

Presidential Address

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A Personal Journey

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Dear Friends and colleagues. Susan and I thank you for being here today, for honoring us this year, and for being such great friends for 25 years since we attended our first Academy meeting at the Broadmore as guests of Tom and Liz Ballantine. Three years later, in Pasadena, we were elected to membership. I emphasize we because I was clearly advised that Susan was a major factor in our acceptance by this great organization. That event was symbolic of the guiding role that Susan has continued to provide for our personal, family, and community life.

During the ensuing years, we have shared many happy and productive experiences with Academy friends. You have been an important part of our lives. Today is the capstone of those memorable occasions because you are providing me, as your President, the opportunity to share some personal reflections with you.

Today is also sad because of the absence of so many dear friends. Most are my mentors and legacies of their time.

Having reached a chronologic plateau this year that indicates seniority in The Academy, I could direct my remarks to any of innumerable challenges we face in the professional practice of medicine today. I could examine the crossroads in medical

education and manpower that demand courageous decisions; I could focus our attention on the philosophical issues that threaten the basic structure of medicine as a healing art; or speculate on the incomparable opportunities for advances in the basic understanding of the human brain and mind. But you have heard the discussions already in the program that Peter Black and his committee has organized for you.

Therefore, after much thought, meditation, and encouragement, I have chosen to focus my remarks on my personal inner journey toward wholeness that each of us is called to take if we are to become fully alive and responsive to the challenges and opportunities of today's world.

Sharing some of my journey with you involves considerable risk for me because of my inexperience in speaking of matters of the spirit, and my lack of expertise and knowledge about the topic. However, I do feel safe in revealing my search to you because the Academy consists of friends and colleagues who encourage self exploration. Your trust and respect I value.

Most of you know me well enough to appreciate that I prefer participating in the creation of visions and the spinning off of projects. I find the devil in details, can be

impatient with process, and am still learning to be in touch with tender emotions and quiet reflection. Thus, addressing issues that deal with the inner journey and crises of self awareness is not something that flows easily from my mind into a comprehensible literary form. I claim no original thoughts or access to truth. What follows is a discussion of my work in progress, the confessions, if you will, of one who is seeking a path toward wholeness and balance in life.

Susan and I have been married for 30 years and have been blessed with three wonderful children who are now mature young adults. We have fortunately been spared major tragedies but have faced the normal developmental crises. These crises, particularly those that touch upon the inner journey, represent turning points that have been opportunities for meaningful change.

I have come to believe that the journey toward self-awareness bids us to develop personal responses to four questions:

- Who am I?
- Where am I going?
- How do I get there?
- What is my offering to the contemporary world?

The fundamental question "Who am I?" guides my personal development. At an early age I sought to establish an identity that corresponded to some interior notion of what I wanted to become.

As a brash youth, I expected that education would arm me with the skills that would define my relationship with people. For me, the acquisition of competence was to be the path to success. I was influenced by mentors who were largely contemporary. The lessons they taught became the litmus against which I tested my daily experiences. Many of these were humorous sayings or one-liners that focused on winning, personal success, and being appreciated by peers. You would remember most of these, some are like cliches.

- “The scenery only changes for the lead dog.”
- “The golden rule: He who has the gold makes the rules.” (*Lindner*)
- “When you get to the end-zone, act like you’ve been there before.” (*Lombardi*)
- “Winning is not the most important thing, its the only thing.” (*Lombardi*)
- “In the field of science, chance alone favors the prepared mind.” (*Pasteur*)

These sayings are aimed to activate the ego and arm the warrior mentality with power, strength, and charisma for success. When out of balance, these qualities become masks of illusion that obscure the reality of one’s true inner self.

With maturation I discovered that competence alone was insufficient. I learned that other qualities were important in creating a map for wholeness. Loving relationships, wisdom, and empathetic listening are qualities that bring compassion to competence.

I became drawn to motivational sayings that had a more philosophical tone. Albert Schweitzer's teachings emphasized the basic value of reverence for life, a place where religion and philosophy can meet. Pope John the 23RD was a world leader who stressed unity, valued learning, and emphasized the worth of all persons.

The teachings of Pope John the 23RD, Schweitzer, and other contemporary philosophers and theologians helped me to bridge the space to the study of the Bible. Reading, quoting, and seeking to live some of the teachings of the Old and New Testament have become a source of strength and inspiration. The importance of service and humility are inspired in these two passages from *Matthew*:

“He who would be chief among you, first let him to be your servant.”

(Matthew 20:27)

“The exalted shall be humbled, the humbled shall be exalted.”

