

# Collective Wisdom Initiative

## Seed Paper

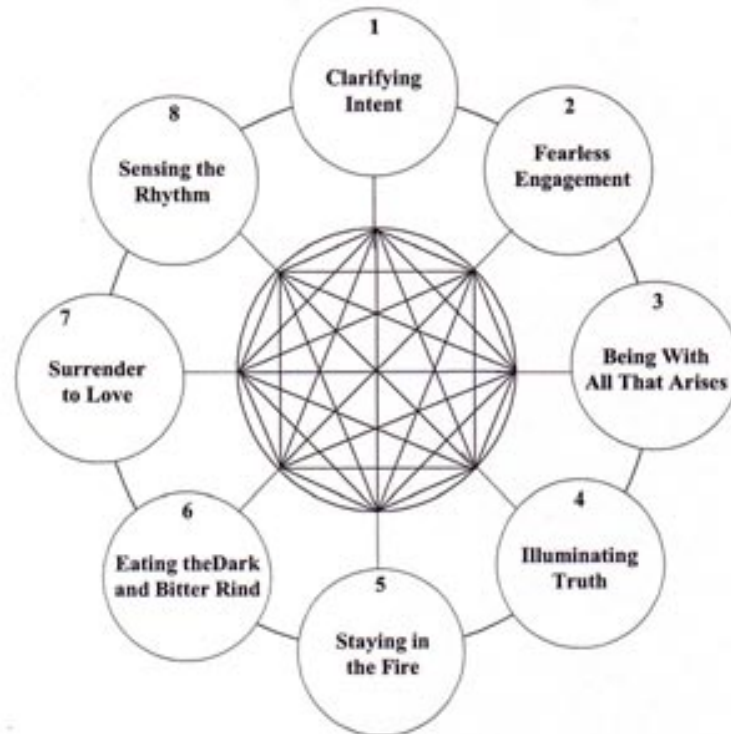
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# Archetypal Practices for Collective Wisdom

Timeless Ways of Evolving Personal and Collective Capacity

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**Overture**

Most of us have experienced the power present in a collective field – moments in which we were deeply attuned with another, times in which we worked with a team to accomplish something we hadn't thought possible, occasions in which a deep well of shared meaning suddenly opened in the center of a circle whose participants had been engaged in intense conflict. Many of us have been deeply nourished by long-term engagement with a circle of friends, a network of colleagues, or a high-functioning company dedicated to more than the bottom line. A growing number have felt the joy and excitement of discovering the latent knowledge and wisdom in a community through a "world café" or related conversation-based process.

In a world that so often seems chaotic, out of control, and beyond our capacity to influence, such experiences remind us of our essential belonging and support our creative engagement with others and world. They are important touchstones in our quest to create lives rich in meaning and work that contributes to the well-being of larger wholes – our families, communities, and even the wider web of life that sustains us all. Often characterized by synchronicity, flow, intimacy, and a sense of "coming home," they help us see that personal awakening and our cultivation of collective capacities are not at odds but intertwined, each quickening the other.

They also serve as harbingers of the higher collective potentials that characterize the groups, organizations, and other "social bodies" we form, when we organize, collaborate, and act with a conscious commitment to each person's freedom, the centrality of right relationship, co-creative inquiry in the service of shared aims, and transformative learning.

Are these experiences simply happy accidents, or are there ways we can more reliably evoke them?

**Glimpsing Possibility**

For more than twenty years, I have helped grow and lead organizations working on the frontiers of science, spirituality, social entrepreneurship, and cultural change – organizations developing more holistic perspectives on human consciousness, pioneering innovative ways to organize, and exploring the emergence of integral values and worldviews in business, health care, education, religion, governance, and other fields.

First as director of transformative learning at the Institute of Noetic Sciences and then as coordinating director of the Chaordic Commons, I have worked directly with thousands of people from around the world to design new organizations, conceive values-based institutional structures and strategies, grow global networks, create collaborative learning programs, and foster personal awakening and development.

These experiences have enriched my appreciation for the extraordinary untapped potentials we each have as individuals – and helped me glimpse collective capacities for wisdom, love, healing, and creativity that are waiting to be realized. In remarkably varied settings, I have seen miracles occur between individuals, magic happen in groups, and the mysterious alchemy of co-creativity on a broad scale take place in communities bonded by a strong sense of common purpose.

I have also spent ample time in lost meetings, ineffectual teams, dysfunctional organizations, and polarized communities. As a consequence, I have become a student of the factors that tend to foster relational magic, group genius, and organizational dynamism, or, conversely, interpersonal friction, group bumbling, and organizational inertia. I have also sought to understand what calls forth individual creativity, vitality, and will. Increasingly, circles, communities, organizations, and networks only realize their full potential by celebrating diversity and enabling all participants to develop and contribute their gifts.

*Our challenge now is to discover ways of engaging with one another, and our own experience, that support our full development as individuals, in concert with a maturing of our capacities for effective collective functioning.*

One lesson from the global quest for new ways to organize is that artful group processes, skillful project designs, elegant organizational structures, and inspiring management philosophies are important in enabling change – and insufficient. By themselves they do not enable us to be ever more courageous in our aspirations, conscious and caring in our relationships, and innovative in our pursuit of purpose. Success in those areas is ultimately a function of what we as individuals actually do, and particularly of the spirit in which we bring ourselves to the encounter with others and our own depths. It has more to do with intention, attention, and intangible qualities of soul than with any intervention, methodology, technique, or structure. Most fundamentally, it involves the individual and collective choices we make about how to relate to the possibilities present in our immediate experience as we grapple with the issues, emotions, and tests that life and work bring us in each moment.

When we are encouraged to “go deeper” in a group, what does that actually mean? What specifically are we being invited to do as individuals? Are there practices that we can undertake – and are they the same practices that, if we committed to them collectively, would enable groups to serve effectively as crucibles for co-developing personal and collective potentials?

## **Archetypal Practices**

In reflecting on such questions, I realized that a distinctive, interrelated set of *archetypal practices* were at play in individuals and groups living and working on their creative edge. I first identified eight:

- Clarifying intent
- Fearless engagement
- Being with all that arises
- Illuminating truth
- Staying in the fire
- Eating the dark and bitter rind
- Surrendering to love
- Sensing the rhythm

These are not outward activities but “inner” practices. They are necessarily personal, grounded in the private experience of each individual, yet they also provide a potent framework for collective experience when participants in a group undertake them together. Both as individual discipline and as the touchstone for collective agreement, they are applicable in settings as diverse as business leadership groups, circles convened to support personal development, and community groups focused on critical issues or a common task.

Figure One illustrates the dynamic interdependence of these eight archetypal practices. While there is a logic to the order in which I present them, they are deeply interrelated and cannot be understood in isolation from each other or the larger field in which they operate. Wisdom requires that we cultivate them together.

I call them *archetypal* because they bring us into contact with the archetypal realm of human experience. Specifically, these practices orient and open us to the subtle, formative fields from which personal experience arises, and through which we bring forth collective reality. These fields link our inner and outer worlds and form the common fabric of personal and collective experience. They weave nonlocal webs of information and communication that connect us to the world as a whole, past, present, and future. Whether we think of them in scientific, social, or spiritual terms, as the implicate order, collective consciousness, the Tao, or divine Mystery, it is increasingly clear that these subtle fields of life, mind, and spirit are source and seedbed for images of the future, innovative ideas, and emergent qualities and capacities. They activate transformative forces in those exploring them at depth.

These nonlocal fields also carry information in the form of archetypes – deep, generative patterns of human possibility that are universal in their underlying form yet unique in how they manifest in each individual, group, community, and culture. The informational character of the archetypal realm points toward two other ways in which the practices I will discuss are arguably archetypal.

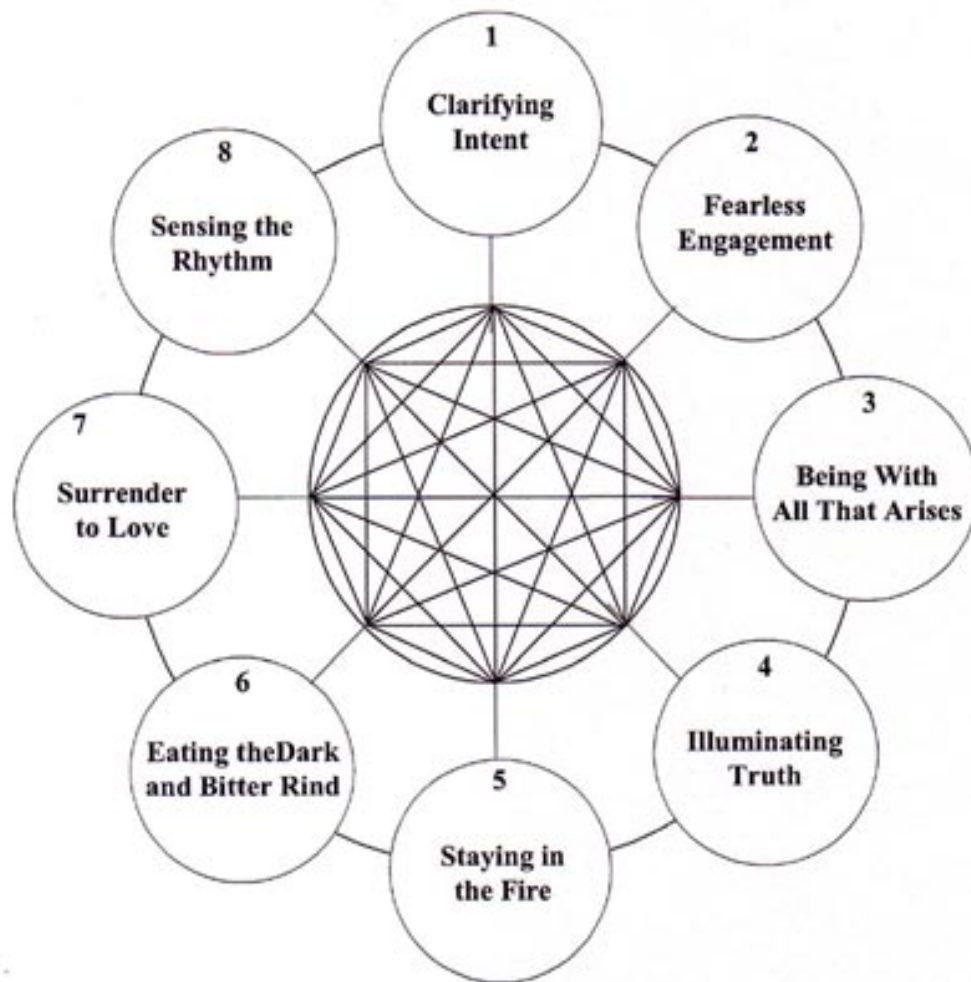


Figure One  
Initial Archetypal Practices

First, they *evoked archetypal content*. They open us to essence and the elemental powers of soul. Through these practices we invite energies, images, symbols, and ideas to arise from the personal and collective unconscious, knowing they may do so in powerful, moving, and sometimes troubling ways. These images and symbols carry information, illuminate challenges, and reveal opportunities we may not have appreciated before. They reveal hidden landscapes of possibility and orient us to emerging orders of wholeness. They often reflect that which has been repressed or that which is just appearing – the past seeking acknowledgment or the future coming toward manifestation.

