



## **MEDITATION, LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

New leadership emerges when ethics are rooted in spiritual practices that allow our true nature - truth, integrity, happiness and wisdom - to be expressed. We have to re-educate ourselves about this, first, by examining our addictive behaviors, then by recognizing what we are truly seeking. We create the conditions for this to happen through silence, meditation and mindfulness practice. I explore the interconnection between leadership qualities and ethics, and chart a path to a sense of internal freedom that can re-construct society with a different form of leadership. This leadership is sculpted from the deep experience of oneself in meditation. This is how we re-educate the world. I refer to ethical guidelines provided by Thich Nhat Hanh as signposts for the spiritual traveler, so that we know how to behave and honor our interconnectedness with everything. I like Greenpeace's motto of "We All Live Downstream!"

### **Introduction**

This essay presents a global perspective on a particular tribe - the human race. The question addressed is that of leadership. I have long pondered on the paucity of quality leadership in the world at the present time. From experience, and reflections on different traditions, I came to believe that the answer was simple and ancient, yet perhaps more radical than old fashioned. Without ethics, rooted in a spiritual practice that entails meditation, there is no possibility of a leadership emerging that would rest on principles of integrity, compassion and awareness. This essay also examines the other side of this assertion, to demonstrate how leadership possibilities can unfold once an ethical, meditative foundation is established.

The lack of leadership, truth and integrity in public life exists simply because the world is ignorant of its true nature. As ignorance can be remedied through education, the question then becomes, "What kind of education?" The answer is meditation and

mindfulness practice. But before establishing that, I explore the current situation about our true nature. I believe that people everywhere are searching, consciously or unconsciously, to experience this and instinctively know that is where their happiness lies. The striving is instructive, because it reveals that humanity's true nature *is* that of truth, integrity and happiness. For instance, at the root of our addictive and compulsive behavior we find a drive to experience spiritual fulfilment - only that drive has been placed in inappropriate and perverted endeavours. I agree with Andrew Weil (1972) and the Grofs (1993), that underneath drug and alcohol addiction there lies a drive to experience wholeness, or a sense of a higher self. Addiction is often referred to as “spiritual bankruptcy’ by those suffering from it. In their depths of despair, many people intuit that their addictive drives are a form of substitute gratification for their inability to touch their true nature (Wilber, 1980). Ken Wilber puts it very succinctly:

*...the intuition that one is the All is perverted into the desire to possess All. In place of being everything, one merely desires to have everything. That is the basis of substitute gratification and that is the insatiable thirst living in the soul of all separate selves. (Wilber, 1980,106).*

When we are driven by our addictions, we can never, ever satisfy them. The end result is always deep suffering and personal destruction. The basic hunger is not for that which we crave or are addicted to - that is only a poor substitute for the transcendental experience of our true nature. Our true nature is what we seek, consciously or unconsciously, and the best therapy, or re-education, for addictive behavior is meditation, as the suffering individual may then have the opportunity to experience what she is truly seeking. It is a formidable task for people suffering from addiction to realize this, to address the causes and consequences of the cravings that drive them. The shift in consciousness to the true goal of our striving does, however, produce dramatic results.

The founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill Wilson, never drank again when he experienced a profound mystical experience after a self-destructive, alcoholic binge placed him in hospital. He knew that his recovery from addiction was not possible without a spiritual dimension to his life. From that experience and insight, he created the twelve step spiritual program of Alcoholics Anonymous, and his leadership in creating this format has relieved the suffering of countless millions around the world. What Bill

Wilson discovered was that our true nature is our spiritual nature, and that is where we find the leadership qualities of truth, integrity and wisdom.

Yet we do not often find these characteristics in high places of public office. What passes for leadership and ethics appears to be uninformed by these essential human attributes. Instead, the turmoil and sufferings of peoples and nations persists, and that is the way it is right now. We can, however, draw inspiration from the realization that the greater the misery and unhappiness in world affairs, the deeper the abject poverty of leadership, the more likely these circumstances will provoke the emergence of divinely inspired people who will redress matters. These persons will bring our global civilization into harmony with a higher vibration.

Our present global troubles and circumstances provide the crucible, which will create this change, as the breakdowns in family, national and international domains provide a clear directive for a paradigm shift to a different path. Leaders and statesmen presently try to govern others with rules that do not reflect any internal set of ethics, but in their hearts they know full well that they cannot even govern themselves. The greatest power lies in the hands of a person who has penetrated to his or her inner most depths through an investigation of their true nature. From living their lives in truth and service, such persons have the authority of example, and wisdom, to exercise a power that most national leaders can only dream about. Until a person begins the search for their true nature, leadership based on ethics will not emerge in that person's expression of public life. I am talking about leadership as that natural core of love, maturity and responsibility that is inherently within us, deeply embedded in our true nature.

The problem is that we have closed the doors to our true nature, due to our wrong perceptions, continual suffering, and because of our small hearts and limited consciousness. The Buddha guided the novice Rahula to this insight with a wonderful analogy. If there is a cup of water and you put a handful of salt into it, then it is impossible to drink, because the water is too salty. If the same amount of salt is poured into a large swiftly flowing river, you can drink from the river because it is large enough not to be affected by a handful of salt. If our hearts expand to become as enormous as the river, then our understanding, compassion and love are not restricted. The Buddha

reminded Rahula to practice meditation so that his heart would become as large as the river and be filled with love.

