

## ***Leading From Within***

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I want to quote some remarks that Vaclav Havel (playwright, dissident, prisoner, and now president of Czechoslovakia) made to the U.S. Congress just a few weeks ago. It was surely one of the most remarkable speeches ever delivered on the floor of our national legislative body:

As long as people are people, democracy, in the full sense of the word, will always be no more than an ideal. In this sense, you too are merely approaching democracy uninterruptedly for more than 200 years, and your journey toward the horizon has never been disrupted by a totalitarian system.

The communist type of totalitarian system has left both our nations, Czechs and Slovaks, as it has all the nations of the Soviet Union and the other countries the Soviet Union subjugated in its time, a legacy of countless dead, an infinite spectrum of human suffering, profound economic decline and, above all, enormous human humiliation. It has brought us horrors that fortunately you have not known. [I think we Americans should confess that some in our country have known such horrors.--P. J. P.]

It has given us something positive, a special capacity to look from time to time somewhat further than someone who has not undergone this bitter experience. A person who cannot move and lead a somewhat normal life because he is pinned under a boulder has more time to think about his hopes than someone who is not trapped that way.

What I'm trying to say is this: we must all learn many things from you, from how to educate our offspring, how to elect our representatives, all the way to how to organize our economic life so that it will lead to prosperity, and not to poverty. But it doesn't have to be merely assistance from the well educated, powerful and wealthy to someone who has nothing and therefore has nothing to offer in return.

We too can offer something to you: our experience and the knowledge that has come from it. The specific experience I'm talking about has given me one certainty: consciousness precedes being, and not the other way around, as the Marxists claim. For this reason, the salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and in human responsibility. Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better in the sphere of our being as humans, and the catastrophe toward which this world is healed--be it ecological, social, demographic or a general breakdown of civilization--will be unavoidable.

I don't know if there has ever been, from a more remarkable source, a stronger affirmation of the work of religion and higher education than Havel's words, "Consciousness precedes being," and "The salvation of the world lies in the human heart." Here is the heart of the matter--the formation of the human heart, the reformation of the human heart, and the rescuing of the human heart from all its deformations.

Matter, he is trying to tell us, is not the fundamental factor in the movement of history. Spirit is. Consciousness is. Human awareness is. Thought is. Spirituality is. Those are the deep sources of freedom and power with which people have been able to move boulders and create change.

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How many times have you heard, "Those are good ideas, inspiring notions, but the reality is..."? How many times have you heard people try to limit our creativity by treating institutional and economic realities as absolute constraints on what we are able to do? How many times have you waited for a foundation grant before taking a step? How many times have you worked in systems based on the belief that only changes that really matter are the ones that you can count or measure or tally up externally? This is not just a Marxist problem. This is a human problem, at least in our 20th century, technological society.

Vaclav Havel has said some hard things to his own people about how they conspired in the domination of a tyrannical Communist system through their passivity. We too, are responsible for the existence of tyrannical conditions, of external constraints which crush our spirit, because we are responsible for co-creating the world through the projection of our internal limitations. The spiritual traditions tell us that we have complicity in the making of the world as it is. We are not victims of that world; we are its co-creators. The fact that we have complicity in world-making is a source of awesome responsibility (sometimes painful responsibility), and a source of profound hope for change.

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The insight that I want to draw from the spiritual traditions, and from Havel, is an insight that may be best expressed in a word from depth psychology. The word is "projection." We share responsibility for creating the external world by projecting either a spirit of light or a spirit of shadow on that which is "other" than us. Either a spirit of hope or a spirit of despair. Either an inner confidence in wholeness and integration, or an inner terror about life being diseased and ultimately terminal. We have a choice about what we are going to project, and in that choice we help create the world that is. "Consciousness precedes being."

