

**Bringing Your Spiritual Practice into Your Work<sup>1</sup>**  
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**Introduction**

A major reason for writing this paper is my desire to encourage readers to bring their spirituality and their spiritual practices into their work in the world, and to endeavor to create in their organizations a climate hospitable to others who may wish to do so.

Most professionals are reluctant to speak in our organizational and work lives about our spiritual practices. I have experienced a similar reluctance in myself. I have been an organization development consultant during all of my working life, over fifty years so far (See Harrison, 1995, 1995a). I have written a good deal about organizational cultures, issues of consulting practice and the like, but I, too, have avoided expressing myself in print regarding how I have tried to integrate my spiritual practice with my professional life. However, a major passion during my half century as an organization development consultant has been to encourage my clients and colleagues to pay attention to the shadow aspects of organizational life, those that are usually unspoken. For example, in the face of warnings by some colleagues about possible consequences to my reputation, I first wrote in the eighties about the importance of accessing the power of love in organizations (Harrison, 1983, 1987). So far as I can tell, my professional image suffered no harm as a result. Now it seems appropriate to take another step in that direction, and, perhaps, to contravene another taboo by exploring ways of bringing one's spiritual practice into one's work.

I have for a long time been interested in possibilities for knowing and doing that are not mediated by our five senses. Examples of these might be

- The uses of "positive thinking," affirmations, synchronicities, and other approaches to manifesting desired outcomes of our projects and intentions.
- Non-traditional approaches to healing, such as Reiki (Haberly, 1990), energy healing, healing prayer, and Kything (Savary & Berne, 1988).
- Using kinesiology (muscle testing, pendulum, dowsing, etc.) to access inner knowing.
- Communicating and partnering with non-physical guides, allies and helpers, including various forms of meditation and prayer.

In recent years a growing number of books, articles and web sites devoted to these matters have surfaced, and people are becoming more open in speaking about their beliefs and practices in working with things unseen. Now, having given talks on this subject to other consultants that were warmly received, it's time for me to write about it.

First let me say a little about what I mean by spirituality and spiritual practice. Here are three definitions from a paper on teaching spirituality to business students (Pielstick, 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> To be published in ReVision, Vol. 30, Issues 3 & 4, April 2009: Transformative Leadership, Alfonso Montuori and Urusa Fahim, Eds.

Oxford Desk Dictionary, The quality or condition pertaining to the nonmaterial, higher moral qualities, or the sacred.

Mitroff & Denton (1999, p. xv), The desire to find ultimate meaning and purpose in life, and to live an integrated life.

King (cited in Gibbons, 2000, p. II-13), The search for direction, meaning, inner wholeness, and connectedness to others, to non-human creation and to a transcendent.

When I use the term, I am referring to experiences of the sacred, and to practices that may lead to such experiences.

Present in each of us there is an inherent drive to move toward wholeness in the course of our evolution as persons. In consequence, if both one's work and one's spiritual life are vital and alive, one will begin to experience a need to bring them into congruence with one another, and, indeed perhaps to speak freely about them. In the work cultures many of us live in, there are perceived and sometimes real costs and consequences of being open about these matters.

The views I present are based upon my own experience as a consultant, mostly with private sector organizations. During that time, I have come increasingly to value wholeness in my inner life and my work experiences, and I have found that the inner and outer can enrich the other when I bring them together.

Along with many members of my generation, I was trained early to avoid conversation about sex, religion, or politics in most social gatherings. In the circles in which I now move, the prohibition against references to sex has been relaxed much more than those regarding politics, religion and spirituality. I have found in conversation with others that a surprising number of people are engaged in bringing their spiritual beliefs, values and practices into their work, but they often feel isolated and alone or lonely in doing so. We have come, it seems, to identify the principle of religious and spiritual freedom with a prohibition against speaking publicly about what we do and think in our spiritual lives. Perhaps one reason for that is the fear that one will be judged by others who do not agree with one's utterances, even, especially, when the others do not voice their negative judgments.

I probably push the boundaries on speaking about my spiritual practice more than many, and what I have found is that such conversations go along best when I talk less and listen more—doing the latter with as much empathy as I can muster—and when I am able to avoid judgmental thoughts. Come to think of it, that holds true for conversations about most things!

In this paper, I intend to describe my personal journey in bringing my work and my spiritual life into harmony and congruence with one another. I know from others who have entered into such an undertaking that they have had similar or analogous results to mine. I suspect many others have taken on a similar task to mine, have proceeded in very different ways, and have obtained equally satisfying results. I believe that whatever one's religious or spiritual path, it can offer rich opportunities within it to affect one's work and one's workplace for the better, whether that be through following one's basic spiritual principles and values in work, through prayer and

meditation, or through engaging in specific practices intended to furnish guidance, assistance and blessing to the practitioner and to others by spiritual means. I hope that my story may be useful to others by opening up options and possibilities to consider from the standpoint of one's own understandings and inclinations.

I shall also suggest here that practices for working with the being, soul or essence of an organization in a spiritual way can be of value to consultants and leaders, and indeed to any member of an organization. I shall give examples of such work from my own practice, and suggest ways in which the work may be approached.

I shall also briefly address the difficult issue of when and how to share one's own spiritual practices and experiences with others. That is a growing edge for me, and indeed, writing this paper is part of my learning process in that regard.

