From optimisation to transformation –
my path to the wellspring of rationality, morality and spirituality

For many years I have been occupied with and contributed to the development of a number of concepts that have significance at both the organizational and the personal level. These include such notions as organizational ethics, social and ethical accounting, values-based leadership and corporate social responsibility. In recent years these have been supplemented by another concept which, one might say, underlies the others; spiritual-based leadership. But all of these approaches to reality are quite different than those that characterized my life earlier.

It is therefore challenging and most refreshing to be invited to write an essay about the professional and personal path one has tread. This is in particular the case just now as I am in the process of being relabelled. On April 1 (“April Fools’ Day”), 2003 I will replace the title of “professor” by that of “professor emeritus” So this is a most appropriate time to reflect upon “where I have been” and “where I am going” - upon the road I have followed and the road I will choose when laying down my life’s path in the years to come.

Looking back, it appears that I can describe the path of personal and professional development I have trodden until now as one from rationality, via morality to spirituality. Each of these terms, rationality, morality and spirituality, has successively played a major role in my personal as well as my professional life. My reflections as to that path will be structured around the close and dynamic interrelationships I have experienced between my professional and personal development.

It is far more difficult for me to describe the path that I will try to create and follow henceforth. This is not due, as one could expect, to uncertainties as to what the future holds in store. Rather it is due to limitations in my being able to put into words an aspiration that is at such an existential level that it transcends the use of language. I can best “describe” the path I will try to follow henceforth as one that leads to the very source of rationality, morality and spirituality - to their wellspring. Hopefully the underlying meaning will become clearer. It is my earnest wish that the thoughts, which now unfold, may resonate with your own conjectures, feelings and experiences.

Some reflections on “paths”
“Path” is an often used metaphor when describing human behaviour – we hear people speak of “the road less travelled”, of coming to a fork in the road where an existential choice is to be made, of paths to success and paradise and of spiritual paths. One walks or otherwise moves slowly down paths while one zooms along on highways. Progressing along a path permits reflection and
contemplation. Underway we learn that there are “rules of the road”. We experience limitations to our degrees of freedom in choosing our path – that somehow, due to our circumstances and previous decisions and behaviour, there is an element of “karma” influencing or determining where we find ourselves and where we choose to move on to; “as one sows, so one reaps”.

On rare occasions, for example in connection with a personal crisis, we may also have experiences and insights that are so dramatic, sudden and unexpected that a striking alteration in our world views, self-reference and character results. Surprisingly, and fortunately, in spite of such abrupt and dramatic changes, there is a sense of continuity, the path is still one’s own, personal path. Looking back, so to speak, these new insights simply seem to manifest themselves, as though they were there all the time and just waited for the proper circumstances to make their appearance. We discover that we are pathfinders on our own path to personal development and transformation. That we are its co-creators, that we discover our path while beating it out.

Such at least is the way that I have experienced my own development, characterized at rare intervals by amazing surprises and existential wonder, which are followed by a longer period of digestion. I have come to recognize and respect these experiences as manifestations of a latent blossoming, of a path from myself to mySelf.

The early path: Rationality is in the driver’s seat
I grew up in a second generation, middle class, Jewish intellectual family in New York, where logic, facts, rationality were the only acceptable perspectives on reality and choice – and where “success”, in the form of economic wealth or intellectual achievement, was paramount. There was little place for intuition and metaphysical conjecture – or for joy. And there was certainly no room for faith based on a religion or in a benevolent Godhead, particularly as we were deeply affected by the barbaric murder of millions of innocent people during the Second World War just because of their religious heritage.

Our family life was also strongly affected by serious and long lasting illness. This led to both great financial demands and stress which reinforced the dominating emphasis on “getting ahead” and creating circumstances that could lead to a life free from anxiety as to survival. The focus was not on humanistic ideals or on personal satisfaction but on coping.

