LEADING WITH WOUNDS: A LIABILITY OR GIFT?

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Abstract: Leadership and woundedness typically connote a toxic combination. This author proposes that although woundedness increases susceptibility to indiscretion and problematic leadership practices, this is not the whole picture. Taking a psychological and theological approach, this article explores the other side of woundedness for the practice of good leadership. It considers how wounds may function as "organs of increased sensitivity" and might even allow for greater attentiveness to the needs of followers. This author considers the inevitability of bearing wounds, explores the dangers of compartmentalizing, and investigates how a spiritually mature leader might be able to convert his or her blind spots into gifts of sensitivity. The article concludes with a proposal for an Other-centered, relational model of leadership built upon some of the principles of Lipman-Blumen's work on leadership toxicity, Walt Wright and Max DePree's models of relational leadership, and Emmanuel Levinas philosophy.

Introduction

Conventionally, human weakness is understood as a liability for corporate, organizational, or communal function. A person's wounds can be conceived of as the location of vulnerability and the locus of potential failure, weakness, and toxicity. From this perspective, these weaknesses lead to inappropriate sexual encounters, grandiosity, greed, and countless other practices that fill the history books concerning politicians, CEOs, organization heads, and church leaders. A trend in leadership literature over the last few decades has been to

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dissect and explore the creation of corrupt, sociopath leaders (e.g., how did Hitler's rejection from art school early on contribute to his efficacy in massacring millions?). These topics, tethered together by a common inquiry into the effects of wounds upon the behavior of leaders, top many bestseller lists.[1] The literature suggests scandal is derivative from hidden wounds and that these wounds are a festering repository for toxic behavior. Within many Christian circles, wounds are equated with the Fall and are quickly split off into the darkened shadows of sin's nature.

This paper does not discount the veracity of these claims yet seeks to provide a corrective to this skewed approach in understanding the woundedness of leaders and its effect upon followers. Instead of viewing woundedness as a liability or solely as a source of relational and organization ruptures, I maintain that woundedness can provide the fuel for both the most toxic and constructive features of a leader. This argument is presented via three sections. First, the inevitability of human woundedness is described with the intent of neutralizing the common illusion that leaders need to keep their wounds from affecting their leadership roles. Since a significant part of the literature already addresses the shadow side of woundedness, this section of the paper is brief. Second, the gift of a leader's wounds is explored, considering how they can allow greater sensitivity and more profound relational engagement with

[1] The following list includes just a few bestsellers that have emerged over the last decade that (at least in part) explore the vulnerabilities, susceptibilities, and woundedness that contributed to various leadership pitfalls: Bill Clinton's *My Life* (2004); Ron Rosenbaum's *Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil* (1998); Ignacio Ramonet's *Fidel Castro: Biografia a dos Voces* (2006); Athan Theoharis' *J. Edgar Hoover, Sex, and Crime: An Historical Antidote* (1995); Curt Gentry's, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* **(**1991); Richard Hack's *Puppetmaster: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (2004)*;* Gretchen Rubin's *Forty Ways to Look at Winston Churchill: A Brief Account of a Long Life* (2003)*;* Armand Nicholi's *The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life* (2002).

one's followers. Finally, an Other-centered and relational model of leadership is described and suggested as an alternate mode of understanding woundedness that can maximize leadership sensitivity and congruence and minimize blindness and susceptibility.

Inevitability of woundedness

What is meant by woundedness? This term should not be left with the assumption of shared meaning. In this paper, woundedness is understood as a basic element of the human condition in which our social constitution, unresolved personal intra-psychic and inter-personal conflicts, developmental immaturity, emotional sensitivity (temperament), skewed perceptions, personal hurts, and universal fears function within our everyday lives. It requires little insight to recognize that each person is raised by imperfect parents who have bought into particular societal, communal, and personal illusions. Each person is the product of genetic proclivities from a lineage of broken persons. Each person has had experiences that have left marks. Each person is at a particular point in his or her developmental processes, with the inherent maturities and immaturities of that stage. Everyone walks through life carrying his or her "primal baggage."[2] Christian theology accentuates this claim of inherent woundedness by describing the broken, finite, and sinful state of humanity. There are both inherited and accumulated wounds. As Paul says, "We see through the glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12), and it is our woundedness that supplies the tint.

More often than not, people act as though they function from a purity of choice that transcends their wounded condition. People view the world through the lens of their wounds (needs, hurts, desires) but believe they are actually seeing things as they *truly* are. They do not see the dramatic similarities in their relational

[2] Gary McIntosh and Samuel Rima. *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: The Paradox of Personal Dysfunction.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997, 49).

patterns. They rarely detect the underlying and archaic thought processes that shape their emotions and behavior. Each time they are in a relationship, they fall into analogous traps, experience similar things, but attribute it to exogenous factors. People remain largely blind to their wounds and the effects they have upon their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. They may give lip service to being wounded, but cannot own it in lived experience.

Sadly, this also means that people largely remain utterly un-attuned to the wounds of others. They may label another person as annoying or promiscuous, but rarely do they consider what these behaviors and temperaments mean in the larger historical and cultural map of that particular individual. People are viewed myopically. We shape them to fit within our own paradigms, distortions, needs, and wounded humanity. Our coworkers are often experienced as our annoying brother or sister, childhood friend, or *ideal* romantic partner. Our supervisors, teachers, and leaders are often experienced as our fathers, mothers, or Divine patron. Different people bring out different facets. We translate our current relationships through the prototypes of past, significant (and often unresolved) relationships.[3] We transfer prior experiences onto new ones, making them more manageable, forming a sense of greater preparedness, but also (in the process) shaping it and distorting it. Interacting with others is a collision of characteristics, distortions, needs, and patterns on both sides. All interactions are mediated through our internal worlds and histories.