Understanding this provides us with an arrow to the heart, a necessary direction to turn inwards. That is the most effective way to relieve suffering and expand our consciousness. At the same time it removes wrong perceptions. In this manner we open the doors to the state of being a loving, mature leader, who can make a difference. We all have this capacity within us, yet rarely do we express it fully. We must look deeply into our suffering, and at the same time take the steps to expand our consciousness. These are not separate elements, for when our consciousness is narrow, we hold on tight to all our self imposed dramas and suffering. We slam the door shut and keep our dysfunctional habits intact so that they can play hell with our lives. We remain wounded, driven by our scars, angers and fears and we suffer all our lives. The remedy of meditation and mindfulness practice places us on the path of consciousness expansion, and on that path, the knots of suffering begin to unravel. The knots are not so tightly held when the tapestry of our consciousness expands. With that step the inner doors to the heart, to our true nature, begin to open, and the tight grip we have placed on our cravings and sufferings begins to loosen. Our fidelity to meditation and diligence in mindfulness practice truly serves us, for as we expand our consciousness and connect to our true nature, we touch the seeds of leadership that lie dormant within us.

Before this can be effected, we must learn to stop – *Samatha*. We have to slow down from our busy lives and mental clutter, silence our monkey minds, and come to rest. This is why in meditation we do pranayama, deep relaxation, walking meditation and the like, to slow down and come to a stop. One by one we close the external doors to external events that preoccupy our senses with one kind of illusion after another. When the mind is full of thoughts, prejudices and opinions about others, and external events, we become lost in all that is external. We must learn to shut the door. As these outer doors close, the inner door to the heart opens, and in that location there is only love, goodness and wisdom as a foundation for leadership.

We must create the conditions for this to happen. There is no point in having this knowledge and insight if we do nothing about it. It is necessary to institute silence in our lives, to have fidelity to daily meditation practice, and learn to bring mindfulness to

everything we do. From this stopping we can better see deeply into ourselves, glimpse and experience our true nature and know our leadership potential. At the same time we see the patterns of behavior that create blockages within us, and prevent us from touching our true nature. This is *Vipassana* – deep looking and insight. But first we need to stop. When you find that you have stopped, do not move from that place – the center of your being. Stay there and be still, for that is where the inner door to your heart opens and love and compassion fill you. This is how you go beyond cravings and addictions. This is how you go beyond the “I,” the attachments to ego, and this is how you may claim the kernel of leadership that is your own. Just become love, enter the state of your deepest and truest nature, and do not move from that location.

The interconnection between leadership qualities and ethics provides a set of issues that can be explored on many different levels, and through various types of discourse. It is necessary to see deeply into those factors that produce quality leadership and those that do not. Furthermore, to see deeply into the ethical guidelines that provide a foundation for leadership of the highest quality. Ethics refer to a set of value guidelines for people to bring their lives closer to the highest principles of integrity, leadership and self-awareness. As an imposed code of rules and regulations, ethics have little meaning. It is only when ethics are internalized as part of a spiritual path, and lived from the inside, can we say that ethics have penetrated to the core of a human being. Ethics are guidelines to take the spiritual traveller in the direction of God and the energy of mindfulness. Once we dwell there, rules and ethics become unnecessary. Yet, on the journey, wise ethics and rules of behaviour are essential to guide our footsteps on the path of personal liberation. Ethics are an internal friend to guide us when we are confused, lost and full of doubt. They are not a heavy burden that oppresses us; rather, they are guidelines provided for us by teachers who love us dearly, and who seek to guide us along our path.

The truly great leaders throughout history have rooted themselves in a deep spiritual awakening. The Buddha's Eight-fold path and precepts for his monastic and lay communities, are ethical instruments to show the way to similar awakenings, and provide the clarity for leadership to evolve. Abraham Lincoln, with his deep reverence for God and ethical standards, lead America into a civil war rather than tolerate slavery in the



inspiration to the world. In the twenty-seven years Mandela spent in prison, the connection between truth, ethics and leadership became very clear to him. There is no political leader like him in the world today and he inspires the world with the quality of leadership that brought down the South African system of apartheid. All these leaders moved beyond doubt and uncertainty. Each one embarked upon a quest for their true nature. Besides these examples, at the present time, we know of only a few leaders of quality in political, corporate, bureaucratic and religious domains of life. Current leaders at the local, national and international levels seem to look only to their own establishment or re-election. Driven by power and greed they quickly succumb to corruption, and then peddle corruption to protect their power and self interests. It is the same process of corruption whether it is found in village India, the British parliament or the United Nations, and steps must be taken to change it. A different face of power must come to the surface to support a different kind of leadership in the world today, one built on ethics and spiritual awakening rather than on self interest and corruption.

Leaders who root themselves in a deep spiritual understanding and knowledge of themselves, are in a position to bring peace to their nation and to the world, for they will see deeply into the morass of the world's crises. They know that the solution is a spiritual one, balanced with the existential necessities of life. Their leadership can guide us to happiness, for they have the experience and insight to show everyone the pitfalls of ignorance, cravings, myopia and wrong pursuits. The general state of emergency in world affairs causes so much pain and suffering that re-education is crucial. The re-education I have in mind is through meditation, so that ignorance about our true nature is removed. This need not only be regarded as a spiritual solution per se, simply that we realize that the basic necessities of life have not been taught to the current generations inhabiting the earth. With re-education through meditation we experience the territory of the heart, and learn that love and compassion are a necessary part of our daily bread. Furthermore, that our service as leaders rests on this twin foundation of love and compassion. In this manner our leadership qualities transform the world, for our hearts emanate the energy frequencies of transformation and balance. The signals from our hearts, when we occupy that consciousness radiate and resonate to others, out into the universe and around the world.

