

CHAPTER ONE

UNFOLDMENT

I do not know where this book found you – in an airport bookstore just before embarking on a business trip, at your favourite holiday resort, on the shelf next to your bed in winter time, or among your birthday presents. Lives are different and so are leadership journeys. But I do know that if you're reading this book, a question is taking form in your mind or in the mind of someone close to you. It may not be well formulated, it may be vague, reluctant to be expressed, or it may have been hammering in your mind loudly enough to stop ignoring it. You might feel lonely at times with this question and experience increasing alienation, as if you were the only one who thinks or feels like this, the only one who does not feel entirely at home in this world. Or it may be less than the seed of a question; it may simply be a vague feeling of tiredness, a fear of insignificance, a hurtful absence of meaning in your life, a feeling of being lost, an inner numbness, or a palpable sense of rising emptiness. Or you might have picked up this book because it resonated with you, because it expressed the feelings you have had for some time.

Maybe this book has found you in the middle of a real crisis, in an experience of loss or disappointment, in the wake of a change that you did not initiate, or in a time when you feel undeniably stuck. Or maybe you're content with the achievements in your life, but you sense faint anxiety because you suspect they may not last.

There are innumerable ways in which the human mind and heart prompt us to pay attention and to ask ourselves where to go from here. And there are as many ways of ignoring the cues. Whether you're paying attention or ignoring the cues, please consider simply observing. Just that: observe what is happening. You aren't the only one on this journey. There are many others travelling this path.

But it is *your* mind and *your* heart responding to something that is no longer lying dormant within you. It is a reminder that your leadership journey is a quest, that it always has been and always will be one. There is no guarantee that you'll ever reach the final destination – but there is a promise that the longer the journey is, the more you will have understood about the human mind and the human heart, and the nature of consciousness. There may never be an answer to the question of what exactly your contribution is, but, with a bit of luck, you may well come closer to a feeling of being at home in the Universe.

Not long after his dialogues with Krishnamurti, David Bohm developed his theory about the 'implicate and explicate order'. In a conversation with the leadership thinker Joe Jaworsky, he explains:

Yourself is actually the whole of mankind. That's the idea of the implicate order – that everything is enfolded in everything. The entire past is enfolded in each of us in a subtle way. If you reach deeply into yourself, you are reaching into the very essence of mankind. When you do this, you will be led into the generating depth of consciousness that is common to the whole of mankind and that has the whole of mankind enfolded in it. The individual's ability to be sensitive to that becomes the key to the change of mankind. We are all connected. If this could be taught, and if people could understand it, we would have a different consciousness. (David Bohm, cited in Jaworsky. 1996, p. 80)

Whether you recognize it or not, there is an unfolding taking place through you in your leadership journey. It may not be entirely in your hands, but it is not happening without your permission either – you aren't passive in this process.



A Glimpse into Theory: David Bohm's Theory of the Implicate and Explicate Order

The quantum physicist David Bohm describes the order that underlies all visible order (understand: visible physical and mental structure), as the 'implicate order'. The implicate order (from Latin 'to be enfolded, to fold inward') is a level of reality that can be imagined as lying beyond our normal everyday thoughts and perceptions, and also beyond any of the models of reality offered by traditional scientific theory. What we see as well as what we construct mentally belongs to the 'explicate order' (Jaworsky, 1996, p. 78). In the implicate order, one could say that everything is *enfolded* into everything, invisibly, very much like Krishnamurti's concept of *one consciousness*. In this deeper order of nature, everything is interwoven with everything else, forming the underlying source of what we see as manifest reality – the explicate order, where things are physically or mentally manifested. Each such manifested entity is perceived as existing in its own particular region of space (and time) and outside the regions belonging to other things (Bohm 1996, p. 177). Quantum physicists look below this surface reality into sub-atomic reality with its field of potentiality that gives rise to the physical world. What they find is only potential and constant change.

David Bohm believes that our organs of perception cause us to fall prey to an illusion, thinking that not only are the things we see and the thoughts we have separate from each other, they also seem to be all there is to reality. Buddhist philosophy is founded on a similar conclusion. Physical reality is called *maya* (illusion), which we believe is all there is,

ignoring the vast underlying interconnected reality. Bohm suggests that if we became aware of the *oneness* of all things on a deeper level, including the oneness of all humankind, we would see that ill will, competition, hatred, violence, and conflict are nothing more than unconscious acts of self-destruction (Bohm, 1996).

Another quantum physicist, Dana Zohar, describes this underlying reality as a kind of undercurrent, almost like a vast sea (Zohar & Marshall, 1994, p. 331). As human beings we are like excitations, ripples on the surface of the quantum vacuum's sea of potentiality (ibid, p. 274). We are temporary yet relatively stable structures over a certain period of time, like temporary forms to be seen on a surface. Like everything else, we are part of nature's evolving reality. Life is a never-ending flux of enfoldment and unfoldment. Everything undergoes constant change. Even what we see as manifest and stable is constantly under reconstruction: we ourselves, mind and body, the world. 

When you find yourself in any of the states I mentioned above, I believe it is worth looking at the early part of your journey. Your memory might be scattered or faint. It might take time to remember anything at all. But I am sure there were secret daydreams, fairy encounters, heroes you admired, books you were fascinated by, a painful experience that triggered a quest, a silent promise to yourself, dreams of discovery, visions of being a saviour, empathy with suffering, an identification with heroes who represent deeper human values. No two young leadership stories are the same. So don't expect grand visions. Look for the value beneath your memories, the emotionally charged insights. Take your time to unearth the ordinary details. Collect the scraps of memory patiently. Gradually begin to listen to your leadership journey, as if there were a connection to a great

underlying tune that is constantly playing yet so difficult for us to hear. While you begin to search your memory, listen to this.

In the early 1950s in rural Ethiopia, a boy named Samson had reached school-going age. He had grown up with a father he admired for his strong character:

He never submitted to power and went every mileage after the truth. He loved human beings, irrespective of their social status, and he had a way of simply acknowledging your existence and giving the required space for whatever was there to exist.

