

Leadership and the Wisdom Traditions

Patrick Bower

An essay contribution to
Conversation 2014

garyhubbell  **consulting**

GHC Conversations

Annually, Gary Hubbell Consulting convenes and hosts a small hand-picked group of social sector professionals for three days of intense dialogue and critical thinking. We strive to create a thought-provoking, mind-opening, and stimulating conversation about the social sector, philanthropy, and leadership. This deep exploration of the nature and challenges of the environment is intended to engage, inform, and inspire senior leaders to be catalysts for change in their own organizations and communities of influence. With each GHC Conversation, we seek to establish the seeds of a continuing and enriching network that nourishes us as individuals and helps each of us change how we converse, inspire, and seek new dimensions of impact.



Participant Bio

Patrick Bower

Vice President—development, St. Luke's University Health Network

Patrick Bower serves as the vice president for development at St. Luke's University Health Network, an integrated network of six hospitals serving Northeastern Pennsylvania and Western New Jersey.

Pat has 28 years of experience in the management of non-profit organizations, with particular expertise in campaign management and major gift fundraising. He has held senior fundraising positions at the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey (now part of Rutgers University), Iona College and the Boy Scouts of America. During the course of his career, Pat has led fundraising programs that secured over \$200 million in charitable support.

Pat began his career as a community organizer in Chicago and Jersey City, New Jersey where he supported residents in their efforts to improve public education, neighborhood safety and serious environmental concerns.

Pat grew up in West Virginia and is a graduate of West Virginia University and St. Mary's Seminary, where he studied English literature, philosophy and theology. He enjoys hiking, reading and spending time with his wife, Diane, and their four children. Pat currently serves as Scoutmaster of Troop 121 in Clinton, NJ. He is a member of the Visiting Committee, WVU College of Arts & Sciences, Department of English and a trustee of the Minsi Trails Council, Boy Scouts of America.

This is Pat's first GHC *Conversation*.

Leadership and the Wisdom Traditions

Patrick Bower

As Third Sector leaders we desire stronger families, healthier lifestyles, better-educated children and increasing access to jobs and opportunity. Our collective hope for this brighter future is articulated in the mission statements of the nation's 1.5 million charities; but the way forward is unclear:

- **Our healthcare system** has transformed our ability to overcome illness and disease, enabling those with access to care the opportunity for full and active lives that past generations could only dream of. Yet, health care is expensive and perhaps unsustainable in its current form. It has also been criticized for overtreatment, medical errors, chronic underfunding of wellness and prevention, and failure to provide care to all.
- **Our public schools** have produced generations of well-prepared students who graduated into jobs that enabled them to support families and provide upward mobility for their children. But the middle class is shrinking and the nation's wealth gap is wider now than at any point in the past 75 years. As a result, our urban schools and the children they serve are in crisis, characterized by low-achievement, high drop-out rates, and a general malaise among teachers and students alike.
- **Strong families and supportive community organizations** have long been the bedrock of our economic and cultural success. They have imbued the unifying values of self-reliance, concern for others and a shared belief in a better future for all. Yet, increasing numbers of children are growing-up in unstable families. Violence and compromising behavior now cripple so many that our worst fears are being confirmed: fewer young people are entering adulthood with the character traits and resilience needed to forge authentic pathways to success and independence.

Conversation 2014 is an opportunity to consider how we can be more effective in meeting the challenges of our time—in both our employed roles as senior executives of hospitals, schools, and human service organizations and in our non-employed roles as volunteers and benefactors.

When I first heard the organizing theme *Right Being...Wise Action...In Community*, I was struck by its metaphysical orientation. This phrasing seems to invite a discussion that is broader than the familiar topics of process improvement and business strategy. In fact, the phrase *Right Being...Wise Action...In Community* can be considered an elegantly concise definition of both wisdom and the goal of wisdom.

- **Right Being** concerns our basic orientation to the source of life as we define it and how that orientation is expressed in our relationship to ourselves and others. Right Being

values congruence, authenticity and faithfulness to core beliefs, especially those that are shared by the world's major wisdom traditions: a belief in the sacredness of life and the interconnectedness of all things; an insistence on the primacy of love and the importance of servant-leadership and; acknowledgement that authentic spirituality involves the systematic deconstruction of the ego or false self.