Second, these practices *catalyze archetypal dynamics*, both individually and collectively. The archetypes that inform human experience are reflected in specific patterns of behavior by and between people in groups. As we explore and open to the elemental formative influences in and among us, we activate energies, images, and emotions that shape experience and relationships in particular ways. Aspects of personal and collective functioning that we might ordinarily attribute to individual psychology or group dynamics – sabotage, charismatic leadership, generosity, scapegoating, heroic achievement – may also reflect the activity of powerful archetypes. These patterns may bind and impede individuals and the group, or enhance and elevate their functioning.

The significance of such experiences lies in how we work with them. We often activate archetypal dynamics in groups without being aware of them, just as archetypal images arise spontaneously without our deliberately calling them forth. Engaging them with greater consciousness creates the possibility of directing our energies constructively toward a common purpose, rather than working unconsciously at cross-purposes with our stated aims.

The archetypal practices explored in this paper bring us into a direct, embodied, living relationship with the raw material of our lives and work. While there is value in using popular archetypal figures (such as Warrior, Magician, Lover, or King) as lenses, reducing our experience of archetypal energies to a few simple patterns may obscure realities that are complex, paradoxical, and mysterious. There is greater power in working moment by moment with what arises as we touch and are touched by the deeper intelligence inherent in the ground of Being. Sometimes the potent images, ideas, and patterns of relationship we experience will activate and focus us in wonderfully creative ways, bringing just the insight or knowledge we need. At other times, we must work with care and imagination to understand what is taking place and free the energy constellated by archetypal images or conditioned forms. Throughout this process, we must constantly negotiate the creative tension between articulating experience in order to work with it and not constraining experience by the descriptions we impose.

Hence the importance of *practices*. Over and over, we all settle into habitual ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, and relating. Practices challenge that conditioning by continually returning us to the freshness of experience in the present moment. They enable us to come into direct contact with the living intelligence of our body and being. More than a belief system or set of ideas about experience, they involve actually entering into and working with what we sense or feel in the moment, in a deeply embodied way. Through these practices, the body and the energetic centers that work through it become more sensitive and effective as organs of perception, expression, and action. Sustained practice helps us cultivate presence and strengthen the will to awaken that serves as a touchstone when other forces in us resist consciousness or change.

There is one other sense in which the practices I will discuss are archetypal. *They characterize the hero's journey*. The world calls each of us individually and all of us collectively to that quest today; each of us, and all together, have trials to endure, lessons to learn, and treasures to bring back to our communities. To complete our hero's journey, or even one cycle of it, we will be called upon to clarify intent, engage our task fearlessly, confront all that arises, and so on. In this sense, in addition to evoking archetypal content and dynamics, *the practices themselves may even represent archetypal forms of human functioning* – primal ways of relating to our own experience. They do not require the kind of special training or expertise that would require us to master a new body of knowledge or spend years in school; rather, they involve using and cultivating the most basic capacities of the mind, heart, and spirit in ever more conscious and refined ways. As we become more skilled in their use, we become clearer vehicles for spirit's expression in the world. I have thus chosen to call them archetypal practices, while recognizing that the phrase is deliberately provocative.

## Complementary Practices

As I explored these first eight practices, I realized that each had a complementary practice related to it. Taken to an extreme, or undertaken in isolation from its sister practices, any practice could result in unhealthy actions, fixations in consciousness, or maladaptive attitudes. The complementary practices foster creative tension between each pair and, in the set as a whole, a dynamic harmony that is endlessly generative, allowing each force to function appropriately. In brief:

<u>The practice of ...</u>	<u>Is complemented by ...</u>
Clarifying intent.....	Inviting guidance
Fearless engagement.....	Respecting boundaries
Being with all that arises.....	Taking a stand
Illuminating truth.....	Engaging in dialogue
Staying in the fire.....	Surfing the wave
Eating the dark and bitter rind.....	Uplifting the treasure
Surrendering to love.....	Acting with power
Sensing the rhythm.....	Fulfilling our aims

While this paper describes the complementary practices only briefly, they are equal in importance to the initial practices described at greater length. Each practice infuses the other; in fact, each practice contains its complement in seed form. The natural movement or unfolding of any practice will lead to expression of its complement. Moreover, we may call upon more than one practice in any given circumstance, and a full description of our experience in any given moment would likely discover several practices in play.

Taken together, these practices have potent effects at many levels. They can catalyze insight, promote discovery and innovation, enable transformative learning, and quicken the emergence of new capacities or maturation of existing ones. They steep us in the collective fields of resonance, connection, and possibility involved in “presencing”<sup>1</sup> and enable us to bring forth life-affirming futures. They unblock the creative wellsprings of life, mind, and spirit, and orient us to what is emerging within, between, and through us.

Of course, even when we commit ourselves in good faith and work diligently, the process is rarely stress-free. The paths to co-awakening, collective wisdom, higher levels of organizational functioning, or the formation of communities of freedom are often arduous, frustrating, and charged with intense emotion. Images may resist interpretation; group processes may collapse into vicious circles. Moments of crystalline clarity may seem like brief interludes in long periods of confusion; glimpses of commonality and coherence may only briefly pierce a lingering fog of doubt and discord.

In short, co-developing personal and collective potentials in deep, reliable, and practical ways will be messy. We cannot sense into or explore the subtle, imaginal fields giving rise to our lives and world without opening to the full spectrum of personal and collective experience, conscious and unconscious. This will challenge and delight us, test and surprise us. But even as the archetypal practices take us into unmapped and unpredictable territory, they also bring us into a living relationship with the

contours of that land and teach us to navigate its shadows and light. Loving this process and developing our capacity for creative, fluid engagement is the key to a final master practice at the heart of the archetypal practices wheel – playing the whole game magically. Figure Two depicts all of the practices in relation to one another.

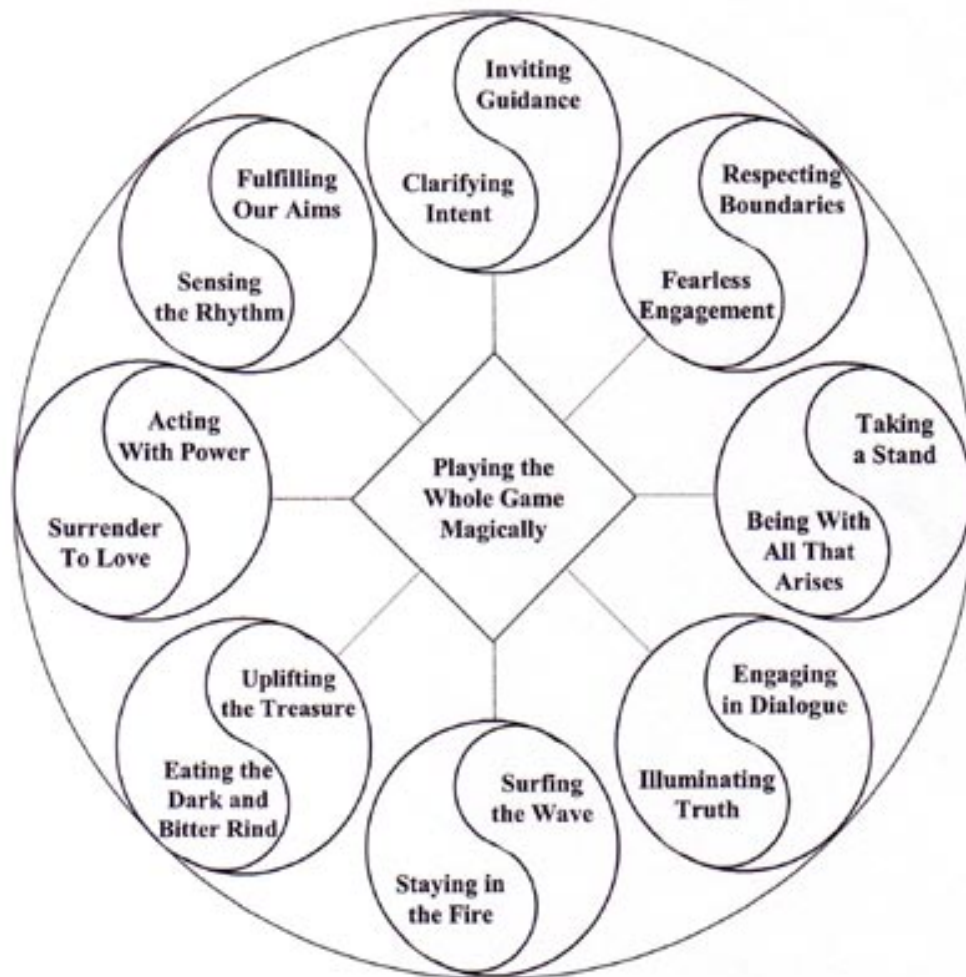


Figure Two  
Initial Archetypal Practices for Collective Wisdom

In working with these practices, respect is essential. We cannot control the creative process; we will never master Mystery. We go forward with both confidence and humility, awakening slowly, with occasional success and glimpses of possibility to inspire us. When the outward manifestation of our practices is hard to observe, we trust that our discipline has potent, invisible effects. With patience, good fortune, and compassion for ourselves and one another, we may gradually bring forth lives of beauty, economies of plenty, and cultures in harmony with the Earth.

## The Practices

### Clarifying Intent

When we embark on a journey, *clarifying intent* is our crucial first step. Knowing what



we want and establishing a clear, conscious aim opens the door for all that will follow and continually orients us on the path. It becomes a touchstone for every turning.

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*We must have a pure, honest, and warm-hearted motivation, and on top of that, determination, optimism, hope, and the ability not to be discouraged. The whole of humanity depends on this motivation. – His Holiness the Dalai Lama*

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In many ways, there is nothing special about this practice. Goal-setting is an important element of effective planning or strong program design; clarity of purpose is increasingly recognized as essential for organizational effectiveness. Being mindful of such issues is a vital dimension of collaboration and community life. As an archetypal practice, however, *clarifying intent* is more than a phase or dimension of group process, project management, or organizational design.

Archetypally, *clarifying intent* is akin to prayer. Like contemplatives steeped in a monastery's silence, we quiet our thoughts, open our hearts, and plant the tiny seed of intention in the rich soil of spirit. We water the seed with sustained awareness, nourish it with compassion, feel it quicken in the subtle energetic fields of consciousness. We are not attached to the fruits it will bear; our work is to care for the seed. Attention invests our intention with power, even as we are calling upon powers beyond our own to help realize our aims, likely in ways we neither predict nor control.

*Clarifying intent* invites us to explore the hidden rooms of the heart and the potent currents that stir the soul. It calls us both to focus and purify our aims, discerning what we really want amid the many needs and desires that clamor for attention. As an aim that transcends the small self (or narrow group needs) awakens, we may experience the emergence of *sacred* intent where self, soul, and world intersect.

Recently I have worked with a particular intention that is especially powerful with respect to the co-development of personal and collective potential. In working with groups, I consciously affirm an unconditional desire for and commitment to *finding solutions that serve the highest good of the whole and all who comprise it*. The group, or individual participants in the group, may also have other, more specific aims or intentions. But the intention for, and orientation to, the highest good for each and all serves as our fundamental and ever-present touchstone. It is an invocation more than an agenda, a powerful tone that reverberates through visible and invisible realms to attract all who support our effort. Clear strong intent is a potent attractor in the field of Being.

In my experience, this conscious focus *both* on the integrity and well-being of the whole – whether a dyad, group, organization, or community – *and* on the integrity and well-being of each person or part of the whole is subtle and important. Focusing only on the whole, or only on the individuals who comprise the whole, will invariably be sub-optimal. We may focus so much on a particular vision concerning the well-being of the whole that we inadvertently force individuals to silence or subjugate themselves. Then we come up with solutions for the whole that do not fully draw from or reflect the depth, diversity, and dimensionality of all participants. Alternately, we may put so much emphasis on individuals pursuing their own self-discovery or personal ends that we fail to recognize that “the center cannot hold,” that the integrity of the whole has

been sacrificed to individual autonomy or the needs of subgroups.

