emphasize the person instead of the act of creation itself. But when we describe someone as "having a genius," we acknowledge the gift of tapping into a field that is larger than us, accessing something that is presently unknown. When it is framed this way, there is less hubris and anxiety, less identification with the creative process itself, and, hence, more spaciousness.

When we access pure awareness, and wisdom comes to the surface, we drop into an interconnected field that runs through all of existence. If we go deep enough into the self, we find this substratum that binds us all.

Our analytic mind is dual in nature. There is a subject and an object. The substratum of pure awareness is beyond duality, often referred to as "non-duality." There is no sense of separation or "other" in a non-dual state.

It is often disconcerting when we make contact with this interconnected field because we experience it as empty, something that we naturally resist. As soon as we

begin to tap into this spacious quality, we often anxiously pull back telling ourselves that there is no reason to visit this place, there is nothing here.

However, when we have the courage to make contact with this boundless field, exercising patience and fortitude, we eventually find ourselves in a rich flow of insight and innovation—a font of creative energy that is sourced from within.

Several years ago, my husband and I moved our family 1,900 miles across the country—from Princeton, New Jersey to Taos, New Mexico—basing our decision to do so on intuition. Both of us had lived our entire lives on the east coast, and we had lived in the Princeton area for almost 25 years, raising our children there. At the time that we left, our work lives were thriving, our son was about to enter high school, and we had developed strong, sustaining relationships in our community.

When people asked us why we were moving, we couldn't offer a truly satisfying reason, couldn't say that we were relocating for work or that Taos held some sense of promise for us in terms of practical, everyday life. Indeed, Taos is a difficult place to make a living—many people piece together several jobs in order to live there. But we also chose not to say that we were moving based on intuitive knowing because this elicited people's anxiety, and subsequent judgment which then amplified our own.

So we found reasonable answers. We said we wanted to live in a place of great beauty, which was true, or that we hoped to open a retreat center, which was also true. When we explained that we had coordinated our move with our daughter, Dillon, and son-in-law, Kyle, people seemed slightly more settled with our decision, although what they did not know is that neither Dillon or Kyle had jobs in Taos either.

Using intuition as an inner guidance system is something that I taught my children when they were growing up, particularly around issues of safety. I encouraged them to listen to their gut at all times, but particularly when they felt the slightest sense of discomfort, noting that oftentimes this is the only signal they will receive when a person or a situation isn't quite right. I reminded them that their analytic mind would argue with their intuition. My message to them was, "Trust your gut anyway."

So in 2011, Dillon and Kyle relocated to Taos, and six months later, we pulled up our substantial root system to move as well. We knew that if this test of inner guidance failed, the consequences would be quite difficult. But if our intuition was correct, we would have strengthened our courage to follow some part of ourselves that guides us directly into the unknown.

When we follow inner guidance, we often end up in situations far beyond what we would intellectually risk. Often, what comes into form is larger than what we would have known to ask for. Life becomes surprising in

its abundance and sometimes quite implausible. We find a place within ourselves that we can trust and, hence, where we can rest, regardless of the exterior world and its demands, trials, and complexity.

What is intuition, and what does it mean to use it as a form of guidance in our everyday lives? Intuition is the conduit between our analytic mind and the state of pure awareness. It is essentially a translator between the field of intelligence that cannot be fully grasped by the mind, and the mind itself.

Our intuition is guided by the context in which it appears, arising out of a unified field, a totality. It is a knowing that is relational, contextual, and holistic. Because this is so, from the perspective of the mind, intuition comes as a realization. We have a "hunch," and are suddenly surprised by what we know.

The mind is a closed system. Similar to a computer, its output is based on input. Intuition is fed from the stream of pure perception, tapping into an infinite stream of creativity that can be accessed only in the present.

Intuition is often drowned out in a cacophony of information overload, repetitive thoughts, plans, and disquieting emotions, particularly anxiety, fear, and impatience. When we connect more deeply and consistently to presence, the quieter voice of intuition becomes more accessible, guiding us in decisions large and small.

We live in a society that minimizes intuition and reveres the intellect. We value knowledge over wisdom. In doing so, we place that which is finite above that which is infinite. “The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift” (Samples 1993). When we calm down our chattering mind, we more easily access this subtle and potent voice within.

Chapter 6

“It’s as if the perceived separation of humans from one another, and from other forms of life, is the glue that holds our current story together. We’ve got to find out what it will take to break free of this tragic story. We have no idea the cost we pay for living this story of separation.”

— Peter Senge et al., *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*

The primary job of the mind is to differentiate, judge, sort out, and analyze, to say “this and not that” or “if this then that.” This capacity is a profound dimension of our humanity. However, when our intuition recedes into the background, and our intellect becomes our primary way of apprehending the world, then we know the world only as differentiated. We may intellectually buy into the idea that interconnection exists, and there may be moments

when we actually glimpse this truth, particularly when we are spending time in nature. But how can we really know this deep in our bones when this is not our everyday experience?

When we are less tuned to intuitive wisdom, our analytic mind becomes our primary source of guidance. As a result, our experience of life is of separation and duality. This creates an underlying sense of anxiety.

How do we find inner peace when we experience ourselves as existentially alone? We cannot. A chronic sense of separation sets into motion an insatiable hunger. Imagine sitting down to a banquet to eat the most delectable meal. For a short time, we feel satiated. However, our appetite quickly returns, and we long for more. Many who accumulate wealth experience such insatiability.

This aspect of human nature is artfully depicted in both Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism as turning people into “hungry ghosts,” portrayed as gaunt and empty-looking creatures with distended bellies. Living in a perpetual state of restlessness, they are driven to appease their appetites. When we search for contentment in the outer world, we set this same insatiable cycle in motion. With hungry ghosts nipping at our heels, the world becomes the object of our chronic hunger, often showing up as an unending desire for money, power, or self affirmation.

This is a root cause of greed, and the troubled relationship that the modern world has with itself. It arises from the loss of our experiential knowledge of the

interconnectivity of all life. Our felt experience of interconnection is found within. When we make our way back to this place, accessed only in the present moment, we reconnect to the pulse of life, the life force itself.

Returning our intuition to its rightful place as sacred gift while shifting the intellect into the role of faithful servant reawakens our sense of communion *with* instead of dominion *over* the world around us. Instead of habitually imposing our will on the world, we enter into a relationship of reciprocity, listening both within and without with greater nuance. Our intentions flow out into the world, and we notice that the world responds. Then when the world flows toward us, instead of automatically judging our experience, we pause, receiving what has arrived on our doorstep. We understand there is a conversation, a relationship at work. We aren't alone, holding ourselves up by our bootstraps. We have the direct experience of being embedded in a matrix of connection.

When we perceive ourselves at the center of the universe, and assume that everything emanates from us toward the world, we override this conversation, and there is no reciprocity, only imposition.

Perhaps nothing illustrates this more clearly than the myth of unending linear growth. The cyclic nature of creation is observed in all natural systems beginning with birth, followed by sustenance, and ending with decay and death, providing the mulch for rebirth.

There is also a cycle of concealment, a phase that cannot

be directly observed. We go into concealment every night when we sleep. The bright green of new life nestled deep inside a seemingly dead bud on a tree in winter is a lovely visual representation of this. Concealment is a cycle of rest, something that has virtually disappeared from the life of organizations.

