

In Search of Harmony: Becoming Your Own Hero at Work

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Chapter 10

Edifying Others

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

—Romans 14:19

A successful man is he who receives a great deal from his fellowmen, usually incomparably more than corresponds to his service to them. The value of a man, however, should be seen in what he gives and not in what he is able to receive.

—Albert Einstein

Man wishes to be confirmed in his being by man, and wishes to have a presence in the being of the other . . . Secretly and bashfully he watches for a yes which allows him to be and which can come to him only from one human person to another.

—Martin Buber

All heroes are asked to do more than they can yet do. To finish the journey, they undertake perhaps the toughest part of the adventure: annihilating the prideful, ego-driven aspects of their personality in service to others. The final lesson is one of sacrifice. They decline to use political power, such as position or money, or any capacity to coerce others either overtly or covertly. Since political power tends to damage relationships, they reject the traditional ways of influence, turning instead to spiritual power, the ways of wisdom and goodness. Heroes develop their capacity to behave with a higher degree of awareness and discernment about themselves and others. They undertake the painstaking responsibility of observing everything. Little by little they come to know their spiritual gifts and to carry the responsibility that accompanies these gifts. The process is bittersweet, filled with paradox and dilemma.

When we dedicate ourselves to spiritual power, we must shed the entanglements and burdens of a compromised life. Spiritual power stands above all else, not acquiescing to the pulls of popularity or success as defined by others. Forbearance and sacrifice transcend the need for inclusion. The “road less traveled” is a lonely one; “spiritual purists” do not submit to the prevailing consciousness or perceptions of the day. They know we know with God, striving to come into an increasing alignment with the mind and will of divinity. They know we are all connected to each other and to a higher consciousness not yet in view. Meekly, they understand we are instruments, his *only* instruments, flawed instruments at that. In every relationship, we bring our own hang-ups that get in the way of success. Our personal shortcomings, especially our pride, threaten to keep us from continuing on the hero’s road of trials.

Knowing when and how to help others is the fabric of the gods and heroes in embryo. It is an awesome responsibility that demands everything we have. During these great, significant moments when we alone are called upon to help someone in need, we often lose our confidence or allow our pride to derail us from our noble destiny. Our fear and conceit hold us back when we could do the greatest good of all.

Author Toni Morrison writes, “The price of freedom is to free another.” When we heed the call to help others in adversity, tried and true principles of sacrifice touch the innermost feelings of the heart—a process that brings about a mighty change of heart for both the giver and receiver. What touches us more than someone being there in times of need? What brings more personal peace than putting other’s needs before our own? Heroes accept this calling to suffer with others, sometimes to suffer dreadfully. They accept this burden willingly because they understand that suffering is not a choice. As the adage states, “We either suffer for ourselves or we suffer for others. Choosing not to suffer is not an option.” Heroes know it won’t matter how expert we are at everything else if we fail in our responsibility to help others in wise ways.

It is difficult to go against tradition, to be an exception to the rule. Doing so requires tremendous effort in unlearning what Madeleine L’Engle calls “the dirty devices of the world”—those things that numb our senses and sensibilities to authenticity and goodness. The competition, criticisms, comparisons, betrayals, and confusion condition us to treat reality like “radium, bearing it in only small amounts at the time.”¹ The process of becoming street smart, learning to live in the “real world,” destroys the sensitivity we need most to respond to others’ needs. Our fear makes us back seat drivers to soulful things. Consumed with protecting ourselves from peril, our hypervigilance keeps us from seeing the needs or potential of others. We forget what we knew as children: the things of the heart matter most. “It is only with the heart that one sees rightly.”

To “unlearn” the things that stop our growth and keep us apart, we reclaim the awe and mystery of a new exciting story unfolding in ourselves and others. We shift our attention to spiritual principles of *being* balanced with *doing*— one person at a time. Attaching ourselves to the ultimate changemaster, we walk the journey alone, trusting in a higher power to make it all worthwhile.

These new principles of change make sense because they bring a new source of power. Spiritually mature people are more responsive to their environment and the needs of others. They make better decisions. Scott Peck writes,

Spiritually evolved people, by virtue of their discipline, mastery, and love are people of extraordinary competence, and in their competence they are called on to serve the world, and in their love they answer the call. They are inevitably, therefore, people of great power, although the world may generally behold them as quite ordinary people, since more often than not they will exercise their power in quiet or hidden ways

The best decision makers are those who are willing to suffer the most over their decisions but still retain their ability to be decisive. One measure—and perhaps the best measure—of a person’s greatness is the capacity for suffering.²

Spiritually mature people struggle to know what is best to do. To edify others, they strive to make decisions with the total awareness demanded by love. Ideal, you say?

But, haven’t we all had enough of reality?

Life itself seems lunatic. Who knows where madness lies? Perhaps being too practical is madness. To surrender dreams, this may be madness. But maddest of all, to see life as it is and not as it should be.³



It’s a balancing act.

Understanding the delicate balances in human relationships is fraught with perplexing dilemmas that frustrate our good intentions. We can have a good motive and a bad strategy and fail miserably. For example, with the best of intentions, our lack of communication skills or poor judgment often lead others to misunderstand our actions. Also, a bad motive and good strategy is ineffective. For instance, without humility, false heroes pass on what they’ve learned, but with themselves still at the

center. When they are caught up in their expertise (often directed toward self-centered desires), pride blocks the path of learning for returning heroes and fellow travelers alike. Knowing how much help to give also creates problems. If we help too much, we create dependency. If we help too little, people feel abandoned and may quit altogether. When we challenge others too little, they may stagnate; when we demand too much of them and they could break.

