

All True Leadership is Self-Leadership

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Acts of Leadership

On December 1, 1955 Rosa Parks feet did not just get tired. She was sitting in the “no man’s land” of seats just behind the white section of a Montgomery Alabama Bus. A white man was left standing at the front of the bus. The bus driver ordered her and three others to move to the back. Three of them did; she refused. Her refusal, spoken in a quiet voice in a now silent bus was a simple act but one that, as a colleague of mine puts it, “contained the DNA of the entire movement.”¹

Rosa Parks was not an unknowing pawn. She had been exposed for years to many sources of new thinking, and was participating in a local context in which deep change was brewing. She had recently spent a week at an interracial workshop at the Highlander Folk School, an extraordinary early institute that daringly promoted open dialogue between races. The move to use civil disobedience to disrupt a divided system, and then the choice to use Rosa Park’s arrest and case as a catalyst, were all part of a carefully cultivated strategy staged over many years to end segregation. But most important, she was the logical choice to serve as a symbol because of the outstanding and unassailable nature of her character. As one commentator put it, her temperament and awareness “represented one of the isolated high blips on the graph of human nature, offsetting a dozen or so sociopaths.”

This well-known story was not then, as is it is often assumed, a random act of civil disobedience, but a conscious strategic choice. It carried the power of a movement that had not yet broken surface but that had been quietly gestating for decades. Most intriguing about this remarkable act of leadership is how simple it actually was. All Rosa Parks did was *refuse to give up her seat*. The significance of her action lay in its meaning, and in the quality of internal intensity and character that stood behind it. This is always the case with any act of true leadership.

There are always, in every age, calls for leadership. The term leadership seems to conjure images of strong individuals who will stand in front of others and lead them – somewhere. Yet leadership of significance does not emerge as a result of grand external action. It comes through unpretentious acts and the deliberate cultivation and expression of the authority of character.

All true acts of leadership flow from the inside out – from the internal choices made within myself, or yourself, to forgive limitations, to stand firmly for what is true, to relinquish internal violence. It is not the what I do that counts so much as the why – and the who that is doing it – that matters most. Many others had refused to give up their actual or metaphorical seats in the segregated South before this. But the spirit of Rosa Parks’ act was clear enough to reverberate through a generation. In her case the power of her action was a result of a high fidelity relationship to her own integrity. This was not a case where she

¹ Leslie (Skip) Griffin, private conversation, October, 2005.

suppressed a sense of superiority to appear humble, or acted to gain attention. She revealed internal consistency with her own inner law – she simply could not have done otherwise. The impact was immense. Upon her death Rosa Parks was the first woman ever to lie in state in Washington DC, a result reflective of the impact of her character, not a plan for self-aggrandizement.

This essay explores the path for cultivating such “self-leadership” – the sort that carries seeds of greatness. While this may seem remote, or unattainable for you, its essence and meaning are not; in fact it is far more easily grasped than you might have been led to believe. The challenge lies not in hearing the words, but in living their meaning. What is required is not more conceptual knowledge so you might reach the high cliffs of intellectual insight. More it requires leaving the security of these cliffs and leaping from them. I describe this movement as a series of passages through three “gates,” three threshold experiences. It is more accurate to say they are doors through which one continuously learns to move, not one time affairs.

The first gate has to do with facing and overcoming the degree to which you have become entangled and caught in the situations you now face. Every organization, and every person, must deal with this problem. By entanglement I mean the realization that you have been caught up in something that you do not intend, find very difficult to extricate yourself from, and yet feel strangely bound to.

The second gate involves stepping into the realization that at the center of all the intense changes that are moving in your world, and in the world as a whole, is an eye of the storm. That is, there is a place to stand, an orientation point, present within and for each one of us, that can tell us how to act and how to live. To find this center in yourself, you do not have to be good, or censor yourself, or be loyal to someone, or devoted to a belief system or ideology. You do have to let go, and you do have to express the very finest qualities you know in each moment of your life. Ultimately you discover that you *are* this creative center, the very orientation point you have been looking outside of yourself to find.