- **Wise Action** flows from Right Being. It is an attitude toward life that is open, accepting and non-judgmental. Its hallmark is love and compassion towards ourselves and others leading to healing and personal wholeness. Wise Action stands in opposition to manipulation and dependency and often means refraining from action.
- **In Community** implies a willingness to enlarge our perspective and act collaboratively in the best interests of the group, affirming shared history, shared experience and most of all, shared consensus regarding values and goals. To "be In Community" this way demands authenticity achieved through dialogue and compromise.

The inward turn suggested by *Conversation 2014* is offered with full appreciation for the past efforts by non-profit organizations to solve these problems with innovative programming and enlightened management. But the social and cultural problems we are encountering today are so large and complex that honest consideration of spiritual and psychological understandings is warranted, especially given our limited success in resolving the ego disputes and turf wars that make lasting progress so difficult. Perhaps a higher level of consciousness is just what is needed to pull us out of the low places where we are currently stuck, tires spinning, mud flying in all directions?

Much has been written about this path to wisdom or higher consciousness. Our collective understanding of the journey is contained in our sacred stories and myths. By design, these stories invite multiple perspectives, asking us to honor them in their wholeness. When we resist the urge to turn them into propaganda, they reveal important truths about ourselves and each other and the importance of authentic leadership.

In this essay, I hope to explain four qualities of wisdom that each of world's major spiritual traditions encourages us to adopt. These qualities are proven gateways to authenticity and joy. They lead to greater organizational effectiveness and a growing ability to recognize and acknowledge value in all situations. When practiced consistently, these four qualities function as internal gyroscopes enabling us to call forth life-affirming responses in ourselves and others.

Mahatma Gandhi, one of the 20th century's most admired leaders, said: "If we could change ourselves, the tendencies of the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change toward him."¹ When we take these words to heart our personal and professional goals become an ongoing mission to foster change in ourselves in hopes of bringing change to others and the organizations we care about.

In Christianity, the journey to understand and model these wisdom qualities is known as servant-leadership. In Buddhism it is called the bodhisattva path; Joseph Campbell wrote about this path in the *Hero with a Thousand Faces* and the poetry of Rumi points to the dynamic and bright space this path leads toward. The qualities we will consider in this essay include: wisdom's invitation to embrace our fears and challenging emotions; wisdom's invitation to enter second-half-of-life thinking; wisdom's invitation to enlarge our perspective; and wisdom's invitation to embrace ambiguity.

¹(Morton)

In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Fredrick Nietzsche said: "And there is nobody from whom I want beauty as much as from you who are powerful: let your kindness be your final self-conquest."² When we hear these words, a space deep inside our heart opens in response. Instinctively, we understand kindness and love are what we most need if we are to heal ourselves and each other. But how do we acquire the perspective needed for kindness and the ongoing discernment of Right Being...Wise Action...In Community?

Let's begin by considering wisdom's invitation to embrace our fears and challenging emotions. Fear influences so much of what we do and how we experience life. Fear of uncertainty and change keeps us trapped in familiar but unfulfilling situations. Fear of criticism and rejection prevents us from pursuing new ideas and fully developing our talents. Challenging emotions frighten us and cause us to contract, erecting walls to keep people and situations at bay. In our smallness, we vacillate between the poles of grasping and aversion, fervently trying to manage our experience of life. These tendencies bring suffering. They diminish our capacity for relationship and cut us off from the joyful moment-by-moment awareness that is our birthright.

Wisdom invites us to abandon these controlling habits and relate to ourselves and others in a more fulfilling way. The first step toward this playful and energetic space is to honestly connect with our feelings and experience life as it unfolds. This requires a willingness to "accept what comes" as a gift.

But connecting with powerful emotions, especially the disagreeable ones, and learning to see them as gifts is not easy. Most of us have spent a lifetime developing coping strategies to separate us from this volatile energy. Wisdom asks us to investigate our tendencies to shut down or numb out. Some of us use alcohol or drugs; others use food; many more use defensiveness or judgment as a strong shield. Excessive busyness is a common strategy whereby we attempt to outrun our uncomfortable feelings, never slowing down long enough to experience our true self. Our culture, like all cultures, is complicit in this communal exercise of avoidance and supplies us with never-ending opportunities to escape. If fact, grasping and pushing-away is so habitual and automatic, we rarely notice these tendencies in ourselves.

