



SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

A Holistic Life

— JIYING SONG AND SHANN RAY FERCH

The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.

*I am not free while any woman is unfree,
even when her shackles are very different from my own.*

— Audre Lorde

A primary reason for the general malaise and lack of human connection experienced by so many in contemporary society coincides with a loss of joy. With both East and West currently facing widespread personal, relational, and existential losses, the question of what it means to live in and be developed by a real community and to authentically encounter what might be called a sense of home is haunting. Pervasive patriarchy has produced great loneliness, degradation, and desolation in the human community.

In Greenleaf's terms, the true community is a result of servant-leaders working to meet the most ultimate needs of those with whom they come into contact. The result of meeting such needs is that



others grow wiser, more free, more healthy, and more autonomous. In Greenleaf's conception, in a good relational environment, a good home community from which to live and move, people are liberated toward the best sense of healthy humanity and therefore become better able to serve, and the least privileged of society are benefited or at least not further deprived. Juana Bordas, a Latina leader known for her vitality and profound advancement of servant-leadership in the contemporary leadership landscape, also calls people to a deeper sense of home. She refers to servant-leadership as having a powerful base in ancient and contemporary collectivist cultures, the will to serve being the foundation for the collective's trust in a person or group's ability to lead. Bordas (2007) recognizes a profound communal broadening and deepening in current national, and by extension, international life: "The rapidly increasing cultural and racial diversity . . . is challenging leadership to better reflect the values and worldviews inherent to our multicultural society" (p. ix). She notes a more holistic and diverse sense of leadership in families and communities will only be affirmed "when the voices, values, and contributions of all . . . are integrated into mainstream leadership" (p. ix).

In a world where leaders and organizations face global pandemics and power conflicts, patriarchy and gender dualism still prevail be it in the East or West. Gender stereotyping and the glass ceiling continue to affect humanity's conceptualizations of leadership (Barreto et al., 2009; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Olcott & Hardy, 2006; Parsons, 2019; Reynolds, 2013, 2014, 2020). The ill-effects of patriarchy are deeply rooted and ubiquitous, and often overlooked by both men and women (Johnson, 1997). In the ancient Chinese philosophy of the cosmos, males are heaven while females are earth, males are *qian* while females are *kun*, and males are *yang*



while females are *yin* (Bao, 1987). This was dichotomous but equal; there was neither high nor low between *yin* and *yang* (Bao, 1987). It was not until the Han Dynasty (around 100 B.C.), *yin* and females were degraded to be inferior and subjected to *yang* and males (Bao, 1987). This ideology led to women's footbinding, concubinage, arranged marriage, and deprival of women's education in ancient China (Bao, 1987). Women were subdued based on the ascendancy of patriarchy, the focus on the contradictory aspects of *yin* and *yang*, and the elevation of *yang* (Bao, 1987; Xie, 1916/2011). It set the norms for Confucianism and controlled Chinese people for two millennia. Having stressed the equally and mutually complementary character of *yin-yang*, some scholars paved the way for the women's egalitarian movement in 19th-century China (Bao, 1987; Xie, 1916/2011).

In the West, embedded in male-focused interpretations of the Bible as well as the more atheistic influx of industrialism, hypercapitalism, reductive science, and empire, patriarchy has been a powerfully controlling and degrading set of conceptual tools used to maintain, enforce, contest, and adjudicate social order (Miller, 2017). Notably, a well-discerned vision of spiritual life, be it in Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Confucianism, or Christianity, has the seeds of equality and dignity for all people, but in most traditional forms of religious interpretation an undue focus on the maleness of God, women's subjugation, and hierarchy with regard to people, church, temple, or mosque is still prevalent (Ruether, 1989). Women have been excluded from leadership roles in many religious bodies based on certain interpretations of honored scriptures (Cowles, 1993; Howe, 1982). People might think that this issue has been less intense in recent history because egalitarians have made progress, but many men as well as women throughout the world, religious or otherwise,



still take this stance. The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (1988) clearly states in its Danvers Statement: “some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men” (Affirmations 6.2). Despite many scholars’ vigorous efforts of interpreting the Bible in a more discerning historical context (Bailey, 2000; Belleville, 2003; Kroeger, 1979; Wright, 2004), gender discrimination prevails in religious leadership in China and the United States (Song, 2018, 2019). Atheistic, agnostic, or non-religious leadership worldwide embodies a similar calcification of gender discrimination as systemic sexism, homophobia, racism, and classism still pervasively dominate the systems of the modern world economically and structurally.