Without the quality of resting in our true nature, we are not in a position to take care of the world, whether this be our home, workplace, school or the global ecosystem. In the Diamond Sutra, the Buddha very carefully mapped the reality of our being interconnected with everything, so that if we wish to make a difference to the world, to care for it, we must journey inwards and take care of our true nature. Once there, we will find the strength, wisdom and clarity to be leaders for the twenty first century. Thay Nhat Hanh spoke about this to the Gorbachev State of the World Forum, held in San Francisco in 1997. He stressed the importance of our daily practice of mindfulness so that we can be there deeply with our true presence, so that we may nourish the vision and reality of Interbeing. That is the ground of the Diamond Sutra. Furthermore, it is the foundation for the leadership necessary for the twenty first century. We already possess a means to regulate planetary and universal affairs, but have simply forgotten to turn on the switch. The switch is heart consciousness. The journey to it is meditation and mindfulness practice. These are the major components of the new leadership that is beginning to emerge world wide.

In a later section, I will approach this topic of leadership through questions I have been asked in meditation classes. These questions, which probe the core qualities of leadership and ethics, provide a template for the reader to examine the qualities of leadership in himself, and also in the leaders she is represented by in the community, nation and the world. Before coming to these questions and answers, let me first map the topography of leadership and ethics.

### **Standing for One's Own Good or Standing for Truth?**

What is meant by Good, and how is this different from Truth? It depends on the definitions used and on the experiences that the definitions are applied to. Truth is considered as a universal energy, the voice and power of God, the boundless energy of mindfulness. The power of living in Truth, and Truth Alone, was the strength and authority behind the wisdom and knowledge provided by all the great masters and spiritual leaders. They provided an ethical order to guide their public, and their dedication to Truth was the foundation of community and nation. This knowledge and wisdom is offered to the modern world through the numerous meditation programs of the

world's wisdom traditions. The intent is to transform the world through individuals' Living in Truth so that mature leaders with loving hearts are empowered to transform public and private life.

On the other hand, "Standing for Good" refers to our everyday circumstances. We take a stand for the "good" of our particular interest group, whether that be an ethnic, religious or national identity. In doing so, we get caught in the trap of exclusive identities. All our efforts and energies become devoted to protecting and justifying those narrowly held identities. For example: standing for the good of Croatian or Serbian ethnicity in the former Yugoslavia and killing anyone not of that identity - such is the nature of ethnic cleansing; standing for the good of Hinduism or Islam in India - such is the nature of religious sectarianism; or for the good of only American or Russian nationalism - such was the nature of the Cold War in global geopolitics. Only separation and entropy can follow from standing for the "good" of everyday circumstances and immediate identifications. None of this has the extraordinary force of "Standing for Truth." That comes directly from the power of self-awareness, beyond the boundaries of everyday circumstances and identities. Though both terms, at this level, are subjective, only one is truly powerful and everlasting - and that is "Truth". To Live in Truth provides the power to transform nations and the world.

At a much deeper level all these distinctions fall away because words and concepts are limited tools to extend the experience of that which is unlimited and boundless. Mystics in tune with the Truth of God simply live, and become, the mystery through their example. Because they *know* from experience, they understand Truth fully, and there is no need for them to take a "Stand for Truth": they simply are THAT. Despite the limitations and imperfections of words and concepts to convey that which is full and perfect, it is possible to provide a map with some travel directions for the reader. Truth belongs in the Absolute dimension of Nirvana and Samadhi. In this Absolute dimension there are no concepts, discriminations or distinctions, simply a knowing of the wondrous interconnection of everything. Lying outside of time and space, the Absolute dimension provides a truly mystical experience of all consciousness, which can only be lived, not talked about. The notion of "Standing for Good" rests in the existential dimension of our everyday lives. This is the Relative or historical dimension, and unfortunately many of

our discussions about Truth remain caught here, as every particular interest group and set of identities has its own Truth. This is Relative truth only, one that has yet to acknowledge the dynamic nature of interconnectedness between levels and between all phenomena.

Thay Nhat Hanh (1992) has pointed out that the two dimensions relate like waves to water. Waves are born and die, they rise and fall, pushed into shape by winds, tides and gravity; they take different forms and movement and disintegrate on some river bank or seashore. Water, on the other hand, remains the same, unchanging and unchanged by the action of waves. It is water that corresponds to the Absolute dimension of Truth. Waves reflect the Relative, historical dimension of "Standing for the Good" of our particular interest groups, and the preservation of narrowly defined identities. The inter-relation between waves and water is, however, a dynamic one. All of us are both waves and water. If you see deeply into one, then you naturally touch the other; such is the nature of interbeing. The experience of the water, even a momentary one, provides a flavor for the waves of life. The importance of daily meditation is for the experience of silence and Samadhi to be increasingly brought into your activities and everyday circumstances. As the experience of meditation is extended into your work, it continues to flow into whatever activities you do. When you continue to meditate, remarkable changes occur in your attitudes towards life's situations - the people, events and objects with which you constantly engage. You will notice that your actions begin to follow your meditations, without your appearing to do anything about it, although it is your fidelity to practice that has brought you to a deeper awareness of your strengths. You will also recognize that the realization of Truth is the same for all human beings, and you begin to connect to everyone from that standpoint.

The difference between meditation and external activities will further decrease, as congruence between meditative and daily activities settles into your being. You start to know your true nature, and the truth of it shines forth through your expression. The mind calms, clears and becomes flooded with happiness, for happiness is identical with your true nature and is available to experience once you remove false identifications. It is not so much that you gain knowledge; rather, it is that you remove ignorance and know that you are not the limitations of body, thought, mind and desire identifications. You are an

unbounded self where happiness, freedom and responsibility coincide to make of you a natural and true leader. This self-awareness leaves your doubts and uncertainties behind. It enables you to understand why everyone, consciously or unconsciously, strives for happiness and also why happiness is so often sought after in often damaging ways. Yet the striving is a deep recognition that our true nature *is* happiness. Somehow we know this - that happiness is an essential component of our true nature.

