



A DOOR AJAR, PEERING INTO THE NATURE OF A PERSON

Three Insights for Servant-Leadership

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Nested among the many inspiring traits of Abraham Lincoln was his ability to perceive accurately the nature of a person. Donald T. Phillips (1992) therefore raises the challenge, “If modern leaders don’t intuitively understand human nature as well as Lincoln did, they should at least make an attempt to learn more on the subject” (p. 35). This article is an attempt to foster that end, in my own life as a leader, as well as within the lives of those who take the time to read these words. A leader’s lasting impact for good or for ill rests upon this. One may find, as Robert K. Greenleaf (1977/2002) insightfully noted, “It is part of the enigma of human nature that the ‘typical’ person—immature, stumbling, inept, lazy—is capable of great dedication and heroism *if* wisely led” (p. 35). The following will explore three nature-of-a-person statements. The first will be covered in greatest length as it is foundational for the latter two. Each subsequent statement will build upon what came before with insights for leadership being explicated at every level and brought to conclusion at the end. These three statements are:



1. *It is the nature of a person to have within both good and evil, shadow and light, but wisdom sounds the alert that evil is the intruder and trains one's eye to recognize it.*
2. *It is the nature of a person to respond in kind to love, mercy, and compassion, yet to summon the courage to love first one must quell voices of defensiveness, retribution, and retaliation, which also cry aloud from the heart of humanity.*
3. *It is in the nature of a person to live with peace, altruism, and resilience when one's appetite for life is satisfied with hope, although too many feed on a diet of fear.*

1. IT IS THE NATURE OF A PERSON TO HAVE WITHIN BOTH GOOD AND EVIL, SHADOW AND LIGHT, BUT WISDOM SOUNDS THE ALERT THAT EVIL IS THE INTRUDER AND TRAINS ONE'S EYE TO RECOGNIZE IT.

CNN (McLaughlin, 2019) reports that in the fall of 2018 a Dallas police officer arrived home to her apartment building worn out from her beat but still in uniform. She headed for her apartment only to find its door ajar. Trained for this she readied her service weapon and cautiously entered. A black man sat upon the sofa. Certain he was an intruder she fired with dead aim into his chest. She remained ignorant of the true evil until it was done. She was on the wrong floor. This apartment belonged to a promising young professional, who moments before sat on his sofa enjoying ice cream. She was white; he was black. She was armed; he was unarmed. She used deadly force; he did not provoke it. It is enough to fuel a firestorm of controversy. Yet, if one takes this cue to look



introspectively, the door is ajar to human nature. Enter cautiously for here sits a frightening capacity for evil even amid intentions for good.

The potential for goodness, beauty, and light arising from the stock of humanity is undeniable as well. Consider Michelangelo's stunning depiction of humanity's origin that graces the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Consider his sublime sculpture of David standing in the Galleria dell'Accademia. However, consider also what Shann Ferch (2012) says about that statue's muse in his book *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity*. David is called, in the Hebrew Scriptures, a "man after God's own heart" but an "ugly irony" (p. 196) persists. David flagrantly abuses his power for murder and adultery. Ferch (2012) reflects, "Such a desperate paradox, though extreme, is not unfamiliar to the lives of leaders everywhere" (p. 196).

A glimpse at the origins of humanity, not through Michelangelo's artwork but through the same Judaic tradition that records the paradoxical David, offers this explanation in the words of God to Cain, humanity's first son: "Sin is crouching at the door; it desires to have you" (*New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 4:7). Cain discounted the warning, entertained the intruder, and killed his brother. Evil is an intruder to the human heart and failure to recognize it is tragic. The Dallas police officer failed to recognize the intruder; she was the intruder. So it often goes.

Carl Jung (1959) in *Researches into the Phenomenology of Self* spoke of people's propensity to ignore or positively spin their inner shadow. He wrote, "It is often tragic to see how blatantly a man bungles his own life and the lives of others yet remains totally incapable of seeing how much the whole tragedy originates in himself" (p. 10). Jung then adds; "an unconscious factor . . . spins the illusions" (p. 10). It is an easy path to pass off the hurt of others as



accidental, to shift blame, or to welcome the delusion that it is actually good.