The third threshold involves discovering that there is a fundamental creative rhythm to life, and that it is possible, in every moment, to be aligned with it. The idea that there is a larger order, and more, that it is precisely informative for behavior here and now, seems to many to be quite strange, but is embedded in all aspects of natural systems: the tides, the rhythms of the seasons, the cycle of day and night. What is more challenging to see is that these same rhythms are part of every aspect of creativity for human beings – that indeed all true creativity follows and flows in a similar pattern. Understanding this, and operating in alignment with it, allows us to fulfill our own creative impulses.

The essence of each gate is a choice to let a significant aspect of your own inner experience change. Each one involves a movement out of the comfort zone of familiar beliefs, into an unfamiliar, but ultimately exciting new experience. Passing through each of these requires personal and deliberate choice, and “internal work” – work on the nature and quality of one’s own expression of oneself. Crossing through these transitions, most critically means coming out of a familiar and habitual understanding of who you think you are, into a larger

and more vast sense of self. The essence of self-leadership is crossing through, and mastering the experiences of, each of these gates.

Two World Views

To navigate these three levels of experience, it is vital to understand what one is crossing out of and what one is crossing into. The shift involves a change in worldview, from a mechanistic paradigm to a living paradigm of experience.

The fundamental and deep assumption most people make when they face any serious leadership challenge is that the problem is “out there” – in the people causing them difficulty, in the constraints appearing in the situation, in the climate and culture of the system in which they are operating. Just ask them about it; they will quickly outline for you all the reasons and forces causing them difficulty. They will tend not to examine their own contribution and responsibility.

This is because the idea that the problem is out there is built on another assumption, which is that the person is not themselves part of the picture they are observing. They do not see their own influence or responsibility. The observer believes himself to be separate from that which is observed – to the point of not even noticing this assumption. What he sees is just – there. This naturally further leads to the idea that the problem can be solved with a “technical” solution, that is, one that somehow rearranges the external circumstance, without any additional need for learning and human adaptation.

These three assumptions – that the problem is out there, that the observer is not part of the observed scene, and that there are therefore technical solutions to most problems, describes the essential ingredients in a world view that has dominated most thinking about leadership and the nature of order itself. This view can be summarized in a single term – “mechanistic”. The mechanistic worldview says that the reality is “constituted of entities which are outside of each other, in the sense that they exist independently in different regions of space (and time) and interact through forces that do not bring about any changes in their essential natures.”² In this view, everything is regarded as separate from everything else, and is related to every other thing through a pattern of external arrangements. This point of view in other words denies the meaning and validity of internal and interior realities, and assumes that the external realities are all fixed.

The most obvious example of the mechanistic order and worldview is the machine, which is made of parts assembled together, each with an external relationship to every other part. The mechanistic mindset is built on the idea of separate parts. There is one machine in particular – the automobile -- that most plainly reveals the potency (and ultimately the limits) of the mechanistic view and its impact on almost every aspect of human experience.

In automobile production, there are interchangeable parts and ultimately interchangeable workers. This is the essence of mass production: focus on the piece parts, find the least cost way of producing each one, sum it all up, and you have the best solution. This worldview, once limited to the production of automobiles, now dominates the way almost

² David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, Routledge, London, 1980, Chapter 7.

every organization today is led: it represents the victory of the mechanistic paradigm. Every not-for-profit organization, most schools, healthcare systems, are constantly looking at their activities in terms of inputs and outputs, managing costs and controlling quality.³ Results are defined in advance, people are expected to be smart and go produce them; outputs are measured at the end of the process, and gaps observed are used as constraints to demand new and higher levels of outputs. Human beings have accepted the impact of mechanistic thinking to the point that they think of themselves as parts of the machine of production in their work – we only bring “part of ourselves to work” we say. The whole of oneself is not needed or accepted there. This process is so deeply pervasive and taken for granted that challenging it seems pointless; it is hard to imagine alternatives. Yet there is a remarkably different, and greatly more powerful, alternative and practical way of functioning, at both a collective and individual level.