Leaders tend to emphasize birth and sustenance because they are faced with organizational pressure to keep their foot on the gas pedal. When a cycle of concealment appears, anxiety arises because there is an assumption that "nothing is happening." Willpower alone must then be used to push an organization forward. At that point, we are no longer listening, just imposing.

Cycles of death, too, are often resisted in organizational life. Too often, we don't know when to lay something down or let it go. Unending growth is sustainable only at the cost of exhaustion, burnout, illness, and imbalance. The assumption that we can live outside of the laws of this creative cycle is profoundly arrogant, reflecting, in part, the dominance of our linear, analytic mind.

The myth of separation is alive and well in the psyche of the Western world. It defines the times in which we live. This must change if we are to bring in a different vision, both within our organizations and in our own lives.

The need for a paradigm shift in the outer world requires a paradigm shift within us. Cultivating a relationship not only to knowledge but also to wisdom is a part of this shift.

Wisdom comes from the present moment, informed by the context in which we find ourselves. It shows up in the form of intuitive knowing. The voice of intuition is subtle. When we slow down and calm the analytic mind we more consistently hear its gentle voice.

Several years ago, I coached a handful of senior executives in a company that was in the process of being sold. I witnessed a number of people struggling with the prospect of finding a new job, ushering in uncertainty and anxiety. In moments such as this, it is tempting to impose our will upon decision-making. It takes discipline to listen to our intuitive wisdom.

The future seems relatively predictable when we are embedded in a large and stable organization or ensconced in a routine that has been the same for some time. However, when there is a sudden shift, such as a death of a loved one or the loss of a job, we are thrust into the existential truth of uncertainty.

The only thing that is certain in life *is* uncertainty. We may work for the most secure institution in the nation, leave the office, and be hit by a car.

When our world is rocked by sudden change, we are exposed to a quality of groundlessness that is, in actuality, always present in our human experience. These moments provide an opportunity to examine how we make decisions in the midst of the unknown.

When the rug is pulled out from under our feet, there is a tendency to react with fear. We fret. We worry. We go over and over what we need to do, rehearsing various scenarios and often unconsciously assuming that whatever arises in the future is entirely of our own creation.

In truth, we are never responsible for each and every turn of events. If we study the important junctures in our lives, we find there is a reciprocity between our effort and the larger stream of life carrying us forward.

I recently had a client who lost his job due to a layoff. He described his experience this way: "I was devastated after I lost my job, fearful that I would never again thrive professionally. After several months of unemployment, I received a call from a headhunter, and he arranged a meeting that I knew was not likely to lead to a job but that I felt I should attend. That person recommended a book that I had been meaning to read. I bought the book, and I was so inspired, I reached out to the author. He put me in touch with a person who shared many of my interests. This led to a position in a company that I would never have imagined. It wasn't what I had in mind, and it has opened up an entirely new direction in my work."

We are never alone in the world pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps because we are never alone. But in order to know this to be true, we have to be willing to experiment with letting go. This is at the heart of the experience of the skier who surrenders to the mountain, and thus enters into a relationship of reciprocity. This

experience is what we mean by “flow,” characterized by deep enjoyment, total immersion in the moment, and a sense of timelessness. When we begin to relax our grip, challenging our desire to control each and every moment, we no longer override the relational matrix in which we are embedded.

In his book *Consolations*, David Whyte writes, “To rest is to give up on the already exhausted will as the prime motivator of endeavor, with its endless outward need to reward itself through established goals. To rest is to give up on worrying and fretting and the sense that there is something wrong with the world unless we are there to put it right; to rest is to fall back literally or figuratively from outer targets and shift the goal not to an inner static bull’s eye, an imagined state of perfect stillness, but to an inner state of natural exchange.”

Tuning in to our intuition, we find a way of knowing that allows us to relax in the face of uncertainty. But there are challenges. Sometimes our intuition doesn’t align with our rational thought, which can be particularly unnerving for those who are, by nature, highly analytical. And guidance that comes through intuition has its own sense of timing, often requiring great patience.

Sometimes we are guided to rest. But if we don’t know how to rest then we may not be able to heed this call. Sometimes we are guided into letting something go without knowing what is next. If we assume we exist in a chaotic universe that requires our will for each and every

step, then we may not have the necessary courage to let go. Following inner guidance requires courage, a capacity to consciously step into the unknown, which is the truth of existence anyway.

Recently a client reached out to me as she contemplated making a decision that would require her to leave a coveted position in her organization, and jump into the fire of uncertainty. Her husband had received a job opportunity that meant moving from Brooklyn, New York to Austin, Texas. If he took the position, she would leave her job without the prospect of a new one. She was passionate about her work, and had risen to the top of her field. But she had begun to have doubts about her current position.

She described her decision-making process this way: “I had been ignoring strong signals. The work I was doing was good work for me, but the person I had become in that context was not good and not healthy. Over time, it started to feel really wrong, but I couldn’t figure out how to get myself back on the right path. I knew that I needed to be lifted out of the situation, even temporarily, to regain perspective.

“So when the opportunity to move to Austin came along, there was the promise of a slower life, one where I could breathe and think, where I could replenish. That was as much as I knew.

“In trying to make this decision, my husband and I created a giant spreadsheet. New York was on one side and Austin was on the other. We listed pros and cons for each

city. They came up completely on par for completely different reasons. Each city satisfied a different set of values.

“We wanted this spread sheet to tell us what to do. We finally realized this was a joke, that this was not going to be an analytical process. It was great to do this exercise first. But this was not a decision of the intellect but a decision of intuition. Which path feels most in tune to the path of the heart?”

“It was a huge realization when we saw that economics or lifestyle would not be the deciding factor.

“In the end, we knew that moving to Austin was the right decision, and I left without employment. Shortly after we moved, an opportunity came along which was very similar to the work that I was doing in Brooklyn, very inspiring. But it was part-time. The move ended up giving me the opportunity to course-correct without abandoning the course altogether.”

Having experimented, over time, with her intuition as a form of guidance, my client was able to follow this call even though it evoked anxiety. Landing solidly on her feet, her trust in her intuition has now grown. This will help to ease her way as she continues to confront uncertainty in the ever-emerging future.

This takes us to the heart of true vision. When we deeply embody the present moment, vision naturally and inevitably arises because it is from the depth of our present

awareness that the trajectory of the future reveals itself.

A visionary perspective involves the capacity to recognize what is being called forth from the present moment into the future. This requires us to listen to the world around us as well as to the intuitive voice within us. When we become internally quiet, we sense the emerging future. Sometimes we are called to hold steady or to make only an incremental change. Other times, the most interesting and implausible vision arises, calling in a paradigm shift.

Although an innate capacity for true vision is rare, it can be developed by learning to navigate the complex waters within. However, this is a significant piece of inner work. Anyone who has learned to give greater credence to their inner knowing has mastered the art of discernment. This is so because when we go inward we find a cacophony of voices and conflicting points of view. The self is a house of mirrors. The process of separating the voice of our most essential self from the internalized voices of culture, family, and rational thought is at the heart of the work that must be done in order to gain access to the endless source of wisdom within.

Chapter 7

“I like to imagine a person’s psyche to be like a boardinghouse full of characters. The ones who show up regularly and who habitually follow the house rules may not have met other long-term residents who stay behind closed doors, or who only appear at night.”

