



EDITORS' CHOICE:
SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality for Business Leadership

Reporting on a Pilot Course for MBAs and CEOs

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I, like others in the class, began my morning drive to Santa Clara University with some degree of trepidation. I wondered whether I read carefully enough. There was this palpable fear of whether I was prepared for a 6-hour discourse on spirituality. Will I stumble on my thoughts? Will I come off inarticulate and spiritually immature to my peers? The pressure of a good performance was daunting. (MBA student)

At one level, I am scared to death of beginning this course. But I know I should be here, or at least my wife and my colleagues are sure I need to be here. (CEO)

This article reports on a course, Spirituality for Business Leadership, that began in the fall quarter of 1998 at Santa Clara University and continued through December 6. Nine CEOs from Silicon Valley and nine MBAs who are working professionals enrolled in the alpha test of the course. Participants encompassed diverse spiritual orientations: Hindu, Jewish, Catholic, major Protestant, evangelical Protestant, Unitarian, Buddhist, and agnostic. (Participants were not selected for diversity but simply represent the rainbow character of a California MBA/executive cohort). Only a few regularly attend religious services in church, synagogue, or temple.

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The course was conducted on Saturdays every other week from 8:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m., with the exception of a two half-day retreat. Each Saturday included three class modules (what would be three class periods in a regular academic schedule).

Participants in the course were asked to provide written feedback following each course module. Quotations from their comments are interspersed in the report.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Students and executives had read extensively during the summer prior to the course. Most had sampled the overall reading list, or at least had read the readings for the first three modules. One of the delights for me as the professor was the pleasure both groups expressed with the readings, even though this was a body of literature outside their normal perview. For the most part, I had chosen extensive readings from the spirituality tradition, rather than management spirituality books. Although reactions to individual readings differed, no work was without an appreciative defender when we discussed each module's selec-

tions. The reading list by itself was a voyage of discovery.

Some of the readings are delightful; some are an absolute challenge to read and absorb. But I have found all I have read to be useful in broadening and strengthening my spiritual foundation. (CEO)

The course began by defining spirituality as "lived experience" (rather than theology or religion) and by discussing course norms to guide us during sensitive sharing of each individual's journey. I adopted a combination of Appreciative Inquiry, used by Episcopal Archbishop Swing in his leadership of interreligious dialog, and dialogic protocols. This established a set of norms for class discussion and a sense of safety. The class followed these norms without further reminder, an indication they felt the norms were important. This plan also encouraged and allowed individuals to speak with integrity from their own tradition and personal journey, rather than regressing to some vague syncretism. Although I included quotations, scriptures, and writings from other traditions, I spoke primarily in the voice of my own tradition (Catholic). In the second class, individuals sometimes commenced speaking with phrases such as, "From my Hindu perspective . . .," "As a Jew . . .," "For a Buddhist . . .," and so on. Later, as the group came to know each other, such prefaces were omitted. The norms, along with instructor modeling, were successful in creating authentic dialogue regarding participants' spiritual journeys.

Very good job of setting the ground rules. You are tackling a difficult subject for individuals to discuss openly. You have laid out guidelines to build trust and encourage openness. (CEO)

I have a general nervousness or discomfort about being an atheist/Buddhist/agnostic in what I perceive to be a largely Judeo-Christian environment. Consequently, I am greatly relieved by your efforts to separate the notion of spirituality from religion and theology, and by your careful references to "what in your tradition you call the mystery, i.e., God." (MBA student)

A successful aspect of the course design was to pair a CEO with an MBA learning partner. The CEOs were initially much more self-disclosing and modeled greater risk taking in class dialogue for the students. But even more important, the MBAs were profoundly touched by the depth of spiritual sensitivity and leadership complexity reported by the CEOs, making the

course far more powerful and real. There was no doubt in the minds of students by the end of the course that the path a senior executive walks is a complex spiritual challenge.

One can only bring one's life experience to the seminar. Therefore, as an MBA student, I observe the executives' struggle and try to integrate (both lectures and CEO perspectives) with my own personal experience and perspective. This course is a rare opportunity for me as an MBA student to experience the struggles of integration from the perspective of senior business leaders. (MBA student)

A dialogue segment within the first class module commenced with an opportunity to share why each individual chose to attend this class in Spirituality for Business Leadership. Major themes included were a desire for greater personal integration between leadership and personal spirituality, a need to discover a source for both inspiration and courage in difficult times, a turning point (new company or position) that invited a reexamination of how to make the new organizational context a more spiritual and humane setting, and a sense of isolation in the leadership role. All these concerns were made more compelling by the frantic pace of executive life. (These executives mirror the recent interview study by Professor Ian Mitroff, 1999).