This led me to seek an education that would not challenge such world-views and that would put me on a path leading to “success” and a well-structured existence. My parents’ contributions towards the costs of my studies were supplemented by scholarships, loans and work, all of which enabled me to study at some of America’s premier institutions of higher learning. I studied engineering at Princeton University, took an MBA at Harvard University and a Ph.D. in Operations Research at Case-Western Reserve University. Between my MBA and Ph.D. I spent two years in Scandinavia, one year doing research under a Fulbright Grant in Denmark, and one year doing management consulting work in Denmark and Sweden for American companies. My totally unanticipated trip to Denmark, just as an unanticipated travel to India 26 years later, was to have enormous implications on my life’s path.

“Optimisation”, the subject I had chosen to investigate in my university education and academic research, and to apply in my work with organizations, was a natural result of my upbringing, education and desire for a well-structured existence. I was fascinated by the highly simplified
underlying postulates as to human rationality – that we seek to behave in a manner that maximizes the “utility” that results from our decisions. That we are able to clearly define goals, that we seek the most appropriate means to achieve these goals, and that all of this can be expressed in mathematical terms so that optimal courses of action can be decided upon by the use of appropriate analyses and computations.

Young adulthood: I become an expert in optimisation - and a narrow-minded person.
It is said that as one thinks, so one becomes. During my graduate studies and my early professional work, where I looked at the world through an optic of hyper-rationality, I became a very myopic person. I knew more and more about less and less; I was becoming an expert. In my personal relationships I placed strong demands as to the discourses I participated in; they had to correspond to my perspectives on rational behaviour as a search for optimisation. There was little room for loose or unclear goals and ill-defined alternative courses of action. Logical thinking and means-ends rationality were the only acceptable frames of reference for making decisions, for reacting to stimuli. And life was considered to be a chain of decisions whereby one attempts to optimise the outcomes of one’s actions. This was a powerful way for me to structure my world – and was appreciated by the academic world and the world of business. It provided me with a reasonable degree of satisfaction, professional recognition and economic success - and a rather cold, sterile approach to life. It also led to a rather significant distinction between private life and work life.

After completing my Ph.D. thesis (Pruzan, 1964), I returned to Denmark where I first worked for IBM. I was their first operations research “expert”. I helped them develop the concept that computers could be used not just to save costs when carrying out simple existing functions such as working with invoicing, preparing statistics, production planning and the like, but to actively contribute to the formulation and solution of sundry decision problems in business, based on the methods of operations research and its underlying paradigm of optimisation. Soon afterwards I held an invited lecture at the Danish Operations Research Society. After my presentation, an enthusiastic professor invited me on the spot to become an associate professor at the Technical University of Denmark and to help him build up the new Department of Mathematical Statistics and Operations Research. Those were the days in Denmark when professors had the power to make such decisions without having to go through the formalities of public calls for applications, detailed evaluations by a committee, possibilities of complaints and so on. So a few days after our first meeting I accepted his offer and returned to academia, not as a student but as associate professor of Operations Research. This gave me the opportunity, together with a small number of like-minded people, to develop the areas of OR and mathematical statistics in Denmark so that we received high international recognition.

After a few years of intensive teaching and research I cut back on these activities so that I could have more time to apply my concepts and tools in practice. Together with a friend who, like me, had done his Ph.D. studies in operations research in the US\(^1\), I formed a consulting company: OAC, Operations Analysis Corporation. Almost overnight we were extremely successful, receiving considerable recognition from both the business world and academia for our leading-edge work, most of which was of the nature of contract research. I was able to use optimisation as a frame of

\(^1\) Dr. J.T. Ross Jackson has been a close friend ever since – and amazingly enough, even though our ways parted for some years after we sold OAC in 1976, our “paths” have been strikingly similar. He and his wife have for years provided considerable financial and personal support for projects throughout the world which have aimed at ecological and spiritual development, and they are both actively engaged in what one might refer to as a spiritual search.
reference for formulating and “solving” complicated decision problems at major Danish companies and institutions. I worked closely with the top management at a large number of major organizations, a rather unique opportunity for a person not yet 30 years of age; we are talking of the mid-1960s, where the average age of leaders was much higher than today, and where hierarchies rather than flat organizations characterized both private and public enterprises. We soon had a fine staff, almost all of whom were my former students, and we started working for organizations throughout the world. All of this supported me in my construction of a normative world-view based on optimisation; organizations should optimise their performance and in order to do so, they should explicitly apply optimisation methods.