In spite of these challenges, we have what it takes to help others, but we must first show up. Rachel Naomi Remen in *Kitchen Table Wisdom* shares a story told by Jack Kornfield, a Buddhist teacher, who describes this principle he learned at a bingo game: the sign on the wall said, “You Have to Be Present to Win.”⁴

We are all innately endowed with heroic power to influence each other in profound ways. In reclaiming this capacity, we also help ourselves. Because of our own experiences, our own woundedness, we are *enough* for whatever we face in our relationships with others if we are willing to grow. We need not worry about being experts, only willing to open ourselves to others so they may not be alone in their adversity. We can rely upon the small decencies of everyday life at work. Theodore Roosevelt said, “The lives of truest heroism are those in which there are no great deeds to look back upon. It is the little things well done that go to make up a successful and truly good life.” Gather all the courage you can to get involved in the dirty details of being human at work. Albert Schweitzer understood the impact of just having the *desire* to be present in others’ lives:

The one essential thing is that we strive to have light in ourselves. Our strivings will be recognized by others, and when people have light in themselves, it will shine out from them. Then we get to know each other as we walk together in the darkness, without needing to pass our hands over each other’s faces, or to intrude into each other’s hearts.⁵

If we believe that we are enough and open our hearts to others, they will come to feel they are enough, too. Kyle’s story is an example of this principle:

I was new to the company’s large customer service facility. I was young, energetic and perhaps a little too confident in myself. Nevertheless, I was a dedicated worker and good at what I did. I was assigned to work with another professional. I will call him Jim. He had been at the facility for a few years. Jim was fifteen years my senior. I thought our new relationship was solid until a few weeks after arriving co-workers began to warn me to watch my back. I was told that Jim was saying some very negative things about me.

I was furious. My first thoughts were to get back, to spread some dirt on him. I thought, “Two can play at this game.” But I warned myself against this hypocrisy and decided that I would approach him directly.

I walked to his office and asked to speak with him. I sat across his desk and felt my legs shaking I was so nervous. I said, “Jim, it is important to me that we have a good working relationship. Anything that would get in the way of that relationship I believe is important to talk about. I am not here to accuse you of anything. I just need to share with you what I have heard. Several people have told me that you have said some unkind things about me. Is that true?”

Jim was certainly surprised and a little pale. He then said, “I would never say anything negative about you. I am enjoying our working relationship.”

I responded with “Like I said, I am not accusing you, I want you to know that if I hear anything I will not burn a lot of emotional energy on it without coming to you and letting you know what has been said. I will be loyal to you and myself. If I have something to say to you, you will hear about it directly from me. Our working relationship is important me.”

Whether he was telling the truth or not did not matter. Co-workers said he stopped. That conversation was the start of a great professional friendship. I learned, interestingly, that he was going through a very painful and difficult divorce when we had that discussion. I was reminded that all behavior has its “logic” even when it seems wrong or even irrational.



Listen more than you talk.

We show a desire to be present to someone else by not just having an *equal* balance between listening and speaking, but by setting aside our own ego and agenda more rather than less of the time. Communication is more a spiritual or character-building process than a language process. Jockeying for a larger portion of air time is often a cue we are trying to convince others of our importance, our worth, our abilities. Refusing to listen communicates unhealthy pride: *I care more about me than you*. Listening communicates caring—if your eyes don’t glaze over, that is. One of my bosses, had the technique down: nods of the head, paraphrasing, questioning. However, yawn after yawn and a glazed-over look in his eyes showed he couldn’t care less. I always felt diminished, as did others in the department, who often joked about his pretense. “People don’t care how much you *know* until they know how much you *care*.”⁶

Listening to someone requires more than just hearing the words. Listening conveys our understanding from his or her point of view. This does not indicate, of course, that we *agree*—only that we *understand*. The purpose of the message can take one or more of the following forms:

- **Small talk**—relationship building
- **Self-expression**—catharsis: venting feelings or thoughts
- **Information**—sharing facts/opinions
- **Persuasion**—selling something

It is helpful to understand the primary purpose of the conversation as a precursor to understanding. But, it's not so clear cut. Often, conversation contains elements of all four purposes, frequently starting with the safest form of communication and moving to more intimate or serious levels. Since communication is so easily misunderstood, it is very difficult to know how to respond to others under ordinary circumstances, and especially in perplexing circumstances. The primary tools advocate a laundry list of analytical and reflective listening skills:

- Organize and summarize content.
- Listen for implications.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion.
- Avoid barriers to listening, such as
 - red-flag words.
 - loaded statements.
 - biases and expectations.
 - stress conditions.
 - context.
 - personal meaning.
 - physical distractions.
 - speed and length of message.
- Invite, reflect, paraphrase, question, prime to enhance understanding and meaning.
- Get closure.

These are *important* skills to know, however they are not *essential*. When I reflect upon those situations most helpful to me when I most needed someone to listen, none of them was in the workplace. Many of the people never went to college, never worked outside the home, and, most assuredly, never had any training on how to listen.

There are two levels of understanding: communication and communion. Communication involves the transfer of information. Consequently, communication skills focus on the exchange of information in a comprehensive, accurate, and timely manner. These techniques minimize selective communication, emotional bias, distractions, and other factors that often result in misunderstandings. But sometimes exchanging information is not enough. Sometimes the complexity and vagueness of the challenges ahead require more than merely exchanging data and ideas. Successful collaboration often requires understanding what is in our hearts as well as what is in our heads, understanding our intentions as well as our words, exchanging trust and respect as well as information and expectations. In the arena of the heart, communication tools such as active listening, reflective phraseology, and emotionally neutral terms are hopelessly inadequate—they barely scratch the surface.

When I was growing up, I survived the chaos and conflict by escaping to the homes of four women who lived in a little circle around my home. When things heated up at home, out the door I went, arriving uninvited but always welcome at one of these places of refuge. Though old enough to be my mother, one neighbor, appropriately named Grace, welcomed me like a bosom friend. We sat at her kitchen table talking about any and everything. But, mostly we listened to each other. In our loving silence, we were two comrades, a generation apart, seeking higher ground on which to stand. Her comfort is as real today as it was then. Grace lived up to her name. She knew all about needing to be present to win. She knew nothing about organizing content, paraphrasing, red-flag words, or getting closure. Grace just attended to me. Somehow her own seven children never seemed to need her more than I. She knew intuitively *I was more than I seemed* and had what it took to triumph over adversity. She never tried to fix me or the problems so overwhelming that many would have thrown their hands up in despair. Or, some others would have felt it their duty to rescue me in some way. Grace, like the other women, just paid attention and this was enough. She gave the gift of herself, the best gift of all.

It is a terrible burden to carry around the feeling it is our duty to fix everything. Or to carry the vanity that we are powerful enough. What a relief it is to realize and accept we do not have the power to solve other people's problems and that by trying to do so we may actually *decrease* their ability to do so for themselves! Learning to walk the delicate line between providing appropriate emotional support without becoming too enmeshed in solving others' problems is the journey of the hero.

