

Transmuting Suffering

A Leadership and Advising Perspective

Arthur Colman and Éliane Ubalijoro

Fox's idea of Via Negativa is reflected in learning from experiences that require us to let go of things we believe define who we are or that we think are necessary for our happiness. This path helps us develop the capacity to grieve and still function, which is needed today if you are to confront nonstop change—or even the horrendous loss, victimization, or scapegoating leaders sometimes face. Having skilled and empathetic confidants and advisors can help us to heal and find the possible learning from whatever we experience, as well as from our own less than noble impulses. This daunting task of facing your own shadow, and the shadow in the world, is the subject of the next essay, by Arthur Colman and Éliane Ubalijoro.

Transformative leadership, especially in the context of collective trauma and suffering, is fraught with difficulty, inevitably blending positive intent with negative power issues. Leaders in these situations need the largest possible perspective to inform their goals and actions. A partnership with a trusted advisor whose ego is less involved and whose vision is therefore more capacious is of inestimable value.

The advisor-advisee relationship takes many forms. Our interest is in the leader-advisor relationship in which the focus of leadership is on healing and transforming past and present trauma in a collective. Our premise is that leaders and their advisors need to move toward a

wider consciousness, which requires new strategies to match the changing problems and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

We emphasize a process that encompasses an amalgam of insight, reflection, support, and personal and collective development, all through a perspective of love and healing. It is a mode of interactive work emphasizing reflection and insight focused on the analysand's personal development and includes the analyst's own feelings and experience. It is carried out in a carefully bounded relationship, which usually precludes direct help or instruction.

The Developmental Roots of Leaders

Suffering, vulnerability, and fear have profound effects in shaping leadership styles and directions. In the movie *Invictus* (Eastwood & Peckham, 2009), we witness the reenactment of a dialogue between Nelson Mandela and Francois Pienaar, two leaders of vastly different age and experience, one leading a nation out of apartheid and the other leading a rugby team that hosted the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Here is their conversation:

NM. Tell me Francois, what is your philosophy on leadership? How do you inspire your team to do their best?

FP. By example. I've always thought to lead by example, sir.

NM. Well that is right, that is exactly right, but how to get them to be better than they think they can be? That is very difficult I find.

FP. Inspiration perhaps.

NM. How do we inspire ourselves to greatness when nothing less will do? How do we inspire everyone around us? I sometimes think it is by using the work of others. On Robben Island, when things got very bad, I found inspiration in a poem.

FP. A poem?

NM. A Victorian poem, just words but they helped me to stand when all I wanted to do was to lie down. But you didn't come to hear an old man talk about things that make no sense.

FP. No please, Mr. President, it makes complete sense to me. On the day of a big match, say a test, in the bus on the way to the stadium, nobody talks.

NM. Ah yes, they are all preparing.

FP. Right.

FP. But when I think we're ready, I have the bus driver put [on] a song, something I've chosen, one we all know, and we listen to the words together and it helps.

NM. I remember when I was invited to the Olympics in Barcelona. Everyone in the stadium greeted me with a song. At the time the future, our future seemed very bleak, but to hear that song and the voices of people all over our planet made me proud to be South African. It inspired me to come home and do better. It allowed me to expect more of myself.

FP. May I ask what was the song, sir?

NM. Well, it was "Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika."

FP. A very inspiring song.

NM. We need inspiration, Francois. Because in order to build our nation, we must all exceed our own expectations. (Eastwood & Peckham, 2009)

Their mutual goal is to open the inner space of their countrymen and women through a more open consciousness and knowledge of their interconnectedness, a fundamental principle of African Ubuntu philosophy, to move away from a consciousness of polarity toward unification and toward a common goal that transcends apartheid, a "third thing" (Montero & Colman, 2000).

The third thing transcends ego, crossing to a stage (which Jung [1963] describes as the third conjunction) in which individuation culminates in living one's truth in and through the world (Colman, 1997).

The men confront the obstacles from the world of depth and unconsciousness by practicing vision making together. Poetry, song, and sports take the dialogue beyond egos to a place of higher purpose and create images and feelings that unite all South Africans, a nation heretofore symbolizing oppression and subjugation, and create a glimpse of what a healed and integrated whole society could look like.

Overcoming painful experience is often an entryway into leadership. We come to trust leaders like Mandela, Roosevelt, or Gandhi who have known profound physical and social pain as well as fear. Leaders with profound personal experience of trauma must evolve through a "counterphobic stage" in which fear and pain are first denied, then "mastered." But a "counterphobic leader," however well adapted, carries the history of victimization, which may include a substrate of anger and the need for revenge, which may emerge in times of stress. Advising such leaders requires reflective techniques that focus on helping individuals gain a great deal of self-knowledge. The fruits of this hard-won self-knowledge can then be brought into the collective. The advisor can help the leader identify the roles projected onto him or her and help amplify those that are best suited in collective interactions to achieve change.