In the private sphere, however, there did not appear to be much room for "optimisation", certainly with respect to personal relationships, compassion, love, aesthetics, appreciating nature – and my relationship with myself. Nevertheless, in spite of my common sense, personal experience and intuition, the optimisation paradigm infiltrated my attitudes towards even this private sphere. One could think about the "optimal" house, "optimal shopping routes", perhaps even the choice of "optimal friends" or an "optimal partner". I even wrote about such silly matters!

So, looking back, while my personal experience, as a youngster appeared to have played a decisive role in my choice of higher education, gradually, and without conscious awareness, the direction of the relationships between my personal and professional development reversed. My professional worldviews were now colonizing my private sphere. They reinforced my narrow focus on rationality, with the result that I became, I think, a very critical and rather difficult person to deal with, always demanding clear, logical explanations and arguments. In many ways I must have been a rather unpleasant person. But there was a saving grace: I was all the while torn between my hyper-rational self and my strong doubts as to some of life’s most fundamental, existential questions. This internal tug-a-war left me confused, sensitive and extremely curious – and therefore a challenging person as well.

**Rationality is challenged by morality**

Not only was my focus on optimisation challenged by my experiences in the social sphere and by my doubts. Challenges were nagging me intellectually as well. Although I worked seriously with the concept of optimisation in my research and let this amputated view of the world dominate my early work, doubts as to the solidity of the basis for this worldview started to disturb me. These doubts, which started to appear as far back as during my doctoral studies in the US, dealt not so much with the methods of optimisation, but with its relevance, whether in fact we live in a world where things are to be “optimised” by human intervention. Could attempts to “optimise” lead in fact to far-from-optimal solutions in the real world due to our limited abilities to understand and model the complexities associated with human choice? And what if people and organizations did not want to optimise? What if the tacit understanding that decision problems are intrinsically optimisation problems is simply wrong – that economic rationality is too limited an expression of human aspirations?²

I originally brushed such questions aside, telling myself that one had to want to optimise, not to do so was a sign of ignorance. That if only people could learn that it is possible to optimise, they would

² This should not be confused with the notion of “bounded rationality” inspired by the work of Herbert Simon and his associates, and which emphasized our limitations for being able to define and determine the optimal solutions to decision problems.
understand that they should optimise - they would see the light. And I would be a torch-bearer! But then again, since almost no one appeared to optimise in practice, doubts lingered on.

Together with my future partner in the firm OAC, I wrote my first journal article: "On the Development of Utility Spaces for Multi-Goal Systems" (Pruzan and Jackson, 1963). Although, as the title indicates, the subject matter was certainly not “humanistic” or “spiritual” and consisted of a number of mathematical theorems and their proofs, it in fact contributed to a major expansion in my thinking and convinced me of some significant limitations to the applicability of the optimisation paradigm. What the article did was to develop a series of necessary and sufficient conditions for our ability to formulate a decision problem as an optimisation problem. Little did I know then that that article in a little known Danish journal would be referred to later on as a seminal contribution to the field of Multiple Criteria Decision Making\(^3\), which had not yet developed at that time. Nor could I imagine then that this interest in understanding the preconditions for being able to optimise – and therefore in developing a more complex perspective on decision making - would eventually lead to my tearing down the edifice I was in the process of building up.