(Matthew 23:12)

The challenge to create the inner journey to know oneself is beautifully described in a letter from Paul to the Romans.

“Do not conform yourselves to the standards of the world, but let God transform you inwardly by complete change of mind so that you will know the will of God, what is good and what is pleasing.” *(Romans 12:1-2)*

Stimulated by these and other teachings, spirituality became an ever increasing part of my search. Spiritual mentors have stimulated the wisdom that shape my growing response to the questions: “Who am I?” and “Where am I going?” These responses, rooted in the truth, are proclaimed in varied language forms by the great spiritual leaders of the world. Their message, the Holy or Divine dwells deep within each human being.

This was Christ’s message when he told the disciples, “The kingdom of God is within you. It is in your midst.” A 20TH century monk and writer, Thomas Merton, echoed these words, proclaiming that God is the deepest center of ourselves. He identified this personal center as our true self, contrasting the notion with our false self or a mask that shrouds itself in illusions.

When we find this true self then we will have found God. If God is light and truth, unrestricted by time and space, then our highest calling is to become the window through which God shines into his own world.

This is a lofty vision, one that increasingly orients me with respect to the person I seek to become. I journey on, looking for a true awareness that will connect my spirit to new and creative forms filled with beauty, serenity, compassion, and reverence for God’s

creation. It is a quest for a God that binds us together rather than separates us by race, creed, gender, religion, and culture; a God who transforms human suffering so that no time, place, or event exists, even in the worst of human conditions, where God cannot be found.

The vision of my journey leaves me faced with the question “How am I going to get there?” I can move forward only by making choices that increase my capacity for wisdom, freedom, and love. But the choices are many and the distractions are attractive and enormous. Life is filled with illusions like success, power, and possessions. Each illusion creates a deviation on the path to wholeness. These illusions compete for our freedom, awareness, and leave little time to receive peace and grace. Grace is not something that can be acquired like so many of our goals in life. It is a gratuitous gift that can only be received by those who are receptive. Scott Peck reckoned that grace is like grits; it just comes like with any breakfast in North Carolina.

How does one prepare for the peace and freedom that comes with grace? How does one become linked by the Creator to the world? How do we recognize that the stream is as sacred as the blood and that the breeze is as precious as our breath?

I have come to see that peace comes with cultivation of openness and receptivity. With this sense of peace comes a freedom from being judgmental. This means that we are open to emulate the good we see in others and receptive to accept blame when we feel judgmental toward others.

Frank Mayfield had a saying that “a person is not a man or a woman until tested in a thousand different ways.” He imagined that this quality of strength is characterized by balance, self control, perseverance, dignity, and equanimity—all of which diminish the need for external confirmation. Such wholeness allows an adversity to be transformed into a learning experience and generates strength for daring action. Strength and action may come from indomitable will where joy lies in the fight and satisfaction in the effort. These strong traits are admired in physicians and make for human feats that may seem miraculous.

As physicians and humans, we have many experiences that test our personal powers of strength, will, knowledge, and veracity. Some of these experiences cause us to wonder what breakthroughs can transform our spirit and define our destiny.

I was unprepared for a transformative experience or revelation that we will call Kairos. Our youngest son, Neal, who is so much like his mother in all the important qualities, introduced me to the concept of a Kairos experience. Kairos is a Greek term that signifies a divine timing, the ready or ripe moment when circumstances synchronize the events with unusual clarity and impact. It refers to a precise instance when the presence of the divine erupts in ordinary time and places. Kairos is a moment of great significance that seizes the breath and stills the soul. Such moments are rare. They come with such singularity as to demand attention.

In high school, Neal attended a Kairos retreat for students. This occasion was my first experience of what in retrospect I recognized to be a moment of divine timing. In the course of a few days we observed our teenager transformed into a free spirit who followed his bliss on a path as if it had been waiting for him. I followed his transformation with deep interest and a sense of awe. Some years later, I was at a crossroads in my personal journey, when an experience occurred that proved to be a momentous test of my ability to accept imperfection and to practice patience, trust, and love. I would learn to let go of many warrior qualities that seemed more comfortable to use when I was personally assaulted and threatened.

In this story, a patient had been followed for several years with a benign meningioma. Rather suddenly, the tumor had a dramatic growth and the patient's symptoms progressed. Removal of the tumor was recommended. I felt certain that I was forthright and clear in explaining the options, risks, and expectations of treatment to the patient and family. Additionally, the patient had a prior heart condition that was evaluated by consultants who concurred with our plan. After the tumor was removed, the patient postoperatively developed heart failure. Poor cardiac output, which coupled with the reduced carotid flow, lead to a stroke. The staff and I were forthright and attentive to the needs of the patient and family. However, the patient's recovery was less than perfect, leaving him with a

hemiparesis and mild cognitive deficit. Within days after his discharge from the rehabilitation center, I was shocked to receive a notice of expectant medical legal action related to failing to obtain an informed consent.