### **My own experiences and practices**

Having had a very secular upbringing in a family of scientists and engineers, I had little spiritual or religious training. Although I often experienced feelings of awe and transcendence in the natural world, I did not interpret those feelings as in any way spiritual. My awakening to things spiritual began when, in my early forties, I realized on a transatlantic flight to the US from my then home in London that I had no burning ambitions or desires, having come pretty close to achieving most of those I started with, both in my personal life and in my work as a consultant. I mused that if the aircraft were to fall into the ocean, there would not be too much left unfinished, and yet I expected to live as long again as I had to that point. The journey behind me was full of bumps, dead ends and steep places; the one ahead seemed flat and rather empty.

The time was the early seventies; I had heard something of eastern spiritual practices, but knew nothing about such matters., except that meditation was reputed to be an antidote to the feelings of meaninglessness and emptiness that I was then experiencing. Having always been highly achievement oriented, I began a spiritual search that over the next seven years included Transcendental Meditation, the Arica forty day training (Ichazo, 2008), and a variety of other excursions into the esoteric. Then came a night in 1978 when I was walking home from a session at the Nyingma (Tibetan) Institute in Berkeley, wondering why all this searching was such a lot of work. It came to me that I had been striving to get into highly exalted states of consciousness, but I wasn't really what I thought of as a good person. I didn't always tell the truth; I viewed the law as something to be respected only when someone was watching. I was avaricious, striving to get at least my share, and often more than my share, in my business dealings. I seemed to be aiming for an advanced degree in the practice of spirituality, but I hadn't yet passed Decent Personhood 101.

Starting then, my aspirations became more modest. I directed my attention to the basics of integrity, generosity, kindness and open-heartedness—often making progress, sometimes backsliding. I expect to continue that process, along with other spiritual practices I have encountered that serve me and others, for the rest of my life.

During the early nineties, when I was about 60, I began to work with an energy healer at a time when I was having a difficult time recovering from the termination of an intense love relationship. She introduced me to the use of flower essences for self healing, and to kinesiology as a way of communicating with my body as to which essences would benefit me at a given time. Wright (1988) describes both the use of flower essences and of kinesiology.

This work stimulated me to embark on an exploration of ways of receiving information from non-physical sources. I began with some success to use Wright's methods to complement my reason and my intuition in dealing with difficult issues in my consulting practice, as well as in my life generally. More recently I have expanded my understanding and my practice through study with David Spangler and the Lorian Association.

Wright provides detailed methods for obtaining practical guidance on whatever activity or project one is engaged in, through accessing a combined "team" composed of devas, nature spirits, "The White Brotherhood"<sup>2</sup> and one's higher self. Such a team may be enlisted for immediate assistance with health, business, relationship or other issues, or may be asked to enter into an ongoing relationship in support of an ongoing life issue or project.

David Spangler's work encompasses what he calls "incarnational spirituality," and includes a detailed cosmology. A central idea of incarnational spirituality is that while the material and non-physical realms are different in quality, the non-material is not "higher" and certainly not more sacred than humanity or the everyday material world we inhabit. David Spangler, through The Lorian Association, gives an online course specifically oriented to working with non-physical allies (2008).

Here are some experiences I've had with these approaches:

When I'm writing professionally I invite a connection to inner allies for inspiration and guidance, using the practices advocated in Machaelle Small Wright, 1990, 1997. While that connection is in place I may use a pendulum to test whether something I'm writing is understandable by my intended audience and likely to be well received. Working this way in co-creative partnership often leads to being "in the flow," a condition in which I often feel as though the material is being sourced elsewhere, although it is completely congruent with my own values and intentions. An example is the writing of my professional autobiography (Harrison, 1995) in which I was frequently assisted in moving through stuck places by establishing a co-creative partnership with unseen allies.

In my personal life I have had good results with similar approaches. My spouse and I have set up non-physical teams to assist us in such projects as these: deciding on relocating ourselves from the Bay Area to the Pacific Northwest; finding the right house to purchase; planning vacation trips; working with health issues; and deciding financial issues such as responding to requests from non-profits and from family members for financial support. If nothing else, the process of framing appropriate questions and focusing our attention on the details of these issues has

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<sup>2</sup> The White Brotherhood is a name sometimes used to refer to "ascended masters," "bodhisattvas" and other highly evolved beings who have been in human form and may or may not be currently incarnate. These beings are said to have chosen to serve life on earth and in particular, humanity.

enabled us to make better decisions. However, we believe we have received more support than that: when we work with the support of a non-physical team, we seem to be blessed with more than the usual number of fortunate synchronicities, in which events come together in ways that make our lives easier, safer and more successful. We also note that none of the decisions we have made in this way have turned out badly.

I have pondered the question of when to invite such guidance and when to avoid doing so. The stance I have come to take for myself is that I best serve myself and my clients when I limit myself to inquiring how best to do something, or which of several approaches will most likely lead to the result I or my clients want. I have not always limited my inquiry in this way, sometimes asking "should I do this or that?" and I know I can obtain answers to almost any question I ask. I have come to question the wisdom for myself of asking "should I or shouldn't I?" questions, unless I am first clear about my own intention in the matter: who or what I want to serve, or what desired state I want to achieve. I place these limits because I want to practice assuming personal responsibility for what I do in the world, although I am quite willing to seek assistance in the ways and means for doing what I have decided upon. However, there are times when I feel confused, helpless or dependent and do go beyond my self imposed limits on the questions I ask. When I do this, I am careful to be clear about who I am asking for guidance, because I want to increase the likelihood that what I receive will be for the highest good for all.