His father proposed that he go to a modern school. But, at the age of seven, Samson violently opposed this – he refused to attend a modern school. Ethiopia was predominantly Orthodox Christian and for a long time, the traditional church had been the only source of education. At that time, modern schools were associated with non-orthodox Christian religion. Samson with his bright seven-year-old mind concluded that going to a modern school would mean that he would have to change his faith and convert to modern Catholicism. His father, a peasant in a traditional culture, could have forced the boy, but he did not. Samson says:

He acknowledged me as an equal because I existed and I needed to be given the space I deserved. So what he did was to take me to the head of the Orthodox Church in our neighbourhood to convince me that going to a modern school would not mean I had to change my faith. This experience – to be treated like an equal by my father – was absolutely crucial for me. It lives with me and in me.

There it is – a strong and deep value, timeless, resiliently placed in

the collective human consciousness: the conviction that people are equal and should be treated as equals. Implicit in this conviction is an intuitive knowing that borders separate what belongs together; the insight that the world needs tolerance and enlightenment; the desire to experience and create harmony; an admiration for people who fight for justice; and a fascination with the diversity of the human race.

Children have innumerable ways of relating to eternal human values. Edith's parents lived in the country side in southern Germany. Her mother and father had a hard time. Edith's mother didn't come from the 'right' social class. Her father should not have married her and people made sure she was always aware of this. It was 1960 and Germany had not entirely recovered from the Second World War. At the age of 14, Edith began to escape into books and music: Beethoven and Simone de Beauvoir. She wrote in her diary:

I have a dream to change the world. Tolerance, tolerance, tolerance. I want to be the most tolerant person, and enlightened, really have clarity, and really understand how the world functions. Equality, and respect, respect for the dignity of a human being, no matter what race or colour or religion.

This intention stayed with her and became a driving force throughout her life.

At the core of what I call the initial deeper intention is a perception of incoherence – the world is different from one's intuitive insight, it contradicts the deeper value one has experienced in insights, dreams, and admirations. Here the initial deeper intention develops: this has got to change. This needs healing. The world needs to become how it is meant to be. I want to understand how the world works. The intention is intuitively geared to healing, to contributing to life, to serving, to wanting to create change for the

better. There is, at times, a frightening element of loneliness – the child or young adult senses that this deeper feeling of how things ought to be is not widely acknowledged. It might be better to keep it a secret, this stuff of dreams, diaries, and journeys of the mind. But even though it is buried, the intention has formed and it begins to form the mind in subtle ways.

How this happens depends on the mind and circumstances of the young person. And it is not always a conscious process. The pieces of the puzzle that you might be able to see in retrospect might have been there all along. There is no way of knowing how accessible this intention is to the growing mind of an adolescent, and no way of telling how it will influence choices and how resilient it will become. But I believe that many more people than we think are aware of the whole and have an intuitive feeling about what is needed in the world.

Lucia, the child of mixed Italian and English parentage, grew up in London. In the early 1980s, there was a TV series she loved very much. Her absolute super heroine was Wonder Woman.

Wonder Woman was very cool, she was such a superhero and she would save whoever was in trouble. As soon as she was needed she pulled a lasso out of her belt and she would swing the lasso over her head and become Wonder Woman, the saviour.

In her dreams Lucia *was* Wonder Woman. At the age of 11, Lucia knew that she wanted to become a lawyer. She loved debates, she loved arguing, and she wanted to fight for the underdog. She wanted to help people who did not have a voice, who were condemned for the wrong reasons or who could not get themselves out of difficulties.

I believe that the initial intention is the starting point for your leadership journey. It is a resilient underlying theme, not necessarily

rational and seldom realistic, but nonetheless a deeply held emotional thread that informs your journey into adult life. For some people it grows into a clear vision for change in the outer world during adolescence, following a realization about what the world seems to need, and, subsequently, about what one needs to do in the world to help it to become a better place. For other people, it remains a vague underlying rhythm, masked by the experience of its irrelevance in the outer world. The intention too often gets lost in the turmoil of finding one's place in private and professional life – even the strongest of visions is sometimes dismantled by the impossibility of its implementation, and the intention is slowly buried by disappointments and disillusionments. But, somehow, it surfaces again in different guises throughout the journey until it makes itself known as questions that turn up at different points of the journey. This thread consciously or unconsciously informs the choice of profession, places, organizations, tasks.

During the years in which he grew, Samson's deeply held conviction about respect and dignity for each and every person in the world became an unconscious guiding force. Education and exposure to the world made him see that the value he so strongly internalized was not at all commonly applied. This triggered deeper questions in life. As a young adult, he wanted to know how the world works, so he plunged into philosophy and politics. The more he saw of the world, the more he knew that it did not operate according to his deeper values – neither the world at large nor Ethiopian society. He dreamt of changing his society, thinking that there must be a way of overcoming the misery and destitution. His bright mind gravitated to the revolutionary writings of Marx, Lenin and Mao. The warrior in him adopted the commitment to change and took on the Marxist resolve to struggle. He believed this was the only way of bringing about transformation. Samson joined the political party whose strategy was to fight for political power and thus to

change society. But his dream got lost – the movement was crushed by the brutal force of Ethiopia’s military dictatorship. Samson was imprisoned. He spent four years of his young life behind bars, in conditions that most of his fellow prisoners did not survive. Samson later said:

Like any inexperienced young person, I used to believe that it is possible to change the world into what you want it to be. From the prison experience, I understood what power can do, what it can be used for, and that changing the world to your ideal is not such an easy task. I learned that social change requires something beyond wishes and desires.

A willingness to understand the world or to change it goes hand in hand with a growing need to participate in the world. If you care to look for it, the urge to create change, to bring forth the world, to express one’s gift, to invent helpful things, underpins a young person’s desire to understand the world and fascination with difference. Although it may differ in intensity, form and content, this urge fuels young people’s excitement about moving forward in life, taking a stand, and taking the lead. This does not mean that it works the way we intend it to. The world does not want to be changed. People do not understand our intention. Others do not necessarily agree with our vision. Those we want to help do not want to be helped. Sometimes, what we choose to do, inspired by our intention, ends up failing to support our values.