The Living World

In contrast to the disassociated view embedded in the mechanistic image, there is another way of seeing things, one that is more consistent with emerging ideas in science, particularly in recent years in biology and the emerging inquiry into the intersection between brain functioning and neurophysiology. The gist of these ideas is that things are more alive, and interconnected, than was once thought. The essence of this view is that reality and its underlying order is a “living system” whose fundamental characteristic is “undivided wholeness.”

In this worldview the whole organizes the parts – in contrast to the mechanistic view, where the sum of the parts is seen as adding up to make the whole. This is a perspective one could say is inherent in Life itself – that Life is an undivided whole. We divide the world into parts in our minds, but nevertheless the whole, Life, is primary. The mechanistic mindset focuses on the parts and their external relationships. A living system approach looks to the underlying internal relationships in a system, to the space out of which these things arise, and then to the external structures that give form to this.

This sense of undivided wholeness is present in physics, for example, in some of the insights emerging in quantum theory, where traditional views about mechanism have been shown to be incorrect or at best only partial. My high school teachers taught me that reality consisted of discrete objects – “atoms” – and claimed that we lived in a kind of billiard ball universe – objects colliding and moving past each other. Influence was a function of local forces acting on each other. Influence fell off as a function of distance. Because the world was presumed to have a discrete and unchanging set of objects and forces, the ambition in the mechanistic worldview was to obtain precise measurement and prediction about that movement. If you knew the velocity and mass of an object you knew where it would be. This translated into leadership contexts as the desire to have predictable, planned and controllable results, and the assumption that there was a best way to achieve that result. The revolution will happen on Tuesday at 6 and be over by 10am the next day.

³ James Womack, *The Machine That Changed the World*.

Recent developments in physics have challenged this view. A more complete description, it is now argued, is that reality emerges out of a field of potential, and can be seen to be acting either like a wave, or like a particle, depending on how it is measured and observed. Reality changes depending on the context and arrangement one creates for observing it. In other words, observer and observed are understood to be not at all separate; each profoundly influences the other. We live in a relational universe.

Even more intriguing, and perplexing, quantum theory now suggests that there are ways particles appear correlated and coordinated with each other even though there is no local force acting on them. According to traditional, classical mechanics, this is not possible. But the experimental research is clear, and fundamentally and deeply contradicts the expectations of the mechanistic paradigm. This principle of “non-locality” in quantum theory strongly points to the notion of an underlying wholeness – a way by which objects are related that does not require local force acting upon them to cause influence.

It is not only in physics however that a different worldview shows itself. In architecture it is possible to sense the underlying wholeness in a design problem, and to draw out the factors that would enhance it. There is something in a barn, for example, whether it appears in New England or Holland or the western United States that has a certain recognizable quality to it. This quality is independent of the location, the observers, the builders, and yet is widely understood. A barn flows together into a whole in a way that is both pleasing and vivid. Christopher Alexander says that this is because it displays qualities of “living process” – the barn has within it structures that enhance and contribute to the sense of wholeness.⁴ The most telling quality of wholeness, says Alexander, is that it creates a good feeling. The structures and feeling that produce this are identifiable and reproducible.

There are examples of this way of thinking emerging in the midst of the industrial world as well. Toyota has emerged over the last 40 years as a company that has sought to respect this underlying sense of wholeness. Their approach places human beings, and the rhythms by which a human being works, not the mechanistic piece parts, at the center of their system. Fundamental to the Toyota approach is the idea of the “space”, or in Japanese “ba”, which guides action. Within Toyota there is a focus on “takt” time – the time it takes for a person to do a particular task. Their ambition is that a worker should be able to emerge from a Toyota factory as if they had been to a spa. A worker is not a “cog in a machine” in these settings, but an intimate part of a system that controls the flow of work and knowledge about that work.