Without exception, we relate to and translate persons and experiences through the habits of our horizons, the smallness of our stories. We interpret our realities by translating them through our horizons of personal history, experience, cultural heritage, and needs and

[3] Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through." *Standard Edition, 14* (1915): 147-156.

wants.[4] These horizons bear the yearnings and compulsions of our wounded needs and desires. Persons are unaware that there are often unconscious needs undergirding their thoughts and actions. We are socialized to express our fears, desires, and needs within particular acceptable parameters. Ultimately, these contextual and social taboos push the needs themselves into a tangled unconscious sphere where we have little access. We then become further blind to our own needs and desires as they join the swirling, inaccessible, subterranean region of our unconscious. Despite this repression, these needs and desires manifest themselves within socially acceptable practices and language.[5] For instance, I often get the sense that when one of my students comes up to me after class and says, "Was my paper okay?" he or she is really asking "Dad, do you think I am okay?" It is often true that as a professor (and therapist), I become the container for a history of unmet and displaced needs. Of course, the fact that my own interpretative apparatus leads me to believe that my students are seeking resolution with their fathers when they are interacting with me may be my own need to feel as though I have worth and significance. There is often an intermingling of needs and desires effervescing forth in every relationship. Our interactions often betray the presence of a deeper nexus of unresolved lacking in our lives. Our need to feel loved and desired underlies much of our lives. Even the mundane of everyday life, when viewed through this lens, can be seen as a kaleidoscope of our wounds, finding expression and seeking resolution. In a sense, we look around seeking who might be the eventual resolution to our emotional and psychological angst. We turn professors into fathers and leaders into demigods. The ever-blistering wound of

[4]Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 2nd revised ed. (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1960/1989).
[5] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961a).

humanity entreats the need for assurance, protection, belonging, and a sense that everything will be alright. We dangerously impose this upon those around us. Inevitably, they fail us. Henri Nouwen's treatment of the issue of loneliness nicely illustrates how we often expect others to provide resolution for our needs and desires. He states,

> When we are impatient, when we want to give up our loneliness and try to overcome the separation and incompleteness we feel, too soon, we easily relate to our human world with devastating expectations…No man or woman, will ever be able to satisfy our desire to be released from our lonely condition. This truth is so disconcerting and painful that we are more prone to play games with our fantasies than to face the truth of our existence. Thus we keep hoping that one day we will find the man who really understands our experiences, the woman who will bring peace to our restless life, the job where we can fulfill our potentials, the book which will explain everything, and the place where we can feel at home. Such false hope leads us to make exhausting demands and prepares us for bitterness and dangerous hostility when we start discovering that nobody, and nothing, can live up to our absolutistic expectations.[6]

How is this imposition of deistic expectations placed upon each other relevant to our understanding of leadership? Far too frequently, there is an inherent assumption among followers, congregants, clients, employees, and leaders themselves that persons holding leadership positions should be able to suspend the effects of their woundedness as they function in their respective roles. We project onto our leaders the requirements of our inner world. Our illusions, and the psychological

[6] Henri. J. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer.* (New York: An Image Book/Doubleday, 1972).

needs upon which they are based, require a person "to satisfy some of our deepest longings."[7]

John Calvin, a sixteenth-century theologian, stated "the human mind is, so to speak, a perpetual forge of idols."[8] We are quite proficient at placing our needs and wants at the feet of self-forged gods. We require of them the promise of resolution for our gaping wounds. Ultimately, it is only a being without wounds of his or her own that would be capable of achieving this end. So, leaders are exalted to this status of immaculacy. We place all of our illusory stories (with their inherent need for stability and assurance) on the divinized leader. So, when a person appears to be capable of leaving his or her wounds at the door of a leadership position, they are far more likely to be promoted and climb the ranks. Of course, these things are never explicitly stated. The expectation for a leader to be a woundless entity is built into the subtext of the responsibilities, organizational structure, nature of the relational network, and the general ethos of such an environment.

It is a generally agreed upon principle within psychological research and practice that human beings are incapable of shutting off their woundedness. These wounds are inextricably imbibed into the very fibers of a person's thoughts, feelings, and emotions. The inner world of every person shapes his or her perception of the world, relationships, and tasks. Again, this parallels Christian doctrines concerning depravity. No person is capable of pure perception. Every person distorts reality through projection, displacement, denial, sublimation, and countless other defense mechanisms that allow us to maintain a degree of homeostasis, constancy, and security (thus allowing for the maintenance of our stories without

[7] Jean Lipman-Blumen, "The allure of toxic leaders: why followers rarely escape their clutches", *Ivey Business Journal: Improving the Practice of Management.* 2005b, January/February: 2.

[8] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. by H. Beveridge.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), chapter 11.

the intrusion of anxiety producing alternatives).[9] No person is immune from him or herself. The draw toward compartmentalization of one's world as a leader (i.e., personal vs. professional self) is a foolhardy and illusory requirement that is not based in the strictures of human reality. It is a misplaced expectation for God. Inevitably, the terrain of the leader's internal world will be actualized and fleshed out within the roles that he or she plays as leader, even if it is somewhat curbed in the honeymoon stage of the leadership process.

This call toward compartmentalization is, in part, a symptom of the followers' divinizing needs for leaders to be a bulwark of stability, immune from the capricious world around them.[10] Furthermore, the more a leader internalizes these requirements and attempts to compartmentalize, the more sophisticated his or her defense mechanisms become. That is, when told that wounds are not allowed to be visible or to participate in the organization, leaders are forced to split off particular parts of themselves. It has become increasingly clear, in psychological literature, that when we split off portions of ourselves that are deemed taboo in a particular context, we blind ourselves to the wounds that are still present and, thus, see them only through profoundly distorted mechanisms. We may no longer recognize our own wounds but rather see them in others and persecute them.[11] In other words, when leaders are placed in a context that requires a suppression of their wounds, they will become blind to the plank in their own eye and be overly attentive to the specks in the eyes of others.[12] Moreover, this burying of one's woundedness within the context of leadership does not remove the possible

[9] Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy, 6th ed.* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001).