Edith left the narrow-minded German countryside where life and the Catholic convent school kept forcing her to conform, and she set out to discover the world. Reading Simone de Beauvoir had opened up her mind to a different world, a world that was to be explored and changed. She stayed faithful to her deeper values and her desire to understand the human condition. She studied psychol-

ogy and social work, only to confront the rigidity and conformity of academia when she became a member of a university faculty in Switzerland. Her dreams of a free and equal world still called her, and she went to New York to work in the Bronx. She says:

I took my psychology into the black community in New York, and worked for seven years in Harlem in the Bronx. I discovered many things: I could organize, I could brand social services, but I could only do these things because I was accepted. And they accepted me certainly not because I was a psychologist or because I was white, or because I could organize, they accepted me because I accepted them, just that, the way they were, as equals.

I believe that the leadership journey begins long before we ever get the chance to move into an official leadership position. There is a perceptible search for coherence that is fuelled by the initial deeper intention. Both engender the beginnings of a quest, and are probably the most underestimated or neglected forces in a leadership journey. The quest contains the deeper values. For some, it becomes a set of very strong political or moral values; for others, it is transformed into passionate work or high achievement. It is influenced by education, politics, and experience. And it strengthens and weakens according to how the world receives – or rejects – its nature. The quest arises from, and is continually nourished by, a repeated return to the deeper core values. These are not the morally imposed values we internalize through religious exposure or by being in a particular political context; neither are they the values taught by society, parents, schools, higher education or organizational cultures.

A quest based on an early intention is nourished by a deeper ground of knowing. We have all experienced such knowing – through other people, nature, books that resonated with our hearts, movies that

touched our souls. Nobody taught us. It did not reach us through the intellect. We knew it when we felt it. And we usually know when the quest gets lost, when it withers, when it fades.

Lucia went after her dream – she got a degree in law. She contemplated becoming a barrister, but could not afford it. After her time at the university she went to Italy to teach English. Through a friend she found a job at a very good law firm. But awakening to reality was frightening – the atmosphere in the law firm came straight out of a Charles Dickens novel, complete with old-fashioned structures. Happily, the owner of the law firm was impressed by her work and encouraged her to stay. He promised her that she would become a junior partner in two years and a senior partner in five. When Lucia saw this vision of her life mapped out in front of her, she left. The map bore no relation to her real quest. But she had learnt to listen to her inner voice and to risk change. It was not much different in the law firm she worked at in London – an atmosphere that dampened creativity, with very little real human contact, no room for change and no people to save. So her quest continued. There was truth in her quest. Her wish to make a contribution that would have a lasting impact, her old dream of changing the balance of power between the haves and the have-nots, was faint, but still alive. The fact that she had studied environment and energy law during her time at university made her search more consciously for a structure in which she could evolve and to which she could contribute at the same time. After thorough research she decided to join a multinational energy company.

The very pattern that sets the theme of the journey – the early intention, the experience of incoherence, the quest – sometimes unfolds into two parallel paths: the willingness to redress something ‘out there’ in the world, and the search for our own healing. The two paths cannot be separated. Each nurtures and inspires the other, and very often in healing others we heal ourselves. In creating

harmony for others, we create harmony for ourselves. In overcoming injustice, we might heal our own experiences of injustice. In helping people to find their voice, we may find our own voice. In this way, each leadership journey results in personal integration while it aids integration in the world. For some people, it is easy to trace what in themselves they needed to heal. For others, it is almost impossible to remember – the pain was so strong that memory deleted the experience. Whether or not you feel that you need healing, the quest is based on a search for inner and outer coherence.

As an adolescent, you might rarely, if ever, have thought about leading. And you could never have anticipated the long and winding road that was in front of you. But the longing for coherence, by whatever means, was there, and so was the desire to understand, to create, to take part: all the stuff that leadership journeys are made of. There might have been dreams you gave up on, or aspirations that turned out to be too ambitious. Or you did achieve what you wanted to, with pride. For most of us the desire to actively and creatively participate in our own and the world's unfolding is a driving force. I believe what gets lost all too often is the core of the underlying intention: the very essence that was meant to go beyond the actualization of yourself, the deeper dream that was meant to heal the world, or some piece of it. Long after the early intention has faded, long after the dream is lost, the quest for coherence continues, randomly, more superficially, and directed at the outer world. We hope to come home by changing the external environment, by trying to find a better match, a new relationship, a different job, companies, places, houses, countries, by overworking or breaking free from the world, by immersing ourselves in a hectic social life or by withdrawing from the world. And this will keep happening until the incoherence becomes so unbearable that we know something within needs to change. Whether forced or voluntary, reflection increases our ability to notice that no outer coherence will appear

without at least a degree of inner coherence. We might get trapped in the constant search for coherence in the outer world and only if that fails, begin to start asking different kinds of questions. This might sound arduous. But it need not be.

The first door into your leadership journey opens when you begin to observe both the past and the present; when you begin to recollect your memory, gather the scattered pieces of what might have been your early intention, when you begin to feel there could have been a quest, the first door has opened.

The second door opens when you begin to accept. This is how I have come to be. As Bill Isaacs says, ‘Ultimately, we perceive the coherence of the world as we extend forgiveness – to ourselves and others’ (Isaacs, 1999, p. 69). Acceptance is the only road to compassion. This does not imply agreement or approval, just acceptance. This is how things have come to be. This is me in it. The experience of ‘feeling at home in the universe’, wholeheartedly acknowledging your existence, is probably the closest description I can give. Not every crisis leads to a phase of stillness, a halt and the openness to ask new questions. We have the desire to maintain our identity the way it is, we find immediate solutions, and this prevents, or outmaneuvers contemplation. This is perfectly all right. There is no need to read signs into every event in life. But if you feel that there is a deeper loss of orientation, a lasting question regarding what your contribution could be, a pervasive sadness that this might be all there is or a serious doubt about the direction of your path, it is worthwhile turning your ear to the wind and listening to a deeper song. There is one. When we feel we’ve run dry because of the never-ending busyness of life, and when a list of uncounted chores is placed between us and our hearts, then it is time to invite stillness. The outer world no longer aligns with our deeper values. Something that never had a chance to be heard before wants to be heard now.

