

## Integral Leadership

### Opening Space by Leading through the Heart

*Jonathan Reams*

While Scott uses practical examples of change management to show why it is so important to do our inner work, the next essay in this section, by Jonathan Reams, provides research findings from integral psychology and neuroscience that can help you recognize, name, and utilize the toolbox of inner resources we all have that can support your efforts to become a more transforming leader. Reams shows how an enhanced understanding of the function of the soul in its psychological meaning, the importance of intuition, and the neuroscience of the heart fosters a quality of consciousness that others can sense in you. It also can help you become open to more expansive options and increased opportunities.

Today's world calls for a new consciousness from leaders—this is clear enough. However, the contours of this new consciousness are less clear. It is well known that we cannot solve our problems from within the same level of consciousness that created them (as noted by people such as Albert Einstein, Gregory Bateson, and Chris Argyris). But what does this really mean when as leaders we are called to go beyond the cliché and make it a reality? We have been living in the full blossoming of rational thought, and in reaching its limits have created the kinds of crises we see all around us. To lead today requires us to transcend (while including) the rational, mental structure of consciousness and lead from an integral consciousness. From it, we can get a perspective on the hypercomplexity of issues by relating to the heart of them. Indian sage

Sri Aurobindo (2000), consciousness researcher Claire Graves (1974), philosopher of science Ervin Laszlo (2007), leadership and consciousness researcher William Torbert (& Associates, 2004), and integral theorist Ken Wilber (1996, 2000), among others, have all contributed to our understanding of integral consciousness. For example, Swiss mystic and transdisciplinary consciousness researcher Jean Gebser (1985) described five structures of consciousness that have emerged over human history: *archaic*, *magic*, *mythical*, *mental*, and *integral*.

This integral consciousness enables us to relate to our thinking rather than come from it. Research over the last thirty years has revealed that how we relate to the contents of our consciousness can mature well beyond what we have taken for granted (see, e.g., Kegan, 1994; Torbert & Associates, 2004; Wilber, 2000). This maturing process enables a connective knowing of the heart that is not merely a static process of coming to grasp objective facts, but a dynamic relationship between the knower and known (see Palmer, 1993, 1997). The question then arises: What is the source of this knowing?

### **Spiritual Beings Having Human Experiences**

The source of this integral consciousness that integrates mind, emotions, and body is soul. The consciousness of soul is implicitly different from and goes beyond the consciousness of the mind. But during the Renaissance, the development of the mental structure of consciousness internalized a belief in the material world as the ground of reality. Thus, materialist science, for the most part, disregarded concepts like soul and spirit. In this view, human beings are composed of complex enough arrangements of physical matter to be able to produce consciousness and spiritual experiences. For example, the majority of neuroscience research on spiritual or religious phenomena has attempted to explain such experiences as an evolutionary genetic predisposition, or symptoms of brain malfunctions.

However, neuroscience also can be approached from a nonmaterialist perspective. A good example of this is Beaugard and Paquette's (2006, 2008) research. In line with this view, Deikman (1996) equates

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the essence of our Being or the “I” with pure awareness. Klemp (2002) talks about the creative nature of soul. Such nonmaterialist views enable us to transform our core beliefs about the essence of who we are. They open up space for viewing ourselves as spiritual beings, souls, having human experiences. Thus, we can define soul as a *creative unit of pure awareness* (for information on the spiritual practice that has shaped my view in this area, see <http://Eckankar.org>).

### Presenting as Soul’s Presence

As leaders, we often look to the past to get a sense of how the future might unfold. Scharmer (2007) recognized the limits of this approach and pointed to *presencing* as “the blending of *sensing* and *presence*, [and it] means to connect with the Source of the highest future possibility and bring it into the now” (p. 163). In developing his definition of presencing, Scharmer draws on Ray’s (2004) notion of Self and Work, the capitalizations indicating our highest sense of being and purpose in this world. Reflecting on this, I am drawn to ideas coming from the works of Plato (1992), Hillman (1996), and Newton (1994, 2000). They all discuss purpose in conjunction with the importance of character—what we do with what we have in this life (a cornerstone of leadership).