INTEGRATING BUSINESS LEADERSHIP AS A CALLING INTO THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

The second module focused on the power of business as a contemporary societal institution: the all-encompassing aspects of life within the organization; the way in which the organization affects employees, communities, and nations; the potential for great good and great mischief; and the holistic complexities of senior leadership. The lecture was designed to create a tension between the potentiality and the frailty of a leader trying to span such broad challenges. Then, the theme of "calling" (vocation) was developed, referring to the calling stories of Judeo-Christian scriptures.

I liked the quest that was presented during the first session. It was a challenge: Can we integrate personal and business life into a single self? (CEO)

Since one of my questions is how a life spent in business can be a spiritual life, the presentation of the con-

tributions made by business to society was helpful. It gave me this insight: If business is essential to society, and most people must participate in it in order for society to function (as opposed to being full-time charitable volunteers or monks), and if all people are called to a life of full spirituality and holiness, then it must be possible to live a full spiritual life while in business (because the alternative is that either everyone becomes a monk or spirituality is available only to a privileged few). (MBA student)

Executives and their MBA learning partners then walked together in the Mission Gardens at Santa Clara University, discussing how each individual felt called to the leadership role and what challenges they were struggling with. The MBAs were again impressed at both the level of aspiration toward goodness and the difficulties of the executive role.

As for myself, I came to the first seminar expecting to encounter executives who through success would have lost a sense of self and identity and consequently would be searching for a spiritual element in their lives. I was confused as the executives spoke of integration in the first seminar. I had not yet understood the spirituality of these executives. During this discussion, I was in awe of the depth of their spirituality. Through their voices I have just begun to understand the struggles inherent in personal integration and senior leadership. (MBA student)

I find the mix of students and executives wonderful. For us, it provides the freshness of the voice of the young. For them, I am sure they draw value from our experience and comfort that even after this many years, in many ways we are as spiritually naive as they are. (CEO)

LISTENING TO THE INNER VOICE IN THE MIDST OF TURBULENT BUSINESS ENVIRONMENTS

Each Saturday course segment included as a third module a unit on prayer/meditation. All began with music appropriate to the particular exercise in the beginning and at the end. (Music selections included early Christian classical music, Hindu chant, Native American chant, Zen flute, and Sufi selections). For prayer/meditation modules, we moved from an executive seminar room to a small chapel at the corner of the Mission Church.

The first spiritual exercise was taken from Black Elk's Lakota Sioux spirituality. It was prayer and med-

itation focused on the gifts we receive from our spiritual elders as guides for the journey. The exercise was selected because the prayer and meditation form would stand outside the spiritual traditions of the members of the class, allowing individuals to share their meditation experience in the voice of an elder rather than in their first-person voice. The majority of the class members did share a reflection in a protocol in which no eye contact was made.

Reactions to the first encounter with prayer/meditation were for the most part favorable, although a few found this first encounter in prayer sharing a little uncomfortable. (It will be noteworthy to follow the development of the comfort with prayer and meditation over the duration of the course.) Most class members had not included regular prayer in their recent lives and certainly not prayer with professional peers.

Highlight of this first session was the meditation, the Lakota Sioux Living Circle. I found it profoundly moving. (CEO)

Like several of the other execs, I have drifted away from active prayer and will need to become comfortable with it again. (CEO)

At the end of this module and all subsequent modules, a theme for back-home prayer/meditation was suggested. For the duration of the course, 20 minutes in the morning and evening was suggested as a discipline. A few in the beginning, then more, and finally a majority of the class by the end of the course adopted some prayer/meditation discipline and began to experience the power of spiritual practices in their lives.

BUSINESS LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES AND THE NEED FOR SELF INTEGRATION

This module built on the work of the Harvard cognitive psychologist Howard Gardner, who shows the development of leadership as a life work. Class participants chose a leader (Ghandi, Roosevelt, Pope John XXIII, George Marshall, Martin Luther King, etc.,) and observed the lessons from these leaders' life journeys for the required spiritual integration of the business leader. The theological premise integrated with the psychological studies was the importance of "being" as a precedent for "doing" if one is to avoid cynicism, despair, and burnout in the intensity of the leadership role. It was a powerful and delightful dialogue, with

CEOs illustrating applications to their own life journey from the stories of their selected leader and MBAs examining model leaders with full human frailties from whose experiences they hoped to learn. The felt sense of the need for personal integration as a precondition for leadership emerged as a strong theme that continued throughout the course.