In Gary and Joy Lundberg's book, *I Don't Have to Make Everything All Better*,⁷ the four principles of validation, three of which relate to listening, help us leave in compassionate and caring

ways the responsibility where it belongs. This book is a must read for helping fulfill the universal need we all carry around inside ourselves, the need to believe: I AM OF WORTH, MY FEELINGS MATTER, AND SOMEONE REALLY CARES ABOUT ME. Validation is learning to be with someone where they are, not where you want them to be. The four rules of validation are (1) *listen* by giving your full attention; (2) *listen* to the feelings being expressed; (3) *listen* to the needs being expressed; (4) *understand* by putting yourself in the other person's shoes. The responsibility for someone's problem lies with him or herself. Set boundaries by being kind, respectful, and firm. Give at least two good validating phrases or questions such as, "This has put you in a tough spot," or "What do you think might work?" or "I can imagine how that must feel," or "How do you feel about that?"

The popular ways of work are to direct, tell, fix, and cajole, all of which assume superior knowledge over the person who has the problem. And when we are on the other end of the situation ourselves needing help, we resist the counsel of others that could free us from our errors. Cultivating a listening heart requires a "mighty change of heart," letting go of provincial, superficial, prideful arrogance. The listening heart knows that what is real is individual, that there's more to the story, and that it's impossible to influence in enduring ways without love. Even when we don't get it right, it's never too late to turn things around.

Stephen's Story

She hired me right out of college and trusted me enough to provide me with significant and meaningful assignments. She also allowed me room to breathe, which was important to me. My philosophy of work needed that space. We also had similar views on life, which led to a strong and healthy friendship.

Our work philosophies were quite similar, except in one critical area—organizational politics. My perception was that my manager viewed others as for or against her, or for or against our department. She had enemies and mistrusted the friends of her enemies. Although I was new to organizational politics and even naive in some instances, I felt that it was not necessary to have enemies or be the enemy of her enemies. I chose to go to lunch and associate with some who did not "side" with my boss.

This disturbed my manager and resulted in her challenging my loyalty and making inferences about trust. It came to head one day in her office. She was furious because I had gone to lunch with her boss, a man who did not want her in the organization. She demanded to know what we discussed and why I had been so "stupid" as to go to lunch with him.

To me the word "stupid" was a personal attack that I would not tolerate. I lost my cool and told her that she could fire me but that I was not going to be treated that way. I then stormed out of her office.

She was upset, as was I. When we both had cooled down, we sat down to have one of the best heart-to-heart conversations of my career. Her words were emotional and difficult to share. She told me about growing up without a trustworthy father and a marriage that ended because of an untrustworthy husband. She told me that it was difficult for her to trust because of her life's experience.

Her sharing brought a new perspective for me. I realized that if I were going to survive in organizations that I had to be willing to deal with the total lives of my associates, not just the person I see during work hours. Influencing others for good requires that I honor all that they are, not just what they can do from 8:00 to 5:00.

I committed to my manager my loyalty. I told her that I would never share information or engage in a conversation that hurt her in any way. I told her that it was important for me to have relationships with everyone in the organization, regardless of their "political" leanings. That conversation resulted in commitments to each other that lasted well beyond our tenures at that company.



*Edify in the spirit of truth,
but never argue about what is real.*

Lord Byron wrote, "Adversity is the first path to truth." By continuing down the easy path of perceiving only what is wrong instead of digging deeply to find truth, we thwart our progress. Hard times force us to explore the uncharted territory of what is *right* and what is *real*. Many shrink from this path because they do not want to be challenged, they do not like to be uncomfortable. When we begin to observe others in reverent ways—not as objects or instruments to an end—but as fellow travelers with a unique mission not unlike our own, it *is* infinitely more painful. It requires giving up preconceived and misconceived ideas about ourselves and others, some held for a lifetime. To become seekers of the truth, we must also jump over some other hurdles described by Roger Bacon,

There are in fact four very significant stumbling blocks in the way of grasping the truth, which hinder every man however learned, and scarcely allow anyone to win a clear title to wisdom, namely, the example of the weak and unworthy authority, longstanding custom, the feeling of the ignorant crowd, and the hiding of our own ignorance while making a display of our apparent knowledge.⁸

To guide and help others discover or recover truth, we need to be settled in our own beliefs—beliefs based upon unchanging principles—and consistently apply these principles to life’s constantly changing situations. To edify others, and in the process edify ourselves, requires “sturdy, all-weather souls who are constant in every season of life and who are not easily stalled or thrown off course.”⁹ We painstakingly fashion “sturdy all-weather souls” over time, learning precept upon precept. Daily, we bind ourselves to godliness, not just in the large defining moments, but the seemingly small ones. The degree to which we do this governs how well we may help others.

The divine attributes of love, mercy, patience, longsuffering, meekness, and honesty pave the safe way to allow others to take risks, to become vulnerable enough to experience something new, instead of continuing to play the same old tapes over again. For example, Person A lacks trust and views almost every situation from the perspective of fear displayed in relationships as suspicion, taking offense easily, and attacking others. When Person A shows a lack of trust, Person B views it as an indictment against her; that is: “Person A thinks I am not a trustworthy person.” Person B feels diminished by the perceived indictment and responds defensively, thus creating a vicious cycle or a downward spiral:



To edify the person who lacks trust, we model our love of truth by looking empathically underneath the lack of trust to the root cause, which is fear, and responding with meekness and patience. *We don't take it on* in the same way the farmer did not take on his grim prognosis or the “expert opinions” about his corn fields. We tell the rest of the story to ourselves: we are all more than we seem. The awe of life unfolding and expanding in mysterious ways keeps us on track. His or her

behavior says more about him than me, and mine more about me than him. By taking offense, we prove that we really *are not* trustworthy, therefore becoming equally complicit in perpetuating a lie or a situation out of sync with reality. By not arguing defensively with Person A's reality, we help move each of us to higher ground. The question becomes not just how much we love the truth, but also how much we love the soul of the other person.

The example just given takes us into a new realm of discernment: seeking the truth in the everyday interactions with others whereby we transcend the obvious. We perceive reality by discerning the spirit of another, not what appears on the surface, to be real. This is the only way to successfully manage the paradoxes, dilemmas, and confusion of organizational life without being chewed up like hamburger.

Truth as Science. Knowledge is a part of truth, but the meaning of knowledge is based in emotions and feelings, not facts. Further, knowledge is often ambiguous, allowing itself to be rationalized to support any variety of conclusions.

Truth as Emotion. Emotions are reliable only in as much as they are a reaction and reflection of another. More often, they also are a reaction and reflection of ourselves, projected onto the world around us. Hence, people who cannot trust themselves will mistrust everyone else regardless of the true nature of the person they are dealing with.