These qualities of wholeness are not far below the surface, nor are they limited to external structures. Over the past 15 years I have explored with groups of people around the world the experience of collective intelligence that can be achieved through dialogue. It is possible, in certain conversations, to create a sense of communion, and connection that is elemental and profound. While it does not always appear, the conditions for its emergence are knowable. Fundamentally it has to do with the quality of the “container” or holding environment in which the conversation is held. The container creates a field in which subtle

⁴ Christopher Alexander, *The Nature of Order*, Vol I.

and delicate listening is possible, and out of which new forms of feeling and thinking can arise.

Each of these examples hint at the beginning understanding, one could say of a “technology of wholeness” – a way of thinking and acting about any system, that does not take the piece parts as primary, but strengthens the Life in the whole.

A Change of Orientation

Many people are today awakening to this sense of the interconnectedness of Life – the potential of a worldview and experience that is inherently whole and not fragmented. This is an age, some now say, where there is a “reappearance of humanity”, where there is a rejection of attempts to manipulate, and distinct valuing of the genuine, the real.⁵ I think of it as the “age of identity” – a time when there is a rediscovery for people of a core ground, a core set of truths about oneself. Some even argue there is a mass movement along these lines appearing, of “blessed unrest” – where people are self-organizing to overcome limitations in a way that is both highly aligned and without central coordination⁶

Unlike the mechanistic view, the living world arises from an internal experience and flows out. Therefore participating in it and understanding it requires an internal change, a change from the inside out. This tends to be a stumbling block in a world where knowledge is thought of as something that is held in the minds of experts – teachers, books, and that it somehow must be brought “into” oneself. There is a different kind of knowledge required here. Listen to Rumi, an Islamic poet, writing in the 13th century:

*There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired,
as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts
from books and from what the teacher says,
collecting information from the traditional sciences
as well as from the new sciences.*

*With such intelligence you rise in the world.
You get ranked ahead or behind others
in regard to your competence in retaining
information. You stroll with this intelligence
in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more
marks on your preserving tablets.*

*There is another kind of tablet, one
already completed and preserved inside you.
A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness
in the center of the chest. This other intelligence
does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid,
and it doesn't move from outside to inside*

⁵ Reference from conference conducted by *Strategy and Business*, 2005.

⁶ See Paul Hawken’s latest book, *Blessed Unrest*, 2007

through conduits of plumbing-learning.

*This second knowing is a fountainhead
from within you, moving out.*

Revealing this fountainhead of experience requires we cross three gates in ourselves – three dimensions of Self-Leadership. You need to (1) develop *awareness of the wholeness in the situation* in which you are functioning. This means coming to understand how to release yourself from entanglement in circumstances. It means seeing more clearly and taking your own responsibility: how you have created unintended results from well intended actions; (2) *awaken to identity* – to the essential nature of what could be called your eternal self, the true nature of your own core access to the living wholeness. This requires shedding amnesia – an illness most human beings seem to have. Most of us do not know where we have come from, where we are going, and most importantly, who we are! And finally (3) *align with living process*, with the creative rhythms and processes inherent in Life. The mechanistic worldview leads us to try to impose order on the world. But in doing so we fail to hear the order that is already there, and fail to let the creative possibilities within us emerge.

Entanglement and Awareness

In Boston we are the proud recipients of the biggest infrastructure project in the US – the “Big Dig”. At \$14.6 billion and 13 years and counting, this has taken far longer and cost far more than planned. None of this of course is any surprise to anyone. The taxi drivers began calling this project “The Big Joke” after it became apparent that the miles of tunnels were leaking – everywhere. More recently, a two-ton ceiling panel collapsed killing a passenger in a car. The panels, it was found, had been suspended with glue, and in one case, duct tape.

Projects go wrong all the time. In fact management and innovation solutions seem reliably to produce the opposite of their intended effects. The “revenge effects” of new technology never fail to amaze. The healthcare system itself is one of the biggest killers of people in the US. What is going on here? Human beings are constantly getting entangled in the systems in which they function. We lack awareness of the whole systems in which we live, and of the system of consequences we set in motion whenever we take action.

