



Approaching the Heart of the Matter: Personal Transformation and the Emergence of New Leadership

A Paper in Celebration of Synergos' 25th Anniversary

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Introduction and Background

After 25 years of working with Synergos, I – and we as an organization – have become clearer about what kind of leadership is needed to help the world become more peaceful, equitable and sustainable. We have also become clearer about how to help emerging leaders meet this challenge. This paper describes the need for what we call personal transformation (self-knowledge and self-love) as an important prerequisite for becoming ‘bridging’ leaders – who can listen, empathize and bring others together to solve problems collaboratively. It traces my own journey to understand my fears, find safety in knowing and understanding myself, and then become more effective as a bridging leader in the world. Telling my story is my gift to others seeking to find their role along this same path toward contributing to a better world.

It may seem surprising to some readers, who have known Synergos over the years as an organization which focused on inclusive partnerships as a way to promote greater equity and social justice, that we have added such an internal reflection component to our work. I hope that, by reading this paper, you will understand and appreciate the relationship between the inner and outer work.

My Own Journey Begins

For some time I have felt a growing pull of connection among people seemingly very different from each other: from different countries, with different ideologies, religions or backgrounds. It is a positive attraction that paradoxically exists in the context of more and more people feeling horror, shame, indignation (add your own emotion) at what we humans have been doing to each other, our home planet and its other-than-human species; a recognition that we are facing a choice point – individually and as a species. Either we shift the paradigm about how we are living, consuming or interacting or the whole thing spins out of control and the Earth survives, but without most or all of us humans and many other species.

Some of us are facing this with despair, others with resignation, still others with the hopeful sense that the shift will happen within each of us first, and then we can each, in our way of *being* as well as *doing*, be available to accompany others as they too come to this conclusion. As we make this shift, we come to recognize other members of the growing 'team' of people dedicated to the same ends that is forming around the world with only a loose sense of recognition to unite us.

For those of us who are activists, often on the front lines of pushing for change, the notion of turning inward to shift things out there may sound too passive, too slow or just plain crazy. It did to me fifteen years ago when, as I sometimes say, "unbeknownst to me, I moved to Montana."

The story: I was burnt out by 1997 after twelve years of pushing, together with others, to create a new model of social change that opted for inclusive partnerships in a world that was mostly confrontational, segmented and exclusive. I had been planning on taking a three-month sabbatical to write, but once I allowed myself to stop, and to stop in a very beautiful, wild, isolated part of the world, all sorts of unexpected thoughts, dreams, visions and ideas began to pop up. I was going to try to write about Synergos and its approach, but I ended up writing stories about my personal journey that mostly posed questions to which I had no answers.

I only realized some years later that the strong pull that led me to isolate myself in the natural world created the impetus for me to slow down, open myself both to some emotional pain I had not fully explored before, and connect to a larger whole through a powerful reverence for the Earth and her nurturing, protective qualities.

It was this disconnection from the urgency of the outer work I had been doing for so long and the opening to new sources of insight and ideas coming not solely from the left brain, that ultimately allowed me to feel my way into new program ideas for Synergos.

Unfortunately, at the time, I had no idea where they were coming from, how they could be lived out or how to persuade my colleagues that we should shift the emphasis of our work from solely an outer, activist approach to a combination of inner and outer.

A Shift in Synergos' Focus

I returned to work with Synergos eight months later and began advocating for change to include more reflection that would allow for creative inspiration as well as hard work. We had been focused on institutional strengthening, particularly of institutions that could bring together different segments of society to create greater equity and social justice and reduce poverty – largely community foundations. We called them *bridging organizations* (a name coined by Professor L. David Brown, one of my teachers in

Synergos' early days and one of the first Synergos Associates, a brain trust that helped guide our formation). We noticed that the kinds of individuals who were drawn to such institutions were able to reach out across difficult divides to bring people together. We became interested in the question of what skills enabled them to do this. This curiosity resulted in the creation of a Global Task Force on Bridging Leadership, which met between 2000 and 2002 to explore this question and document and analyze some case studies.

The focus on this style of what we called *bridging leadership* continued beyond our joint research with members of the Task Force in three of the participating countries – Ecuador, the Philippines and South Africa – but lay dormant within Synergos until the past four years, when it has been revived as part of the work we do with our several networks and the partnerships in which we participate as conveners and facilitators in different parts of the world.

During the lull in concept development and practice of bridging leadership at Synergos, some of us were also coming to feel what is expressed in the first paragraph: that *the shift we wanted to see in how people treat each other and the Earth was going to have to be preceded by a shift within ourselves*. As a result of a partnership with consulting firms Generon and McKinsey, and spurred by the impact on me of my time in the wild, we began taking people (network members and staff) on retreats in the wilderness (mainly in Montana, but also, later, in Maine, Georgetown, South Africa and the Kangaroo Valley in Australia).

The retreats allowed participants to slow down, spend time alone in the wild in a structured format and, through a series of guided exercises, find a clearer center and their deepest purpose in being here on Earth. They emerged, according to their feedback, more committed, clearer about their role in life and energized to do their work in the world. Seeing these impactful results, we began to focus on bringing what we came to call Personal Transformation work into all of our activities with networks and partnerships around the world. As with network members, partnership participants often referred to their retreat as one of the most meaningful experiences of their life.

These practices of bridging leadership and personal transformation emerged separately at different times, and initially it was not completely clear to those of us developing, participating in and implementing them what the connection between them was. Through my own participation in, and eventually, co-guiding over a dozen such retreats and through my work in the world as a bridging leader, the connection has gradually become clearer. It is this connection, and the implications for Synergos' practice, that is the subject of this paper.

My Personal Journey toward Integration of Inner and Outer Work

My own clarity with regard to this connection emerged as I began to recognize and understand *what were the obstacles within myself that prevented me from becoming the best leader I could be*. Once I could see those and begin what will be a life-long process to overcome them, I could see that those obstacles that are common to so many – fears, anxieties, anger, desire to please, insecurities of various sorts – would have to be dealt with before I would be able to fully listen and empathize with people. And here is the connection: *listening and empathizing are the fundamental qualities necessary to be a good bridging leader*.

Addressing these issues inside myself turned out to be a daunting task. I do not regret having taken it on; but I have come to see from my own experience and from that of others who have opted to take the same journey, that personal transformation is no mean feat! It is, in my view, a necessary prerequisite to being able to connect from a deep and authentic place with other members of the “team” out there – others who are committed to the same urgently needed paradigm shift. And it is also a prerequisite for inspiring those who may not yet recognize the need for such a shift but who will respond to the presence we exemplify. When we are consistent, reliable and empathic, we are able to create safe spaces within which others can clear away internal confusions and then open to consider their own purpose in life and how they want to live it out in greater harmony with the whole.

The rest of this paper identifies some of the challenges we face when we undertake this Hero’s Journey (as Joseph Campbell refers to it) into consciousness, which I would define as becoming aware of our own sometimes hidden motivations and needs that could interfere with our capacity to be in relationship with others and be productive in the world. It also outlines a number of activities that can help people along their journey.

I dedicate this exploration, written on the 25th anniversary of the founding of Synergos, to those people in the larger Synergos community who are finding the courage to take this journey on your own and as part of the team, and to my guides and teachers, some named here, some not, who have helped me gain the insights I have gleaned so far. We are joining the gathering team to shift the paradigm of how we co-exist in harmony on this Earth.

Fear – Its Origins and Consequences

Staying Small to Stay Safe

Somewhere along the line of human evolution, fears caused many of us (especially those who lost their link to the natural environment and came to live in crowded, stressful living conditions) to shrink into a smaller way of understanding – and living - our existence. We needed to feel safe. And the unknown made us fearful. So we shrank the unknown into manageable bits that took much of the meaning – and the magic - out of it.

It's so understandable when you think of it from the survival point of view: we are mortal, our lives are so relatively short, and, just when we are beginning to be able to understand something larger than our small, limited lives, we die. We manufacture all kinds of beliefs (religions, ideologies, myths) to rationalize our life and our death, to reassure ourselves that something (heaven, hell, reincarnation), some meaning, will continue after our bodies disintegrate and the light in our eyes is extinguished.