An early articulation of the transcendent sources of purpose is outlined in Plato’s (1992) *Republic*. This cornerstone of Western philosophy closes with the myth of Er, in which Plato describes the journey of souls in the afterlife. The end of this journey is a meeting with a daimon, or guardian angel, who guides the soul in the process of choosing lessons to learn when coming back into this world. Hillman (1996) draws on this myth to make it clear that we are not blank slates when we are born, but come into this world with a sense of character and calling. Newton (1994, 2000) goes further by drawing on numerous case studies of hypnotherapy regression to outline the details of this process. As leaders, we are expected to provide a sense of purpose that can motivate others. Being able to draw on a profound sense of purpose can be a source of inspiration and meaning for ourselves and others. The ability to do this

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is linked to character, the sources and seeds of which we bring into this human life as soul.

Central to being true to our character and calling is integrity. Palmer's (1993) conception of truth as troth shows that truth is not a noun, fact, or objective thing, but a verb, or relationship. Troth (as in betrothed) becomes a living pledge wherein we learn how to live in integrity. Having integrity links the transcendent character of soul with our human character. The process by which we come to know this is emergent. Bohm (1992) says that "who we are is unknown, but constantly revealing itself" (p. 167). Scharmer describes presencing as our capacity to perceive the future that is trying to emerge. This concept of "emerging" in relation to our "highest future possibility" can be viewed as aligning, or bringing into integrity, our human consciousness with the consciousness of soul. Scharmer calls this having an "open will."

Thus, presencing can be seen as a process of suspending the reactive tendencies and limitations of the human will in order to be open to the call of soul. It implies acting in integrity with soul's purpose for our human experience. The alignment of purpose and action is a balancing act that requires intention and choice. As leaders, we must maintain a quality of presence as we direct our attention from the inward opening of our will, to the call of soul, to the outward movement into action.

How can we translate this call of soul into action? Through learning how to make good choices. Leaders help shape the boundaries of what is real and not real. We give life to what we choose to give attention to. With this comes the responsibility to be conscious of how we choose to direct our attention. Frankl (1992) is known for saying that no matter what our external circumstances, we can always choose our attitude. Pattakos (2004), Isen and Klein (1999), and Owen (2000) build on this notion to show how we choose to believe myths or stories about our lives and the world around us and become trapped into living out these stories. To get beyond these traps, we have to move from being "subject to" them to making them objects of reflection (Kegan, 1994). An integral consciousness can support such a transformation in how we perceive our choices. But what is at the heart of this consciousness? Asked another way, what is the role of the heart in this consciousness?

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### Presencing and the Knowing of the Heart

Scharmer (2007) also describes presencing as “the phenomenon of seeing and thinking with the heart” (p. 160). We commonly associate the heart with both soul and emotion. It stands in as a way to talk about what is not only intellectual. Goleman’s work on emotional intelligence has highlighted the importance of seeing and thinking with the heart (Goleman, 1995; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). To understand what this might mean for leadership beyond a metaphor for emotional intelligence, intuition, or nonrational thinking, I draw on research from the field of neurocardiology.

The discovery of a “little brain” of about 40,000 neurons in the heart has led to research on its nature, functioning, and potential. Drawing on a systems view of our body’s physiology, McCraty, Atkinson, Tomasi, and Bradley (2009) note that the heart does far more than pump blood—it conducts a flow of information throughout the body. In this role of the heart they found four distinct psychophysiological modes: mental focus, psychophysiological incoherence, relaxation, and psychophysiological coherence. The coherent state is shown to have a significantly positive effect on functioning in numerous areas of health and well-being.

The authors establish a direct link between coherence and emotional well-being (which is also an aspect of the quality of soul’s presence). In addition, they show evidence for positive effects on cognitive functioning resulting from coherent psychophysiological states. From their research it becomes clear that the coherent state is a desirable one to be able to access, and has significant implications for leadership (Goleman et al., 2002).

Yet the actual role and impact of the heart goes well beyond these psychophysiological phenomena, venturing into the energetic realm of holographic electromagnetic fields. The patterns of information that have the most influence on the body will be those with the strongest field, and “the heart generates by far the most powerful and most extensive rhythmic electromagnetic field produced in the body” (McCraty et al., 2009, p. 55). McCraty et al.’s research shows that the heart has

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sixty times greater electrical voltage amplitude and 5,000 times stronger magnetic field than those produced by the brain. This electromagnetic field “can be measured several feet away from the body with sensitive magnetometers,” thus providing “a plausible mechanism for how we can ‘feel’ or sense another person’s presence and even their emotional state, independent of body language and other signals” (p. 55). From this it appears that our heart states will not only have a significant impact on the body and brain but also generate a field that can be detected by other people.