The concept of integration is really starting to cohere for me. I hear it as the underlying theme of the class. It comes across strongly in the lectures and readings, (Gardner's "embodiment," Rahner's "praying the everyday"). (MBA student)

DISCERNMENT AND SENIOR BUSINESS LEADERSHIP

Discernment flowed as a critical need from the prior discussion of the leadership and organizational challenges to which leaders must respond.

As an executive, you have a limited number of major "plays" which you can make during your time in office. You need to be clear what matters, and what your focus will be! (CEO)

My reality—I haven't included God in the decision process. May have made some better decisions if I did and I would be surer of my decisions. (CEO)

Because both MBAs and CEOs are well trained in problem solving, discernment offered a rich new overlay for following the movement of the Spirit in their lives. For many, the discussion of discernment was a comforting verification of how God (for nontheists, their inner voice, the Tao, the cosmos) actually had spoken to them, often without their full realization. For believers in a personal God, it was a reminder that prayer is the foundation of discernment and that "going it alone" was allowing the false self to lead down paths of error.

What spoke to me most of this module was that intuition will come to you through sincere prayer and discernment—and that you can trust this intuition because it comes from outside you (God). (MBA student)

Wisdom and discernment are key to successful leadership and are provided by God as we humble ourselves before Him. (CEO)

APPROACHES TO PRAYER/ MEDITATION/REFLECTION AND THE LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

At this point, the felt gap between the demands for personal integration in the leadership role, the holistic challenges of the contemporary organization, and the complexities of discernment led naturally to a sense of need for guidance. There was a readiness to explore prayer/meditation as the "narrow door" to wisdom. And for theists, as the door to discovering God's will to find sustaining ability to be and to do.

The first thing that struck me about the second class was the ability of a couple of the CEOs to articulate a time when they surrendered to God in time of need. I really admire the rawness of some of the feedback. I personally used to pray a lot and in the past couple of years have felt "too busy." (MBA student)

If I were to make one observation, it is that neither generation present in the course has been taught how to pray. Prayer had been too often associated merely with ritual in the lives of many seminar participants. So there was a wonderful sense of discovery in the ways in which prayer can be spontaneous, we pray without realizing it, prayer can be integrated into the "everydayness" of our lives in Rahner's sense, and in discovering diversity of forms of prayer. "Pray always" was an admonition not understood and not seen as achievable in business life. The module on prayer was a wonderful "Aha" or breakthrough for most—for the first time, they were brought a contemporary perspective on prayer. To discover that God who is infinite has an infinite number of ways of allowing us to pray and that it is God who prays in us was liberating. In the journal entries from seminar participants, one began to see a turning to prayer.

After lunch, we listened to a lecture on prayer. This lecture helped me tremendously. I realized that "HELP" was actually prayer, and there were many times that I was praying and did not even know it. (MBA student)

Prayer (active) is difficult for me to do. Hard work in a sense, yet I realize thinking of it (prayer) as work won't work. Have to let go... not easy for me. (CEO)

The lessons on prayer were very important to me. I don't know how to pray. I don't feel connected and don't know how to connect. Listening for the inner voice was new for me. That God is here to help us in

the process of discernment was a powerful lesson. (CEO)

I hope that these moments from class will propel me over the next few months to continue with active prayer. (MBA student)

I substitute "mystery" for god and find the meditative reflections very nourishing as a nonbeliever. (MBA student)

The prayer/meditation experience for this module was *Lectio Divina*. Participants were encouraged to bring scriptures or religious writings from their own tradition (Jewish, Buddhist, Taoist, Hindu) to the exercise, and the level of sharing at this point intensified. A comfort in acknowledging the value of connecting to the Transcendent Mystery (however understood) now emerged with increased vigor.

One of my greatest opportunities for growth is in my prayer life. The information provided in module six is an excellent resource for me. (CEO)

THE SPECIAL CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP POWER

Until now we had largely focused in the course on the positive and the potential. There were criticisms from some executives that the discussion was idealistic, not admitting the pressures of greed, vicious competition, the short-run earnings demands, and so on. So there was a readiness to confront the dark side of business leadership.

Nonetheless, my wife, who prepared lecture slides for the next two modules, was skeptical: "Are you really going to be this harsh in your critique of leadership? Isn't this going to seem unduly negative? Won't this alienate your group?"