But the bottom line is that we come to live smaller lives out of fear of the wars that might kill us; of possible violence against ourselves that, in turn, cause us to manifest that against others; of the possibility that the emotional, physical, spiritual violence that we may have encountered in our childhoods and our short lives will be repeated on ourselves or our children.

So we do whatever we have to do to keep ourselves safe: a solution has been to 'hide' from the daring, bold, adventurous child of our self who wanted to go out and explore the world – and make our self very small and even invisible so that no one will perceive us as a threat and no one will hurt us. We hide as a way of protecting our self and, in doing so, we hide our magnificence, our wholeness, our full creativity, as well as those aspects we were taught were bad. We use a great deal of energy trying to keep these

parts of ourselves invisible, sometimes to the extent that even we forget their very existence.

But magnificence and other, less appealing qualities don't like to be shrunk or compartmentalized. They suffer, fester, seek weaknesses in the walls of their containment and escape (to the horror of our safely small selves) in little – or sometimes larger – eruptions that startle or lead to disapproval or amazement by others and set our alarm bells to clanging loudly.

How Could I Have Done That?

We ask, not believing that we could have behaved so badly – or acted so big. That is absolutely the opposite of who I really am! That was so inconsiderate, angry, inappropriate, boastful... Fill in the adjective of what we were once told we were when we tried to be big and were discouraged with labels that fearful others used to try to keep us safely small. Because the process of getting big can be disruptive, uncomfortable, threatening to those guardians or observers, most of whom had already resigned themselves to being small in the effort to stay safe themselves. They usually don't *mean* to cause us harm. But they might as well be binding our feet.

A story: I am writing this and all of a sudden the voices of the smallness patrol begin to intercede. They say things like:

- *What makes you think this will be of interest to anyone else?*
- *How come you fancy yourself such an expert that you are writing this without footnotes to the literature of the Much Wiser and More Erudite?*
- *Do you imagine you're channeling this knowledge and, if so, that it will have any credibility with others?*

A reasonable amount of experience with these voices enables me to recognize them as just that: voices. Not The Truth in all its imagined enormity and all-powerfulness.

Another voice, which I have consciously, tenderly, patiently cultivated in the face of these doubters, gets to rebut, reassure:

- *Let's just keep going and see where this takes us before we start worrying about how it will look from the outside.*
- *You may remember that, when you are feeling whole and connected to all parts of yourself (heart, mind, body, soul, spirit), what you say resonates for yourself and often for others as well.*

- *It is in stifling the flow that you go back to being small. Let's encourage it, not stop it before we have even heard what it has to say.*

All right, then, I can continue, knowing that these voices will always be with me, even though I have mostly become conscious of who they are and why they are there.

As participants in the retreats we have organized begin to listen to their diverse inner voices, as described in the next section, they too have experienced growing compassion for, and acceptance of, their diversity and sometimes mixed messages without letting the voices, which often came into existence during childhood, dominate their adult perceptions and behaviors.

The Evolutionary Origins of Fear

It is not that there are not valid reasons for fear. We all know what they are. But the origin of our fearfulness precedes our potential for human consciousness. It resides in our amygdala, the reptilian part of our brain that is just above the stem at the base of our skull. It is programmed in, a default that is difficult – and sometimes foolish – to try to override. We hear or feel the fast approach of a car before the rest of our brain has a chance to process it and we jump out of the way. Someone we don't know reaches to take our baby and we instinctively turn away and clasp her more closely. A larger person raises a hand and we shrink away as though he meant to hit us. Prior experience or prior warnings cause us to react viscerally to keep ourselves or our loved ones safe. This is not an argument for ignoring or suppressing genuine external reasons to be fearful or to act accordingly.

Robert Sapolsky's delightful book, *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*, details the difference between ourselves and other mammals in reacting to fears triggered by the amygdala: we remember and register fearful episodes and build up stress in our adrenal glands, which leads to chemical changes in our brain, while other mammals react and then let it go when the danger passes.

As human populations grow and communities which were once isolated from each other come into closer and closer contact, they end up competing for the same resources of food, water, materials to create shelter, safe spaces and buffer zones. This provokes our individual and collective amygdala, and the adrenaline which stimulates it, to become more agitated and easy to trigger.

Ironically, humans, whose brains are evolving toward greater capacity for understanding, empathy and consciousness, are simultaneously held back in our evolutionary development by what also protects us: fear. The fight or flight reaction that

served early humans well in their struggle for survival may not be the best way of adapting to more complex forms of human organization.

This leads us to a question of whether safety, on the one hand, and expanded consciousness and understanding, on the other, are opposites of each other and mutually exclusive. If we think in the box about how we define safety, perhaps the answer is yes. But if we redraw that box to contain a much larger conception of existence than our smaller selves would feel comfortable imagining, the answer can look quite different.

Redrawing the Box

To do this, we need to be able to imagine a much broader definition of 'us.' We need to move beyond the borders of the self, the container of the immediate or even extended family, beyond community, watershed, state, nation and even the larger human family. We need to let our imaginations and sense of connectedness roam beyond all living things, beyond even our planet, the universe, to take in the entire Cosmos, whatever that, which is beyond our ability to know, is. If we imagine that we are each connected to that unfathomably huge, infinite whole, and through that to each other and every thing, seen and unseen, known and unknown; if we truly allow ourselves to feel a part of that, then it is possible for our struggling human consciousness to feel less afraid of what might happen on an individual basis to our self, our family, our community, all the way up to the whole of humanity or the whole of our home planet. Again, this does not suggest ignoring imminent physical danger; rather it is a change of mindset more generally.

But this is not a leap that is easily taken, especially if we have based our lives until now on keeping our self small to be safe. And yet, if we don't find ways of taking that leap (incrementally, not all at once), we will continue to play into the divisiveness – and, ultimately, danger – that trying to protect whatever small definition of 'us-ness' we have been employing up to now produces. We will continue to suffer the same consequences that have been sprouting out of our search for personal, small group or national security that are having such devastating consequences for large segments of the human population, for the diversity of species and for the skin of our home planet (Earth herself will continue to survive – we merely inflict skin wounds on her – but which of her species, and which groups of those species will continue to exist and remain viable will be another question).

Some of the distortions that result from the scramble for self or small group safety include:

- Social injustice resulting from vast disparities between rich and poor as the more aggressive or 'successful' claim more and more of the resources available;
- Conflicts between groups that lead to skirmishes, wars, genocide, violence against the weaker members of society, and enslavement;
- Mistrust across groups which makes communication and reconciliation ever more difficult;
- Damage to other species and to the forests, plains, agricultural lands, rivers, lakes and oceans of the earth in the rush for materials and resources; and
- Damage to the human spirit, consciousness and sense of connectedness to each other and to a larger whole that could be the way out for all of us.

How on Earth, then, to begin to reverse this trend?

Beginning with Ourselves

First, there is no way of escaping the need to begin with our very own self. This piece of transformation is not something we can begin by preaching to others. For one thing, what evidence would anyone else have that such a transformation is possible if they have not seen it either out there among other humans or through their own bodily, heart-ful, mental and spiritual experience of it?

Luckily, there are guides who can help us initiate our own process – while creating a safe enough container within which it is less terrifying to explore. Some of them are human. I have been fortunate to have a number of such models, teachers and guides whose examples I could begin to follow, even amid the clamor of my small and safety-obsessed voices. But the Mother of all guides, to whom my human teachers have, to a one, led me, is our Earth herself. Offer her the least opportunity to hold you and give yourself the chance to feel what it is like to be held and protected – in the larger sense – by her, and you will already have the basis for a counter to the voices of fear and smallness.