There is another reason why I find it useful to access spiritual forces for assistance with ways and means, rather than inquiring what one should do. I have found that the discipline of deciding what I want, and then making a clear statement of my intentions assists me in maintaining focus and direction. According to Wright (see her publications on working with "soil-less gardens," 1990, 1997, 2007) it greatly assists one's non-physical allies if one writes a concise, clear and unambiguous statement of "definition, direction and purpose" (DDP) for one's project before initiating an inquiry. I find that doing so also assists me greatly in removing ambiguity and inconsistency from my intention. My preferred practice is to write down a statement of intention for the project for which I want help. I try to be both specific and brief, so that I focus on the essence of my purpose and desired outcomes. As I move through a project, I will often come back to my DDP, ask myself whether it still represents my intention, and then change it if necessary. Having made a clear statement at the outset, I can use such a review to track my progress. I find it satisfying and encouraging to remember where I was at the outset in relation to my intended results, and see how far I've come.

Having developed a clear and precise statement of the essence of my intention, I then focus on that essence, and invite allies to join me, following Wright's suggested procedures (op. cit.) or choosing some other process. For example, I may use processes I have learned from David Spangler's work on partnering with spiritual forces (Lorian Association, 2008). Wright's work is easier to apply, because she gives explicit and detailed directions for accessing assistance, and I am glad I could follow a set of explicit directions when I began my explorations into what initially seemed to me to be very esoteric matters. I have now had enough experience that I can venture beyond the somewhat rigid directions that Wright insists one follow, but I find working within Wright's framework to be quite comfortable.

Spangler gives the practitioner a lot more space to use one's own intuition, personal preferences and creativity in working with non-physical beings. Critical to Spangler's work with allies is developing and using one's "felt sense." Spangler has defined the felt sense as "A capacity grounded in our bodies and felt as a physical sensation as well as a mental and/or an emotional one to identify and experience subtle forces, energies and beings... It is related to the familiar idea of a 'gut feeling' or a 'physical hunch.' This can be developed with practice and attention to what our bodies have to say about the world around us."<sup>3</sup> For me it means being open to associations, bodily senses, intuitions and imagery that may arise while I am focusing on my intention. When I sense the presence of an ally or allies, I then focus on my intention and my questions about the project and remain alert for what may come to me through my felt sense.

Spangler (2004, 2008) has also published a step by step process for manifesting desired outcomes, which I have found provides a useful and viable way of focusing attention and intention on a project. As noted above, it relies heavily on using one's felt sense, but it does so within a more formal structure. One thing I like about it is that the method provides a framework and process for becoming clear about one's intentions and desires, a feature that I find missing in Wright's work. One can thus start out from a place of less clarity and focus, and become much more clear as one goes through the process.

It's true that I do not always go through elaborate, highly structured processes when I want a bit of assistance. I will often use kinesiology to decide on the spur of the moment, some question that is puzzling me. Kinesiology lends itself to "yes" or "no," questions. In my case I make use of a pendulum because, like a number of others I have talked with, I find that if I use the kinesiology process advocated by Wright (1988) I get unreliable results. I also make use of a pendulum when I have set up a formal connection with allies and am seeking yes or no answers to questions about whether or not a particular act or course of action is likely to lead towards my intended outcomes.

When I first did this, I had to get over my prejudices about the kinds of people who use pendulums, or dowsing, as it's often called. However, the practice yields reliable results for me.

Like any practice that taps into one's intuitive knowing, outcomes are subject to influence by wish or fear on the part of the practitioner. That is why, when I am working on something important, I prefer to focus my intentions, and to invite allies who may protect the integrity of the process. It can also be helpful to ask someone else to check the answers I receive by repeating the process. For example, in making decisions about family matters, such as making charitable donations, making gifts or loans to family members, planning a trip, and so on, I invite my spouse, Margaret Harris, to join me and take an independent reading on the questions posed. On the infrequent occasions when we don't track one another, we then inquire more deeply into how each of us is interpreting the meaning of the question we have asked. Such a process is only appropriate, of course, when the second person is properly attuned<sup>4</sup> to the project or decision under consideration.

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<sup>3</sup> For detailed instructions for developing one's felt sense, see Ann Weiser Cornell, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> I use the words "attune" and "attunement" from time to time in this paper. I find that the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary definition of "attune" is quite close to what I mean by the word. That is,  
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I have evolved theories and beliefs about how and why this all works, but I have to say that I hold them lightly—I don't pretend to really know. In spite of the fact that I come from a family of engineers, and much of my formal education was in the sciences, I do not feel greatly distressed by my lack of certainty. When exploring beyond the boundaries of what I think of as science, I use a kind of naïve empiricism; I believe one is doing well just to find practices that work reliably and produce desired results. Having found some such practices, I feel that it would be disempowering indeed not to use them, just because I don't have a scientific explanation for how they work. It would feel limiting to me not to explore and experiment with processes for which scientific explanations are lacking. How else are we to go beyond our current paradigms and world views?

