

# Can You Love Them Enough? Organizational Consulting as a Spiritual Quest

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**SUMMARY.** This paper describes the labor of the heart for those consulting on contested terrain. A loving practice, it is suggested, can sustain the consultant and potentially heal the organization. [*Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.haworthpressinc.com>*]

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Hope is an orientation of the Spirit.

-Vaclav Havel

## ***SPIRITUALITY AND LOVE IN ORGANIZATIONS***

As anyone who has practiced the art of loving knows, love is something one strives to achieve and maintain not something one falls into.<sup>1</sup> A spiritual

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orientation to the concept of love requires an appreciation of love as verb-and-object, a joining that ultimately transforms the subject. Love transforms the seeker so that what is achieved is not only the possession of the loved object, but also the fullest possible expression of one's self<sup>2</sup> as a loving being.

In the medieval story of the Quest for the Holy Grail, the Grail or Chalice is what is sought and what is to be achieved is the regeneration of life. The force out of which life regenerates is known to us all as love. Love is the quest that transforms the pilgrim into the object for which he has searched. The quest, then, is a pilgrimage made in order to find the fullest bloom of the Self.

In his comprehensive review of the religious and psychological roots of the meaning of love, Paul Fleischman (1989), a clinical psychiatrist, tells us that "in Buddhism, love is understood as embracing all beings . . ." (p. 190). Jesus, Dr. Fleischman reminds us "preached an unqualified human love: Love your enemies, bless them that curse you . . . if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?" (p. 190).

Fleischman also reminds us that for Erich Fromm, giving is the essence of love: "a correct giving that doesn't create indebtedness, but creates others who feel they now also have enough extra to give" (p. 197). As Fromm put it, "Love is a power which produces love" (p. 199). As noted above, the subject and the object are the same.

From Paul Fleischman's point of view, "Every case of psychotherapy, to a greater or lesser extent, is a problem of the failure to love" (p. 187). Might the same be said of organizations that seek consultation? Organizational behavior consultants receive calls for assistance with handling conflict, managing diversity, improving staff morale, increasing commitment to the organization's mission and vision, and building cooperative, productive teams. In the domain of organizational behavior, as in the world of psychotherapy, the failure to love is often at the root of these needs and problems.

Contemporary organizational theorists and writers embrace spirituality as an important aspect of organizational life. Manz, Manz, Marx and Neck (in press) examine the spiritual virtues of five Old Testament leaders and use these principles to help business leaders reconcile "business values with virtuous living." Robert Quinn (1996) in his book about organizational change tells us that "Ultimately, deep change, whether at the personal or the organizational level, is a spiritual process" (p. 78). Laurie Beth Jones' *Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership* (1995) speaks of love as guiding Christ's plans. Writing of the importance of relationships in Jesus' plan, she describes his love for his disciples, and his ability to love them until the end as crucial to his work. "Love," says Jones, "is the infrastructure of everything and anything worthwhile" (p. 255). As Christopher O'Rourke (1997) suggests in his work on group psychotherapy, "listening for the

sacred" is an invitation to "encounter the divine." This invitation is important in organizational consulting as well.

Leroy Wells, Jr. (1978) writes that all collaboration between organizations and consultants demands knowledge of organizational systems and the levels of group processes. He identifies five levels of organizational process: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group (group-as-a-whole), intergroup, interorganizational. At all of these levels, cohesion and wholeness are possible, as are conflict and disharmony (splitting). When there is conflict at the intergroup level, the members of the organization may be said to be functioning on what I call *contested terrain*.<sup>3</sup>

### **CONTESTED TERRAIN IN ONE ORGANIZATION: A PARABLE**

In the fall of 1996, an organization that cared for elderly disabled people requested consultation from an Organizational Consultant who was an African American woman. The staff of the organization numbered 1,250. The Director was a man of Moroccan descent. All of the senior managers were white. Almost all the service delivery staff were "non-Caucasian," and at least half spoke English as a second language. The vast majority of staff were people of African descent, mainly Haitian immigrants. The agency served a population of 450 patients who lived at the facility and were all white.

The Director summarized the issues of contested terrain by saying that the various cultures in his organization had difficulty relating to each other. He described the patients as a "sensory deficit population" and said that caretakers compounded the problem by speaking French and Creole to them instead of English. This worried him, and some of the patients' families had complained. There were also many communication obstacles among factions on the staff. Sometimes there were open affronts, sometimes the barriers were acted out in body language.