Advising as a form of healing taps into the core energy akin to biological rites of passage, mirroring in the social collective our species's evolutionary needs. As Eric Kacou, a strategist who works with leaders from postconflict nations, suggests, at organizational, societal, and national levels, preconditions for change formulated by his colleague Michael Fairbanks are needed: moral purpose, tension, receptivity to change, and new insight. Kacou (2009) stated,

“When . . . these conditions are not met, wrong choices are made, and meaningful change is unlikely. Furthermore, prosperity-inducing change remains elusive, and leaders alienate themselves from their industries and political base” (p. 249) and, most important, from themselves. The touchstone for transformation is always at the individual/collective interface.

The Archetype of the Scapegoat in Working with Leaders

Prometheus, an ancient Titan god, stole fire from Zeus and gave it to humans. Enraged, Zeus created Pandora to bring misfortune to mankind and punished Prometheus by having him bound to a rock while a great eagle ate his liver. When leaders are involved in transforming a system (bringing fire to humans would certainly qualify), it is rare for them or their followers to emerge unscathed, as with Nelson Mandela, spending much of his early life in prison for challenging the oppressive system of apartheid. As in this situation, the mythic figure of the scapegoat is frequently in play, illustrated by the torture of Prometheus as well as the fate of humans facing the dark mischief released from Pandora’s box. The story of Prometheus and his powerful gift is also that of Joan of Arc, Jesus, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and many less deified transformational leaders maligned and venerated for their work.

The experience of being scapegoated taps into a primal human fear of being exiled from the group, which in many times in human history could result in death. Indeed, if the scapegoat is not exiled, he or she is likely to be sacrificed—if not literally killed—fired from a job, or dismissed from a position or suddenly persona non grata. At the very least we experience being mirrored by those around us in negative ways, threatening our basic sense of goodness and worth. Surviving this requires tapping into some deeper core identity and value. In finding an inner treasure of strength and resilience, we may also find the font of our inner creative imagination that can serve us ever after.

Leaders whose ideas and policies have significant impact are myth makers filled with our projections for a better life, who, like Prometheus, bring fire: a new technology, ethos, and esprit to us. But they also bring fear, for change carries with it instability and the risk of failure inherent in implementing new and innovative models.

In the alchemical classification of the four elements—fire, water, earth, and air—fire is the great transformer. Bringing fire to a system metaphorically describes one of the key functions and defining characteristics of transformational leadership. Unlike a “catalytic” leader, who provides an essentially unreactive surface on which a chemical reaction takes place but in which he or she is unchanged by the reaction, the Promethean “fire bringer” leader ignites and alters the reaction while being transformed by it. Advising such a leader requires knowledge of the leader’s role and fate in the process of transformation, the archetype of the scapegoat.

Leaders of complex systems, where change and development are needed and the archetype of the scapegoat therefore looms, may benefit more from deep reflection and challenge rather than support and positive feedback. This is especially true for those who know their own competence, have already achieved a great deal, and want to learn more about themselves in relation to their organizations and work career. The advisor must ask the leader to evaluate change and risk. Do they want to understand more, to develop further, and to leap beyond the known inner and outer worlds? Are they satisfied with the status quo and their current level of functioning and success, or do they want their leadership efforts to touch and change the world?

To find a psychic center, the leader and the advisor need to stand together at the crossroads of an enterprise, intent on bringing the inner and outer worlds of the leader’s mandate together. What is required is a reborn connection with the collective, an attitude that embraces that which is difficult to say and difficult to hear, and therefore includes the risk of becoming a

scapegoat by bringing the Promethean fire close enough to feel its heat. We see more than enough evidence around us that truth doing is a dangerous path to take, often leading to personal isolation and collective chaos. But there is also pervasive proof of the life-numbing risk of not living one's truth. It is present in depressed faces, physical illness, dead relationships, and unrealized potential and creativity.

If we identify scapegoating as the collective analogy to ignoring the shadow in the individual, then bringing the scapegoating process to the surface is a powerful way to heal society. We need to recognize what we have scapegoated and repressed in ourselves and bring it to the light of day before we can effectively become a healing force for those who have been oppressed. This requires facing the depths of our own pain, suffering, and victimhood so that we can also face that of others, while adding a balm of curiosity, compassion, and passion. Without that, the practice of leadership becomes a cruel and sterile experiment rather than a place to rekindle spirit for enlightened leadership.

It is the advisor's role to create a safe and sacred space that diminishes the desire for flight and helps the leader without invoking a relationship that fosters dependence. The advisor must be able to hold the largest point of view separating herself from the leader's personal goals and conscious desires. This impersonal perspective helps leaders guard against the inevitable psychic bombardment of expectation and dependency, and the development of psychic inflation that leads toward the scapegoat/messiah complex.

Music, art, dreams, travel, fantasies, vision, and relationships facilitate intersections with large non-ego and collective forces that define individuation in the world. When playing, singing, or listening with transformational intent to Brahms's *German Requiem* or Mozart's Mass in C, for example, some of us will enter sacred space and the "death and rebirth archetype"

and emerge transformed. When we interact with this third thing with that intent, when we join with it, shape it, play it, and sing it, we can enter the realm of ecstatic transformation. It is a place of passion, where pain can be transcended.