Allow yourself, in the reverence and gratitude that emerge from that feeling of being held, heard, protected, to connect through her to the sky, the universe, the miracle of life – and yes, whatever we call that: the Word, God, Spirit, the Cosmos – and you will be your larger self. The larger self is the one

- Whose heart is open and can feel gratitude;
- Who feels connected to a greater whole;
- Who can operate in the present and therefore;
- Who can access greater creativity;
- Who knows and likes who you are; and

- Who is able to rise to whatever you may be called upon to do at any given moment without excessive fear or self doubt.

The impulse to shrink, hide or fight in the face of something or someone new or apparently threatening loses its grip in the face of gratitude, awe or connectedness. The energy that we release in the latter state communicates itself to those whose behavior might otherwise have stimulated our fight or flight reactions, reducing, in turn, their fear and its resultant behaviors and reversing a vicious circle. Not all the time and not immediately. These reactions are so built into human protective behavior that we need to become discerning about when we can allow ourselves to reach out with an open heart and when we must stand back and wait for a better moment – or actively move away or even protect ourselves against imminent aggression.

But each time we are able to allow open, loving, supportive energy to flow out of our self and it is received (sometimes with initial suspicion or fear, sometimes with gratitude, wonder and even awe), we are reversing, in ourselves and in those who receive it, a brain-, soul- and heart-pathway that has become quite deeply engraved in human consciousness.

Some Antecedents of Connectedness

Having made the case for the evolutionary development of fear in humans, let me now take the opposite side of this argument and posit that this was not always the case, particularly in indigenous societies. Earlier human societies lived close to the land, worshipped Mother Earth and Father Sky and their progeny and lived in awe and reverence of their miracles – and their apparent madness. That is not to say that they did not live physically difficult lives, die young or suffer periods of hunger, disease and war. But these difficulties existed in a context of connectedness to a larger whole and a faith in its ultimate coherence.

As human groupings shifted from nomadic hunting and gathering to settled agricultural (and later, industrial) communities, religious beliefs began to shift from nature-based animist beliefs to other forms of worship. Organized religions tried, and sometimes succeeded, in replacing animism, to create that sense of connectedness.

The essence of most, if not all, religions fosters harmony, empathy and connectedness. Many of the leaders of these same religions, however, being human and therefore being prone to the same amygdala reaction as the rest of us, end up preying on the fears and smallness to which we are all susceptible.

Sometimes the way of expressing a particular religious belief system, rather than encouraging believers to expand and include, have a subtext of exclusion, judgment, condescension or even extermination of those who do not follow *their* particular form of belief. This is not, of course, true for all the leaders or believers of any religion. So religious belief *can be* another route to compassion, open-heartedness and transmission of positive energy. That, in turn, makes others feel safe and connected in the larger sense that will help the human paradigm shift from one of fear to one of love.

There is Safety and Then There is Safety

I realize I have been writing about making ourselves safe by keeping ourselves small, as though being safe and small were one and the same and run counter to growth, well-being and consciousness. It is really important to understand the importance of feeling safe in order to allow the heart to open and to be able to function as a whole being. But we need a more nuanced definition of safety to be able to make the distinction.

Understanding Our Fears by Listening to the Voices within Us

Two beloved teachers and friends, Tony Weller and Bill Plotkin, have talked and written in different ways about the voices inside ourselves. Their work – which is well laid out in Bill Plotkin's *Soulcraft* and Hal and Sidra Stone's (Tony's mentors) *Embracing Ourselves* – describes the archetypal voices that exist within all of us: The Wounded Child, The Wild and Magical Child, The Nurturing Parent, The Loyal Soldier (or Protector) and many others, which may be generalized or applicable only to ourselves. Until we become aware of these voices, we often aren't aware that, depending on circumstances, very different aspects of our Self may be speaking at different moments.

Let's say you're tired and feeling needy. Your partner has not been fully available to give you what your Wounded Child needs (total love, total attention, meeting its every need, the way a baby or toddler would want from its primary caretaker). You get petulant, resentful, even vengeful or sulky. Part of you knows this is unreasonable (perhaps). But that part wants what it wants when it wants it, and will not listen to reason as to why it can't get it NOW. If expressed as it is felt, we are unlikely to have our need met unless our partner is a highly conscious saint who knows that voice as one aspect of our self and feels compassionate toward it.

The Wounded Child may differ in each of us to the degree it dominates our inner conversation – or outer behavior. It represents that part of our self which, in some way, didn't get enough – primarily love – growing up. Someone disparaged or mocked us,

criticized us, abandoned us or even beat or abused us. The child to whom that happened still lives within us, and will never forget that lack. For those lucky enough to have had a relatively wound-free early childhood, growing up in an atmosphere of love and acceptance, there is still liable to be some trauma left over from the birthing process, which caused a protective scar to form around that moment of our lives.

As we grow, we form what Tony calls 'Protectors' to shelter that child from further hurt. The Protector, which Bill Plotkin calls the Loyal Soldier, may have formed at age 2, 3, 4 or even later. But it was born to protect us from further wounding.

A Story: Bill uses as analogy the tale of Japanese soldiers in World War II who were left on islands of the Philippines or Indonesia, sometimes for up to thirty or forty years, not knowing the war was over. As far as they were concerned, they were still serving their country even if they had long since run out of bullets and were living in the jungle or had integrated into remote local communities. Their perception of the world had stayed frozen at a moment in time.

Needless to say, when they were discovered, finding a way to rationalize what might otherwise have seemed a waste of thirty or forty years, was key to their remaining whole emotionally. The Japanese government handled this sensitively and intelligently. It first thanked and honored them profusely and often for their incredible service to their country. Then, just as often, it told them that the war was over; it was now safe for them to lay down their weapons and resume a peaceful life. And finally, equally critically, it found a way to reassign them to do something useful in society that many years later so that they could continue to feel valued.

If we think of our internal childhood Protectors in the same way as these Japanese soldiers, we can see that they have been doing a heroic job all these years, trying to keep us safe from further hurts of the sort many of us suffered as very small children. In the intervening years, though, just as the Wounded Child never grows up, those early Protectors still believe that that particular 'war' or trauma is still going on. It is not capable of understanding that, in the meantime, we have grown up. We are no longer as physically helpless as we were, and we have probably developed some verbal and behavioral skills that can, in an age-appropriate way, defend us against most sources of further hurt.

This is where staying small to stay safe comes in. Those Protectors of our early child are still behaving in the way they did back then, without making allowances for our adult self's evolving ability to protect ourselves in different – and more age-appropriate – ways. In order to convince them that 'the war is over,' we must first meet them and have

the conversation that the Japanese government had with its long-lost soldiers; and then, very importantly, as Bill says, reassign them, or as Tony talks about, update them.

We *do* need to feel safe and honor the internal Protector that has kept us that way (as we may have other voices that are advocating highly risky behavior of a productive or unproductive nature that need at least a counterpoint for us to be able to consider the risk). But, from a safe space, we need the opportunity to consider that the Protector who has been active up to now is perhaps no longer adequate to keep us feeling safe *and* allow us to grow into our biggest and most effective self so that we can be available for whatever role in the world we are called to fulfill.

When Tony works with people using what is called Voice Dialogue, in which he speaks with any number of our inner voices to get the 'I' that is the self we mostly present to the outside world to hear the variety of feelings that exist inside, he calls on the Protector right after speaking to the 'I'. He does this consciously to make sure that s/he feels safe having him talk to the others – some of whom may be disruptive, angry and generally unruly. It is only with the go-ahead of that Protector that Tony will then invite some of the others to speak. In doing so, he is creating a safe context for the person to listen (as their Protector is ready) to different voices that may be sad, angry or even hopeless or destructive. This process can eventually extend to our Shadow, or disowned aspects of ourselves (see next section), but usually begins with more accessible voices that are not repressed, though generally not recognized as distinct from the cacophony of our many expressions.