Humility versus Pride. The humble will see and feel what is and will have reverence for the divine potential of God's creations. The proud will see and feel things in terms of what they themselves are or will perceive things as they wish them to be. This is the choice of faith: to see with our eyes, and play God, or to see with God's eyes, in faith that the truth will eventually be revealed.

Thus, the large question of truth becomes understanding the real me and the real you, children of God, our innocence and potential, independent of the scars of life that mar us. With the help of Deity, we may edify others through an uncompromising dedication to honesty. F. Enzo Busche writes, "Only in that state of pure honesty are we able to see truth in its complete dimension. Honesty may not be everything, but everything is *nothing* without honesty."¹⁰

In helping others, however, this does not mean being "brutally honest." We teach in the same way we learn precept upon precept. Sometimes the whole truth is too much to take in and has a negative effect if given when a colleague is unprepared. Ask, "What will be the likely outcome of my sharing this information at this time? Would an incremental approach work better in this situation?"

Is preparation needed?” When reproof is needed or difficult information needs to be shared, how often do we destroy a person’s confidence by giving “bitter counsel,” believing the end justifies the means? Always let the truth, not our lack of consideration, do the cutting.

Remember the goal of edification is loving the truth and the soul of another so much that we are willing to sacrifice time, money, self-interest, the games we play, and the need to impress, to be right, to win, and to deceive—to give it all up for the sake of truth clothed in kindness.

A young man came to Socrates one time and said, “Socrates, I have come 1,600 miles to talk to you about wisdom and learning, and I would like to have you teach me [since] you are a man of wisdom and learning.” Socrates said, “Come follow me,” and he led the way down to the seashore. They waded out into the water up to their waists, and then Socrates turned on his friend and held his head under the water. His friend struggled and kicked and bucked and tried to get away, but Socrates held him down. Now, if you hold someone’s head under the water long enough, he will eventually become fairly peaceable. And after this man had stopped struggling, Socrates laid him out on the bank to dry, and he went back into the market place.

After the young man had dried out a little bit, he came back to Socrates to find the reason for this rather unusual behavior. Socrates said to him, “When your head was under the water, what was the one thing you wanted more than anything else?” and the man said, “More than anything else, I wanted air.” Socrates said, “All right, when you want wisdom and learning like you wanted air, you won’t have to ask anybody to give it to you.”¹¹

Truth is the air we seek. Being true and seeing truth require faithful conviction that “principles are more important than control, that honest feelings are more important than smooth facades, and that understanding new information benefits the individual expressing it as well as the receiver.”¹²



Fortify faith

Many people limit faith to religious conviction, but it need not be so. Faith is a far more basic and transcendent principle. Simply put, faith is the belief that there are higher powers operating in this

world than those we see and understand. Accepting these powers into our lives transforms us into better people. These powers become accessible through lives of personal integrity, principle, and compassion. Faith is not only a source of abiding peace, wisdom, and happiness for ourselves, the healing can be shared with others as well to help them on their journey. The outcome is more accurate perception, keener insights, greater knowledge—all of which we need to do our jobs well. St. Augustine wrote, “Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore, seek not to understand that thou mayest believe, but believe that thou mayest understand.” To make good decisions, to create edifying relationships, believing *is* seeing: believing (faith or trust) = seeing (gives rise to) = understanding = forgiveness. Therefore, it just makes sense to do all we can to intensify our efforts to reinforce faith and trust with our co-workers. To fortify faith, we prepare ourselves first, demonstrate that we believe in the innate goodness and potential of others, create structures for faith to grow, and be receptive to the influence of others.

Preparing self. Becoming an instrument through which others may grow in courage is a little like what Madeleine L’Engle describes as remembering we can walk on water. Through patient, diligent personal preparation we study, pray, and worship to learn the art of the impossible and the incredible joy that accompanies it. We must work every day whether we feel like it or not. We work because every relationship is a creation in process. It is art. “The artist is a servant who is willing to be a birthgiver,” writes L’Engle. “And the artist either says, ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord,’ and willingly becomes the bearer of the work, or refuses.”¹³

Bearers of the work know their weaknesses and strengths and that both often trade places. They know what they feel and can articulate it. They feel settled in what they care about and want to happen but are willing to defer or wait for explanation of events. After careful analysis, things feel right in their mind *and* heart. Bearers of the work also know that “the principal part of faith is patience.”¹⁴ Relationships are built over time with the centerpiece one of commitment that goes beyond organizational entanglements. The work is extraordinary because there are no ordinary people. We have always been thus. The words of Wordsworth remind us of our ancestral home and the common origin and destiny of lives:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home;
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!¹⁵

We always were—first spiritually begotten and now we must be spiritually transcendent. Yet, how easily we forget who we really are.

Belief in innate goodness and potential. Because a noble heritage binds us, fortifying faith is in our best interest not just because it is a nice thing to do, but because to do otherwise ensures failure. “Our doubts are traitors; and make us lose the good we oft might win; by fearing the attempt,” wrote Shakespeare. If we think we can’t, we can’t. What hope do we have in accomplishing personal or organizational goals by doubting the abilities or potential of others? Most of my heroes have had their say on the power of belief and trust. Shakespeare and Emerson knew, “They conquer who believe they can.” Emerson wrote, “The glory of friendship is not the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when he discovers that someone else *believes in him and is willing to trust him*” [Italics added] We fortify faith by approaching each situation from the Hindu perspective of “I see and honor the divine within you as you see and honor the divine within me.”¹⁶ Remen reminds us of “the wisdom of remaining open to the possibility of growth in any and all circumstances, without ever knowing what shape that growth may take.” She says:

We are, in a certain way, defined as much by our potential as by its expression. There is a great difference between an acorn and a little bit of wood carved into an acorn shape, a difference not always readily apparent to the naked eye. The difference is there even if an acorn never has the opportunity to plant itself and become an oak. Remembering its potential changes the way in which we think of an acorn and react to it. How we value it. If an acorn were conscious, knowing its potential would change the way that it might think and feel about itself.¹⁷

She further points out that recognizing a sense of possibility is different from making demands; it is “simply being open to whatever promise the situation may hold and remembering the inability of anyone to know the future.”¹⁸ Rabbi ben Azzai seconds this by sharing a thought from the Talmud: “Despise no man and consider nothing impossible, for there is no man who does not have his hour, and no thing that does not have his place.”