Reconnecting with your early intention is a very important step in reclaiming the essence of your leadership quest. It involves asking your mind to create order in your memory. This is not always comfortable. You'll most probably come up against resistance: I cannot remember; there's nothing to remember. Never mind. There *is* a young leadership story, a context of experience in which your urge to create unfolded, in which deeper insights arose your heart. There were inspirations, discoveries, and turning points. There is a thread that leads to where you are now: choices, achievements, disappointments and more choices. Let the questions lead you, even if they change over time. Sometimes they might get lost in the hurried passage of daily events, or they may be violently silenced by reason. The purpose of questions is to clarify the inner search, not to find a quick solution to your current situation. If you want to reshape your leadership journey or redesign your contribution, you need creative space to reframe your current view of the world and your place in it. You need to enter the uneasy melting pot of inner transformation.

When you search your memory, you might find that your leadership journey does not have a marked beginning. A deeper underlying quest might have begun long before you ever came close to anything like an official leadership position. When you moved into a leadership position, you did not think of it as such, nobody really prepared you. You could not quite make out the difference. There might have been signposts along the way, showing you that there was always an underlying quest – a phase of hesitation, a period of uncertainty about what is right and what is wrong, a question that kept coming to mind, a dissatisfaction that you could not respond to on an outer level (and decided to ignore), or an experience that left you without explanation. A persistent question unanswered is always an invitation to inquiry, a reminder of the journey.

Like any other person, a leader goes through various cycles of learning. The path is rarely straightforward. It is more often a river meandering its way to the delta. But there are moments that signal significant change: the journey of life turns into a more conscious leadership journey. Suddenly your way of participating in life has changed. The more independent discovery phase of your adolescence gives way to a different pattern – you become more embedded in the societal and organizational system. You have assumed certain responsibilities in your profession and in your family. All of a sudden your word counts, your decisions have an impact beyond yourself and sometimes beyond your imagination; you carry a responsibility that, if not used mindfully, could damage others. People expect something of you. You are entering a whole net of expectations and demands that begin to shape your identity in a different way. Your early intention might have withered or still be alive, your deeper leadership journey might have begun long before, but now reality places its demands on your desk. You might feel you are not old enough to meet the demands. There is the thrill of challenge mixed with doubts about your capabilities and your willingness to operate in contexts you did not consciously choose. The world you enter does not necessarily promote or support your quest, and nobody asks for your deeper intention.

Lucia chose the multinational energy company as the setting for her quest, not entirely for career reasons. She wanted to be able to influence things in an environment where people count and where there was at least a minimal commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility and sustainable development. She remembered her grandfather saying, 'If you want to rebel against a system, you have to do it from within. You can't just stand up and shout that you disagree.' She knew the path would be arduous, and that she might have been changed by the system before she would be able to change it. Not too far down the road, reality asserted itself:

I've only been here for three years, and I have become slightly disenchanted. I have a much more realistic vision now of the organization's work and what trade-off can or can't be made. I think that is probably good, understanding how things work, because then you are more able to progress within a system, and get what you want out of it. If your views are too idealistic, you are unlikely to get to the bottom of something. But I think I have become a lot more cynical, maybe this is just growing up.

She was now willing to prepare for a period in her life when the excitement of career and increasing influence would replace her need to nurture her deeper intention.

The act of taking over a leadership function seems to create a new environment in which new structures and new patterns of relationship create a new framework for the shaping of identity. And in this chemistry the theme of the journey develops, most often beneath the surface. Experiences are not always easy to interpret – they do not follow the script we mean them to follow. We hit severe obstacles on our path and arrive at crisis points in our careers. Sometimes a person's path can change in a moment. There is no need to indulge in prolonged contemplation about the rights and wrongs of the choices you've made along your path. But it is worth looking for the common thread running through events, and trying to figure out the emotional connection to your deeper values. This helps you see that crises and times of disorientation are openings – they remind you of your heart and they push you into a new realm of life.

Gerard's career had always worked out. He grew up in France and when he was a young boy he loved adventure books. He loved adventures in nature most of all. Jacques Cousteau was his absolute favourite. There was something about being in tune with nature that had always fascinated him. When he was a teenager he read a

poem by Kipling, in which an older man talked to a young man about how to be in the world. It impressed him that he would be a real man if he succeeded at being at ease with people, whether they were paupers or kings, then he would be a man. In Gerard's emotional world it was clear that everything was linked to everything else, that he was linked to the bigger world and that being at ease with the world was a form of harmony where no power prevailed. Being interested in science Gerard chose to complete a degree in engineering. He joined a multinational oil company, studied further, and his career progressed in a straightforward manner. He began to notice issues of power. Organizational culture required his participation in a dynamic and power-driven environment, and he did well. One manager with whom he felt really comfortable impressed him the most, because that manager always took other people into account, and valued fairness and a respect for different perspectives. He genuinely cared about other people's thoughts. However, Gerard did notice that this man's career options were limited: the value he placed on the idea of connecting differed substantially from the other managers' priorities. But despite Gerard's unease about this observation, he kept building his career path until many years later when he moved into a higher and very responsible position. He now had a superior with whom he just could not get on. And he disliked his colleagues in a way he just couldn't explain. He did his best, but finally concluded that it would be better to change jobs. He moved on, got another job in the same company, but the discomfort from his previous job stayed with him:

The experience pushed me to start thinking why am I here, why am I working for this company, what am I looking for, all those questions, for which, at that time, I had no answers.

Initially he took this period as a very negative time in his career,

an unjustified block he couldn't explain. But over time he realized the importance of the experience – it had triggered an inquiry into deeper questions in his life. A couple of years later, Gerard decided to leave the multinational company and take a year off to reconsider his path and his genuine contribution.