The session on leadership power and the temptations to narcissism, overcontrol, and vanity was inspired by a meeting with NASDAQ executives in Pebble Beach, California, where CEOs indicated that *hubris* was the pitfall for senior business leadership. This module clearly set forth the seductions toward narcissism associated with those in powerful corporate positions. "The Bonfire of the Vanities" in the executive suite was highlighted, and the need for humility and God's grace made evident. Rather than being alienated, both CEOs and MBA students found the unit powerful, and another warning that without prayer/meditation, to occupy a position of power without making a misstep is difficult.

I believe that this last class got to the heart of the issues of being a CEO. The choices that one has to make and the implications of our actions. It is easy to be led from day-to-day reality, because of the power of the office of CEO. It is easy to be self-delusion, because of the actions of subordinates artificially seeking to be approving of the executive. And in the age of advertising-driven ethics, it is very easy to absorb our society's reinforcement for wealth-building actions, at any cost. So in the middle of all this, where is center? I think we went a long way to address some of these issues. (CEO)

THE SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES OF WEALTH VERSUS POVERTY OF SPIRIT IN THE BUSINESS LEADER'S LIFE

Poverty as a spiritual path and wealth as a challenge is a special paradox for CEOs. Their charisma is wealth creation, and their reward is riches. This unit reviewed the economic scriptures (dealing with wealth and poverty) in Christianity, Buddhism, and Taoism and discussed the practices of almsgiving, justice giving, charity giving, philanthropy, stewardship (both of organizational and personal wealth), and asceticism as executive disciplines leading to detachment. Issues of social justice and maldistribution of income were also developed. The scandal of the destitute, both in North America and around the world, was set forth.

It was the first time that the CEOs were relatively silent and primarily introspective, to the surprise of the MBAs.

What was missing: The CEOs' views on either the "Virtue and Affluence" text or on the subject of wealth and philanthropy at the individual and/or corporate levels. Was there a reason that they were quite silent about these issues? (MBA student)

The silence was not a rejection of the challenge but a reflection that for the most part, these considerations had not been high in the consciousness of most of the CEOs. In Silicon Valley, CEOs are first-generation wealth creators. In terms of motivation theory, this is the generation of overachievers who create wealth, but as a by-product of their desire to do: to solve a problem in chemistry, electronics, bioscience, and so on. The wealth that accompanies these technological successes—and the consumption excesses that are easily slipped into—are frequently not reflected on, much less the impact on their families and the community. Thus, the module was quietly and thoughtfully

received by CEOs, especially as MBA students challenged the conspicuous consumption and insensitivity to the less advantaged that they perceived as a negative dimension of Silicon Valley.

Wealth accumulation is not an easy subject. It brings out some deep conflicting emotions. I was silent because I need to think and pray about all this. (CEO)

I have been guilty of underestimating the ethical challenges of the maldistribution of income in business. (CEO)

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE IN THE HECTIC SPACE OF A BUSINESS LEADER'S LIFE

The module on contemplative practice, which immediately followed these two modules (Module 9 had been rescheduled to the last class meeting), was particularly well placed. There were so many challenges in the above two units that it might have been off-putting, as my wife had feared, had it not been for the ability to "rest in silence" rather than in anxiety. This module on contemplation introduced the class to apothetic prayer, its psychology and theology, and the parallels and differences with Eastern nontheistic meditative practices. With respect to latter, I had been privileged to hold a Nathan Cummings Foundation Fellowship in Contemplative Practices during my sabbatical in preparation to teach this course and had spent time with Taoist and Buddhist practitioners. This provided an important bridge for class members who were agnostic or outside the Judeo-Christian tradition. It allowed me to conduct the experience of contemplative practice with sensitivity to the differences and with deep appreciation for the beauty of Eastern contemplative practice.

What a wonderful moment this meditative experience was. Members of the seminar seemed ready to fully enter into contemplative space and relinquish pretense that the ego and intellect could resolve the many spiritual issues that power and wealth create for senior business leadership. Even more encouraging was the fact that a number of participants following the module began building contemplative practice into their busy schedules.