Structure for faith to grow. Experience tells us that “bitter counsel” makes others fight back. These conditions breed doubt and doubt dries up creative participation. We can structure opportunity for “sweet counsel” and “councils” to serve as vehicles for developing truth and understanding. Since we all have extraordinary power by virtue of our ability to choose whether or not to cooperate—a power prized above almost all else—obtaining mutual purpose, mutual respect,

and mutual meaning *is* challenging. The unequal distribution of power and the limitations of one or two people's wisdom create powder-keg situations which preclude truth and agreement.

When I worked as director of a mental health agency, finding this mutuality tried me to the core. A volunteer board of directors ran the agency where I served as its executive director. People were attracted to the organization for a variety of reasons, a chief one being a desire to be included in the power elite of the community. Others served for more humanitarian reasons. But it was difficult to sort out and respond to everyone's personal agenda or pet project. Every board member was in essence my "boss," but the president of the board (who served for a two-year term) had the final say. It was not unusual for me to have many discussions each week with various board members about projects or proposals. As one of two paid staff members, I normally felt torn in a million directions. Not surprisingly something was always coming out of left field.

One such ball came from the current president of the board. A young minister by profession, on the surface he was congenial and supportive. On one occasion, he and I discussed a particular project, and later I shared our discussion with another board member. The president was not supportive of my position, but the board member was. After the board member phoned the president to try and influence him to support the project, the president went ballistic. He accused me of going "behind his back" to lobby for my position and "forbade" me from having similar discussions with board members in the future. From my perspective, there was nothing covert or unusual about it; it was just the way I had done things in the agency for more than three years. However, the president felt I had set him up.

Flabbergasted by the president's response, I sought counsel from another board member, who was responsible for personnel issues. The first thing he said was, "We have to get some other people in on this." He arranged a meeting with a few other board members, and the situation was quickly resolved. The presence and wisdom of the group quickly equalized the power dynamics and polarization between the two of us.

I've never forgotten the insight of my colleague's advice to form a small "council" through which to discuss this problem. "In councils we learn the correct principle that no one person is good enough to take full responsibility for the decision making or the outcome," writes Professor Bonner Ritchie. "Truth can be found only by an honest exchange of committed people, and when values transcend bottom-line outcomes. . . . "Principle is more important than performance."¹⁹ In my situation, the president's use of force to, in effect, take away my freedom of speech was so offensive to me I would never have carried out his directive. I would have resigned first. Without

my cooperation, the president's directive had no chance of being implemented. Research by Professor Ritchie shows that one-half of decisions are never implemented because of coercive tactics or because people do not buy into the decisions. He explains,

If we do not have a council, we increase the risk of becoming victims of the decision-making process, leaving us both cynical and resentful. We will fight back, and we will be abused, and will likely abuse others. As leaders and followers, the only protection from these negative side effects is an understanding of the council as a form of organization with sweet counsel as the criterion of interpersonal exchange.²⁰

We fortify faith by structuring opportunities for open and honest expression of our true feelings, including our doubts and fears. Francis Bacon writes in *De Augmentis*, "If we begin with certainties, we will end in doubt. But if we begin with doubts and bear them patiently, we may end in certainty."²¹

Be willing to be influenced by the process. If we take on the responsibility of counseling others, we must also be willing to receive counsel from them. We literally must learn to lay our burdens at each other's feet, saying, "I care about you, I want what you want. Can we work this out." And keep saying that for as often as it takes to get back on track when there are problems. Our answers and timing for others are often off base. We fortify faith when we trust that the truth will prevail if we are given the opportunity to explore it in both directions without censure. Say, "Help me understand," and be willing to adjust your position based upon the information given. Admitting error through a sincere apology breathes life into a relationship. Defensiveness communicates, "I care more about my feelings than yours," and also that I care more for my personal feelings than solving the problem.

In summary, fortify faith and we starve doubt. Through consistent, patient effort, we develop memories of past approval which discount present anxieties that hold us back. "Faith is what makes you feel the comfort of the hearth while you're chopping the wood."



Teach that which satisfies.

The hero's journey is more about creating relationships whereby we help others *formulate their own questions* rather than imposing our own values and opinions about what others should be about.

In *Education of the Heart: Rediscovering the Spiritual Roots of Learning*, Russell Osguthorpe reminds us of the sacred nature of learning relationships and the characteristics of questions of the heart. The purpose of learning at work should also be to develop moral behavior, best mastered in an atmosphere of mutual trust in which both colleagues become self-forgetful, willing to submit to one another in truth and love. Osguthorpe says,

The more I consider what learning is, the more I see it as a sacred privilege, an act of wonder. I believe that when we are learning we feel most alive—when we are learning, we feel closest to God. Why is it that so many view learning as a form of drudgery, as something to be avoided?²²

I believe it is because we have forgotten or never learned how to pursue or to allow others to pursue their questions of the heart. Fear, resentment, cynicism, competition, and an unrestrained need to control others in the workplace preclude our making ourselves accessible to explore questions that are equally concerned about *being* and *knowing*. Questions of the heart have both *passionate* and *compassionate* attributes that inspire creativity and innovation. Often these questions originate deep within, showing up as hunches and intuition. Responding to questions of the heart is essential for creativity. These questions demand intense focus and attention from ourselves and others, but they can not be handled with coercion or force. We often have a deep conviction that it is our destiny to pursue the answers to these questions in ways uniquely our own.

Think of your most joyful, fulfilling learning experience. What are the characteristics that make the situation stand out? When I was first asked this question, the answer was easy. Though I did not have words to describe the experience, I knew immediately that Osguthorpe's description of "questions of the heart" matched my experience with my mentor, Professor Bonner Ritchie.

At the age of forty, when I moved with my two teenage sons from North Carolina to Provo, Utah, to attend graduate school at Brigham Young University, I was terrified beyond words that I might not have the "right stuff" for completing the master's program in organizational behavior. No one had ever finished college in my family, much less a graduate degree. Stories of the difficulty of the program were legendary, especially getting through an organizational theory class taught by Professor Ritchie. Students feared and admired him not only for his brilliance but also because of the way he taught his classes. My friend warned me, "Get something written and turned in quickly; don't be intimidated by him."

Professor Ritchie's syllabus contained a list of ten books as suggested reading plus two additional books of choice. Ritchie's outline stated two *primary* means of "sharing, testing, and evaluating your ideas: class discussion and papers." He regarded class discussion as a "crucial part of the learning process." He said, "For the most part I leave it up to you to decide what to communicate and how to communicate it." As a minimum, he requested at least two critical reviews of relevant, non-assigned books. He wanted us to submit a packet at the end of the term containing all work completed along with an analysis of our learning experience. Professor Ritchie concluded the syllabus by explaining the primary differences between a "scholar" and a "student" with a final statement that grading was, of course, "subjective."