[10] Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion.* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961b).

[11] See Melanie Klein's work in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963,* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), for a more systematic look at the process of projection and persecution.

[12] Referring to the passage from Lk. 6:42.

toxicity from these wounds. If anything, it creates subterranean septic tanks whose contents become convoluted and eventually seep into and poison the soil out of which one's leadership abilities grow. Such a leader becomes increasingly blind to his weaknesses, susceptibilities, and fears. In turn, they become more controlling, more powerful, and more self-protective.

If threatening events and unmet needs are acknowledged and dealt with openly, meeting the needs can be a healthy process. "If, however, we perceive our attempts to meet these unsatisfied needs as a sign of weakness or personal failure or if we are unaware of how to meet these needs, our attempts are often sublimated and begin forming what will become our dark side."[13]

Lest it appear that this paper is positing that followers are solely responsible for the creation of toxicity by forcing their leaders to segregate their woundedness from their professional self, it must be stated that those persons commonly attracted to leadership roles may already be quite apt at partitioning their inner worlds. Effective leaders are driven. Where does their drive come from? As with most of life, there is a dual motivation behind most of our behavior. On one side, this drive is likely born out of a passionate desire for a company, organization, or ministry to succeed and for a particular vision to be actualized. On the other hand, this drive is likely derivative of a lifelong sense of inadequacy, "existential debt,"[14] a need to be someone or something, a desire to overcome a sense of powerlessness, or to finally please that dad that could never be pleased. Both are at work continuously and are in a constant state of parallel processing. There is a stunted story that underlies the leader's motivations, needs, and desires as well. McIntosh and Rima, while describing many leaders within the church, assert "the personal insecurities, feelings of inferiority, and need for parental approval (among other dysfunctions) that compelled these people to become

[13] McIntosh and Rima, 56-57.
[14] Ibid., 58.

successful leaders were often the same issues that precipitated their failure."[15]

A careful caveat is needed here. The duality of motivation described above is represented in this paper in a somewhat unidirectional fashion. That is, woundedness is focused upon to the exclusion of other positive motivational forces or attributes such as one's gifting, calling, and inherent potential. Motivation and drive need not be construed as *utterly* derivative of woundedness. However, I recognize the inextricable interplay between the shadow and the light, the vacuous and the substance, love and hatred. Strengths and weaknesses are co-constructive. The overemphasis upon wounded motivations is necessary to accentuate the recognition that wounds are not merely problematic characteristics that are in need of resolution. Rather, they can be invaluable sources of sensitivity and life. This will be further illustrated in the coming pages.

At times, leaders may draw from their followers' divinizing needs a false sense of competency, an illusory ability to give assurance, protection, and sustenance. As the leader feels incapable, the lure of followers desiring an omni-capable person provides a perfect yin-yang of pathogenic illusions. This is a broad description of only one leader/follower scenario. This yin-yang of pathology can be seen in many other forms, depending on the shape of one's wounds and the interactions within a given context. We see here a collusion of the toxic needs of persons (described above) and the toxic susceptibility of a leader. When followers need a perfect being and project this perfection onto a leader who is constantly questioning whether he or she is adequate, the leader is dangerously susceptible to buying into the divinizing illusions of the organization. In order to feel desirable, competent, and driven, these individuals have routinely split off parts of themselves, rejecting elements of woundedness in order to promulgate a sense of worth and capability. This attempt to pursue leadership prowess

[15] Ibid., 11-12.

at the expense of integrated wholeness has dire consequences. Ample stories are told of church leaders that live secret lives out of their woundedness while remaining triumphantly effective and attractive leaders in the pulpit.[16]

Dr. Lipman-Blumen provides a critical reminder that toxic leaders are frequently organizationally-grown.[17] That is, the woundedness of a leader can be cultivated, stoked, and fueled by the organization, personnel, and monetary needs to such a degree as to turn non-toxic woundedness into a festering arsenal of toxicity. I contend here that it is the seeded pressure toward non-wounded leadership, along with the fertile stories of inadequacy within leaders that frequently creates the blindness and neediness of the wounded leader. More will be said about how woundedness can create susceptibility to destructiveness in leaders but, first, I turn to the main thrust of this paper, an exploration of how wounds can be an asset to leadership.

The Gift of a Wounded Leader

The title of this paper is derived from the work of psychologist and theologian, Henri Nouwen, who recognized the inevitability of human wounds and brilliantly explored how these wounds provided a conduit for healing. In his book *The Wounded Healer*, Nouwen states:

> After so much stress on the necessity of a leader to prevent his own personal feelings and attitudes from interfering in a helping relationship…it seems necessary to re-establish the basic principle that no one can help anyone without becoming involved, without entering with his whole person into the painful situation, without taking the risk of

[16] See McIntosh and Rima for a plethora of anecdotes concerning the dichotomization of pastors' dark corners and public life.

[17] Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005a).

> becoming hurt, wounded or even destroyed in the process. The beginning and the end of all…leadership is to give your life for others…[this] starts with the willingness to cry with those who cry, laugh with those who laugh, and *to make one's own painful and joyful experiences available as sources of clarification and understanding.*[18]

Further on in the book, Nouwen describes how our wounds can be the most powerful place for bringing about healing and wholeness in others. Nouwen, a spiritual father for many, lived a tortured existence of insecurity and fear.[19] However, this did not keep him from assisting in the healing of many people who read his work or listened to him speak around the world. Michael Ford entitled his biography of Nouwen, *The Wounded Prophet*. It was Nouwen's woundedness that allowed him access to the shared plight of so many. Nouwen asserted that it is through one's woundedness that one grows most in touch with God and others.[20] Rationality and understanding have a low ceiling in their ability to expose a person to the needs and desires of others. It is in the process of being in touch with one's fragmented, lonely, needy, and frightened self that one can most readily attend to these things in others. It is in grappling with one's own suffering that we are likely to grapple with and attend to the suffering in others. Forming illusions and stories that give manageable form to our wounds merely leads to fragmentation and further self-focus. It is when we blindly search for resolution of the conflicts that emerge from our wounds that we merely perpetuate them within ourselves and use others as a means toward our ends. When we blindly recycle our wounds or compartmentalize them to comply with leadership

[18] Nouwen, 1972, 72. (*italics* mine).
[19] See Michael Ford *The Wounded Prophet: A Prophet of Henri J. M. Nouwen.* (New York: An Image Book/Doubleday, 2002).
[20] Henri. J. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life.* (New York: An Image Book/Doubleday, 1975).

pressures, we cease to see the needs of others and capitalize upon their needs to manufacture solutions to our own.