As a result of this failure to connect with "our life as it occurs" and embrace our fears and challenging emotions, we do not learn the important lesson life wants to teach us: "acceptance of what comes", especially the things that scare us, is the vehicle for our transformation. This "openness to life" is the gateway to enduring stability and joy and an important step toward wisdom.

To fully appreciate wisdom's invitation to "open to our experience," it helps to think of past situations from our personal life when a willingness to embrace or deal with "what comes" or "what happened" has helped us grow. Perhaps it was the courage to finally end a destructive relationship or seek new employment. Maybe it was a few baby steps taken to develop a skill that had never been acknowledged or appreciated. Perhaps it was coming to understand that the "bad thing" that happened long ago is the source of something good. The situation in question might have led to deeper empathy and compassion or caused your path to intersect with the person who is now your best friend.

We can also apply this willingness to "welcome what comes" in our professional and organizational lives. In my work leading a multi-campus hospital development program, I am finding it helpful to slow down and connect with my emotions and fears for the future.

²(Kaufman)

These feelings help me identify my learning agenda.

My current fear is that I will fail in my efforts to identify and build relationships with increasing numbers of potential new donors. I am also afraid our planning has historically been weak and our program has become too dependent on outlier gifts. Rather than run from these fears, I am trying to embrace them. We recently engaged outside counsel and completed a comprehensive planning process. We have also initiated a robust dialogue regarding process improvement, especially as it relates to major gift fundraising. These discussions have led to efforts to build a successful physician champion program leading to increased giving from grateful patients.

Several years ago my 13-year old daughter made a special gift for me. It was sculpture featuring a fearsome painted dragon encircling the world, holding on firmly with its sharp claws, head poised to spew fire. Kelsey had no understanding of the power and depth of the image she selected, but I did.

When she is older, I will teach her about Hindu and Buddhist iconography and the symbolism conveyed by dragons and mythic creatures. They adorn the gateways to Asian temples and communicate a fundamental psychological and spiritual truth. Personal transformation requires us to befriend our dragons, the situations in our life we most want to run from.

I keep this painted dragon on my desk to remind me of wisdom's never-ending call to "welcome what comes." Wisdom asks us to practice this radical acceptance every moment of our day, opening to the white heat of anger or the lonely feelings of rejection.³ Following this path leads to an emotional flexibility and deep-seated empathy we never thought possible. These skills serve us well in our roles as leaders and agents of change, enabling us to act with greater confidence and boldness. Sometimes this confidence encourages a tender forbearance; other times it demands we act boldly, cutting off the head of the snake before it can strike.

As we progress on wisdom's path, slowly letting go of our fear and desire to grasp and push away, *wisdom invites us to enter second-half-of-life thinking*.⁴ We do this by developing a greater understanding of the first-half-of-life when we became "the people we are," in response to a world that both frightened and excited us.

As most of us know, we were not alone in this effort to mold ourselves. Our parents, peers and authority figures alternatively shamed and encouraged us in their effort to fashion us into images of their liking. Much of this shaping was unconscious. We internalized their voices, pushing part of ourselves into light and part into shadow, coping with personal traumas as best we could, acquiring the inner strength and practical skills needed to achieve independence. Since fear, anxiety, control and ego were always nearby, we developed patterns of helpful and off-putting behaviors.⁵

Life would truly be a sad and unfulfilling affair if we remained stuck in this first-half-of-life thinking, willing to sacrifice authentic relationships and collaborations to our ego concerns. Yet, so much of our personal and cultural life remains dominated by first-half-of-life actions and their consequences. Just pick up a newspaper or tune into your favorite news website for an up-to-the-minute reminder that when we, in the words of James Hollis "choose security over growth, we outrage the soul, and the soul outraged manifests in symptoms

³Brach

⁴Rhor

⁵Richo

of depression, anxiety disorders, envy and jealousy of others, dependencies and so much more.”⁶

Second-half-of-life-thinking values interdependence above independence; it is head below heart; power in service to love. Second-half-of-life thinking requires much soul-work on our part and can be considered a veritable “weeding of the garden” to untangle the mixed motivations, judgments and personal anxiety management systems that separate us from others and a spirit of true belonging.

This second-half-of-life designation is not so much about chronological age; it concerns spiritual orientation. Some people are in their 30s when second-half-of-life thinking emerges, others are in their 40s and 50s; and some people remain stuck in first-half-of-life thinking and behaviors well into old age, never fully relinquishing the ego’s firm grip on their actions and attitudes.

