

PART THREE: PRACTICE

CHAPTER TEN

DIVINE LOVE AND ORGANISATION

In this chapter I take my experience of stillness, described in Chapter Six, and reflect on the relation of silence with divine love.

I give an example that shows how the practise of silence helps me to revise my actions.

I use Senge and Scharmer (Senge and Scharmer, 2001) as an exemplar showing how spiritual practice can be used to support a 'deep-listening process' within organisation.

I conclude the chapter with a summary of my findings.

ACTION ACCOUNT: Witnessing

There is a gap between the in and out breath. I watch that space imagining the in-breath of eros and the out-breath of agape.

There are many places where we can slip out of our everyday world. These places and spaces have existed since time began, they happen as the sun rises and sets each day, at the equinoxes of the year, through rituals and transitions of the human life cycle, and through death.

My understanding of this space is formulated from a mixture of eastern and western philosophy. And an acceptance that there is a way of experiencing the world that is not dependent on sensory perception or on socially constructed frameworks.

I imagine being outside culture and language as an infinite experience arising through a synaesthesia of the senses that goes inwards to the inner body, or through the spaces found between bodies and between times, or in the giving up of identity through sacred ritual. These ways of knowing are outside everyday

experience whilst taking place firmly within the body situated in the material world.

This is how I perceive these spaces:

Witnessing

Above and below, to the right and to the left of my chattering mind
is the shimmering sea

At the heart of my chattering mind
is the shimmering sea

This shimmering sea holds and
is within my chattering mind
Slowly, quietly and more quietly now.

Watching and listening, more awareness grows
of that which exists inside and outside my chattering mind
And as it expands, my mind unlimited becomes the shimmering sea.

(Journal, Autumn 2000)

THE FIRST ITERATION: REFLECTION

Reflections on Silence

In Chapter Five I refer to my chance meeting with someone who taught meditation, which eventually led me to an experience of divine love, and who has acted as my spiritual guide for the past 21 years.

In Chapter Six I describe my experience of the relation between stillness and silence in this way:

'Silence arises from stillness, an absence of internal movement, and an absence of power- relation. It is an experience that allows me a glimpse of divine love. Here there is no compulsion, no inner or outer movement; here there is plenty of space and choice. This is where I 'know' my (o)ntology and (e)pistemology. Moments of coalescence occur in that silence, where the parts that I usually experience as separate become whole. This is the effect of the ordering principle of silence, achieved through the transformative nature of love. Love dissolves the boundaries between being and doing, silence discloses the whole, and I become the space' (Chapter Six, page 179).

Silence goes beyond convention, beyond power. In silent space I realise the presence of divine love. When I say that 'silence re-orders my action' I am referring to the transrational, the inexpressible, the mysterious dynamic of divine love. I cannot explain how this re-ordering happens. However, I can show how the practice of silence affects my actions.

CASE EXAMPLE FIVE: Silent Practice Influencing Action

The events took place at NHH. **I notice the process that I went through, shown in bold.**

My concern: I journalled the whole of an event which involved several meetings and a telephone conversation with a fellow Board member with whom I had a serious disagreement on an equal opportunities issue.

I begin to imagine the solution and explore possibilities:

I journal:

...I need to reflect on how it might be possible to build bridges...I have a great deal of respect for D's financial expertise and the way that he is willing to speak up in Board meetings.

At this point I drafted the following email but did not send it:

“Just wanted to appreciate your public support for those policies last night. Whilst we might have a difference of opinion on ‘Equality and Diversity’ issues, there are so many other key issues on which we agree, even for this reason alone I think that it is important to maintain our alliance on the Board. You are a good man David and I would not want this to interfere with our relationship in the long run.

It's a pity that I had to rush off last night; it would have been good to stay for the wine and mince pies.

Did anything interesting happen?

All the best,
Eleanor”

I evaluate my imagined solution:

I have been sitting in ‘silence’ since I drafted this email. What came to me during this time was:

- That in retrospect, I could have handled the previous sub-committee meeting, and my conversations before the Board meeting, a lot better. I responded too quickly to (a) G not taking ‘care’ and not responding properly to my email

suggestion and (b) Sending the email to K, C and T. I could have telephoned G, and I could have telephoned C if I had really wanted to resolve the issue, rather than 'prove' someone had acted wrongly.

- Who is this 'self' that wants to see equality, but acts in this way? What does my loving self say?

I have spent at least 2 days on this, not slept for more than 5 hours last night, and the net result is that I have built myself into a ... stereotype ... But then my stereotype of him may be even stronger!

I am responsive first and foremost. I like people for heaven's sake, and if they do not do what I think that they should, I say so quickly – even whilst I am thinking – 'Is this wise?'

Surely the reason I do this because I need to respond if I see injustice? It is a principled reaction. Why does it feel like 'love' has no voice in this situation? Perhaps 'love' here would just be a presence rather than a thought, being clear internally that I oppose utterances that do not give support to those who need it most, but not necessarily saying so? That does not feel right either, that feels like an oppressed silence.