I experienced the power of holding an intent for the good of each and all first-hand when working with ten technical assistance providers from around the world to form a global network in management and leadership for health. We had four days in which to accomplish a set of goals that, at the outset, every member of the group felt would be impossible to complete. Even though I had designed the agenda and assured participants that with sustained effort (and grace!) we could succeed, I, too, secretly felt it would be a miracle if we accomplished all we had set out to do.

From start to finish, I held the intention that whatever occurred be for the highest good of each individually and of all collectively. I was mindful of this intention in designing the meeting and regularly affirmed it in the days leading up to our gathering. I encouraged other members of the core team to hold our work in the same spirit. We were completely committed to helping those gathered achieve the more specific goals on which we had agreed – work necessary if the network was to form – but this aim had within it the seed of our more fundamental intention.

During the meeting, I renewed this intention each morning by spending time alone, envisioning each participant in the mind's eye, holding him or her in my heart's hands, and one by one articulating my wish in relation to each of them specifically. I then did the same for the group as a whole, and prayed for *my* being able to serve in whatever way would help us realize the intention.

Midway through our four days together, none of us were certain we would succeed. We began to concentrate with a laser-like focus on key outcomes and "astonishing efficiency" while refusing to compromise integrity, excellence, or depth. Our overarching intent, consciously articulated, served as a catalytic field for the effort. By the time we departed on the final afternoon, every single item on our "to do" list ticked off, we all felt as if we had participated in something extraordinary. Co-creative work exceeding our expectations had been done, and every person had made important contributions. Each participant's needs and interests had been addressed, and all felt enriched and enlarged by the collective result. Our conscious efforts had been the vehicle through which we achieved success, but intent had organized and activated the field in which our work unfolded, guiding us in ways we could not have anticipated.

*Clarifying intent* focuses and directs the magnetic, attractive power of the soul, spirit, or being. It activates the associative networks and the nonlocal connections of the mind and heart. It opens the subtle pathways of the body and its mysterious energy systems. It calls to capacities we have already developed and others that are latent, awaiting development and expression. It grows us by calling into our lives and work that which will challenge us. It acts as a lodestone that magnetizes the field, bringing our many disparate energies and identities into coherent relationship.

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*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. – Jesus of Nazareth*

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## ***Inviting Guidance***

*Inviting guidance* is the complementary practice for *clarifying intent* – and a check on hubris. When we work consciously with the primal power of intention, we begin to stir, personally and collectively, in ways we may not even sense or recognize at first, and the world stirs with us. Yet experiencing the efficacy of focused intention may tempt us to overestimate the power of personal or collective will and seek to impose our aims on others or the world.

*Inviting guidance* requires surrender to a higher intelligence, a greater spirit, a deeper wisdom than we ordinarily access, individually or collectively. We recognize that we cannot engineer or program outcomes that will effect our aims. This is especially true when our aim is to serve the highest good of each and all, for this is well beyond our knowing. It is more a mystery to be explored than a prize to be won. We recognize that the larger realms of life, mind, and spirit harbor infinitely more creative powers than we can harness through reason or control with our will. We trust in the inherent goodness of Being and open ourselves to its unfolding our individual genius and the genius of the groups we form. Especially when we are stymied, *inviting guidance* reminds us that innovative solutions are possible that we cannot imagine or glimpse in the moment.

Every hero, if her quest is to succeed, must learn to recognize, honor, and accept guidance. In the old tales, allies often appear in unlikely guise – as a wizened old man, a wild woman, a meek animal, the whisper of trees – and their messages may be expressed in mysterious ways. We too may find guidance appearing in unexpected ways, when we least expect it, through a chance meeting, an offhand remark, something witnessed on the street. *Clarifying intent* sends a call out into the cosmos; *guidance* is contained in the responses that invariably come back.

## **Fearless Engagement**

*Fearless engagement* is the archetypal practice through which we engage others, our work, and our own depths. Clear intent sounds the tone that resonates through the field of Being, activating the field and setting all the webs of connection and possibility quivering. Our capacity to discover, evoke, and develop the potentials present in that field, to touch and inspire one another, is then colored by the spirit in which we proceed.

Fearless engagement entails the capacity to work at the edges of our own and the group's comfort zone. It is a practice of exquisite attention to what must be challenged and provoked, or to where we need to extend ourselves. Archetypally, it expresses the warrior's spirit. The warrior enters the field of engagement boldly, confident in her abilities. She waits to be tested, to be shaped by wrestling with greater forces and beings. She welcomes whatever comes and whomever she encounters – her own shadow, those who oppose her, the very guardians of the inner realms themselves. She is open and alert, filled with the aliveness and vitality that come from giving herself fully, without conditions. All her senses are awake and every cell in her body tingles – something deep within her stirs. She feels radical joy in saying *Yes!* to engagement, an elemental excitement in meeting and being met. She knows it is always herself she is meeting, even as she meets the world, and she knows it is always the unknown itself that beckons, even as she steps forward to accept the next

challenge, again and again.

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*Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all. – Helen Keller*

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The essence of *fearless engagement* is our entering the field of experience openly, willing to engage with the whole of ourselves. It is active *and* receptive. Like warriors, we give ourselves to the process *because* we anticipate being tested or challenged. We take risks, knowing that only in the alchemy of engagement can the possibilities emerging in us and our work be realized. Through *fearless engagement*, we discover who we are and what we can do, and learn to face what arises with gratitude for the gift it offers.

Several years ago, I met with six women in leadership positions with a nonprofit global service organization to help them plan a two-year organizational renewal process. As our planning proceeded, it became clear that the initiative would require a major commitment of time, and a willingness to travel globally, by almost fifty participants from around the world. This was a major issue. Almost all the leaders in this organization were volunteers with families, full-time jobs, and other responsibilities. They were individuals for whom “family is first” – and most were already overcommitted. Our excitement about the initiative, and our confidence in its success, suddenly waned. Even if questions about the budget could be resolved, we doubted the feasibility of our plan. We feared that we expected too much. Eventually I asked, “Our vision is wonderful, but who would actually do this?”

Fortunately, it was not my place to answer. Having listened to all the reasons why it would be impossible for anyone to participate, I was on the verge of concluding that, in fact, no one would volunteer to participate.

The planning team was silent. A seed of doubt had been planted and rapidly grew. We all looked around the table at one another, our faces growing longer, and stared at the timeline we had mapped out as if it held some secret we had not yet deciphered. The silence lengthened; we all feared the initiative might fail before it had even begun.

And then, in an instant, the path forward opened. A working mother of two young children cried, “I would do this!” She spoke with such tremendous conviction that spirits immediately lifted, as if a room lost in shadows had suddenly been flooded with brilliant light. That one vote of confidence, that single affirmation, enlivened the field of possibility in which we were working. We completed our planning, issued a call for participation that elicited three times as many volunteers as were needed, and launched the project. In the succeeding two years, many lives were touched in ways that will never be forgotten. In part because, in the face of corrosive doubt, one woman was willing to step fearlessly forward toward an image of possibility.

*Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness concerning all acts of initiative and creation. There is one elemental truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans – that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves all. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issue from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of incidents and meetings and material assistance which no one could have dreamed would come his or her way. Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

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Through *fearless engagement*, we quicken what is present and emerging in and among us, personally and collectively. We will often find ourselves tested by what arises, for it may challenge us or others. For a group, the practice implies that individuals are encouraged to bring the whole of themselves to the process and that the group is willing to explore the pathways created when an unforeseen door of possibility suddenly opens. Participants are invited to come forward with difficult questions or half-baked ideas; we expect false starts and suspend judgments that dampen inquiry. With time we develop the skill of going deep and working the edge, discovering that is where insight, learning, and innovation occur.

Practicing *fearless engagement* does not mean fear never arises – or that, when it does, we should discourage or deny it. Uncertainty is a fundamental feature of the creative process and characterizes almost anything interesting we do. In the face of uncertainty, we may naturally experience insecurity, anxiety, doubt, or despair. It is just then, however – when we take ourselves to the edge of our knowing and are tempted to draw back – that something else moves in us. When the abyss yawns, when monsters of the unknown deep and guardians of its treasures confront us, an inner elemental force awakens in us, if we let it. We call upon and cultivate courage, discovering in ourselves the deeper ground from which *fearless engagement* springs. Courage is a capacity of the heart, as its etymology implies; *fearless engagement* is an archetypal move of the soul.

### ***Respecting Boundaries***

*Fearless engagement* teaches us to love the frontiers. We discover in ourselves a taste for adventure that urges us always to push on just a little further. If this taste for adventure becomes a compulsion, if we constantly feel impelled to push the edge, to uncover all that is not being said, we may be possessed by the archetype and risk losing our way. If we believe we are invincible, that our continually probing the darkness can only be in the best interests of the group, we may harm ourselves or others. A complementary practice for *fearless engagement* is thus *respecting boundaries*.

Each person and group has the right to determine their own identity and to guide their own discovery, development, and unfolding. We do this in large part through managing our boundaries, both inner and outer. The locked door keeps the uninvited out and also protects the treasure within. The garden wall turns away foragers seeking the young plants that have not bloomed yet. The closed circle enables conversation to deepen and focused work to be done. We know that growing ourselves will require opening, that offering our gifts to the world means engaging, but these choices should

be freely made, whenever possible. *Respecting boundaries* reminds us that *fearless engagement* is fundamentally an invitation and an opportunity, not a demand and expectation.

It also helps us appreciate boundaries as meeting places – the zone of contact between ourselves, others, and the world. Even as they protect us, boundaries *present* us. They facilitate interaction. They are membranes simultaneously ensuring the integrity of our systems and mediating our connection with the environment that sustains life. *Respecting boundaries* can mean honoring the processes, protocols, and patterns of communication through which we meet and come into relationship at our boundaries, through which learning occurs, and through which we participate in bringing forth the world.

If we are attentive, every archetypal practice fosters appreciation of the need for its complement, sensitivity to when it is called for, and a feeling for the fluid interaction of the two. Working with *fearless engagement* hones our awareness of just how important *respecting boundaries* is, while *respecting boundaries* nurtures intuition about when we need to challenge those boundaries and move fearlessly forward.

The practices of *fearless engagement* and *respecting boundaries* blend boldness and humility. The guardians of our personal and collective treasures – the guides who can aid and counsel us on our journey – demand both. Together these practices inspire a deep respect for our own integrity, the integrity of everyone with whom we work, and the mystery that informs our co-awakening. They do not call us to act foolishly or contrary to our own best judgment; they invite us to trust in a deeper emotional intelligence, to cultivate both the capacity for listening to that which calls us and the willingness to let ourselves respond. Eventually, we learn to distinguish between the turbulence that attends healthy transformative change from the discomfort we feel when something is fundamentally not right. We listen each other into being, and together we bring forth the work that is uniquely ours to do.

## Being With All That Arises

*Clarifying intent* sows a seed in the rich fields of consciousness and connection. *Fearless engagement* nurtures it. As the seed opens and our work unfolds, we accept and open to all that emerges. *Being with all that arises* in the field, whether it be the private content of personal experience or what occurs in the group, is a third archetypal practice required for our journey.

