



## BRING ME MY BOW OF BURNING GOLD

— SHANN RAY FERCH

Leadership comes in all forms, some diseased by over-indulgence in ego, others too soft when courage and strength are required. Balance and fortitude, modesty and passion, humility, gratitude, forgiveness and love . . . all are characteristics too commonly lost on the contemporary leader. This is not surprising, considering each of these qualities are gritty, and only honed through long apprenticeship with beloved others, mentors, friends, colleagues and co-workers with whom the leader has become vulnerable enough to grow in vital ways, to live and breathe the wisdom we need, and to become, truly, the servant of others. I'm so happy to introduce the exceptional writers in this volume of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*. They hail from countries near and far—from China, Brazil, Spain, and Canada to name a few. They are bold, decisive, elegant, and modest. Their work stands against the chaos and brutality, against the apathy and ennui of the present age. I hope they speak to you. I know their voices are filled not only with uncommon discernment, but also with light, strength, and love. They welcome us deeper into the human community of which leadership is only a part, and



perhaps not the most important part. They welcome us into the lives of those who are servants first. From such discoveries we gain not only the inner will to transcend ourselves, but the collective healing necessary for the task.

In the human arena, as fraught as it is with unrest, alienation, and outright inequity, it seems right to me that these essays, articles, and research on servant-leadership represent a sisterhood and brotherhood of thought-leaders who help us overcome our all too common human ills. Mundane but ultimately necessary qualities are embodied in the articles here, qualities connecting us, and providing a window into a deeper understanding of ourselves and others. In persistent acts of humility and gratitude, grit and grace, servant-leaders reveal their character. In purposeful acts servant-leadership organizations prove their chemistry, their culture.

I think of grit as something honed by a multitude of daily choices (practicing the precision, effort, and discipline of servant-leadership over and over again) that eventually build to moments of courage during the chaos of individual and organizational life. Social science tells us humility is related to greater emotional well-being and gratitude is related to greater critical thought. But where are the leaders who think of the effects of such values on organizations? Where do these virtues come from? I'm not sure they can be completely traced, but I found them over and over in these articles. For servant-leaders, the slow build of becoming more authentic, over years and even decades of choices—to be purposeful, to refuse to take the easy way out—results in something we might call a miracle:



organizations whose decision-making is done with alacrity, and whose cultures are among the most fulfilling and effective in the world.

Recently, I was reading the work of William Blake. Blake was not only the accomplished and fiercely authentic poet we know him to be, he was also a stunning visual artist. In his long poem *Jerusalem*, I found the following stanza.

Bring me my Bow of burning gold:  
Bring me my arrows of desire:  
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!  
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

In reading the lines again now, the words still strike home, words of inspiration reminding me of the articles collected in this journal. I want to thank every writer in this volume for giving of their mind, heart, and spirit to generate new and profound work in order to further illumine Robert K. Greenleaf's bold, beautiful notion of the servant as leader. May Blake's thoughts be a bridge leading us from communal fracture to communal healing, and may we as readers and writers, be sent forth like arrows from a bow of gold, inscribing a heavenly arc in the sky of our individual and collective lives.

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*International Journal of Servant-Leadership*. Dr. Ferch's work regarding leadership, organizational culture, and the human will to forgive and reconcile has appeared in scientific journals and other scholarly venues, and he has served as a visiting scholar in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. His story collection *American Masculine* (Graywolf Press), selected for Esquire's list of "Three Books Every Man Should Read," won the American Book Award. He is also the author of *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity: Servant Leadership as a Way of Life* (Rowman & Littlefield), an Amazon Top Ten Hot New Release in War and Peace in Current Events, *The Spirit of Servant Leadership* (Paulist Press), edited with Larry Spears, and *Conversations on Servant Leadership: Insights on Human Courage in Life and Work* (SUNY Press)), edited with Larry Spears, Mary McFarland, and Michael Carey. His novel *American Copper* (Unbridled Books) won the Western Writers of America Spur award and considers colonization, racism, and cultural dignity in the American West. His collection of poems, *Balefire*, won the High Plains Book Award and appears with Lost Horse Press. As a poet and prose writer, his work has appeared in some of America's leading literary venues including *Esquire*, *Poetry*, *McSweeney's*, *Narrative Magazine*, *The Journal of American Poetry*, *Poetry International*, and *Salon*. He has served as a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellow and as a panelist for the National Endowment for the Humanities, Research Division.