Recently, a colleague shared one in a series of letters he had received from a physician who had been justly terminated from his hospital leadership position. This dismissal followed a series of ethical and fiduciary breeches and was now ancient history, having occurred almost 20 years ago. Even though the aggrieved physician is now past 80, he still feels compelled to defend his wounded ego, lashing out repeatedly at those whom he believes perpetuated the injustice. How sad that he has remained stuck in first-half-of-life thinking his entire life!

Irish poet and Hegelian philosopher John Donahue has given a helpful hint to those wishing to enter second-half-of-life thinking. He wrote “if you want to grow spiritually, identify a point of contradiction in your life. Find the threshold moments where the sides of the contradiction meet. At those times and places stay faithful to the aura and presence of that contradiction and hold its two sides gently in your embrace and ask it what it wants to teach you.”⁷

This willingness to hold the paradox, to be transparent with ourselves and others, bringing our personal and institutional contradictions into the light, is the hallmark of second-half-of-life thinking. By dropping our cherished story lines and shifting our perspective we are able to be vulnerable with ourselves and others. This vulnerability is a great gift. It opens a space inside us that fosters compassion. Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron acknowledged this gift when she wrote: “Dwelling in the in-between states requires learning to contain the paradox of someone being strong and loving and also angry, uptight and stingy. In that painful moment when we don’t live up to our standards, do we condemn ourselves or truly appreciate the paradox of being human?”⁸

Vulnerability is increasingly being discussed as an essential attribute of leadership and overall happiness. A recent TED talk on the subject by Brene Brown went viral, generating over 4 million views. In the *Gifts of Imperfection*, Dr. Brown writes: “Wholehearted living is about engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness. It means cultivating the courage, compassion, and connection to wake up in the morning and think “no matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough.” It’s going to bed at night thinking “yes I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn’t change the truth that I am also brave and worthy of love and belonging.”⁹

⁶Hollis

⁷O’Donohue

⁸Chodron

⁹Brown

Second-half-of-life thinking and acting is about bringing the truth of this essential worthiness to greater awareness in ourselves and the people we care about. It is about understanding the depth of Rumi's poetic insight when he said "Bless your wounds; they are the places where light enters your body."¹⁰ When our speech, actions and behaviors are grounded in this inner authenticity and worth, the likelihood we will act with wisdom is greatly enhanced.

In my professional life as a philanthropic leader, one of my key responsibilities is to identify and foster generosity. While first-half-of-life people make charitable gifts, transformative giving is most often the domain of second-half-of-life people and their concerns. To connect more effectively with these special people, I am taking more risks in my one-on-one meetings, probing more deeply to uncover predominating values and their concrete expression.

This more careful listening is helping me stay focused on my aspirational goal of adding value to each and every relationship. I want to help people identify what they most want to accomplish via philanthropy and assist them in bringing more good to the world. Authentic stewardship, transparency and a renewed focus on communicating impact are essential attributes of this more mature approach to fundraising.

When we begin to move past first-half-of-life thinking, with its emphasis on security and ego-concerns, toward second-half-of-life thinking, with its emphasis on spiritual transformation, *wisdom invites us to enlarge our perspective*. This enlargement is painful and requires us to redefine our understanding of security and the meaning of life. This fundamental redefinition of meaning is what Jesus meant when he spoke about "death to self" and "opening to a more abundant life."¹¹

In the ego-dominated first-half-of-life world, our anxiety is relieved by possessing or controlling people, situations and things. Vulnerability is feared and the goal of life is often reduced to acquisition and consumption. To hold this narrow perspective invites spiritual malaise and growing isolation.

Our wisdom traditions warn against becoming stuck in this inherently unsatisfying experience of life. They encourage individual and societal transformation, advocating a deeper connection with ourselves, each other and the world around us. Wisdom encourages this larger view of life and emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things.¹²

But what path will lead us to this more expansive view? How do we acquire the mature perspective needed to move beyond individualism and our ego-centric viewpoints? Each of the world's spiritual traditions has affirmed three paths leading to an expansive world view. These paths can be summarized as great love, great suffering and great silence.

To our modern mind, the most enigmatic of these paths is the reference to great silence. As modern people, we have almost no use for silence and take every opportunity to fill our days with sound. Even during prayer, those moments when we consciously try to connect with something larger and more expansive, our consciousness becomes filled with words, either spoken or repeated inside our head.