The Director explained further that the organization was in the process of downsizing since many clients were being placed out in the community. Staff were "being involuntarily laid off," and were feeling that the administration was "insensitive." "Staff," he said, "want to be treated with respect," and he wanted that too, but as a result of a directive from those above him, he was letting people go.

There were many distressing incidents. In one case an African American staff member said that a manager had pushed and shoved him and had spoken to him in a disparaging way. Another Black staff member complained that a white nurse referred to her as "this girl." In one sector of the organization,

the service staff complained of mistreatment by their manager and submitted a petition with 120 signatures.

The Director initially asked the Consultant for help in developing a more open communication style and to build team spirit among staff. Early on, the Consultant attended a meeting of the senior management team. With the exception of the Director, all members of the team were white. After the Consultant was introduced, and issues of conflict between cultural groups and people at different levels in the agency were described several managers expressed an interest in having the Consultant work with them. One wanted help with his staff and another requested focus groups for her program.

Toward the end of the meeting, one manager, who had been silent, declared "Affirmative action hasn't worked." She said she was "tired of quotas," and "positions being held." When the Consultant inquired about quotas and the holding of positions at the agency, she replied that these policies did not apply to their organization, but that she had seen examples in many other places.

In a private meeting with the Consultant, one manager shared the details of an "impassé." A white nurse had complained of a threat from a Haitian staff member and the incident was under investigation. The threat was reportedly verbal, taking the form of the statement: "You don't know who you're dealing with." This statement was interpreted by the nurse as implying that there would be a reprisal. The union had become involved and the nurse had acquired an attorney. Other staff were drawn in, too. During the investigation, one person said that the nurse perceived herself as superior to others and the Director was seen as siding with the staff. In these and similar ways, the investigation had exacerbated tension in all sectors of the agency.

The agency requested a proposal for consultation to deal with these issues, and the Consultant prepared one and handed it in. No response was received for several months. Upon inquiring about the reason for the delay, the Consultant was informed that the Director had left the organization. It was later revealed that he had been terminated.

Nine months later, the new Director, a white woman, contacted the Consultant again. This time she requested another proposal to deal with the same issues. It was written and sent. There was no further word until two months had passed. At that time, an emissary from the organization was sent to meet with the Consultant. In this meeting the Consultant was informed that one problem he saw was that all-Black service delivery staff were being ghettoized into the bottom service delivery level. In addition, disciplinary actions had increased markedly over a three-year period. A class-action suit on behalf of the staff had been filed, claiming mistreatment by managers. Downsizing continued.

A month later the proposal was accepted in writing. The consultation was

scheduled to begin in six weeks, despite what the Director described as her managers' "mixed reviews" about whether to go ahead. Three months later, after complicated negotiations and a reduced dollar amount due to the late start, the consultation began. The Consultant's primary objective was to assess the needs of the Center and then to establish support for a Diversity Initiative. The work began with the Consultant using the familiar technology of organizational diagnosticians—observations, individual interviews, focus groups. By the winter of 1998, the organizational assessment was at its midpoint. At this point, one member of the organization termed the organization a "powder keg." Some people were open to the consultation, but others were extremely ambivalent about it, and their silence covered feelings of panic and fear.

The Consultant found it increasingly difficult to operate in this atmosphere. On one occasion during a focus group comprised of managers of the physical plant and technical services, race and racism were discussed. Approximately thirteen managers were present. The staff were all white and predominantly male, except for one manager who was Asian. The Consultant and a Black man who was Co-Chair of the Diversity Committee that was spearheading the Initiative were facilitating the meeting.

The managers described the non-white service delivery staff as not caring about the patients, stealing from them and neglecting them. On the other hand, they maintained that they were color-blind. The conversation grew heated. A few of the white managers asserted that racism was a thing of the past. When the Consultant and the Co-Chair brought up examples of racism, like slavery or the dragging murder of James Byrd in Texas, the managers dismissed these examples as either too old or extreme. When the Co-Chair tried to give an example in the agency, a white manager arose from his chair, leaned across the conference table, pointed his finger in the face of the Black man, and said, "You're a racist." At the request of the Consultant, he later apologized.

In another meeting, a white clinician expressed his resentment about having to "water down" his reports so that they could be understood by staff members whose first language was not English. He asked, "Why do I have to water down my reports so they can be understood by people with a third grade education?" He repeated this comment three times angrily. Haitian staff later met with the Consultant and demanded an apology, which was never received. Threats were reportedly made against the clinician.