### **Experiences in working with the soul of an organization**

Since I have been a consultant to business organizations for such a long time, in trying to integrate my spiritual practices with my work it has seemed natural to look for ways in which connections with non-physical allies could support making good decisions in business. In this, I take as my starting point the idea that a good decision is one that serves the good of the whole. By "the whole," I mean something akin to the totality of the living systems that are impacted by a decision.

I have sometimes indulged myself in dreaming of a world in which we all enlist the assistance of non-physical beings when dealing with the very complex issues for which we cannot foresee all or even most of the consequences of our actions. I have occasionally had a vision of the Board of Directors of a company in a strategic planning session. They spend a few moments attuning themselves to the soul or essence of their business, and then, after staff presentations, followed by full discussion of the issues, they ask for guidance on the different aspects of their strategic plan. In my fantasy, they are sitting around the conference table tuning into their felt sense, or using kinesiology to ask, "Will it benefit the whole for us to downsize our business this year? Is it for the highest good for us to merge with one of our competitors?" And so on, each one reaching a sense of what is for the best, using their own approach to receiving information and guidance. When they do not agree, they deliberate further, then attune more deeply and try again. At the end of the day, off they go to their homes, secure in the knowledge that they have used *all* the resources available to them, seen and unseen, human and angelic, to ensure the future well being of their business *and* of the Earth!

My decision to focus on the good of the whole is based on values, not practicality. I do believe it is possible to receive assistance from spiritual allies in projects with a narrow or self-oriented focus—for example, making an advantageous investment. I have occasionally used spiritual connections to try to gain financially, and I have found that for me, it doesn't feel good to focus my work with the sacred on pecuniary gain, especially when that may occur at the expense of others. It is also true that the methods I use to receive information and guidance from non-

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1. to bring into harmony
  2. to make aware or responsive <attune businesses to changing trends>

physical realms are less subject to distortion by wish or fear when I can maintain a fairly detached attitude towards the outcome. Such detachment is difficult for me when my financial security is involved.

In working with organizations, I now tend to think of myself as establishing a co-creative partnership with the essence, spirit, or soul of that organization. When working in this way I will invite a connection with that essence and ask for information and assistance in my work.

The first time I experienced such a connection, it was through the agency of another consultant. We were both at a gathering in which the conversation turned to the difficulties several of us were having in bringing our spiritual lives into our work as consultants. This individual mentioned that he was able to do psychic readings of the organizations he worked with. I asked him if he could do a reading of one of my clients, an electric utility where I was having some difficulty in seeing how to move forward. He agreed, and asked me to lie down so he could put his hands on me. After a short time, he said he was getting an image of a giant, muscular being, similar to the one represented by Rodin's sculpture, *The Thinker* (c. 1880). This being was endeavoring to hold a heavy hammer aloft, but was strained to the limit of its strength by the hammer's weight. If the hammer should fall, destruction would follow, and the being would then have failed to keep a sacred trust.

I found this image provocative, although I could not imagine what it meant. The experience stuck in my mind, and some weeks later, I decided to take the risk of sharing the story with the Vice President for Engineering, in the hope that the image would mean something to him. To my utter amazement, he was able without hesitation to give me a meaningful interpretation. He told me that the company had decided some while ago to postpone investment in additional generating capacity, due to the high cost of capital. As a result, this old line utility, which, as business expanded in its territory, had grown up and prospered together with its customers, was dangerously stretched to meet the growing demand for electricity, causing fears of an area-wide blackout similar to the one in New York City in 1977.

Because my work was with Customer Service, I was not involved with the generating side of the business, so I had had no idea of this. As my work with the utility unfolded, I found the event and conversation helpful to me in better understanding the essence of the organization, with its strong dedication to traditional values of public service. It was also the first time I had an inkling that the idea that an organization had a "soul" might possibly be more than a metaphor.

A couple of years later, I had a powerful experience involving a possible non-physical being associated with an organization. I had been invited, together with my then partner, to a conference being put on by the Findhorn Foundation, called "From Organization to Organism." The invitation came from Roger Benson, a co-leader of the Findhorn Community. Knowing of my work with organization essence (Harrison, 1972, 1987, 1992) Roger asked if I would be willing to undertake a diagnosis of the Findhorn Community's organization culture, an invitation I was glad to accept, because the organization was so clearly different from those I had previously experienced.

Following the conference, my partner and I conducted numerous interviews with members of the community, including its leadership, its teaching staff, long and short time residents of the community, and one of its founders, Eileen Caddy. When the interviews were complete, we had about a day and a half to collate and do a content analysis of our data, and to create a presentation to the assembled community after dinner that evening. This would have been plenty of time if the data had mapped nicely to the model of organization culture that I had by then been working with for years (Harrison, 1992). We would not have been surprised when this very different community did not fit my model exactly, but we were not prepared for the degree of discrepancy we found. We tried to come up with a model that did fit the data, but found that quite difficult. This led to a difference of opinion between us as to whether we should go with a modified version of my original model or persist in coming up with a new one. Meanwhile, our available time was shrinking fast, and our anxiety was rising.