Patriarchy relates to excluding women from (certain) leadership roles (Barreto et al., 2009; Cowles, 1993; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Ferch, 2020; Howe, 1982; Jakobsh, 2004; Olcott & Hardy, 2006; Parsons, 2019; Reynolds, 2013, 2014, 2020; Tilghman-Havens, 2018), sexual harassment and violence against women (Bao, 1987; Bloomquist, 1989; Griffith, 2004; Miller, 2017; Ruether, 1989), femicide and child abuse (Kennedy, 2000; Parkinson et al., 2012; Redmond, 1989; Taylor et al., 2014; Tran, 2020). Given the long traditions of patriarchy, many organizations today are still male dominated with the assumptions that these organizations are gender-neutral and their structures asexual (Jakobsh, 2004). With these assumptions and systems of entrenched power, both men and women are conditioned to maintain the status quo (Jakobsh, 2004). That which can be named as feminine is often subdued, degraded, dominated, or made invisible by the masculine in China as well as in the West.

When I (Jiying) worked in China, I was promoted to leadership positions later than my male colleagues because I am a woman and



assumedly would need to spend more time to take care of my family, which would hinder my performance at work. Later, when I became the Operation Director and was recruiting graduates for my company, I tended to choose female students only if they had higher degrees (Master's vs. Bachelor's) or much better experiences than their male peers. I did not do it out of intentionally discriminating against women, instead, I thought it was to serve the interest of a gender-neutral corporation. I was conditioned by the male-dominant perspective to maintain the status quo and I lacked the discernment necessary at the time to resist and seek to transform oppressive systems into liberatory systems (hooks, 1985; West, 2014).

The renowned feminist warrior poet Audre Lorde died in St. Croix in 1992. She lived as a freedom fighter seeking to serve the deepest needs of people in order to create a more just world. Her critique of patriarchy resounds: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change," (Lorde, 2007, p. 110). Only love and freedom, and the legitimate power associated with serving the highest priority needs of others can help heal the heart of the peoples of the world, especially the least respected or those Cornel West (2014) identifies as the wretched of the earth, a moniker imbued with clarion transparency by Frantz Fanon: the least of these being the people we are called to serve, sacrifice for, and even die for in order to ensure a more humane existence.

We believe servant-leadership, in its ethic of love, care, and service to the least privileged is a potential antidote to patriarchal binds because servant-leadership "espouses a nonhierarchical, participative approach to defining organizational objectives and ethics that recognizes and values the subjectivity and situatedness of



organizational members” (Reynolds, 2014, p. 57). It can be “a driving force for generating discourse on gender-integrative approaches to organizational leadership” (p. 51). Since Greenleaf coined the term *servant-leader*, the debate over its paradox has been ongoing. Eicher-Catt (2005) claimed the apposition of servant with leader was associated with subjugation and domination respectively, and instantiates a paradoxical discourse game that perpetuates male-centric patriarchal norms rather than neutralizing gender bias. Reynolds (2014) proposed Eicher-Catt’s (2005) critique adds to a quality deconstructive discourse, however, Reynolds (2014) argued that the paradoxical linguistic term “servant-leader” in its authentically embodied contextual foundations is not a disguise for male-centric norms as Eicher-Catt (2005) claimed, but a complementary and harmonious sense of wholeness across the gender spectrum.

Reynolds analyzed Spears’ (2002) 10 characteristics to examine servant-leadership constructs in terms of gender. Reynolds (2014) argued that six of the 10 characteristics distinguish servant-leadership from other forms of leadership whereas the other four are more in line with traditional notions of leadership. Foresight, conceptualization, awareness, and persuasion can be characterized as leader behaviors, which are often associated with the more traditionally masculine aspect of leadership; whereas stewardship, listening, empathizing, healing, commitment to the growth of people, and building community, on the other hand, are predominantly needs-focused and other-oriented, and thus comprise more feminine-attributed aspects of leadership (Reynolds, 2014). These two sets of characteristics, when pursued through seeking to “make things whole” as Greenleaf espoused, are complementary, not oppositional as Eicher-Catt (2005) claimed.