Christian mystic Thomas Merton's great contribution to western spirituality was an almost single-handed effort to re-introduce the path of great silence to the Christian tradition.

¹⁰Barks

¹¹Rhor, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*

¹²Tolle

Eastern spirituality, with its emphasis on meditation, always maintained a healthy perspective on silence and, fortunately for us, the past fifty years bears witness to great sharing between east and west.

The affirmation of great silence as an essential path is shared by other traditions too. I recently came across a heart-wrenching passage written by Chief Luther Standing Bear, a Native American Indian who experienced the destruction of his culture and cherished way of life. He wrote: "The man who sat on the ground in his tipi meditating on life and its meaning, accepting the kinship of all creatures and acknowledging unity with the universe of things was infusing into his being the true essence of civilization. And when native man left off this form of development, his humanization was retarded in growth."¹³

Chief Luther Standing Bear's lament should be an encouragement to us all to seek enlarged perspective with greater zeal and fidelity. But silence still remains a hard sell. To some people sitting quietly, attending the breath, grounding oneself in the moment-by-moment experience of the body, letting the mind grow still and releasing thoughts as they arise is torture to be avoided at all costs.

While it is difficult to enter silence for any length of time, the value of meditation or contemplative prayer is undeniable. It creates greater acceptance and spaciousness in our relationship to ourselves and the people and situations we encounter. Meditation fosters the helpful ability to pause in our response to the world, enabling us to connect with our highest aspirations and make wiser, more life-affirming choices.

Wisdom's invitation to enlarge perspective has a number of pressing implications for my professional life, especially during this time of systemic change. Health system leaders are increasingly being asked to realign services to ensure that "value to the patient" is the overarching goal.¹⁴ The coming focus on bundled payments, readmission rates, and population health management will also influence our traditional brick and mortar fundraising priorities.

In the future, hospitals may be called upon to lead community-wide wellness and prevention efforts and other projects the community feels add value and reflect their non-profit mission. Increased fundraising activity for medical and nursing education is anticipated, as well as an expanded focus on improving access for marginal populations. Support for robust care coordination and life enhancing services like hospice is predicted. We are also likely to see more fundraising initiatives to acquire technology whose purchase is jeopardized by decreases in operating capital.

As we enlarge our perspective, making deeper connections and fostering more value-oriented approaches, additional qualities of wisdom make themselves known, including *wisdom's invitation to embrace ambiguity*.

First-half-of-life thinking does not understand the transformative power of ambiguity. It delights in absolutes, using them to calm our fearful egos, preventing us from gazing too deep into the abyss of uncertainty. Rules, cherished understandings, predictability and "the true facts" as we perceive them are woven into firm ground to stand on. We live comfortably in this space, but at great cost. We are cut off from a vast openness and much of the vitality and joy of our life is drained away.

Spiritual maturity requires us to shatter our containers of certainty again and again,

¹³McLuhan

¹⁴Lee

exchanging predictability for mystery as we accept the invitation to “live life as a river flows, carried by the surprise of its unfolding.”¹⁵ When we honor life in this way, wisdom’s transformative energy is released and the payoff is substantial: we acquire a newfound trust in life and a confidence in our ability to flourish in all situations.

In *What Matters Most: Living a More Considered Life* Jungian analyst James Hollis said it well when he wrote: “Certainty begets stagnation, but ambiguity pulls us deeper into life. Unchallenged conviction begets rigidity, which begets regression; but ambiguity opens us to discovery, complexity and therefore growth. The health of our culture and the magnitude of our personal journeys require that we learn to tolerate ambiguity in service to a larger life.”¹⁶

The great sadness of the modern world and perhaps all of world history is culture’s inevitable hijacking of religious tradition. We continually bind-up wisdom’s transformative power, tamping it down to protect first-half-of-life concerns. If you have any doubts about this, just consider the many times religious leaders have been complicit in protecting the church’s cultural position at the expense of justice. It is also why there is such great enthusiasm for religious leaders who are perceived as second-half-of-life people advocating for second-half-of-life concerns. The growing popularity of Pope Francis speaks to this hunger for authentic leadership.

Deep down, our religious traditions understand culture’s power to hijack them and a collection of enigmatic sayings has emerged to guard against complacency. Contemplating these phrases is painful, until we realize their purpose is to help exchange our certainty in favor of transformation.