A nearly pervasive feature in leadership literature is the assertion that a leader functioning out of a manualized set of principles provides a lackluster and banal experience for his or her followers.[21] Ultimately, the leader must bleed out of his or her journey in order to "resonate" with others. One's level of emotional intelligence (i.e., "self-awareness", "self-management," "social awareness", and "relationship management") remains one of the strongest predictors for leadership success.[22] Rote features and leadership characteristics derived from a stale reading of Steven Covey guarantees nothing if it does not include the bumps and joys of the leader's inner world. "Being at the center, being in control, differs from being at the heart."[23] A leader who does not include his or her entire person cannot connect voice and touch.[24] "There is no formula, no ideal model, and no program of steps to success. It is a relationship- and relationships resist definition,"[25] despite the need that persons have to define parameters and discern the principles underlying the leadership/follower processes. "Leadership is more tribal than scientific, more a weaving of relationships than an amassing of information…"[26] If leadership is relationship, this guarantees the inevitable inclusion of the leader's woundedness, for better or worse. Moreover, the exclusion of woundedness from leadership, as discussed in the previous

[21]Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence.* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 19-69.
[22] Ibid., 30.
[23] Max De Pree, *Leadership Jazz.* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1992), 35.
[24] Ibid., 3.
[25] Walt Wright, *Mentoring: The Promise of Relational Leadership.* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004), 58.
[26] Max De Pree, *Leadership is an Art.* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 2004), 3.

section, is an unattainable and, I would argue, an undesirable possibility.

If woundedness is a given, then what do we do with it? If its denial sets the stage for toxicity, then how should we work to recognize it and what purpose does it serve? I would argue that the unavoidability of woundedness should not be viewed as an obstacle to leadership or a variable to be calculated into the equation, but rather woundedness can function as a unique conduit of sensitivity and attentiveness. If, as Max De Pree asserts, leadership is largely about making one's voice and touch congruent[27], then the first step toward this is the integration of one's wounds with his or her person, role, and vision as a leader.

When one is in touch with and working through his or her woundedness, it changes status from blind spot to an area of increased awareness and sensitivity. The most spiritually mature individuals are not those who no longer have wounds, but rather those who are not blind to them. A spiritually mature leader is not constantly blindsided by the manifestation of his or her wounds. Rather, these wounds become a part of the individual's wisdom. When one knows and has wrestled with his or her susceptibility to becoming a Savior-type, then when an employee asks for a Savior (in the multifarious forms that people do), the leader will become aware of this impulsive activation toward assuming that role. Raising one's consciousness to one's internal patterns, proclivities, and needs is a fundamental step in resisting a perfunctory response.[28] Emotional intelligence is partly a matter of being aware of one's trigger spots, fears, areas of increased sensitivity, and points of susceptibility to particular calls from others made upon oneself. As Goleman (et. al.) points out, our emotional patterns and habitual responses are deeply

[27]Depree, Chapter one.

[28] See James Prochaska and John Norcross, *Systems of Psychotherapy: A Transtheoretical Analysis,* 5th ed. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2003) for a full discussion about the central place that "consciousness raising" has in all psychotherapeutic work.

embedded in our limbic system, a more primitive, reactive region of our brains.[29] This region is heavily wired to the frontal cortex, the region that allows for rational judgment and constructive engagement. Studies have shown that leaders with greater activity within the frontal cortex (particularly in the left prefrontal cortex) were better able to modulate and hedge the activity of the trigger-happy limbic system. Overall, this allowed them access to the emotions and responses of the limbic system (a critical element in human function) without being overtaken and led by this lower level neural activity.[30] Their brains have become wired in such a way as to allow rich conversation between patterned, old, and emotionally-loaded responses and new, creative, and dynamic thoughts. This combination allowed for the greatest degree of emotional intelligence and leadership resonance.

An example from the process of psychotherapy may be helpful in illustrating how wounds might actually function as a gift. When the client enters with his or her maladaptive and unhealthy needs, it pulls the therapist in a particular direction. The client comes in with a *transferential* need for the therapist to become a particular type of person (be it a father, mother, romantic partner, or even an ego itself). The therapist is drawn toward this by the very nature of the dance steps being taken by the client. The therapist's own woundedness leaves him or her largely susceptible to becoming a partner in this dance (e.g., counter transference) and to do so would be in collusion with the illusory and destructive needs of the client (e.g., enactment). This would be to resolve the existential angst of the client through illusions of safety and connection that cannot actually be provided by the therapist. Wounded therapists, who have not worked through their blind spots, often succumb to this dance out of a desire to feel as though the client is connecting

[29] Goleman, et. al., 19-31.

[30] See Goleman, et al for an arsenal of neurocognitive studies regarding leadership and emotional intelligence.

with them or finding meaning in what they are saying. The only way to feel this way is to join with the draw of the client.

A seasoned therapist, however, is hopefully able to experience, watch, and redirect this process. He or she has not become calloused to the pull and draw of the client. It is not as though the therapist's wounds have utterly disappeared. Wounds are life long. They stay with us. Instead, though the pull to collusion is still there, the therapist is now able to use his or her *experience* of being pulled as a means toward better understanding the deeper story of the client's needs, fears, and desires and how the client probably pulls others in outside relationships. This provides an *in the moment* picture of the client's needs and hurts. In essence, the therapist's woundedness becomes a sensitive measure by which he or she can be more deeply attuned to the wounds of the client. The therapist's wounds are a significant part of the healing of the client's wounds. It allows a level of attentiveness that was otherwise only academic or even utterly eclipsed. Without this woundedness, these calls from the client may go undetected.