— James Hillman, *The Force of Character and the Lasting Life*

Prior to our move to Taos, I experimented with living a life guided by intuition, incrementally taking greater risks. Our decision to move was the culmination of this practice. Despite my anxiety, I had developed enough trust to take this leap.

Although for years I had sensed that one day my family would open a retreat center, in truth I had reservations

about this, aware of the high level of commitment and responsibility this required. However, when the move to Taos was imminent, and we were looking for a place to land, it was clear that this was precisely what was emerging. This was so, despite the fact that we had limited resources, and could not imagine how we were going to make this happen.

We allowed things to unfold without the use of strategic planning. If we had been living by strategy, we would have aggressively marketed in the west because that coast is more accessible to Taos than the east. We would have identified our target audience, analyzed our brand, developed a curriculum, and hired a web designer. Instead, we watched and listened, trying to discern the timing and what, precisely, we were being called to do.

We ended up buying a piece of land close to town that included several out-buildings, one of which could be revamped for a retreat. Not much happened for the first two years. Then the funds showed up for us to renovate and we did, still able to see only the largest brush strokes of what was emerging. Over time, we gained clarity, continuing to listen within and without. Sometimes what emerged came as a lovely surprise.

For example, we realized that food and nutrition were more central to our vision than we had initially imagined. We knew it was a priority to provide delicious, organic, high quality food, but it became clear that we would also grow as much of our food as possible, and incorporate

teachings around diet and mental clarity into our curriculum. This led to a decision to create a much more substantial kitchen than we anticipated.

The vision for the center was also larger than we had originally imagined. If we had seen the full picture from the beginning, I am not sure we would have had the courage or stamina to bring it about. But once we set things in motion, we were no longer intimidated by the scope of the project. We were living into the vision versus setting a goal and strategizing toward it.

This is an example of the way in which intuitive wisdom often leads to something far beyond what our rational mind can comprehend. We grow into what the future is calling forth, even when we are hesitant, fearful, or when our shoes are oversized. In contrast, when decisions are based upon fear, they reflect this and are thus limited, often incremental, and small.

If our inner knowing is this potent, wise, reliable, and creative, why don't we consistently draw from this place? There are some people who seem to innately, and relatively easily, access inner guidance. But for many of us, discernment is more challenging. Sometimes we do not hear one voice but several, which is a reflection of inner conflict. Sometimes we hear nothing at all. Sometimes we have internalized the perspective of an authority figure, drowning out our own knowing. Often we struggle with separating the voice of intuition from the voice of reason.

How can we understand this challenge more clearly?

To do so, it is helpful to think about the self as consisting of two parts—the stream of pure awareness that is consciousness itself, and a constructed self that we identify as our personality or ego. This delineation is, in the end, a false one because the background of pure awareness is never separate from our identity. However, this distinction can be a helpful way to understand some of the forces at work within us.

One of the great koans of all time is the question, "Who am I?" There are schools of philosophy that invite students to contemplate this question over the course of years. What makes up our sense of self?

We derive our identity, in part, from the thoughts that stream through our mind, and the way in which our thoughts cluster into various beliefs. We notice, as well, that we identify with our feelings, and that there are certain patterns of feeling that repeat themselves, also coalescing into a sense of self.

We may identify with our ancestors, our race, our gender, or our past, and call this by our name. We may identify with certain gifts or shortcomings or what we see as our purpose in the world. We may identify with our physical body, something that is strongly reinforced in the Western world.

But eventually, if we look deep enough into all of these areas of identification, we discover the way in which they are not very substantial, and are actually illusory. Am I really my feelings? When I sit with them long enough I

begin to notice that they are in a continual process of flux and change.

So, then, am I the pattern of feelings that repeatedly show up? Am I my beliefs? My past? My race? At one level these things can be understood as “me.” But at another level we discover how elusive these constructs are because these things are fluid, contextual, and fluky.

Have you ever had the experience of looking back at a photograph of yourself as a child, trying to re-identify with yourself in that form? We construct that child out of memory, and at some level we sense the illusion of this. That child is both gone and here at the same time. What is this paradox?

The true self exists as pure awareness. It is distinct from the self that is constructed through our identification with our thoughts, feelings, our past, and our bodies. The true self connects that child in the photo to this moment. It is the background of existence. The personality of the person I call “Jan” is a filter through which pure awareness passes so that I may participate in creation.

Developing a sense of identity is quite necessary in order to mature into a healthy adult. We cannot skip this aspect of our development. But as many great thinkers of adult development have concluded, it is important in the second half of life to actually deconstruct our sense of identity because if we do not, we limit our growth.

We have all known people who tightly cling to some aspect of themselves even when it isn’t helpful. For

example, if I identify myself as an optimistic person with a great outlook, and I am suddenly faced with news of my death, I may respond with an imposition of positive thoughts, using this as a defense against what I am experiencing. In this case, grief is likely to be my genuine response. But if I put on a happy face instead of allowing myself to grieve, I will usurp the path of grief itself, a path that could allow me to be at peace with the end of my life. In this example, my identification with having a positive attitude creates an inability to access the purity of this moment. My tendency to put on a happy face will eventually develop a fragile quality because it is no longer an authentic response but rather a construct of habit, an artifact of identity.

How do we develop a more fluid relationship to life, one in which we are less identified with our past, our bodies, our thoughts, and our emotions? How do we live with greater authenticity, spontaneity, flexibility, openness and, consequently, more joy?

In order to loosen the grip of identity, we have to notice what it is that we identify with. Our identity mirrors itself back to us in our relationships. It shows up in our habits of mind, thought, and emotion, and in troubling patterns that, regardless of our best intentions, continue to repeat themselves. To loosen the grip of identity, we look at the places where we are stuck or highly habituated. We notice where there is stagnation in our relationships and in our work. We begin right where we are. We begin with developing greater presence.

Oftentimes, our emotions nudge us to examine ourselves more deeply, and invite us to heal the past or release a habitual pattern. This is the gift of depression, anxiety, impatience, defensiveness, obsessive thoughts, or chronic anger. These serve as flags placed in the ground to show us where we need to drill down.

As we begin this kind of self-examination, we notice there are countless ways to distract ourselves from the actual state we are in, ranging from substances which alter our state of mind, food used for comfort, addiction to media, work, or sex, a rigid adherence to schedules that do not allow us to feel, a chronic seeking of pleasure, an obsession with the imagined future, or an addiction to speed. We notice that, over time, our distractions themselves become a part of our identity.

When we increase presence, we encounter this wall of distraction. When that happens, we have to go through the sometimes painful process of becoming aware of what we are distracting ourselves from, facing the aspects of ourselves that are uncomfortable, that we don't like, or that frighten us—a sense of inner emptiness, anxiety about the future, fear of the unknown or change, fear of death, hesitation in using our gifts to the utmost, or holding a view of ourselves and our capacity that is too small.

This brings us to a core principle in leadership development. If we wish to gain greater access to wisdom, we have to face ourselves as we truly are, going through layers of

self realization, and releasing our identification with the self we have carefully constructed over a lifetime.

When we do so, we begin to notice the degree to which we are run by anxiety, greed, lust, anger, or ambition. We often become aware of a fuller potential, an experience that can make us afraid. We begin to notice that, even though we think of ourselves in a certain way such as helpful or kind, we carry opposing characteristics as well because our identity is, by definition, dual in nature. We become aware of the forces of habit, and the degree to which we are on automatic pilot. We become aware of chronic judgments that keep us separated from ourselves and others.