Another experience, this time 10 years later, contributed to an expansion of my notions of what my role in life is, what my moral obligations are, who I really am. In 1974 I led a project for our firm, supported by the World Bank, in the newly established country of Bangladesh. This was the former East Pakistan, which had won its independence via a bloody civil war that started in 1972. My work involved developing a large computer model that could assist the government in designing the logistical system for storing and distributing both domestically produced grain products (mainly rice) and imported grains. Major potential investments in buildings, technology and infrastructure were to be evaluated based on my analyses. The analyses convinced both the ministers of parliament in Bangladesh and the World Bank that our recommendations should be followed and the World Bank supported the subsequent investments.

The project was an eye-opener for me. Until then, all my work had been done for corporations and governmental institutions in the West. Here I witnessed, for the first time in my life, devastating poverty on a mass scale, as well as ignorance and an almost complete lack of infrastructure, education, hygiene and health systems. And I made my first brief trips to India, a country whose cultural and spiritual ethos was to exert a significant influence on me 15 years later.

Although my professional work on the project was most successful (Pruzan, 1978), what really affected me deeply, for the first time in my professional life, was the awareness of the responsibility I have as a human being for those people who are affected by my professional behaviour. This was the seed that was to blossom years later into my second major perspective on behaviour: morality.

After roughly 10 years of co-leading OAC, my former partner and I decided that we each wanted to develop ourselves in a way that running a company did not permit; I felt the need for more time to reflect on the exciting experiences I had had in applying operations research methods in practice, my friend felt the need for working alone on developing theories he had as to financial markets. So in 1976 we sold the company to a major Danish international consulting company – and I returned to academia, this time to the Department of Economics at the University of Copenhagen, where, for 9 years, I was in charge of the field “planning”. It was during this period I wrote my advanced

\(^3\) In the classic early reference (Keeney and Raiffa, 1976) the article is referred to many times as a seminal work, together with publications by internationally recognized mathematicians and mathematical economists such as Debreu, Luce and Tukey, and Leontief.
doctoral thesis with the formidable title: Locational Decisions and Combinatorial Optimisation. In
spite of this economical, mathematical rational approach to reality, I continued to tread a path where
I vacillated between enjoying working with mathematical formulations of decision problems and
experiencing significant doubts as to whether I was in fact contributing to society by doing such
work. And whether I was being true to myself.

The tension between these two perspectives on reality culminated when a journal asked me to
reflect on some work I had led more than 15 years earlier. It involved helping leaders of the
cooperatively owned and run slaughter houses in Denmark to prepare for significant changes in
technologies and market conditions, a challenge that these leaders had not been able to deal with in
a satisfactory manner due to the lack of a shared understanding of the problems they would face.
Based on an intensive study of the sector, together with some of my employees at OAC I had
developed a model to analyse how to minimize the total costs in Denmark of producing and
distributing products of the Danish meat industry. The results were to serve as the basis for major
decisions as to the long term structure of the sector, including the number of slaughter houses for
cattle and pigs, their location, size, suppliers, product specialization and the like. Our work resulted
in a series of recommendations that provided the basis for realistic negotiations, something that had
not been possible previously.

So when I was asked to reflect on this “highly successful” project, I had anticipated that I would
have a most enjoyable experience and that I would look back with pride on my former work, which
was recognized for its originality and relevance, and had been the subject of a number of newspaper
as well as scientific articles. I was therefore rather amazed that the opposite was true. When I
described the work performed over 15 years earlier, I became downhearted and confused. I realized
that in reducing the problem to an “optimisation problem”, we had only included factors that
exerted influence on costs (the overall problem was to minimize total system costs). What was
neglected was the influence that the slaughter houses and related production units had on their local
societies. The model indicated the need for a significant restructuring of the industry. Mergers were
to drastically reduce the number of independent cooperatively owned slaughterhouses and
production sites. These were, over a number of years, to be replaced by the concomitant formation
of far fewer and, relative to what existed then, huge facilities.