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*Do you have the patience to wait  
till your mud settles and the water is clear?  
Can you remain unmoving  
till the right action arises by itself?  
The Master doesn't seek fulfillment.  
Not seeking, not expecting,  
she is present, and can welcome all things.  
– Lao Tsu*

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*Being with all that arises* is a contemplative practice. We bring “bare attention” to our

experience, witnessing what is present without analyzing it, making up stories about it, or pretending that it isn't happening. Typically, we favor some ideas and reject others; we are comfortable with certain feelings and eager to be free of others. *Being with all that arises* means that we allow ourselves to witness all that occurs with equanimity – even our own tendency to censor or shape experience. Whether angry, curious, or bored, immersed in an exciting flow of ideas or captivated by a story, we practice mindfulness. Gradually, a capacity for breadth of awareness and stillness at depth develops in us. Even as the surface of consciousness is roiled by waves, a deeper presence is quiet and aware. We sense streams of consciousness, care, and wisdom that are ordinarily hidden. We see not just a few trees but the whole forest, the branching network of roots beneath the forest, and the animals that call the forest home. *Being with all that arises*, we come into dynamic relationship with the intrinsic intelligence and endless creativity of life itself, manifest moment by moment through the unfolding of personal and collective experience. We learn to rest in the still point at the heart of activity and to sense the subtle movement in stillness.

*Being with all that arises* also calls on the archetypal skills of the shapeshifter. Each group traverses many different territories in its life. Finding ourselves in the desert, on the crest of a wave, in the tangled thickets of a dark wood, or on a trail up the mountain requires us to *be with* quite different types of experience. Something in us flexes as we work with the full range of ideas, issues, and opportunities that arise. We meet and honor each person on his or her own terms; we embrace and honor a varied spectrum of experience, letting imagination and soul inhabit and explore multiple realities. Over time, we discover that this is as much a capacity of the heart as the mind, for truly being with means not only that we intellectually recognize what is occurring but also that we meet it with tenderness. With growing capacity, we come to welcome even that which is scary, unfamiliar, or painful, conscious of our vulnerability. *Being with* in this way is an act of generosity, supported first by acts of will but later nourished by the well of compassion that opens in and among us.

Each archetypal practice develops certain qualities and capacities. *Being with all that arises* fosters and is furthered by the ability to embrace creative tension. We experience this over and over in our personal experience and in the life of groups. Sometimes it is the creative tension between our dreams and our current reality; sometimes we find ourselves challenged to hold apparently contradictory perspectives as equally real, meaningful, or valid. Perhaps we recognize the virtue of patience, of listening, of remaining receptive, yet at the same time feel compelled to do something or speak out. We may feel torn by the private call we experience as an individual and our sense of responsibility or loyalty to a group. In a group, we might long for leadership yet recognize the importance of not having a savior step forward. These are all opportunities to practice *being with all that arises* in such a way that we allow something new to come forward.

*Being with all that arises* means embracing these tensions, rather than trying to eliminate ambiguity or reduce complexity prematurely to make ourselves comfortable. The process stretches us. We grow by allowing two or more realities to come into deeper relationship with each another, by living in the space between knowing and not-knowing, being and doing, staying in the question and taking a stand. We stay present to deep emotion without being swept away by it; we learn to contemplate diverse perspectives rather than dismissing them with quick judgments. We begin to distinguish "what is" from what we think "should be." Our rigid ideas of right and

wrong lose their edge. We listen, inquire, and try to understand, trusting that by stretching to encompass polarities we open a space in which something genuinely new can emerge. Slowly we develop some skill in embracing multiple perspectives, knowing each bears a gift, even when inner and outer forces would have us narrow attention and close off options.

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*Often care of the soul means not taking sides when there is a conflict at a deep level. It may be necessary to stretch the heart wide enough to embrace contradiction and paradox. – Thomas Moore*

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In the renewal initiative launched by the woman who exclaimed “I would do it!”, participants from nine countries, speaking eight languages, sought to create a new statement of purpose for the global community they represented. They sought a statement that would tap into the wellspring of vision that inspired the organization’s founding, reflect the wisdom gained through almost half a century of service, and resonate with their personal experience.

Initially, each individual thought he or she knew just what that purpose statement should be, and all were surprised to discover that others had different views. Some proposals seemed incompatible, while others involved a clash of priorities. Gradually the group progressed from debate to discussion and then dialogue, growing ever more comfortable with the tension among views and ever more curious about the new statement they could sense taking shape. They worked diligently and waited consciously, trusting that what emerged would transcend and enfold the “multiple right answers” important to each individual, since each reflected a facet of the whole. And indeed it did.

In the penultimate meeting on this task, each individual was invited to offer, as simply as possible, the statement of purpose that for him or her best reflected all that had been expressed. After each participant had spoken, a long silence ensued. One woman said that while each person’s words had been different, she had heard her sense of purpose present in every other. Another had an image of a wellspring at the center of the circle, a single common source expressing itself differently through them all. Then, just as they had allowed the arising of multiple perspectives on the subject, they allowed themselves to rest in the silence deepening around it.

The next day, one of the group proposed a clear, concise statement unlike any that had been offered to date, yet clearly expressing the essence of all. The group immediately recognized its rightness with unanimous assent.

Participating in groups, organizations, and communities continually immerses us in paradox. *Being with all that arises* entails working more consciously and creatively with that creative tension, seeking the dynamic harmony between such apparent dualities as individual and community, freedom and belonging, competition and collaboration, self-organization and co-evolution, autonomy and organizational coherence, part and whole. The process of dancing with these dualities engages the whole person and the full spectrum of diversity in a group or community. As we open to the fullness of personal and collective experience, allowing what feels like contradiction to co-exist, we invite a higher intelligence into our lives and signal our commitment to finding



higher-order solutions that serve the highest good of each and all.

Our skill in working imaginatively with such polarities is precisely what gives self-organizing systems – whether families, teams, networks, or organizations – their ability to adapt and evolve, to learn and mature, to grow in capacity, creativity, and wisdom. This is enormously stimulating once we develop a feeling for the process and a sense of how liberating it can be – when *being with all that arises* frees us from where we have been intellectually or emotionally stuck and prompts us to explore a suddenly much larger, more intriguing territory. Those who learn to embrace creative tension become more open, tolerant, imaginative, and flexible. Collective imagination becomes infused with compassion, playfulness, and a trust in what is arising in the moment, knowing it will provide gateways to creative insight. When working with creative tension becomes formulaic – or we lapse into rhetorical commitment to “both/and” solutions without actually engaging in the deep work that brings them forth – individuals lose their passion and the community as a whole will lose its agility, poise, and verve.

As an archetypal practice, *being with all that arises* expresses our commitment to the whole of our experience, personally and collectively, and to the possibilities present in the deeper fields of our being. The hero is ready and willing to see “what is” clearly and to meet whatever arises on her journey with alacrity, knowing each meeting is a microcosm of the whole quest. She offers herself mentally, emotionally, and spiritually to be stretched, to be opened, to be shaped by life’s creative hand. Knowing she will experience discomfort, she cultivates equanimity; knowing her attention will continually wander, she practices mindfulness. Slowly, the field opens to her, revealing more of its secrets. She witnesses the co-arising of self and other, inner and outer, personal and collective.

### ***Taking a Stand***

Such awareness is seductive. Yet *being with all that arises* should not lead us to drift on the winds of circumstance, content to observe what is happening and accepting whatever comes. It should not tempt us to mistake openness alone for effectiveness, nor entail our condoning behavior that is unacceptable. Embracing creative tensions and working to bring forth solutions that transcend and enfold does not mean dithering endlessly and trying to make everyone happy. Our refusal to settle for what is familiar, to accept easy compromise, signals a disciplined commitment to innovation, not an escape from responsibility or choice.

*Taking a stand* is the complementary practice for *being with all that arises*. In any given moment, we choose and act with as much consciousness, care, and imagination as possible, knowing each choice – and what we learn from it – will deepen the insight, understanding, and ability we bring to the next choice. Through *taking a stand* we define ourselves; we affirm certain possibilities and ignore others. The practice affirms our uniqueness even as it becomes the touchstone for connecting with others and the world. We invest ourselves in *this* relationship and turn from *that* one. We say yes to this commitment and no to another. With such choices, we express integrity and embody our values, thus revealing our ground.

*Taking a stand* is as much a matter of being as of doing. The hero is tested,

repeatedly. Often the stand he takes, the way he holds himself in the face of challenge, is as important as any action that follows. In the same way, our stand may sometimes be reflected more fully in how we “line up” to an issue or opportunity than in any particular action we take or decision we make. A strong stand is flexible and open, not inflexible and closed – a form enabling interaction with the world, not a position foreclosing it.

## **Illuminating Truth**

As we stay present with all that is arising, we orient ourselves by *illuminating truth* – the practice of uncovering and accepting what is fundamentally true in and about our experience in the moment. The truths we seek are not dry facts but the living expression of deeply embodied knowing, a direct knowing that arises out of our participation in the world as it arises in and through us.

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*Without the experience of loving truth for its own sake, regardless of the consequences – without the willingness to completely open your heart to the fullness of your own truth – you will not have the energy or the motivation to go beyond your familiar reality. – A.H. Almaas*

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*Illuminating truth* reflects the soul’s hunger to know its true nature – to understand *what is* ever more deeply and to have that knowing be the ground for life and work. As a practice, it draws upon the intelligence of all our faculties – intellect and feeling, the body and its kinesthetic sense, the heart, gut, skin, and other subtle organs of perception. We relax the grip that constrains awareness and invite all the voices in, especially the inner voices that too often remain silent. We attend to clues about what is, articulating what we know and acknowledging truths hidden or at the edges of awareness. If we notice ourselves growing defensive or aggressive, we soften and turn back to examine what is actually taking place in our hearts, minds, and bodies. We accept what we discover, without trying to rationalize it or defend ourselves.

Through the practice of *illuminating truth*, we come to know and trust ourselves in deeper ways. We learn to recognize the voice of intuition and start to respect the inner signals that tell us when something is not right or needs attention. We become better able to recognize essential truths about our commitments and connections with others. Gradually, we hone both our capacity to perceive truth and our readiness to live by what it asks of us. We come to value revelation as guidance, even when it is discomfiting.

Knowing *what is* provides the ground on which we stand in the present moment. While the ego resists acknowledging uncomfortable truths that challenge it, something in the soul relaxes when we recognize the truth of our situation, even when it is painful. With this relaxation comes an opening – a curiosity about ourselves and the world – that supports continuing inquiry. Sustained practice of *illuminating truth* entails a dedicated engagement with the dynamic field of Being that yields new discoveries and deeper understanding.

Archetypally, *illuminating truth* characterizes the scientist or sage. The scientist uses ever more sensitive methods to discern what is, motivated by her quest to understand

the world and its inner workings. She does not separate herself from her object of inquiry but comes into living relationship with it, finding in relationship a *feeling* for truth and further clues that will guide exploration. She loves the continual unfolding of inquiry, knowing the story is never complete. The essence of her science is disciplined attention to what experience reveals; she practices *illuminating truth* at each step. She is willing to be surprised by what she discovers and is ever mindful of how her assumptions and tools of inquiry shape what she sees.

The sage, too, wants to peer through the veils that mask truth. He masters what is known and then peers beyond that into the darkness of not-knowing. For him, *illuminating truth* is inherently transformative; it vitalizes the self-organizing intelligence of Being and evokes guidance in ways that are healthy and life-affirming. The scientist and sage challenge convention, ignorance, and prejudice by evoking basic intelligences that have been hidden, by elucidating elemental patterns that were obscure, or by speaking to deeper truths that touch the heart and awaken the soul. Through such efforts, *illuminating truth* becomes the catalyst for innovation, the foundation for wisdom, and the ground for compassionate action.