Thus, if we talk about our quality of character as leaders creating an aura or field around us, we are referring to a measurable electromagnetic phenomenon. I want to phrase this as the space that leaders create. This is a foundational element of a view of leadership as opening space. Yet this research goes beyond explaining how we can sense the space or field of another person. Perception of future events also is within the realm of explanation.

Central to Scharmer’s concept of presencing is the notion of sensing and connecting with our highest future possibility. The quantum physics principle of nonlocality (that there is a domain of reality beyond time and space) can give us a way to understand intuition as future perception (Bell, 1964; Bohm, 1980). McCraty, Atkinson, and Bradley (2004) describe a rigorous experimental study that, along with other research (Bradley, 2007), indicates that sensing the future is possible. We as leaders are called upon constantly to make choices based on limited information. Cultivating access to *pre-sensing* what wants to emerge from the future can give us an edge by offering us access to new realms of information. Thus, presencing as “thinking with the heart” is much more than an abstraction or metaphor. It also is describing a specific activity of the heart that can be cultivated.

The phenomenon of thinking with the heart implies something qualitatively different than thinking with the mind. A simple reframing of this concept to a “knowing of the heart” can help us link it to the HeartMath research findings (McCraty, 2009). The scope of this research shows that this knowing of the heart can transcend the thinking of the mind. Kriger and Seng (2005) note that in relation to Islamic

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understandings of leadership, the “heart, as a psycho-spiritual organ of perception, not the intellect of brain, is believed to be the faculty of knowledge” (p. 779). In this reframing, we also can make a link between the consciousness of soul and the knowing of the heart. We could say that while the mind thinks, soul knows.

### **Leadership as Opening Space**

By reframing our core beliefs about who we are (spiritual beings having human experiences) and cultivating an integral consciousness, we can begin to lead in new ways. As leaders, we create space through the quality of our presence, consciousness, and actions. This can go either way. We can create spaces that Owen (2000) characterizes as “soul pollution” (p. 1), constricting the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical area we and others have to work in. We also have what Carey (1992) calls a “fundamental option for self-transcendence” that opens these spaces (p. 217).

A few years ago, I attended a “dialogue” between two leaders in the field of new paradigm thinking. Friends who knew very little about these speakers came along as well. We listened as the speakers took turns offering their thoughts on the topic of the evening and each other’s remarks. After the event, my friends commented on how much they were put off by the first speaker, feeling as if he had been pontificating, talking down to them, and almost demanding that his views be accepted, not only by the audience but, by implication, by all those who thought differently on the subject. They then commented on how with the second speaker, they felt invited into an inquiry and encouraged to think for themselves, and had a sense of a heartfelt connection.

Such differences are not always so easy to spot. I was hired to facilitate preparations for two agencies facing accreditation reviews. On the surface, meeting the first executive director (ED) was not so much different than meeting the second. However, as the work unfolded, the differences in attitude between the two became apparent. The first felt the accreditation process was a hoop to be jumped through, after which the organization could go back to the comfort of business as

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usual. The second saw the process as an opportunity for growth and revitalization of the agency. Both ultimately were successful in gaining accreditation, but the impact of the processes on their organizations was markedly different. For the first ED's agency, it was indeed back to business as usual, with everyone relieved that the extra work had passed and they could get back to "normal." They simply added some paperwork to the surface of how they went about their tasks, but nothing fundamental changed.

For the second ED's agency, accreditation was a transformative process that was followed up by a staff-driven strategic planning process to articulate a new vision for evolving how they did their work. Conflicts and tensions left by the ED who preceded the current one were healed by the integration of the preparations for the accreditation review with a very authentic inquiry into how things had come to be as they were. The process allowed everyone in the agency to reframe their work in ways that enabled growth. I believe many of us can relate to such spaces being closed or opened.

A full illustration of integral leadership is well beyond the scope of this chapter. What I have aimed to do is illustrate the kinds of leadership that can emerge from moving toward an integral consciousness. Integral leadership's capacity to open a transformational space offers a way to understand what is called for to meet the challenges of today's world.

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