What the model did not, and could not, include, were the effects that such developments could have
on the local communities. Most of the slaughterhouses were located in small towns. They were a
major source of employment for truck drivers, employees at the slaughterhouses, skilled craftsmen
who would make repairs to the buildings, machines etc. Each time a slaughterhouse shut down, it
contributed to the development already underway whereby people left the rural communities and
moved in to the cities. The model could not take into account the “costs” involved with such
demographic upheavals – “costs” resulting from loss of jobs, the migration of families from the
local communities to the cities, the shutting down of local schools and shops – which again led to
even more people leaving the local communities. For such “costs” could not be measured, and
certainly not in monetary terms!

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4 A colleague I had worked closely with for a number of years, professor Jakob Krarup, defended his advanced
dissertation on the same day; its title was Combinatorial Optimization and Locational Decisions. By then we had co-
authored a book and 25 articles in international scientific journals.
Rational reflection leads to a focus on ethics

Shortly after these reflections I was invited to seek a professorship at the Copenhagen Business School (CBS). The professorship was not yet defined and I was asked to suggest its title; I responded with the term “Systems Science”. The reason for this was that this emerging field had a holistic/systemic perspective on organizations, which I felt corresponded well to my awakened intellectual curiosity for being able to deal with and “model” complex social phenomena. It provided an approach to description and understanding, which went far beyond the simplistic approaches of economics I hitherto had worked with. I sought the professorship and was appointed in spring 1985. This also meant building up, together with another new professor at CBS, a new department: Department of Computer and Systems Sciences.

One of the early decisions I made was to try to hire a modern, systems-oriented philosopher so as to be able to develop the field. Not only from an economic or organizational focus, but from a far broader perspective. The position was to be associate professor in systems theory. To my great joy, three of Denmark’s most creative and productive philosophers sought the position. To my even greater joy, and in disregard for all the rules, I was permitted to hire all three of them, even though originally only funds for one were allocated. So in February 1986 the major part of the systems group at my new department consisted of philosophers; this was indeed a major change at the Copenhagen Business School where the dominating perspective on reality was, to use a Milton Friedman expression, “the business of business is business”!

Within a short time this led to intense discussions on a concept of ethics in organizations. Together with one of my new colleagues I developed a concept of multi-stakeholder, multi-value approach to ethics in organizations. It was based upon my colleagues work with the German philosopher Habermas’ work on discourse ethics and on my own work with multiple criteria decision-making. This led to the theoretical development of the concept of “ethical accounting”, to a number of articles in Danish and international journals and to the first implementation of ethical accounting in 1990 in a major Danish bank. That same year, together with another of our colleagues, we published a book building upon the reflections underlying this work (Jensen, Pruzan and Thyssen, 1990): The Ethical Challenge: On Shared Values in a Pluralistic Society (in Danish). It was about this time that I was also involved in co-founding the Danish Academy of Applied Philosophy, which provided a forum for people from the worlds of academia and business to exchange views.

While all this was going on, I still kept investigating how my mathematical-analytic approach to reality could encompass some of the new perspectives I developed during my work with the philosophers. This led in 1991 to the publication of yet another book, this time with a focus combining the philosophical and the mathematical approaches to ethics and decision making in organizations (Bogetoft and Pruzan, 1991): Planning with Multiple Criteria: Investigation, Communication, Choice.

To make a long story short, this fascination with both the rational and the moral led me to be the co-initiator and architect of two significantly different educational programs, each with a three-year bachelors program and a two years masters program. The first of these was “Mathematics and Business Economics”; the second was “Philosophy and Business Economics”. The first represented

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5 Milton Friedman, Nobel Prize Laureate who has exerted a powerful influence on economic thinking during the last 40 years, see e.g. Capitalism & Freedom, University of Chicago Press, 1962
6 Dr. Ole Thyssen, now professor of communication at the Copenhagen Business School, and a highly proficient author and participant in the Danish debate as to organizational ethics.
7 Hans Siggaard Jensen, now professor and Research Director at Learning Lab Denmark.
the simplicity and optimality perspective, the second the complexity and morality perspective. Both contributed to the profile of the business school – and to my own personal and professional development.