Martin Luther King Jr. (1963/2010) recounted the scene of a high school basketball team's tragic bus accident on a southern highway. Paramedics responded, but abruptly left saying, "we don't service niggers" (p. 24). A passing pickup took the most critical to a nearby hospital. Again they were turned away; it was a white hospital. By the time that truck reached a colored hospital three students died due to the delay (p. 24). It is too snap a judgment to say that the white healthcare workers were evil people. They engaged daily the crucial task of patient care for the hurting. What can be said is that they did not recognize the evil in their actions. They lived blinded by what Jung (1959) described as an unconscious illusion. King (1963/2010) therefore spoke of ignorance as humanity's greatest enemy. Wisdom brings recognition of evil in one's own heart and life; ignorance blinds one to it. Thus sincerity of intention is never sufficient to pass for goodness. As King described it: "Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity" (p. 39).

Kalil Gibran's tragic novel *The Broken Wings* (1912/2017) sheds wisdom's light on societal evils in Gibran's home city, Beirut, and how evil imbeds unwittingly in human systems. His protagonist reflects: "Spiritual disease is inherited from one generation to another until it has become a part of people, who look upon it, not as a disease, but as a natural gift" (pp. 77-78). Not isolated to Lebanon, this replicates the world over causing ancient prophetic voices to cry out: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness" (*New International Version*, 2011, Isaiah 5:20). Too many enact evil by well intentioned ignorance.



Victor Frankl (1959/1984), a survivor of German concentration camps, spoke of this duality at the core of humankind. He said that humans may behave like “swine” or like “saints” for “man has both potentialities within himself” (p. 157). In a similar breath he added, “man is that being who invented the gas chambers . . . he is also that being who entered those chambers upright, with the Lord’s Prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips” (p. 157). Frankl’s reflection introduces the discipline of prayer. It, for many, provides a retrospective space where a person can humbly identify, honestly confess, and seek Divine salvation from the monsters hidden within. Not that sincerity of religious fervor provides more immunity to evil than sincerity of intention. Jihadists, crusaders, and fanatics have proven the contrary, but so have conventional believers. Churches across Germany embraced the Aryan clause in the 1930’s rejecting anyone of non-Aryan descent lending religious credence to later Nazi horrors (Kelly & Nelson, 1990, pp. 127-133). Yet this amounted to more than acquiescence on the part of those believers; such ideas were actively cultivated in the church in Germany. Susanna Heschel (2015), while writing about what she calls the “slippery, yet tenacious nature of racism” (p. 3), confesses her youthful and naïve hopes that dedication to sacred scriptures alone would root out racism in modern humanity. The edifice of that idea grew out of her childhood as she watched her father, renown Jewish theologian and scholar Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, march with the likes of Martin Luther King Jr. in support of civil rights in America. As she puts it:

I concluded from his example, and from the many movement leaders I met during the course of my childhood, that religion was the most important force against racism. The heart of the civil rights movement was the black church and the Bible. The



words of the Bible could turn stones into hearts, it seemed to me, and I was certain that the conversion of America to the belief that racism was evil had come about through prophetic inspiration. I was wrong on both counts. (Heschel, 2015, p. 8)

Her later scholarly study in the fields of religion and race brought down that façade erected in her youthful mind. Heschel spent years studying German archives looking intently at the publications of theologians during the rise of the Third Reich. She says it

shattered many of the assumptions I had held about that era, and about the power of religion to conquer racism. Theologians had long argued that the Nazis had ‘persecuted’ the Church, that Nazism was an anti-Christian, pagan movement. But to the contrary, what I discovered was that prominent Protestant theologians, joined by some Catholics, were enthusiastic in their support of National Socialism, especially its anti-Semitism. (Heschel, 2015, p. 10)

While the locus of her research was in Germany dealing with anti-Semitism, Heschel remarks that she has come across similar patterns of thought in defense of South African apartheid.

Indeed, Desmond Tutu in his recounting of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) notes that the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa “provided the theological rationale for apartheid and had even preceded the politicians by proposing certain legislation to effect the God-sanctioned separation of the races” (Tutu, 1999, p. 184). Still, Tutu’s book on the subject, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, is deeply spiritual and he notes that the TRC was as well, intentionally so (Tutu, 1999). Four ordained ministers, who had been national leaders of their church bodies, were



elected to the TRC and Nelson Mandela chose one of those, Desmond Tutu, to chair the commission. Tutu (1999) called their work, “profoundly spiritual. After all, forgiveness, reconciliation, reparation were not the normal currency in political discourse” (p. 80). In a similar vein, even though a young Susanna watched her father, Rabbi Heschel, join Martin Luther King Jr. and many other religious leaders to roll back the tide of racial segregation in America, King noted that in large part Caucasian Christian churches had perpetuated segregation from the start (King, 1963/2010, p. 38). Susanna Heschel’s (2015) thoughts on this came with an invitation for scholars to welcome critical race theory into the realm of religious studies and ethics to help differentiate darkness from light when it comes to human interaction. No longer should darkness and lightness be determined by the tone of one’s skin, or by any measure of ethnicity, but rather by differentiating the true line between goodness and evil inside each individual.

