

The Marriage of Logos and Mythos: Transforming Leadership

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I think in the past, maybe, different sectors carried on more or less independently. Now today...everything is interdependent, interrelated. That's the reality. Under these circumstances, it falls on us to work together.

His Holiness The Dalai Lama

Introduction - Towards an Imaginal Worldview

This paper argues that His Holiness The Dalai Lama speaks not only to different functions or disciplines of leadership but also to the interrelatedness of a twofold consciousness: *mythos* and *logos*. This twofold consciousness -- the re-uniting of the inner vision of the mythic world together with the brightly illuminated world of logos -- is where the inner world and outer world of leadership meet. It is in this overlap that a new imaginal worldview of leadership is possible, one that takes full account not only of the processes, issues and style of leadership but also the deep parallels between leadership and the mythic imagination.

This paper also argues that re-engaging the mythic imagination gives rise to a new perception of the *commons* - a possibility space that holds the potential to reunite a twofold consciousness. Viewing the *commons* from both a *mythic* and a *logic* perspective can contribute to the overall health and well being of the community of the

whole. Such a worldview perspective transforms leadership from one rooted exclusively in a Western scientific tradition to one open to wisdom from the past.

Incorporating *Mythos*

To begin I will outline several stories that demonstrate how mythos and the mythic imagination makes its appearance in group fields for learning and change.

Around the world a consensus is growing among many of the need for a more holistic, transparent and interdependent way to steward societal progress. It speaks of a desire for leadership that is focused on more than just economic indicators such as GNP. Instead it is transformative leadership that takes into account the full range of concerns, diversity and potential of the community. It speaks to a need to incorporate mythos and the mythic imagination into leadership for learning and change.

Recently over one hundred leaders in health, socio/cultural, public administration, the aboriginal community, students and many others in the Simcoe/Muskoka region north of Toronto, Canada met together for an historic occasion. Through the day they engaged in generative conversations to explore what needs to be present in our communities that would contribute to the wellbeing of all citizens.

Unique to this gathering was the introduction of music, art, time in nature, story-telling, seeded dialogue, small table and large circle conversations and personal reflection. This shifted the focus from a more broadly understood strategic planning and priority setting perspective to a more challenging and life enhancing process. It allowed time and space to come into the moment, to listen, reflect and speak from the heart and engage the questions that mattered most to their communities. In this respect the day offered a new and emergent model for community partnerships and collaborations that nurtured a spirit of empathy and compassion. It brought into being the kind of interdependent world His Holiness the Dali Lama foresaw.

** What are the places and spaces in our community where we experience the greatest sense of aliveness, vitality and significance?*

** When we think about the relationship of our built environment, the health of our population and community well-being - what really matters?*

** To build the ground for our future, what do we want to conserve and what needs to change?*

The Transformative Power of Music and Story

As the day unfolded many noticed that the pace of their speaking slowed, there was more space between the sentences, their listening seemed more focused, they frequently paused to find just the right word and there was almost a lyrical song like quality in the way they spoke. It was as if the group was enfolded in a field of energy not unlike what I experienced in the relationship between myself and an audience in piano concerts. When this occurred I did not know if I was playing or I was *being* played. This same life force was enveloping the group. Were they speaking- or being spoken? The learning community had shifted into a parallel universe where everything seemed more vital, animate and alive, their voices resonating with a generative force as they reached across their differences and connected with a unifying force of life itself.

Part of what accounted for this shift in the tone of conversation was improvised piano music. Music created out of the moment is a precise and organic articulation of what is resonating in the room itself. This knowingness of music – of sensing the deep current of human feeling and experience - challenges our dependence on logical analysis and empirical evidence as the only basis for knowing what we know. Music transcends the ego. It reaches into the deep self and expresses a human emotion that comes out of the felt experience where words cannot go. In our busy time-bound and rational world, music awakens us to a deeper mythic realm. It reconnects us to the experience of faith, revelation, beauty, mystery, harmony, stillness and the joyful experience of time out of time itself. Most important it contributes to creating a learning field that is spacious, slow, integrative and whole.