The statement that "prayer is much about listening not just speaking" stood out to me. Our communication with God doesn't have to always be spoken out loud and "demonstrated" to others. It can be personal

and in a listening mode and that God helps us become better at prayer. (MBA student)

Thank you for the guidance in the contemplative practice. It is my favorite path to prayer and meditation, although I have a lot of room to do it more effectively. But then again, it is the effort that matters most in the eyes of God. Correct? (CEO)

I was very interested to hear from you that Thomas Keating recommends contemplation for the overcoming of the ego and the recognition of dependence on God (I don't remember your exact words). Since this is the very point I've been struggling with, I'm very motivated now to try centering prayer and just see what happens. (MBA student)

RETREAT: A TIME FOR PRAYER/ MEDITATION/REFLECTION ON THE LESSONS LEARNED REGARDING SPIRITUALITY AND THE CALL TO LEADERSHIP

Our retreat was held at Villa Holy Names in the Santa Cruz foothills, a collection of comfortable old residential buildings with a chapel on the grounds of a retreat center and retirement complex for Catholic nuns. It was a stormy and rainy weekend. It also seemed as if most of us were not in the mood for the weekend. Midterms were haunting the students, and a number of executives were caught in turbulent business problems. We arrived as sullen Californians feeling put on by both organizational events and the weather.

The retreat schedule, beginning after a noon meal on the first day, was as follows: An opening mediation based on *Lectio Divina* focused on the gifts and challenges of each of us in our present and future leadership roles; this was followed by silent meditation, sharing our reflections, dinner, Zen sitting, and silent meditation.

As was our course norm, readings were available from diverse spiritual traditions. It was interesting that now all seemed to feel comfortable reflecting on—and indeed being appreciative of—the scriptural jewels from varied wisdom traditions. The sharing of gifts and challenges just before dinner highlighted the diversity of talents within the group and the mysterious way in which we need and bless each other. Then, in the evening, Tracy Kahan, a faculty colleague and psychologist at Santa Clara University, led the group in a very disciplined Zen Sitting.

The next morning, we began with a Buddhist "mindful walk" meditation. A memory I especially

cherish is the mental picture of CEOs and MBAs scattered across the hillside engaged in mindful walking in light rain. We had come a long way on the journey, as evidenced by the discipline that rainy morning.

Then, in late morning, another faculty colleague, Hersh Shefrin, Bellotti Chair of Finance, led the group in a joyful celebration of Jewish prayer, using the Psalms of the Hillel celebration and the Exodus epic symbolizing our own spiritual exodus from sin toward the Kingdom of God.

A small wonder occurred, which we all hold in our heart. First, we recited the Psalms responsively. Then, Hersh asked us to allow him to chant part of the Psalms in Hebrew so we could experience the joyful nature of the chanting, suggesting we hum, as only one member of the group knew Hebrew. At this stage of our own mindfulness, the room filled with loud voices singing in Hebrew. None of us quite understood how that was possible, but the joy exploded in the chapel.

Then the Jewish prayer. Excellent stuff. It was interesting to hear the comments afterwards that Hersh (and all of us) was amazed at our willingness to sing the psalms in Hebrew. I think it is true that the group has developed a trust. (MBA student)

The overwhelming sentiment of all, even though we had arrived distracted and somewhat dispirited by nasty weather, was a wish that the retreat could have been longer.

I thought the time spent on the retreat was wonderful. However, it was too short. The problem is that people will not know it's worth it until after the time is over. I am just as guilty as any one in the front end thinking that "noon to noon" was a huge block of time to give up. But once I got there I quickly changed my attitude from the notion of time given up to time to be realized and well spent. In the end, it was indeed time well spent, and I found myself wishing that we had more. (MBA student)

A BUSINESS LEADERSHIP ENCOUNTER WITH VOICES SOMETIMES NOT HEARD

After the retreat, course participants were asked to engage in a field experience as a prelude to the discussion of the mystery of suffering. The guidelines for the experience are partially presented in Figure 1.

We had discussed the forthcoming field experience, and it was clear that this would be a step outside our

Organizational leaders, through socioeconomic position and role, are sometimes separated from the poor and suffering.

This is not to imply that suffering doesn't touch all our families and friends through illness, aging, death, misfortune, and other trials.

Yet there are resources available to families of the business leader that are not available to others.

Many contacts are mediated through social agency personnel seeking the business leader as a potential benefactor or connection to the leader's expertise.

In these situations the business leader is preoccupied with what he/she can/should do or contribute.

By contrast, this field experience is to be with the poor and suffering outside of the leadership role and socioeconomic position. The focus is on:

being with, rather than doing for
listening to and learning from

And then prayerfully/meditatively reflecting on the experience as the Spirit guides you.

Choose an encounter with those presently unable to engage in active participation in our economic system.

HIV patients in later stages of their illness, chronically ill, the aged, the disabled, and so on.

The choice should be made with your own discernment, but you are encouraged to reach outside your comfort zone to a group you might prefer not to encounter.

This is an "I-Thou" encounter with each person, not with a category of people. Listen to the individual voice, the life story, the sources of desolation and consolation in this person's life. His/her experience of the world and his/her spiritual perspectives. Explore attitudes toward the economic system, should your informant wish to express feelings on this issue.