Leadership development, at this level, is a process of seeing through our identity so that we can more consistently access the wisdom that is within, living and thus leading with greater spontaneity, insight, immediacy, and vision. The reason that this is so is because it is our identity—our carefully constructed sense of self—that obscures our relationship to pure awareness or the wisdom that is within.

Picture a light bulb that has been hanging in the basement for some years. Over time, dust has accumulated on the bulb so that it no longer shines brightly. One day, we notice that it has become dull and, layer by layer, we begin to clean it. Eventually, light begins to shine through. We can think of our identity as similar to that accumulation of dust, and of the light within the bulb

as our true self or pure awareness. We do not have to do anything to develop pure awareness. We simply have to work on clearing away all that is obscuring the stream of wisdom within us.

When we moved to Taos, there were times when I discerned the next steps in my work correctly, following inner guidance with relatively little struggle. But there were other times when habits of mind and emotion got in my way.

For example, I was impatient with how much time it took for our project to unfold. I wanted things to happen more quickly. Although I was offering individual retreats, I was anxious to begin working with groups to see the fruit of our labor.

At one point, I decided to plan a group retreat, ignoring my sense that the timing wasn't right. I put together an agenda, chose a date, figured out the logistics in spite of the fact that the landscaping around the center had not been completed, and sent out a flyer advertising an upcoming retreat.

Very few people responded, and those that did said that the date would not work. There were two possible responses to this. One would be to use my will to figure out how to make the retreat happen anyway. I would have been swimming upstream, something I had successfully done many times before, though always at the cost of

eventual exhaustion. The second option was to use this as an opportunity to self-examine. Why had I ignored what I knew to be true?

In retrospect, I could see that anxiety was a key feature of my impatience. I wanted assurance that we had discerned correctly. I wanted to put an end to the uncertainty of the future. I was working through a level of ambition that sometimes got in my way.

I ignored signals both from within and without. Internally, my gut told me it was too soon. Externally, the retreat center was not completed, something I had rationalized that I could work around. This is the work of discernment, the process of teasing out inner guidance from the desires, whims, and vagaries of the ego. Often-times, we develop discernment by looking in the rear-view mirror, examining the results of our action.

Sometimes when there is a failure to listen both within and without, the stakes are terribly high and the outcome is a travesty. In a September 2015 article in *The New Yorker*, Nick Paumgarten tells the story of Revel, a 57-story casino built in Atlantic City in 2012. It was supposed to provide 5,000 jobs and revitalize the city.

Two years after completion, the entire project imploded at a loss of \$2.5 billion. This glass and steel coffin now stands empty, a monument to a colossal miscalculation about the intricacies of Atlantic City with its complicated history. It is a study in runaway ambition and greed that blinded a number of players. Most likely, this fiasco was

not a result of a lack of intelligence but rather the result of hubris, obscuring both an ability to listen to context, and to accurately access intuitive wisdom.

In a massive failure such as this, it is easy to put the players who miscalculated so terribly on the other side of the fence, viewing their greed and reckless ambition with the eye of judgment and disdain. But if we are judgmental of others in this way, we will turn that same disdainful eye on our own dark side.

There is nothing wrong with seeing the error in ourselves and others and, when appropriate, addressing this. Indeed, it is a great virtue to strive for excellence. As leaders, it is critical that we do so. But excellence is different from perfection—an important distinction in inner work and in leadership. Perfection is black and white—we are either perfect or not—and calls forth judgment. But excellence evokes a work in progress, inviting us to continually strive toward our best while learning from the process as it unfolds.

When we work toward excellence, we discover that miscalculation and mistakes serve as portals for growth and refinement, sometimes leading to something entirely new. As leaders, it is important that we work with the forces of human nature as opposed to standing in judgment of them so that our very nature becomes our teacher.

When we self-examine, stumbling into dark places that we prefer were not there, it is critical to see ourselves through the eyes of inquiry, not judgment, because this

is how we find our way to a deeper understanding. This opens the heart instead of shutting it down.

For example, let's assume that I am triggered by the story of Revel. Sensing the unbridled ambition that led to this fiasco, I feel a wave of righteous indignation coming over me. I see greed *over there*. This is a red flag, indicating an unexamined place within myself. I would not react this way if I had a better understanding of my own greed and ambition. If I turn my attention to this aspect of myself, I am likely to feel that same indignation.

We often use shame and condemnation as a way of whipping ourselves and others into shape. In this sense, it has a positive intent. But when we spin on a wheel of judgment, we dampen our ability to be open, and block our capacity to understand humanity at a deeper level. This is not to suggest that anything goes. On the contrary, this is how we work with the troubling parts of our own nature so that we are more effective when responding to others.

In contemplative work, a state of inquiry requires that we develop an “observing witness” or an “observing self,” a part of ourselves that simply watches, without judgment, the rise and fall of our thoughts, feelings, and sensations in the body. We develop this objective observer by pulling our attention off the external world and turning within.

As we notice what we are up to, we usually discover a voice of judgment. At that point, the work becomes shifting the tone of this judgmental voice from condem-

nation to neutrality, and ultimately to compassion. *Oh hi! There is that feeling of greed. And now I am condemning myself for feeling this way. Let me soften my judgment so that I can stand closer to my greed to see what I might find.* Notice that in this kind of self-talk, we are not judging the judge.

At that point, we are in a better position to discover what is underneath the greed, an emotion that we can assume is, in part, fear. If we keep drilling down in this way, we eventually find ourselves at a place where we are in communion with all of humanity. We all know fear. We all know what it is like to have an impulse to hoard. Approaching ourselves in this way opens up our capacity for true compassion and genuine humility.

When we see the limited number of principles that govern human nature—a desire to love and be loved, to identify and utilize our gifts, and to be peaceful and content—we realize that humans are much more alike than different. When we understand that we all share attributes of imbalance, struggle, and obscuration that show up on a continuum of darkness in humanity, our universal nature is even more profoundly revealed.

From this, we eventually develop genuine humility that's not based on an *attempt* to be humble but is, instead, a quality that arises from the depths of our knowing. I recall a friend who once said that she was sure that if she was put in jail with anyone on the planet, she could eventually find a way to understand them, and therefore

to love them. This was an expression of her sense of the relationship between understanding, and an acceptance of all parts of life, including the dark.

Acceptance does not mean that we sit back in the face of injustice, disempowerment, abuse, or violence. It does not negate anger or sadness when we encounter disturbing aspects of ourselves or others. Rather, understanding is a path to compassion, and compassion leads to true humility, transforming the negative forces that are both within us and around us, helping us to perceive the world with greater clarity, and thus take action that is more objectively informed.

Compassion is a lynchpin in leadership, affecting every decision, and human interaction, and informing how we show up. Sometimes we are called to lead, sometimes to follow. Sometimes we need to pass leadership to another and at other times, to simply listen. Sometimes we need to take decisive action. Other times we need to stand back and let things unfold. Judgment obscures our perceptual field while compassion clarifies.

Virtue in the world is an outer manifestation of inner work. The outer world mirrors the inner world. Clarity within creates clarity without. Our perceptual capacity is so fundamental that we rarely speak of it, yet this is the gateway to wisdom. As the poet William Blake once wrote: "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through

narrow chinks of his cavern.”

