



# Developing the Heart of a Leader

## Strengthen Your Character with a Reflective Practice

We live in a world that is beautiful and full of opportunity. We also live in a world that is chaotic and crazy-making. Your ability to find internal peace, love for yourself and others, and the inner strength to face adversity determines which world you spend most of your time in.

In business, we can become masters at ignoring our own signals that something is not right. We battle with input-overload and unending urgencies on the outside; and bury our best intentions with troubling emotions on the inside. We do this to ourselves with painkillers, alcohol, television, complaining, criticizing people behind their backs, and so on.

We focus on what we are doing and accomplishing without attending to who we are being when we are doing and accomplishing. Eventually, we discover we are neither where we want to be, nor who we want to be.

**Having learned these lessons the hard way, we offer you the practice of remembrance as a sacred treasure. It returns you to your beautiful world when you have fallen into your crazy-making world.**

We gratefully uncovered this treasure for ourselves in 1998 and have been using the practice ever since. It is not our own invention by any means. Indeed, Cynthia Bourgeault PhD clarifies the ancient nature of heart-centered reflection in general, quite well:

*“According to the great wisdom traditions of the west (Jewish, Christian, Islamic), the heart is first and foremost, an organ of spiritual perception. Its primary function is to look beyond the obvious, the bounded surface of things and see into a deeper reality...a world where meaning, insight, and clarity come together in a whole different way...a subtle seeing in the dark, a kind of spiritual night vision that allows one to see with inner certainty that the elusive golden thread glimpsed from within actually does lead somewhere.”*

Our own transformational experiences align with this understanding of the heart. It occurs for us as a primary information center that complements our mind. Not to be confused with the home of our emotions, our hearts are where we find our values, inspiration, creativity, and strength of character. Sometimes dormant, sometimes alive, this is where the best of humanity resides.

Initially, we experimented with a heart-centered reflective practice for our own benefit. Our surprising results encouraged us to cautiously share this treasure with some of our clients who were privately looking for better answers to their own business challenges. Sharing the remembrance with clients led us to these insights,

*“The practice of repeating a sacred word heightens a person’s innate positive qualities so that these qualities become our more prevalent and natural ways of being, during both times of ease and times of difficulty. With practice, a person’s positive qualities overcome or replace counterproductive qualities such as self-doubt, self-importance, arrogance, judgment, anxiety, and hopelessness; leaving them with an experience of deep wisdom, peace, compassion, patience, and internal strength – all qualities of a flourishing human being.”<sup>2</sup>*

The remembrance returns us to what we have forgotten: knowing that the secrets to meaningful success and genuine happiness are “treasures” already buried in our own hearts. This practice ultimately becomes a way of being, providing a path beyond the ego-struggles that are at the root of our personal suffering and ineffectiveness.

No description can do justice to this practice, so we suggest you find your own experience of connection to your heart with a simple experiment for 30 days:

*The practice of remembrance, in form, is a simple one: the repeating of a phrase or word that is sacred to you with an intention to experience a connection to your innate goodness.*

1. Choose a word or phrase that represents the highest source of goodness in your world-view. Depending upon your cultural background, spiritual orientation, and personal history, you will come up with something that resonates in your heart. Examples include the Name of the One in a sacred language (Elohim: Hebrew, Alaha: Aramaic, or Allah: Arabic), or a short phrase such as Peace Within, Divine Light, or Loving Kindness. It is crucial you choose something that works for you. People who have no spiritual orientation get value from this practice by choosing a word that represents or calls forth whatever they hold as most precious in their lives (i.e. Allowing Life, Awesome Joy, Peaceful Ocean, Truthful Living).
2. Sit quietly with your eyes closed and bring your awareness to your heart area. Breathe in and out naturally, and quietly repeat your word or phrase as if it is coming into and out of your heart. We recommend spending 30 minutes per day with this practice (some people prefer one sitting and others do it several times for a few minutes). We have found that even beginning with a sincere effort of 5-10 minutes per day will begin to provide noticeable benefits.