Critical race theory as a movement began in the field of law on the heels of the civil rights era. While some African American scholars like Thomas Sowell claimed that formal equity had been achieved in America through the civil rights movement such that further action was unnecessary, the body of scholarship that became critical race theory opened up with Derrick Bell, an African American civil rights scholar and legal educator, who challenged that notion on a number of fronts. For instance, he spoke of “interest convergence” to explain why civil rights litigation gained success in the 1950’s through 1970’s (Minda, 1995; Tate, 1997). National interests of the U.S. abroad courting the admiration of developing nations to strengthen worldwide opposition to communism were threatened by the public relations nightmare stemming from racial inequity at home in the U.S.; this provided a new and shared interest



among prominent white leadership to pass civil rights legislation (Minda, 1995; Tate, 1997). Richard Delgado, himself an early and sustained voice in this movement, identifies interest convergence as one of the principle tenets of critical race theory suggesting that when the self-interests of certain groups align it may cause them to define race in ways that suit the shared interest (Delgado & Stefancic, 2018). That may lead to racial oppression as Heschel (2015) described in relation to German Jews when the interests of the Nazi party and the German theologians aligned. People of Jewish ethnicity were “suddenly transformed from being neighbors to being despised; one day they were Germans, the next day Jews” (p. 4). Yet, Heschel (2015) notes in the case of Irish immigrants in America that interest convergence can also go the other way; they morphed from being designated a minority population, like Latino’s of today, to suddenly being lumped into the white majority (p. 4). Such changes reveal that the concept of race is also a social construction, not merely a biological reality (Delgado & Sefancic, 2018). Critical race theorists seek to unveil the socially constructed racism that continues to permeate our society building upon the accomplishments of the civil rights movement with a new approach (Tate, 1997). Although the civil rights era brought formal legislation of equity to all U.S. citizens regardless of race, critical race theorists contend this has not afforded the U.S. a new post-racial society (Minda, 1995). Rather, Delgado and Stefancic (2018) insist that racism persists by masquerading as ordinary, meaning:

Racism is difficult to address or cure because it is not acknowledged. Color-blind, or ‘formal,’ conceptions of equity, expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is the same across the board, can remedy only the most blatant forms of discrimination. (p. 8)



Delgado and Stefancic (2018) go on to cite the way people of color in America continue to pay more for products and services, have a shorter life expectancy, receive poorer medical care, are more apt to be the target of racial profiling, and occupy disproportionately fewer upper-echelon jobs while a significantly higher percentage of menial ones all due to factors that lie largely beyond the individual's sphere of control. These are systemic issues of racism. In addition, Delgado and Stefancic (2018) cite studies demonstrating that Americans, across the board, "harbor negative attitudes towards members of groups other than their own" (p. 13). Critical race theorists are not content to call this good.

The embrace of evil for good is a pervasive blight on humanity; yet the one who learns to recognize it hears a higher call. So, Martin Luther King Jr. (1963/2010) said this of a person: "Though the evils of sensuality, selfishness, and cruelty often rise aggressively in his soul, something within tells him that they are intruders and reminds him of his higher destiny" (p. 133). That higher destiny will not be to eradicate the evil of others in a direct sense. Even if one tries valiantly Robert Greenleaf (1977/2002) was right: "Liquidate the offending people, radically alter or destroy the system, and in less than a generation they will all be back" (p. 58). This is so because the capacity for evil still exists in the core of each person. Greenleaf instead (1977/2002) pleads that the process of change must begin internally saying, "the servant views any problem in the world as *in here . . . not out there. . . . change starts in here, in the servant*" (p. 57). This internal process commences as the voice of the suffering truly pierces one's ears.

Greenleaf came to know Susannah Heschel through a close friendship with her father in his later years of life. Greenleaf (1977/2002) warmly characterized Rabbi Heschel as both "an



exemplary servant leader” (p. 262) and a “protesting Old Testament prophet” (p. 266). He said this not just because of Rabbi Heschel’s social activism and prolific writing but because of how Heschel understood the role of the prophet in the Hebrew tradition. Greenleaf (1977/2002) recounts Heschel saying,

I have learned from the prophets that I have to be involved in the affairs of man, in the affairs of suffering man . . . I think everyone who reads the prophets will discover they really were the most disturbing people who ever lived . . . If I were to say what challenges me most in the Hebrew tradition it is the high view it takes of the nature of man. (pp. 265-266)