As the theme of the quest unfolds, it encounters major challenges along the way. Sometimes the quest lies hidden behind more immediate life events, personal choices and professional careers, and sometimes the challenges to the quest are disguised as crises, frustration, depression, fear, apathy, cloudiness or reticence. Sometimes we know that something needs to be done, yet we are reluctant to make the effort. Or we do not know what it is we could do or stop doing. The mind finds numerous arguments to keep things the way they are. The uncertainty of a quest, the unpredictability of a journey seldom aligns with the way we have laid out our life. So we don't make the effort – out of fear, out of resistance to change, or out of a feeling that we don't have the time or energy to make the extra effort.

No matter what leadership position we hold, we stop leading genuinely the moment we lose our connection to our quest – because this was the very reason we embarked on the journey: the intention to contribute, to discover, to understand. Leading, I believe, has at its deepest core the intention to serve. If we disconnect from our deeper intention, from the values we intuitively hold, we get off track. We will more likely respond superficially to the world – we thrive on, and are driven by, power, influence and material wealth. There is nothing 'wrong' with success in its numerous forms as a positive response to our being. But if we have disconnected from our deeper values, we can become entangled in the strings that attach us to the more superficial attractions in the world.

One very clear indication that we are disconnected from our inner core is when our passion dries up, when reason has silenced

the heart's voice and dreams are things of the past. The presence or absence of passion is an excellent measure of your closeness to or distance from your underlying quest.

In retrospect, Gerard noticed that he had lost his passion long before he finally decided to leave the company and reshape his professional life. He carried out his tasks well. He contributed to his company's performance and there was a clear indication from the company that his chances of climbing the corporate ladder were good. In the first years of his working life, he had been very passionate about what he was doing – not so much as a reflection on what the company was doing, but for himself. He could see his path. He was very driven, able to propose solutions and to advance projects. This gradually turned into an inner commitment to the company's course, but at the same time, his own passion slowly but surely dissipated:

I was committed to do the job that I was asked to do correctly and as well as I could, but I couldn't find why I was doing it, so I was spending the time to do it and the energy to do it but about the why I had no idea, I only realized this much later.

Leading is expressing your creative potential, your ability to bring forth the world with others. If your heart is no longer involved, if your passion has disappeared, it is time to ask uncomfortable questions. If you have abandoned your quest because of life's pressures and a daily schedule over which you have no control, you are in danger of abandoning your deepest potential to lead and contribute. The pianist and management consultant Michael Jones says: '... the question 'Must I lead?' is a perennial question that can never be settled once and for all time.' I believe this is a crucial remark – no matter what leadership position we hold or do not hold. We lead

when we bring our unique potential into the world, when we neither shy away from contributing our gifts to the world nor avoid learning from the world's responses. But this kind of leading is a choice that needs to be renewed every now and then. We don't always feel like taking up the challenge of leading from within, harnessing the truth of our deepest values. This might, at times, feel naïve, and we have no idea how to enact such leadership in our world. There are times when we have tuned into a movement of co-creation made by circumstances we partly created ourselves. We might officially lead, but in doing so we act as carriers of a series of events over which we have little influence and that are pulling us along without us actually leading consciously. The need to service the identity we have built around ourselves in private and professional life prevents us from questioning the status quo, our contribution, and our way of leading. We tend to forget that leading is a creative act, no matter how structured the task appears to be, and that this creative energy needs renewal, regularly, consciously:

Leading from our gifts is an art and, as with all [of the] art, is not only something we choose, but a calling that also chooses us. In making this choice, we become the ground upon which the forces of fear and contraction work against those of growth and expansion. In this fire our gifts gain the substance and the resilience to serve and also withstand the world. (Jones, 2000, p. 15)

Bringing the creative urge back into your life consciously is not always easy. Creativity has its own rhythms and dynamics. It requires phases of non-action – not something we have many opportunities to do in the daily rush of events. So, while searching for your earliest intention, you might also take the time to unearth what your pattern of creativity is. When we are creative, our heart is involved,

we feel closer to life, and no matter how aware of it we are, we feel closer to our deepest values. People are different, so the ways that enable their creativity to flow are different.

Allowing your creative expression to well up from a deeper source requires emptiness within. This can mean a mind that rests in silence; it can take the form of withdrawal, into nature, into yourself, into a busy crowd you are somehow separated from. It is anything that allows an inward process of connection. Remember – when you connect with yourself, you connect with the world. And when you really connect with the world, you connect with yourself (we all know this energy when we fall in love). This inward-looking state is one of contraction. This is not necessarily a comfortable process – all artists know this. The void is also a place of vulnerability, insecurity and self-doubt. But it cannot be *avoided*. The chaos within is the breeding ground for a new creation. Expect trouble and don't expect easy answers. Welcome the very thing you would rather ignore: uncomfortable questions, rough times, unforeseen conflicts, and a lack of clarity. A new cycle of expansion usually rises from a time of chaos or emptiness. When we learn to integrate this more consciously into our lives, it will be less stressful and cause less unexpected discomfort. Then there is less of a need to enact outer crises, because we've integrated the need for contraction into our daily schedules. Internal shifts usually happen during periods of contraction. After a period of contraction, a new connection with the world forms. Sometimes the world looks different, we see things we have not seen before, and familiar things look different. We walk differently in the world. Our creative urge has been nourished, we become inventive, we make things happen, we plan new endeavours, and we bring forth the world. The result of contraction is always some kind of change – in our life, in our organization, something new manifests when we follow our creative urge and combine it with the creative urges of those around us.

Once the new creation, the idea, the structure, the physical change, the new relationships have taken root in the world, the phase of expansion slows down and finally rests, as it has come into being. It has created a new pattern in the world – different connections and different relationships. We often take this as the end point of creation. But it is not. It is just the mirror of our co-creative urge – the physical world reflects our creative impulses.

When we are able to complete the creative cycle consciously, we move into a different phase of contraction – this time deliberately and not alone. We consciously engage the system we helped to create into reflection, we actively invite feedback, and we foster collective contemplation. We create a space for resonance, deeper thoughts and truthful conversations. We ask, is our creation, and our co-creation, a meaningful response to what needs doing in the world, in this society, in this organization, in this family? This is a space rarely considered important in the professional world – it seems to be just a waste of time. But if it is missing, the cycle of creativity remains incomplete. We ourselves might end up creating and creating, inspired by success and driven by the attraction to power, influence, impact and self-image. The danger is that we'll run dry, lose our passion, disconnect from our heart, and above all, lose people because we are too preoccupied with our own creation, our own development.