I gradually began developing the original focus on ethics and on ethical accounting to include such concepts as values-based leadership and corporate social responsibility. In the mid-90’s I met with a few people from various parts of Europe to discuss setting up a professional membership organization that would promote social and ethical accountability within organizations. ISEA (Institute of Social and Ethical AccountAbility – www.AccountAbility.org.uk) was established in London in 1996 and I have been actively involved in guiding it ever since. In 2003 I step down as member of ISEA’s Council. 8

In the meanwhile, my department at the Copenhagen Business School grew and became more heavily involved with questions of leadership. In 1996, the same year as ISEA was formed, the systems/philosophy group from my old department joined with other members of CBS to form the Department of Leadership, Politics and Philosophy; we are now the largest department at the business school with upwards of 120 employees, including over 30 Ph.D. students.

My increasingly international orientation, my work with ISEA, with my department and the new educational program in Philosophy and Business Economics were all developing at a rapid pace. All the while, however, a new perspective was greatly affecting my outlook, aspirations and sense of identity.

My path from rationality and morality to spirituality

While my professional activities had been exerting a considerable influence on my personal development, these roles became increasingly reversed, once again, starting with the late 1980s. In 1988 I was approached by yet another person who has played a significant role in my beating out my own path 9. He had heard about the work that I was doing on Ethical Accounting and the underlying notion of shared values in organizations. Although he was in his late 50’s at the time and had had a successful business career behind him, he was intent on writing a Ph.D. dissertation on such concepts. I will never forget our first meeting on September 1, 1988. While I spoke of values from a primarily instrumental perspective, i.e. as means for developing a dialog-culture in an organization that could strengthen organizational identity and purpose, he spoke of them at an existential level. It was as though he spoke of Values and I spoke of values, as though they were far more than means to ends, they were ends in themselves, and they were universal.

I became fascinated by his way of looking at the world. On my 53rd birthday in March, 1989 he presented me with a book called Spirit and the Mind, written by an American psychiatrist (Sandweiss, 1985). It dealt with the teachings and talents of an Indian teacher/guru/spiritual leader called Sathya Sai Baba who resides in the south of India. I had never in my life read such a book and I must admit that it made me feel most uncomfortable. With my atheistic background, its talk of God, of our each having a spark of divinity as our core essence, and of the unity of all religions turned me off. Nevertheless, I was fascinated by this teacher’s extremely inclusive, non-sectarian approach to the notion of spirituality and his emphasis on the notion of loving and serving others as

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8 In particular I should mention Dr. Simon Zadek here. Simon is now the CEO of ISEA. Since we first met in the mid 1990s, we have had a close personal and work relationship. In 1997, together with the third of the founding fathers of ISEA, Richard Evans, we published the book (Zadek, Pruzan and Evans, 1997), considered by many to be a seminal contribution to the field of accountability.

9 Thorbjörn Meyer completed his Ph.D. studies on values in organizations when he was in his mid 60’s. He contributed to the development of ethical accounting in Denmark, having led its implementation in a number of organizations. He exerted a strong catalytic influence on my spiritual search.
the key devotional practice. I was also challenged by the focus on our ego as the major barrier to our personal development. When I asked my colleague why he had given me such a book, he explained that he had been greatly influenced by the notions of “Human Values” he had learned from this Indian spiritual leader; the reason he was studying for his Ph.D. was because this Sai Baba had encouraged him to do so.

This conversation led to a series of conversations about the notion of spirituality. I noticed that I was becoming deeply fascinated by the teachings of Sai Baba. At one point I asked my colleague if he would teach me how to meditate, as I understood from him that meditation can be an effective way of stilling the mind so that we can gain contact with our selves at a deeper level than our activity in the outer world permits us to. That we can, so to speak, develop from human doings to human beings. I have since then meditated every day, with only a few exceptions, and have found it to be a wonderful way for me to start my day.