That was it. We came to class, waiting for *him* to lecture, waiting for *him* to tell us what to do. Professor Ritchie sat waiting for *us* to initiate the topics of discussion. He also waited for us to prove to him we had a good grasp of organizational theory. At first, it was scary. What did he expect? What did he want from us? We all huddled in the halls trying to figure Bonner out, instead of figuring ourselves out, which is what he wanted.

Remembering my friend's counsel, I started keeping a journal of my learning. Inspired by a passage from *My Name Is Asher Lev*, by Chaim Potok, within the first week I wrote my first journal entry. I began with the quotation by Asher Lev as he began to awaken to the artist within himself: "Why didn't I ever see it before? I asked myself. Something has happened to my eyes and head in the mirror above the bathroom sink." My opening paragraph in my journal said,

To see with eyes that live as separate membranes with a noble purpose is my desire: to give my eyes the freedom to linger past what is acceptable; to allow my eyes to trace, taste, embrace the coming together, the going apart of variety; to stay around when others have gone; to become so familiar with my subject that I know and am known; like Asher, "To be responsible to my art."

I continued to write my musings every two or three days and turned a small collection in to Professor Ritchie. Fearfully and to my utter amazement, I read his comments about my thoughts. He wrote:

Vivian,

I really like your careful, thoughtful, upbeat approach. You get more insight into a brief comment than most people. You raise excellent issues—pose great hypotheses. Now, can you take one, or more of these and extend the inquiry? Your coverage is good—can you follow through?

Could I follow through? Just watch my dust! I read and reread his feedback, along with his specific challenges to many of my assumptions. This was heaven! I could actually explore questions that were of interest to *me*! I had waited forty years for this opportunity. Absent of any clue about how to go about creating my own learning experience, I knew intuitively my life changed forever. Without the opportunity to learn how to explore my questions of the heart, I would not have written this book.

Professor Ritchie's unorthodox style exemplifies the spiritual roots of the "education of the heart." I learned from him never again to hold on to those things that cannot satisfy. This experience initiated the keys of study and faith needed to pursue the work meant for me to do. Learning what God wants us to learn changes us in profound ways. As we guide others to also have this experience, something holy happens.

Professor Ritchie modeled the eight keys for providing guidance that Osguthorpe identifies:

1. Invite rather than control.
2. Offer rather than constrain.
3. Listen rather than preach.
4. Nurture rather than control.
5. Stretch without breaking.
6. Trust in mutual potential.
7. Rely on the rigor of love.
8. Recognize God's hand.²³

In completing the last cycle of the hero's journey, helping others at work requires considerable "pondering" about the perplexities we all face. Pondering takes place in the "empty spaces" of our lives. The challenge is to look beyond the outward appearances of our co-workers, to look upon individuals as God sees them. When we look upon the heart of man, we learn to see, like Asher Lev, with new eyes. We learn to adapt our behavior to benefit those we serve and lead. We open the

doorway for others to find truth and for truth to find us. Pondering the question, “What is the right thing to do?” replaces expediency and manipulation with benevolent “hints from heaven.”

Political power is measured in terms of control and domination; God’s power is measured in dimensions of benevolence, discernment, and edification. Control and domination are artificial creations of those who seek power in the worldly definition; benevolence, discernment, and edification are qualities of the heart.²⁴

Binding ourselves to God’s power and direction liberates us from the personal need to interfere in the lives of others in unrighteous ways. We sense or interpret things with greater accuracy, with increased empathy, with less strife. The results, or fruits of such a yielding to God’s influence Osguthorpe classifies as *sensibility, reverence, humility, edification, inspiration, and joy*.

Without *reverence* or *humility* a question of the heart cannot emerge. Without *sensibility* the learner cannot determine the adequacy or sincerity of guidance that is given. Without *inspiration* we cannot be certain that we have found truth.²⁵



Don't keep score in goodness.

If we don’t care who gets the credit, we never have to worry about getting recognition. When we condition ourselves to require frequent and large amounts of appreciation from others, we set ourselves up for disappointment. As much as we all enjoy positive reactions from others, expecting constant recognition is a little red-flag that we may be doing good things for the wrong reason. People can sense when we’re too needy for attention, especially when our focus is toward those in positions of power. Playing to the crowd is an empty exercise, short-lived in the pleasure it brings. There is satisfaction in providing our own validation, claiming our own value independent of the honors of men or in comparison to their shortcomings. We can know we are keeping score with comments like, “I would never do that!” Heroes refuse to be defined by the assumptions, attitudes, values or behavior of others.



Be bold in virtue.

Like “dissidents” of the past, present, and future, we ponder the core of our doubts, our fears, and our despair, to come up with the seeds of new hope, new self-confidence—a new commitment to live beyond our personal limitations and boundaries. We find peace in knowing it’s not the falling down but the getting up that matters most. We’re not afraid of the power of the veto, the power to say “no” when our conscience speaks, knowing that some things are worth fighting for. We’re inspired more by purism than prestige, pay more attention to “ruthless rules than ruthless rulers.” The burden of a compromised life compels us to think carefully about where we spend our days at work to plan accordingly. We lay claim to and exercise our righteous powers, all that we can muster, to see good, to do good, to be good. Not *gooder* in relationship to others. Just *good*. We do away with the pride and enmity of the comparative life and give ourselves to helping people pursue answers to their *questions of the heart*.



Gather the light.

From childhood, light has intrigued me. My favorite song at Sunday School was about light: “This little light of mine, I’m gonna’ let it shine! This little light of mine, I’m gonna’ let it shine. This little light of mine, I’m gonna’ let it shine; let shine, let it shine, let it shine!” I felt powerful when I sang this song: the words and the lively tune affirmed the goodness in me. They fortified my courage to overcome the unrelenting darkness of my young life.

Light and darkness seem to always go together; they play off each other as surely as dawn follows the darkest part of the night. In the scheme of things, without one we cannot know the other. The darkness calls us to light; it hastens our steps, permeates our inattention. Darkness is a wake-up call to do what we think we cannot do. “You and I in our own little circles have been placed here to light up the landscape of others, frail and flickering as our own flames seem at times,”²⁶ writes Neal Maxwell. Unqualified and imperfect as we are, God calls us to warn and warm others with all the light we can muster.