We cannot know on our own what needs doing. Collective reflection is probably the most neglected aspect in leadership creativity. The importance of this second contraction phase of the creative process in fostering collective and individual learning in the sense of enfolding experience back into consciousness is often underestimated. It allows collectively generated insight to take its roots in the individual. It invigorates an internal expansion. It unfolds or expands in our individual consciousness, changes the structure of our thinking, reframes our identity and creates a new starting point for another creative wave to well up.

The creative process is continually occurring ... We are always somewhere on this wave in every part of our life ... We are surrounded and interpenetrated by a pulsating universal wave of creation. We are of it, we are it, it is us. It flows through us, and we flow through it. There is no end and no beginning. We create it as it creates us. There is no initiator. There is only the creative wave of life that is constantly unfolding and enfolding. (Brennon, 1988, p. 311)

We know this by our tendency to avoid stagnation, contraction, the void. But if we begin to see the creative process as a whole, as a cycle requiring phases of different qualities, and not only as our inner drive being fulfilled by outward success, then we can put the pieces of our quest together in a different way. There are periods when we move in uncharted territory. They can be filled with excitement, yet accompanied by fears and self-doubt. There are moments when we lose direction. There are sometimes long phases when we trudge through life without being at all sure that we're doing the right thing. This is all part of the journey and cannot be avoided. But if you decide to revive your quest, you need to observe and accept it.

Edith worked for seven years in the social service structure in New York's Bronx, living her dream to promote equality: 'I found unbelievable passion. I was caring and doing unusual things and needed tremendous humility.' But there came a time when she hit obstacles in the most unexpected ways, and experienced a profound disappointment. Her passionate contribution ceased to align with people and reality. She was put in charge of a project, and while she had a strong connection to her clients in the Bronx, she encountered difficulties with colleagues in the social service structure, people she perceived as being more interested in money, status and position. She began to feel hugely disconnected, her spirit was lost, her passion

dead. She got caught in a political intrigue, was outmanoeuvred by somebody else and finally left the service. She felt that something within her had been killed.

Not long after, she decided on a complete turnaround – she moved from psychology to technology and from the social services to business. This forced her to push the values she held deeply into the background and to apply the very rules she had been rebelling against for so long, but it also opened up an entirely new arena of her life.

Crises are also openings. We might not be willing to see this in the very moment they occur. But if you look back with a little bit of patience, you might find that your crises were forced contractions and, therefore, openings into new creative phases. You just couldn't avoid the downsides. Thus, reflection as a means to live the contraction phases of leadership creation more consciously, both individually and collectively, could be a cornerstone for reconnecting with your creative urge. Robert Greenleaf more intuitively recommends this as 'withdrawal' to re-orient oneself and calls it the art of 'systematic neglect' (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 19).

Again, people are different, and so are their leadership journeys. There is no one model, there is no recipe. Some people are at their most creative in solitude. Some need to be nourished by regular encounters with nature. Others only become enthused when they can connect with other people. They need to feel a deep human cord, a certain energy that is invoked by contact with other people.

When you look at your own leadership journey you might begin to find coherence, a meandering development with outer events triggering inner transformation and vice versa. Your identity, as a person and as a leader, has been, and is, under construction. If you look closely, you might be able to find a theme or a recurrent pattern that surfaces regularly and consistently. There is a story at the bottom of this theme. Before you try to overcome recurrent

patterns that you have identified as negative, look more closely. They might contain clues to what your quest is about. You might be holding on to a deeper value that, if brought more into consciousness, would smooth your path and help you to be more at ease with the world.

Samson went to university after he had been released from prison. He studied in Ethiopia and in Europe. A new world opened up. The warrior in him was silenced by the experience of the military power in his country. He was careful to not repeat his way of fighting the system that had brought him into prison and that he would have now judged as naivety. Later in his life he joined the Faculty of Economics of the University of Addis Ababa, until he had a dispute that asked of him to either surrender to an organizational requirement that would have compromised his values or leave. Samson decided to resign:

I realized that truth does not count. You will not win a case because you have truth with you. I did subject myself and my family to material problems. But it also showed me that without having been conscious about it then, I am driven by the quest for truth. The preparedness to stand behind the truth despite penalties and consequences is part of my leadership quest. That is what I see in myself. I also learned that you will not fail so long as you are internally balanced and solid. What matters is the coherence in yourself. That coherence gives you strength to surmount problems and gives you [the] capacity and ingenuity to be creative and find a new course in life.

There is a core of our identity that seems to remain unchanged throughout our leadership journey. Identity forms not so much as a result of an existing, unchangeable, persisting self, but as a result

of a constitutional mental and physical structure emerging with a high degree of coherence in interaction with the world. It is obvious that reflection plays a crucial role in the transformative process of forming one's leadership identity, whatever form it takes. We often learn and reconnect with our deeper quest only at 'the edge of chaos'. We integrate humility and the reconciliation with our imperfect humanness in small doses into our identity. Our mental structures determine perception. We make sense of the world according to our experience. Our identity is the lens through which we look into the world. In its core, all this is formed during the early journey.

Patterns of thinking and subsequent action emerge from childhood and adolescence. The deeper initial intention forms. The quest begins. Patterns of action or thought are constituted and reconstituted in continuous reciprocal interaction between our individual mind and the structural context surrounding us – other people, the world. Patterns of thinking sometimes impede, sometimes facilitate learning. *The more we defend a certain rigid identity the less we learn.* It becomes more difficult to transcend experience, so we get stuck in it. It clouds our path and we expect more of the same. We re-enact similar patterns.