### *Leaders Have a Shadow Side*

What does all of this have to do with leadership, and with the relation of leadership to spirituality? I'll give you a quick definition of a leader: A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to project on other people his or her shadow, or his or her light. A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to create the conditions under which other people must live and move and have their being--conditions that can either be as illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what's going on inside him or her self, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good.

I want to look at the shadow side of leadership. In the literature on leadership there are so many pamphlets and books which seem to be about "the power of positive thinking." I am afraid that they may feed a common delusion among leaders that their efforts are always well intended, their power always benign. I suggest that the challenge is to examine our consciousness for those ways in which we project more shadow than light.

I'm thinking about a clergy person who has a choice between creating conditions in a congregation which are of the light, or conditions which are of the shadow. I'm thinking about the CEO of a corporation, large or small, who faces the same choice day in and day out--but often does not even know that the choice is being made.

The problem is that people rise to leadership in our society by a tendency towards extroversion, which means a tendency to ignore what is going on inside themselves. Leaders rise to power in our society by operating very competently and effectively in the external world, sometimes at the cost of internal awareness. I'm suggesting that leaders, in the very way they become leaders, may tend to be people who screen out the inner consciousness that Vaclav Havel is calling us to attend to. I have met many leaders whose confidence in the external world is so high that they regard the inner life as illusory, as a waste of time, as a magical fantasy trip into a region that doesn't even exist. But the link between leadership and spirituality calls us to re-examine that denial of inner life.

I think leaders often feed themselves on "the power of positive thinking" because their jobs are hard. They face many external discouragements. They don't get a lot of reward, and so they feel a need to "psyche themselves up" even if it means ignoring the inner shadow. Of course, leaders are supported in this by an American culture that wants to externalize everything, that wants (just as much as Marx ever did) to see the good life as a matter of outer arrangements rather than of inner well-being.

I've looked at some training programs for leaders. I'm discouraged by how often they focus on the development of skills to manipulate the external world rather than the skills necessary to go inward and make the inner journey. I find that discouraging because it feeds a dangerous syndrome in leadership.

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### *Out of the Shadow, Into the Light*

I want to talk specifically about the shadow life of leaders. I'd like to talk about the way those shadows get projected on institutions and on our society. I'd like to talk about some monsters that leaders need to ride all the way down if we are to create less shadow and more light. I have five of them as a sampler, and a few thoughts on how the inner journey might transform our leadership at these five points.

One of the biggest shadows inside a lot of leaders is deep insecurity about their own identity, their own worth. That insecurity is hard to see in extroverted people. But the extroversion is often here precisely because we are insecure about who we are and are trying to prove ourselves in the external world rather than wrestling with our inner identity.

This insecurity takes a specific form that I have seen many times, (especially in men), and I see it in myself: we have an identity that is so hooked up with external, institutional functions that we may literally die when those functions are taken away from us. We live in terror at the thought of what will happen to us if our institutional identity were ever to disappear.

Do you know the tragedy I see in our institutions when leaders operate with a deep, unexamined insecurity about their own identity? These leaders create institutional settings which deprive other people of their identity as a way of dealing with the unexamined fears in the leaders themselves.

Can I give a simple little example, which may even be painful? I am astonished at the number of times I call an office and the person who answers the phone says, "Dr. Jones' office; this is Nancy," because the boss has said to do it that way. The leader has a title and no first name; the person who answers the phone doesn't even have a last name. This is a powerful example of depriving someone else of an identity in order to enhance your own. Everywhere I look I see institutions that are depriving large numbers of people of their identity so that a few people can enhance theirs.

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That's the first shadow of leadership I want to name. The second shadow that is inside a lot of us (and please understand that I am talking about myself and my struggles here as much as anybody else's), is the perception that the universe is essentially hostile to human interests and that life is fundamentally a battleground.