Although I was fascinated by these experiences, I had no thoughts about investigating the matter more directly; my rational mind and my atheism were formidable barriers. But I was to be mistaken. In summer 1989 I was to deliver a lecture at the University of Pennsylvania in the United States. On the way, I would visit my parents in New York City. When my colleague heard about this, he asked me if I could take a small gift with me to one of his friends who was a Danish businessman living in New York. It turned out that this friend was an old acquaintance of mine from my time at my firm OAC, Operations Analysis Corporation. When I met him on a beautiful early-summer evening in New York, 21 years after our acquaintanceship in Denmark, it turned out that he too was a follower of the Indian spiritual leader Sathya Sai Baba. He told me how his encounter with Sai Baba had influenced his life in an extremely positive way. He then told me that he was completely convinced that I had to meet this holy man and that if I was willing to do so, he would be my guide. We agreed to meet in Sai Baba’s ashram, located near the city of Bangalore in the south of India, later that summer.

That trip was a mind-boggling experience. Just as my trip to Denmark in 1959 had completely changed the course of my life, so too did this trip to India radically alter my aspirations in life, my understanding of reality and my relationship with myself. And this of course has had a significant feedback to my professional development.

Until then, my work with ethics in organizations had been primarily of academic interest. I had considered values and ethics from an instrumental perspective – as “tools” for leaders to use so as to enable them to deal with the more complex challenges in a world characterized by more fluid organizational structures and an increasing focus on the role of stakeholders, globalisation and highly improved communications and computing technologies. Gradually my perspective changed. These concepts now became important in a new and empowering way. They were no longer looked upon as means to an end, they became vitally important in their own right. I found myself gradually becoming one with them, they became part of me, were vital to my self-reference. And underlying this gradual development was my increased fascination with deep existential questions – both on a personal level and on a collective level. At the personal level I became concerned with questions such as: Who am I really? What is a good life for me? What are my obligations, my duties, to myself and to others? And at the collective or organizational level there were questions such as: Who are we? What is a good life for us? What are our obligations?

This represented a significant shift in focus. From a concentration on the outer world to the inner world. When I tried to reflect on this shift and why it had taken me so many years to ask these

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10 Jorgen Trygved is one of a number of spiritual-based business leaders that I have come to know. In 2002, together with a few others, I have commenced work on an international research project to investigate how people from different cultures and religions integrate their spiritual search into their practice of leadership. The project is mentioned later on in the essay.
basic, very fundamental questions, two answers appeared (over and above my own, particular upbringing in an atheistic and highly intellectual family). The first was that we live in an era that is strongly affected by science. This has been a gradual development since the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century – and has led to an extreme duality. There is a distinction, a “distance” between the observer and the observed, science demands this. We study atoms, stars, computer chips, frogs, pesticides, whatever. We are the subjects, they are the objects. Even other people are studied by psychiatrists, biologists, geneticists. What we have not been brought up to study is ourselves. And since people’s personal experiences are not susceptible to study by others, the focus on scientific method, with its demands on controlled experiments, replicability and falsifiability, deny the existence of a science of the soul. We have simply been weaned from a focus on introspection, from the “who am I” question, by a dominating scientific paradigm. A scientific view of the world, which has brought with it great increases in technology, productivity and wealth – but which has to a great extent relegated the spiritual to the esoteric.

The second answer was that we, most of us, have not been brought up to focus on fundamental questions as to what is important in life. Busy parents, schools dedicated to skills development (and prohibited in many places by law from raising fundamental existential questions), churches that, at least in much of the western world, have gradually lost their influence on our world views and aspirations – and films and TV that promote pictures of “the good life” as one characterized by luxury, comfort, beauty and youth, have all contributed to a kind of value or ethical nihilism. A result is a focus on wealth, prestige, power, comfort and the like, and not on achieving satisfaction, fulfilment, joy or on even investigating the potential sources of these.