In every act we do, in every thought we think, every minute of every day, we are increasing or decreasing our receptivity to light. Have you wondered how some people radiate so much light that

within minutes you feel complete trust, and with others feel guarded after a lifetime of experience? Have you noticed the light that seems to radiate from someone's eyes? I believe it is the degree to which these people have successfully nurtured light in themselves through conscious devotion to it. People who radiate light understand what Jacques Lusseryan, the blind hero of the French resistance understood: "Light does not come to us from without. Light is in us, even if we have no eyes."

As an artist understands the need to use light effectively to create beauty, so do we. We are called upon to co-create with God the environment that builds us and others up. In *Walden*, Thoreau wrote, "It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look. . . . To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts."

Heroes past and present by their very being affect the quality of the day. For some, this role is a sacred trust. Joe DiMaggio was such a hero, always presenting himself with the dignity expected of men of great influence. Talk show host Larry King told of an encounter with DiMaggio in the locker room after an old-timer's game at RFK Stadium in Washington, D.C. DiMaggio was in his undershirt when ESPN came in with their cameras. "Stop! Stop!" he shouted, "You don't take a picture of Joe DiMaggio in an undershirt. You take a picture of Joe DiMaggio in a Yankee uniform. The children will see this."

What a difference life would be in the workplace if we all behaved as if our children were watching. This is not to imply that we have to behave perfectly, only that we are on the right road moving in the right direction.

Gathering light keeps us moving in the right direction.

Light as humility. Dr. Friedrich Dessauer, an atomic physicist, writes

Man is a creature who depends entirely on revelation. In all his intellectual endeavor, he should always listen, always be intent to hear and see. He should not strive to superimpose the structure of his own mind, his systems of thought upon reality At the beginning of all spiritual endeavor stands humility, and he who loses it can achieve no other heights than the heights of disillusionment.²⁷

Meekness doesn't play well in corporate America. Ironically, without it innovation and creativity are impossible. Innovation and creativity demand a childlike openness to originality and uniqueness. Yet, how is this possible when the traditions of our worklife pull us to be in control, to know everything, to be invulnerable? (Remember that at the age of five, 90 percent of the children measure "high creativity." By the age of seven, the figure dropped to 10 percent, and by adulthood, it is only 2 percent!)²⁸

Author C. S. Lewis warns us that self-conceit or pride lead to every other vice. He challenges us to find out how proud we are by asking ourselves, "How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take notice of me, or patronize me, or show off?" The point of the exercise is to see that "pride is essentially competitive . . . it is the *comparison* that makes you proud—the pleasure of being above the rest."²⁹ Most of the qualities needed for creative action are virtually beaten out of us by the age of seven. And the job is virtually finished off by the time we begin our careers.

To recover the attributes of creativity, such as an openness to the unexpected and comfort with uncertainty, we have to get used to feeling like fish swimming upstream, or a fish out of the water altogether. Rediscovering the childlike qualities of humility and meekness has an added bonus of curtailing self-pity and anxiety about real and imagined offenses. Humility helps put us in the proper state of mind to not only learn, but to work creatively, and to make course corrections when needed. With practice, we learn we can trust our own senses, a prerequisite for surviving in the workplace of the next century.

Light as kindness. "Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves."³⁰ The practice of loving kindness is the hallmark of most religions of the world. The Dalai Lama says his "true religion is kindness":

If you practice kindness as you live, no matter if you are learned or not learned, whether you believe in the next life or not, whether you believe in God or Buddha or some other religion, in day-to-day life you have to be a kind person. With this motivation, it doesn't matter whether you are a practitioner or a lawyer or politician, administrator, worker, or engineer. Whatever your profession or field, you carry your work as professional. In the meantime, deep down, you are a kind person. This is something useful in daily life."³¹

Kindness is exemplified by being centered, unflappable, steady as we go. It does not mean being weak or wimpish. Kindness never compromises truth, but handles the truth in reverent ways. Sometimes we show kindness by saying nothing, letting the truth evolve in the other person's own

time and space. Other times, “telling it like it is” with merciful judgment is the kindest thing to do. Bearing the misery of knowing which one to choose is the journey of the hero at work.

Light as forgiveness. Forgiveness brings light into the lives of both offender and recipient of the offense. By letting hurt go, we retrieve our own power to define our lives within our own values and put the responsibility of making a course change where it belongs—with the other person. By our wounds we are healed because our capacity to endure is magnified, but *only* if we let the hurt go. The test for knowing whether or not forgiveness is complete is if *we still feel pain*. We may know we have forgiven *only* when we don’t feel hurt any more. By forgiving others first, we provide the *foundation* for their hearts to change. With the light of forgiveness, others are compelled to look within because they can no longer blame us for holding a grudge, even if tucked away secretly in the heart. By practicing forgiveness consistently, our light memories extinguish the darkness of self-pity; our memories deflect the sting of offenses from others. Through forgiveness, we edify each other.

Light as integrity. To live and work with integrity means having the quality of being whole, undivided, complete in our convictions, purpose, values, and behavior. The hero lives in the light so he does not need the limelight. The illumination of his character is enough to light the landscape on the darkest days. His integrity is the umbrella virtue covering all others including honesty, moral courage, sincerity, and dedication to truth. To extol the virtue of compartmentalizing our moral life from our worklife is absurd. Since when is schizophrenia (a condition that results from the coexistence of disparate or antagonistic qualities, identities, or activities) a good thing?

Light as faith. To gather the light, heroes kick themselves and others in the behind occasionally. They are aware when they are falling down on the job, making excuses, letting themselves off the hook, getting in a rut either by laziness or from too much consensus decision-making, too much conformity. Heroes edify others by confronting the natural inclination to slide back down the mountain just ascended—or, for that matter, being too passive to begin the trek at all. They understand the natural pull to rely on the intellect, what can or cannot be disproved, measured, labeled, put in the box. The admonition to “work outside the box” reminds us of our tendency to “misname” each other, to limit people and the creative things they can do if allowed or encouraged to break the “rules.” To see things in a new light—the grand “aha!”—heroes have faith in the value of variability. They define deviancy *upward*, fanning out in new directions, resisting the tendency to converge on the wrong variable. They support the needs of creative people to be autonomous, self-sufficient, more open to the irrational within themselves, more self-assertive and emotionally sensitive than many of their co-workers. They don’t freak out with their

unconventional, unrealistic, undisciplined, work habits. They invite intuition as *reliable* light that serves their creativity. It tells them which book to buy, which words to use, what new path not yet explored to follow. Studies show that three out of four people prefer sense perception to intuition. However, 90 percent of creative people show a preference for *intuition to sense perception*.