In the same way, a leader is pulled and drawn by his or her followers to become a divine figure that can meet their needs of sustenance, meaning, and safety. Followers commonly look to leaders for stability and a sense of self.[31] Much like a therapist, followers transfer their patterned responses and conglomerate of needs in a magnified and exponentially more potent form onto the leader.

"Be all things to all people."

"Give us assurance."

"Provide a sense of clarity that we can latch onto in this tumultuous world."

"Make me feel as though I have a sense of worth and purpose."

"Give us something to believe in."

[31] Lipman-Blumen, 2005a.

"Attend to me and give me importance and recognition."

Through a variety of forms, the leader experiences the pulls and tugs of these expectations and mandates. It is often an unconscious yank, pulling on the cords of adequacy, worth, and a sense of belonging, each of which attracted him or her toward leadership in the first place. The dance begins. Followers need a sense of safety (out of their misappropriated woundedness), and the leader needs a sense that he or she is adequate to the task of leadership (derived from his or her unattended wounds). Put these together and you have a leader who measures his sense of adequacy based on whether he is meeting the insatiable mandates of his followers' need for safety. This waltz would appear to be a perfect fit. But, regrettably, the deeper needs of the followers ultimately remain unmet, though the itch is occasionally scratched.

Furthermore, the leader is forced to perpetually ratchet up his sense of his capabilities (and ultimately his power) in order to bear the ever-consuming voice of inadequacy. Movements within the leader take place that compel an increased sense of control. The leader begins to have far less tolerance for messiness and feelings of powerlessness. Creativity is replaced by assured measures of efficiency or *tried and true* methods. Constructive discourse is supplanted with a propagation of the status quo. The bottom line is made to be a reflection of the leader's sense of worth, with employees functioning as a means to this quantifiable end. This foxtrot is born out of a leader who has remained unaware/un-attuned to his or her own wounds and blindly repeats them, being consumed by their patterns and demands.

The draw to attend to the existential desires of followers is not always one of positive expectation (i.e., divinizing). In other words, there are many times in which a follower's diminutive story involves self-deprecation. The draw, in these instances, is for the leader to confirm and maintain the negative self-image that followers have of themselves. Hopefully, the following story will provide an illustration of this process.

About five years ago, I worked at a residential treatment facility in Southern California that housed, treated, and schooled severely emotionally disturbed boys. These boys were taken from homes due to abuse or neglect. At first, they were put in foster homes, but became so problematic that (after being relocated to over a dozen other foster homes) they were placed in this facility. My role was in the school, as a special education teacher. Due to the abuse histories that these boys had experienced, in addition to the subsequent relocations, most of these boys had stories that involved being unwanted and feeling unlovable. They were extremely violent and angry. I did my best to engage these boys and provided opportunities for emotional and psychological discipline and academic challenge.

At one point in the academic year, the director of the school asked to meet with me. We sat down and she started with, "David, you are doing a great job here and we all appreciate your efforts." Of course, I knew something else was coming that would include an all-trumping "however." As predicted, she went on to say, "*But* I am concerned that you are pushing your students a bit too hard. You need to understand that statistics show us that half of these boys will be incarcerated and go to prison or a psychiatric institution within one year of leaving this facility. The remaining fifty percent will either become janitors or be killed. This is the reality of the situation. Pushing the students too hard will end up only causing disappointment to them and yourself." I was dumbfounded. After regaining my verbal faculties, I responded with, "With all due respect, I will treat each of these boys as though they were capable of going to Harvard or Princeton. If they choose to do otherwise, I will not stand in their way. I want them to have that choice and I don't want to make that choice for them beforehand."

The children had stories of being unwanted and unlovable. This is all they knew. This is all that had to act out of. So, their actions were violent, unwanted, and unlovable. They were burdensome and nobody wanted to

deal with them. The ways in which the boys acted out of their pathetic stories drew the teachers and administrators to cease believing in the children as well. The boys were neglected in their family of origin and, consequently, they ensured that the same predictable end would take place at this facility as well. In a sense, by the leadership buying into the stats and providing meager education, they continued neglecting these boys and allowed the pathological draw of the boys to determine how they viewed them. By the end of my time at this facility, anecdotally, the 1st through 3rd graders in my classroom scored higher than the 8th graders at the same school.

This illustration is a reminder that humanity, especially those in leadership, must constantly work to transcend their own stories and natural responses. We must be watchful and observe the activity of our wounds in order to respond in a way that is not circuitous to our own and other people's small narratives. We must subscribe to a vision that guides beyond the pull and tug of person's broken stories. We will not be free from experiencing this tug, but rather by using this *experience* we have more to work with in understanding the needs, fears, and worlds of these broken children, congregation members, employees, and citizens. My hope is that I helped to provide a corrective experience by disrupting the status quo of these boys' inner worlds.

Though we can "never completely eradicate our dark side" leaders can take a journey to "redeem their dark side" in such a way as to give it as a gift to others.[32] A subtle shift takes place when one takes this journey. This will be a journey alongside of another person, be it a therapist, spiritual director, accountability partner, etc., whose primary role is attending to the narrative out of which you are functioning as a leader. Instead of one's wounds begging for resolution and satisfaction, one's narrative begins to change toward understanding and healthfully responding to the needs of others.

[32] McIntosh and Rima, 145.