This high view is akin to the higher calling of which King (1963/2010) spoke. It is the expectation that humankind exists for more than self-interest, regardless of who else stands to benefit by way of converging interest. There is a truer heart to humankind which is deeply other-centered. Rather than fearing, suspecting, ignoring, repudiating, or oppressing others, this truer heart uplifts, encourages, celebrates, and unites. As Rabbi Heschel recognized, this cannot be realized without engaging the affairs of those who suffer. The imprint this left on Greenleaf (1977/2002) is apparent in his words regarding those who learn to listen: “By their intense and sustained listening they will make the new prophet who will help them find that wholeness that is only achieved by serving” (p. 235).

For those willing to listen, from one such huddle of hurting comes the calm but assertive word of bell hooks (2003), who speaks up for a truer nature of love against a backdrop of patriarchy: “Women, along with the culture as a whole, need constructive visions of redemptive love” (p. 15). Critical race theorists have long found affinity with feminist thinkers who similarly speak for people whose marginalization has been normalized by dominant society.



This critical lens invites leaders to take serious stock of intersectionality; that is, the compounding effect of multiple factors of disadvantage (Delgado & Stefancic, 2018; Tate, 1997). Hooks is but one voice from that perspective. From yet another intersectional margin rises the poetic angst of Layli Long Soldier (2017). She describes the “sticky current of Indian emptiness” (p. 62) that she confesses to experience daily “on drives, in conversations, or as I lie down to sleep” (p. 62).

This article opened with glowing remarks concerning Abraham Lincoln’s attentiveness to the nature of a person. Yet all leaders, even Lincoln, need the corrective voice of those who suffer to clarify the lines between good and evil. Lincoln was attuned to these voices when it came to the plight of slaves in America but numb to the cries of Indigenous peoples whose exploitation at the hands of white people stretched as far back as the origins of slavery in this land, and further. The horrific mistreatment of Native people escalated in intensity even as the Civil War began to unfold. The same week that President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation went into effect making all slaves legally free in the eyes of the U.S. Government thirty-eight Dakota warriors were executed by order of President Lincoln in a mass hanging in Mankato, Minnesota (Long Soldier, 2017). It was the day after Christmas, 1862. It remains the largest legal mass execution in U.S. history.

If Layli Long Soldier (2017) had been there to lend her voice to the Dakota people, perhaps Lincoln would have listened: “The Dakota people were starving. The Dakota people starved” (p. 51). The amended and broken treaties that ceded the Dakota lands to the U.S. Government were as turbid, muddy, and unclear to the Dakota people as the water the state was named after. “The word *Minnesota* comes from *mini*, which means water; and *sota*, which



means turbid. Synonyms for turbid include, muddy, unclear, cloudy, confused, smoky” (p. 51). The Dakota people did not know that these treaties meant loss of their hunting grounds and livelihood. They had nothing to eat and local government traders would offer them no line of credit to purchase food at white trading posts. One such trader, Andrew Myrick, callously said of the starving Dakota people, “let them eat grass” (Long Soldier, 2017, p. 51). Since Layli was born too late to speak for those people, the Dakota warriors wrote their own poem and Layli is inclined to call it just that, a poem. Dakota warriors rose up in aggression against the settlers and traders who were oppressing them and the first one they killed was Andrew Myrick filling his mouth with grass (Long Soldier, 2017, p. 51). For this they hanged. Still, no one helped the starving people.

Layli retells the story because it has been forgotten by history, overshadowed by accounts of the Civil War’s triumph over slavery. It is vital for servant-leaders to hear these stories. This is an important feature of critical race theory as well: recognizing the voice of people of color, allowing them to tell fully their story, and listening intently to each individual. Color blindness in law attempts to treat all people equally but in so doing it generalizes people without listening to the plight of any in particular. This can be “admirable, as when a governmental decision maker refuses to give in to local prejudices. But it can be perverse, for example, when it stands in the way of taking account of difference in order to help people in need” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2018, p. 27). Blindness can be a metaphor for ignorance, a way of keeping a person in the dark. Instead of color blindness, critical race scholars posit the importance of race consciousness. Gary Minda (1995) explains in his review of post-modern legal movements,



Emphasis on race consciousness in critical race scholarship has stimulated a call for stories from and about the experience of people of color. As a result of the new pedagogy of storytelling, a new form of narrative jurisprudence emerged within critical race scholarship. (p. 172)

This attention to particulars and to the plight of individuals is not only important in jurisprudence, it is critical in the field of leadership and in the habitus of the servant-leader.