Then I remembered what 'diversity' is about – respecting multiple perspectives. Of course, the more perspectives the better – even old-fashioned ones? More choice, creativity from conflict perhaps. How can I build bridges this way? The principled reaction is not so much about what is 'right' and what is 'wrong', but about finding resolution through relationship.

I modify my action:

I reword and send the following email:

“Just wanted to appreciate your public support for those policies last night, and to say how much I admired seeing you put your private views on one side.

I set out to value all perspectives, and hope that where there are differences of opinion that by seeking to understand others better we create the possibility for agreeing worthwhile and sustainable policies. In retrospect, I think that I could have handled my side of things better than I did. Whilst we have that difference of opinion on 'Equality and Diversity' issues, there seem to be a lot of other issues on which we agree wholeheartedly.

You are a good man ... and I don't want this to interfere with our relationship, and I hope you don't mind my emailing you about this.

It's a pity that I had to rush off last night; it would have been good to stay for the wine and mince pies.

Did anything interesting happen later on?

All the best,

Eleanor"

This example shows how I integrate spiritual practice with my leadership activity, and how I learn from the 'place beyond reason' (Herschel, 1988 p. 1) on an everyday basis. Being unique does not give me a unique purpose; instead, silence gives me a distinctive way of seeing and acting in the world.

THE SECOND ITERATION: REFLECTION

The discourse of presence in organisation

Now I reflect on Senge and Scharmer's example of 'quiet preparation' in the 'interior action turn' to support this connection between spiritual practise and leadership practise.

Senge and Scharmer give an account of the tacit influence of silent practice as the 'interior action turn (tacit)' affects the practice of others in the 'exterior action turn (explicit)' (Senge and Scharmer, 2001 p.246) in the Handbook of Action Research:

'The deep-listening interview process...which usually takes three to four hours for each interview, has turned out to be a life-changing event, in the assessment of many interviewees. Asked about the personal practises that allow such a unique conversational atmosphere, the consultant responded, "The most important hour...is the hour prior to the interview," ... For this particular interview, this hour is always reserved for quiet preparation, which involves a combination of reviewing prior thoughts and meditation' (Senge and Scharmer, 2001 pp. 246-247).

Scharmer (Scharmer, 2000) goes beyond linearity to suggest a U-shaped learning loop, describing this as a regenerative process in which the sense of 'I' is lost and individuals enter a common space of emergent knowing. In this new space, created by the merging of individual knowingness, time and action become instantaneous. The action just happens, as enaction in an instant.

'Seeing sensing, presencing and envisioning will not make a difference unless they are translated into action. Brian Arthur sees the way to operate in the new economy as a sequence of (1) observe, observe, observe (2) allow inner knowing to emerge (3) act in an instant. Says Arthur, "In oriental thinking, you might just sit and observe and observe – and then suddenly do what's appropriate. You act from your inner self' (Scharmer, 2000).

Importantly, and similarly to Griffin (2002) and Rayner (2004) Scharmer suggests that we do not think of the emerging wholes as a 'thing':

'Bortroft claims that we cannot know the whole in the same way that we know a thing, for the whole is not a thing. Thus the challenge is to encounter the whole as it *comes into the presence* in the parts' (Scharmer, 2000 [*author's Italics*]).

In this way the parts do not have to know the whole in order to come to know because parts 'show us the way to the whole' (Bortroft quoted in Scharmer, 2000).

'Presencing' the future is enabled through shifting the locus of listening through four different perspectives, and understanding the nature of language through a similar number of frames, which are: talking from politeness, through debate, through inquiry, and on to flow. These listening conversations recontextualise organisational discourse through a pedagogic transmission that deliberately employs sense-making and ethical modalities, outside the usual conventions and organisational norms.

Scharmer's ideas about presencing seem to be a development of Torbert's Four Territories and Fourfold Awareness (Fisher, Rooke and Torbert, 2000). However Scharmer has developed a different articulation of relationship, which includes qualities of silent knowing that are not reliant on reason and cognition.

Summary

In seeking to develop a leadership practice that fosters the growth and development of people and organisations through love, I use my spiritual practice and action research methods integrated within my everyday living. This is my ordinary way of being, living and learning.

Writing this thesis and developing my living educational theory, I learn more about the transformational aspects of love and the importance of silence. I come to appreciate more fully the part that my embodied knowledge plays in my decision making, and the way that this embodiment can influence others.

I have always understood the importance of daily discipline for the maintenance of my personal identity and stability. However, this inquiry shows me how it is also central to my leadership practice.

At the beginning of my inquiry I thought that I needed to learn new leadership skills¹ but now I can see that spiritual practice is the ground from which these skills will develop when they are needed. My case examples show that spiritual practice does not confirm me in my opinions – quite the contrary – they change the mode of my seeing (my consciousness) so that I am able to see how and why I need to shift. Because of its importance, I have called this shifting process the ‘reordering principle of silence’. It is through this reordering principle that I sense the presence of divine love.

In this thesis I show how the sense memory of divine love can be transposed into and alter my leadership actions through the reordering principle of silence.

¹ This is one of the reasons why I critique Torbert’s Leadership Development Framework.