The other is the power of listening to stories of place. The morning opened with a presentation by Sherry Lawson, a widely admired and local native story-teller. Her first

words to the group were; “I want to tell you a story of how my ancestors spoke to me through the gravestone of ‘my gran’ in the cemetery one day.” In the narrative of her community, every place is a meeting place – their community is woven into the fabric of the land. It is sustained in the mythic story of Mnjikaning, the home of the Chippewa First Nations and the land on which the conference was held. “You are on sacred ground” she reminded us. “When you are on Indian land you need to learn together in Indian ways.”

Over the centuries Mnjikaning was the uniting narrative joining together the diversity of tribes and cultures of all peoples. This included the European settlers who came much later. It is not only heard in their voices, it is also felt in the gentleness of the soil and carried in the wind, the water, the light and the sky.

When Sherry introduced the power of her story everyone listened and the veneer of our day-to-day identities dropped away. We were no longer students, nurses, politicians or accountants. Our voices were no longer simply trying to inform. Instead our stories carried the power to transform our worldview as we sought to express the truth of our experience that was forming on our tongue as we spoke. For a moment we were tapping into those deep core archetypal energies that have defined our place in the world for thousands of years – healers, warriors, magicians, enchanters, weavers, shamans, visionaries. In stepping out from the norm, we had taken up the thread of our ancestral place on earth, one that has been long forgotten and needs to be remembered again.

What we were touching was the forgotten domain of *mythos* - a deep matrix of connectivity, an aboriginal Dreamtime where we become part of the ongoing creation story of the world. The Dreamtime elevates our field of attention. It is a threshold space that exists both now and in the future. In the Dreamtime we start with nothing and from this emptiness our voices become song - songs that help us sing our world into existence and in so doing bring our future into being. So the rhythm and cadence I was hearing in the voices that morning may have been the Dreaming - a language of the imagination that lifts up our gaze to sense into a possible future, which cannot yet be clearly seen or understood.

Restoring the Health of the Commons

In the context of a Western worldview, a parallel social space may be found in the *commons*. The commons is a possibility space – a thread of fellowship and collective awareness that has been with us through the fullness of time. Whether it is the front porch, the village green or the musicians’ open stage, the commons is a space of *kenosis*, the Greek word for the emptying of oneself, the suspension of certainty and the practice of a disciplined unknowing. Wherever and whenever people are gathered, the commons is a power - like the Dreaming – a space that is potentially there, but only potentially, and not always and not forever.

Wherever we go, we *are* the commons. It is the space between us that forms whenever we meet. It is the space of reciprocity in which we existed and thrived for thousands of years as we confronted the daily mystery of a universe we could not grasp. The commons was the space of appearance in which we shared the ecstatic experience of what it meant to be fully alive to the life of the imagination as expressed through stories poetry, dreams, conversation and song. This intimate correspondence with our social and more than human world filled us with a profound joy. It was what made us fully human. It was the unfathomable wonder of being fully present to the mystery of an invisible world that existed side by side with the hard difficulties and challenging demands of our day-to-day reality.

One of the unfortunate realities of today is that while the commons is always with us, we seldom *see* it. The rational and objective nature of our minds often blinds us to the deeply subjective world that lies in the spaces between the notes. The success of early cultures was that these spaces *were* their world. What could not be seen or understood was not considered a threat or adversary, but a gift. And, because it was a gift, it meant that taking from the world always involved the ritual of giving back. As a result we co – existed in partnership with one another in a spirit of true reciprocity – a stance of open, curious, creative and respectful engagement nurtured in perpetual state of profound equanimity.

This spirit of the enchantment of the world was expressed by the German Philosopher Hannah Arendt in the following way...