Listening to these distinct voices can lead to wonderful clarity about why we have been having certain feelings that may appear contradictory to others. We become a sleuth in our own self-discovery, an ally in our own healing. The Protector, instead of resisting the change, when consulted, merely sets the pace of it. We start to feel compassion for some of the sad or angry voices. They are, after all, speaking out of our own experience – even if we had forgotten or dismissed it as insignificant. We learn to listen and take care of those more vulnerable parts of ourselves (rather than asking someone else to do it) and they, feeling heard and appreciated, start to act out less, allowing us to soothe them when they need it. This, in turn, allows our heart to be open more of the time and available for external connection and empathy as well as this very valuable internal self-compassion.

Opening Our Heart and Getting Big

Another way of putting all this is that fear and love are opposites, perhaps even more than love and hate. If you think about it, it is very difficult to keep our heart open when we are afraid. We're generally using most of our energy to protect against the fear, and

part of that entails closing off the heart to protect it from getting hurt – and staying small to stay safe.

To expand, our heart needs to be open. Getting big (expanding) means:

- Being able to distinguish between and manage our own inner voices so that we do not displace what is really our own issue by projecting it onto others;
- Becoming able to understand and empathize with other people; and
- Trusting ourselves to think creatively and act in a flow rather than stopping every few seconds to make sure we're being proper or inoffensive or pleasing.

To access spirit or our deepest soul's purpose in life, we need our heart to be engaged. Even to be physically coordinated, we need to *be present and trust* our body to make the right moves. This means getting out of our directive left brain that operates more slowly (not to mention judgmentally) than the heart-connected right brain that always exists in the present.

Two apparent polarities seem particularly relevant to our search for consciousness. Understanding them could lead to greater harmony among humans and less damage to other species and Earth. The first is the contrast and separation between who we are consciously, in our daily lives, and the repressed or suppressed 'shadow' aspects of ourselves. The second is the imbalance, within ourselves and in our external collective manifestation as society, of the *yin* and *yang*, or masculine and feminine. These are the subjects of the next two sections.

Recognizing and Owning the Shadow

A story: I have dived deep several times to try to understand the origins of the parts of me that I have denied. I have also been following the advice of writers on shadow to look at what irritates me most about others, on the theory that that is precisely what I am repressing in myself.

One night, in a guided retreat, I find myself uncomfortable, impatient, dissatisfied and feeling as though I am not going anywhere, not learning, not freeing myself. My daughter-in-law Krista, a talented teacher of voice and expression, offers to help me with a breathing exercise designed to free stuck energy. We breathe together, deeply, sighing or groaning with each exhalation. It doesn't really work and I continue to feel frustrated. Some time later, seeing that I am still stuck, she suggests we do it again. I acquiesce but feel resistant. I admit that I don't want to do it (in stronger language than this). Her eyes light up as she sees the resistance - and the possibility. "Okay," she says, "let's add movement."

I start to move to the music, but in a half-hearted way. "You have to commit to it, Peggy," says Krista. From across the room, Samantha, my guide in many things, interjects strongly, "Sound, Peggy, sound!" I hate this! Everyone else in the room is quiet. I don't want to disrupt them. I feel uncomfortable making strange noises even by myself, much less in front of other people. I normally don't even make any noise when I cry. But I know I have to break through this.

Instead of lying on my back dancing with my legs and arms, I sit up and begin punching and kicking toward the fire, trying to add grunts to each punch. But I feel so self-conscious! I simply can't put my full self - whatever that is - into it. Then, suddenly, I know. I have to go outside, away from people, away from the music.

Despite its being late fall, the weather is mild. I'm in bare feet, a T-shirt and sweat pants, but I don't feel the least bit cold. I can't hear the music from inside so I assume no one can hear me either. From a standing position, my movements become wilder, more aggressive,

my voice louder, shouting and grunting. A huge energy emerges from inside me; the me that is stomping and sounding is not the me I know, but it is fully present, occupying all the space, vibrant, indefatigable, FURIOUS. Witnessed by the trees and the night sky, I RAGE as I move and shout, no words attached; pure feeling. It is ecstatic! Free! I feel as though I could do this all night.

But the 'this' gradually shifts from aggressive kicking and punching to wild dancing, using every part of my body. I still don't tire, but little by little the dancing smooths out, becomes flowing. I feel the presence of a me I recognize. This me starts crooning "come dance with me," holding her arms in the female dance position, swaying invitingly. She is singing to the force, the being who had temporarily taken her over with his rage and power and huge energy. "Come dance in me," she chants, inviting him in. And he accepts, because there follows the wedding of the energy from before with the grace and flow that is now available.

The dance finally over, some new composition of me gives thanks to the trees for their utterly non-judgmental witnessing, and to all the directions, between and among which I have just engaged in this ritual of integration. I return to the group and the fire energized, calm and clear.

Finding the aspects of ourselves that we have hidden, even from ourselves, for reasons of safety, is not easy. What we find will almost certainly disgust us initially, for these are the qualities we have been told as a child are bad – or for which we are bad. This is shadow.

Why Try to Find Our Shadow?

Wouldn't it be so much easier – and safer – to let sleeping dogs lie, so to speak? The answer will depend on what kind of life we want to lead. If we are more committed to the version of safety that will keep us small and hidden, then probably yes, let them lie. There is invariably pain and confusion as this 'other side' of our self meets the light of day.

But if, as was very much the case with me, I felt like I was operating on only half of my energy, capacity, brain power, heart-fullness and intuitiveness, I *had* to go there to recover my full self and energy. The amount of energy it takes to hold down a repressed side of one's self is otherwise not available to living life.

Another factor gave me hope that I could overcome whatever feelings of shame or self-loathing might come up as I discovered what was underneath. I know from reading (books like Robert Johnson's *Inner Work*) and from my teachers that most of what our

very young self interprets as unacceptable, disgusting, unworthy, etc. *is not that bad!* We were only a small child when these judgments were being pronounced. How bad can a small child be? We believed those pronouncements of “bad girl” as a judgment of our whole self when they were probably meant as circumstantial and related to a particular behavior. Once we, as an adult, re-experience the forbidden emotion and the circumstances that led to its being repressed, it becomes possible to forgive and find compassion for the small, innocent child that we were. In fact, our shadow can only become dangerous to ourselves and others if we *don't* unearth and integrate it because then it can act out in ways that our conscious self cannot control (as with *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*).

The Shadow in the World

For anyone who wants to live consciously with their full creativity and energy, and to dedicate that to creating a better environment around us for our family and community or to honoring our commitments in the world, there is still another reason for taking this difficult road into Shadowland. Armand Bytton, another wonderful teacher, states it so clearly: the same light and dark that is in ourselves is out there in the world. Only by recognizing and owning the dark that is in us will we be able to see and confront it out there. There are elements in our shadow selves that resonate with and may even help to replicate the darkness in the world if we do not explore, air and ultimately integrate those long-ago personal distortions into our larger self. If they fester and grow in the dark (our unconscious mind), they are likely to multiply and align themselves with aspects of the outside world that the rest of our self condemns or tries to change: a meanness, an exclusion, a selfishness, greed or destructive rage.

Identifying Aspects of Our Own Shadow

The rage that erupted from me during the episode described above had long been bottled up because I was not allowed to express anger in childhood. It was too dangerous, for various reasons. I learned to suppress it and, later, to not even feel it consciously. It was as though it didn't exist – except that people close to me had experienced it leaking out in mean, sarcastic or biting ways that hurt more than the words in which the message was cased. I had become aware of it over time as I saw how negatively I reacted to anyone else's open expression of anger. I tended to judge it as inappropriate at the same time as I felt very anxious in the presence of it. I would resort to trying to control the other person's anger in order not to have it trigger my own unrecognized feelings.

Rage is one aspect of my own shadow. Another is revealed when people are very demanding of others – again, revealing a way I would have liked to have been but was

not allowed. Others may have repressed very different forms of behavior and feelings deemed unacceptable. What irritates you most about other people's behavior? Therein may lie a clue to your hidden shadow.

Feelings and habits that have been buried for most of a lifetime do not go away instantly, of course. But a release like the one I described, when experienced in a safe and guided environment, can set a benchmark against which we can measure what is going on inside. If I'm feeling stuck and impatient, I'm learning to move my body and breathe deeply and make sounds to get unstuck. I can now more easily recognize uncomfortable or frightened feelings as arising in response to anger – either my own, which has not gained expression, or my fear of someone else's, which I'm afraid might get out of control. Taking that first step, though, is like the first time we leap into deep water with no one to catch us.