After more than 25 years of medical practice, I was to be as a defendant in court for the first time. I was completely unprepared for the hostile attitude of the family. The charges were fraud, that is willful concealment of information, negligent practice, and failing to obtain an informed consent.

My warrior instincts were heightened to a fevered pitch. I was incensed about the apparent injustice as well as the breach of respect and trust that I presumed we had shared. However, Neal and Susan lovingly suggested that I consider another approach. Neal, who by this time is far advanced in his personal spiritual journey, counseled me to review the inspirational scriptures of the old testament. I was particularly taken with the Jeremiah who, although a holy servant of God, became impatient, at one time cursed man, and prayed for vengeance on the enemies of God. Jeremiah was admonished by his God for his impatience and lack of trust. "If you can not run with men, what will you do when you are expected to race with horses?" was God's question for Jeremiah.

While waiting for the trial, Susan and I visited Neal in Italy and spent several days in a monastery. There I was blessed by a special connectedness with the abbot who, in this quiet place of retreat, revealed the gift that one receives in a life of contemplation, silence and prayer. Brother Patrick, the monk, who had been a physician previously described the contrasting forces of man's behavior as "emissive" or "receptive". "Emissive personalities," he said, "spend much of their time projecting thoughts. They are agents of change and are sometimes aggressive, hostile, acquisitive, and concerned with power. They are poor listeners. The task of the mature person is to develop the habit of receiving, accepting without judgement, and knowing what new truths are being revealed." This is quite a different stance for one who is accustomed to being an agent of change. He stressed in receiving there is the need to be quiet and to be constantly open to receive messages from any source. He advised "be open because God can speak through all of his creations." Furthermore, he reminded me that God does not leave us to face our perils alone. Was this a Kairos experience?

The trial did occur this summer. I was amazed that I found myself at peace. I was able to breathe deeply even while I was accused of being untrustworthy and indifferent. Fraud charges were dropped by the judge when it became clear that we would not accept a settlement. Although no expert witness had been called to testify, the jury was charged to

consider negligence in practice. The jury was deadlocked for days before reaching a compromise verdict . They ruled against negligent practice but found me guilty of one count — lack of informed consent. The jurors who would speak with us, including the foreman, were apologetic. Remembering the monk's words, we were committed to being open to all messages. We accepted that my explanation may not have been fully understood by the family. We accepted that I may have appeared less than sufficiently caring for a disabled patient and his suffering family. We accepted that it may seem arrogant to recommend a surgical procedure for a condition that is not life threatening. We considered all of the opportunities to improve what must have been a breakdown in communication.

Subsequently, we implemented a policy to provide a comprehensive written explanation of options, risks, and expectations of what was presented verbally. I have chosen to no longer make decisions for patients. Rather I allow the patient and family to assume that responsibility with the aid of our statistical data and to have access to a choice of consultants, support groups, and reference literature. To my surprise, there has been an outpouring of support for this approach. Patients and families have become more knowledgeable and more fully appreciate the limitations of our technical abilities. Sharing the responsibility is more likely to create a synergistic feeling of trust and respect. This

process does require patience and time. However, one moment of patience may ward off a great disaster while a moment of impatience may change a life.

Given this experience, I became convinced of the importance of fully involving the patient and the family in all decisions related to the healing process. Now, I was ready to explore the final question in my spiritual journey. What is my offering for the contemporary world? What is my role as an individual who has great potential for compassion and the ability to perform in a competent manner? It is my challenge as a teacher and physician to free compassion and competence to flow through the lives of others. I must be sufficiently secure to serve as a mentor for my students, to nurture without being competitive, to listen without problem solving, and to advise without having a personal agenda.

This new awareness has crystallized my belief that my main calling as physician is to create an environment characterized by exemplary behavior, competence, and compassion. This environment will enable our patients to better engage their abilities to mobilize the forces of spirit and body in the healing process. I believe that enlightened people who take responsibility for their actions are more likely to heal, be at peace, and suffer less even when bad things happen as is shown in the following story.

A 60-year-old widow recovered after suffering a hemorrhage caused by a deep ventricular and basal ganglia AVM. Deciding that she wanted the lesion removed, she was confident that her prayers would be answered even though the risks of surgery were substantial. As she expected, the AVM was completely removed. However, the intraoperative angiogram showed some extravasation of dye in the ventricle. To our horror, there was massive brain swelling, which led to intravascular consumption coagulopathy, such that the resultant hemorrhage could not be controlled.