Where the path ends: the journey to the wellspring of rationality, morality and spirituality
Looking back at the path travelled so far, my “quality of life” has undergone a metamorphosis. In my youth coping was in focus. Then came structuring and achieving via a powerful, often cynical focus on my (and others’) rational behaviour. Later on my rational reflection led to a broader, moral perspective that supplemented my rational analytic approach to reality. And during the course of the roughly 15 years since my return to India in 1989 and my spiritual awakening, life has expanded in a new and unexpected way. I have gradually become more aware of who I truly am and of the joy and peace and love that is our birthright.

In this later period my personal life and my work life have become more or less indistinguishable. My values and aspirations as to my work are no different than those with respect to my personal development. Work used to primarily be a combination of the following: a means of earning a living, an opportunity to learn, a platform for establishing good social relationships and a “place” in society, and an activity where I could excel and experience excitement, rewards and recognition. Now, all of these are overshadowed by far more basic aspirations.

Since I know from a number of deep spiritual experiences that, as Jesus proclaimed “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke, 17, 21), my path from now on must be to the depths of my own reality. This should by no means be misunderstood as a decision to remove myself from society and to sit in a cave in the Himalayas, chanting mantras and living a life of asceticism.

On the contrary, it means living an active life where I have “my head in the clouds and my feet firmly planted on the ground”. It means actively seeking, in all of my activities, with heart, mind and soul, the source of my being, what I have here labelled the wellspring of the rationality, morality and spirituality, that have played such a dominating role in my personal and professional development up until now.
For example, I now regularly lecture about spirituality and leadership internationally\(^{11}\), particularly at some of India’s premier business schools\(^{12}\). I have started writing about this subject from a number of different perspectives including power, teaching and cross-cultural leadership (Pruzan 2001, 2002, 2003). At present I am working on two international projects together with my wife and two American friends who live in India\(^{13}\): *Human Values in the Workplace*, a book for self-study to be used by individuals or groups, and the research project *Spiritual-based Leadership*, based on interviews dealing with the experiences, results and difficulties faced by leaders of major international companies who acknowledge that they lead from a spiritual basis.

So, based on my experiences until now, here is the “compass” I intend to use on the path that I will be creating and following. It consists of a number of inquiries to guide my steps:

- Am I behaving with integrity – is their purity and unity in my thoughts, words and deeds?
- Are they helping me to transcend my ego-mind and its demands as to achievement, recognition and rewards?
- Am I listening primarily to my conscience and not to my ego?
- Am I focusing on the means, not just on the ends?
- Do I look upon the outcomes of my endeavours with equanimity, no matter whether they appear as “success” or “failure”?
- Do I look upon my work as a spiritual practice – as a means to serve others?

Such self-referential inquiry has emerged naturally and helps to nurture my spiritual perspective on life. The focus on the outer world is now supplemented by a deep focus on the inner world. My body is no longer just a means of activity and pleasure; it is the temple of my soul. Questions such as “Who am I?”, “What is a good life for me and for others?” and “How best can I serve?” are becoming a part and parcel of my everyday contemplation.

Over and above this “compass”, I know from experience that other practices such as meditation, prayer, enjoying the company of like-minded people and actively seeking a meaning in existence, which transcends my senses and my intellect, will support me on my path. A path from myself to mySelf, a path from becoming to being, a path that ends where it begins, at the wellspring of rationality, morality and spirituality.


\(^{12}\) I now regularly teach MBA students and guide Ph.D. students at Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning in Prasanthi Nilayam in the state of Adhra Pradesh. In addition I have lectured at the Management Centre for Human Values at the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) in Bangalore and Ahmedabad and the Institute of Management Development in Gurgaon outside of Delhi; I have established student and faculty exchange programs between these institutions and the Copenhagen Business School. In particular, I have been inspired by the activities led by professor S.K. Chakraborty at the IIM in Calcutta, where I have lectured on a number of occasions.

\(^{13}\) Debra and William Miller, highly renowned consultants and authors and the founders of the non-profit organization Global Dharma Center. They have been a source of inspiration in our spiritual search.
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