So, hear a bit more of Layli Long Soldier's (2017) story. She says that the "Indian emptiness," which endures in her, still sweeps over her regularly despite the U.S. Government's recent, 2009, formal blanket apology to Indigenous peoples for two centuries worth of atrocities. It is a "sticky" emptiness because the President lacked the dignity to even read the apology publicly with all tribes present to receive it (Long Soldier, 2017, p. 57). The voices are varied, the hurts many, but if a person listens intently enough one might hear a more elemental plea. One may hear as God invited Cain to hear after the intruder named sin had its way with him: "Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground" (*New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 4:10). If by listening wisdom teaches one to recognize, name, and admit one's own shadow, then the internal line between darkness and light becomes clearer. Ferch (2012) spoke of such a line: "If there is a line . . . between intellectual unconsciousness and the thoughtful life, then fear, anger, chaos, stress, and effort are below this line" (p. 125). Yet above it, said Ferch, these reside: "Contentment, grace and ease, gratitude and humor, wisdom, inspiration, forgiveness, healing, power, and love . . . these are the hallmarks of true personhood, true consciousness, and true leadership" (p. 128). These hallmarks enable a person to lead courageously with a love that has the power to transform others as well.



2. IT IS THE NATURE OF A PERSON TO RESPOND IN KIND TO LOVE, MERCY, AND COMPASSION, YET TO SUMMON THE COURAGE TO LOVE FIRST ONE MUST QUELL VOICES OF DEFENSIVENESS, RETRIBUTION, AND RETALIATION, WHICH ALSO CRY ALOUD FROM THE HEART OF HUMANITY.

Marleen Ramsey (2003, 2006) studied reconciliation in South African following apartheid. She contends that the most significant implication of her study is this: “Where human beings practice the principles of servant-leadership, empathy, forgiveness, and healing, there is hope for redemption in the hearts of some of the most hardened persons” (Ramsey, 2006, p. 133). She invites readers to consider the story of an American Fulbright scholar, Amy Biehl, abroad in South Africa, who assisted with black voter registration. Stirred by slogans, “One settler, one bullet” and “kill the whites” (Ramsey, 2003, p. 125), a mob of young black men stopped her car one day shouting “settler, here’s a settler” (p. 127). She was pulled from the car, severely beaten with stones, and killed. Eventually caught, her killers were sentenced to lengthy prison stays but years later were encouraged by their political party to seek amnesty under the TRC. One described his thoughts as he entered his plea in amnesty court with Amy’s parents present. He said, “I did not care what they think of me, how they feel about me. . . . They know why Amy was killed” (p. 139). Certain they came to oppose his plea, he was equally sure that he was justified in killing Amy. Her parents actually came to support his plea in an extension of forgiveness. He tells how this transformed him: “I felt the pain, and I started to realize this person was on our side and we didn’t know” (p. 140). He said of Amy’s parents, “I wanted to sit next to them . . . to hug them” (p. 131).



A similar scene played out in an American court at the sentencing of the Dallas police officer introduced earlier. The brother of the deceased shocked the courtroom as he spoke directly to her from the witness stand: “I forgive you and I know if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you too” (ABC News, 2019). He then turned to the judge: “I don’t know if this is possible, but can I give her a hug?” (ABC News, 2019). Evidently that was not expected for he did not get an immediate answer, so he pleaded, “please, please” (ABC News, 2019). The judge consented freeing him to step down from the stand. He crossed the courtroom and embraced the woman who killed his brother, while she sobbed on his shoulder.

In each of these previous accounts the perpetrators expected a vicious call for retribution to come screaming out of the bereaved. Yet, in each, love’s extension transformed the setting. This not only happens in the egregious circumstances of death, but it rings true also in the mundane situations of daily life. Donald Phillips (1992), in *Lincoln on Leadership*, tells of such a night, November 13, 1861. Leading up to that night General McClellan had been abrasive and dismissive of Lincoln, even avoiding him. He tired of Lincoln’s assertive attempts to direct military strategy. That night Lincoln and two other White House officials visited McClellan’s home. He was not there, so they waited over an hour in his parlor. When McClellan returned, he was informed of the President’s waiting, but he marched right past the parlor up the stairs to bed. Those with Lincoln were beside themselves in outrage. Lincoln calmed them: “Better at this time not to be making points of etiquette and personal dignity” (p. 32). Just a few months later McClellan wrote to Lincoln in a letter, “You have been a kind, true friend to me . . . during the last few months. Your confidence has upheld me when I should have otherwise felt weak” (p. 33). Lincoln’s words that night display his



personal resolution to quiet inner murmurs of bitterness, in himself and in others. McClellan's words reveal the transformational power a small spot of compassion, like Lincoln's, may have on the stubborn heart of another.