Our carefully constructed and guarded identity is the “narrow chink” of our cavern. Clarity arises when we cleanse this lens of perception through compassionate self-awareness. In so doing, we consistently access pure consciousness, building an experientially-based trust in our own inner wisdom.

Chapter 8

“A deep experience of rest is the template of perfection in the human imagination, a perspective from which we are able to perceive the outer specific forms of our work and our relationships whilst being nourished by the shared foundational gift of the breath itself. From this perspective we can be rested while putting together an elaborate meal for an arriving crowd, whilst climbing the highest mountain or sitting at home surrounded by the chaos of a loving family.”

— David Whyte, *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment, and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words*

David Gelles describes in a March 2016 article in *The New York Times* that meditation, particularly mindfulness training, has become a multi-million dollar industry. It

is estimated that in 2015, meditation-related businesses generated \$984 million in revenue. I suspect that that number will continue to increase.

It is easy to adopt a cynical attitude toward this—our country has a way of gutting good ideas with highly developed marketing practices that flatten and oversimplify. As the meditation industry has grown, its practices have been gobbled up in this machine, a machine that’s characterized by a state of efficiency, ambition and overdrive, the very state to which meditation is ostensibly responding.

However, in my experience there is sincerity at the root of our emerging collective hunger for meditation, a reflection of our suffering as it relates to our relationship to time. Many of us are skimming over the surface of our lives, sensing that something core to a life well-lived has been lost in the process.

For those who are chronically stressed or wish to slow down, meditation is, indeed, an antidote. The simple act of placing our attention on our breath cycle immediately effects the autonomic nervous system, bringing into better balance the sympathetic side of this system—the part that is associated with stimulation—and the parasympathetic nervous system that is associated with rest.

But there is another aspect of meditation that is less emphasized in popular culture. When we meditate, we either intentionally or inadvertently initiate an inward journey. Meditation not only evokes the relaxation response but

brings to the surface of our awareness aspects of ourselves which may be unprocessed or buried. Pouring sand into water, it will come to rest at the bottom of the glass and the water will remain relatively clear. But if the glass is shaken the water becomes cloudy. Similarly, meditation shakes up latent material that lives within us.

As we repeatedly bring our attention back to the moment, hidden aspects of ourselves come into awareness, including parts of ourselves that we may find troubling. This can be the source of profound growth, but it can also be problematic if we do not have the proper support and guidance to work with what is arising.

This is an elegant set-up, an amazing reciprocity between accessing the silence that is at our core, and the revelation of our constructed identity which obscures that silence. As we meditate, our character is slowly revealed to us, and as it is revealed, we are given the opportunity to let go of negativity, which, in turn, allows us to more easily access pure awareness. Over time, we eventually stabilize our relationship to the silence within, resting while in motion.

Recently, a friend expressed concern about the modification of meditation, questioning the ethical application of contemplative practice regardless of the context. She wrote, "It is hard to believe that one could have a real and deep meditation practice and then go out and sell more assault rifles."

A number of years ago, I attended a conference that was teaching a technique that had been shown to help mediate the effects of trauma. Most of the attendees were mental health practitioners, but there were also several lawyers scattered throughout the room who saw an opportunity to use this technique to manipulate people on the witness stand. One person's medicine is another person's poison.

The answer to my friend's question is simply, yes, it is possible to take powerful practices such as meditation out of a context that had originally presupposed an ethical application, and apply it in dubious ways, such as making a more effective salesperson for peddling of sub-prime mortgages.

But this is not my intent in teaching contemplative practices to leaders. Rather, it is to awaken self-awareness so that leaders are able to perceive the relationship between the inner and outer world more clearly, recognizing, in particular, the interconnectedness of all life. At its highest and best, character development is at the heart of this work as we quiet the mind, and watch what arises within us, noticing our impact on others.

As we refine our perceptual capacity, we often see the outer world differently, and are sometimes required to make changes because situations that were once tolerable may no longer be so. Over time, we become better at discerning correct action because we are moving from a narrow perspective dictated by our constructed identity to a view of the world that is more vast.

The best way to evaluate correct action is by its impact. Did our action clarify or obscure? Did it create harm or support positive growth and change? Are our actions in harmony with a world that is interconnected or did our choice reflect the illusion of separation?

From this perspective, unless our intent is to harm or there is an indifference to harm, selling subprime mortgages would become intolerable because we are no longer myopically consumed by forces of which we are not fully aware such as fear-driven greed or rampant ambition. Instead, we recognize the motivation behind our actions, and the impact of our choices. When this is so, we are in a position to bring our actual behavior more in line with our highest intent.

For much of my life, I did not feel worthy, carrying around a sense of self-rejection. I was never enough, and I worked hard to fill this deficit.

There were junctures in my life when I thought that certain accomplishments would help, like earning my doctorate or developing a successful company. These things did give me a sense of competence, and allowed me to develop and use my gifts. But the underlying, often subtle, self-rejection remained untouched. There came a point when I realized that nothing external would impact this core feeling.

As an adult, I saw myself as one big self-improvement

project. Although this was, at times, exhausting for both me and those around me, I learned a lot about change. I discovered that there were aspects of myself that I could shift through my intellect and will.

For example, in my early twenties I became a student of self-discipline. I began by setting a goal of daily exercise. I developed ways of tricking myself into initiating this goal. I learned that I could not allow myself an escape hatch, that there was no legitimate excuse for not exercising. This worked, and I was able to extend this discipline to other parts of my life.

In my thirties, I struggled with a chronic habit of judging people, noticing their faults and internally critiquing them. My degree in psychology had exacerbated this tendency. I did not want this to be so, and I worked to change this. This required the ability to notice when I was standing in judgment. When I caught myself in the act, I would soften my gaze and look again, finding the beauty in whoever was in front of me. Over time, I was eventually able to make progress on this.

But there were other aspects of myself, such as my fundamental feeling of unworthiness, that did not budge with well-meaning effort. Over time, I began to understand change differently. Instead of approaching myself with the force of my will, I released the notion that I needed to be fixed. I worked on strengthening the muscle of my attention, developing a strong internal witness, and deepening my compassion.

This refined my capacity for self-awareness, an ability to stay present for whatever was arising within me without trying to manipulate or change anything. This proved to be more challenging than it sounds because, like everyone, I had multiple ways of distracting myself from my actual state. Turning toward uncomfortable feelings or parts of myself that I didn't like seemed anti-intuitive. Isn't it natural to pull our hand away from a hot stove?

I experimented with the idea that through experientially *attending* to what is, as opposed to intellectually *explaining* what is, I supported the process of change. This meant stabilizing an ongoing moment-to-moment awareness of my physical body because this is where the entire show of the self takes place.

Perhaps nothing proved more tenacious than my sense of self rejection. Over time, I was able to stay present when this feeling arose, locating where I felt it in my body so that I could witness it. I noticed that the physical sensation of this changed and morphed and moved around. Eventually, I was less reactive to this feeling, and I learned to respond less from this place within myself. But I wanted this to change! I wanted to accept myself, all of me—that which was flawed and that which was lovely.

When my children were growing up, their changes were often imperceptible. One day their pants fit beautifully, and then the next day they were high waters. I had the same experience when I bore witness to something that I wanted to change. I would bring my attention to some

aspect of myself over and over again, sometimes over the course of years, until one day I would notice that that feeling or that thing hadn't happened in a while.