When such feelings become conscious, it is no longer so difficult to articulate them in a way that allows for a discussion that could both allow the other person to air their feelings without my trying to suppress them, and me to say how scared I am of them, which often helps the other person to be mindful of how s/he is expressing them.

The Relationship between Shadow and Fear

How are shadow and the fear that shrinks us into our small, supposedly safe, selves related? For one thing, a lot of what we are afraid of *is* our shadow (interesting how that saying, "afraid of his own shadow" is part of at least the Arabic, English and French languages). We repressed aspects of ourselves that, if expressed, might have gotten us in trouble – sometimes serious trouble. So any leakage of shadow behavior in our self or demonstration of it in others (for whom those behaviors might not represent *their* shadow) will feel very threatening. If we were turtles, we would want to pull our head inside our shell.

My sister Abby resolutely refused to withhold her opinions and expressions of anger against our mother (at great cost to herself and often in an attempt to protect the rest of us). But witnessing the two of them going at it was among the most terrifying memories of my childhood. There was no way I was going to risk the wrath of our mother, so I shrank into my shell, becoming bland, passive – and self-destructive. It was preferable not to be seen or heard than to risk what felt like annihilation.

As my commitment to work out there in the world and to create partnerships that included all the stakeholders, not only those with whom I felt comfortable, grew, I eventually had to examine the limitations that my hidden shadows were imposing on my effectiveness. Sometimes, for example, conflicts among groups need to be aired in

order to be cleared; but if I was so terrified of conflict, my tendency would be to make nicey-nice and patch over conflicts before they were addressed.

These dynamics also affect personal relationships, of course. In my own case, in the past I chose several partners for whom expression of anger was not a shadow issue. They expressed anger openly – and not always cleanly (that is not the repressed shadow me speaking!). Undoubtedly I, in part, chose them because they were able to express what I could not – even if it bothered me terribly when they did – just as I also chose them for many other qualities that I admired. In other words, until we come to own our repressed feelings, we will either project them onto others or find others who carry them into the world for us; usually both. Until we understand that dynamic, it is likely to cause serious tension in relationships.

The Importance of Integrating Our Shadow Self

So the uncovering and integration of shadow aspects of our self lead to several benefits that can bring significant peace and energy to our work and lives:

- Life energy that was being used to suppress the shadow will be freed up and can now be applied to positive things we want to do in our personal lives and in the world;
- The things we were repressing are usually not as horrible as we imagine them to be; if we can forgive ourselves for them by understanding how they originated, we will have more empathy for ourselves – and for others;
- By surfacing these elements, they will no longer control or tyrannize us; some of their energy dissipates in airing them and we will be conscious of what remains and in a better position to refrain from acting them out; and
- There is always a gift hidden in the pile of what we thought was just dung; it may be freed-up energy; it may be greater creativity; it could be a liberated sense of humor and imagination – or many other possibilities.

This is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

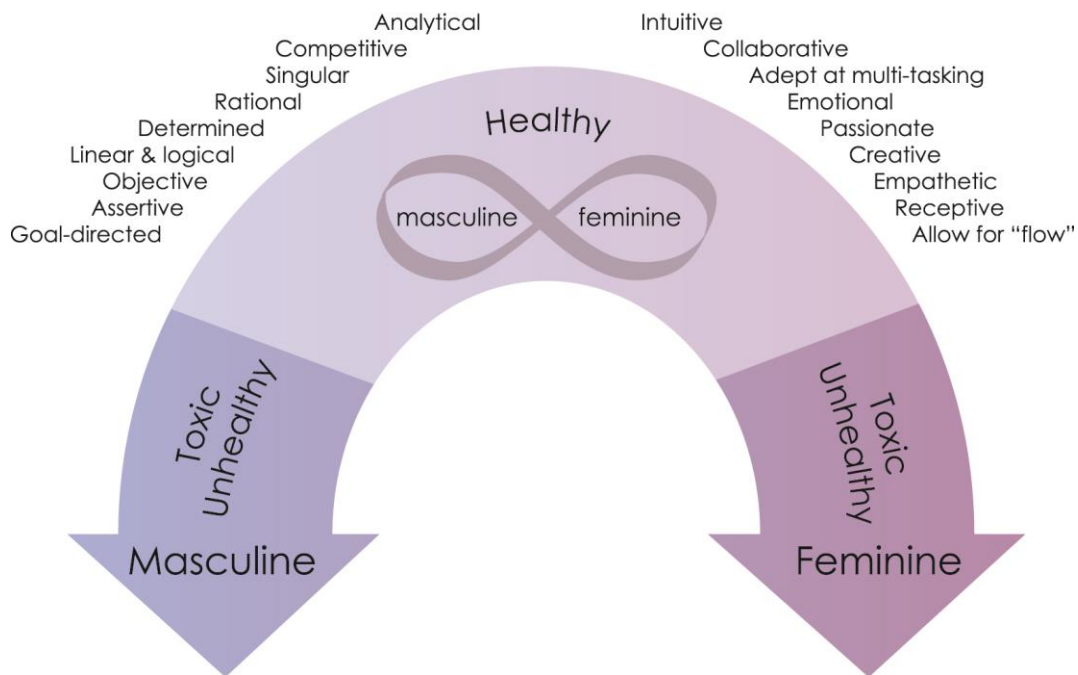
Rebalancing the Masculine and Feminine

If we think about the nature and origins of the imbalances in the world, a plausible case can be made for their either being caused by or echoing the out-of-whack relation between the Masculine and the Feminine within ourselves and in society. In many cultures, the notion that women may have masculine elements or (even more sensitive) men may have feminine elements is so touchy that it is worth explaining how these terms are being applied before going further.

Masculine and Feminine Traits

In Western society it is easier for us to accept that everything has a 'yin' (feminine) and 'yang' (masculine), perhaps because we think of them without their gender meaning, as needing to be in balance, within and without. Perusing the internet looking at a diversity of views about the dichotomy of masculine and feminine traits, I encountered an interesting and illustrative list and an opinion about the meaning of finding masculine/feminine balance within ourselves. Stephen Cocconi from www.TheMichaelTeaching.com says that "coming to terms with and learning to optimize your own unique mix [of gender traits] such that your happiness is maximized and...your life success is enhanced" is the task of each of us. His chart (see next page) of healthy masculine and feminine qualities offers us at least a Western model of the contrast – and complementarity.

He does not go on to delineate the unhealthy or toxic aspects of either gender, but we can make some guesses. When assertive turns to violent or domineering, analytical to compartmentalizing or divisive, logical to discriminatory, for example, we have the beginning of an oppressive individual or society. Similarly, on the feminine side, when receptive tips over into passive or submissive, when emotional becomes reactive, or adept at multi-tasking becomes manipulative, we have the basis for mistrust and untrustworthiness.



From www.TheMichaelTeaching.com

A story: I am on a guided retreat at the beginning of which I set the intention to try to understand what happened to the Feminine in society several thousands of years ago when women, who had been revered as healers, priestesses, and tenders of the Earth, were suddenly oppressed by a male-dominated society and emerging religions in a series of shifts that appear to be the origin of this round of imbalance between the Masculine and Feminine in the world.

The music allows my meditation to deepen and my imagination to generate the following vision: I find myself at the bottom of a deep trench, too deep to climb out of. It is dark and dank. I feel desperate and want to scream for help, claw the earthen sides. My body is tense. Everything in me wants to rebel, fight. Suddenly, it comes to me: fighting can't be the solution. That is how we humans have been resolving conflicts for thousands of years in the Masculine way.

