

RECALLING THE TEACHINGS

ON VISION: HOW DO YOU SEE THE WORLD?

Developing a vision involves taking stock of your life experience, noticing what you see in the world today, and discerning your hopes for tomorrow. Discovering the thread that connects your past, present, and future views of the world will allow you to begin to articulate a vision for your service and leadership.

This is no easy task. Most people do not examine the connections between their lived experience, world views, and deepest hopes at this inner level. If you challenge yourself to do so, you will gain a deeper understanding of and a confidence in your vision for the future. In sharing your vision with others and listening to theirs, you will not only develop the ability to lead with your hopes and aspirations but also learn the flexibility to consider how you might collaborate with and inspire others.

ON INSPIRATION: WHO INSPIRES YOU?

Bernard of Chartres, a 12th century French Neo-Platonist philosopher, famously said that he and his peers were like dwarves perched on the shoulders of giants; they were able to see more and farther than those who came before them not because they had sharper vision or greater stature but rather because they had been elevated onto the shoulders of the giants of the past. Isaac Newton later popularized this phrase, writing to a friend, “If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

We are connected by life’s continuity. We live in an interconnected reality in which the wide variety of human experiences and understandings are all around us. As you are about to engage in a life of service and as you are discerning your vision, whose shoulders are you standing on? How are you looking to history, to relationships, and to the world around you to gain both understanding and inspiration? We often talk about the “giants” of our lives as our heroes, so it may be valuable to consider what actually makes a hero.

MYTHS OF VISION:

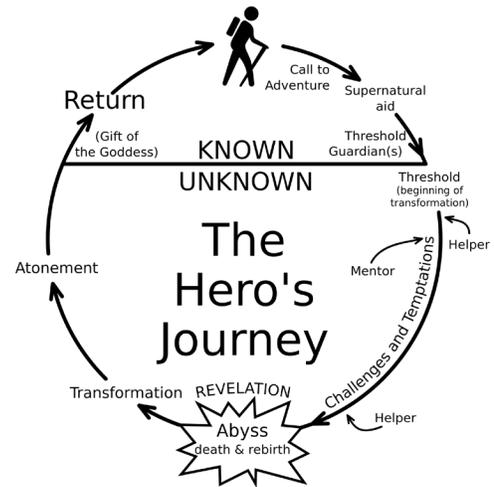
Myth 1: You are either born with vision or not.

Myth 2: Your vision must be new and unique.

Myth 3: Having a vision is dependent on smarts.

Myth 4: Your vision must be bulletproof before being shared with others.

Myth 5: Your vision will never change.



OUR STORIES: WHAT MAKES A HERO?

Joseph Campbell wrote insightfully on the hero's journey as represented across cultures through mythology and storytelling traditions. He concluded that the hero's journey as a metaphor for life's journey follows a clear narrative structure moving from the known into the unknown and back again with battles, death, rebirth, and transformation unfolding along the way.

Campbell has defined a hero as "someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself." If we consider this definition, how many everyday heroes do you know? What can you learn from their courage? In our heroes, we see something that we believe the world needs. In our heroes, we recognize the qualities of being and of acting that inform our dreams of how to make the world a better place. We recognize that we need these teachers (helpers and mentors) in our own lives to move us along the path of our journey—we cannot go it alone.

Perhaps the greatest task in life is to look beyond ourselves in order to commit to something greater, as Campbell suggests. Recognizing this challenge, we suggest that taking time to reflect upon those who inspire us is not about trying to determine the qualities that will make us bigger/better/more powerful but rather about honoring mentorship as we distill a vision and set out on an adventure. To discover what inspires us is really to ask ourselves how we are connected to a lineage and network of wisdom seekers and change makers.

DEEP LISTENING: CONFRONTING THE CLUTTER

"To listen is very hard," Henri Nouwen wrote. When we practice deep listening with another, we are often confronted with our inner chatter and our own desire to be heard. Mindfully opening the heart with an intention of listening fully to the words, expressions, and lives of another is a radical act. Let the practice of listening (and being listened to) be what guides you to connection—to justice.

"To listen fully means to pay close attention to what is being said beneath the words. You listen not only to the 'music,' but to the essence of the person speaking. You listen not only for what someone knows, but for what he or she is. Ears operate at the speed of sound, which is far slower than the speed of light the eyes take in. Generative listening is the art of developing deeper silences in yourself, so you can slow your mind's hearing to your ears' natural speed, and hear beneath the words to their meaning."

— Peter Senge

Watch Brené Brown's two viral TED Talks for more on vulnerability, courage, and connection:

"The Power of Vulnerability"

"Listening to Shame"

Go to: www.ted.com/speakers/brene_brown

IN PREPARING TO LISTEN DEEPLY, ASK YOURSELF:

>> Do I believe in my own inherent worth and dignity?

>> Do I believe in the worth and dignity of the other?

>> What is in the way of these beliefs (if anything)?

>> Can I step out of my fear of being vulnerable to practice deep listening for a moment?

>> What would it mean to connect with my self and the other in this way?

ON THE VULNERABILITY OF CONNECTION

At the core of many understandings of justice and equity is the idea that each and every human being possesses an inherent worthiness and dignity. Often we strive to be agents of change by developing skills of analysis, discerning approaches to challenges, and grappling with our own beliefs and doubts. Rarely, however, do we spend enough time contemplating this idea that we need to act in alignment with a belief in the inherent worthiness and dignity of all people—of all life.

Brené Brown articulates that embracing vulnerability is fundamental to embracing the mystery and fragility of life and that those who have realized their own inherent worthiness and dignity are best able to embrace vulnerability.

If we accept the idea that to believe in the worthiness and dignity of ourselves allows us to live with vulnerability, which in turn allows us to practice courageous and compassionate connection, then we see clearly how the path to justice and peace must be paved by vulnerably authentic leaders committed to listening deeply and pursuing connection within themselves and with others.

The practices of self-acceptance combined with deep listening have the power to unlock a virtuous social cycle of courageous and compassionate connection.

- *When have I felt deeply listened to? How did it feel?*
- *How do I listen?*
- *What gets in the way of my listening?*
- *When have I had a feeling of deep inner calm?*
- *What gets in the way of my feeling deep inner calm?*
- *What do I experience when I say, "I don't know"?*
- *How do I gather and listen to others?*
- *When have I felt deeply understood? How did it feel?*
- *How do I seek understanding?*
- *What gets in the way of my seeking understanding?*