Now we begin to see the importance of ethics based on Truth, as a foundation to guide and nurture leadership of the highest quality. It is waves connecting to water. When you see deeply into the Absolute dimension and experience it, then the existential reality of the Relative, historical dimension is revealed, nurtured and transformed by the experience of the Absolute dimension. The relationship is dynamic, rooted in silence and an evolving consciousness. The relationship between ethics and leadership has the same structure. This too is dynamic when we acknowledge the interconnected nature of Absolute and Relative.

A classic example of the interplay between Absolute and Relative is the life of Gandhi. He lived by Truth in Absolute terms and gained great concentration and insight through his personal "Experiments with Truth" (Gandhi, 1927). His process was an internal examination of himself and God, with a focused scrutiny of where Absolute Truth lay. Gandhi was rooted in the historical reality of India's religious sectarianism and the British colonial presence. Many of the people around him stood only for the good of Muslims or of Hindus, whereas Gandhi clearly followed the path of Truth that underlay Hindu, Muslim and the British colonialist, (he also wanted the British to leave as friends of India.) He was unwavering in his commitment to Truth, he did not need to take a stand for it. He became it. He lived it. He was like the water of the Absolute dimension, and he provided that flavor for the waves of changing circumstances to be touched by his example. It was from Truth that Gandhi liberated India. His strategy of nonviolence recognized the true nature of interconnectedness, of interbeing - of the dynamic interplay between waves and water. But without his personal spiritual strength, this strategy could never have worked. His ethics, established in the Absolute dimension, in Truth, enabled a quality of leadership to emerge that the world has rarely seen. Yet it frightened those who lived by the Relative, historical dimension only. And so the waves of separation -

the concern for Hindu good and Muslim good - lead to partition and to his assassination. These waves rise and fall. But the eternal water of Truth, the Absolute dimension of Samadhi is unwavering and unaffected. That dimension is beyond time and space, which is why Gandhi remains very much alive as a powerful example to the world. The Nobel Peace Prize committee in acknowledging the Myanmar leader, also acknowledged Gandhi whose example she followed. Gandhi is alive in the world today and his life is a chronicle of leadership based on ethics.

### **From Self-serving and Selfishness to Selflessness**

Selfishness and self-serving describe a state of mind and of being; therefore, they can be changed through education and training in self-awareness that shifts the energy of that particular mind state. I am talking about new paradigms for citizen *action, responsibility and awareness*. Though in actual fact, the process is the reverse direction: change *awareness* through methods of education and meditation, so that citizens can then take *responsibility* for their society through proper ethical *action*. However, before we get to process, it is important to map the characteristics of selfishness and self-serving so that we know precisely what has to shift.

Selfishness and self-serving are associated with a process whereby individuals, communities and nations hold fast to their presumed identities and special interests. Status, wealth and power become attached to these identities and special interests. An enormous amount of energy is expended to keep that status, wealth and power intact, and to ensure that no one else shares in it. Selfishness is, thus, about exclusion, creating gross inequities between those who have and those who have not. Once in motion it is like a monster that can never be satisfied. There is the powerful ego drive to control, expand and profit, and to deeply entrench this manifestation of ego in all aspects of life. This process is fuelled by the collusion of power elites in business, politics, media and bureaucracy, who share a common interest in maintaining power at all costs. As the engine of selfishness is power and greed, it inevitably produces corruption. This describes the operation of transnational capitalism and the attendant production of alienation and human misery.

Selflessness, on the other hand, is the rebel that challenges and threatens these systems, and can lead to their modification and transformation. In selflessness there is no identity or special interest group to protect; therefore there is no greed or power in the sense of political and economic power. Rather, what emerges is a citizen power based on selflessness. This is the power of example from the heart. Selflessness is rooted in the heart, in love and compassion for others, and it reaches out to the hearts of those who are touched by it. The power component of selfishness works through coercion, force, control and an enormous expenditure of energy and resources. Whereas the power of selflessness is the authority of example and wisdom. It is also a smile from the heart that gently lifts the hearts of those who experience it. The teaching of meditation and education about increasing self-awareness are the methodologies that start the shift from selfishness to selflessness. A new paradigm evolves out of selflessness, because there naturally emerges a creativity, leadership and dynamic energy, which then lead to the formation of new and more appropriate structures for human activities in society.

Such newness is stifled by selfishness, for selfishness protects the special interests of corrupt elites who entrench power, control and identity in order to maintain the status quo. The truth is that such selfishness produces misery for both those holding power and those who do not. It is a deadly, unseen poison because it slowly saturates people's systems with bitterness and disappointment. Like a thief, it robs them of the joy of life. Thus it is that selfish takers and getters do not experience joy. They are not happy, for their joy has never been nourished. Despite the wealth and accumulation from selfish taking, there can be no joy, and in a way, wealth acquired through selfishness represents a curious form of poverty, the poverty of the human spirit - to be without joy. It is the selfless giving of oneself that produces joy, happiness and the glow of the spirit. In other words, selfish strategies of exclusion are energy drains and miserable for all concerned. On the other hand the all inclusive strategy of selflessness has a dynamic creativity and upward spiral of energy, that can lead to liberation for all parties. When we look deeply into selfishness and self-serving, perhaps to our surprise, we find misery, exclusiveness and energy drains. Selflessness, by contrast, enjoys the characteristics of freedom, inclusiveness and an opening for purification and liberation of a spiritual nature.