Finally, in some desperation, we resolved to seek help. From our interviews I knew that the community members often turned to the "Angel of Findhorn" for guidance. We went over to the Sanctuary, a circular room built for meditation that was fortunately unoccupied at the time, and I lay down in the center. I then asked the Angel of Findhorn to help me to understand the data we had collected and to create a model of Findhorn's organization culture. I lay quietly for a few minutes, and quite suddenly and clearly a model came into my mind, one very different from anything I had worked with before, and one that seemed to fit our data. As I recall, the work of organizing our interview findings then flowed along easily, and we were able to complete our flipchart presentation just as the bell rang for dinner. Following the meal we made our presentation to the assembled community members, whose comments on our offering by and large confirmed the congruence of our model with their lived experience of Findhorn's culture. (This event is described in Harrison, 1995).

Being semi-retired, I have not been practicing organization development professionally for a while, and am limited in the examples I can give from recent practice as a consultant. I have been a board member for non-profit organizations, however. I find that after so many years as a consultant, I tend to bring a consulting orientation to my board work. I can report that I have found it very helpful to establish connections with non-physical allies when faced with decisions as to how best to assist a board to move forward with its work. I have found such connections valuable in deciding when to confront and when to support, when my usefulness on a board is at an end, what is the right timing for raising an issue, which board tasks to volunteer for, how to address a difficult issue, and so on.

### **Allying oneself to the soul of one's organization**

David Spangler (2004) has written of "inner citizenship," the spiritual aspects of being an American. He speaks of attuning oneself to the highest aspects of our country's collective being, and he describes the practice of living as a citizen in ways that are congruent with that vision. When I read Spangler's work on this,, my immediate thought was, "This idea is directly applicable to the spiritual aspects of one's relationship with an organization, whether as an employee, a manager , or a consultant." I have been inspired to build on his work so that it applies to the spiritual practice of living in an organization. (Spangler & Harrison, 2005).

Our spiritual life in an organization involves our values, our myths and our vision, all those ideas, images and emotions that together make up our sense of what it means to be a member of the organization. The aggregate of what is held on that level by all the organization members can be thought of as the collective psyche of the organization. Although that psyche has a good deal of consistency, it can also shift and change based on market events, management changes, the ups and downs of our own careers, and how fearful or powerful, successful or frustrated, contented or disaffected we may be feeling.

There is a deeper level yet that is not just a psychological one, but a spiritual level, a level of essence or soul. (In exploring the possibilities that may open to us through sensing and working with the soul level of an organization, I ask that readers accept its existence as a proposition testable through experience, not as a matter of faith or authority.)

In some organizations it is fairly easy to arrive at a "felt sense" of the organization's soul. I remember in particular a visit I made to the Lima, OH plant of Procter & Gamble in 1986. The Lima, OH plant was P&G's first venture into using the "high-performance systems approach" elements of which are self-organizing teams and participative management. In this approach, everyone in the organization, especially those at the shop floor, is trained in the skills, understanding and processes they need to make their own decisions on behalf of quality and business success, and given the authority to do so. The flow of information and influence in the organization goes laterally, as well as up and down the hierarchy, instead of having all the ideas and commands flow from the top.

On my arrival at the plant, I was greeted by the Plant Manager, who had assembled a group of employees and managers to brief me and answer any general questions I had, prior to a plant tour. The first thing I noticed was that I couldn't tell the managers from the workers by the way they dressed. The second thing I noticed was that I couldn't tell the difference between management and workers by the way they talked, either. In my previous experience, workers have tended to talk about their jobs and about company policies which affect them; managers talk about technical systems, production goals, improvements they are endeavoring to make in the technical or people aspects, and the like. I experienced a palpable sense of good will and camaraderie in which everyone seemed to participate, a sense of caring and support that appeared not to be in conflict with lively competition between work teams on productivity and quality. I came away with a strong sense of what I now think of as the soul of the organization, which was characterized by love, service, cooperation, innovation and creativity, and which seemed to permeate all of its doing and being.

It is certainly true that many of us spend a great deal of our lives in organizations that seem to lack anything that we could characterize as "soul." And as we look from the outside at many organizations, some of whose names are household words, we find it difficult to imagine them as having a soul. Organizations can be ruthlessly exploitative, lacking in integrity, and seemingly without any kind of heart. Organizations may be confusing, full of contradictions, inconsistent and lacking in clear purpose, so as to defy our attempts to know their deeper essence.

It is with organizations as it is with individuals. We may be inconsistent, seemingly without purpose, hard hearted, and we may do evil. Yet there is always something deeper, finer, and

more constant behind our behavior. The existence of soul does not depend on outer manifestations, and the latter may either reflect our soul or obscure it.

An organization's soul comes into being through human choice and will, initially that of the founders. It begins as a kernel of focused energy, around which additional energy can collect and achieve coherency and an organizational pattern or structure may form.<sup>5</sup> We may look for the genesis of the organization's soul in the founding story. Christina Baldwin in her wonderful book, Storycatcher describes a fine approach to doing this work (Chapter 8 in Baldwin, 2007)

As others join the organization and give their own energy and will to manifesting the organization's core purposes, collective mental, emotional and relational patterns evolve, which have both conscious and unconscious components. These form the culture of the organization, which begins to exert a will of its own, felt by organization members as norms and pressures to behave, think and hold values that are congruent with the collective. These collective tendencies might be called the "personality "of the organization. It reflects the energies of organization members, and at the same time the collective is more than the sum of those energies. The corporate personality begins to act as a being with its own unique qualities.