The Consultant also met with the service staff. In one of these meetings, a Haitian woman took the floor. Apologizing for her accent, she said she wanted "to say something," in the hope that we "could understand" her. She spoke about how she and her fellow co-workers often felt about their jobs as caretakers. In halting, heavily accented English, she told how they hated to

come to work in the morning and how they were unable to speak up for themselves, for fear of retaliation by their supervisors. "Even in meetings when we are asked to talk, we cannot speak," she said. "We are afraid. We get sick. This not speaking makes us sick, because we must hold it inside. We cannot let it out."

She spoke of how she and other direct care workers were ignored: "You are treated like a chair or a table, a piece of furniture. They don't speak to you. You are looked down on, talked down to." She continued, "Those of us who have so small jobs are not respected by those who do big jobs." She said repeatedly, "Even the Bible says we should respect one another. Even the Bible says this."

The Consultant was not exempt from this atmosphere. The concept of parallel process informs us that when the organization is caught up in strife, conflict within the organization will be reflected in conflict between the Consultant and individual members, groups or even the organization as a whole. In fact, the Consultant was screamed at in one meeting, and asked, "Who do you think you are?" On another occasion, her facilitation of a meeting was interrupted, and she was blamed for the intergroup conflict. Finally all the Consultant's records were subpoenaed by the courts as evidence in the suit against the organization. The court was now another entity in the contested terrain.

The Consultant's optimism and confidence were shaken. Could organizational consulting, which attempts to address problems and resolve conflicts in a rational, collaborative way, really be helpful in untangling the hurts and horrors of injustice at the level of whole classes, whole ethnic groups, whole peoples?

### FINDING A LOVING STANCE

To go on in my own voice,<sup>4</sup> the organization described above was not easy for me to love. On many occasions, I was moved to anger, on many others I was moved to tears. Like the pilgrim in Rilke's poem "*Ich bete wieder, du Erlaughter*," overwhelmed by the perilous quest for organizational change in the contested terrain of this organization, I felt moved to cry out:

I've been scattered in pieces,  
torn by conflict,  
mocked by laughter,  
washed down by drink.

In alleyways I sweep myself up  
Out of garbage and broken glass.

On the occasion when staff members were harangued with reminders of their supposed “third grade education,” I drove home weeping. As I wept I remembered a question that Leroy Wells had put to me almost twenty years earlier: “Can you love them enough to help them learn?” I was expressing my frustration about an organization I was consulting to at the time. I have long since forgotten the particular dynamics of the situation, but the question returned to me with full force in the cold winter of 1998.

To understand the question it would help to describe my relationship with Leroy Wells. During his life Wells had been a faculty member at Howard University, a highly influential organizational consultant and creator of the “Black Love” Workshops. His book chapter “The Group-as-Whole: A Systemic Socio-Analytic Perspective on Interpersonal and Group Relations” (1980) was frequently reprinted. According to Clay Alderfer (1999) who remembers Wells as a man of “profound human compassion,” this article “remains today one of the most frequently cited theoretical papers in applied behavioral science.”

I attended a “Black Love Workshop” facilitated by Wells at The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) annual meeting in Boston in 1975. I met him several years later during the late 1970s when I was a psychology intern at Yale University Medical School. By 1979, Leroy Wells, who was eight years younger than I, had become a friend, and a mentor. When I became Director of the Afro-American Cultural Center at Yale, the home of the Black Church at Yale, Leroy and I were both members of the Church. We co-facilitated a Black Church at Yale retreat and did a couple of other workshops together. Wells was then a doctoral student at Yale’s School of Organization and Management, and was already a gifted consultant and teacher. Like the best kind of mentors, his question, “Can you love them enough to help them learn?” encouraged me toward higher ground. Higher ground as he demonstrated in his workshops was a hallowed place where heart, spirit, and mind could meet as one.

In a paper published after his death, Wells (1999) described the work of the consultant or “group-taker.” He wrote,

The consultant must understand the heart of the group (i.e., the core of the group’s experience), take the group to heart (i.e., give undivided attention to the group), possess heart (i.e., have the courage to steadfastly work to understand the group), and carry the group in his or her heart (i.e., constantly keep the group as a beloved object).