*How does this discussion impinge on leadership qualities?* It is possible to distinguish a leader from a follower in that leaders assume a sense of responsibility for the whole; whereas, followers are only concerned with their immediate self interests, be it profit, power or survival. Thus, leadership carries with it considerations of inclusiveness as opposed to exclusiveness, joy and happiness in being as opposed to misery and despair. With these distinctions in mind, the selfless/selfish dichotomy is a facet of the leader/follower distinction. Selfishness is about ME, Exclusively MINE, and carries no sense of responsibility for the whole. It is wrapped up in keeping things just as they are, to protect pre-existing identities and the power of special interest groups. From the distinctions drawn above, a selfish person - no matter how powerful - is clearly a follower (not a leader), a taker (not a giver). It is the process of meditation that provides the key, and the momentum, for the shift from selfish to selfless to take place. The characteristics of leader and selfless overlap. Both terms refer to responsibility for the whole and also to inclusiveness. Both terms also have a sense of joy and happiness in the adventure of life and evolving consciousness, and both terms reflect deep aspects of our true nature. Being a selfish follower, on the other hand, is hard work, as it pits us against the strong tides of our true nature. It is natural to be a selfless leader; that is the flow and sense of life. No such sense is available from the terms "follower" and "selfish", which take us into the mire of ego, personality, conditioning and karma, striving like hell to keep identities intact. Such a striving does not emerge from the leader/selfless connotations.

### **Freedom, Leadership and Ethics**

When time and space are suspended and one experiences, however fleetingly, the glorious interconnections of all phenomena as God's web of creation, then one has touched "inner" freedom as part of the quest for our true nature. It is a sense of interconnectedness so vast and boundless that there are no words or concepts that can adequately describe it, one simply becomes it. Animals, plants, minerals and people are no longer separate. No longer are levels and dimensions of consciousness separate. It all interconnects as a miracle of creation. The sense and depth of interconnection reflect how deeply we are united with God inside us, and the energy of mindfulness guides us to realize we are part of that same common source. This freedom is there, before our eyes

and experience all the time. We experience it only when we move beyond separation, distinctions, and concepts, and see the web of creation just as it is, be with whatever is happening just as it is. From this experience of "inner" freedom everything flows and simply falls into place. In such a state of internal freedom a person's life is a dance to creation, for that person has abundance in his soul and a sense of prosperity in every aspect of life. Prosperity is a reflection of an inner state, and to be truly rich requires that we transcend the fetters and chains of suffering and karma, then in freedom intuitively dance the song of the soul.

No one can give you freedom. It comes from Living in Truth in each moment and surrendering. When you can be with reality as it is without resistance, then you are free to recognize the interconnectedness and source of all things. As you continue to see and be with reality as it truly is, there is a process of expanding awareness that can be referred to as Enlightenment. Enlightenment is not identified with any particular state of freedom. It is the process of expansion created by being with reality just as it is. Extraordinary powers of vision and action ensue from this state of freedom, and we can step into it by progressively releasing false identifications of our self with ego, body, karma and other identifications.

In meditation, the experience of freedom is facilitated by releasing the bondage of false identifications. Once these identifications are removed, then you are left with freedom - the eternal, unconditional essence of your true nature - without the limitations of identities, special interest groups, karmic and ego boundaries. This is "inner" freedom. This freedom carries a full sense of responsibility for the whole of creation, and in seeing how this translates into social action we are necessarily brought back to ethics. Freedom from within is not to be confused with the so-called freedom to pursue the impulses of the senses, which reflects a state of non-responsibility. True freedom is the boundless joy of the soul. In everyday life, however, it is expressed *within* boundaries of social structure through ethics, which in turn protect the sanctity of individuals, families and social groups.

Ethics reflect the underlying spiritual values known in the Absolute dimension of inner freedom and are thus a bridge into society, so that everyday life in the Relative dimension is guided by deeply known spiritual principles. These principles are a natural

part of the Absolute dimension and there, do not need to be stated; but in the Relative dimension of social structure a stated code of ethics is necessary. Freedom to act out sense imperatives is not freedom at all, and this is what ethics orders and regulates. Freedom that comes from the joyous experience of interconnectedness, happily comes to rest in society through a code of ethics that reflects its essence. Once freedom is experienced in this manner the big shift or transition has happened - from taker to giver, selfish to selfless, follower to leader.

*How can this sense of freedom be brought into the re-construction of society?* The sense that we are related to, and interconnected with all peoples and phenomena is the key. The first step is to meditate deeply to connect to the freedom inherent in the experience of our true nature. Another step to support and facilitate this is to adhere to a set of ethical guidelines and values that focus our attention constantly on our true nature of interconnectedness. Whatever we think we are, or focus upon, then our intellect operates to protect and reinforce it. So if we focus on the heart instead of the ego, on selflessness instead of selfishness, our intellect supports that focus and shift. In this process of shifting focus, the intellect comes to rest in the consciousness of our true nature rather than reinforcing the boundaries and separations inherent in our limited ego identifications. From this standpoint we see that ethics provides a bridge from the Absolute dimension of inner freedom to the expression of that freedom in the Relative existential world. Then we can see how the individual in freedom automatically and naturally expresses ethics in all aspects of life's activities. This is what Khalil Gibran explored and expressed in "The Prophet" - an ethics based on aware consciousness (Gibran, 1923).

Once again we return to methodologies of educating and training individuals to be self aware, and to shift their consciousness through meditative practice. In the next chapter, *Guidelines To Recreate Our World*, I discuss the ethical guidelines provided by Thay Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist master who I have studied with. Other ethical systems are equally valuable; this chapter speaks directly to the thesis of interconnectedness, and is close at hand through my personal experience. Ethics provide signposts for the spiritual traveller, so that we know how to behave. They are used to guide our footsteps on the sands of time as we channel our energies inwards and

Godwards. Ethics are not confining. They are friends and guides into God consciousness, into the energy of mindfulness, and once we are there they become redundant, as we then naturally live in a totally ethical manner without the necessity of rules. However, on the journey to that state of consciousness, it is ethics that constructively harness our energies in a productive manner. Wise rules are a necessary part of the spiritual path.