I once failed a group with which I was consulting by compromising my dedication to *illuminating truth*. A team of two dozen individuals from the public, private, nonprofit, and academic sectors had come together to create an organization that would serve them all. They came to the design table full of dreams for how the new organization might be structured and what it would do. During our initial meetings, it became apparent that two fundamentally different images for the organization were competing. In part because of time constraints on the group's work, the group eventually adopted a statement of purpose that forced those two perspectives together in a way that compromised them both. Because we did not fully acknowledge and unpack each perspective and its implications, we sacrificed the possibility of discovering the truly novel, transcendent solution we sought. Instead, certain perspectives were slowly but surely discouraged, partly by others in the group, partly by the facilitators who guided the process.

In retrospect, I realized that my practice of *illuminating truth* had been lacking. I did not help the group honor each perspective fully enough, trusting that an inclusive, higher order solution might emerge. The group could not establish a generative space for breakthrough insight or innovation because it did not know how to recognize and acknowledge the full spectrum of participants' aims, interests, and orientations.

To be fair, I was not fully aware at the time of just how deep participants' differences were and did not appreciate how significant they later would prove. Yet even this highlights an important dimension of *illuminating truth*. An ever-present temptation is to settle for available answers or to stop inquiring when we think that *now we have it*. But inquiry need not cease while we act, even when time presses; we can embed inquiry in our action. Truth-telling liberates energy and imagination. It inspires commitment. This is so even when telling the truth means acknowledging what we don't know. For a group seeking innovative ideas whose value will only be proved in the marketplace – or just making hard choices in a context of ambiguity and uncertainty – *illuminating truth* entails encouraging full exploration of the issues and options, welcoming and seeking out as much information as possible, being mindful of potential distortions in perception, thinking, and judgment. As our appetite for truth

grows, we gain greater access to the full spectrum of collective capacities and become better able to work with whatever arises in creative, adaptive ways.

We must be willing to inquire into what we discover and be changed by what we learn. A token acknowledgment of issues, perspectives, or questions without exploring their implications suppresses important insights. It precludes learning and short-circuits the creative process, leaving us to function with only a portion of our resources. And it pisses people off.

When some portion of our reality is denied, there is invariably tyranny at work.

Fierce honesty and challenge are the fuel that feeds the fire of our dedication to *illuminating truth*. We have all had a lifetime of experience in masking certain truths from ourselves. The ego is clever, subtle, and persistent in using the mind to preserve its equanimity and position, to bolster its sense of value, and to pursue its ends. We must therefore be disciplined and imaginative in illuminating truth. We challenge ourselves and others, and we invite others to challenge us. We support others in seeing themselves, and they support us in seeing ourselves. We listen one another into being and slowly bring our language into line with actual experience, learning to see through the many ways we soften or distort the truth, personally or collectively. In the course of our work, the practice of *illuminating truth* will help us expose assumptions, uncover the hidden roots of current reality, and perceive the formative patterns that shape identities, actions, and relationships. The more precise we can be in our awareness, the more potent that awareness can be as a catalyst for personal awakening and collective development.

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*A form of free dialogue may well be one of the most effective ways of investigating the crises which face society. Moreover, it may turn out that such a form of free exchange of ideas and information is of fundamental relevance for transforming culture so that creativity can be liberated. - David Bohm*

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## ***Engaging in Dialogue***

Shadow expressions of our dedication to *illuminating truth* include fanaticism in any form – insistence on a point of view, imposition of a dogma – and the need to be right. We come to believe that we alone know what is true, or that what is true for us is necessarily true for others. *Engaging in dialogue* thus complements illuminating truth. Individually, we embrace the whole of ourselves in our inquiry, welcoming all “inner voices”; collectively, we seek out and interact with a broad range of people, perspectives, and possibilities. We recognize that any expression of truth is always partial and that our experience is always one thread in a larger tapestry. Through dialogue, what we know to be true is continually enriched and informed, sometimes reframed, by our casting the net of inquiry ever wider and more deeply.

The hero never succeeds solely on the basis of her individual knowledge and abilities. The hero’s quest is always, in essence, a dialogical journey. She is in constant conversation with her companions, with allies who appear on the path, with those who oppose her, with her own inner promptings. Progress depends on her remaining deeply true to herself and letting herself be shaped and informed by these encounters.

Through them she is in dialogue with destiny and the world, and the transformation in her experience of self and world that results is as great a gift as any other treasure she discovers.

*Engaging in dialogue*, we suspend judgment, stay alert to assumptions, and speak from the heart. Yet the essence of the practice is *listening*. We listen for what is present or emerging in us; we listen into others for what is present and emerging in them; we listen into the center of our collective circle for what is present and emerging there, knowing that every voice is necessary for the pattern of the whole to be manifest in its entirety. We listen with our hearts and minds open, every fiber of our being alive to the slightest quiver in the field of connection and possibility that enfolds us. This kind of listening becomes a creative force in the dynamic field of Being, activating what lies dormant, uncovering what is hidden, calling forth that which seeks expression.

*Engaging in dialogue* helps us eschew simplistic answers and ready truths that dull the edge of our living engagement with the world. Tolerating and even encouraging dissent is crucial, though ideally in dialogue it never becomes an effort to protect territory or argue for the rightness of this or that position. By articulating and testing multiple perspectives, we arrive at a richer and more nuanced experience and understanding that shapes the field for personal experience and collective action. Co-intelligence emerges in the pattern woven by each of our stories and testimonies, and the fabric of shared meaning is stronger for all the threads that contribute to it.

## Staying in the Fire

*Illuminating truth* challenges our conditioning, our habitual patterns of thought and action, and our comfortable routines – and therefore takes us into the fire. We come face to face with troubling realities and feel an inner friction develop. We chafe with the heat of self-examination and experience painful interactions within and outside our groups. The discipline of *staying in the fire* enables us to endure the intensity, heat, and pressure we experience, knowing it both fuels and is produced by the deep transformative work to which we are committed.

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*Self-creation is an art of fire. – M.C. Richards*

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*Staying in the fire* means letting ourselves cook. It is not so difficult when the heat is low, when we are simply annoyed by aspects of our own or others' behavior. It grows more difficult when we argue, stop listening, grow frustrated, and see all progress, or any hope of it, come to a screeching halt. When we wonder why we are here and what will ever come of the process. When the animal instinct in us is to fight or flee.

Caught in these traps, we commonly react by attacking others, compromising ourselves, or seeking easy solutions. Some might look for a leader to take charge or try to force their will on the group. Others constrict attention and insist upon sticking to the agenda, or deny that anything is wrong. Sometimes breakdown occurs. We ordinarily think of this as a failure in group process, and it might be. But it also might be precisely what the group needs to coalesce at a deeper level, to discover a sense of purpose or direction, to nurture learning or innovation.

This is when staying in the fire is crucial. When our bodies are filled with overpowering emotion or the group field is charged with tension, we stay conscious and work with what is arising instead of acting out. We contain and ground the electricity that runs through us like lightning, seeking a target. We trust that, even if we burn, we will rise like the phoenix from the ashes. In fact, breakthrough may require that our current identities or conditioning be consumed. Staying in the fire, we form the alchemical vessel in which emotional transformation can occur.

As an archetypal practice, *staying in the fire* expresses our faith in the regenerative capacities of soul and spirit. It purifies and prepares us, reflecting our willingness to be changed by the encounter with our own depths, others, and the world. It signals our dedication to each other, to the possibilities present in our meeting, to the process of presencing, and to what we are creating together.

Several years ago, fishermen and environmentalists in the northeast United States met to create a new organizational vehicle for resolving disputes and developing community-based approaches to sustainable stewardship of marine resources. At the time, fishermen were often engaged in conflict with one another over fishing territories, sometimes even shooting at each other. Fishermen generally viewed environmentalists as hostile to their livelihood, and environmentalists viewed fishermen as ignorant of ecology. Both groups struggled with representatives of the federal and state governments who were tightening the rules and regulations on the fishing industry in ways not informed by local wisdom.

When they first met to pursue their bold and far-sighted aim of creating an unprecedented collaborative, neither trust nor affection was much present. Early meetings sometimes devolved into shouting matches. Accusations flew as participants pounded the tables and took advantage of the context to bring long-simmering grudges forward. There were many moments when the process could easily have imploded, if not for participants' willingness to endure the volcanic eruptions of deep emotion and work through distrust, anger, resentment, and frustration until something else emerged.

The tide turned when men and women at the table began looking beyond what separated them to what they most fundamentally wanted for themselves, their children, and their communities. There they discovered common ground in a set of fundamental human concerns, including concern for the health of our larger environment, that transcended the many more specific issues on which they disagreed.

Trust in one another may not have been present when they began, but commitment to the process was. By *staying in the fire* together, they developed confidence in themselves, personal and collective self-knowledge, trust in and affection for one another, an innovative organizational concept to guide their work, and a commitment to moving forward together that was unshakably rooted in the strong bonds that were forged by their *staying in the fire*. In wrestling with deep and complex issues that affected livelihoods and the future of their communities, they did not resort to scapegoating. They did not settle for premature solutions or the familiar compromises that would have eased the pressure. Knowing these courses were dead ends, they

followed their anger and fear all the way down to their roots in much more basic human aspirations. They stayed this intense, challenging course even though they did not know where it would lead.

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*In a dark time, the eye begins to see. – Theodore Roethkes*

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Sometimes *staying in the fire* means finding creative ways to sustain a change effort when those opposed to it want to shut it down. At an inflection point in another organizational initiative, we learned that some leaders were excited about working in new ways, that others were quite comfortable with current practices (and neutral to the change process), and that some were concerned the initiative might threaten the community's integrity. Tension quickly developed, with some hoping a mandate for change would be created while others insisted that all change efforts be stopped. Both groups looked to the organization's board of directors to decide which path to choose.

The board recognized that the intense clamor for resolution created a second tension, between leaders' desire for the board to act and the need for an extended community dialogue about issues and opportunities. Directors also recognized that it would not serve the organization if they assumed the role of savior. By *staying in the fire* and not simply resolving the issue in favor of one group or the other, directors eventually discovered an approach that addressed all concerns. They created a safe and protected space for experimentation within the organization that allowed new approaches to be tried while not requiring everyone to participate. Those who opposed change could continue to operate under existing policies while innovation occurred within a policy framework that allowed for organizational learning and dialogue.

This organization's directors used an explicit set of organizational principles to support their deliberations and decision making. These or other agreements can provide an important framework as groups *stay in the fire* by sticking with difficult and important issues, not letting participants meander away or change the subject. They help ensure that fairness, transparency, mutual respect, and other core values are actually practiced, especially during the awkward initial learning process. Experienced guides can also be helpful, both through stories they tell to inspire and through the stances they model.

*Staying in the fire* means suffering consciously. Suffering consciously enables the energy we experience to be used in the service of our deeper aim. It can be directed toward insight, toward opening unexplored territories of relationship, toward drawing to us the intelligence or creativity we need. Fire burns away what is not essential and clears the ground for something new to emerge.

But suffering consciously is not easy in the best of circumstances; in heated encounters, even to maintain a thin thread of connection to consciousness and presence may feel like herculean work. *Staying in the fire* runs counter to instinctual and learned responses. We tend to flee what isn't comfortable. We react to protect ourselves. If we actually see ourselves surrounded by flames or hear inner voices screaming as something in us is seared, we may panic. Staying in that fire – or, even more, cultivating a desire to enter the fire in order to be cleansed or to bring forth what is hidden – takes courage, maturity, and trust.