"This articulation, I believe, is the basis for a spiritual leadership…because only he who is able to articulate his own experience can offer himself to others as a source of clarification."[33]

Leading for the Other

> Albert Nolan, the South African theologian, noted the hard-to-travel continuum from simple empathy to complete identification with the Other…At the near end of the continuum, compassion, we ask 'Am I my brother's keeper?' The next way station, which requires structural change, answers, 'Yes, I am my brother's keeper.' The third point on the continuum, humility, says, 'No, I am my brother's brother.' Only when we manage to feel both solidarity and reciprocity with the Other, the far anchor point of the continuum, can we say, 'No, I am my brother.' For leaders, this ability to see the Other as self requires a willingness to share power and authority with other leaders, with constituents, even with non-followers and potential successors.[34]

As religious leaders, an essential distinctive must be the recognition that our definitions of selfhood must not merely mirror the meta-perspective of our society. In Western societies where the "masterfully, bounded self"[35] and autonomous journey of each person is emphasized and encouraged, models of leadership are churned out that emphasize particular traits, aspirations, and susceptibilities *within* leaders. Leaders are described in monadic and self-contained terms. This emphasis within leadership studies seems to adopt the prevailing constructs within society that depicts the individual as a solitary entity; the belief that people are separated by discrete "non-porous" boundaries.[36] In this model,

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[33] Nouwen, 1972, 38.
[34] Lipman-Blumen, 2005a, 243.
[35] Phillip Cushman, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy.* (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1995), 19.
[36] Ibid.

wounds are impediments to function and the domicile of susceptibility. As shown thus far, this paper suggests that wounds are not merely a personal affair that is containable and individually discernable but, rather, wounds impart access to the space between persons where ethical responsibilities shape the persons and the leaders that we become.[37] I suggest here that these inward-looking and isolated definitions of leadership identity must be displaced and that a critical step in transforming one's wounds from dangerous susceptibility to an organ of increased sensitivity is the redirection of oneself toward others, for others. This is a reminder to religious leaders of an ethic of self-emptying and self-sacrifice that must guide our constructs of leadership rather than merely co-opting cultural and societal values.

Woundedness is not a personal affair. Wounds elicit, evoke, cajole, draft, magnetize, and demand from those around us. As wounded beings, we find ourselves not as solitary entities, but rather within a matrix of interdependence, interrelationship, and exposure to the needs/desires of others along with the ever-burgeoning and protruding needs/desires of our own woundedness. The Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, challenges the Western notions of human identity by stating that, "The human I is not a unity closed upon itself, like the uniqueness of the atom, but rather an opening, that of responsibility, which is the true beginning of the human and of spirituality."[38] Similar to the quote that began this section, Levinas asserts that to even ask the question "Am I my brother's keeper?" is to have already sinned.[39] It is the beginning of relational dislocation. It creates the

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[37] See Emmanuel Levinas' *Emmanuel Levinas: basic philosophical writings.* In A.T. Peperzak, S. Critchley, and R. Bernasconi (Eds.). (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996) for an introduction to Levinas' work on the human identity as it relates to the Other.

[38] Jill Robbins, ed. *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas.* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 182.

[39] Edwin Gantt and Richard Williams, *Psychology for the Other: Levinas, Ethics, and the Practice of Psychology.* (Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2002), 62.

cavity for interpersonal rotting and toxicity. It is one of the grand illusions of our culture, an illusion that has contributed too much of our leadership woes.

Critical of the conventional interpretation of the human condition and its leadership model by-products, this paper builds upon the call of Lipman-Blumen to strive for "…constructive, Other-oriented leadership,"[40] the work of Max De Pree and Walt Wright to establish a model of relational leadership, and the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas to establish an ethical foundation for our conceptions of self and leadership. David Knight and Majella O'Leary argue from a Levinasian framework that ethical leadership requires taking responsibility for the Other and shedding one's pre-occupation with self.[41]

Based on these admonitions, it becomes obvious that there is a significant need to reconceptualize the role of a leader. In most contexts, leadership is a process of upward mobility, privilege, and personal achievement. A leader is someone recognized, chosen, and vested with power. Leaders commonly stand on pedestals that act in concert with their need to feel adequate or to have assurance of their worth. These pedestals are partly made out of the composite ingredients of the expectations, yearnings, transferences, existential needs and divinizing tendencies derived from the stories of the followers. As described earlier, this posture ultimately leads to increased pressure toward compartmentalization, blindness to oneself, numbed ability to understand the underlying needs/desires of one's followers, susceptibility to buying into and generating a myriad of illusions, and increased focus on oneself, as a leader. The "larger" one becomes as a leader, the more likely it is that he or she will live out an even smaller story. They may measure their self-worth in terms of their image, efficiency, others' willingness to follow orders, and/or monetary

[40] Lipman-Blumen, 2005a, 257.

[41] David Knight and Majella O'Leary, "Reflecting on Corporate Scandals: The Failure of Ethical Leadership." *Business Ethics: A European Review 14.* (2005): 359.

gain. Here, leaders' woundedness is viewed (by followers, board of directors, and the leaders themselves) as an obstacle, diversion, barrier, or liability. From this perspective, wounds need to be eradicated, compartmentalized, or ignored.

An Other-centered model of leadership capsizes the conventional models described above. Lipman-Blumen states, "…when we learn to take up the immense cause of the Other, we inevitably learn to lay down the smallness of ourselves."[42] This paper suggests that leadership should be defined as responsibility for the Other; a person accountable to the needs of his or her followers, bearing others as a surrendered servant. Leadership is not a personal achievement born out of upward mobility as much as it ought to be a personal sacrifice born out of downward mobility toward those in need. "Above all, leadership is a position of servanthood. Leadership is also a posture of debt; it is a forfeiture of rights."[43] In other words, we are not claiming our rightful place based on our talents, achievements, and abilities. We are promising to give these things as gifts. As a leader we commit to emptying ourselves to the needs of others. Leadership is a "responsibility to the social group"[44] and an "opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who permit leaders to lead."[45] Instead of focusing on one's own image as a leader, the "tone of the body of the institution" becomes of greater importance.[46]

This understanding of relational, Other-centered leadership would "vastly change the candidate pool, the selection process, constituents' attitudes toward leaders, and the leader's attitudes toward authority, power, honor, and office."[47] Instead of measuring one's worth in terms of the economic bottom line or notoriety, Walt Wright

42 Lipman-Blumen, 2005a, 254.
43 De Pree, 1992, 220.
44 Lipman-Blumen, 2005a, 246.
45 De Pree, 2004, 22.
46 De Pree, 1992, 28.
47 Lipman-Blumen, 2005a, 246.

reminds us that, "The people you serve are more important than the summits you climb."[48] Here, wounds are accepted as a natural part of the ebb and flow of human relationality. Wounds are part of what creates the vibrancy of human experience and allows for greater sensitivity to the needs and desire of others. Wounds are a unique means by which a leader can reach the innermost needs of those whom he or she is serving. Wounds defy the illusion that we are solitary and contained.