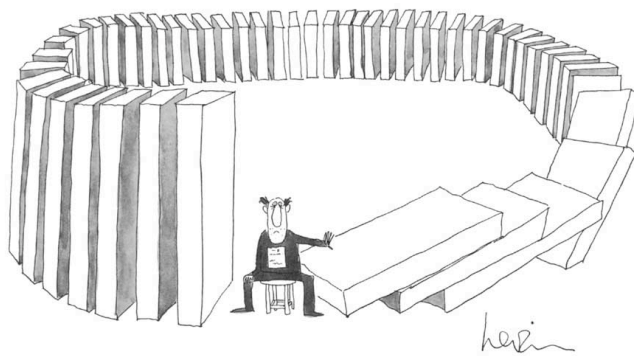
It is of course not just organizations that create unintended results. Everyone can relate to the feeling of trying ever harder to change circumstances, only to find that things only seem to get worse! The more we struggle, seemingly, the more trouble we get into.

One reason for this, and of the consequences of the mechanistic worldview, is that it has led us to fragment the world – to divide it in parts order to manage and measure it. The downside of this is that we divide the world into pieces and forget we did so – choosing not to see the impacts of our actions, because we are focusing on one particular part. A part that has lost awareness of its relatedness to the whole is a fragment. The word “fragment” comes from a root that means “to smash.” The parts in the whole begin to operate as if they were separate and unrelated to each other – different academic departments in universities or hospitals find themselves competing or in conflict; different design teams for

aspects single product differ; men and woman find themselves failing to understand one another.

Human thinking fragments things in time as well as in space. Human beings are tuned to pay attention to events, to things that happen that can be reported on discretely – this machine broke, that memo got written, this person called, – things that we can react to. But we are less aware, and in general less capable, of tracking and responding to patterns of events that are casually related and take place over time. This tendency to focus on the local and immediate can lead to trouble because it leads us to miss the causal chain that produced the symptoms we do not like.

The problem is that we lack awareness of the whole nature of the systems in which we function, and tend to focus on superficial features, as opposed to subtle or deeper factors. Like the gentleman in the image below, we tend not to realize that our actions tend to come around again:



Sometimes the dominos take months or years to be felt. For a while, it appears as if nothing is happening, and then suddenly, bang! The “non-linear” nature of systems effects take us by surprise.

For many years human beings have debated whether the domino called Green House Gases (GHG) would negatively impact the environment, for instance, and some still do. There has been over the past 25 years a long slow increase in temperature and a gradual rise in GHG concentration in the atmosphere. Yet only recently have people begun to see impacts and question their cause. Even climatologists can be taken by surprise. Many today for instance, are saying privately things like “it is happening a lot faster than we thought it would” speaking about the melting of major ice fields.

It is possible however to become attuned to the movement and dynamics of a system. Taking a shower, one learns not to step in until the cold and hot water have had a chance to mix. This is a system insight! You know there is a delay between the action you take and

the impact it has. Most human beings are entangled in the systems that they are in, not realizing that they are creating the very effects they do not like.

Crossing the first gate means cultivating a deeper sense of awareness, of listening not just to what you are putting out, but to what is coming back. Crossing this gate requires we enlarge our sense of self, so that we are conscious of more than just what is immediately around us. Most people listen largely in “self-confirmation mode” – meaning, they listen for what agrees with what they are saying and discount what does not. Being in a mode that is open to disconfirmation can quickly reveal what you are missing and not seeing, but that is right in front of you.

Harvard University researchers Daniel Simmons and Christopher Chabris recently created a startling experiment on “inattention blindness” that illustrates this point. They took a group of 6 college students, gave them two basketballs and placed them standing in a circle. Three of the students wore black shirts and three wore white. Sometimes the students passed the ball using bounce passes – one bounce before reaching the next person; sometimes they used chest passes – passing directly from one person to another without letting the ball touch the ground. The students passed the balls for a minute; the researcher made a video of them. Observers were then divided into groups, with half asked to count as carefully as they could the number of bounce passes and half the number of chest passes. About 20 seconds into the video, slowly and in a lumbering gait, a man dressed in a gorilla suit walks right through the middle of the students passing the basketballs. They ignore the gorilla. The gorilla stops in the middle of the students, turns and faces the camera, beats his chest, and then slowly walks off the screen.