According to Greenleaf (1977/2002), servant-leaders are “*healers* in the sense of *making whole* by helping others to a larger and nobler vision and purpose than they would be likely to attain for themselves” (p. 240, emphasis in original). Healing is underappreciated in leadership (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). It is “the most rare and perhaps the most needed characteristic of leaders today” (Ferch, 2012, p. xi). A hallmark of a servant-leader is that “they heal others, and they do so through mature relationship to self, others, and God” (p. 72). A central essence of servant-leadership is the commitment to making oneself, others, organizations, and relationships whole. Of course healing and making society whole takes great moral effort in community with others, as feminist leaders such as bell hooks, Judith Butler, Angela Davis, and Juana Bordas attest. Such healing can be said to be a byproduct of the self-awareness, listening, empathy, and community-building envisioned in servant-leadership. This sense of wholeness resonates with Tutu’s (1998) understanding of community, “a person is a person through other persons” (p. 19).

This sense of wholeness also resonates with the way of *yin-yang* in ancient Chinese literature:

As for yin and yang, they are the Way of heaven and earth, the fundamental principles [governing] the myriad beings, father and mother to all changes and transformations, the basis and beginning of generating life and killing, the palace of spirit brilliance. (Unschuld, Tessenow, & Zheng, 2011, p. 95)

Lao Tzu (about 4th or 6th century B.C.) said, “All the myriad things carry the Yin on their backs and hold the Yang in their embrace, deriving their vital harmony from the proper blending of the two vital Breaths” (Lao Tzu, 2005, p. 49). *Yin* and *yang* cannot exist without each other. They are a complementary and harmonious



oneness. This oneness, wholeness, across gender, culture, and context, is the heart of servant-leadership . . . the curative element capable in small and large ways of healing patriarchy, imperialism, and dominant culture's inherent conscious and unconscious dominance. The world seeks wholeness, even as self-embedded lifestyles and desperation strike at the core of our ability to create community and give to others a sense of home in which love and power remain in balance, and openness, humility, strength and vulnerability are one.

In looking closer at this dynamic as a man I (Shann) find servant-leadership challenges my will to power with a coinciding and more profound will to love. Vulnerability can be painful, but it is required for healthy community. I grew up in Montana, in a home filled with music, basketball, hunting, and fishing. Having served as a panelist on the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities Research Division, as well as for the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts as a literature fellow, I've come to admire both the great sense of inquiry found in social science as well as the depth of art and human potential found in works of true literary merit. The loss of home is a recurrent theme in the contemporary literature of America. Sometimes downplayed or ignored, most often revealed as fractured or fragmented or wrecked, the sense of loss is pervasive and painful and raises questions about human nature, my own experience of manhood in the context of home, and the nature of servant-leadership. In this section I want to consider polyvalent meanings of manhood, and what servant-leadership might have to say about masculinity in contemporary times.

My father turned seventy recently.

"I guess the Lord saw fit to bless me," he said, and it wasn't only about the seventy years, it was about the wilderness. In a given



season, a Montana hunter might bring home a deer, perhaps an elk. Many people in Montana feed their families on the steak, hamburger, sausage, and jerky that arrives after an animal is rendered and processed. My family lived mainly on deer as I grew up. In his seventieth year my father brought home two turkeys, an elk, two deer, two antelope, and a mountain goat. The mountain goat he found in the Crazy Mountains, north of the Beartooth Range, a hunt he took alone in the high country, cresting ridges and plateaus, rock walls and escarpments at higher than ten thousand feet. He went farther than expected in order to approach from above and shoot the animal behind the shoulder on a steep slant from three hundred feet.