Then the organization can, if it is sufficiently organized and attuned to being of service to life, hold the energy of the soul level. I think of the soul of an organization as expressing its will to do some kind of good— as Spangler puts it, to bring a blessing into the world. At this point, the organization's life transcends the will of the founders, and it is much more than the sum total of the organization's members. Soul generates life force. It is a nurturing field for the people in the organization, and to a lesser extent, its customers, suppliers, and the wider community. Thus it is a force for good, both within and without, and that to me is a reason why as organization members or consultants, we should wish to work in partnership with an organization's soul, because it represents the highest and best vision of the organization in its environment.

Organization soul can differ from the organization's culture and personality, which may be strongly affected by other human motives such as fear and greed, by the environment within which the organization operates, by technology, markets, business cycles and the like.

The focus of consultants, executives and managers in their efforts to change and direct the organization, and to enable it to deal with its internal and external problems and opportunities, is, I think, rarely directed towards the soul level of the organization. Usually, attempts to change and manage the organization are at the level of personality, culture, technology, markets and finances and the like. This is demanding enough for most people, and the organization's soul remains implicit and often unconscious. There are those who do concern themselves with the congruence between the organization's being, and its strategies and tactics, and I believe there to be strategic benefits in doing so.

Strategic benefit is gained when we enlist the cooperation of an organization's soul in co-creative partnerships for the good of all, using whatever approaches are comfortable for us when working

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<sup>5</sup> My thinking about working with the soul of organizations has been greatly influenced by my conversations and correspondence with David Spangler, and also with Freya Secrest and Sophia Frowert.  
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with spirit. The example I give above in which I invoked the Angel of Findhorn is a case in point.

It is possible to enter into active dialogue with the soul of an organization. Instead of treating the organization as a mechanistic environment that we—or anyone else—manipulate for our own ends, placing the full responsibility on ourselves for directing and "fixing" it, we can enter into a personal and intimate relationship with the system. Our role then becomes less that of a mechanic and much more that of a sensitive and receptive gardener, who endeavors to understand the unique growth patterns of each plant, shrub or tree, through the full range of its life cycle or evolutionary path. I suggest you try the exercise below:

1. Go within yourself in a brief meditation. See if you can get a felt sense of the *presence* of the soul or spirit of an organization with which you are associated. Be aware of any images, sounds, words, kinesthetic feelings or intuitive ideas that may arise that connect you with something that feels like the soul or spirit. Write these down.
2. Inquire of that being: What is your vision for this organization? What is your work to do in the world? What benefits are you meant to bring? Write down whatever comes in response to this question.
3. Ask: What interferes with this purpose? What is needed from me/us to support your evolution at this time? As before, take notes on what you receive.

Asking such questions can bring group members to a new and deeper understanding of their organization's purpose, and this understanding may enable them to "come back on track."

For example, in a recent Board retreat conducted by the author and Freya Secret for a small non-profit, revisiting the founding moments of the organization resulted in the realization that both an educational and an activist thrust had been part of the founding vision. As the organization had evolved, however, the educational mission came to dominate the consciousness of its members, and the activist aspect was forgotten. Remembering the original vision brought new energy and understanding into the Board, out of which new initiatives are have been undertaken.

It is important to understand that getting in touch with soul of an organization has consequences. The soul carries within it patterns for the transactions of the organization. When we draw upon that connection, we shall find ourselves moved to take on responsibility for other entities, not just engaging in transactional relationships with them. Soul business is business with integrity, and more than that, with a sense of the connectedness of all to all. One consequence of this, for example, is that if we tend to be preoccupied with the organization' internal issues, frequent enquiry of its organization's soul may direct our attention outwards towards the organization's relationships with its stakeholders.

Note that when we are connected to soul, the consequences of negative behavior become more potent. The energy of the soul level tends to magnify the impact of the organization's acts, for better or for worse, thus raising the costs to the whole of our doing harm.

The founding story is a good place to start looking for the organization's soul, but it is not static. Subsequent stories may become more pertinent. Different narratives give differing viewpoints on the soul. The original narrative may become too narrow a way of understanding the soul. Organizations develop wisdom and understanding over time. To me, however, it is usually crucial to an understanding of the essence of an organization to know the founding story, at least in outline. That is because, when the energies and impulses that brought the organization into being become overlaid or distorted by subsequent influences, personalities and events, those energies do not go away, but continue to have a presence. Losing touch with that presence is a kind of soul loss, and may contribute to organization members feeling that they have lost their way, and are in some way rootless and ungrounded. The founding story may become part of the Shadow of the organization, and may need once again to be brought into the open and made a conscious part of the organization's life.

Consider how organizational soul becomes autonomous from founders' souls. For example, the founders may incubate the soul of the organization. We not only look at the founders' intent, but also at how that intent might have evolved to the present day, given the circumstances that now exist. What were the deeper principles underlying their intent, principles that might lead to rather different conclusions and actions today, if we can become aware of them?