Observers are first asked how many chest passes and how many bounce passes they saw. They are then asked if they saw anything odd about the video. Typically 25% or less raise their hands. The video is again shown, this time though the instruction is not to count anything but just to watch. This time, about 80% of the people see the gorilla, and realize that *they did not see it at all the first time*. This result can be quite shocking to people. It is not often that a gorilla walks across your screen, you realize, and you just miss it.

What this research shows is that this kind of thing happens much more often than we think. We lack awareness of the whole, of the situation and the factors in it, typically because we are counting piece parts, small aspects of the situation. *We see much less than we think we do.*

Paradoxical as this sounds, crossing the gate of awareness means cultivating a conscious appreciation of our own blindspots, of the limits of our vision, of what is present in and around us. When you become interested in what you might not be seeing, you begin to see more. You also begin to realize that people around you have been telling you about things for some time, but that you chose not to listen. The awareness I am speaking of here is not merely awareness of events, or even patterns of events, however, but of the very way we process information and understand the world. Becoming “mindful” of the way our thought filters the reality we see, or think we see, is an essential step.

Amnesia and Identity

One of the most challenging things for leaders anywhere to accept and act on is the realization that they have accumulated bad habits – ways of operating that do not reveal their highest and finest selves. Bad habits represent inattention to character.

The second gate to cross, to discover the fullness of the living world, requires we take the brave step of acknowledging the worth and potency of one's own character. This is from Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay, "Self-Reliance":

A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses his own thought without notice because it is his... there comes a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better or worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. Not for nothing, one face, one character makes an impression, and another none. It is not without pre-established harmony, this sculpture in the memory... Trust thyself. Every heart vibrates to that iron string.⁷

The fundamental habit to overcome is the discounting of one's own greatness. We have literally forgotten it. This kind of amnesia leads us to look around to find value, and meaning, in things outside of ourselves, but this journey always results in our coming up empty handed.

Acceptance of the largeness of one's own character immediately puts into stark relief that which one has accepted or tolerated that does not meet that gold standard. This is a surrender that reveals depth, not weakness. What is intriguing is that orienting in this way to one's own sense of Self stabilizes one's world. There is, one discovers, as I suggested, an "eye" to the storm. Such realization as this emerges from internal discipline, relaxation, and humility. This kind of understanding places the polarity of one's world in oneself, so that you are not then always chasing out there what was always present right here. As you do this, the world comes to you. Indeed this was one of the remarkable dimensions of Rosa Park's stance. She did not start out intending to lead anyone. She simply took a stance of character in herself, and the world organized itself around her. Listen to her speaking at a conference when she was 85:

Back in Montgomery during my growing up there, it was completely legally enforced racial segregation, and of course, I struggled against it for a long time. I felt that it was not right to be deprived of freedom when we were living in the Home of the Brave and Land of the Free. Of course, when I refused to stand up, on the orders of the bus driver, for a white passenger to take the seat, and I was not sitting in the front of the bus, as many people have said, and neither was my feet hurting, as many people have said. But I made up my mind that I would not give in any longer to legally imposed racial segregation and of course my arrest brought about the protests for more than a year. And in doing so, Dr. Martin Luther King became prominent because he was the leader of our

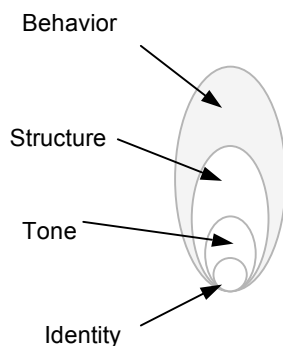
⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

protests along with many other people. And I'm very glad that this experience I had then brought about a movement that triggered across the United States and in other places.”⁸

Character reveals humility. While there are many ways to think about leadership, the realization comes that in the end all true leadership is self-leadership; what happens within oneself determines the impact felt in our worlds.

I have found that a useful way of thinking about the gate of identity is to see it as a series of levels. Think of these levels as dimensions of a flame. The first level, the yellow of the flame, corresponds to the actions, the outer evidence of behavior.