The animal collapsed and slid a great distance down a narrow chute. It took time and great caution to reach the goat where it came to rest across a razor uplift of rock. There my father straddled a rock spine and stood over an expanse of sky as he proceeded to bone out the animal. He knew he would need to work fast. In a treacherous pathless country, being caught coming down the mountain after dark is not pleasant. In his precarious position, field dressing a mountain goat, a job that normally takes my father forty-five minutes took more than two hours. With a hunting knife, a sharpening tool, and a small bone saw he worked to quarter the animal, remove the meat, and take the cape and horns. Finally, with the sun on a hard lean toward last light, the heavy pack was ready and he began the descent. The Crazy Mountains are a dramatic and isolated “island” range east of the Great Divide, north of Big Timber, Montana. They lie in Sweet Grass County between the Musselshell and Yellowstone rivers. Just after dusk my father emerged on the flat below the mountains, made his way to his truck, and returned home.

For years, my father and I could not express our weaknesses to one another. Nor could we easily express our tenderness. In those



years, conflict was hot and full of wrath and mostly irresolvable, but in later life, love came to us and taught us the nature of forgiveness. Roxane Gay (2014), the dynamic and truth-telling feminist and nationally renowned writer, said strength is made perfect in weakness. Purposefully echoing the New Testament book of Corinthians, she gives masculinity a new lens from which to view power. Power not as force but vulnerability, a strength that emerges through weakness. The physical landscape of Montana, as well as the interior landscape of people, gives a small glimpse into the reality of how we give and how we ask forgiveness. The land can sometimes be an echo of how we change, and especially how we love. In America there is sometimes a pervasive lack of vision regarding the masculine and the feminine. Across the gender spectrum, many who identify most with masculine traits do not have words for their relationship to women or to men. Here, when combined with a wordless or muted interior, the Montana landscape evokes an even more isolate and rugged exterior, often resonant of the stylistic characteristics of a man's own physicality. A man's generational family line, his temperament, his response to abuse or violence or sustained trauma, all this is embedded in a Western landscape as bleak as it is beautiful, as fatal as it is enervated with life. The result, for those who cannot find words to express feelings, is often a potent bend toward that which is harsh, desolate, violent, and deadly. As a result, some men live physically loud and largely defunct familial lives. Or in a counter shadow, many men shun emotional engagement and carry an ultimate sense of apathy toward that which is lovely and true in the lives of others. Such men live empty and void and are also often experienced as meaningless. Such men become leaders blind to gender integration, and blind to the possibilities of servant-leadership. Often they unconsciously or



consciously forward an anti-ethic of command and control. In violence or apathy, the unhealthy masculine cuts off the feminine and succeeds in harming relationships with women and other men. Even if it can be said that all of us benefit from a healthy and in fact exquisite balance of the feminine and the masculine, many men find it very difficult to reach toward the feminine within their own masculinity, and many women find it equally difficult to reach toward the masculine within their own womanhood. As a clinical psychologist working with couples for more nearly 30 years, I've found balancing courage with tenderness, and love with legitimate power, is necessary for both the feminine and the masculine to relate on an in-depth level throughout the complexity and fluidity of contemporary gender formulations. Servant-leadership, when engaged with sincerity, humility, and the will to change, provides just such a balance.

Broken relationships, fractured families, the border of despair, the fall from grace. On the more masculine side of the continuum I've found those who reject grace or fall short of grace tend to live in violence or ennui toward self and others. Truly, there is a hard fall for people who reject grace. At the same time, in my experience a deep desire to return and atone exists in the lifeblood of the masculine in America. I've come to understand that almost all men yearn for grace and in fact love from the women and men in their lives. I believe most men yearn for an authentic sense of home, yet without grace and love a life of pain and unwieldy consequence tracks them, often in predatory fashion.

The mystery of life and the hope for love is irrevocable and is felt even in men whose interiority can often appear more mountain-like than human. Cold, distant, massive in darkness or density, far removed from the intimacies of daily life, such men suffer. Still, in



the heart of hearts, I've learned men crave something higher. If you have encountered wilderness, you know the great respect, awe and fear wilderness commands, and at the same time you know the intimacy wilderness imparts without measure. In a similar way, I believe the men of the West, even those who appear to be the hardest or most emotionally apathetic and void, desire a pathway toward grace, and if they somehow are given to set out on this path, they tend to traverse the landscape bravely and with endurance. I believe leadership espousing and embodying a healthy sense of gender integration can be realized through seeking to understand the tremendous depths of servant-leadership. Certainly, some leaders never open their eyes or soul enough to begin the journey back from a fractured sense of self and others into a loving community, yet those leaders who dare are beloved in their families and communities.