With this realization, it seems that the music shifts from dark tones to a high soprano voice so pure that I am transported out of the trench and find myself on its edge on top. In front of me is a female being so full of light that I can hardly make out her features except to note that she is exquisitely beautiful and shining. I say to her "You were here all the time, weren't you?" She nods, smiling. "But then why didn't you help me get out?" I ask, with some emotion. "Because I knew you would find your way," she answers, still smiling. I realize she means that I/we needed to dream up a different way out. A Feminine way.

Toward a New Feminine

It is as though the world is requiring of the Feminine (in each of us, not only women) that we find a new way that is neither fighting nor resisting, but somehow inviting and imagining as the counterpoint to the unhealthy Masculine's domination and oppression or the unhealthy Feminine's submission and passivity, and as the complement to the healthy Masculine's rationality and determination. This new way is very different than either the submission or manipulation to which the Feminine has resorted to hide from, defend against or resist the unhealthy aspects of the Masculine. It involves inviting and allowing. It involves *being* a certain way, not only *doing*. It involves empathizing and collaborating.

Toward a New Masculine

Of course the world will also need a new Masculine to play its part in the rebalancing. The unbalancing that happened up to 10,000 years ago as nomadic societies became agrarian may have resulted from a Masculine reaction to Feminine power that, in turn, had previously thrown off a delicate balance in the opposite direction. To the extent that the resulting Masculine oppression grew out of fear of Feminine domination, that fear must be allayed in order for the healthy – and healing – aspects of the Masculine to reassert themselves in the world. *We must* stop conquering and dominating each other, eliminate the assumption that 'to the victor goes the spoils,' raping, pillaging, exploiting the Earth, destroying her forests and polluting her water supply. We need a healthy Masculine that protects, initiates, invents, conceptualizes and asserts – without forcing.

This period of time requires more nurturing of each other, our children and our planet; it requires greater collaboration, conciliation, empathy. It is not that it no longer needs logic or goal-direction, but these need to be complemented by the former with greater reverence and respect than these qualities have been afforded in most cultures in the last millennia.

Unfortunately, no one can wave a magic wand and instantaneously create the society we would like to see. There will continue to be shadows and darkness in human society and on the Earth. But we *can* begin shifting this imbalance within our self. We *can*, as we do that, begin practicing and teaching methods like bridging leadership, that rely heavily on Feminine characteristics. We *can*, by placing greater emphasis on our way of 'being' and not just our 'doing,' serve as beacons for the shift in balance that is coming, identify ourselves to other members of the emerging team of conscious and balanced leaders, and make what we have learned available to others seeking similar balance through the way we interact with them as much as through what we tell them.

Becoming a Bridging Leader – A New Paradigm for Conscious Leadership

As we think about a new paradigm for what I would call conscious leadership, which bridges across divides and wherein leaders are aware of their own obstacles and limitations and do not mistake those for problems in other people or the world, we need to draw from many types of research findings. Much of what we have examined so far comes from psychology, philosophy and spirituality.

A Neuroscientific Perspective on Conscious Leadership

Neuroscience sheds a different kind of light on the skills we need to be able to function effectively in different situations, according to my friend and teacher from McKinsey, Michael Rennie. He describes brain *beta waves* (32 beats per second) as lending themselves to *multi-tasking*, which modern life, full of constantly available technology, and many different and sometimes-conflicting obligations, poses as a challenge to us. It may be useful when we, in fact, need to shift our attention from one thing to another in quick succession (or simultaneously!) although it usually implies not much heart connection. It is not, however, useful for deep thinking, relaxing or concentration.

Alpha waves (16 beats per second), which he characterizes as *single-point focus* of the sort we achieve when meditating or when we finally screen out everything else and start writing or building something in which we are totally absorbed, is the second level of brain function. It is particularly useful for completing a project or thinking through an identified problem. It is still identified with mind function although the process through which we achieve this state (through meditation, endorphin-releasing physical energy, yoga or tai chi) most likely creates the sense of presence which usually also engages the heart.

Theta waves (8 beats per second), he continues, occur at moments when we are disconnected from obligations. We might be taking a shower or taking the bus to work,

doing something so rote we don't need to think. All of a sudden, we may have a big Aha! and find that a problem we had been trying to figure out with our thinking left brain has just been solved, apparently without engaging it at all. In other words, it lends itself to a source of *creativity* that is not available to us in beta waves. To get there, we need to be very relaxed – something many of us don't allow ourselves very often; *not trying*. This entails trusting (a heart function) that the answer will come – or at least *not thinking or worrying* (a left brain function) about whether it will. This is the kind of Imagination Martha Beck describes accessing in *Finding Your Way in a Wild New World*.

Finally, *Delta waves* (a mere 4 pulses per second) entail the *pure emotion* characterized by a woman nursing a baby or a couple making love (as opposed to just having sex). It is a state from which we can connect with another so deeply that we know how that one is feeling even if miles apart. It is totally dependent on an open heart. It requires absolute internal stillness and is, in many ways, the antithesis of beta brain. We need to be able to access each of these brain states to handle different situations.

A Story: Michael began by teaching the complementarity and usefulness of each of these states (and many other things) to corporate executives in banks and other companies. To the amazement of his colleagues at McKinsey, productivity and profitability in these companies showed startling leaps as the executives of these companies began to engage in meditation, retreat time, etc. Being left-brain and results-oriented, they asked him to form a small team (Mindset) within McKinsey to teach their partners how to access these states and to learn the skills he was employing to improve the performance of the companies with which they were working. As would be expected from any sample of people, about a third of the people who went through the training took to it like a duck to water and started incorporating the methods in their work right away; another third found it interesting and perhaps used some of it when it seemed appropriate but didn't fully integrate it in their coaching practice; and the last third thought it was a load of baloney and didn't want to have anything to do with it.

It is interesting to speculate, given the hard data on success in the very outcomes-focused terms McKinsey strives for, why this third was unwilling or unable to incorporate the methods. One possible answer is that the newness of the approach did not feel safe to their as-yet un-updated Protectors. The possibility of sinking down to a feeling level that the left brain could not control may have been too threatening, even in the face of the evidence of the potential benefits to profitability and improved corporate culture of helping clients to do so. It goes to show that, even in building the capacity of highly skilled consultants to engage in heart- as well as brain-work, a context of safety must be built into the training, or the learning will not take.

So yes, feeling safe is critical to allowing the heart to be engaged as well as the brain, thereby allowing us to function at peak effectiveness in terms of creativity, being present and being able to listen to and empathize with others so that complex tasks can be accomplished collaboratively and with maximum flexibility.

The Importance of Emotional Intelligence to Effective Leadership

When a team or partnership group is working in a context of trust and with what Dan Goleman (author of *Emotional Intelligence*) calls emotional intelligence (EQ), the productivity results will be much better. It may take extra time up front to get them there, but the work will happen more smoothly and collaboratively once the context is set.

Goleman has gathered research to show the importance to organizational achievement of leaders with emotional intelligence. In *Leadership: The Power of Emotional Intelligence* (published online in 2011 by More Than Sound LLC) he cites two studies demonstrating this. In his own research looking at the needed ratio for job success of technical skills and IQ to EQ, the latter proved to be twice as important for jobs at all levels. He quotes a 1996 research study by David McClelland which found that senior managers with a critical mass of competencies relating to EQ outperformed yearly earnings of others by 20 percent while those without these capabilities underperformed by the same amount. EQ was the key indicator of success, considerably more so than the other two.

These results have caused many leaders to reconsider how they build capacity in their leaders and staff. But to enhance people's EQ, we need to consider all the factors discussed previously, because people whose childhood Protectors have not been updated are liable to be reactive and closed when faced with situations that threaten them, thereby holding their EQ down. In order for such "updating" to occur, people need to feel safe and trusting enough to be willing to listen to their inner voices. Then they can strengthen – rather than weaken – their Protectors to keep the *adult* self safe in appropriate ways. From this feeling of safety, they are ready to improve their EQ.

