

Leading from the Soul

Leading from the Soul is the exciting and dynamic intersection of spirituality, psychology, internal systems, and self leadership. This paper is a primer and takes a brief look at how we can better lead from the core of who we are created to be, which is in the image of God. And doing this while successfully managing the other voices and noise within us that often get in the way of our true self. Leading from the Soul is a pathway to wholeness, integration, and peace.

Everyone is familiar with the caricature of the person contemplating a course of action with the devil dressed in red holding a pitchfork on one shoulder whispering in the person's ear to "do it," while an angel in white is on the other shoulder whispering in the other ear, "don't do it." Often our internal dialogue is not confined to the simple metaphorical angel and devil but instead consists of a crowded interior space of various thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Some of these internal voices are strong and demanding, while others are more subtle and less defined. This internal dialogue with the different parts and sides of our personality often seem to compete with one another.

Our complex internal dialogue demonstrates that we are multi-dimensional people with many different parts to our personality that are manifested constantly in different ways, at different

times, and in different parts of our body. We are one integrated person made up of not fully integrated parts that play out in our interactions, behaviors, and most importantly, how we feel about ourselves. This concept of parts and the internal system is based on the ground breaking research and work of Dr. Richard Schwartz, The Founder of Internal Family Systems.

Among all the different sides to us, what remains true is that we all have the divine spark in us. We are created by God. And God is all loving and all good. When we think of the core of who we are created to be and who God wants us to be, some of the words that come to mind are loving, grateful, hopeful, confident, purposeful, and content. This is our true self, our core. Genesis 1:27-28 states that “God created man in his image.” But often our core self seems to be misaligned or competing with other parts of our personality, such as anxiousness, fear, judgment, dishonesty, and impulsiveness.

We know the natural inherited state of sin plays a role in our shortcomings. But understanding ourselves, our core, and the events that shaped us are also key to understanding our internal system and being able to ultimately be who God created us to be. It is important to look inward and get comfortable with the various sides to us that make up our internal system. Even the parts we may not like, are uncomfortable with, or are embarrassed by. And then we need to understand the nature of these parts and the important role

they once played in our lives and determine what their role should be now.

A key to looking inward at our internal system is understanding and appreciating the trauma we have experienced and may still be experiencing. Trauma can come in a big “T” and also in a small “t,” but both can have a profound impact on who we are and how we relate to ourselves and others. Most people would categorize traumatic events as some form of a catastrophic happening, such as being a victim in a violent attack or involved in a major accident or natural disaster. People can suffer significant trauma as well from seemingly less catastrophic events, such as from experiencing rejection, shame, verbal abuse, and failure. Trauma is measured by how a catastrophic or non-catastrophic event impacts a person and not by the event itself. We have all suffered some form of trauma.

Trauma can sit in our mind and body. Our body’s natural reaction to a triggering event and trauma is to fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. And well after the event has transpired, we may cognitively and rationally believe we have adequately processed the trauma and are over it, but as Dr. Bessel van der Kolk so eloquently states in the title of his book, “The Body Keeps the Score.” Memories of certain traumatic events seem to continue to live in our body and are difficult to cognitively and rationally override.

When we experience trauma our internal system can become distressed and overwhelmed. Our coping skills get compromised and overloaded. Even much more so if the trauma occurred as a child or teenager, which is often the case. To deal with and mitigate the trauma, the internal system swings into swift action by inherently developing survival and coping parts to our personality to help manage and alleviate the distress. These parts are ways that our internal system attempts to override and manage the trauma, survive, mitigate the pain, and avoid the recurrence of the trauma. The body is hard wired to avoid a recurrence of trauma. The survival and coping skills that came into fruition at the time of the trauma often stick with us well beyond the traumatic event.