As a man, I believe men need atonement.

In order to find such atonement, our will is required. Our will to be mentored by women and men who are exquisite servant-leaders, who balance authentic love with power for others, and who generate in us and others greater health, wisdom, freedom, and autonomy, as well as a greater will to serve.

In atonement, people are restored to a sense of home.

In my own home, because of my wife and the heart we share with our three daughters, there is a spirited love for poetry, story, music, and dance. When I met Jennifer, I began to experience life more fully. She feels deeply and is an elegant and complex leader, thinker, writer, and reader who meets the world with tenacity and belief in immanent possibility. A fully expressed person is a wonder to encounter—the woman or man capable of understanding, embracing and transcending their own weaknesses or their own



shadow, while also attending to the light. Jennifer is such a person. I think of the capacity to live in balance as an everyday miracle: balance involves not only embodying darkness, as we are wont to do, but also transcending our individual and collective darkness by living toward light, as is our shared hope. From this encounter with an articulated sense of the healing qualities of the feminine and the masculine, I believe the essence of home becomes more present to us.

Home is a place of peace, reunion and reconciliation, where love, discernment, gravity, gentleness, wisdom, power and beauty reside. Home, rather than dislocation or displacement, draws us to the affirmative reality of what it means to be human. That home could be the original sacredness of the Native American traditions in Montana such as those of the Northern Cheyenne or the Blackfeet or the Sioux, or the many other powerful sovereign nations of Montana, or it could be a sense of home that heralds from a far homeland such as my own heritage in Czechoslovakia or Jiying's heritage in China. Home can be found anywhere in the world, in the heart of the community we hope in and for which we openly seek a healing that will reverse the descent of the present and take us into the vitality of a more responsible future. Home is acknowledged or embraced, challenged, divided, attacked or subdued as a result of the level of ego we may have in our lives at a given time, or depending on the level of atrocity we may have suffered in our families, nationally or culturally.

When my father came home from the mountains he was received with open arms. We thought with gratitude of how he went at seventy into the heart of a rough and often relentless landscape. In the house, the evening settled and he cooked a meal for us. My mother prayed and we received her grace. My wife read to us from



sacred texts, enjoining us to bless others with the blessings we'd been given. We celebrated how good it is to be alive and wild as we gazed with open eyes on the beauty of the wilderness in this world.

There is a pernicious displacement of people today.

And there is also the hope of returning home.

Emotional and spiritual wilderness is sometimes equally as treacherous as physical wilderness. In the mix of Native American and Euro-American culture in Montana and in the American West, imaginative and essential life comes of care and discipline, brokenness and surrender, and the honoring of one another's cultures while also directly facing the atrocities of the present and the past. Servant-leaders take us toward the atonement we need to become more whole. Honoring place and people and history with a commitment to truth-telling aimed at restoring the sense of relationship one to one, between people, and between cultures heals the nations, and heals the world. Of ultimate value is an understanding of love and power, the atrocities and massacres and grave harms, the pervasive human rights abuses as well as the reconciliations that have transpired in Montana history, in American history as a whole, and throughout the world. Integration of both feminine and masculine ways of knowing, seeing, and being is a lodestar. In the unhealthy home, as in the lived experience and embodiment of personal, organizational, or global dysfunction, the nature of the masculine as it appears in society presently is often something that either steps forth in greed or remains apathetically dormant and is therefore unconsciously violently projected or silently subduing, rather than something that is contemplative, given in dignity and received with dignity. Listening is diminished or in fact destroyed. I believe the healing of the masculine involves receiving the influence of the feminine, of home, and of the will to



be honorable, integral, intimate and authentically life-giving in the center of culture and country.

May we learn to speak of healing, wholeness, and the return to oneness rather than fragmentation in family, culture, and nations. In this language, humanity generates not only exceptional holistic leadership, but grace, forgiveness, reparations, restoration, and mercy. May each poem, essay, and research discovery in this volume be a light to you on your way.

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