The second level corresponds to the “structures” that give rise to these actions. You can understand structure by thinking of a river. In a river the rocks on the riverbed, and indeed the very shape of the riverbed, influence and inform the movement of the water. Depending on the positioning of the rocks, you will see patterns on the surface of the water. The rocks are the structures, and they determine and control the flow of the water. Rosa Parks encountered the intense structure of racial segregation in the South. Below the level of structure, however, is something more – the quality of the atmosphere or relationship in which the actions are taking place. I refer to this level as the “tone” out of which the structures arise. Everyone can name the tone or feeling in a given situation: it is either scattered or still, light or heavy, joyous or oppressive. The tone, or energy of a situation, is also enormously influential on the quality of the outcomes, and tends to dictate what structures arise and persist.



But there is more yet below this – the space out of which the tone emerges. Think of this as the stand a person a person takes. This core level, the blue of the flame, is the nature of the character of a person, which could simply be called the center of their identity. The identity level is the core or source, the hottest part. When people at Toyota speaks about space, or “ba” they are referring to the Tone and Identity levels. They see western managers trying to understand their system, looking at the action and structure levels. For many years such managers have taken one tool or technique away, tried it, only to discover that its effectiveness was limited. The fad cycle of improvement, whether at an organizational or personal level, is based on efforts to change caused by this lack of deep

⁸ Talk given in Williamsburg, VA, June 2 1995.

perception, a lack of understanding of the course of identity from which character and action moves.

Self leadership is the act of deepening awareness of the structures that guide one's habitual actions, and the tone and identity that have supported this, and then allowing these deeper factors to change. This is the second gate, and it is the essence of the process of maturation.

Rhythms of Life

The final gate to cross has to do with the realization that the living world already has within it pulsations – rhythms – with which one must be aligned if one is to be effective in producing change. It is a recognition of timing. The mechanistic frame has embedded within it a notion of time that is chronological – time is linear, an arrow moving ever into the future. This kind of time could be referred to as “*kronos*”, from the Roman god of time. Everyone is in a sense enslaved to *kronos*, to linear time: look at your wrist! There is another kind of time, generally the time of the seasons, of the sense of fullness of things. This kind of time, called “*kairos*”, is cyclical, and rhythmic. It is the timing of the seasons, or the tides. When you stand on a beach, you can get a sense of whether the tide is coming in, or going out. We sometimes say that the season is changing. The capacity to sense this is evidence of our awareness of *kairos*.

The living world works on *kairos* time. Humanly imposed mechanistic time, *kronos*, while useful, used exclusively can cause us to miss the rhythms of natural creativity that are characteristic of a non-mechanistic approach.

This point of view could seem quaint, perhaps impractical. Yet as an MIT Research colleague of mine recently noted, “if you step into a Toyota factory, you immediately gather a the sense of rhythm in the place.” A large industrial facility designed to build cars, with a quality of *kairos* at its center!

There is a gate here because it appears one has to leave something behind, namely the sense of control that seems to be inherent in the mechanistic approach to time, to come to understand how to operate with a different sense.

There are many other dimensions of rhythm and creative process in this gate. A central feature resides in the difference between a generative order and a descriptive order. A “generative” order contains a set of instructions that hold the potential of assembling something with life in it. A descriptive order is a blueprint – where the final dimensions are defined in advance. A genuinely creative process cannot pre-define the results it is to produce. To define everything in advance is to squeeze out the life in it. Generative orders follow a creative flow, a sequence where one step builds on the next, but where the final product is a function of all the factors interacting together. The outcome is creative, but not precisely predictable. What needs to be cultivated is the capacity to act in a generative manner – to get the feel for this.

Stepping into Life

Awakening to the potential of a new worldview is a first step. But the next step requires action, and a choice to cross three gates, to engage in and experience three distinct rites of passage – cultivating awareness, stepping into maturity by awakening to a deeper level of one’s own identity, and aligning with the underlying rhythms of Life – by listening for them, and learning to walk with them.

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