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<sup>2</sup> Flourishing Enterprise: The New Spirit of Business, Chris Laszlo and 8 co-authors including Paul Werder, Stanford Business Books, 2014

3. Each time you do the practice, do a brief inventory of your experience of yourself before and after your practice. Take note of your physical sensations, emotions, and thought patterns. If you like keeping a journal, it will help you deepen your awareness and understanding of the issues you are working with and the progress that you are making.
4. During your practice allow your mind to be as it is, quiet or busy. Each time you notice your mind becoming a distraction, simply return your attention to your heart without judgment, continuing to repeat your remembrance word or phrase. As you deepen your experience of remembrance your mind will eventually quiet down. This internal quiet mind is not a prerequisite. A calm mind is a ‘treasure within your treasure’ - an eventual enhancement that comes with filling your heart with the positive energy of your remembrance.
5. Allow yourself to be surprised with insights or inspirations that help you find what you need. If slowing down for reflection causes you more discomfort than you had been aware of, allow yourself to feel what is there and continue with your remembrance. It is counter intuitive to “lean into” what’s painful, but that is the most effective way to find the relief and peace you’re looking for. The love that awakens with your remembrance will eventually clear your heart of what’s troubling you. Depending upon the issue and your readiness to receive relief, it may be minutes or months until you experience the clarity you need to work through your situation. Be patient, continue, and trust that love, peace, and wisdom will prevail over whatever is troubling you.
6. As you discover the possibilities and profound satisfaction that comes from the practice of remembrance, you will naturally want to incorporate it into your daily experience of life. We encourage you to experiment while working, sitting in meetings, or when you prepare for a difficult conversation. An ideal time for remembrance is when you wake up at night. It is the prevention and the cure for stress, as well as the tool that best opens your heart to inner wisdom.

### **A practical example:**

An executive is faced with a business challenge that is causing stress. Rather than charging into action, or collapsing into inaction, she:

1. **Takes time to notice how she is feeling in her body.** She notices tension in her neck and heaviness in her shoulders. Realizing that none of these responses mean anything in and of themselves, she has come to learn that these feelings merely point to something significant, and any discomfort in her body is a signal that she does not yet have a complete perspective about what is troubling her.
2. **Examines what emotion has caused this reaction.** She feels nervous and notices she’s worrying about a deal she made with a former partner. Emotions, also, are not the source of the problem, but merely indicators of what is brewing inside. Making a decision from an emotional basis is not wisdom - it is reaction that often makes matters worse. To find clarity and wisdom before making a good decision, she must go deeper inside beneath her emotions.
3. **Takes a minute to examine what the emotion is about.** She is worried that her integrity will be challenged if she can’t make the payments she agreed to with her former partner. All emotions point to what is causing them. Once she is aware of what she believes is causing the emotion, she takes the next step to bring her heart into play.

4. **Trusts that connecting to her heart will help her navigate through this situation.** She recalls she can access her heart's guidance and has found value in her practice many times. She patiently repeats her remembrance phrase until she finds more clarity about what's troubling her and what she can do to make things right.
5. **Looks at what she believes is going on until the larger reality of the situation begins to be revealed.** She realizes that she values the relationship with her former partner more than she values herself. She recognizes that her partner's end of the deal is substantially more favorable than what she is receiving. She also acknowledges there are other factors in her life making this situation more complex than anyone anticipated.
6. **Follows the thread of expanding awareness, she asks what is needed, and allows an answer to arise.** She realizes it is time for a new conversation. She realizes that asking for a reconsidered agreement can have integrity, preserve the relationship, and improve her possibilities for future success. By following this guidance, she will be able to take inspired action with a positive intention regarding all that is important to her.
7. **Stays true to her heart's highest intentions until the best possible outcome is realized.** With support from her colleagues she engages in three meaningful conversations with her former partner over the next few months. Ultimately, they arrive at a revised agreement that allows both of them to move forward with mutual respect. She acknowledges her former partner for being open to the renegotiation and comes through her challenge with peace of mind and a stronger heart.

The key to this leadership approach is that every time you are not seeing a situation completely or clearly, your body will react in an uncomfortable manner; and when you resolve your issue with a deeper perspective consistent with your values, one way or the other, you feel a genuine sense of relief.

The more you fill your heart with the positive energy from remembrance, the more easily you will come to this higher perspective; and the less your body and emotions will need to let you know you have lost your connection to your heart. Best of all, each time you reawaken your heart through remembrance, you are building your internal character strength and preparing yourself to live in a world that is beautiful and full of opportunity.