With ethics serving in this manner, it is then an easy step into Leadership and being a parent to the world, to take care of the planet and society simply through being aware and responsible for the consequences of interconnectedness. "Greenpeace", the international environmental organization, has a motto which states "We all Live Downstream". This means that we are interconnected, and responsible for global pollution because our patterns of consumption connect us in a planetary system of resource abuse. An acute awareness through ethical values that reflect our true nature of brotherhood and interconnectedness, would quickly lead to global pollution being addressed and then solved. Daily life and existence for individuals and nations are full of problems and will continue to be so. It is our attitude and mental clarity to these existential realities that make the difference. Through meditation there emerges along with freedom, the attributes of clarity, calm and vision. From this standpoint solutions to life's issues are readily available and confidently implemented. The freedom that is accessible through meditation gives extraordinary power to the clarity, confidence and vision experienced, and appropriate actions and remedies appear almost like magic. It is the creativity of a mind and soul in freedom that makes it appear so choiceless. The right action in the moment simply arises and appears to be self-evident. There are particular steps here; the experience of freedom and interconnectedness, a bridge through ethics from inner freedom into our existential day to day realities; which provides the foundation for clarity in leadership to emerge. We see freedom in different forms; as a process of enlightenment, the experience of God consciousness, in ethics and in leadership.

This combination provides the power for citizen awareness to translate into a grass roots movement that governments and corporations will have to respond to with accountability and transparency. This does not happen overnight by simply wishing it to

be so. It can be fast and electrifying, if a due process of systematically raising the consciousness of individuals, communities and nations is enacted. This process is meditation, the experience of Samadhi, of the Absolute, and bringing it as Freedom into our daily lives. Then we will be able to fully respond to the message in President Kennedy's (JFK) inspirational appeal to his fellow Americans:

*Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.*

The way is clear for citizen power to be rooted in self-awareness, selflessness, freedom and leadership and the commitment is not to any particular nation, although that is certainly a good starting point. Eventually it is: "Ask what you can do for your world."

### **How to Stop a Runaway Horse**

A man was riding a powerful, fast horse through a village. Everyone was amazed at the tremendous speed of the horse as sparks and dust rose from its thundering hooves. Someone called out to the rider "Where are you going so fast?" The rider replied "I do not know, better ask the horse!"

The horse in this anecdote is our ego attachments, greed, selfishness, karma, false identifications and the seeds of corruption that are latent within us. If we want to find out where we are going, who we are and how to live in Truth, we have to stop the horse. *Samatha* means stopping, being still, and doing nothing. Then we prepare to take the step to see deeply - *Vipassana*. From that state it naturally emerges where we are going, who we are and how to live in Truth. There is a Hindu saying which states "When this "I" shall die, then will I know who am I". The consciousness of ego, I, I, I, me, mine, is like a barren arid desert. The flow of God's grace, the energy of mindfulness, cannot gather and deepen in the arid desert of ego identifications. The deep quiet valleys of humility collect the streams of mindfulness and without humility, of putting the experience of God first and one's ego last, the thundering hooves of the horse will never be brought to a halt. Stopping the horse and then seeing deeply is about self-mastery, and freedom from the bondage of ego-attachments, of the flesh, emotions and habits of all our false identifications. Then one knows who one is, where one is going and what it is to Live in

Truth. By stopping, by being still and seeing deeply, we engage with our true nature, surrender to God as the "Doer" and simply become the instrument of Divinity.

We often have an incorrect picture of ourselves as either unworthy or weak whereas in actual fact everyone is perfectly Divine. What is unworthy and weak are the habits, desires, thoughts and identifications with the body, mind and circumstances. As we embark on the quest for our true nature we discard the false identifications, not by doing something in meditation but by truly doing nothing. Thus in meditation we come to rest in our true nature, that divine eternal energy, that presence behind the mind that allows something else to arise from our depths of consciousness - the experience of our true nature. It is from this foundation that leadership, based on integrity, can emerge.

Meditation is a methodology that is aimed at stopping the horse, and leads us to the experience of our true nature. This is through calming the body and mind, and seeing deeply into who we truly are - we are not the mind nor the body, simply the everlasting source of mindfulness. Meditation provides a foundation for a powerful experiential leap from a state of followership into a state of leadership. Different levels of meditation take this evolving process further and provide the instruments to deepen the shift from followership to leadership. This is "moksha" - liberation - as true leadership emerges once we stop, remove ourselves from internal and external bondage, put God first and experience the freedom of true leadership. We must decide whether the horse of our ego identifications rides us, or with clarity and calm we stop it, master it and assume the selfless responsibility of true leadership.

## **Questions and Answers**

### **Q1. What is a Leader and how is this different from a Follower?**

A leader brings about the awareness that each person is responsible for everything that is happening, and assumes that everyone has the capacity to be a leader. He empowers people, and nurtures the seeds of leadership within them. A leader is someone who takes responsibility for the whole, and the most effective way of doing this is to create other leaders. This means a leader must be inspirational, capable of empowering others and including everyone in a vision. A leader who does this comes from a natural

place of joy and inspires others through her example. A leader is not confined within narrow interest groups or identities. Freedom from these constraints allows her to be a divine presence in people's lives, and that state has the power to transform people, communities and nations, and in this way a leader creates a new consciousness.