“The work of the heart,” he said,

is to develop the passion, courage, and compassion to engage in a deeply contactful relationship with the group. (p. 383)

Comparing the role of consultants to that of nautical navigators, Wells said, "Heart is analogous to loran (*long range navigation*) that establishes the geographical location and the direction of the vessel. The group-taker must use empathy to help locate the group in its current voyage" (p. 383). Observing that working with groups is based on the ancient Greek concept of *agape*, he wrote, "Love for mankind (sic) is the source of the group-taker's courage. Love of learning is the source of the group-taker's commitment. Love and wonder of being fully human is the source of the group-taker's competence" (p. 389). To me, these words of Leroy Wells describe fully the relationship between consulting and loving.

The consultation described above was a difficult one for me. I was ambivalent about accepting the contract, and for eighteen months I was haunted by the idea that the most ethical thing for me to do was to resign. In a time of deep conflict, Wells' question, "Can you love them enough to help them learn?" gave me a way to proceed with integrity and love. Here are some of the ideas I developed as a result of considering his question.

### *The Idea of a Quest*

First, I needed to understand that the question, "Can you love them enough to help them learn?" serves to notify the Consultant of the beginning of a quest. To Quest, the transitive verb, is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "to search for, pursue, seek out." The suffix "-ion" forms a substantive of condition or action. As a separate word, however, "ion" means "an electrically charged atom or group of atoms." In this sense, then, the Consultant's quest resembles a heat-seeking force, seeking out the love in service of the work.

In a quest the learning process is integral to the outcome. As I, and several of my colleagues, illustrated in an earlier paper (Romney et al., 1992), "Process can be destructive when we lose sight of the . . . potential for learning, growth and change" (p. 98). A positive process means "being committed to (learners') growth and development." In a quest for learning, relationship is also key. Writing in that paper about teaching in the classroom, we asserted "the relationship of the content to oneself, the student-teacher relationship, and the relationships between students are key in the educational endeavor" (p. 98). Considering process and relationship in the case described above, the Consultant was moved from wondering "How can I change them?" to "How can I love them?"

### *The Importance of Questions*

Questions, as Socrates demonstrated centuries ago, have an incredible ability to educate (to lead out) and, in the case of organizations so torn apart,



to lead the consultant up to higher ground. The question “Can you love them enough to help them learn?” demands a response of continuing to question. Am I loving them enough? Am I helping them to learn? Will I? What does it mean for me to love them? How much is enough? What do I have to do to help them learn? Who are they? If I am to help, how? What is my role? Am I able? What must I do to be able?

Such questions push learners to ask what makes a question transformative. In analyzing Wells’ question to me, I saw that the question was phrased in such a way as to encourage agency and to inspire a reach. The phrase, “Can you . . .” located the responsibility for the outcome in my sphere of influence.

Second, the question “*Can* you” was oriented toward possibility thinking. Is it possible for you to be able to consider doing this? Even if I were not capable of it at the time, the question asked me to entertain the idea that I could do so. I was reminded of Norman Vincent Peale’s famous quote, “Raise your sights and see possibilities—always see them, for they’re always there.”

Third, the question was phrased so that it generated the “not yet said.” Considering the “not yet said” in this organization helped me to look with a compassionate eye toward the organization and to ask, “What is the pain that leads people to behave in this way?”

### ***The Importance of Wonder***

Another word related to questioning is wonder. Wonder, with its two handmaidens, awe and reverence, unites inquiry and love. When these two ideas are brought together in work with an organization, another manifestation of love is possible.

When I thought about the pain of people in the organization and attempted to maintain a reverence for their humanity, I understood how downsizing had struck fear into everyone’s hearts. Service delivery staff, being at the bottom, were naturally worried, but so were the white managers. Many of them were people in their fifties who had worked at the Center since they were young college students. Where would they go next? They saw the world around them changing, and they did not understand why or how. They felt themselves becoming anachronistic, as white workers in a residential facility at a time when community integration was becoming the norm and organizations were increasingly being called to hire people of color. The litigation taking place frightened them further. They felt wrongly accused and many spent sleepless nights worrying about the outcome of these complaints. They were worried and they were angry. The combination of fear and anger created a defensiveness and an aggressiveness of which they themselves were not often aware.

In contested terrain, the consultant’s work is to encourage enough empathy

to allow the competing groups to release their hold on the negative and replace it with something positive. Loving people means taking them up to higher ground when, for fear of losing all, they hold on with iron-fisted desperation to the little that they have. A loving practice means that the vision must be conceived under spiritual guidance.