Bringing people together to bridge across social and economic divides, disagreements and conflicts to solve problems collaboratively, a key function of Synergos and its network members and partners, requires emotional intelligence (EQ). Developing those qualities requires inner work to address the limitations that I have described in the previous sections and which most of us face. These include:

- Understanding our *fears* and the *Protectors* we have developed to minimize them;

- Finding ways to *update our Protectors* to allow us to be our biggest self as well as feel safe;
- Recognizing, accepting and integrating our *Shadow*; and
- Rebalancing our own inner Masculine and Feminine in order to stimulate a parallel rebalancing in the world.

Understanding What Leads to High EQ

Goleman enumerates the key elements of high EQ as self-awareness, self-management, empathy and social skill. He describes the components of *self-awareness* as “having a deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs and drives,” an “understanding of [one’s] values and goals,” and “an ability to assess one’s self realistically.” To have such understanding, one must not be too afraid to look at or too insecure to listen to the different and conflicting voices inside that speak to us.

He describes *self-management* as the ability to engage in “an ongoing inner conversation...that frees us from being prisoners of our feelings” (read Voice Dialogue). People able to do this, he continues, “are in control of their feelings and impulses...and can create an environment of trust and fairness” (read safe spaces). Signs of emotional self-management include “a propensity for reflection and thoughtfulness; comfort with ambiguity and change; and integrity.” It certainly requires reflection to be able to listen to our own voices. We can only handle ambiguity and change when we are comfortable within the core of ourselves. And our integrity depends on knowing ourselves and our values deeply, all the way down, so that we can depend on our self – and others can depend on us – to be consistent in our behaviors and beliefs even when our voices may say (to our self) conflicting things. By implication, we must understand and know our shadow if we are to be reliable and consistent in our behavior – otherwise we may project it onto others or act it out in ways that surprise and alarm ourselves and others.

Regarding *empathy*, Goleman distinguishes between adopting other people’s emotions and understanding and considering their feelings. The ability to consider the feelings of others implies being able to distinguish theirs from our own. And being able to do that requires knowing our own, even when they may be complicated or confused.

Empathy requires us to put our self in other people’s shoes, emotionally speaking, even when their shoes are different from our own. It does not make someone feel heard and acknowledged if we say something like “Oh, I felt exactly like that when...”[insert the situation in which you feel your experience matched their own]. That presupposes what their feelings were rather than acknowledging them. Saying something like “It sounds like you felt incredibly stressed when... [insert event],” in a questioning, rather than

definitive tone, to leave room for the other to adjust it to more closely match his or her felt experience, allows the other to feel heard and acknowledged. Carl Rogers was a master of what is called 'active listening,' a practice of reflecting (rather than parroting) back to the other what one has heard until s/he feels truly acknowledged and empathized with.

Goleman describes the first two components of EQ as self-management skills whereas empathy and social skill "concern a person's ability to manage relationships with others." He describes socially skilled people as having "a knack for finding common ground with people of all kinds" and working "according to the assumption that nothing important gets done alone." As he says, "people tend to be very effective at managing relationships when they can understand and control their own emotions and can empathize with the feelings of others."

These descriptions of the qualities that are required for high EQ perfectly match a number of the qualities we at Synergos and the members of the Global Task Force on Bridging Leadership identified (through analysis of case studies and practical training) as critical to becoming good bridging leaders. As we further develop workshops, training manuals and training-for-trainers curriculum, we need to gear them to both the external and internal qualities that form the prerequisites of high EQ and good bridging leadership. *Our overall success, both in training trainers and in leading trainings, is liable to depend on the extent and depth of personal transformation work we as bridging leaders and trainers have done or are willing to do, so critical is this to acquiring the qualities we are seeking.*

The Status of Bridging Leadership Thinking and Training in the World

The need for bridging exists at every intersection of the threads of the social weave that contain our families, communities, societies and world. And it takes more than one bridge builder to span any given divide: there has to be someone on the other side of the divide also reaching out, listening and empathizing; maybe even a whole constellation of people representing different viewpoints but willing to listen to others.

Some people come to these skills more naturally, perhaps from birth order, personality or some other fortuitous circumstance that gives them this gift. Given the enormity and frequency of the divides causing tension and destruction in the world, however, we can't only depend on those who gravitate naturally toward this style. It is time to prepare whole teams of leaders at all levels, equipped with the internal and external skills needed to bridge, with the inner and outer resources to do this well.

Ernie Garilao, friend and mentor, who, in addition to many distinguished career positions, was a member of Synergos' Global Task Force on Bridging Leadership, institutionalized the teaching of Bridging Leadership at the Asian Institute of Management in the Philippines. He has led numerous workshops to train bridging leaders, including within and among the military, various government ministries, community organizations, NGOs, etc. He also led the development of a number of case studies of successful bridging leaders, which he uses as course material in teaching people to become bridgers. In addition, Synergos Senior Fellows, GPC members and friends from the Philippines are hosting a mentoring and training program for 15 to 20 young bridging leaders each year from different segments of Philippine society.

Colleagues at Synergos, both in the U.S. and in Southern Africa, are also in the process of gathering curriculum materials for the teaching of bridging leadership to different audiences. And Synergos' long-term partner in Ecuador, Fundación Esquel, also developed training materials for programs they led for leaders in all segments of Ecuadorian society.

Others have also identified the ability to bridge divides through leadership style as key to positive social change, including my friend and sometime Synergos consultant Mark Gerzon (*Leading Through Conflict* and *Leading Beyond Borders*) and Ronald Heifetz (*Adaptive Leadership* and *Leadership on the Line*, co-authored with Marty Linsky). More traditional leadership paradigms and teaching methods are being supplemented – and in some cases supplanted – by a paradigm that includes all the qualities described in this paper.

Resources for Becoming a Bridging Leader

The remaining portion of this paper is intended to briefly describe some activities and exercises that have helped me overcome some of my own obstacles to becoming more fully present and to becoming able to listen and empathize better in order to maximize my own capacity to bridge across divides and help prepare others to do so as well. I hope that these will be useful to the reader, both for your own personal development and your ability to bridge and to help others become better bridge builders.

Here, then, are some activities that may be of use in this journey:

Time in the Wild

We are children of this planet. We are held and nurtured by her. The best way to recover a larger sense of safety is to return to her and allow ourselves to feel held and understood. In many cultures this is a given. These possibilities are intended for those who don't already make this part of a daily or weekly practice.

- To prepare yourselves for this work, go outside for an hour with no agenda. Find a park or a tree or a patch of grass; if you're in a rural area, wander away from people and houses. Slow down: you're not on a hike, but a wander.
- Take off your shoes and feel the earth beneath you. Lie down on it.
- Indulge in 'La dolce far niente' (doing nothing), a lost art to many Westerners, but a great way to get out of your left brain.
- Bring with you a journal and jot down things that come to you even if they don't make a lot of sense to your left brain.
- Allow some object, plant or animal to attract your attention, lure you into a 'conversation' you perhaps didn't expect. They may not speak out loud but you may receive messages anyway. Write them down.
- Read Bill Plotkin's *Soulcraft* for an understanding of dialogues in the wild and many more ideas for ways to drop below beta wave thinking and into a conversation with the soul.
- Perform a Seven-Directions Ceremony. Most indigenous societies gave meaning to and honored the four directions (sometimes the seven directions, including Father Sky, Mother Earth and the Cosmos). For those of us who often don't even know where south or east is, identifying the directions and honoring them can be profoundly grounding in terms of where we are in ourselves and in the world. Briefly, beginning with the East (place of new beginnings), turn in that direction and offer your thanks, continuing to the south, west and north. Bill Plotkin describes this in *Soulcraft*. It is a wonderful way to begin a time in the Wild. Thanking anyone, including the directions, opens our heart with gratitude.
- Sign up for a vision quest, which will take you much deeper into this methodology (I recommend Animas Valley Institute's workshops and quests; www.animas.org. Synergos has engaged a number of their guides to co-lead our own retreats, including Peter Scanlan, Jade Sherer, Bill Plotkin and Annie Bloom).

Engaging Your Soul

Your soul doesn't speak in the language of the left brain (logic). It speaks in poetry, song, chants, music, dance, play, movement, dreams, imagination. Your soul carries your deepest purpose in being here in life. Uncovering that may take some time to sink down and allow yourself to de-link from routine activities.