A Glimpse into Theory: Self and Identity

The construction (and possibly deconstruction) of one's own identity is a lifelong process. We generally assume that the deeper character of a person is difficult to change. This might be true to some extent: and what I argue here about the initial deeper intention also assumes that there is something we have created within that remains relatively stable in its core. But it is also important to realize that our identity is not fixed despite how much we are inclined to

defend it. Our identity is constantly changing in response to experience. Our Self is a process and not a status quo (Macy, 1991a). For Joanna Macy, the identity of a person does not reside in an enduring substance or 'self', but in the actions of the person, and the choices he or she makes. They shape behaviour and experience, which, in a reciprocal loop, shape the person's identity (Macy 1991a, p. 173). In such a view, the self is not separate; it lives in its relationship to others as recipients of one's action. Long ago, Martin Buber described the same relational aspect of the 'self' in his essay on I and Thou when he said: 'In the beginning is relation' (Buber, 1970, p. 69). He reminds us that no identity, no self is thinkable without the innate longing for the 'You'. 'Man becomes I through a You. What confronts us comes and vanishes, relational events take shape and scatter, and through these changes crystallizes, more and more each time, the consciousness of the constant partner, the I-consciousness' (Buber, 1970, p. 80).

If one sees the organizing principle of the universe as relationship (Jaworsky, 1996), concepts of self and identity that neatly demarcate a person, and which assume the development and personal growth of a person to be mainly self-created and self-determined, become questionable. Identity, in a participatory universe, is not only highly co-created by relationships, it is actually part of these relationships, part of an infinite network of cause and effect. 'Identity is inseparable from relationship' (Helgesen, 1995 p. 16). Is, then, the assumption of a distinct leadership identity illusory? Despite all attempts at personal mastery, can a leader only become what he or she is because of others?

If one sees identity in its relational aspect, one could describe it as a set of interconnected patterns, a network in

communication with other networks. The development of these patterns in connectivity takes place continually, yet it only becomes observable and conscious with growing self-reference. When awareness and attention become more prominent, a person begins to communicate with herself about the pattern of identity and begins to understand the process of co-creation between her and the world differently.

A manager from a multinational company describes this as follows:

‘I always assumed that identity is a relational and volatile thing. Identity is shaped by and inherently is an aspect of relationships, but it is so that you have a choice about the quality of the relationship. Identity for me is a pattern. There is always a choice to be made, how to relate and when to relate and then it deeply affects the evolution of the pattern. I guess in some ways there is a core that is not immutable, but more static than the rest of the pattern and that core can be shifted but requires a great deal of awareness before it begins to move. And that core is tied consciously or unconsciously to the world out there or to the perception of the world out there. I tried to determine how much self awareness is part of that ability to see the pattern. It would almost be like becoming aware of the constant flowing, being able to see the centre of the pattern, the initial primal pattern that one needs to be conscious of, in order to maybe shift and integrate in a different way.’

What this manager points out very profoundly is the role of reflection in enabling the flexibility of identity to such a degree that the person can learn in response to experiences. Attachment to a certain image of oneself makes it more difficult to adapt and to participate in the evolutionary process. Holding on to a particular image of our identity

could possibly prevent us from seeing the whole and our part in it. But at the same time, there seems to be a deeper core in which the superficial life experiences need to be integrated, one by one.

Margaret Wheatley reminds us that the self is not a fixed feature, but that it is the means through which we experience, understand and interpret the world. 'We see the world through who we are. All living beings create themselves and they use that 'self' to filter new information and co-create their worlds. We refer to this self to determine what's important for us to notice. Through the self, we bring form and meaning to the infinite cacophony of data that always surrounds us' (Wheatley, 1999, p. 167).

In the dilemma between needing to become aware of oneself and falling prey to the illusion of maintaining a certain image of oneself, it might prove helpful to approach the issue of self and identity as a process of continuous change. If one sees the world in terms of relationship and not so much, as we are used to doing, in terms of substance, then personal identity becomes an emergent and constantly changing phenomenon influencing its environment and constantly being influenced by it.

Because of apparent reality and the structure of our sense organs, we do perceive separate objects, we create abstractions, including that of a separate self, and we start believing that these objects belong to an objective and independent reality. Capra concludes: '... we need to think systemically, shifting our conceptual focus from objects to relationships. Only then can we realize that identity, individuality, and autonomy do not imply separateness and independence.' (Capra, 1996, p. 295).

Identity, then, can only be approached as a mental pat-

tern in constant interaction as part of a web of relationships, reciprocally co-created and supported by a physical structure, the body. This mental pattern never just exists; it constantly creates itself and is created, ever changing and fluid. It is, perhaps, the essence or the quality of this seemingly maintained and, on the surface level, slowly changing pattern, that, as Norbert Wiener puts it ‘is the touchstone of our identity ... We are but whirlpools in a river of ever-flowing water. We are not stuff that abides, but patterns that perpetuate themselves’ (Wiener, 1967, p. 130). 

There is a balance to find – the more we construct ourselves as open to feedback, the more we will be able to transcend experience and come closer to forgiveness and compassion for our own and others’ imperfect humanness. And there is a core to sustain – the deeper values we hold, values of the heart, need to be brought back to life and nourished. They are our connection to the collective human consciousness, to the human heart. On the surface of the quest are outer events, career paths, achievements. Underlying these is a deeper journey. It is vital to access this deeper quest because when it is dormant, we run at half our natural speed and contribute a fraction of what we are and what we could be. In a way, though we may be very active in the outside world, we shy away from our real leadership capacity. We might be good at something, and we perform, but do we lead?

No matter what causes reflection, outside events, inner or outer crises, a question, an encounter with somebody else or a slow process of dissatisfaction with one’s life, at some point on the leadership journey a moment of stillness seems to occur that sets a different tune. Questions become louder and there is a demand for inner space, time, and the freedom to think into a different direction.

Inquiry, the art of asking questions in order to find truth, understanding and meaning, is certainly as old as humankind. One of the documented rhetorical questions of the Buddha in ancient India was: What is the purpose of inquiry? '[It] ... is to seek for the absolute unity which underlies all seeming diversity.' (Oliver, 1971, p. 76). Now this response might be too far from our daily reality. But, at its core, it has a meaning that is important to contemplate: in ancient India the purpose of inquiry was not to find a solution to a current problem. A question or set of questions was the vehicle for opening the mind to a deeper understanding of the world. An inquiry does not necessarily follow rational logic, it can rest on intuition: 'The individual cannot think his way to understanding; he must feel his way toward it. The end sought is not objective clarification, but subjective insight' (ibid., p. 76).