Organizations have two identities. The first is what the organization does in the world, e.g., offering goods and services. The second is the organization's ecology, the community in which it takes part. Both play a part in the ongoing evolution of the organization's soul. The soul doesn't stay apart on a higher plane and just beam good energy to the organization. It seeks to express its qualities as practically as it can, and those qualities manifest through behavior.

If our own behavior as managers, organization members, or even as consultants, is thoughtless or negative, we can cripple the soul in expression, e.g., through fostering a culture of fear, greed, personal ambition, narrow agendas, short sighted expediency, and so on. We are then expressing soul in a dysfunctional manner. There are forms of human expression that can bind the soul and prevent it from manifesting its qualities; the end result is that the soul is more or less crippled.

If we live in an organization where the governing principle is fear, it can result in binding the souls of those in the organization and the soul of the organization in very tight ways. The life energy of the soul can be weakened, obscured or diffused, but it is still present as a part of the organization's life and potential. When soul is obscured in this way, it often helps to look back at the organization's founding story for clues to the soul's qualities and capacities.

**We can ask the organization, "Within the context of this organization, how can we nurture the greatest freedom, open up space for people to be more creatively expressive, more secure, more safe—things that release some of these bindings."** How that is best done depends on the nature of the organization: an army would do it differently than a consulting firm would; a partnership would be different than a multi-national corporation would; a non-profit would be different than a for-profit organization.

Organization soul brings a connection to a wider community of souls. The implication of such connections is that an organization's soul seeks ways of stimulating the organization to be a responsible player in the larger environment.

Soul vs Culture: Organizational culture is mostly transactional; soul is radiant, giving. It grows in the depth of its connections and availability of its energy if it is given a chance. The founding story of an organization can be rather narrow, e.g., "We'll make these goods and provide these services, and we'll make a lot of money." But other possibilities become evident to organization members through time that are beyond transaction, e.g., giving to the community. Organization soul can deepen by expressing its highest vision in a growing number of ways. It deepens through additional possibilities and capacities. Culture is what happens when you cope with the world. Soul is what you want to infuse into everything you do. Also, culture is specific and possibly measurable. Soul is not.

In mergers and acquisitions, we end up with "hybrid organizational soul," in the same way that we may evolve a hybrid culture. The more congruent are the culture and soul of two organizations, the less sense of loss and confusion organization members will experience during the transition. By the same token, when two organizations come together, both with strong and well developed soul and culture, there will be more conflict than if the soul qualities of one of the partners is relatively undeveloped or weak.

**As a manager executive or consultant, nourishing the soul of the organization is one of my major responsibilities.** That doesn't mean we have to nurture all parts of the organization. Sometimes parts have to leave or die. What it does mean is that whatever we do is done in integrity and in congruence with the highest values. For example, in cutting costs, integrity may be served by executives taking a pay cut and sharing in the suffering.

As organization members in touch with the organization's soul, we need to be mindful of nourishing it, and of not doing things that jeopardize the soul or our connection with it. There is thus a spiritual dimension to one's responsibilities that is added when you begin working with soul. No longer just concerned with the bottom line; we are also concerned with what might be called the "top line."

If different parts of an organization can agree on what is the highest and best that they have in common, that can inform choices they make about how they work together. You are always looking for the balance between the good of the part and that of the whole. Even when you are making a decision to downsize and eliminate a part, you do it in such a way as to empower the part that is separated.

Once you get into the rhythm of soul work, you find that it is supportive of doing things that way. However, it requires a good deal of attentiveness at the outset, and until that rhythm is established. It's not so different from what happens when one cares for one's own soul, rather than simply nourishing parts of the personality. One takes on a new set of priorities. Those new priorities may at times restrict choices, because we are putting additional requirements on ourselves. At the same time, working with organization Soul opens up new vistas and possibilities for expression, as in the example above of my work with the small non-profit.

It is worth noting that organizational soul is not identical in its genesis to an individual's soul. Organizational soul emerges, develops and becomes more complex as the organization develops. But you are still talking about that spiritual dimension, one of quality and meaning. It makes sense to look at that development, and ask of each phase, "What might this period have contributed to the soul of the organization?" Whereas with a person, you might ask, "What did this period reveal, provide access to," the implication being that the person's soul was always there as a latent quality ready to take form when it is called forth.

I want to speak briefly here about the work of Mitch Saunders and Craig Fleck, with whom I have been associated during the last couple of years. This work, sometimes called Sensing and Shaping the Future (Saunders, 2008) has strongly influenced my thinking about working with an organization's soul. Saunders would not, so far as I know, describe his work as a spiritual practice; therefore, a detailed treatment of it is beyond the scope of this paper. I consider the approach to be implicitly spiritually oriented, however, so I describe it in outline here.

For me, the essence of the Sensing and Shaping approach is in the kind of relationship we establish with a living system, such as an individual, group or organization. We can choose to relate to the system as an object to be planned for and acted upon, or as a *being* in its own right, with whom we can establish a relationship, a co-creative partnership. This is reminiscent to me of Martin Buber's (1996) distinction between "I It" and "I thou" as the two fundamental ways we can relate to another.