Wonder is one of those spiritual gifts that the consultant can impart. It is like the wonder that is created by seeing or feeling the art of Karen Spitzberg, the "visual artist" who creates art for blind people. Spitzberg, who teaches art history and art appreciation to people who are blind, creates work to be touched. Art, she tells us, is in the fingertips and in the mind. In a similar vein, the consultant can bring to organizations an awareness that they have not had before; she can teach them to "see" even when they have for so long been blind.

### *Looking for the Exceptions*

Love, in contested terrain, also means looking for the "exceptions" (Steve de Shazer, 1994) and "unique outcomes" (Michael White, 1995). It means finding the times when the dehumanization is not present, when the strength and the competencies of the "other" are seen. In this case, the Consultant looked for staff members who were exceptions to the examples described above. One question to ask is, "Who is enacting the holy?"<sup>5</sup> This meant directing my attention to staff who were able to engage in some kind of respectful, loving practice with others. I found this ability in many of the members of the Diversity Committee, and in the Assistant Director of the facility and in the Director.

In the beginning of the second year of the consultation, I met with the Director, the Assistant Director and the Equal Opportunity Officer from the Central Office. I was not pleased with the meeting. Throughout the consultation all contacts with the agency had been initiated by the Consultant or by the Central Office Equal Opportunity Officer, who had strongly recommended that the organization seek consultation. Because the agency, itself, never initiated contact, I believed they did not see themselves as partners in the enterprise. It was as if it were the Consultant's project, not theirs.

Second, the organization wanted to remove the Assistant Director from her position as co-chair of the Diversity Committee, on the grounds that she was too busy. I knew this would give the committee the message that the Initiative was no longer considered important. Third, I believed the organization continued to avoid looking at changes in policy and climate, preferring to focus on seemingly easier solutions of training and diversity celebrations.

I decided to ask the Director to meet me for lunch outside the facility. I hoped that if we were able to talk person to person, we would be able to develop more trust and better collaboration. I began the meeting by saying to

the Director, "I'm confused. Who am I working for? You or the people from Central Office?" After her initial surprise, and the revelation that she thought it was I who continued to involve Central Office, the Director assured me that I was working for her and for her agency. This exchange removed us from a triangulation that had interfered with the work. Seeing me as paired with Central Office made it difficult for us to develop a partnership. Without the presence of the higher authorities in our meeting, she and I began to develop a more productive relationship.

Our next topic was the Assistant Director who wanted to step down from her position as co-chair of the Diversity Committee. She was being mentored by the Director, and I shared my enthusiasm about her. I explained how much she was respected by all staff and how much integrity she had. Like the Director, I saw her tremendous leadership potential and I told the Director that I had some specific plans for developing it. I also told her that I saw Diversity work as crucial to all managers' learning. My goals and the Director's goals converged again, strengthening our ability to collaborate.

We next talked about how to give the Diversity Committee a specific task that would allow them to see their importance in the work and have an experience of accomplishment. The Director also invited the Consultant to help her think about how to design a mentoring program for new managers at the facility, and ended the meeting by opening her arms to the Consultant to offer her a hug. The agency had finally welcomed the Consultant and was beginning to join in the work.

I found other examples of "exceptions" in the patients themselves. Although the previous Director and other managers and patients had complained about Haitian staff speaking Creole in front of the patients, we noted that there were some "unique outcomes" (White, 1995). In some cases staff would sing lullabies and other songs from their childhood to their patients. These tunes offered comfort and joy. Observers would notice that even non-verbal patients, or those who spoke only English, would often respond to their caretakers if they were spoken to in Creole. A chair would be moved, a plate carried to the table, or there would be a laugh or a smile that indicated comprehension. The caring and love of staff members transcended linguistic barriers.

### *Focusing on Positive Outcomes*

"Can you love them enough to help them learn?" is also an example of a question focused on positive outcomes. Another such question is "How can I help them to love each other?" This new question reminded me of the importance of providing models of collaboration. As a result, I expanded the consultation by bringing in a multiracial consultant team.

The facility was divided along lines of race, with white people in the

management positions and people of color in service delivery positions. We believed that modeling interracial and intercultural collaboration in the consulting team would furnish an example with which different groups could identify. We also wanted to have people in charge who could be seen by service staff as representing them.