Inquiry, if understood in such a way, can be an aid on the road to the perception of coherence. A process of inquiry increases our ability to step into the unknown. This is not a culture we nurture in our professional lives. Very few corporate or institutional environments invite good questions instead of good answers. Good questions do not have immediate answers. Coaches know this phenomenon: if you have asked a question that cannot be answered right away you have opened the person to change. Unanswered questions are faithful – they accompany the person until they have been answered, much later, not always directly and not always consciously. The mind is constructed to keep unanswered questions in the forefront of consciousness, particularly those that have touched the heart. Finding the questions that cannot be answered immediately is a vital component of our developmental path. This can be unsettling rather than comforting: the least that is expected of a leader of today's organization is that he or she does not know the answer or searches for questions that, for him or herself or for others, cannot be answered straight away.

Inquiry underscores uncertainty and an acceptance of uncertainty. Engaging in inquiry means to be willing to look into what one does not know or understand, and to search for the understanding of what others see that might differ from one's own point of view. It invites dialogue, with oneself and with others. Real and deeper inquiry, into ourselves, into life or into a situation, requires the ability to listen. Only when a person suspends the urge to find a quick explanation for what is, when silence is allowed to take space, only then can inquiry lead to the depths of life's data. What is known and interpreted as meaning this or that can be dismantled and re-synthesized. In a difficult-to-answer question is a request to open beyond the old interpretations and take a fresh look at what one thinks one already knows. An attentive inquiry is likely to transform our habitual tendency to listen only to what we already know and overcome our inertia to go beyond conforming our memory's choices to the meaning we made up long ago. The ability to inquire is to perturb and penetrate this ordinariness of human explanation, to go beyond it into the unknown and open and allow, with the question, a possibility to emerge that would not do so otherwise. It is a commitment to new possibilities of life.

In that the question is an opening to a new form of life, it actually allows the re-organization of our thought patterns – a prerequisite for something new to develop. Inquiry is not a technique, it is a way of being. It requires courage, the permission for empty spaces in our leadership journey and above all the willingness to learn and to listen to oneself and others. Or as Robert Greenleaf puts it: '... only a true natural servant leader automatically responds to any problem by listening first. When one is a leader, this disposition causes one to be seen as servant first. This suggests that a non-servant who wants to be a servant might become a natural servant through a long arduous discipline of learning to listen.' (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 17). Questions that allow the discovery of the world within and

without, asked from an inner attitude of respect, genuine interest and openness to discovery, are gateways to understanding the coherence of life and the deeper quest of our leadership journey. They can be the beginning of a healing process.

Paul is a manager in a multinational company. He has spent 27 years there, with great enjoyment and sometimes greater ambivalence. He has held various leadership positions, but only in the last couple of years has he developed a different attitude to space and reflection:

Questions have actually caused deep reflection ... I often go for a walk and think about them and come back, and a week later I read them again. What I found great in questions is that I noticed ... there has been a consistency in my leadership journey. Deep down inside I have not changed what I feel I want to be, and what my journey is about. So my thinking, my depth of feeling, my intent, I don't believe it has altered in 30 years. The way I have approached turning that feeling, or thinking or intent into practical action, has definitely wavered throughout the years, but has become stronger and more consistent from the heart pull or action, than in the early days where it was a mixture of the heart and the head. My quest was to help people develop as people, and access the capabilities they never knew they had. I didn't know this when I started out on my journey, I couldn't have articulated it but that is how it felt.

The developmental path of a leader is shaped by the way questions are posed and transformed as they inform the inner and outer search. The way of re-organizing memory through inquiry influences the art of finding new possibilities in life. There is an assumption here – the ability to listen, to create empty spaces, the courage to

venture into the unknown and the establishment of a continuous inner dialogue have as much influence on our developmental paths as external events.

Inquiry helps us transcend experience. The more we are not just driven in our leadership journey, but able to observe what is happening while it is happening, or at least, to reflect in retrospect, the more our choices will be made contextually – that is, with increasing perception of the whole. When we gradually become alert to the deeper dimension of our path we will also perceive other people's paths in a more differentiated way. We might notice principles operating in the lives of others that are similar to our own. We might notice that the theme of our journey survives. It is the underlying quest that is unique to us, because we hold it in this world and it is eternal, because it expresses one particular form of a collective human consciousness.

This is how Samson expresses it in his early fifties:

I believed all along when the moment of reckoning comes my inner self and energy [are] driven by the search for truth and equality of human beings young and old, short and tall, fat and thin, poor and rich. I have never submitted to the pressures of power, be it political or economic. Sometimes I feel that I am foolish. Because I think that truth matters and works but when I 'wake up' and look around it is not truth that is leading the world, but rather pragmatism – playing the dance of powers. Despite this occasional 'waking up' however I have remained a rebel to [what] I think does not represent the truth and to anything that questions the equality of human beings. If I were to have my way, my choice would be to join with similar minds and hearts around the world and work towards creating a world where *truth* holds and matters and where human beings get at least a minimum security of

existence and are treated equally irrespective of status. Where everybody enjoys the same degree of confidence in being and living in the common home – the world, where the world of inequality is replaced by the world of equality and people have more opportunity to live a life of their choosing.

Reflections

Can you remember a daydream or thoughts you had when you were young (childhood, adolescence or when you were a young adult) that had anything to do with wanting to change the world, wanting to do something for the world (be it small or big), helping people or nature, or being somebody special with particular influence on the world? How did this dream or thought come about? What was it connected to? Which events preceded it or surrounded it? What was it? Did it get lost? Were there different dreams?

Was there any person or figure from a book or a movie with whom you identified? Why? What qualities did this person or figure have?

When you were a teenager, was there anything that fascinated you a great deal, or something you were searching for, a quest you felt you needed to be on, or something you wanted know or be or become?