This is what happened with my self-rejection. I cannot say when it dissipated. All I know is that one day I noticed I hadn't felt it for a long time. I had softened, and had less of a need to prove anything. As a result, I was gentler and more patient with others.

The way we change depends upon what needs to be changed. When I set goals with my clients, I identify which goals are tactical. This type of change requires commitment, focus, and a healthy will.

But there are other goals that only respond to repeated visits from our attention stream, as we stay present, make friends, and accept some part of ourselves. When this is the case, we cannot predict when change will occur.

Most of my clients are used to setting business goals, and achieving them in a prescribed time frame. For some types of change, we set a goal and drive toward it. Other times, this is not possible. That is when it is important to let go of the dictates of the linear, analytic template, respecting that the rhythm of transformation is on its own time schedule, and cannot be rushed. What we can do is set into motion a framework that supports growth.

So here we are, full circle, back to the idea that a cornerstone in the foundation of leadership development is the capacity to discipline our attention stream so that we

have some choice over where we direct it. For most of us, our thoughts and emotions are like wild horses pulling a cart in which we are helplessly tossed around. As we are consistently more present, coming into our bodies more fully, we notice there is an interplay between our thoughts and feelings. Neither are objective because they feed off each other.

Many people assume that thought is more objective than emotion. But in truth, our emotions often drive our thoughts. For example, let's suppose that I am resistant to changes in the strategic direction of my company because I may lose my job as a result. So I defend myself by building an intellectually rigorous and seemingly rational argument against change. But in truth, my point of view is driven by my desire to remain employed. In order to offer a more objective view, I need to perceive the relationship between my fear and my perspective.

When we learn to witness our inner world without judgment, we create space, and as a result, we are less reactive. Over time, instead of being driven by the surface level of thought and feeling, which is inconsistent and sometimes turbulent, we are anchored to a place of inner quiet.

This is similar to the experience of swimming on the surface of the ocean with choppy waves and fluky current, and then diving down to the bottom where it is suddenly still. We can look up and see the turbulence at the surface of the water, but we are no longer affected by it. Instead of being tossed around on the choppy surface, we are

anchored to stillness within.

When our minds become still, and are no longer clouded by inner obscuration, we become like a reflective pool, mirroring the world around us. Thus, we have greater clarity in all that we do—in our ability to see others more objectively and with greater compassion, to comprehend a broader point of view, to recognize patterns, to perceive connections between seemingly disparate bodies of information, and to recognize the trajectory of the future that arises from where we stand. Again, the core of the work of leadership development in this context is working through inner obscuration, including turbulent emotions and habits of mind.

When working with emotion, we must develop the capacity to stay present for our felt experience. This is different than intellectually noticing what is going on within us. The physical body is like an antenna, receiving and organizing data coming from within and without. Every emotion has a specific physiology.

Silvan Tompkins from the *Tompkins Institute* describes the biology of each emotion. For example, when we feel shame our eyes drop, our neck muscles release, and our head falls forward. When we feel fear, our eyes widen, eyelids tense, eyebrows raise and contract, skin cools, and the hair on the back of our neck stands up. Although the triggers of emotion vary from one culture to the next, the physiology of emotion is universal, regardless of cultural context.

As children, we display emotion quite openly. But over time, we learn that this is not always safe. We become ashamed of what we feel, and so we learn to hide it. We do this by freezing our bodies. Now when we feel shame, we no longer lower our head and eyes. Over time, this means we are less in touch with our feelings because we have cut off the cues from our physical body that indicate what we feel. Eventually, our emotions have to be quite amplified before we register them.

So in order to work with our emotions, we have to feel them. This means reconnecting to the physiology of emotion. Many of us live primarily in our heads, either lost in the past or obsessing about the future. To work with our emotions, we must be present. Instead of dwelling in our heads, we learn to dwell in our bodies.

When I am helping clients develop emotional intelligence, I sometimes teach them to track the specific physiology of each emotion, bringing into awareness sensations and feelings that may have gone unnoticed. When we do this, we understand why we tend to escape into our thoughts—it is difficult to stay present when we are unsettled or when we feel bad. Again, this is why emotional courage is such an important character trait for leaders.

For example, in my own process of deepening self awareness, I discovered a chronic buzz of anxiety in my bones. It was like having a noisy fly in the room. Once this came into my field of awareness, I was highly annoyed by

it, and I noticed that I tried to avoid situations that exacerbated this feeling.

I applied the principles that I am describing here, bringing my attention back to this anxious buzz over and over again. Over time, the feeling dissipated, ushering in a greater sense of calm.

This is an example of how the potency of our attention stream, directed towards our felt experience, supports certain kinds of change. But the “how” of this remains unknown, similar to the mystery of our children’s growth spurts or the greying of our hair.

Chapter 9

*“Did you know that the ant has a tongue with
which to gather in all that it can of sweetness?
Did you know that?”*

— Mary Oliver, *The Leaf and the Cloud*

When we deepen our relationship to the present moment, we develop an ability to live with greater ease at the boundary between the known and the unknown. This moment becomes the next, and the border between the present and the unknown future reestablishes itself, moving forward in time.

We often attempt to mastermind the future. We do this whenever we rehearse a “worse case scenario.” But in the end, we never really know how things will turn out. And there is beauty in this, as it is in the spaciousness of the unknown that we make ourselves available to the

wisdom that is within, and allow impressions to impact us from without.

To make friends with the unknown requires relinquishing our internal map—habits of mind and emotion. Instead of projecting our hopes, fears, or expectations into the future, we simply show up—aware, alert, and listening.

Being this open and available requires letting our guard down, and making friends with our vulnerability. It requires fortitude to withstand the constant change that is at the heart of life as we know it. It requires letting go, over and over again. It requires not only an open mind, but an open heart.

Perhaps nothing captures open-heartedness more fully than the virtue of innocence. When innocent, we approach each moment without preconception, and with our whole selves, including our heart. Implicit in this is a willingness to learn. In Zen Buddhism this is called “beginner’s mind.” As Lee van Laer explains in his Summer 2016 article in *Parabola*: “We begin in innocence, both in deep time and as individuals; an absence of guilt, a blamelessness that is born of our place in nature. It implies an acceptance, and a subordination, to forces much greater than ourselves.” This does not devalue experience, which has its own beauty and richness. Rather, we make room for both.

When I work with clients, I make it a practice to leave my experience and education at the door so that when I come into a room, I simply take in whomever is in front of me. If I work primarily from what I have learned, I will miss

the particularity of this moment and this person, and, as a result, understand very little. In a 2016 Summer article in *Parabola*, Rachel Jamison Webster writes: “Innocence can embrace the world—and renew it—in a way that does not turn a blind eye to experience. Innocence may be sharpened and expanded through experience, but it is the holy ground that we return to.”

Innocence presupposes an open heart, and this is the basis of a calm mind. When we are present and in touch with our physical bodies with a relaxed and receptive heart, the mind becomes open and spacious. In this state, we gain a fuller and more dynamic understanding of the world around us.

Our hearts close when there is unresolved hurt from the past. When this is so, the mind goes into overdrive and we contract. We can identify what is emotionally unresolved by noting what and who triggers us. For example, if we have been betrayed in the past, and our hearts have not yet fully healed, any kind of present-day betrayal triggers a strong reaction. Whenever we react negatively toward another person, we are in the presence of a potential teacher as that person reflects something that is not resolved within ourselves. In coaching, I often have leaders talk about the person in the organization who bothers them the most, as this is inevitably a rich source of insight.