As I listen to everyday discourse, it is amazing to me how many battle images I hear as people go about the work of leadership. We talk about tactics and strategy, about using our "big guns," about "do or die," about wins and losses. The imagery here suggests that if we fail to be fiercely competitive, we're going to lose, because the basic structure of the universe is a vast combat. The tragedy of that inner shadow, that unexamined inner fear, is that it helps create situations where people actually have to live that way. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The self-fulfilling prophecy is a central concept in the problem that I'm talking about. A quick example: A bank in this town may be a perfectly sound bank. But if enough people start a false rumor that it's an insolvent bank, everybody will line up to withdraw their money and the bank will be insolvent because the prophecy has fulfilled itself.

Our commitment to competition is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Yes, the world is competitive, but only because we make it that way. Some of the best places in our world, some of the best corporations, some of the best schools, are learning that there is another way of going about things, a way that's consensual, that's cooperative, that's communal. They are fulfilling a different prophecy and creating a different reality.

The spiritual gift we receive as we take the inward journey is the knowledge that the universe is working together for good. The universe really isn't out to get anybody; the structure of reality is not the structure of a battle or a combat. Yes, there's death, but it's part of the cycle of life, and when people learn to move with that cycle there is a

coherence and great harmony in our lives. That's the spiritual insight that can transform this particular dimension of leadership--and transform our institutions.

The third shadow in leaders I call "functional atheism." This is the belief that ultimate responsibility for everything rests with me. It is a belief held even among people whose theology affirms a higher power than the human self, people who do not understand themselves as atheists but whose behavior belies their belief!

Functional atheism is an unconscious belief that leads to workaholic behavior, to burn-out, to stressed and strained and broken relationships, to unhealthy priorities. Functional atheism is the unexamined conviction within us that if anything decent is going to happen here, I am the one who needs to make it happen. Functional atheism is the reason why the average group (according to studies) can tolerate only 15 seconds of silence; people believe that if they are not making noise, nothing is happening! Functional atheism is an inner shadow of leaders that leads to dysfunctional behavior on every level of our lives.

The great gift we receive on the inner journey is the certain knowledge that ours is not the only act in town. Not only are there other acts in town, but some of them, from time to time, are even better than ours! On this inner journey we learn that we do not have to carry the whole load, that we can be empowered by sharing the load with others, and that sometimes we are even free to lay our part of the load down. On the inner journey we learn that co-creation leaves us free to do only what we are called and able to do, and to trust the rest to other hands. With that learning, we become leaders who cast less shadow and more light.

The fourth shadow among leaders is fear. There are many kinds of fear, but I am thinking especially of our fear of the natural chaos of life. I think a lot of leaders become leaders because they have a life-long devotion to eliminating all remnants of chaos from the world. They're trying to order and organize things so thoroughly that nasty stuff will never bubble around us (such nasty stuff as dissent, innovation, challenge, change).

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My final example of the shadows that leaders can project on others involves the denial of death. We live in a culture that just does not want to talk about things dying. You see this all the time in our institutional life. You see leaders all over the place demanding that they themselves, and the people who work for them, artificially maintain things that aren't alive any longer and maybe never have been. Projects and programs that should have been laid down ten years ago are still on the life-support system even though they've been in a coma for decades.

There's fear in this denial of death, the fear of negative evaluation, the fear of public failure. Surprisingly, the people in our culture who are least afraid of death, in this sense, are the scientists. The scientific community really honors the failure of hypothesis because they learn something from the death of an idea. But in a lot of organizations, if you fail at what you are doing, you'll find a pink slip in your box. Again, the best organizations and leaders, I think, are asking people to take action that may sometimes lead to failure, to understand that from failure we learn.

The spiritual gift on the inner journey is the knowledge that death is natural and that death is not the final word.

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Finally, we need to remember that all the great spiritual traditions, when you boil them down, are saying one simple thing: BE NOT AFRAID! They don't say you can't have fear, because we all have fears, and leaders have fears a plenty. But they say you don't have to be your fears, and you don't have to create a world in which those fears dominate the conditions of many, many people.