What Abraham Lincoln practiced in individual relationships he courageously led the nation in doing as well in the wake of the Civil War. Lincoln's Second Inaugural address calling for "malice toward none" and "charity for all" (Lincoln, 1865; as cited in Phillips, 1992, p. 178) came at a time when Union leaders of all stripes called for retribution against the secessionists. Lincoln's words are now enshrined on the wall of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. before a larger than life statue of him seated overlooking the National Mall. In it he sits with one hand clinched in a fist determined to save the nation. His other is open in a display of compassion, without retribution, to the people and leadership of the American South (Phillips, 1992, p. 179). These are clear marks of a servant-leader. Not only have servant-leaders gained through listening a wisdom that rightly differentiates internal darkness and light, they also lead with courage in acts of compassion that still the voice of retribution and summon beauty from the hearts of others.

After Layli Long Soldier's stunning indictment of Lincoln, I hesitate to raise him as an example, yet she draws an enlightening insight from Native American culture that gives us reason to continue to learn from Lincoln too. Long Soldier (2017) ponders that in many Native languages there is no word for "apologize," or even "I'm sorry" (p. 92). It is not that the concept of apology is lacking among Native peoples. It is perhaps more real in Indigenous cultures, for among them apology is enacted not spoken. This stands opposed to our dominant Anglo culture in which apologies are often spoken with little substance behind the words. History records no spoken or written



apology from Lincoln on behalf of the Dakota 38, yet in his acts of post war compassion toward the people of the American south Lincoln's humility is apparent and following his example servant-leaders of today may enact a better apology to the Native people of this land than can be offered by congressional resolution. Doing so calls for servants who will lead courageously with love and humility; only these possess the power to quiet the call for retribution.

Desmond Tutu (1999) tells of Brian Mitchell who found opportunity to voice his story through the TRC amnesty court hearings. He had been imprisoned for the slaughter of eleven innocent South Africans, mostly women and children, living in the village of Trust Feed during apartheid. Mitchell was captain of a police station that oversaw the region and suspected a terrorist cell of operating there. Acting on faulty information regarding a certain residence he ordered constables to raid the residence and put down the threat. They entered and killed everyone in the home. Marleen Ramsey (2003) fills in some of the details, "later it was discovered they had hit the wrong house and killed eleven innocent people who had gathered to attend a wake for a friend" (p. 172). For years the massacre was covered up, but eventually Mitchell was convicted and sentenced to eleven death sentences, which were later commuted to thirty years in prison. Four years after his trial Mitchell submitted his plea for amnesty to the TRC. After his hearing, released from prison, Mitchell returned to Trust Feed to seek forgiveness from the community in a public apology. He said, "There was hostility, an enormous amount of hostility. . . . I think a bullet would have been easier to take than answering their questions or hear [sic] their accusations" (Ramsey, 2003, p. 180). Yet with an uncommon mix of humility, courage, and compassion Mitchell vowed not only to speak his apology, but to enact it. "I didn't go away feeling any better" he



recalls, “the only other thing I can do . . . is to assist them as I promised I would in establishing some sort of memorial center” (Ramsey, 2003, pp. 180-181). A year later the son of one of the women killed in the massacre called Mitchell inviting him to come to Trust Feed for a community-wide day of forgiveness and reconciliation. Though at his last visit the voice of retaliation won out, Mitchell’s enacted apology and the courage of this victim to be the first to forgive transformed the community. The community embraced Mitchell publicly and invited him to return and live among them. Mitchell said, “It was genuine, it wasn’t cosmetic, this was absolutely genuine forgiveness. . . . The process allowed me to realize that I could forgive myself as well” (Ramsey, 2003, p. 181). That would never have been possible had the community remained mired in the grisly grip of reprisal.

Martin Luther King Jr. (1963/2010) sounded a similar warning a century after Lincoln: “The potential beauty of human life is constantly made ugly by man’s ever-recurring song of retaliation” (p. 34). That song played loud in King’s era too. Lea Williams (1996/2009), in her survey of American civil rights leadership, explains that the “aggressive” and “revolutionary approach to Black power” (p. 21) of militant leaders like Malcolm X, Huey Newton, and Bobby Seale held strong appeal. Into that cacophony King (1963/2010) continued to pipe the clear call of a servant by leading with love in the face of pain and challenging his fellow African Americans: “If our white brothers are to master fear, they must depend . . . on the Christlike love that the Negro generates toward them” (p. 126). Militants liked to speak of courage, but King’s posture of love demanded courage along with uncommon endurance. This is the reason; while it is within the nature of a person to respond in kind to love, such responses are often not immediately



forthcoming. This tries a leader's resolve. This is what militant Black leaders bemoaned. They decried leaders like King as, "gradualists who sought evolutionary, not revolutionary, changes" (Williams, 1996/2009, p. 21).