“If you meet the Buddha, kill him.” - Vajra Sutra;

“The Tao that can be named is not the Tao.” - Lao Tse;

“God is the God who appears when God has disappeared.” - Paul Tillich.¹⁷

As leaders, when we accept wisdom’s call to embrace ambiguity our ability to tolerate the ups and downs of volatile business cycles and the inevitable personal and professional setbacks is greatly enhanced. We develop greater confidence in our instincts and willingness to abandon outdated road maps. We also find that when stripped of our fear of uncertainty, we become willing agents of change or, as the leader of a large and complex business recently said to me: Leaders are called to be the rod who stirs the drink.

I am slowly learning to harness the power of ambiguity in my professional life. It is helping me investigate and let go of past certainties and cherished fundraising approaches that may no longer be working.

Some of my immediate learning is an effort to understand the positives and negatives of batch thinking as it relates to my efforts to build stronger, more dynamic relationships with benefactors and potential partners. What opportunities are lost when I fall into the maul of special event management or persuade myself that broad-based communication efforts will call forth generosity? How much time have I wasted on connecting strategies that are hit or miss at best? Are my interactions with people truly relational or do I drift toward a narrow transactional focus more frequently than I would like to admit? My growing tolerance for ambiguity has given me the courage to “stir the drink” and ask these questions with greater honesty.

¹⁵O’Donohue

¹⁶Hollis

¹⁷Tillich

For those of us working in healthcare, the coming decade will offer numerous opportunities to reinvent ourselves as our industry undergoes the most comprehensive transformation in its history. The journey before us is akin to rebuilding a speeding car without removing our foot from the gas, even though we suspect the car's driver is blindfolded.

I hope these reflections have been helpful in advancing us toward a shared understanding of leadership and the wisdom traditions. Their ancient and powerful insights can help us become better people and more effective leaders who willingly embrace our fears and challenging emotions; enter second-half-of-life thinking; enlarge our perspective, and embrace ambiguity.

If we are struggling to understand our leadership agenda, either personally or professionally, the most helpful thing we can do is to identify our contradictions, asking gently, but firmly "What do they want to teach us?" For these contradictions reflect us, better than any mirror can, pointing toward our highest aspirations and our basest fears. We should approach them with a sense of awe and reverence for what they can teach us about "who we are" and "who we want to become."

As a hospital executive, I am fascinated by the contradictions that have been revealed by the healthcare debate. The depth of emotion on both sides of this issue should cause us to pause and ask: "What is really going on here? Is this just a debate over the implementation of the Affordable Care Act or is something larger taking place?"

Answering these questions honestly is difficult given our capacity for collective self-deception and self-aggrandizement. Wisdom in her role as "the voice of the Lord that strips the forest bare" understands this better than we do. She invites us to let the complexity of our stories reveal the contradictions in our personal and collective psyches, freeing us from the grip of self-deception.

The stories exposing our healthcare system's mixed motivations and confused values unfold every day. The main characters are our mothers and fathers, our husbands, wives and children, and our best friends. Some stories involve triumph and the heroic use of medical skill and technology to restore life; others reveal this same technology being used to prolong suffering and death. Some stories demonstrate compassion and great tenderness; others reveal insensitivity and error leading to harm. There are stories of intentional overtreatment for economic gain and stories of care denied due to poverty or prejudice. There are stories of frivolous litigation, of runaway juries, of justified malpractice awards and travesties of justice so severe the careers of good men and woman have been destroyed in an effort to account for the unaccountable capriciousness of life.

Each one of these stories functions like Indra's net, reflecting the full measure of our humanity, with its infinite capacity for both generosity and greed. They reveal our defining tensions and never-ending struggle to understand what matters most:

- We value inclusiveness and diversity, but fail to make a place at the healthcare table for everyone;
- We value health, but define well-being too narrowly, misaligning our resources and failing to encourage personal responsibility and prevention;
- We value economic competition and the innovation it fosters, but we do not understand how to reduce waste and avoid needless duplication of scarce resources;
- We value life, but our fear of death is so great we have not yet developed the cultural wisdom to help each other understand when "enough is enough," stewarding precious resources and enabling the heart to complete its noble journey homeward.