Our multiracial team consisted of the original Consultant, a Black woman, a white woman with a national reputation in the diversity consulting world, and a Latina woman whose training skills were known to draw in the most hardened participants.<sup>6</sup> This team made it possible for me to continue in a competent manner. Once the team was in place, one of the first things I noticed was how deskilled I had become in the process of working with the organization. So much time and energy had been spent trying to cope with my own feelings and trying to protect myself and other members of the organization there was little possibility of bringing forth the best that I could offer. I realized that, in contested terrains, the daily demands of survival in an oppressive society overshadow competence and stifle creativity.

Having new members join the consulting team allowed me to lift up my own thoughts and then help the members of the organization lift theirs. With colleagues on board to share the work, I was able to remember Ben Zander's idea, "Never doubt the capacity of the people you lead to accomplish whatever you dream for them." As in "possibility therapy" (O'Hanlon et al., 1999) focusing on positive outcomes gives the organization the opportunity to acknowledge its own experiences and to move toward positive growth and change.

### *Building Empathy and Respect*

In the organization described, staff were engaged in conflict at the intergroup level. Blacks were in conflicts with whites. Managers were in conflict with service delivery staff and each group believed that their group alone had the interest of patients at heart. The Consultant's role was to create the context for a transformational conversation. Working toward dialogue in the multicultural change team, I now saw the possibility of creating the context for a transformational conversation. Building an empathic relationship with members of the staff who were respected by others in the organization was an important first step.

Empathy building, a fundamental aspect of loving, is both a task and a goal. Wells' instruction (1999) was to "engage in a deeply contactful relationship with the group." Each member of our consulting team took it as part of the work to build relationships with members of the agency team and other influential members in the organization.

This effort was confined at first to one-on-one conversations, where questions could be asked and doubts privately shared. We chose people for whom

we could feel empathy and compassion, even if they had been at times antagonistic to the Initiative. We hoped that our ability to understand them and love them would bring forth their strengths. This effort is still in the beginning stages. Our next step will be to build some smaller intergroup conversations alongside the conversations of the Diversity Committee. We know from our own teaching and consulting that it is through interpersonal relationship that bias and antagonism are transcended.

One question that began to seem important was: how does an organization or group commonly define love? In its everyday work and everyday discourse, what word emerges on a regular basis that is most analogous to the word love or most closely reflects a loving stance? Remember the Haitian woman described earlier, the one who said, "Even the Bible said we should respect each other?" Over and over, service delivery staff focused on the word respect. When the staff felt mistreated, they would put it as: "we want respect." When I would speak of race or of racism, the staff would again say, "we must respect one another." When, in a Diversity Committee meeting, I named respect as the shared desire of staff members in the facility, heads around the table nodded in agreement. In the lexicon of this organization, respect was the reflection of love they desired to see. The word "respect" is becoming the mantra of the consulting team and we have begun to include it in our work with the organization so that our training package "Developing Strong Diverse Teams in the Workplace" is being redesigned as "Respect and Collaboration in the Workplace."

### *Holding the Group-as-a-Whole*

The question "Can you help them . . ." requires multidimensional partiality (Nagy, 1973). The consultant is oriented toward being on everyone's side and seeing from everyone's perspective. She must work on behalf of everyone, which in Wells' socio-analytic systemic language is the group-as-a-whole. Taking sides with particular persons or groups risks setting off an escalating dynamic that worsens the situation that already exists.

Bringing a multiracial team into the organization was very instrumental in holding the group-as-a-whole. I was certainly guided by my philosophy and my training to hold the whole group, not parts of it. But the conflict in this organization, and the frequent attacks on me made it very hard to maintain a stance of multidimensional partiality in practice. The white consultant on our team helped by her willingness to step forward and work with staff members in a way they were not yet ready to have me do. The third member of our consulting team was a Latina woman and she completed our team in its reflection of the ethnic/racial diversity at the agency. As Jesse Jackson says, "Don't choose sides. Choose peace, and bring the sides together." Working

with a multiracial/multiethnic team presents a model of collaboration that illustrates how powerful groups can be when they work together.

In this organization, what unites staff is their shared fear of downsizing, their concerns for future employment and their desire for respectful treatment in the workplace. Another way to hold the group is to focus on future employability. This has become another training agenda for the consulting team. Following Lynn Hoffman's communal perspective (in press), consultants who work with the group-as-a-whole must defy borders and build community at the most comprehensive level possible.