King however, courageously endured. By his own recounting King (1963/2010) endured twelve jail stints, a near fatal stabbing, two house bombings, and endless death threats (p. 162) all before losing his life to a bullet fired in hatred by one of the very people he sought to, and taught others to, love. The servant-leader knows that it is in the nature of people to ultimately respond in kind to love, mercy, and compassion. Therefore a servant-leader loves with resilience. King (1963/2010) invited people to say to their fiercest opponents: "We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure. . . . we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall also appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win *you* in the process" (pp. 50-51).

In his essay, "An Inward Journey," Greenleaf (1977/2002) expresses his confidence in the limitless potential for inner awareness that exists within all people. That is part of Greenleaf's hopeful assessment of human nature. Yet, he recognizes that to arrive at this inner awareness requires a journey that necessitates loss. In the essay Greenleaf (1977/2002) reflects on Robert Frost's poem "Directive," of which I will quote but one strophe:

The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you

Who only has at heart your getting lost. (p. 327)

In reflection on these lines of Frost's poem Greenleaf (1977/2002) said:

The source of this attitude toward loss and being lost is faith
. . . . the blinders that block our conscious access to our own



vast awareness are the uncompensated losses we have sustained; and the errors we have acquired from our cultural inheritance, from the undigested residues of our own experience, and from our conscious learning. “Directive” would seem to say: Remove the blinders from your awareness by losing what must be lost, the key to which no one can give you, but which your own inward resources rightly cultivated will supply. (p. 340)

Ignatius of Loyola (1548/1919) encouraged routine practice of this mode of inward journey as exercise for the soul. He said, “Under the name of spiritual exercise is understood every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer. . . . as to go for a walk, to take a journey, and to run are bodily exercises” (p. 4). Ignatius’ directive was that a person might dispose the soul “to rid itself of all inordinate afflictions, and . . . to seek to find the divine will in the ordering of one’s life” (p. 4). Both Greenleaf and Ignatius centered their contemplations on the life of Jesus Christ for discernment on this inner journey because they saw Christ as one who was attentive to those who suffered and who extended compassion to those who despised him.

Even those who do not share Greenleaf’s or Ignatius’ devotion to Jesus will still find that humble and honest reflection on inner misjudgments of evil and good, which our cultural inheritance and experiential residue have led us into, will draw a person deeper into the servant life. Likewise, uncovering the uncompensated losses that give rise to desires of retaliation and retribution is necessary before a person can let go. It takes faith to allow these hurts to be lost, to remain lost, and to trust that from the vacated space inside one’s soul will shine a truer light. The right cultivation of this inward journey always involves listening to the voices of those who suffer at the



margins and it deepens by engendering love, mercy, and compassion in the face of hatred and animosity. The truer light arising from this new and open awareness is the capacity to hope, and to inspire hope in others. People are at their best, when they live by hope.

3. IT IS IN THE NATURE OF A PERSON TO LIVE WITH PEACE, ALTRUISM, AND RESILIENCE, WHEN ONE'S APPETITE FOR LIFE IS SATISFIED WITH HOPE, ALTHOUGH TOO MANY FEED ON A DIET OF FEAR.

The man mentioned previously that killed Amy Biehl received amnesty, yet his life might have fared no better. Nothing seemed attainable to him except by violence. He recounts, “possibly, I would be in prison again. I couldn’t find work and I was frustrated. I told myself sometimes I will engage myself in armed robberies” (Ramsey, 2003, p. 143). Without hope and driven by fears of self-preservation hostility appeals as a viable option. Thankfully, before he resorted to such, he heard of the trust foundation that Amy Biehl’s parents established. It offered employable skills training and job placement assistance. It offered hope. Could these people who extended mercy and kindness to him before incline themselves to repeat it? “We knew we had to be brave and stand ourselves once again” (Ramsey, 2003, p. 142), he said as he described the moment that he and the young men with him learned of this possibility. They were brave. They sought Amy’s parents for help and found it! “Rest assured, I will help,” Amy’s father said to them (Ramsey, 2003, p. 142). Peace, resilience, and altruism arise from the person who finds hope, and more so when filled to the full of it.