Wisdom understands all of this and acknowledges our “Jacob wrestling with the angel struggle”¹⁸ to negotiate the compromises of life. This journey to life’s far shore is our personal odyssey; it is what defines us as human beings and leaders. And like the main character of Homer’s great epic, wisdom invites us to place our individuality and personal challenges in the context of the hero’s journey toward wisdom and a growing love for the world.

Near the end of the *Odyssey*, one of the western world’s oldest and most influential stories, the prophet Tiresias gives Odysseus one final task. He is commanded to pick up an oar from his ship and walk away from the sea until he meets a traveler who mistakes the oar for a winnowing shovel. When that happens, Odysseus is to offer sacrifice to the gods, marking the end of his 20-year journey, and return to Ithaca to reign in peace and prosperity.¹⁹

In the ancient world, the winnowing shovel was the symbol of discernment, a tool for separating wheat from chaff. Like Odysseus, the leader’s journey is not complete until we can successfully work with our experience in such a way that it enables us to discern imperishable value in our self, others and every circumstance of life.²⁰

This continuous uncovering or sifting for value is what our greatest spiritual teachers mean when they say “the path to wisdom lies in choosing to love the world.” The love they refer to is not the romanticized or sentimental love of Hollywood or the blissed-out saccharine love of popular culture. The love we are pointing toward is a rare and precious thing; it is born when we can sit in the flames of our experience and find the courage to welcome all people and situations in their wholeness, understanding that life never wastes an opportunity to invite growth, continually encouraging us to participate in the unfolding of our uniqueness.²¹

This transformative love is at the heart of all authentic community; it is a yielding that acknowledges the rub exists for the polishing and without sand the oyster would never produce the pearl. This view of life is *Right Being...Wise Action...In Community!*²²

¹⁸Abrahamsky

¹⁹Home

²⁰Luke

²¹Merton, *Choosing to Love the World*

²²Ray



Ride your horse along the edge
of the sword

Hide yourself in the middle
of the flames

Blossoms of the fruit tree will
bloom in the fire

The sun rises in the evening

*Thomas Merton*²³

Out beyond ideas of rightdoing and wrongdoing,
there is a field. I will meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.

Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
doesn't make any sense

*Rumi*²⁴

²³Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*

²⁴Barks

Bibliography

- Abrahamsky, Michael. "Jacob Wrestles With the Angel: A Study in Psychoanalytic Midrash." *The Journal of Transpersonal Studies* (2010): 106-117.
- Barks, Coleman. *Essential Rumi*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004.
- Brach, Tara. *Radical Acceptance*. New York: Bantam Dell, 2003.
- Brown, Brene. *The Gifts of Imperfection*. Center City, MN: Hazeldon, 2010.
- Chodron, Pema. *The Places That Scare You*. Boston & London: Shambhala Publications Inc., 2001.
- Hollis, James. *What Matters Most: Living a More Considered Life*. New York: Penguin Group, 2009.
- Homer. *The Oddessy Book X*. The Internet Classic Archive, n.d. 28 January 2014.
- Kaufman, Walter. *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Penguin Group, 1954.
- Lee, Michael E. Porter and Thomas H. "The Strategy That Will Fix Health Care." *Harvard Business Review* October 2013.
- Luke, Helen. *Old Age: Journey into Simplicity*. Parabola Books, 1987.
- McLuhan, T. C. *Touch the Earth: A Self Portrait of Indian Existence*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971.
- Merton, Thomas. *Choosing to Love the World*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2008.
- . *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. New York: New Directions, 1968.
- Morton, Brian. *Falser Words Were Never Spoken*. New York: New York Times, 2011.
- O'Donohue, John. *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*. New York: Harper Collins, 1997.
- Ray, Reginald. *Refuge in the Sangha*. www.DharmaOcean.org. Crestone, CO, 3 April 2013. Podcast.
- Rhor, Richard. *Falling Upward*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.
- Richo, David. *Shadow Dance*. Boston & London: Shambhala, 2010.
- Rohr, Richard. *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2009.
- Tillich, Paul. *The Courage to Be*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952.
- Tolle, Eckhart. *The Power of Now*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1997.



Planning ▪ Strategy ▪ Philanthropy ▪ Coaching

In order to strengthen adaptive organizations for inevitable
change and greater impact

Offices in Milwaukee, WI and Hilton Head Island, S.C.

www.garyhubbellconsulting.com

Corporate Office:
3143 East Hampshire Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53211
414-962-6696