Going from the personal task of embracing one's own light and shadow to becoming a vessel for whatever the universe wants to accomplish through us requires deep work and the presence of another. Here the advisor's role is critical, for the personal and collective risks are considerable. As advisors to leaders, we must ask ourselves: Can we stay in deep awareness watching our own light and shadow dance? Can we inspire leaders and followers who look to us to do the same for them?

Perspectives of Love and Healing in an Era of Global Interdependence

In an era of globalization, when a crisis in one part of the world reverberates in so many places, overcoming trauma through compassionate understanding is central to effective leadership. When healing enters the realm of transformation, the transcendent catalyst of the third thing is needed to engender deep change of personality and profound shifts in life goals and ways of being with oneself and in the world. The process of leaders and advisors investing in themselves and their dialogue to strengthen this "muscle" and decrease their isolation is essential for positive growth.

Leaders learning about their inner self and owning their personal truth goes hand in hand with turning these self-reflections toward their organizations and communities. It goes beyond team building to untouched depths inside the group that are usually guarded but can be opened up by going through crisis with a guide that keeps the free space safe. Advisors feel the need to help and inevitably, the temptation to participate. The advisor needs to find an ethical center from a different perspective and build on a variety of techniques (e.g., attending to

countertransference, strict ethical boundaries with the outside world) as the process makes demands on the relationship.

This stage involves "the integration of the unique and distinct elements of the individual with the collective so that both are served." Beyond the loneliness of being a leader and the desire to be of service to a greater collective even when we feel alienated from it, a space needs to be bridged. The leader's knowledge of this is critical. When the deepest and most grounded spiritual vision is married to a practical and pragmatic drive to transform all existing political, economic, and social institutions, a holy force—the power of wisdom and love in action—is born. Andrew Harvey (2008) calls this Sacred Activism.

In this phase the advisor's work is critical. It must include more than techniques designed to help leaders with their fears and shadows. It must include helping with their vision as it connects to the larger society. The role extends beyond the boundaries of coaching/consulting or therapy into a deep analysis of the world of reflection and action. It is not simply about inner or outer development; it is about the interface of the individual and collective. Then what is learned between leader and advisor is taken out into the world and lived.

[Journeying to the Heart of Change in Society and in Leadership](#)

The rejected parts of ourselves, our shadows, are eventually projected onto our leaders. It is easier to give these negative parts to the leader than hold them ourselves. We also project onto leaders parts of ourselves that seem too grand and wonderful to fit into our view of ourselves or that we repress because we know that people who seem to be too powerful or wise can evoke envy and resentment and thus be dangerous. Often the best among us are actually killed, from Christ to Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr. It is no wonder, then, that we want others to act as

saviors, saving us from taking on the danger of experiencing the scapegoat's fate.

Leaders who understand this dynamic use our guilt and relief at their acceptance of these projections (as the villain who enacts the shameful things we want or the savior who frees us from difficulty) to advance their cause. It increases their charisma and influence for good and bad. But few leaders are sufficiently developed to hold these projections and still be of service to the hearts and healing of the collective. Here the trusted and trustable advisor is a critical catalyst and firewall to the challenges of leadership.

The advisor is also critical to helping move the leader to be able to admit mistakes without bringing on fear, debilitating remorse, or paranoid censure of others. Such acceptance is necessary to allow solutions to emerge without blame or entitlement. When leaders function at this level, they touch the sacred in depth work. But entering the sacred attracts both light and dark forces, and differentiating and integrating these polarities is difficult even for the most experienced leaders. That is why the enlightened leader must not be alone as he cultivates this inner reflection and integration.

In the broken world we live in, leaders are called to be the aperture through which the light shines. The phenomenal existentialist Gabriel Marcel guides us to see the world as a mystery instead of problems we need to solve. He states: "a mystery is something in which I am myself involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and initial validity" (Marcel, 1935/1949, p. 117). With this attitude, intent, and perspective, we open our hearts to a new kind of leadership where our personal development serves societal transformation. Only then will we give leaders the complex set of assets needed to face the daunting tasks of the twenty-first century.

Biographies

Arthur Colman is a Harvard-educated physician, psychiatrist, and author; currently a Jungian analyst in Sausalito, California; and professor of psychiatry at UCSF School of Medicine. His books, which include *Earth Father/Sky Father: The Changing Concept of Fathering* (Prentice Hall, 1981), *Up from Scapegoating: Awakening Consciousness in Groups* (Chiron, 1995), and *Group Relations Reader* (A. K. Rice Institute), have sold more than half a million copies worldwide and have been translated into many languages, including German, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Chinese. He has consulted on issues of scapegoating, revenge, and reconciliation in South Africa, Israel, Brazil, Mexico, Canada, and the United States.

Éliane Ubalijoro is an adjunct professor of practice for public and private sector partnerships at McGill University's Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID). Dr. Ubalijoro currently is designing ISID's Executive Leadership Initiative, an upcoming program to help equip executives in international development with tools that support inner and outer sustainable transformation toward global prosperity. Dr. Ubalijoro is the founder and executive director of C.L.E.A.R. International Development Inc., a consulting group harnessing global networks for sustainable systems development. She is a member of the Presidential Advisory Council for Rwandan President Paul Kagame.

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