Max De Pree, former CEO of Herman Miller, suggests that leaders ultimately must "learn how to become abandoned to the needs of the followers."[49] How can we, in laying down our small stories for the Other, not merely enable and collude with their repeating and pathological tales? The answer to this is long and involved, but within the confines of this essay, it can be said that the hope is that we, as leaders, become abandoned to help our followers begin seeing their expectations and projections for what they are, derivatives of a tempestuous working of wounds, needs, and desires. A healthy leader is able to *feel* the toxic requirements of their followers without falling prey via his or her own toxic susceptibility. As a leader becomes more aware of his or her wounds and works through them, this allows for the cultivation of this organ of sensitivity while also working to transcend the small story of adequacy, worth, and achievement that has guided much of his or her life. Ultimately, a leader who has suffered through his or her own woundedness in healthy ways may be able to help followers get to their *actual* needs, those underlying wounds that are funding the illusions, expectations, and dictates.

The environment created and questions asked by a leader become a means for followers to re-translate their pathological mandates into a greater understanding. The

[48] Walt Wright, *Mentoring: The promise of relational leadership.* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004), xxvi.
[49] De Pree, 1992, 137.

leader asks questions that assist followers in getting behind and above the impediments to real connection and increases their recognition of how persons and things have become merely transitory satisfactions, idols of their own making. In a sense, this means that a leader shirks responsibility to fulfill the maladaptive beckoning of the followers and bursts the bubble of these misplaced expectations. Lipman-Blumen refers to this as the "valuable inconvenience of leadership," a process whereby leaders assist in the process of disillusioning followers by bringing them into the process of leadership, thus disrupting leader/follower distinctions that breed distortion.[50] The leader, in refusing to dance the toxic dance and be a woundless god who can satiate all claims upon him or her, helps to short-circuit the constricted horizon out of which followers function. "Constructive leaders refuse to succumb to illusions or offer them to us. Indeed, they may insist on shattering even those we create for ourselves."[51] They shake up the world of those around them. They provide opportunities for new experiences and freedom from perpetual patterns. However, to refuse the dance brings about deep anxiety, which followers have aptly avoided through elaborate concoctions.

> While anxiety invariably accompanies serious change, its appearance does not necessarily signify that we are in trouble. Rather, it may indicate that change is under way. In fact, anxiety compels us to expand our identity and authenticity. By facing up to anxiety and the accompanying pain, we become emboldened to take the next step- even in the face of fear and uncertainty. Acting *despite* fear and trembling is one definition of courage, the very stuff of true heroism. Then we are most likely to take risks, to act as our own leaders, even to reach for the stars. The process is painful, but it can strengthen us enough to stop relying on false

[50] Lipman-Blumen, 2005a, 229.
[51] Ibid, 229.

> gods…helps us gain the strength to break out of the control myths that have immobilized us…[52]

Bearing the pandemonium that often accompanies change requires a leader to be fully abandoned to the vision described in this essay, a vision of helping to disillusion followers to such a degree as to create a tectonic plate shift in their lives. This process involves significant risk, constant change, and requires a significant degree of openness,[53] all of which are difficult to calculate into equations of organizational growth and development, but function as the bedrock of what it means to maintain a "posture of indebtedness."[54]

Ultimately, "Leaders belong to their followers. A director should refer to employees as 'the people I serve.' What a different reality that is! And what a different effect on followers."[55] This presumes a particular ethical call toward leadership. It presupposes that leaders must orient themselves toward those who follow. It redirects leadership away from the leader's attributes and image and onto the lives of the followers. De Pree states, "A clear moral purpose removes the ego from the game."[56]

Where do we go from here?

As indicated earlier, human beings cannot transcend their condition. Of our own strength, we cannot recognize and breach our limited and emotionally loaded stories. We cannot see past our wounds without someone breaking into our reality and rescuing us from our habitual processes. And, as leaders, we cannot (through sheer will-power) employ the suggestions enumerated in this essay. This is an ideal that cannot be actualized on one's own. Occasionally, my cynical side tempts me to say that it cannot be actualized at all (especially in this

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[52] Ibid, 239.
[53] See De Pree, 1992, 2003, and 2004 for these themes that pervade his work.
[54] De Pree, 1992, 23.
[55] De Pree, 2003, 71).
[56] Max De Pree, *Leading without power: Finding hope in serving community*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 182.

society). But, with cynicism suspended, there are a few important steps in the movement toward an Other-centered leadership style that can be briefly listed here. First, a leader must submit him or herself to a process of honest and transparent exposure to his or her wounds. This may involve psychotherapy, spiritual direction, and/or mentoring. The sacred process of allowing another to enter into the journey of one's soul cannot be underemphasized as being of essential importance. It is a holy process whereby the habituality and sameness of being is disrupted and something separate or wholly other is allowed to take shape. Transformation of wounds from toxic circuitousness to receptive other-centeredness happens here. Sometimes it may be important for someone to forego a leadership position or not be selected for a leadership position until a particular degree of self-awareness and "working through" has been achieved. An impressive vita or arsenal of experience (our usual measures of competency and fit) does not adequately gauge how a leader will shape the ethos of a particular congregation, company, or agency.