Some groups forge an identity around struggle, just as some individuals and couples do. But *staying in the fire* does not mean suffering because one reveres martyrdom, nor because one believes that only through suffering is anything worthwhile achieved. It does not mean suffering for the sake of suffering or the intentional infliction of distress. *Staying in the fire* is a gesture of affirmation, a nod toward possibilities not yet expressed, a way of preparing ourselves to experience and embody those potentials. Through it we speak of our faith in the healing, transformative power of truth, in the metamorphic qualities of Being, in that in us which cannot be destroyed.

Compassion for ourselves and others is vital – and vitalizing. We are working with primal and powerful experiences worthy of our deepest respect. It is work whose inner side people will never see, but we can support one another by simply being present, caring for each other in our struggle and witnessing without judgment. Over time, we grow a capacity for struggling together, for calling forth that which is painful in order to heal or learn from it. We come to trust our capacity for rising from the ashes, over and over, seeing ourselves and one another anew each time.

### ***Surfing the Wave***

The complementary practice is surfing the wave. An upwelling of creative energy may occur when we have been cleansed and purified, when habitual structures have dissolved and the dynamic energies locked in them are released. We feel a rush as the work excites, enlivens, and engages us. We begin to experience flow as relationships mesh seamlessly, as our abilities feel better matched to our tasks, as a collective field of consciousness guides the process and reveals exactly what we need to know precisely when we need to know it. We are innovative, work together well, and meet or surpass our goals.

*Surfing the wave*, we gain confidence in ourselves, in our connection with others, and in the forces that work through us. Entrusting ourselves to the wave, we discover a deeper identity with the field from which the wave rises and sense the intelligence present in it, embodied in us. We sense greater powers still to be discovered and manifest, if we learn to align with them.

The hero *surfs the wave* when she survives severe trials and suddenly finds unexpected pathways open. Her initial optimism has been tempered by struggle and she may even have felt doubt as great forces opposed her. Now she is buoyed up by progress and sees her tests as a necessary part of the journey.

*Staying in the fire* and *surfing the wave*, we give ourselves in service to a greater work. The hero stays her course, knowing she will experience fire and wave both many times in her quest. Both are integral to her transformation and essential if she is to fulfill her aim. Willing to be shaped, she endures the fire; moving forward, she rejoices in the wave.

### **Eating the Dark and Bitter Rind**

*Staying in the fire* allows us to see what ordinarily we do not see – that which hides in the shadows of consciousness. *Eating the dark and bitter rind* means allowing these shadow elements to come forward, acknowledging and accepting them instead of



pushing them away, and digesting them to liberate the creative juices they contain. It entails a descent into darkness, into the underground realm of perpetual shadow, into the land where there is no light and where light, if it enters, can never escape.

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*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.  
Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.  
– Rumi*

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A clear commitment to developing our highest personal and collective potentials will draw forth all that is inconsistent with our aim. As light calls forth shadow, we will find ourselves experiencing aspects of our character or behavior that are painful to see, feel, or acknowledge. We may glimpse deep-seated patterns that have hidden us from ourselves or hurt others. We may see more clearly than ever before our weakness, insecurity, ego, avarice, cruelty, blindness, or grandiosity. We begin to perceive the mechanisms of the mind or group process that ordinarily distort awareness, and leave us at the mercy of our fears and desires. Or we may glimpse aspects of collective consciousness that underlie systemic patterns of violence, oppression, or injustice.

The specific content we experience will vary from individual to individual and from group to group. I may become aware of long-buried wounds, frustrated impulses, unmet needs, or unfulfilled longings. I may experience shame, guilt, fear, or helplessness. In a group, participants may pull back the curtain on unconscious collective images or challenge behaviors that are coercive and controlling. Taboo topics may be broached in angry and accusing ways. And then, unless the group is skilled, reactivity will drive a vicious spiral of destructive group behavior. Emotions run high. Projections run amok. Group process breaks down and compassion leaks away. Listening stops and mutual understanding erodes. Some hide while others sharpen their knives or bring out the heavy artillery. Scapegoats are sought, and usually found.

If I cannot endure the darkness in myself, I will see it only in others. If we cannot acknowledge the shadow in a group, we will close ranks and only see it in the world beyond. It is a lifelong practice to become aware of our judgments, self-righteousness, defensiveness, and pain. The truths we cannot bear to recognize about ourselves become the blame we project onto others. But in avoiding bitter truths, we cripple ourselves and those we tag with our enmity, shame, or guilt.

When such darkness wells up and threatens to engulf us – when securing our positions and allowing the veil to fall again is tempting – we have a priceless opportunity to see ourselves more truly and welcome back what we have turned away or denied for so long. If our dedication to *illuminating truth* enables us to stay in the fire, we can open to that which frightens us, befriend our weaknesses, and see the beauty in our failures.

The orange has a bitter rind protecting its sweet and juicy fruit. We must work through that rind to reach the life-giving nourishment it covers. Just so with all we have cast

into darkness. We must invite it back in and dwell with it openly if we are to experience its gifts.

It seems paradoxical. We find our way through this darkness by going more deeply into it. We *eat the dark and bitter rind* by becoming ever more fully present to the elements of our experience that are most discomfiting and shameful – and then by embodying the energies they contain, to transmute them. We embrace self-hatred, our racism, or primal fear of the Other, not acting them out. We witness the images, emotions, judgments, and energies that arise, letting them be present in consciousness and tolerating the emotions they evoke. We try to catch ourselves projecting them onto other individuals or groups. We notice the mind move to lock them back into the basement of awareness or rationalize them with stories that reestablish its comfortable view of self or world. Slowly, the practice of digesting bitter truths frees life energies that have been locked in conditioned stances against the world – energies assigned to buttressing the ego, defending ourselves against others, or trying to control the chaos of our environment. We regain contact with the body’s vitality, with our tender hearts, with the inherent, diamond-like intelligence of mind. We become more present.

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*One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. – Carl Jung*

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**A**ddressing the “brutal facts” in an organization sometimes requires us to eat the *dark and bitter rind*. This might take many different forms – confronting the financial realities facing the firm, discovering the damage a company’s product or operations is causing, recognizing oppressive aspects of management styles or employee relationships. However painful such things might be to acknowledge, what is crucial is how we choose to respond to what we learn. Denial, obfuscation, and efforts to “pass the buck” are increasingly seen as short-sighted. Leaders dedicated to creating a context for individual and collective excellence will foster openness, inquiry, responsibility, and a passion for learning – starting with themselves.

For a brief period, I worked with the chief executive officer of a major service firm. While not the company’s founder, he had been responsible for significant growth and innovation, leading the company into new product and service lines that earned industry-wide respect. The industry as a whole was rapidly evolving, however, and the CEO was pressed to develop a new business model even as he sought to distribute power more broadly, create an internal climate of innovation, and improve customer service. He invited my team in to survey staff, identify critical issues and opportunities, and work with the senior management team.

What emerged from our interviews was that employees at all levels were distressed by the gap between rhetoric and reality. While leadership professed participatory values, their actual practice was limited. Lack of communication stymied collaboration and controlling management policies prevented staff from assuming responsibility in creative ways. It also became clear that the problem began at the top. Widely praised as a brilliant visionary, the CEO was also a perfectionist who expected exceptional performance from everyone else, especially his senior management team. When others did not perform to his standards, he would step in and either do the work himself or micromanage. Professing a desire to relax control and give more authority

to his colleagues, he actually lacked the trust in them that would enable him to do that.

This is a common story. What makes it noteworthy was this leader's commitment to truly listening – and to personally leading change. He not only wanted but needed to understand how his values, leadership style, and other qualities inhibited or enabled employees. His many gifts and accomplishments notwithstanding, he realized that his behavior was a critical factor limiting learning, development, and innovation in the organization. He also recognized that to modify his behavior would require both sustained self-inquiry and transformative work with his team. His willingness to *eat the dark and bitter rind* was exemplary and in itself signaled seriousness of intent to his colleagues, who were then inspired to open and stretch themselves. Together they began to let go of their managed identities, relax overly controlling agendas, and move beyond safe and familiar territories, gaining access to opportunities for generative learning and discovery.

To draw out the deep capacities associated with our true nature, we must risk entering the dark places, trusting we will return but not knowing what pathways will lead us out.

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*In the dark times  
Will there also be singing?  
Yes, there will be singing  
About the dark times.  
– Bertolt Brecht*

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*Eating the dark and bitter rind*, we first acknowledge the truth of our behavior and its effects. We begin to accept responsibility for both intentional and inadvertent behavior that hurts others. Then we explore its roots, what reinforces it, and its place in larger systems of behavior and relationship. We will invariably find personal and collective forces at work and interwoven, even in the most commonplace patterns of interaction.

Inner work helps us effect our own metamorphosis. We are all caterpillars digesting our own substance to emerge from the cocoon as butterflies. Limiting images, assumptions, and beliefs that form the substratum of personal experience are brought to consciousness and metabolized, freeing us to grow. But *eating the dark and bitter rind* also entails reflecting on and taking responsibility for our participation in patterns of relationships and systems whose values we may not share. Sometimes this is relatively straightforward – choosing not to participate in backbiting or gossip, being accountable for mistakes or failures, not punishing others when we are angry or hurt. In a larger sense, however, the challenge is systemic, not susceptible to easy resolution.

Given the world in which we live, we must recognize our part in systems that are unhealthy and oppressive, and the pain we indirectly cause ourselves, others, or the natural world through them. This can be just as difficult as recognizing the shadow that dwells within – perhaps even more difficult, since what we see and feel may be overwhelming in scope and vastly beyond our individual capacity to address. Feelings of helplessness or despair may discourage us from acknowledging the full extent of our predicament. Yet only by entering our despair can we move through it. Our challenge

then is sustaining our gaze, willing to witness the darkness in the world and also to understand how we contribute to it, even as we find our own ways of contributing to transformation. A sense of irony helps, if we do not simply grow cynical.

In this context, *eating the dark and bitter rind* entails going into, staying with, and transmuting the anger, fear, helplessness, or guilt that arises, knowing these emotions are natural responses that arise from our essential experience of connection with life. Only by passing through their dark valley do we gather the power to engage with a caring heart the challenge of bringing forth worlds that reflect our highest aspirations, knowing there are no pure villains. Aware of our own fallibility, we can be more intentional and generative in our choices. Through this work, we help effect the healing and transformation of the world.

### ***Uplifting the Treasure***

With compassion and respect for the soul's resilience, we eat the dark and bitter rind of our lives, trusting we will find the sweet fruit within. We venture into the dark passages leading underground, knowing wonders of inestimable value await there. Then the complementary practice emerges – *uplifting the treasure*. Staying our course through the soul's dark night, we have learned not to fear darkness, in ourselves or others. Hitting bottom, we have discovered unexpected support. A hand is extended, by our own true nature. That same hand pulls back the curtain to reveal our gifts – the contributions only we can make to our family, colleagues, or the world.

*Uplifting the treasure* can take many forms. In addition to the talents and capacities that shape our calling, each of us contributes in large or small ways at different times to a friend's insight, a group's discovery, an organizational breakthrough. Often we do not recognize the significance of these contributions at the time; looking for and appreciating them in ourselves and others is a powerful practice. Experiences of collective wisdom are community treasures that only emerge through the participation of all.