Fear is served to a person in so many forms that it takes disciplined effort to avoid partaking of it, even for the ablest of leaders. Martin Luther King Jr. (1963/2010) described a particular evening in the midst of the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama,



when he was “inwardly depressed and fear-stricken” (p. 130). It was during a week when earnest death threats and another stint in a jail cell left him bewildered. The movement’s agenda called for him to appear before a crowd, which he did his best to inspire. An elderly lady in the audience, affectionately known as Mother Pollard, saw past Martin’s façade. Finding him after the presentation she said, “Now you can’t fool me. . . . I knows something is wrong” (p. 130). He denied but she looked him in the eye and said, “I don told you we is with you all the way. . . . even if we ain’t with you, God’s gonna take care of you” (p. 130). Those words, King said, continued to instill strength in him years after Mother Pollard’s passing. They reverberated because she was a woman full of hope, which fortified her with inner peace and resilience. Mother Pollard walked about town, without the aid of public transit, for months during that boycott. Once a person asked her, was she tired? King (1963/2010) recalls how “with ungrammatical profundity, she answered, ‘My feets is tired, but my soul is rested’” (p. 130). When a person’s soul is rested from fears without and within, that is peace. For this people long. Margaret Wheatley (2012) in her essay *Acts of Courage and Clarity* asks, “Can we be together without fear of what it’s like to be together? . . . We’re all crying to be together in more loving ways because this is what it is to be human” (p. 209).

If people can live without fear, and feed on hope instead, humanity can be together. That was Desmond Tutu’s (1999) dream, which fueled his work with the TRC. He wrote, “Although there is undoubtedly much evil about, we human beings have a wonderful capacity for good. . . . That is what fills me with hope for even the most intractable situations” (p. 253). I consider that akin to what Robert Greenleaf (1977/2002) calls the prime leadership talent, conceptualization. Greenleaf describes conceptualization as a



leader's ability to make a sense of a complex situation, without trivializing it, and to convey that to others in a way that both makes sense to them and that fills them with an inner aspiration to join in taking responsibility for it. He notes that conceptualizing sees "the whole perspective of history – past and future" (p. 79) and goes out ahead to show the path to a better way of being. Or, to use his insightful turn of phrase: "If one is a *servant*, leader or follower, one is always searching, listening, expecting that a better wheel for these times is in the making. It may emerge any day. . . . I am hopeful" (p. 23).

One final servant of hope will round out the life stories populating this article and lead it to conclusion, that of Fannie Lou Hamer. She inspired a generation of disenfranchised Mississippians by typifying the dogged determination with which servant-leaders shun fear, hold onto hope, and lead others in so doing too until the ideal becomes a reality. Lea E. Williams (1996/2009) praises Hamer, who much like Mother Pollard, despite a lack of education and despite eviction from her home, beatings, and jail time, "helped overcome the paralyzing fear that for years had silenced the voices of the black masses" (p. 153). She pressed undeterred toward the day when not only she but all the residents of Sunflower County, and then of all Mississippi, would be registered to vote. With spirited timbre in her voice, fueled by faith in God, Hamer considered "This Little Light of Mine" her theme song. Williams (1996/2009) remarks, "Fannie Lou Hamer believed her little light could make a difference in rural Mississippi," which it did "leaving those she touched forever changed" (p. 159).

GO, SET THE WORLD ALIGHT

As evidenced above, it is time to conclude that servant-leaders strive to attain a better than average sense of the nature of a person.



They live with vigilant awareness of evil's intrusion and seek to gain through listening the wisdom to differentiate internal light from dark. Meanwhile, they lead with courage in acts of compassion that still the voice of retribution and beckon beauty from the rest of humanity. Finally, they refuse to live on anything but hope.

Although not appended to any of his letters in ink, tradition has it that Ignatius would say to fellow members of the Society of Jesus, when he sent them off on official business or ministry for the order, "*Ite inflamate omnia*" (General Congregation 35, 2008, p. 8). That phrase is often translated, "Go set the world on fire." Fire may be spoken of in the purifying sense or it may be equated to the burning of zeal, yet in the ancient world flame was also the only tool at a person's disposal that would bring light into darkness. The advances of the Renaissance notwithstanding, this remained true in Ignatius' day. So, at least one recent assembly of Jesuits has translated *ite inflamate omnia* in a way that nicely sums up the thrust of this article, "Go set the world alight" (General Congregation 35, 2008, p. 8). Setting the world alight is what Fannie Lou Hamer sang of and that is what the servant-leader makes possible through hopeful conceptualized inspiration. I too cultivate that hope. Will you join me?

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