Saunders and Fleck speak of such a co-creative partnership as "coming alongside" a system, working *with* rather than *on* the system. As leaders, consultants, or organization members, we view the system as having its own unique path of evolution, and we see whatever is going on in the system as attempts to be of service to the life of the system. Then we observe what is unfolding, and endeavor to understand how that is related to the evolutionary needs of the system in its life cycle, and we work with the system's own energy to shape its responses in ways that are in service to its life.

The reason I briefly mention the Sensing and Shaping approach here is that I believe it is more congruent with the principles implicit in working with an organization's soul than any other I have seen in my own reading. At the same time, it is not an explicitly "spiritual" approach. Speaking or writing about it is unlikely to evoke the prejudices held by some towards anything that is avowedly spiritual in nature—even though people who think very concretely might have some difficulty with Sensing and Shaping. Therefore, it lends itself to working with an organization's soul in one's inner life, while publicly pursuing a less controversial approach.

### **Spirituality into Work**

What I have said about my own practice, and about working with the soul of an organization is, of course, based upon my own worldview, which is a product of my experience and intuition, and is also deriving from the teaching I have sought out in my quest for understanding. There is no need for one to share that worldview in order to attune oneself to the spiritual aspects of one's work. Each path of which I am aware encourages those who tread that path to seek the highest

and best in all they do, and to work with love. After Kahlil Gibran (1923) I hold that "Work is love made visible. And if you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better that you should leave your work and sit at the gate and take alms of those who work with joy."

Whatever one's preferred way of connecting with Spirit—meditation, prayer, ceremony and ritual, or simply through inquiry of the heart, information and assistance are available to help us on our way. The difficulty comes when we contemplate venturing beyond our own minds and hearts, seeking to engage in dialogue and deliberation with others. Whether and under what circumstances to do this can be a difficult decision.

My own reason for even considering taking such a step is that I feel that such dialogue can be encouraging and supportive to those who engage in it, and I have found that to be so for myself. When, in the eighties, I first began to want to make my work as a consultant congruent with my spiritual life, I was greatly encouraged and supported by meeting regularly with a group of others who had similar longings. The support of that group enabled me to take the first step into publicly sharing my somewhat controversial thoughts about the importance of attending to the workings of love in organizations (Harrison, 1984, 1995).

My own experience of engaging in public conversations about bringing one's spiritual practice into work has been encouraging, although limited to groups of organization development consultants. My earliest experience of this kind was with a session titled "Deepening OD Practice with Spirit: Accessing the Power of the Unseen" which, together with Sandra Florstedt, I offered at the 1995 national conference of the Organization Development Network. I have also offered such sessions to other consultants. Here are some of the things I've learned.

I take pains to create a safe space in which people can share as openly as they are ready to. I first set up the seating in a circle, where each has a view of the others.

One example of how I endeavored to create a safe space is, first, to invite a show of hands in answer to the question, "How many of you have a personal relationship with something you consider sacred? That could, for example, be God, angels, saints; a teacher or prophet like Jesus or Mohammed, and so on?" Most raised their hands.

Then I asked, "If you do have a relationship with the sacred, would you raise your hand if that relationship has an effect on how you do your work?" Fewer raised their hands, but it was more than half.

Then I asked, "How many of you consciously use your relationships with the sacred in ways that are intended to help you with your work?" A smaller but still significant number acknowledged that they did.

Finally, I said, "Are any of you willing to tell us about some ways you do this?" There was silence for few moments, and then someone spoke up. This was followed by more silence, and then another volunteered something. As more people shared, the space between their offerings grew less and less. It reminded me a bit of popping corn, where as heat builds the popping goes faster and faster.

Some of the contributions were quite moving, and it seemed as though a field of trust was being created in the room as more people took the risk of speaking up. When everyone who wanted to had shared, I gave a short talk about how I bring my spiritual practice into my own work. I then moved on by inviting people to sit in groups of three or four and to share whatever else they wanted to with the others in their small group. It was actually difficult, once those conversations got under way, to stop them so that we could close the session in a timely fashion by forming the large circle again and talking a bit about how the experience had been for them.

I was struck in this experience by the number of people who later expressed gratitude for having an opportunity to speak of these matters. A number of times during the remainder of the conference, people came up to me and wanted to share more, or to say how glad they had been to find that they were not alone.

Subsequently, I have experimented with sharing my own story as a way of creating a safe space that others can enter. I don't really have enough data to tell which order of sharing works best; so far, in fact, there has been no discernable difference. While my belief is that I can create more trust by listening than by talking, I am sure that for some, it reduces the risk when I share first. When I do, I take pains to make it clear that my experiences are my own, and that they are in no way intended to be prescriptive for others. That seems to build trust as well. Most of the people in the circles I move in prefer not to be preached to.

In my experience, people have a hunger for this kind of conversation, and it is not difficult to start a dialogue. People in these sessions were surprisingly willing to speak about their spiritual practices, and, if they used them in their work, how they did so. The first times I offered such a session, I was full of anxiety and trepidation about how it would go, and what would happen to my credibility in my profession as a result. On the basis of my experience thus far, I am far more inclined to take such risks again, although I could not say that my fears are completely allayed. The reason it seems worth some risk is that I believe that when the space is a safe one, such conversations can be highly supportive and empowering for those who engage in them, as well as enabling the participants to learn from one another. To me, such a game is worth the risks it entails.

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