### ***Black Love***

Considering the question of love in the context of this consultation, I thought about the relevance of the idea of Black love. Wells was the founder of the Black Love workshops; a lifetime member of the national "Black Church"; a man devoted to The Word, especially as sung in spirituals and gospel music. As a person who believes deeply in the human family, would I be making my focus, too parochial or even potentially biased, by focusing on Black love?

In the end, I feel it is not possible to neglect consideration of what it means to do this work as a Black consultant, or what it means to love and work in the Black tradition. Love is a universal human emotion and action. Yet, as with every emotion and action, there are unique individual and cultural expressions. Black love is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. Black love is the love of a people who go into the Lion's den and still survive. It is the love of a people who are oppressed and despised and who, nonetheless, intentionally hold on to loving.

Perhaps the most well known proponent of Black love was Martin Luther King, Jr. While in jail in 1957, King wrote his famous piece, "Loving your enemies." Beginning with Matthew 5:43-48,

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy Neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven.

King considers the "insistent questions and persistent objections" surrounding the idea of loving your enemies, and offers many positive responses. One idea that speaks strongly to me is Dr. King's statements that "... we must recognize that the evil deed of the enemy-neighbor, the thing that hurts never quite expresses all that he is" (p. 5). There is goodness alongside, outside the wrong that we, as human beings, all do.

Black writers Denene Millner and Nick Chiles (1999) believe that Black love is significant for its love of community, for its emphasis on community building as opposed to a sole focus on dyadic relationships. Black love is also notable for its emphasis on making “a joyful noise unto the Lord.” I remember the praise and uplift of Leroy Wells’s funeral service. Amid the grief and tears, and the Howard University flags flown at half-mast, was the celebration of life so typical of the Black Church. The congregation sang joyously the words of the hymn, “Excellent.” “Excellent. My God is excellent. Excellent is his name” was a phrase that spoke for two that day, for the spirit of God that Wells called Father, and for one of his beloved sons, Leroy, carried back home at the age of forty-five. This joyful, spirit-filled, expression of the beloved community is what we call Black love.

### ***A SUMMARY METAPHOR***

The members of organizations are often like the “caracoles” (shells) one collects on a trip to the beach. In contested terrains, human beings are like the shattered and trashed shells found on a highly trafficked beach, destroyed by the explosion of human life around them. Like people who work in a hostile environment, these shells are crushed down, walked on, trampled.

The consultant searches for wholeness. There are other shells, like the ones found by setting out on a small boat with a tiny outboard motor on a day trip to an offshore island. On this quest, one can approach a pristine shoreline with a tiny stretch of sand. It is long and wide enough to beach the boat, to get out and stretch and swim and search for the “caracoles” in the clean, un sullied surf. The shells in that place can be gathered whole. Their multicolored blues, purples, pinks and browns, become luminescent in the ocean drops that cling to their rounded, curving surfaces. These shells, like questions entering into themselves, can reveal hidden treasure if we have the courage and the fortitude to keep moving inward.

This is the diversity the consultant seeks to locate and create—the fresh, multicolored, multishaped harmony that can be composed within a loving peaceful hand. A loving hand is like the larger shell in which the others can be nested; the varied types and shapes create interest and stimulation. This “holding” shell provides the context for centering, for gathering together the group-as-a-whole. In my vision, this is how love can transform the subject and the object, the consultant and the organization.

This paper has attempted to describe the labor of the heart for those consulting on contested terrain. What sustains the consultant is the wonder of the work, the awe and reverence for humanity, and the appreciation of the gift of love and wholeness waiting at the end. The personal gift to the consultant is the perfecting of the Self, using the powers of love and learning. She

reaches as high as possible, as high as necessary, to create harmony in the contested terrain of organizational life.

## NOTES

1. This idea was first presented to the author in a sermon by Reverend Ed Harding.
2. In some translations of the Bagavad Gita the word Self is used. Capitalized in its translation to English from the sankrit word *atman*, it conveys the inner reality, the spiritual principle, of a person who is inseparable from the whole of creation. It is not to be confused with the individuality of a person (ahakara).
3. This draws on Edward Said's use of the term "contested territories," which is the name he gives to countries who have been divided as a result of internal conflicts and the intrusion of hegemonic forces, e.g., India and Pakistan, North and South Korea, etc.
4. The Consultant in this case is the author.
5. This question was suggested to me by Sandra Nelson.
6. I am grateful to my team of fellow consultants, Rita Hardiman and Rosie Castañeda.

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