Light as love. In the final analysis, the only things that really matter are how much knowledge we gain and the quality of our relationships with each other. Being successful within the traditional definition of success at work has little to do with real success in life. The social and spiritual isolation we encounter in the workplace create special challenges to treating the word *love* as both a noun and a verb. Our attitudes and behavior reflect an enduring regard for our fellow workers—not for the fact alone that it is a *nice* thing. It is essential to effective productive work. Covenantal relationships—those based in a commitment to what is real, relevant, reverent, and repentant—safeguard our ability to gather more light to ourselves so that we may influence others to high and noble living and create profit for the company.

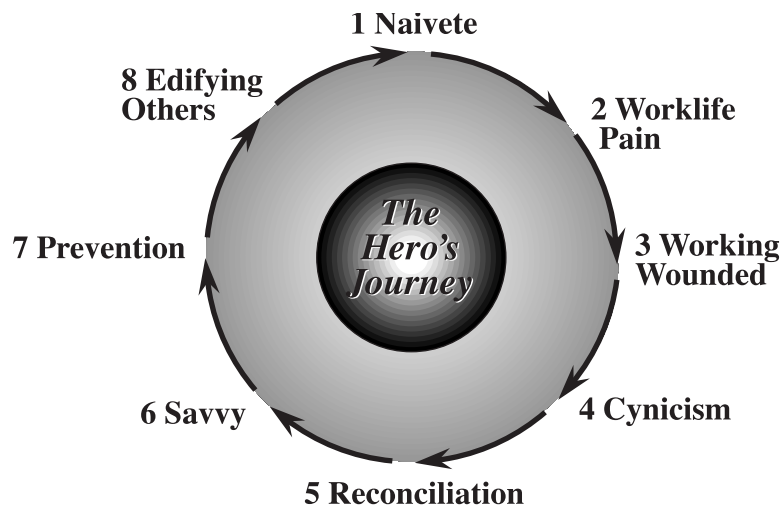
The bottom line: The journey to becoming your own hero at work is hard work. More often than not we have to make it up as we go along. We just do not know the answers and cannot expect to. We live in a world of uncertainty and adjustment to surprises. It has always been thus. All of our heroes, past and present, faced individualized trials, reaching down into the innermost parts of their souls to discover the divinity within. For example, Moses was an insecure old man who stuttered and struggled with a bad temper; Gandhi openly confessed his service was anything but humanitarian, stating, “I am here to serve no one else but myself, to find my own self-realization through the service of these village folks.” Musical geniuses like Beethoven and Mozart struggled with their inadequacies. Even the Apostles of Jesus Christ fled in fear during His greatest hour of need. Indeed, perhaps much of our pain is self-chosen, the spirit “physician” within taking on those impediments of our higher nobler self. Author Madeleine L’Engle captures the anguish inherent in these tests, describing the lonesome path of the hero’s journey:

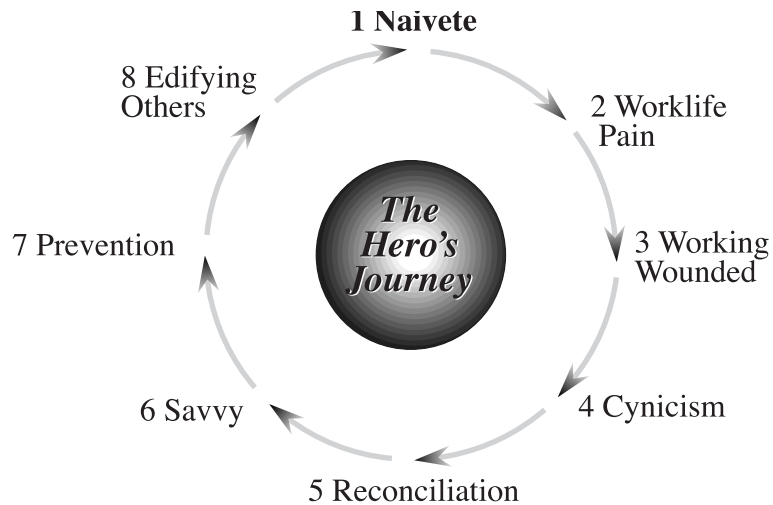
No matter how deep the faith, we each have to walk the lonesome valley; we each have to walk it all alone. The world tempts us to draw back, tempts us to believe we will not have to take this test. We are tempted to try to avoid not only our own suffering, but that of our fellow human beings, the suffering of the world, which is part of our own suffering. But if we draw back from it (and we are free to do so), Kafka reminds us that “it may be this very holding back is the one evil you could have avoided.”

The artist cannot hold back; it is impossible, because writing, or any other discipline of art [such as the delicate art of helping others] involves participation in suffering, in the ills and the occasional stabbing joys that come from being part of the human drama.³²

Thus, we drink our soul's remedy with hope and faith, knowing that enduring well these surprises of life is valuable to some other precious soul who is watching, waiting to see how well we will do. One of my heroes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, understood these connections between all of us—that we are all at different levels, but whatever level we have obtained, it is valuable to someone. He writes, “Every man is a hero and an oracle to somebody, and to that person whatever he says has an enhanced value.” It is a never-ending process of lifting our fellow travelers to a little higher ground. “If you would lift me up you must be on higher ground.” Emerson continues, “We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us which we seem to have ascended, there are stairs above us which go out of sight.”

This is the journey: finding higher ground and starting over again. The journey is more vertical than horizontal. The end of the journey of the hero at work will actually be the beginning of another search.





The words of T. S. Eliot invite us to stay with the journey until we can appreciate not just the melody but also the “pauses between notes” of our lives:

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling
 We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time.

Through the unknown, remembered gate
 When the last of earth left to discover
 Is that which was the beginning;
 At the source of the longest river
 The voice of the hidden waterfall
 And the children in the apple-tree

Not known, because not looked for
 But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
 Between two waves of the sea.
 Quick now, here, now, always—
 A condition of complete simplicity
 (Costing not less than everything)
 And all shall be well and
 All manner of things shall be well
 When the tongues of flame are in-folded
 Into the crowned knot of fire
 And the fire and rose are one.³³

Endnotes

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6. Source unknown
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14. L'Engle, *Walking on Water*, 24. (Anonymous quote)
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