The past is important only to the degree that it impedes the present. When we have resolved disappointment,

betrayal, and hurt from the past, our hearts naturally open, and a quality of innocence shows up. This is why healing is an important component of leadership development.

It is our heart that allows us to know another human being. When we approach someone open-heartedly, we simply receive them, and in the spaciousness of that receptivity people are more likely to let their guard down because their self judgment does not get triggered. This helps us perceive people’s highest potential. We discover the innate value and worth of all humans simply because we are sentient.

This is the kind of human encounter that we long for, this sense of being fully valued, simply because we are. Oftentimes, it is easier to extend this generosity toward our pets. We don’t say to our dog, “Not feeling kindly towards you today because you played such a poor game of catch.” We love our dog unconditionally, even when it lays around and sleeps all day.

When we are in a state of judgment, our perceptual capacity is clouded, impacting our clarity, and concretizing our worldview. If I see you as lazy or ineffectual, you will receive this projection from me, and feel lazy and ineffectual.

In his book *Field Notes on the Compassionate Life*, author Marc Ian Barasch defines compassion as “kindness without condition.” Regardless of the parade of human foibles on display in any organization, all humans have intrinsic worth, and therefore deserve respect. We express

this fundamental sense of respect through kindness. Our innate compassion is often blocked by negativity that accumulates over the course of a lifetime, shutting down our hearts. Cultivating compassion requires working with this negativity. Again, this begins with the development of *self* compassion, apprehending ourselves through the eyes of kindness. This releases our innate compassion toward others.

True compassion is not an emotional state, nor does it require being effusive or emotionally expressive. Rather, it is a generosity of spirit that naturally arises when we open our hearts. When we extend kindness to others, we increase the possibility of tapping into their highest potential. This is a great virtue in leadership.

Open-heartedness does not mean that we no longer have the ability to make hard decisions, such as letting someone go. Rather, our baseline level of perception becomes compassionate so that all of our actions are informed by this. I recall a leader who said that she measured her success in firing someone based on whether or not they left her office with their self-esteem intact. Most of the people she fired over the course of her career stayed in touch with her. She had learned to let people go without losing her compassion.

The substratum that runs through all of existence, which we are calling pure awareness, *is* compassion. We also call this love. Most of us think of love as an emotion. There is a love that is emotive, often called affection.

But there is a higher form of love that arises when we

make contact with pure awareness, dissolving judgment, and promoting understanding. This gives birth to a selfless and spontaneous commitment to the well-being of others. This kind of love is not based on preferences, or on our likes or dislikes. It transcends specificity. In this sense it is impersonal.

It is the rare human being who develops the highest form of love to its fullest potential. Nonetheless, we are born with an innate desire to do so. In the article *The Science of Love*, Barbara Frederickson shares research that demonstrates that love energizes our entire system, broadens our mindset, deepens our ability to harmonize with others, and enhances creativity.

The opposite of compassion is cynicism, indifference, or cruelty. This shrouds us in negativity, stressing our physiology, narrowing our perspective, and limiting our capacity to see others accurately.

Empathy is a gateway to compassion, an inner tuning fork that allows us to perceive the inner state of others. It is different from sympathy. When we are sympathetic, we view the suffering of others from a safe distance, and often feel pity. *Oh, you poor thing. I'm so glad I'm not you.* This disconnects us from others.

Empathy involves joining with another, and connecting to their experience by finding that same place within ourselves. Oftentimes, empathy does not need to be spoken because people know when we have joined them in their experience. Rather than creating distance, empathy

connects. Empathy is a cornerstone of good listening. When someone stands in our shoes, we know we have been heard.

In the last few years, references to empathy have appeared more frequently in business literature. In a 2016 article in *The Wall Street Journal*, Joann Lublin notes that there has been an upsurge in empathy training as a business strategy.

In a 2014 article she wrote for the *Harvard Business Review*, Rita McGrath argues that we are entering an era of empathy, an evolution in the way we think about organizations, including their purpose. She writes: “I would argue that management has entered a new era of empathy. This quest for empathy extends to customers, certainly, but also changes the nature of the employment contract, and the value proposition for new employees. We are grappling with widespread dissatisfaction with the institutions that have been built to date, many of which were designed for the business-as-machine era. They are seen as promoting inequality, pursuing profit at the expense of employees and customers, and being run for the benefit of owners of capital, rather than for a broader set of stakeholders. At this level, too, the challenge to management is to act with greater empathy.”

It is heartening to see a more holistic perspective of leadership emerging in mainstream media. For too long, business has treated leaders like walking heads, exclusively valuing the mind while ignoring the necessity of the heart.

In 2012, Google set out to build the perfect team, resulting in the formation of an initiative called Project Aristotle. Gathering together their top-level statisticians, organizational psychologists, sociologists, engineers, and researchers, they scoured fifty years of academic research, and scrutinized groups within their organization in order to uncover why some teams thrive while others languish.

They looked at numerous variables having to do with the demographics of the group. In the end, they could not find any evidence that the composition of the group made any difference in its effectiveness.

However, when they looked at group norms—the unspoken and informal rules that shape group behavior—they began to gain traction. They found that the most important variable present in high performing teams was a high level of emotional safety. In such groups, people were willing to take interpersonal risks as there was a sense of mutual trust and respect. People spoke openly and freely, knowing that they would not be humiliated or rejected. The atmosphere was informal and relaxed. There was a balanced level of participation amongst group members, without any one person dominating the conversation, and empathy levels were high. In a 2016 *New York Times* article, Charles Duhigg wrote: “To be fully present at work, to feel ‘psychologically safe,’ we must know that we can be free enough, sometimes, to share the things that scare us without fear of recriminations. We

must be able to talk about what is messy or sad, to have hard conversations with colleagues who are driving us crazy. We can't be focused just on efficiency.”

Google's study reveals something that is intuitively obvious—people work and communicate at a higher level when they feel emotionally safe.

Although I have lectured on emotional intelligence and self-knowledge within the context of leadership for many years, I have rarely spoken directly about the heart in this manner. To do so was essentially taboo. However, as concepts such as empathy and emotional safety make their way into the lexicon of the business world, this barrier is breaking. We are slowly reaching a point where we no longer assume that the heart should be banished from business.

A large part of the resistance to the emotional side of organizational life arises from an assumption that this is a messy and irrational part of human existence, best dealt with by ignoring it. This has always been a fallacy. It is not possible to run a healthy organization without a heart, and emotions are not managed by ignoring them.

Data, analytics, and metrics stimulate the mind, but inspiration, creativity, and connection spring from the heart. When we treat the heart like a stranger, we eliminate color and texture, beauty and joy. We lose vital information that informs decision-making. And we tamp down the expression of positive emotion because we cannot cut off negative emotions without eliminating positive ones.

If we lead by fear, which is the simplest approach, then the heart is, indeed, irrelevant. Sometimes leaders explicitly lead this way while other times, this style is more subtle or unconscious. One of our greatest fears is humiliation, particularly public humiliation. Unfortunately, this is often leveraged in organizations in order to motivate.

But if it is our intent to lead through inspiration, creating emotional safety, encouraging collaboration, and unlocking creativity and innovation, we must open our hearts so that we, ourselves, are inspired and unguarded, willing to face the messy side of the human condition.