Make notes. Help us to encounter the person (although you may provide a false identity to respect confidentiality). What do you know you know and what do you know you don't know about this person? Try to take us vicariously into the encounter.

Figure 1: Guidelines for a field experience

comfort zone for all of us. The challenge was to go to the place of suffering you most feared. If you feared death, to have an encounter with the dying. If you feared being severely disabled, to visit those who are disabled, and so on.

This assignment was perhaps the hardest one for me in the course. (CEO)

I could not have approached this field experience prior to the retreat. I had to reach to my new meditation practice to find the courage for the encounter. (MBA student)

When we gathered for what was to be the last meeting of the class, there was a special air of expectation and warmth in the room.

This was our first meeting since the retreat. One could sense an even greater familiarity and camaraderie among the group. (MBA student)

As the participants shared their experiences of the field exercise, it quickly became apparent that most had opted to fulfill the intent of the exercise. Participants had gone to that place that they feared. One student visited a Child Recovery Center with patients with severe birth defects, patients who were medically fragile and technology dependent and who could not function on their own.

It really ripped my heart out to see these young people with such severe health problems, and that they will never lead any type of normal life. It opened my eyes to see how we often spend time worrying about trivial matters. (MBA student)

Another student spent 2 days with a homeless man in San Francisco who sold *Street Sheets*, a newspaper by the Coalition for the Homeless. He explained that most people would judge this man to be a derelict.

I learned the value of basic things in life: food, shelter, and friendship. I learned how small the personal cost of a smile and friendliness is. I knew that these things had value before I showed up on the corner that day. I just never realized how priceless they could be. He made me shed my fears of failure and risk. (MBA student)

An executive spent time with two men who participate in a group that helps prisoners. Both men were also suffering from cancer. He was struck by the grace with which the men accepted their lives. Even while seriously ill, both men continued to reach out and touch the lives of others.

Another executive, who had always been uncomfortable when encountering the homeless in the cities in which he traveled, spent 2 evenings serving meals to the homeless.

My main reason for choosing the homeless was observing my reaction to the homeless I encounter in my

travels. I avoid them, feeling somewhat threatened, and prejudice the people involved. I wanted to break through this prejudice.

I was gripped when I saw the night manager telling a clean cut, nonstereotypical (of the homeless) man who had rung the door to the shelter that he would have to be put on the waiting list for a cot to sleep on. This was the day of the bad storm. I was stepping into my up-scale automobile, going back to my warm house and cozy bed, and I had to drive away looking at this unfortunate individual standing in the rain, not knowing if he would find shelter that night. Needless to say, I did not sleep too well. (CEO)

The stories continued: encounters with residents in nursing homes, colleagues who were stroke victims, a parent broaching subjects that had been closed and forbidden territory, the dying, the seriously injured, the poor. The field experience had unexpected power. Class participants ended the field experience with a new sense of the dignity and grace with which many carry their burdens, an overcoming of the fears that keep us from contact with those less fortunate, and the realization that once we engage in the encounter, simply be with the sufferer, we often gain more than we give.

Before this experience, I knew I was unconsciously, continually trying to protect my heart. Through these encounters, I opened my heart and felt a sense of wholeness that I have not felt in a long time. I felt I had to do something for ____, but actually, through just being with ____, I allowed her to teach and do for me, which is probably the greatest gift that I could have given to her and that I could have received. (MBA student)

At the end of the discussion, I believe the words of Mother Teresa of Calcutta would have been understood by all.

The poor must know that we love them, that they are wanted. They themselves have nothing to give but love. . . . I don't want that you give from your abundance. I want you to understand through direct contact. The poor need deeds, not words. (Kumar, 1998, pp. 58-59)

BUSINESS LEADERSHIP AND THE MYSTERY OF SUFFERING

The discussion now moved to suffering in the role of business leadership. The premise was that an adequate spirituality for business leadership must ac-

knowledge the reality of suffering as part of the leadership journey. Examples of suffering might include the selflessness required by the intensity of the leadership role with its demand on time, emotional energy, and absence of privacy; the inexorable criticism and backbiting directed toward leaders; the loneliness of office and the demands of confidentiality; the anxieties when addressing new strategic challenges; the special burdens of bearing bad news in firings and layoffs; the humbling uncertainties when stepping down from high prestige roles; and so on.

The CEOs provided their own examples of intense moments of suffering, which included layoffs, termination of employment of friends, struggles to protect the organization from ruthless competitive moves, anxiety and fear while redirecting a firm following financial crises. They did not hide the pain of these experiences as part of leadership.