Second, during one's time in leadership, a mentor, coach, or therapist will be an important resource in watching for the dances of toxicity between the leader and followers. We will always have a degree of blindness, even when we are in a healthy place of being in touch with our wounds. Going through intensive therapy in the past does not ensure or hold us accountable to a healthy acting out of our wounds. It is an important step, but not the whole picture. Knowing ourselves and growing in maturity does not necessarily change our will. We need persons in the present who know us intimately and that are mindfully aware of the leadership activities in which we are involved in order to remind, sharpen, admonish, and encourage.

Third, the presence of some form of advising board or Board of Directors should function as an additional accountability system in which the leader's decisions and roles are being scrutinized through the lens of servant-leadership here described. A board whose vision

recognizes the pulls of followers, pressures upon leaders, societal emphases, *and* desires to propagate an overarching drive toward other-centered organizational structures may provide the possibility of empowering and strengthening the leader to such an end. There is almost nothing more constructive than an effective and creative board, and there is almost nothing more demoralizing and debilitating than dissension between a leader and his or her board.

Lastly, in order to change the overall concepts about what and who a leader is there needs to be a counter-cultural revamping of leadership selection processes, limits of terms, and continued formation of leadership training institutes that emphasize Other-centered leadership models. Jean Lipman-Blumen makes many of these suggestions, which are worthy of further consideration.[57] Moreover, this author invites further leadership studies that might help to produce additional options for shaping an Other-centered model of leadership. This conversation is a critical one.

As I conclude this paper, it may be helpful for me to illustrate some of the process described here through my own navigation through woundedness. Having grown up in a home where my voice was often muffled and my thoughts and concerns were treated as inconsequential, I spent many years struggling with feeling small and insignificant, as though no one really cared about my opinion and desires. Over the last decade I have been afforded various leadership opportunities. This has taken me on an intense journey of coming to grips with my wounds and recognizing their manifestations in my work with others. One year, I was chairing a cabinet at Fuller Theological Seminary and was forced to face this issue straight on. During cabinet meetings, I would find myself dominating and feeling compelled to talk, almost incessantly. It was almost as though my position of power had afforded me the right to gather the attention from my cabinet that I was never able to have in my

[57] See the last chapter of Lipman-Blumen, 2005a.

earlier life; seeking a resolution for unmet needs. Having these cabinet members listening to me, investing themselves in what I was saying, and creating actionable items out of my ideas was an incredibly exhilarating experience. The more I gleaned from the ointment of their attention, the more I was blindly living within the small story of my broken history. The more I lived out of this story, the more inward and hegemonic my leadership style was at risk of becoming. My voice became the most important voice. This was ironic considering that I had never felt as though I had a voice beforehand.

As the year progressed, I was challenged in a variety of relationships (i.e., my wife, therapist, close friends, and mentor) to consider the ramifications of growing up feeling emotionally impoverished. These various avenues of challenge were not focused specifically at my leadership style, but rather at my overall journey of learning how to love without fear, give without a ledger book, and find the impediments to my growth. However, before too long, I became increasingly aware of how blindness to my woundedness had created a circuitous pattern within my leadership style that had inadvertently muted the voices of others. As I began working through these patterns, hedging my habitual talkativeness, and creating more space within my cabinet for discussion, I heard new things. I learned to hear at a deeper level. By halfway through my term, I became attuned to some deep feelings of marginalization, neglect, and inequality among particular members of the student body that my cabinet had the responsibility of representing. There was a small contingent of the student body that felt as though they were never listened to by faculty and were not receiving the same attention as other students. These issues had been present for years (preceding my term), but had never been picked up upon or given voice to in years past. I quickly mobilized a series of vehicles by which this voice could be communicated and scheduled meetings wherein the community could address and adjust its orientation toward these persons.

Throughout this paper, I have argued that wounds can be a place of susceptibility where we merely live out our own small stories, but they can also be the location from which wonderful gifts of life and sensitivity can be given and known, orienting us toward the needs of others. My wounds, when I was blindly acting out of them, led me to a self-aggrandizing style of leadership that was largely a perpetual questioning of my self-worth. When coming to know these wounds and coming to grips with them, they began to transform into a receptacle of hearing that allowed me to hear things within the community that had gone unheard for years. My own feelings of voicelessness provided for me a sense of others that needed to be given a voice.

Conclusion: From Pockmark to Beauty

Woundedness is a double-edged sword. It creates an exposure to others that can generate blindness and toxicity or attunedness and sensitivity. Either way, wounds are here to stay. Their denial or compartmentalization subsidizes the processes of buying into and generating illusions. As leaders, this issue determines whether one ultimately focuses inward, on the perpetual stories of adequacy and worth, or outward, toward the needs of those who are being served by their leadership. Our wounds, when not hampered by constricted and circuitous narratives, will forever remind us of the call of the Other and our calls for the Other.

Nouwen provides us with the following illustration. He paints a literary picture of the formation of the Grand Canyon, forged through violent forces of erosion, years of natural disasters, and seemingly arbitrary happenings. He details how this cavernous pockmark tore open the crust of our planet. It is evidence of violence and destruction. However, few would disagree with the fact that it is one of the most beautiful things one might ever behold. This wound upon the earth's surface is now a crustacean bed of life; flowers, trees, and squirrels. It is one of the great, natural wonders of the world, attracting millions of tourists each year. It takes your breath away.

From this, Nouwen formed an analogy between this process and human woundedness. He describes the inevitability of human pain, brokenness, and woundedness. He enumerates how various violent forces, be they abuse, physiological hardship, loss, loneliness, or ostracism are inescapable in this world, where broken beings are relating to one another imperfectly. However, despite (and even because of) these pockmarks we all bear, "a deep incision in the surface of our existence" can become "an inexhaustible source of beauty and self-understanding" and a source of life for others.[58]

[58] Nouwen, 1972, 84.