The fundamental difference between a leader and a follower, is that a leader comes from a state of giving and compassion, whereas a follower comes from a state of taking and greed. This distinction between giving and taking gives rise to further distinctions, and the primary one has to do with responsibility. Responsibility is our natural state of being, and this is what a follower is in denial of, as he trades in responsibility in order to remain comfortable and safe. The safety and comfort is illusory, for when it is traded in for responsibility, power is passed away and the relationships that ensue from not taking responsibility are full of bitterness, hate and aggression. This is the lot of the follower and constitutes a denial of our true nature, producing misery and struggle in life. A leader, on the other hand, in taking responsibility for everything is inclusive, and he does this from a state of overflowing happiness and freedom from within. The leader has a vision for society and creates other leaders to see it through. Because they include everyone, leaders can call on an army of co-leaders to enact the vision and bring it into reality. Followers on the other hand can only hide behind the denial of their true nature and suffer behind their self imposed walls of exclusivity. The natural flow of things is in the direction of giving, responsibility, love, leadership. Taking, following, irresponsibility and hatred go against the tide of nature. It is hard work and tough times being a follower!

The shift from follower to leader is something everyone can do. It is simply a quantum leap into a new paradigm of consciousness, which can find a collective expression in a "Leader Society". That is the direction we are moving in and the crises in individual, national and world affairs, precipitates this quantum leap. We can all do it in an instant - simply by taking responsibility for everything and giving the very best of ourselves in everything we do.

**Q2. Is there a significant change in a person on becoming a leader?**

The shift from follower to leader is a fundamental component and process of meditation programs. It provides one meaning for the term "moksha" - liberation - and is directly associated with discarding false identifications and enjoying the freedom of experiencing our true nature. But how difficult we make it for ourselves. In my own case I engaged in stringent endeavors to become more spiritual, with struggles of purification, surfacing and clearing deep traumas, rituals of renunciation and the like. It was hard work! Yet it eventually became very simple. For me happiness and delight now come through simply BEING with humanity, the planet and the universe, and simply SERVING the same with joy. My struggles and endeavors were a necessary part of my journey in the early stages, but Being and Serving continued that journey in a different paradigm of existence. It was necessary, however, to put in the mileage of daily mindfulness practice, even when I was struggling.

I know this to be true from personal experience, because I become caught in the process of struggle and purification. Then for no apparent reason the veils of illusion dropped away and a natural overflowing delight in Being and Serving arose spontaneously from inside. I attribute this shift to the years of meditation and mindfulness training I have experienced, which is why I decided to become a meditation teacher.

The significant change in becoming a leader is a quantum leap into the energy of truth, love and responsibility. There is a dynamic, joyful energy that infuses everything the leader does. Becoming a follower is a downward spiral into sense satisfaction, special interest groups and narrowly held identities. The next step in leadership is to become truly selfless and to serve others so that your example, which is beyond politics, corruption and self-serving, provides the authority and wisdom that speaks to people. This involves being a true parent to the world, taking responsibility for everything and empowering others to act in that same awareness.

**Q3. A leader's immediate family may object to his concern for the world and demand that his first duty is to support his family. What is a leader's response to this?**

A leader would respond to his relatives by agreeing with them, that they are absolutely correct that his duty does lie with his family. A leader, however, does not have a narrow conception of family such as being only concerned with parents, wife and children. His family includes everyone, his ashram is the whole world and his home is every country. A leader loves his relatives just the same as everyone else, and invites them to join him in the vision of a big, global family where there are thousands of homes that are open, millions of people that love. This is the leader's territory and he includes his relatives in it. On a more local scale the leader's immediate spiritual family is the sangha, the community of religious practice where people who are moved by similar universal principles come together as a community. They observe ethical principles to guide their behaviour and steps to personal liberation. In Buddhism there are three jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. I believe that at the present time the most important jewel is the sangha, which is completely interconnected with the other two refuges. I do not think we will see another Buddha, Christ, Krishna or Mohammed. I feel that each sangha of spiritual practice - whether it is Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish or Native American - is a living cell in the body of the new Buddha, the new Christ, the new Krishna.

With this in mind the idea of the sangha takes on a new significance, which gives tremendous impetus to the movement for global religious harmony. Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and other spiritual communities are all part of creating a new body, or paradigm, in consciousness. Each leader's spiritual family - the sangha - is committed to raising their consciousness so that the new paradigm can be made available to all.

A further implication is that the families of different spiritual leaders are simply different sanghas, and as such they are interconnected cells in one universal body of consciousness. Because the cells interconnect it is vital that leaders find the means to understand and honor the very nature of the interconnected consciousness. This means finding the way to communicate across cultural and psychological boundaries, so that the cells of the new body of consciousness - sanghas - can naturally connect. This is the task

of the global religious harmony movement and of our spiritual leaders. It does not profit the East to exalt itself at the expense of the West. It profits humanity that spiritual leaders find the compassion and wisdom within themselves to cross the arbitrary boundaries that are created by the energies of separation.

#### **Q4. What can a leader offer to the world?**

The best gift I can give to the world is to bring about the awareness that each person is responsible for everything. To express responsibility does not mean that I have to do everything myself. To bring about changes in society and the environment requires first of all, that I bring about changes in myself. Then I may bring people to the awareness that responsibility is a natural part of their divine nature - so why not just BE IT! From this expression so much naturally follows. Love is engendered rather than hatred; homes, work places and nations work, simply because everyone has taken responsibility for them to work. This is in marked contrast to the disintegration that happens in homes, factories and countries where people are driven only by self interest and greed, rather than by taking responsibility for everything. The biggest gift in bringing about this awareness is that it brings us into the natural stream of life, to our true nature - which is to be responsible, to be love, to be mindful, to be a divine presence and force for goodness; such is the nature of true leadership. This produces a "Leader Society" that works, rather than a "Follower Society" that does not.