I went home and wept. My wife held me in her arms. I could never have moved through this moment in our organization's history and faced my employees unless I fully embraced all the pain. (CEO)

Lessons from the earlier discussion began to transfer. The need to be fully present, to *be* with one's colleagues, even when you cannot *do* what you would wish. The need to avoid hiding behind activity as a shield from pain.

The lecture then continued providing spiritual perspectives on suffering as a transforming experience, as a pivotal part of the spiritual journey, bringing the wisdom of different spiritual traditions to the mystery of suffering. The Christian perspective on redemptive suffering was developed.

When we went out in the Mission Garden that noon, we had arrived at a different plateau as a group. We joined arms facing away from each other, as a symbol that the seminar was coming to an end. But there was a joining of spirit even as we looked to a future path of separation. We had touched deeply an aspect of life and leadership that is not often discussed in the instrumental managerial literature. We had uncovered that moment when one can only proceed by faith, by surrendering to the unknown mystery, however each person defines the mystery. By mindful attention to heartfelt suffering, we had better learned how one must face this difficult part of the leader's spiritual journey.

INDIVIDUAL STUDY REPORTS FROM A SPIRITUAL MASTER

The discussions surrounding suffering had been so intense, and the time needed to listen and absorb so extensive, that we did not discuss the papers on Lessons from Spiritual Masters. Authors selected included Thomas Keating, Mahatma Gandhi, Teresa of Avila, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Thomas Merton, Thomas Aquinas, Henry Thoreau, and Black Elk.

Although the class had already taught me that all traditions view the spiritual journey as the "emptying of the self," Keating filled in the details for me. I was unaware of the mystical contemplative aspect of Christianity when I entered this class. (MBA student)

From Teresa, I learned a leader will be tempted by anxiety and doubt. Only leadership that originates in one's center with trust to self and God has the ability to endure. (MBA student)

Thank you for encouraging me to meet Thomas Merton. We will be spending many evenings together as I travel my leadership journey. (CEO)

It was rewarding to read the papers. Clearly, new friendships had been formed between readers and wisdom writers that they had not read in the past, or that they met again with new insight and understanding. Participant feedback indicated that this was a rewarding assignment, providing an opportunity to integrate many aspects of the course by viewing the journey through one master's spiritual perspective.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER AND CELEBRATING THE LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

My colleague James McGee conducted an evaluative discussion as the class ended. If there was an overarching theme as a central motivation accounting for the intensive and full commitment to all aspects of the seminar, it was again the desire to find full personal spiritual integration *in* rather than *in spite of* the leadership role in business.

Participants were asked, "What have been the most powerful aspects of the course for you personally?" Their responses made it clear that the varied format for the course worked. The integration of reading, lecture, dialogue, and prayer/meditation created a rhythm that succeeded. The retreat was a turning point

in comfort with contemplative/meditation practice, and the compassionate visit was felt to be a seminal moment when we refocused our perspective from looking inward at the retreat to again looking outward.

The phases of the course were just right. We proceeded to the next level of intensity based on the foundation of the prior course module. (CEO)

The reading list with the options to choose, its exposure to a breadth of authors and spiritual traditions, and the need to read comprehensively were universally felt to be a strength. For the future, it was suggested that a more complete annotation of the reading list would provide greater guidance in making choices. No one expressed a wish that popular managerial/spirit books play a larger role. At the MBA/CEO level, the exemplification or relevance to the day-to-day of business leadership was found in sharing in the lived experience of all the participants. The preference for this mature group was to retain the in-depth reading from spirituality classics.

The question was then asked, "How appropriate do you feel a course in Spirituality for Business Leadership is for MBA students?" The response was very positive with two caveats: It needs to be an elective that is taken by someone who desires to explore spirituality. Second, having CEOs included was felt to be critical to the experience. Two students felt the course was their perfect capstone for the MBA experience.

When the final evaluations forms were scored, the overall summary evaluation question scored 4.93 on a 5.0 scale. Course materials received a score of 4.5. Importance and significance of the subject matter, 4.93. Here are some selected comments from the evaluation forms:

Great experience but a bit scary at times.

A life changer. Absolutely. A course of this form or topic should be required.

This was the most insightful and rewarding course of my MBA program.

Unadulterated emphasis on spirituality was appreciated. Active participation of CEOs was vital. Many great books.

SOME FINAL COMMENTS

Once again, this article reports on an alpha experiment. What are some take-away personal thoughts,

now that the course is completed and I have had limited time to reflect?