“It was the function of the commons over the ages to make a home for magnifying the spirit of the other, of letting no deed or word be offered without witness. To act in this way was to ensure that those who participated were subject to everlasting remembrance

by those whose lives they had touched. (Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition* 1958 p. 197)

The shift in our worldview to seeing our environment as a resource quickly led to the gradual disenchantment of our world and, with this, the permission to take from the commons without restraint. However innocent these gestures may have been at the outset, they quickly escalated into an acquisitional attitude which has come at great cost.

Soon our senses, once enlivened in this world of wonder, atrophied. Our eyes were no longer able to penetrate the veil to witness and participate in the richly animate world that lay behind. We were inducted into a world in which a fear based structure of beliefs based on perfection and the quest for absolute truth became dominant. This isolated us from the diversity of other worldviews as we strived to bring all of life's unruly elements under our direct control. Soon our world became a battleground centered on a fear that no matter how efficient we tried to be, where there was once abundance, there was now scarcity. As our world spun round faster and faster we realized that no matter what we did there was not enough to go around.

For many now the absence of the commons is a source of indefinable but palpable unrest. It is like a hunger for which we can find no cause or cure. In an environment where the commons is no longer there to be served, every new technological invention and social movement of humankind leans towards the celebration of private preference and the further atrophy of the quality of our public life.

Aspects of the Mythic Imagination

There are four aspects of the mythic imagination that may help restore the life of the commons and create a new centre of being in our relations between the world and ourselves. Together they reflect the timeless learning journey to bring our future into being and to transform our mechanistic view of the world into one that is more transformative, organic and whole;

The first is a call to *stewardship*, a time to appreciate our own gifts and uniqueness and to listen to others and to our own heart to discover what life is calling us to do.

The second is a call to *enchantment*, the attention we bring to beauty and wonderment that enables us to see the extraordinary in the ordinary and in so doing to also find fertile ground where our gifts may take root and grow.

The third is a call to *grace*, the ability to see our world from many different angles and in so doing to weave together many new possibilities in a spirit of generosity, detachment, perspective and novelty.

The fourth is a call to *voice*, the capacity for personal self expression that not only informs but also transforms how we think and see and serves as the source of abundance, of blessing, wholeness, affirmation, order, integration and new life.

Re-awakening a Twofold Consciousness

For many the legacy from the industrial age has been a tsunami that has swept away the footings that kept them connected to their deepest wisdom and true nature. Karen Armstrong writes that in most pre industrial cultures;

there were two recognized ways of thinking, speaking and acquiring knowledge. The Greeks called them mythos and logos. Both were essential and neither was considered superior to the other. They were not in conflict but complementary.

Logos was the voice of reason and *mythos* the language of our felt life together.

With the rise of the industrial economy we found ourselves in a world out of balance. Scientific *logos* quickly rose to dominance and the mythic life fell into disrepute. The resultant loss of languages, cultures, stories, landscapes, ancient gifts and wisdom has been but a few of the greatest tragedies of the commons. With the loss of the mythic life,

we no longer had access to the grace of *ekstasis*- of stepping out from the norm and allowing life to live through us so that we may experience the ecstasy of our intimate connection to a more enchanted and more than human world. The gift of this inner reality of *mythos* cannot be retrieved when our worldview is only legitimized in the context of a rational, orderly and scientific life.

Conclusion

The poet Gerard De Nerval once wrote that “*when you gather to plan, the universe is not there.*” For the universe to be there, we will need to direct our thinking to re-engaging *mythos* and linking it to *logos*. This entails shifting our attention from a sole focus on discrete objects, things, fixed boundaries and categories to a greater awareness of processes, energy, transformation and flow. It is through the collective eye of the commons and our interdependence with one another that His Holiness the Dali Lama envisioned that we are able to see the mythic dimension of the world and give renewed life to a twofold consciousness again.

And this presents a new worldview for the leader/artist. It transforms leadership. It connects the richness of the mythic past to the mythic present, not only as a place to return to, but to grow out from. Leadership from this perspective creates a new marriage between *mythos* and *logos* and in so doing links ancient wisdom and modern thought and thinks them together again.

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