

Creating Your Vision of Ministry

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Part 5: *Uncovering the Treasure: Excavating Your Ministry Vision*
Module 16: Two Birds – Acting and Witnessing

*“Two birds, inseparable companions perch on the same tree.
One eats the fruits, the other looks on.*

*The first bird is our individual self feeding on the pleasures and pains of this world.
The other is the universal Self silently witnessing it all.”*

Mundaya Upanishad

Jesus said, “There is one God...who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Sufis say, “All this is God. God is all that is.” Hindus chant *Tat tvam asi*, *That* thou art. Native Americans and earth traditions point to *That* which unites all of life. Jews remind us, “The Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.” From across faith traditions, voices harmonize that we do, indeed, live in the heart of God – for there is no other.

Still, as expressed in the beautiful *Mundaya Upanishad*, there is an expression of this heart living and feeding on the pleasures and pains of this world while there is another expression of this heart, one might call pure awareness, silently witnessing all. Like the crow, we too are both expressions: messy and Sacred, human and Divine, unconscious and Conscious. And as we begin excavating our ministry vision, it will be critical that we hold both expressions, the one experiencing and the one watching, in unison as a kind of heartbeat. Sustained by this heartbeat, we will instinctively strive to dive deeper and deeper into this heart of God, in search of our illusive inner treasure, for some part of us knows as Jesus said, *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also* (Matthew 6:21). We yearn to be an expression of our inner treasure, fully present in the world, even as we look on in restful equanimity.

As I have studied the lives and journeys of spiritual teachers across faith traditions, I have noticed that each has brought the full expression of this divinely human heartbeat to bear directly upon the world’s injustice and deep suffering. Perhaps no one has better described the human predicament and the way to peaceful equanimity more implicitly than the Buddha in the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha’s First of the Four Noble Truths is that all of life is *Dukkha*, or suffering. The origin of suffering, in the Second Noble Truth, is said to be our desires, passions and attachments related to temporal, or passing, experience. The cessation of suffering, in the Third Noble Truth, is brought about through the realization of the omnipresent, unchanging One, beyond time and space, the inner Absolute Truth, Supreme Reality, *Nirvana*. The daily following and keeping to this realization is the *Path to Nirvana*, or the Fourth Noble Truth.

The first two Noble Truths relate to the *Mundaya Upanishad’s* bird engaged in the pleasures and pains of the world and the third and fourth Noble Truths relate to the bird witnessing all. In order to move toward a life of equanimity and joy, we must fully embrace the human predicament of impermanence even as we witness from the place of pure consciousness. We cultivate the ability to do this in our meditation practice. In doing so, we come to more fully realize that *both* pleasures and pains shall pass as is so beautifully expressed in this story:

“A great king summoned his wise men. He ordered them, ‘Create for me a saying that will stabilize my inner state. When I am unhappy it will bring me joy, and when I am happy it will remind me of sadness. It cannot be too long, as I want to keep it with me always.’

The wise men consulted and contemplated deeply the king's command. Finally, they returned to the king bearing a small box. In it there was a ring, and inside the ring was inscribed the following words, "This too shall pass."

From *Essential Sufism* by James Fadiman & Robert Frager

So, we choose to dive deeper, in search of the treasure – the place of no passing. To do this, we must live and move to the heartbeat that joins both our human self in fleeting experience, the part of us experiencing the pleasures and pains of this world, with our divine eternal Self, the part of us witnessing.

Yet, as the Fourth Noble Truth suggests, pure knowledge of the Path is not enough. The knowledge must be lived. This is why all great spiritual teachers have demonstrated, through their life's journey, the ability, and necessity, of embracing both joy and sorrow in order to arrive at the place of no passing. Each has stood in the midst of suffering while still engaging in action for the good of all. Jesus suffered and died on the cross – yet never truly died as he understood that he and his Father were one. Gandhi, when he saw his assassin approach, simply chanted his mantra, *Rama*, and prepared to die. He died *living* his code of non-violence. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had "been to the mountain top" and had "seen the other side" the day before he walked out onto the balcony where he was assassinated. Mother Teresa told her sisters the most important thing was to "smile" in the midst of deep suffering so they could lift those up wrought with pain. Moses overcame deep personal fears to rise up and lead his people from bondage to freedom. And, Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, too, overcame all his good reasons and rationalizations to rise up and become the "scorcher of foes".

And, so it is with each of us. Let's look closely at our own journey. Is it not the challenges, spiritual two-by-fours, perceived injustices and wrong doings landing in our lives that are the very things requiring us to cultivate some aspect, quality or characteristic we could not have cultivated otherwise? As the Buddha taught, suffering is not a choice. It is an integral part of the human experience. What we do with the suffering we encounter is. As Sri Gyanamata wrote in *God Alone: The Life and Letters of a Saint*, "What happens to us is of little consequence. What we do with what happens is of great consequence."

So, I would offer that in order to fully live within this heart of God, both as the one experiencing and the one witnessing, we must allow Love to have its way with us, to litter our path with thorns as well as roses, steep climbs as well as soft meadows, with violent winds as well as soothing breezes. Perhaps the great poet Kahlil Gibran said it best when he spoke about Love.

"...For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you.
Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning."

Yet, through the great gift of free will, we do have a choice. So,

"...if in your fear you would seek only love's peace and love's pleasure,
then it is better for you that you cover your nakedness and pass out of love's
threshing door...into the seasonless world where you shall laugh,
but not all of your laughter, and weep, but not all of your tears."

Notice that it is fear that may cause us to retreat. So, we practice creating a place in our spiritual practice for all of our experience, for all of us, all of the fear *and* all of the joy – for we are both birds; inseparable companions; messy and Sacred. And, as we cultivate this experience within ourselves, we begin the practice holding a place for all we experience in others and in the world around us. It is only from this place that we can clearly see deep suffering and injustice as well as the eternal joy, within and without, and respond with Love.

Living with an open heart is the map.
Life is the journey.
Love is the Treasure.

Now let's examine the two components creating our *Personal Ministry Character*: our joy filled abilities and interests as well as our essential life lessons.