The need for such a course is greater than I could have anticipated. The desire for personal integration in business leadership through deepening spirituality is intense for both MBA students and CEOs.

Before I offered the course, many colleagues were skeptical regarding the interest of MBA students in such a course, and their readiness to enter into these issues in depth. I found equal readiness in both the MBA students and CEOs; individuals in both cohorts were at all stages of the spiritual journey insofar as one can judge, which is a dangerous exercise. But based on their self-reports, some were just considering a first step in a spiritual journey, and others felt they have been traveling on a deep spiritual journey for some time. There were no fewer advanced travelers in the MBA cohort than in the CEO cohort.

At the cautious and tentative starting point of the journey, two individuals at the end of the course appreciated the exposure and experience but acknowledged they had largely taken the course out of curiosity and that it had not seriously changed their personal journey or leadership. In contrast, most of the seminar participants reported a deepening of a journey already begun. Two contrasting quotes will convey a sense of these differences.

Candidly, the course did not change my feelings about leadership or morality significantly but has certainly reinforced my convictions about the importance of both and provided excellent historical examples. This has led to an increased awareness. Would that I could be as passionate spiritually as intellectually curious. (CEO)

I cannot articulate enough the wonder and appreciation I have for the gift that you have presented me. . . . My journey has just begun. It will take a lifetime of work to find out what kind of tree will grow out of my seed. But I am committed to the unfolding. (MBA student)

The Norms of Appreciative Inquiry Allowed for a Successful Ecumenical Encounter

The norms guiding discussion worked very well. With respect to ecumenical tensions, there was only one symbolic and minor issue that emerged not related to dialogue. Father James McGee asked members of the class to bring an icon (8 × 11 photo) of the spiritual master they selected for intense study. This led to a concern about "false gods" by three seminar

participants; the matter was dealt with gracefully and openly by class discussion, but it was a reminder of the constant need for interreligious sensitivity.

To feel free not to not acknowledge a personal god is important. It also suggests, because the majority of the students attracted to the course do believe in a personal God, that it is important to advise students in addition to sharing the syllabus so that they can make an informed choice. (In this seminar, I had a discussion with each participant before he or she was accepted into the class, which helped bridge the initial tension.)

Pairing CEOs and MBA Students Heightened Learning

However, despite the strongest indication that full attendance was expected, the uncontrolled executive life intruded, and executives missed classes. This required individual tutoring, shared audiotapes, and assistance in interpreting readings outside class. We are still exploring the number of weekends one can realistically expect an executive to be present and how to "bundle" the course to make it accessible to executive participants.

Overall, the Course Was Clearly a Success Judging From the Feedback, But It Requires Great Energy

The snippets of quotations included in this report are indicative but do not capture the depth of the feedback. I have been cautious not to invade privacy and to keep the quotation segments terse. All participants provided a brief feedback following each three-module course segment. Much of this feedback is very personal and heartfelt. A number of individuals shared significant psychological and spiritual experiences in their feedback. Instructor time to respond to such feedback outside class is important.

Father James McGee played an important role, being available to individuals for spiritual direction. His ministerial presence was important to the needs of several individuals, both at the retreat and during the course.

My Own Faith Perspective

As a Christian, I believe the success of a course in spirituality ultimately rests with God and each traveler on the spiritual journey. Therefore, prayer/meditation is critical and at the center of the experience.

Learning about spirituality is more than an intellectual endeavor. Many members of the seminar shared this view.

The afternoon modules spent at the St. Francis Chapel comprise some of the highlights of the day. I know each time I cross the threshold that I am in a sanctuary. The energy that permeates the room when the group is gathered is palpable. Twenty individuals on separate journeys—all seeking the truth—creates a force that each of us can draw our individual strengths from. (MBA student)

In conclusion, the course touched participants deeply. It succeeded as a wonderful seminar experience beyond any hope I dared to hold before the pilot-test.

EPILOGUE

A paraphrase of the Psalmist (Psalm 63):

*Oh God, our God,
It is you that we sought.*

*Our souls thirsted for you,
Our flesh longed for you
Like a dry and parched land without water.*

*Therefore we turned our eyes toward you
in your heaven
And beheld your power and your glory*

*Because we discovered your steadfast love is greater than
life itself
Our lips sang your praise.*

*We are learning to bless you each day of our lives,
to lift up our arms and call upon your name.*

And from Lao Tzu (TTC 29):

*The world is a sacred vessel.
It may not be mishandled.
Who ever covets it will lose it.*

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