When a student asked the Buddhist Master, Ajahn Buddhadasa, to describe the state of the contemporary world, he answered in three words: *Lost in thought*.

To lead from our highest capacity requires that we bring our whole selves to all that we do, facing up to life in all its beauty and ferocity with the courage to be present in our bodies, and with innocent hearts, thus offering clarity of mind to those we serve.

If we wish to clean a polluted river, we do not begin downstream. Instead, we travel upstream in order to find the source of the pollution. Similarly, if we wish to become better leaders, we must go to the very core of who we are, and how we show up in the world, working with the duality that lives within us. Driven by fear, our culture tends to nourish the contracted side of our nature. But we

do not have to buy into the frenzy of our culture. Nor do we need to leave swaths of our humanity at home when we go to work. We can choose a different path.

We are living through a time in history in which cultures from around the world are making their deepest sources of wisdom more readily available, teaching us about true happiness. There is a wealth of resources that support a more vibrant connection to life itself. This begins with the recognition that this is possible.

A Cherokee legend tells the story of a young boy who laments to his grandfather, “There are two wolves that fight within me. One is jealous, hateful, frightened, and angry. The other is peaceful, joyful, loving, and kind. How do I make sense of this?” The grandfather replies, “You are not alone. All of us face this struggle.” The young boy is silent for a minute and then asks, “Which one wins?” The grandfather replies, “The one that you feed.”

Contemplative Practices

Here are three possible practices for those who wish to cultivate silence as a way of reducing stress, deepening presence, or increasing compassion:

Progressive Relaxation Technique

(also called the Body Scan):

Our physical body is ground zero for all that we experience. If we wish to deepen moment to moment awareness, we must show up for our felt experience. The body is here. The breath is here. I can't move my body five minutes from now.

When I am working with clients, I often have them sense how they are abiding in their bodies. Some people have so little connection that they find this exercise all but impossible. Others describe sensations in their head, hands or torso but little sensation elsewhere. Some people

describe having such low body awareness that they can ignore physical pain for some time, not attending to physical problems until they are acute.

One of the reasons that yoga has gained such popularity in the West is because our level of disembodiment is so high. Yoga gives us an opportunity to practice weaving together our breath, and moment-to-moment body awareness.

Progressive Relaxation helps us build the muscle of our attention, brings us into the present by calling us into our bodies, and triggers a relaxation response. For clients who are interested in beginning a meditation practice, this is often a good place to start, as it is more active than a practice such as breath meditation, but still has the advantage of building the muscle of our attention, meaning our ability to focus and hold our attention at will.

THE PRACTICE

If you can, commit to a daily practice for six weeks, meditating at the same time each day in order to establish a routine and to experience the benefits.

Although it is possible to guide yourself through this meditation, I would strongly recommend using an audio recording so that your full attention is placed on the practice. It is important to find a practitioner whose voice is not distracting or annoying. Recordings are widely available, spanning a wide range in time commitment. I would not recommend a body scan practice that is less than 15 minutes.

- Begin by finding a comfortable position, preferably lying down.
- Focus your attention on your feet. Feel the sensation of your feet.
- Then, tighten the muscles in your feet, gripping for about 30 seconds.
- Let go, releasing all tension.
- Feel the sensation of the release. Notice the temperature of your skin, the blood flow, and all sensation. Invite your feet to continue to let go, relaxing the muscles. Focus this way for about 20 seconds.
- Continue moving from one body part to the next, tensing and relaxing the muscles: calf, thigh, abdomen, chest, back, arms, hands, shoulders, face, and head.
- Scan the body and identify any places of lingering tension.
- Breathe into these places one at a time, feeling the tension on the in-breath and releasing with the out-breath.

Breath Meditation

Our breath is never in the past or the future. It is only in the present, and so it is a powerful way to come into the moment, increasing mindfulness. It is one of the most common ways to access a meditative state. For those who wish to lower stress, there is no greater ally. The moment

we turn our attention to our breath, watching it flow in and out of the body, we impact our autonomic nervous system.

THE PRACTICE

Begin by attending to how you take your seat. When we meditate, we are cultivating a state that is both relaxed and alert. The way that we sit should support this state. It is important that you not be uncomfortable but at the same time you do not want to be so comfortable that you fall asleep.

If you can comfortably sit on the floor in a cross-legged position then do so, as this will place your spine in correct alignment. Sitting on a cushion raises your hips and helps with blood flow. You can also use pillows to prop up your knees if you need the support.

If you prefer to sit in a chair, make sure that you are not leaning back, holding your spine in an upright position. Uncross your legs and arms.

Then, without altering your breathing, turn your attention to your breath. You can place your attention on your belly or where your breath flows in and out of your nose. Watch your breath flowing in and out of the body.

When you notice that your attention has wandered, gently, without judgment, escort your attention back to your breath. You will do this over and over again. This is the practice, as you strengthen the muscle of attention.

Do not assume that the goal is to quiet your mind.

It is the nature of mind to comment and chatter. It can take years of practice to calm it down. The goal is to find a deeper state that will eventually emerge, despite the chattering mind. I sometimes experience my own internal chatter as a radio that is playing somewhere in the distant background.

If you notice that a deeper state has emerged, gently place your attention there. Otherwise, continue to focus on the breath, repeatedly escorting your attention back whenever it wanders.

I would recommend that you begin with five to ten minutes of practice a day, increasing this to a maximum of twenty minutes. This is an adequate amount of time to calm the mind and balance the autonomic nervous system.

Most leaders are ambitious. If ten minutes of meditation is good, wouldn't one hour be better? The potential for the overzealous use of meditation without adequate support is a genuine concern, particularly when we are using these practices without guidance.

If you begin to experience intrusive thoughts or tap into material that you find disturbing or overwhelming, then either lay down the practice and find other tools that are less potent or find a skilled practitioner who can help you work through the challenges.

Tonglen Meditation

The practice of Tonglen deepens compassion and cultivates an open heart. It helps immensely when someone

triggers negativity within you. In this practice, also called “giving and receiving,” you take in suffering and transform it into an offering back out into the world.

THE PRACTICE

Begin by finding a comfortable position. Turn your attention to your breath, and follow your breath in and out of your body several times.

If you are working through negativity towards someone, bring that person into your mind's eye. Breathe in whatever is triggered within you—dislike, anger, anxiety, fear, judgment, agitation—accepting that this is so. On the out-breath, send out kindness, wellbeing, and compassion.

If you have a jumble of feelings, then work with one feeling at a time. Do this repeatedly, until you have softened toward the person or have found a greater sense of calm.

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Jan Birchfield, Ph.D. explores the relationship between leadership, psychology, contemplative practice, and innovation. She works with leaders both individually and in groups, as well as in retreat at her center in Taos, New Mexico. She has a passion for working with those who wish to revitalize or who have an interest in increasing emotional or intuitive intelligence. She is a long-time practitioner of meditation and enjoys incorporating practices that explore the nature of consciousness into her work.

Jan also works with the connection between leadership and organizational culture, helping leaders implement culture change. Her clients have spanned a broad range of industries, including MJM Creative, Havas Media Group, Time Warner Cable, Westminster Choir College, Turn-around for Children, and Insight Communications.

Jan has lectured and written for audiences in corporate

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In 1995 Jan co-founded the Center for Advanced Emotional Intelligence (AEI), an executive coaching firm, where she served for eleven years as the Senior Partner.

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