Despite all our efforts, it became obvious that the patient was going to die by bleeding to death. I had never experienced such an impossible situation. I sought out the family to prepare them for the unexpected circumstances. The son and daughter calmly requested that I return to their mother and do my best. When I asked if a chaplain could be called, they agreed.

After returning to the patient, we resumed maneuvers that were previously unsuccessful and the bleeding stopped. When I returned to the family without any explanation for the sudden turn of events, they were being comforted by an small Indian chaplain who introduced himself as Emanuel. Emanuel means God is with us. They explained that Emanuel had brought a sense of peace and prayerful quiet. They were

certain that their mother would recover and she did. From this experience I learned a lesson in compassion and humility that will never leave me, and felt this was a true Kairos experience for me. Subsequently, the patient's minister or a hospital chaplain are always invited to join the healing team because I am convinced that benevolent and prayerful qualities like hope, peace, faith, love, and empathy are necessary. These qualities are spiritually transforming but also have a regenerative physiologic significance that, like Grace, is an inexplicable amazing and precious gift.

If we accept that our worthwhile offering in contemporary life is to be present, to act in a compassionate and competent manner in order to bring healing to God's creations, then how do we acquire the practical habits and the leadership skills to accomplish our mission in a chaotic world where many do not share our values?

Each of us must seek our own response to this challenge. I continue to search by preparing for this discussion with you today, listening to your advice and suggestions, reading, and comparing paths that lead to success and failure with others. Not all wisdom comes as breakthroughs. Some wisdom is more like common sense but may have a profound influence in our daily lives.

Challenging myself to continue to learn and integrate leadership skills, my studies led me to a new path with the help of Margaret, our oldest child. She discovered the remarkable author and teacher Stephen Covey when he was just beginning his successful teachings of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. She introduced this program to our family. By learning, practicing, and teaching the seven habits, we learned to allocate time into four quadrants based on whether issues were urgent or important. We learned how to spend our time in the center of focus and to reduce our effort spent in the center of concern. We learned how to keep better balance in our lives based on Covey's seven habits. We learned that the concept of practicing habits was not new. In fact, Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit."

Covey's art of principle-centered leadership is based on a value system: trustworthiness at the personal level, trust at the interpersonal level, empowerment at the managerial level, and alignment at the organizational level. Applications of these teachings and guidance has enabled us to develop mission statements and strategic planning programs that are personal, familial, departmental, organizational, and community in nature.

Covey teaches us to live, to learn, to love, and to leave a legacy; that the four basic needs — physical, mental, social, and spiritual — are closely entwined in a balance in

which the secret is the need to leave a legacy. This abundance mentality encourages us to share our gifts in a manner that strengthens the weak and unites those needing hope.

My friends, peace then becomes a function of deep inner spiritual life attained through the integration of the sacred and the ordinary. Joyful living is found in the midst of life, not in retreat. This is our purpose — our legacy.

Finally, in balancing the joy and peace of our mental and spiritual lives, our family has not lost sight of the physical and social aspects that must be developed to keep us physically strong and healthy. Sharpening the saw to keep strong bodies, as Covey calls it, is shared by our family. Neal has taught us how to catch the edge of light with a camera. Margaret and Mat have conditioned our bodies and lungs with mountain biking, skiing, hiking, and other physical activities. An example of a new paradigm occurred this summer when Margaret invited me to join her for a bike trip through Glacier National Park on a tandem bike. I was to be the driver and she the stoker (seated on the rear seat) which is in a very dependent position but provides much of the power for pushing the cycle. We made excellent progress with this line up. On the first morning we climbed 4,000 feet, over 22 miles up the Road to the Sun. But on the decline and open windy roads I became very tired and soon needed Margaret in the leadership position. We exchanged seats as in the patient

physician role — this reversal of roles led to a much more effective team. Margaret was a great driver, in the stoke position I felt very safe, could offer some suggestions concerning gear shifting and other adjustments that improved our efficiency. More importantly, I could pedal confidently and create a new sense of bonding with her as we worked together.

Susan and I have discovered small pieces of heaven on earth in monasteries around the world. The physical beauty of these monasteries is complemented by contemplative meditation in the silent beauty of nature. We can share the solitude with God who seeks to share the light so that we are all, in truth, one spirit. As you read in the round-robin, Susan and I are creating a small, personal, natural retreat on the Coleton River in Spring Island, Carolina. We hope that you can come and have some grits, soon.

Thank you.

10/30/96