*Uplifting the treasure* is a turning point in the hero's quest. He may be exhilarated by his accomplishment and sing the wonders of his discovery. No one else could have brought back just the gift that he did; he is justly celebrated. Yet he also knows the treasure does not belong to him. The gifts we bring back from our journey, the discoveries we make through our trials, are inherently personal and inevitably collective. Our contributions are unique to us, but they belong to the community and must serve the whole, if their promise is to be realized. Together we celebrate and share the gifts we are given, harvesting the rich fruit in the great fields of personal and collective potential we have tended.

### **Surrendering to Love**

The greatest treasure proves ours as a birthright.

*Eating the dark and bitter rind*, we gain greater access to the full range of our experience and capacities. We feel the elemental energies of life flow through us more freely. The heart opens and we discover many more dimensions of connection available than we had ever imagined. We practice *surrendering to love*, drawn by an

essential yearning for communion.

As an archetypal practice, *surrendering to love* involves trusting our natural impulse to touch others and our longing to be seen, to be touched. It entails opening and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, relaxing the boundaries that separate us from parts of ourselves, one another, and our common spiritual ground. It involves consciously nurturing our deep wish for awakening, for ourselves and others. Our fierce dedication to truth and our willingness to stay in the fire bring us to the shores of the heart's great sea, the waters that nourish all. Entering this sea, we experience our fundamental belonging to all that is and begin to plumb the depths of interconnection.

*Surrendering to love* transforms our approach to personal and collective potential. We see others, and by reflection ourselves, in a holy light, through the eyes of the heart. We find ourselves both stronger and more tender than we imagined, able to focus on what truly matters. We inhabit the soft animal of our bodies more fully and gain access to qualities and capacities that were dormant before. New ways of knowing and rich, fluid forms of intelligence awake in us. Both collective intelligence and divine guidance flow through the heart, infusing how we see the world, how we relate to each other, how we embrace our own experience, how we engage the world at large and act.

In such moments, we realize the teachings of the world's great spiritual teachers are not simply meant as lofty abstractions or unattainable ideals, but as practical guides for behavior.

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*For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the most difficult of our tasks; the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation. – Rainer Maria Rilke*

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*Surrendering to love* is the antithesis of judgment and control. We open our hearts and accept others and ourselves as we are, experiencing more fully the totality of our being, our essential humanity, and the divine spark in our souls. We recognize the common longings, the struggle, and the quest we share. Of course, most of us do not experience such love all the time. Unless we are saints or fully enlightened beings, we struggle with self-interest, personal needs, and our hopes and fears, both petty and grand.

Fortunately, *surrendering to love* does not require utter selflessness. We practice compassion with ourselves, notice when we close our hearts or minds, and try to nurture a wish for the well-being of the other. We relax just for a moment our compulsion to defend ourselves or attack others, turning instead to our tender hearts and innate knowledge of interconnection, trusting that wisdom, caring, and creativity of a deeper sort will be present. This love is intrinsically intelligent – and precise. It arises through engagement and manifests in specific ways that reflect the unique circumstances of people and place. Another does not have to open himself or herself in order for us to *surrender to love*. The intelligence of the heart, a higher emotional intelligence, can still be potent and influential.

ears ago, I met a woman named Alice Harris, founder of a nonprofit service

Y organization called Parents of Watts. Sweet Alice, as those in the neighborhood know her, is legendary for her ability to help inner-city youth in need transform their lives. Her work in the community began when, as a young mother in a depressed neighborhood, she looked out her living room window and saw several teens vandalizing a car. Someone has to do something, she thought – and then she realized that the someone was her. But Alice was not fueled by outrage or a desire to punish the youth. She was inspired by a deep caring for the well-being of each individual and her community as a whole. She not only opened her heart but also her home to youth in need, dedicating all of her initially meager resources to helping others.

Today, Parents of Watts owns eight houses and supports a wide range of programs and services that have been widely hailed for their innovation and effectiveness. Miracles have occurred time after time to enable Alice and her colleagues to continue doing their work, catalyzed by the depth of Alice's unwavering commitment, her faith, and the unconditional, unwavering compassion that infuses her efforts. Those who know her call her a "force field of love." In her presence, in the field of possibility and caring support she generates, people discover and bring forth capacities they didn't know they had.

Sweet Alice is proof that love activates potential. Love waters seeds of hope that never sprouted, seeds of vision long forgotten. Love introduces energies that fundamentally alter how we function and how the world functions about us. The healing, creative, and self-organizing intelligence of Being in all its mysterious complexity is able to operate more easily. Surprising solutions arise when least expected – and most needed.

The story of Sweet Alice also demonstrates that *surrendering to love* means embracing what is given to us – family, work, friends, community, the places we live or travel, the challenges and opportunities that define our path. In opening our hearts to whatever we encounter in a given moment, we begin to discover that which deeply calls to us, that in which we can easily rest, that which brings us alive, that which nourishes us. As we settle in that ground, our lives and work become ever more self-generating, self-nurturing, and self-sustaining – and ever more naturally responsive to the needs of our communities and the world.

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*Some day after we have mastered the winds, the waves and gravity, we will harness for God the energies of love; and then for a second time in the history of the world, humans will have discovered fire. – Teilhard de Chardin*

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We cannot immediately hope to know such love completely, but each of us can practice *surrendering to love* in small ways. We can be mindful of when our hearts or minds are closed and make an effort to open them, to soften our boundaries, to feel our connection. We can inquire appreciatively, exploring what is working in our lives, what is life-giving, what is nourishing, what provides meaning. We can practice generosity, mindful of the ways we ignore the needs of others or reject their appeals for help. We can choose to give, even when it stretches us. Gradually these gestures come more easily, until we find ourselves dwelling in an ever-widening field of compassion and mutual caring that feels as natural to us as our own breath, and just as vital.

The tenderness we experience in opening our hearts is informed by the strength that arises from love's ground. Love means that we are present with and for others in the totality of their being and with commitment to their highest potential – but this love can be expressed in many forms, including challenge and support. Love is practical and can be demanding. In working with Alice, youth at risk discovered the transformative power of being seen, experiencing respect, and being invited to take the initiative – but they were also expected to be responsible and, at some point, to help others in turn.

In organizations and groups, *surrendering to love* transforms leadership from a compulsion to control others and drive a system to a passion for creating contexts in which all can thrive, ever more fully experiencing their individual and collective genius. When communities as a whole commit to increasing love, it transforms how participants interact with each other and judge their work. Among Quakers, love is a fundamental metric for all community activities. Even in business sessions, Quakers affirm the primacy of holding the meeting in love. Relationships come first. Deliberations are respectful, and decisions are never considered a victory for one perspective or side over another. The measure of any decision's success is the amount of love it generates in the community. Both the community and each of its participants are strengthened.

### ***Acting With Power***

*Surrendering to love* should not be taken as an invitation to grow mushy or spend all our time in a lovefest. Nor should caring obscure the need for decisiveness, at times. When groups mistake an experience of loving connection for clarity about purpose, or imagine that compassion alone is all that is needed to effect change, then *surrendering to love* has become a trap.

*Acting with power* complements *surrendering to love*. Fully embodied love naturally expresses itself in action – action infused with love, with power informed by compassion. Participants in a group may experience the descent of divine love or feel a universal connection with all that is, but this experience becomes real in the world when it underpins, infuses, and guides what individuals or the group actually do. Feeling our hearts open on hearing a moving story will be followed by a desire to respond, if we do not suppress it.

In *acting with power*, we express our whole being. The practice is an essential aspect of the creative process, which only comes to fruition when we give form to that which seeks to enter the world through us. Acting with power is how we realize our values and vision in the world, the practice through which we exert influence and initiate change. Consequences ripple from each step we take.

The hero must *act with power* or fail in her quest. She must trust herself, her capacities, and her judgment. Sensitive to the context in which she acts, she is bold and forthright in her stroke. Her action may or may not be planned, but it is always consequential. Some paths will open while others close. The past is brought to completion, and the future enters the present.

### ***Sensing the Rhythm***

Holding a wish for the well-being of each and all, we sense the fluidity of our lives, relationships, and work. We see the many streams that run together to form the whole and we begin to notice rhythms. *Sensing the rhythm* is the practice of paying attention to how the whole emerges from multiple sources – inner pulls, external processes, aspirations, and threats. We attend to whatever is required to nurture ourselves, other participants, or the process at any given time. Sensing the rhythm calls on an aesthetic intelligence for harmony that guides us in choreographing attention, energies, and activity in relation to purpose.

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*Rhythm is our universal mother tongue. It's the language of the soul. – Gabrielle Roth*

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All creative work, and learning generally, involves incubation, trial and error, fitful stages, fallow periods, and times of enormous productivity. As we gain experience with the process in all its facets and phases, we begin *sensing rhythms* that reflect both the unique features and common patterns in a particular situation. Whether our focus is community development, decision making, innovation, or some other activity, we begin to appreciate the many fluid dimensions of our work and relationships that are constantly in flux, like tides rising and falling to shape the contours of our experience. Slowly we begin to trust that process. With time, *sensing the rhythm* affirms our deep conviction that each of us and every group has a distinctive part to play – and we trust, even when experiencing discord, that if we listen for the subtle pulse in the field of collective connection we will learn how to improvise together with beauty and grace, each an indispensable part of the whole.

The quintessential model for this process, always close at hand, is nature itself. Living systems survive and thrive because of the extraordinarily intricate dance that takes place among all the elements comprising them. They develop and evolve because of the continual conversation that takes place between each being and its environment, processes at every level exquisitely tuned to ever present change. In the body, each cell has its own patterns of activity and rest. These unfold in a fluid medium alive with vibration, a field humming with the music of tissues, organs, and higher-order systems in constant communication and coordination. Some rhythms are regular, some patterns predictable and repetitive. Others exhibit enormous variation, their mutability essential for adaptation and change. Some conserve form and function; others foster transformation. The interplay of these rhythms, each part sensing the others and immersed in the field of the whole, is how the body organizes and guides itself – how life at every level from the molecule to Gaia functions.

In program design and development, the pattern intelligence that informs *sensing the rhythm* manifests in how meetings, programs, communication patterns, or activities are designed and conducted. When participants gather, *sensing the rhythm* means continually being alert to what individuals and the group as a whole need. We move fluidly back and forth among diverse rhythms, at different scales, allowing emergent patterns to surprise us, honoring what is taking place in the moment and that to which the group has committed itself. Every choice and each move we make shapes the flow, gives form to some patterns and diminishes others. We continually dance with what is just arising, what is manifest and fully present, and what is falling away in relation to our aims. We learn to honor all of these rhythms in tending the overall integrity of the process.



In *sensing the rhythm*, we tune ourselves as much to apparent discord as to harmony. We take as much interest in the melodies that seem out of tune as those that play mellifluously. They are invariably an important signal. Sometimes one or more participants have not been able to contribute; sometimes an important issue is being overlooked. Sometimes the group is failing to move forward in a timely way; sometimes it has jumped too far ahead and neglected critical earlier stages in a process. Perhaps the direction of the work as a whole needs to be reconsidered. The most well-conceived processes, innovative meeting designs, and imaginative organizational concepts in the world can not protect us from such messiness. *Sensing the rhythm* reminds us to trust the intuitive intelligence available in the moment, when we turn to direct experience for guidance about what is needed.