What I have to do as a leader is to always give my very best whatever the situation or circumstance; to journey deep into my true nature and to act from that energy. Only then can I legitimately empower others to do the same. By building a cohort of leaders, I am completely dispensable. Things do not depend on my presence, and will thus work wonderfully when I am not around, because there are so many co-leaders who make things work beautifully out of their own responsibility. Whatever is necessary to be done I will do, and it does not matter what it is. This constancy of service gives credibility to leadership, and brings people to a new awareness as they feel and see that I am taking responsibility for everything.

This congruence between what I say, and what I do, is a matter of integrity and part of my selflessness as a leader. This kind of example is a catalyst for others to step into the role of leadership. They then continue the process by creating yet more leaders, who know and live the consciousness of responsibility for everything. This creates Heaven on Earth, through people who take the responsibility of being a parent to the whole world: - "Aham Brahmasmi" is the Sanskrit term for this principle of responsibility. The process and mechanism for this shift lies with the methodologies of meditation and mindfulness practice. By introducing people to the deep silence and rest of meditation, they will automatically rediscover their true nature by discarding the false associations of their nature with body, mind, speech and desire identifications. From the silence of Samadhi they will experience the freedom to be understanding and clear leaders with loving hearts and find that assuming responsibility for all is a natural state of their expression.

Thus they become constantly mindful. Problems become challenges that generate latent creativity and connection. It does not matter at what level leadership is exercised - a local household or an international organization. The former is a microcosm of the latter's macrocosm. The leader of a household and the leader of the U.N. - if they are true leaders - then they possess the same qualities, enact the same processes and take the same responsibilities. Thus it is that a household leader contributes to the leadership of the world.

**Q5. As a leader you have appointed someone to be in charge of a project and that person is not functioning to the mark. How would you react?**

First of all, I would not react. I would respond. To respond means that you take a step back into silence, do nothing except be still, and from there be compassionate and clear. Reaction can only inflame the situation, whereas responding permits clarity and wisdom to enter the picture. This is the meaning of the phrase "activity in inactivity". First of all I would meditate, stop and do nothing. The next step I would take is to listen quietly and deeply, to the project leader and find out what his situation is. This is to "walk a mile in his shoes" in order to understand him. After listening I would point out the clear ethical and leadership standards that are necessary to conduct the project. Then

I would invite him to meditate with me on the issue of what is best for the project, assuring him of my love and support.

After meditation I would encourage him to talk freely about what he thinks and feels about the project, responding only when it is necessary to establish:

- (a) the necessary principles of practice and
- (b) his conduct as project leader.

This allows her to see for herself what has to change, either in leadership performance or in continuing as project leader. By listening deeply and supporting her, I encourage her to draw the solution from her inner silence. I acknowledge the leadership in her while remaining clear and firm about the necessary conduct of a project leader. My focus is on listening deeply, being clear about what is required, respecting her leadership qualities and guiding her with love and wisdom to arrive at solutions that empower her. In the event that she is unable to come up with solutions, from my own silence I may make a suggestion that she either remove herself from the post of project leader or make a renewed commitment to do the job properly. Furthermore to offer a relocation of work that is better suited to her talents, should that be necessary.

**Q6. Officials have become corrupt in the nation and your help has been sought. What do you propose for modern India?**

The equation between corruption and the lack of spiritual, moral and ethical values in the nation is clear. In the absence of spiritual values then corruption increases. Therefore the solution lies with the regeneration of spiritual and ethical values. How can this be done?

Only those with spiritual values can lead others to the same. Only a person who has journeyed to his spiritual depths, through an investigation of his true nature, commands the power and authority that can bring down corruption. For instance, in modern India a guru by the name of Anna Hazare has shown that selfless example has the power to bring down corrupt politicians and bureaucrats. He is granted power and authority by the general public because of his wisdom and selflessness; something that elected politicians cannot yet understand. Nor do they understand that this is the way they must become if they want to be re-elected in the future! His commitment to live in

Truth provides the strength and power to transform a nation mired in the grip of corruption and poverty. At the same time the authority of his selfless example and leadership in village development, re-educates the public into the recognition that Truth works, and it can create a different kind of leadership that will transform public life. He has created the beginnings of a new consciousness and a different understanding about leadership and power. The process is one of retraining and re-educating public awareness through meditative practice, so that Truth emerges as a familiar friend rather than a discarded concept. In this way deeply held spiritual principles inform the conduct of public office as well as infuse into the population at large.

**Q7. What is the moral role of a Leader?**

The moral role of a leader is to experience the freedom of Samadhi, and to express it in society through living by simple and straightforward ethics. A leader provides a bridge between realities:

- (1) The absolute reality of Truth and being with God (one's true nature) and
- (2) The reality of daily existence.

One feeds into two as water into waves, in that the experience of Samadhi in meditation can then influence how we conduct our daily lives. The bridge between these realities is provided by ethics. They are guidelines on the spiritual journey in terms of appropriate modes of behaviour. In the Absolute dimension ethics are not needed, but in daily existence they are. A leader's moral role is to provide and live by those ethics that reflect the Samadhi experience, of being mindful, with God consciousness in total freedom. Freedom refers to "inner freedom" and describes the state of Truth in Samadhi. It can only be experienced in the stillness of deep silence and meditation. A leader occupying this state is not bound by any false identifications, knows his own true nature and operates joyfully as Divinity. His forte is love, truth and responsibility and because he is free, he can stand back and allow "God" to be the "Doer". This form of leadership inspires others to experience the same quality of "inner freedom", as the power of love and caring overflows from the leader to everyone she connects to.

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