- Begin reading 'soul' poetry: the Sufis such as Kabir, Rumi, Hafiz and Mirabai or Mary Oliver, David Whyte, Wendell Berry, Rainer Maria Rilke, Pablo Neruda.
- Start recording your dreams. If you have trouble remembering them, set an intention the night before and write in your journal "Dream Report" with the

date. On waking, reach for your journal and light before doing anything else and write it down in the present tense. Read Robert Johnson's *Inner Work: Using Dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth* or sections of Plotkin's *Soulcraft*. Imagine yourself as every object and character in your dreams.

- If you feel stuck, frustrated, confused, find a place where you can move your body: breathe deeply, do a few stretches or go to a yoga, pilates, martial arts or qi gong class, put on some music (slow or fast, depending on your mood) and dance or drum, go outside and imitate the trees swaying.
- Choose the way that works best for you to come into stillness (from the chattering monkey mind): meditate, read a poem, sit outside and gaze at the birds, imagine your thoughts as clouds passing by – let them go.
- On a day or weekend that you don't have to go to work or tend to family, take off your watch and allow yourself to lose your sense of time. In most Western cultures we are dominated by time pressures and slowing down is very hard. Accessing the soul, the heart and the right brain requires a sense of timelessness. Allow yourself to come into the belief that 'there is time for everything.' It's actually true for everything except our left brain.
- Read Martha Nibley Beck's new book, *Finding Your Way in a Wild New World*. She has very specific (and funny) suggestions for how to come into what she calls Wordlessness, which then leads to Oneness, Imagination and Forming your dreams (read it to understand what this means; it's worth it).

Learning to Listen – To Your Self and Others

- Carl Rogers was the father of a form of therapy that emphasized the importance to the client of feeling heard and acknowledged, rather than told what to do or analyzed. Three of his books, *The Carl Rogers Reader*, *A Way of Being* and *On Becoming a Person* give a good grounding for those wishing to learn how to listen more effectively.
- But since often our difficulty in fully listening has to do with internal interferences from our own different voices that want to be heard, it may make sense to learn to listen to those first, as elaborated in the next section.
- Read Barry Walker's "How Lefty Taught Listening" paper (available from Synergos), which brings in how to 'listen' to body language and other than aural forms of communication as clues to deep listening.

Becoming Familiar with Your Different Voices

- Read *Embracing Ourselves; A Voice Dialogue Manual* by Hal and Sidra Stone to get a better understanding of voice dialogue and parts of Plotkin's *Soulcraft* for some hints of other voices you might encounter.
- As you find the voices that are small (your Wounded Child) or that want to protect you by keeping you small (Protector, Loyal Soldier), speak with them with as much compassion as you can muster (pointers below as to how to begin such a conversation); listen to them; stand or sit in one place when it is your adult voice that is speaking and move to another location when you are speaking as them. If possible, do this out loud.
- Call in your Nurturing Parent (Plotkin) voice to make sure that one of you is watching over yourself in a mature, protective way as you do this.
- Begin to identify other voices. Notice when you have a thought that surprises you or sounds different from your normal thoughts. See if you can give it a name. From a quiet place, ask it if you can speak with it. Ask who it is, how old, when it appeared in your life, what it wants for you.
- Check in with your Protector after each such conversation to make sure s/he is feeling comfortable and safe, before proceeding further. If not, ask him/her what is uncomfortable and what might make him/her more comfortable for you to continue. If nothing will, stop for the moment.
- If you have been practicing voice dialogue with others in a group, you could ask someone you trust to interview you and your different voices, but if possible, get guidance from someone experienced in this methodology before doing so (such as Tony Weller).

Creating Safe Spaces for Yourself and Others

Both as we learn about ourselves and begin to reveal our process to others, it is important to have a safe container within which to do this. Some of the points above address ways to create such a safe space for yourself. Here are some thoughts about group activities which create an environment of safety within which we can deepen our exploration in a group.

- If you are responsible for forming a group, make sure you have talked with everyone who will participate in it and are confident that they understand the purpose and are willing to engage according to the principles you are setting for the group, whatever they are (confidentiality; not doing damage to our self, others or the property; speaking only from the heart; listening with the ears of the heart, etc.).

- Reemphasize these guidelines once the group is together, whether just for a few hours or several days. Explain that this is not just a left-brain work session, but designed to allow each participant to feel and express what is in their heart and that, for this reason it is very important that each person feel safe.
- Holding a Council. This is a very specific, ritualized conversation which allows each person to speak without interruption about what is in their heart. See *The Way of Council* (2nd Edition, by Jack Zimmerman and Virginia Coyle, 2009) or the relevant section of Plotkin's *Soulcraft*. Usually one person lays out the guidelines and holds the space for this conversation. It is important that, if emotions arise, the person experiencing them be allowed to feel and express them fully without other people jumping in with hugs or expressions of comfort. When it first happened to me that I cried unexpectedly in such a group, I was puzzled and ashamed. Michael Rennie looked at me cheerfully and said that was because I had such a big heart. It put my mind at ease and enabled me to feel safe shedding my tears.

Framing the Journey through Different Methodologies

- Use of the U Process. This is a method for allowing individuals and groups to come to their most creative potential for solving problems by first observing the current reality of the problem at hand, then retreating into wild nature to reflect on each member's purpose in life, and finally coming back armed with the refreshment allowed by deep reflection and the creativity of a unified field (be it individual or group). See Otto Scharmer's *Theory U* and *Presence* by Peter Senge, Joseph Jaworski, Otto Scharmer and Betty Sue Flowers.
- Use of The Hero's Journey. Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1956) and *The Power of Myth* (1988) shows how myths represent archetypal stories of the journey toward consciousness and fulfillment that we all take in one form or another. It is useful to read these to get a full picture of the connection to ourselves, but also to refer to the basic structure of the archetypal journey to understand our own, either on our own or as an exercise to be applied in group settings.
- Placing Ourselves on The Wheel of Life. For those who think visually, one way of framing this journey of consciousness and healing is to imagine a circle with points around it representing East, South, West and North. Each direction represents, respectively, Spirit, Heart, Body/Soul and Mind. Each of these is an aspect of ourselves; we may be stronger in some than others, but it is the sum that constitutes our whole. So to ignore the spirit and only operate out of the mind, for example, will limit us in some way. Bill Plotkin, in *Nature and the*

Human Soul (2008) has developed a theory of human eco-development around the wheel.

- **Shadow Work.** This should only begin after we have done a lot of work on the previous areas. It is deep and dark and we need to have a good enough framework for our larger journey to hold our shadow in this larger context. But it can be enormously satisfying and liberating, as described in the earlier section on shadow. I would recommend two books by way of introduction. One is Robert Johnson's (a Jungian psychologist) 1993 book, *Owning Your Own Shadow: Understanding the Dark Side of the Psyche* and the other is Sidra Stone's *The Shadow King*, which has particular relevance to women. If you would like to get a preview of aspects of your own shadow, though, simply pay attention to behaviors or people who most irritate you, and you will have the beginnings of a picture of what you have repressed inside yourself because you were told those behaviors were bad.

It goes without saying that all of these activities will need to be reviewed and revised for different cultures and groups. I look forward to adding to this portfolio of exercises many more that have been used successfully elsewhere as well as in cross-cultural contexts. The divides that we are attempting to bridge span the whole from within ourselves to conflicts among relatively similar groups of people, to across vertical, cultural, ideological, horizontal and sectoral divides in all parts of the world.

One of the advantages of engaging in our own personal transformation work is that we will be less scared of that which is different from ourselves, better able to listen to those who think or express themselves differently, and therefore more open to adapting what has worked for us to what may work better for others. With open arms, ears, minds and hearts, we are so much more likely to be able to recognize other members of the growing 'team' of conscious leaders and, with them, find common ground that will enable us to strengthen the social weave in the tapestry that comprises our planet.

Suggested Reading List

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