Consider a jazz combo. Each member is continually feeling for the pulse of the composition, sensing the flow, honoring the contributions of every other, playing his part and awaiting the opportunity to improvise, adding his unique sound and sensibility to the ever-evolving kaleidoscope of the whole. In jazz, I am told, there are no mistakes. Notes that are misplayed are sometimes played again, intentionally, so the musician can see what undiscovered possibilities they create. Just so when we are *sensing the rhythm* – even as we feel for the flow, honoring what is unfolding, we stay open to the creative potentials that are present in each moment. Sometimes they take us in an unexpected direction that proves much more fruitful than the course we had plotted. Sometimes they simply enable us to appreciate what we have accomplished, or to be conscious in our decisions about next steps.

In the project with technical assistance providers mentioned earlier, I had created an audacious agenda with multiple complex objectives to guide our work. As the meeting unfolded, I continually had to judge just how far to take any given task before moving on to the next, knowing we would return to each issue several times before resolving it. Sensing the rhythm meant letting my feeling for the work at each stage both shape and be shaped by my feeling for how all the pieces fit and flowed together, so that by the end of our four days together we would have addressed all the issues successfully. Participants had to exercise the same judgment themselves, and I intentionally involved them in reflecting on the pattern and flow of our process so that *sensing the rhythm* became a collective practice.

Sometimes we must be willing to challenge a rhythm in service to a deeper vision or broader understanding. On our final afternoon, the group was working feverishly to complete a variety of tasks. A critical moment arrived when we mapped out a timeline and participants committed themselves to a series of ambitious next steps. The group rushed through that task, their enthusiasm for the network they were creating reflected in what each promised to do in the subsequent three months, even though all had families and full-time jobs awaiting them at home. The timeline complete, commitments made, they wanted to proclaim their work done and celebrate.

I took a deep breath and asked them to slow down, even though departure times were pressing some. Up to that point we had successfully interwoven numerous complex patterns of activity into a harmonious whole. We had done a marvelous job of *sensing the rhythm* during our time together. Now we needed to realistically *sense the rhythm* of our work in the weeks and months ahead, fully aware of our many other

responsibilities, to ensure we made commitments we could actually keep. On reflection, participants realized that what they had promised to do was not feasible. But they also expressed concern that if the work didn't happen in the timeframe they had developed, the momentum they had created would dissipate. In a long and sobering moment, we all contemplated the realities. I let the silence deepen, and out of it came several creative suggestions that did not require superhuman efforts on anyone's part. We affirmed this new plan, comfortable with the rhythm to which we had committed ourselves, and concluded on time.

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*We are the flow; we are the ebb. We are the weavers; we are the web. – Shekinah Mountainwater*

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In *sensing the rhythm*, as with the other archetypal practices, we engage ourselves at many levels simultaneously. We tune to the inner realm, sense into a group's field, hold the strategic priorities of our organization in mind. Consequently, *sensing the rhythm* calls us to meet the world, our work, and one another with the whole of ourselves, using all our faculties to sense needs and opportunities in every sphere of personal and collective concern. We work with multiple intelligences, which also helps ensure that everyone contributes. To guide our choices, we draw upon both our intuitive wisdom and the pattern intelligence we have honed through experience. We tune ourselves both to what is taking place in any given moment and to that moment's place in a larger process or pattern unfolding over time. As we gain mastery, the patterns themselves become elements in our repertoire and we delight in creating in ever more evocative ways.

### ***Fulfilling Our Aim***

One risk in relation to *sensing the rhythm* is that we lose ourselves in the music, forgetting our aims. Process takes precedence over substance. We seek perfection instead of recognizing what is "good enough," so we can move forward. We become so focused on the intricacy of interaction in the moment that we lose sight of a larger picture.

When this happens, a common urge is to "drive the process." While this may involve *sensing the rhythm* in relation to a narrow and controlled set of parameters, it typically means ignoring important dimensions of relationship as well. The alternative is to introduce a complementary practice – *fulfilling our aims*. Then *sensing the rhythm* can support a group in accomplishing its goals in ways that honor the integrity of the process, all who participate in it, and the purposes to which the group is devoted.

*Fulfilling our aim* orients us once again to purpose. Mindful of his aim, the hero is committed to its realization. He senses the energy in each action that, once set in motion, seeks its completion. His quest is not complete until he returns to his community with the gift it needs for healing and wholeness. He does not command the course of his odyssey, but an instinct for completing the circle takes him home.

Together, *sensing the rhythm and fulfilling our aims* entail working to understand and respect the interrelated dimensions of our lives, relationships, and work in their dynamic, evolving wholeness. We value each phase of a group's process, each

movement in a community's life, and we give each phase or movement its full due. At the same time, we recognize that every phase flows into another, and that if we get stuck in a particular movement we will never complete the cycle and move on to the next. *Fulfilling our aim* fosters true commencement – ending one phase, initiating the next. The circle, we discover, is a spiral.

## **Playing the Whole Game Magically**

The archetypal practices I have outlined are interdependent. They interpenetrate and support one another. Working with any one, we find ourselves cultivating the capacities associated with others. Over time, we discover ourselves spontaneously using them all as needed. We sense that something has crystallized in us - an essential presence – that is open, aware, engaged, and free. Grounded in this presence, we begin *playing the whole game magically*.

*Playing the whole game magically*, the inner diamond of archetypal practice, is the core process reflected in all others. As we become more open, aware, engaged, and free, we find ourselves relating to experience, good or bad, joyous or painful, full of ease or difficulty, in a fundamentally different way. We take our stance in a deeper dimension of Being. We develop equanimity and a new level of comfort with living on the unfolding edge of our knowing and not-knowing. We begin to trust our ability to move even when we cannot see the path that lies ahead. We recognize that there is no final or perfect solution, ever, and that we are constantly learning, experimenting, and evolving.

*Playing the whole game magically*, we know that our lives, relationships, and work are fundamentally creative processes, always and irrevocably. Slowly we develop a love for this process in all its manifestations. We appreciate the value in darkness, confusion, or being lost – and the gifts of clarity, purpose, or coherence. We understand there is deeper coherence that is always to some extent hidden from us. We appreciate pain as the cost of life and of learning. We seek ever more fully to discover, even if we do not understand, the destinies of meaning that await us.

Personally and collectively, we are the instruments on which life is improvising – and we must continually be tuning ourselves as instruments. With practice, we come to trust the intuitive choices we make in relation to whatever is present and emerging in the moment. We come to know that a deeper intelligence consistently brings forth or shows us what is needed. We slowly recognize that our capacity to *play the whole game magically* stems directly from our interconnectedness with others, our fundamental embeddedness in the web of life, and our inextricable belonging to the matrix of spirit that sustains us. We strive to make ourselves more interesting partners for God.

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## **Coda**

### **A Return to Practice**

How do we begin to learn these practices? Because they entail working ever more consciously with ordinary dynamics of the heart and mind, we carry the opportunity for learning with us all the time. Most of us gain some familiarity with them and the forces involved simply by trying to live in wise, conscious, caring ways. Every area of our life potentially offers a context in which to practice, and many different activities – spiritual inquiry, group processes, or creative endeavors, for example – can teach us something about the patterns and principles associated with liberating potential.

Yet working entirely on our own is like entering a vast, unknown land without map or guide. Initially we may have little knowledge of its dangers nor any concrete image of the places we might reach. We can progress and are likely to make discoveries, but the effectiveness of our efforts will be limited. We will not know whether we have missed important pathways, overlooked or misread key signs, or led ourselves into harm's way.

Consequently, we might look for experienced guides - individuals familiar with the practices and how best to develop them, whether *clarifying intent*, *surfing the wave*, or *respecting boundaries*. When we find such individuals, we can share our questions, confide our concerns, and ask for guidance or coaching. If we actually work with them, we can study how they conduct themselves, notice how they respond to specific situations, learn what they are attending to in a given moment, and sense how they work with the full spectrum of their energies. We can also learn from those to whom one or more of the practices simply come more naturally than they do to us. We might notice what in us is touched by their ways of being, or by how they relate to others, and begin to experiment with new behaviors ourselves.

Of course, we also learn from one another in groups. With a shared understanding of and agreement about group aims, we can remind each another of the spirit in which we want to work, explicitly use and reflect on the practices we are cultivating, and direct our collective energies on behalf of the effort. We can encourage each other in *illuminating truth*, provide active support for *staying in the fire*, and be intentional about *sensing the rhythm* in order to guide next steps. Collaborative learning also enables us to create collective containers for energies and emotions that may be too powerful for a single individual to endure – containers that support each of us individually and all of us together in going deeper. Groups, networks, and communities also facilitate our sharing stories, enabling us to benefit from the diverse insights and lessons of others.

Throughout, we learn by attending to the world's response. Sometimes our practice will have an immediate, positive effect, as when *fearless engagement* creates a new opportunity that engenders success. This is wonderfully reinforcing. Sometimes, however – especially in groups not consciously committed to an inner collective practice – *fearless engagement* will evoke harsh reactions. Our *eating the dark and bitter rind* may seem like self-sabotage. *Surrendering to love* may be judged weak or woolly-minded. Again, this is not always so; sometimes the risks we take inspire others to respond in kind, and the group as a whole advances in significant ways. In virtually all communities, people are increasingly hungry for depth and authentic engagement. Even when there are (or might be) critical reactions, this is not in itself sufficient reason to compromise our practice. However, we do well to be mindful of the context in which we undertake these practices, the ways in which we make them visible to others, and the range of responses they might evoke.

With practice – meaning that we will often feel awkward and uncertain during the learning process – we begin to discern, turn to, and trust the soul guidance that was ignored as we looked to outside authorities for answers or let our ambitions and fears prevent us from listening to our own hearts. Over time, we increasingly see through and relax conditioned ways of functioning, then begin to sense and feel the intrinsic energies and intelligence of Being unfolding through us. Eventually, our own experience becomes our best teacher.

## Global Imperative

Our personal and collective development are profoundly interdependent. Each of us longs to be valued and to bring our gifts forward, and the full flowering of each person is essential for the full flowering of any group or community. When we come together consciously, caring for one another, willing to engage the whole of ourselves in learning and innovating in service to shared aims, we can together be more aware, intelligent, innovative, and effective than any of us could be alone.

At the same time, the collective bodies in which we participate are the crucibles in which we as individuals grow. We must attend to their health and development with the same rigor and respect that we accord individual development. The future depends on it, for our organizations and institutions now play the central role in mediating humanity's impact on the biosphere. Cultivating our higher collective potentials for community formation, principled innovation, conflict resolution, fair use of resources, and democratic self-governance is key to our creating healthy, sustainable, and life-enhancing cultures – indeed, to nourishing all life.

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*Our true home is in the present moment.  
To live in the present moment is a miracle.  
The miracle is not to walk on water.  
The miracle is to walk on the green Earth ...  
to appreciate the peace and beauty available now ...  
in our bodies and our spirits.  
Once we learn to touch this peace,  
we will be healed and transformed.  
It is not a matter of faith;  
it is a matter of practice.  
– Thich Nhat Hanh*

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## Endnotes

1. Presencing is the capacity to sense, enact, and embody emerging futures. I see the archetypal practices explored in this paper as part of the “consciousness technology” for presencing. For more information, see *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* by Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers (Society for Organizational Learning, 2004). [back](#)

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## About the Author

Thomas J. Hurley is a consultant, writer, and executive coach based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Tom was managing director of the Chaordic Alliance and first coordinating director of the Chaordic Commons. For seventeen years, he helped grow and lead the Institute of Noetic Sciences. A writer and poet, Tom holds a black belt in aikido and lives with his wife and son in Richmond, California.

For more information, contact:

[Thomas J. Hurley](#) and Associates

821 Bancroft Way  
Berkeley CA 94710  
Phone 510-849-2698  
[email](#)

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