For example, a female survivor of abuse may have difficulty as an adult being intimate with others. Even though she would like to love and be intimate, there is a part of her personality that “protects” her from getting hurt again. That protective part played a very important and critical purpose when the abuse was occurring and in her formative years. But that “protection” may not be as relevant or needed when she is in her 40s and 50s. As another example, an elementary school boy may have had a father who routinely yelled at him over meaningless mistakes and insignificant shortcomings. That child would have learned early on to avoid making any mistake no matter how big or small. To do so would mean that he would be on the other end of his dad’s berating, anger, and rejection. That young child’s internal system likely drove that child to be hyper

vigilant for anything that could be viewed as a mistake or shortcoming. This protective part played a very useful purpose in avoiding unpleasant and harsh interactions with his dad at the time. As that young boy became a man, that protective part may still play out in the form of perfectionism and lack of self compassion. While serving a useful purpose as a boy, that protecting part now may have unintended negative consequences in this man's adult life.

In this discussion of parts and sides to our personality, it is important to remind ourselves that innate to all of us is our true self, core, the sacred, or better known as our soul. According to Scottish Theologian George Macdonald, "The soul has an eternal nature: created in the image of God, the soul is what sets humans apart and connects them to the eternal, differentiating them from animals and mere physical matter."

Every human has a soul, the divine spark, the sacred, that image of God in our inner most being. Although the soul cannot be destroyed or taken away, certain parts of our internal system can burden and eclipse the soul. The image of God is there somewhere within us but other parts of us are crowding it out and dimming the light of our soul. When these burdened and protective parts are leading the system, we are more likely to be anxious, depressed, and without a feeling of control. This will play out in how we feel about our ourselves and how we interact with others.

The goal is to Lead from our Soul. Return to and become more like the image bearer of the Divine. This is done by integrating and aligning the various parts of our internal system to the image of God within us. Because the soul is divine and it is a reflection of the image of God, there are leadership qualities to it. Using Christ as an example, he fully loved and accepted those who were broken, damaged, wounded, and outcast. In fact, he actively sought them out to extend love, compassion, and acceptance.

To Lead from the Soul requires that we care for our internal broken and wounded parts as Jesus cared for the broken and wounded people in his ministry on earth. In this way we are embodying God's compassion, care, curiosity, and kindness inward to each part of us. We are leading our internal system with God's love and grace. Particularly with the parts that may have come into being because of the trauma in our lives that has resulted in our suffering, shame, and brokenness. This will allow us to be centered and guided by the sacred and lead with our God-centered nature.

In order to Lead from the Soul, we must begin to understand our internal system and differentiate the various parts that make up our system. The goal is not to eliminate or fight with the various parts of our personality that we don't like or are ashamed of. We should focus inward and seek to understand our parts from a compassionate point of view. Remember, all of our parts at one time served a very valuable purpose.

There are a number of concepts that we have been discussing – the soul, internal system, parts, and trauma. To start putting these concepts into practice and to begin to explore our own internal system, we have developed the 5C's. The B5C's. Be conscious, calm, curious, compassionate, and clear. Similar to meditation or a mindfulness exercise, the B5C's can be practiced as a daily routine or when experiencing a triggering event. The B5C's is an avenue to lead from your soul and positively interact with the different parts of your own internal system in order bring about internal harmony, peace, and alignment.

Conscious

Be aware of what you are feeling and experiencing in the moment. Be conscious and aware of how your mind and body are experiencing and processing the present moment or anticipating something in the future. Particularly be aware when your mind and body get triggered or activated.

Calm

Often the natural response to a triggering or activating event may be fight, flight, freeze or fawn. Our stress level will increase as our internal defenses respond. It is important to stay calm. Take a deep breath. Accept the feeling or thought. Don't try to quickly get rid of it in some fashion or form. Accept it, don't fight it.

Curiosity

As you have now decided to sit in the discomfort, engage your curiosity about this feeling and thought. Where do you feel it in your body? How are you experiencing it? Is the part afraid or worried about something? What is this side of you trying to tell you? What is the part trying to accomplish?

Compassionate

Be as non-judgmental as you can be with your parts. Befriend your parts. Listen to them. Sit with them. Comfort them. With a spirit of grace and compassion, allow your parts to fully express themselves. Show the same compassion to your parts that you would show to a friend who is struggling or suffering.

Clear

Have clarity in going forward regarding your parts. Are you able to put that part at ease? Are you able to thank the part and let it know you are ok now? Can you remind the part that you are no longer a child or teenager? Are you able to ask the part for some space? Is it comfortable taking a break? Are you able to lean more into your core, true self, your soul? Are you able to Lead from the Soul?

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