

Chapter Three

Enspirited Leadership in Japan

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On a gray winter day in 2011, the biggest earthquake in centuries struck Japan's Tohoku region, just off the northeast coast. Soon a devastating tsunami arrived with waters more than sixty feet high and traveling at nearly sixty miles an hour. The next day, the Fukushima Nuclear Energy Plant exploded. Nearly twenty thousand people perished, and a half million were without jobs or homes or both. In late 2013, 300,000 people are still living in temporary housing, and in many communities the local economy is still paralyzed. Yet beneath this tragedy, something new is being born.

Government has done the best it can, and its immediate efforts led to an early stabilization. Government can provide temporary housing and get the roads fixed and trains running, but government rarely effectively leads change. Change happens when people change the way they think and begin to act in new ways. At first it is messy, even chaotic. Then over time, new order begins to emerge. But how does it emerge? What leadership is required? In particular, what enables ordinary people to step forward, offering themselves and their own leadership?

Scholars, consultants, and managers have written volumes about leadership over the past decade. Frequently their writing has delved into spirit, presence, and authenticity. What is it in the world that is calling forth this inquiry? Was it always important, or has something shifted as humanity entered a new century?

Background: Bob and Yuka

We have been exploring these questions for many years. We've each had the opportunity to work around the world with people from many cultures and to explore the ways in which authenticity seems to be essential in these turbulent times. We began work together in Japan after the triple disasters of March 11, 2011.

Over thirty months, we have engaged with more than a thousand people, hosting community conversations, creating reflection spaces, and listening to people's stories. We have done this to help people in Japan find their way forward and because we know Japan's experience will be of benefit to the rest of the world. Throughout we've wondered: What gives people the clarity and the courage to offer their leadership now?

In the first decade of this century, Bob's research was with individuals and then with organizations to determine the landmarks that help people step forward to lead with spirit. He named these as a framework for enspirited leadership. Described later in this chapter, this particular view of leadership has informed and guided Bob and Yuka's work.

Yuka believes that before 3.11, as the disasters are referred to, there was a "stuckness." People couldn't express who they truly were because of strict social conventions, and they lived in a materialistic world, isolated from their own true selves and from each other. Now, she notices that people are placing value on things they cannot see: love, trust, partnership, and collective wisdom.

We have used many forms of dialogue—circle, world café, open space technology, appreciation inquiry—to help people listen to each other and speak their own truths. These forms themselves help people be present to each other and to call in spirit. Often when reflecting on these past several years, we recall arriving in Minamisoma, a town of seventy thousand on Japan's Fukushima coast fifteen miles from the reactors, in the

early evening of December 7, 2012. We had come to conduct a community Future Session. As we greeted twenty or so people at the new Future Center, we were told that a 7.3 magnitude earthquake had struck 150 miles off the coast. At that time, tsunami warnings had been posted, but no one knew whether this quake, the most powerful since March 11, 2011, had damaged the Fukushima reactors further. Was more radiation coming their way? Would a tsunami come? There was no way to know. What should we do? We wanted to stay together. We decided to begin a Future Session. If we received an alert, we could take immediate action. But since we were together, we should talk. Quickly we arranged the chairs into a circle.

The magic of the circle worked for us as well. Our own anxiety had been rising. As we sat and checked in with each other, we settled into our own selves and into the collective. The alert passed. There was no major tsunami. We had a powerful evening talking about how to live with uncertainty.

While there are many pressures to return to an “old normal,” the landscape of many people’s lives is filled with uncertainty. This has been a time of punctuated equilibrium (Gersick, 1991) in which the ways people make meaning in their lives have been cracked wide open. Many have stepped through those cracks, offering their leadership in a time of great need and new opportunity.

One particularly important aspect of these times we have noticed is that people are standing up while standing together. An often-quoted expression about Japan is *deru kugi ga utareru* (the nail that sticks up is hammered down). In collectivist culture, individual aspirations are often repressed in favor of the felt aspirations of the collective. The events of 3.11 have been a push causing people to stand for what they want and believe, and they are doing so while staying connected with the larger collective. When the Dalai Lama visited Japan in 2011, he spoke to these same themes: “With our intelligence, combined with self-confidence, we can overcome all these problems. So tragedy

certainly, naturally, brings sadness and demoralizes us; but now you must transform it into enthusiasm and self-confidence and work hard to rebuild your lives, your country” (Watts, 2012, p. 183). A key issue, of course, is what creates this enthusiasm and self-confidence.

Since 3.11, we have organized and hosted hundreds of dialogues and Future Sessions in Tohoku communities as well as in other parts of Japan. Sometimes we have worked together, other times separately, always returning to meet with each other and share our learning. In this chapter, we share some of the stories we have heard, the meaning we are making from this lived inquiry, Bob’s own research into enspirited leadership, as well as some of the questions we see that need to be explored as this work continues.

The ideas presented here are our own, formed through countless hours of listening deeply to the people of Japan. This seemed to be the time to write from our hearts. We have chosen to focus directly on our personal experiences and perceptions in the hope of evoking the same quality of personal reflection in readers. There is time to think more analytically and relate experience to scholarship, but given the enormity of what we and the people in Japan have been living with, this chapter primarily describes what we have experienced, heard, and seen.

Stepping Stones

How does one begin to create the new after disasters? It is not an easy path and certainly is not a linear one. The event of 3.11 was not primarily a natural disaster. It was, in fact, human caused. We heard this point of view first voiced by Masami Saionji, a spiritual leader in Japan (and Yuka’s mother), when she said three powerful words to us in April 2011: *We caused this*. This perspective was also offered by both Sivaraksa (2012) and Ariyaratne (2012), who each suggested it is essential that we recognize the culpability that we as human beings had in

causing these disasters. This opens a space where we can consider how we might cause something else.

There was a dramatic difference in the energetic response to the catastrophic Kobe earthquake of the mid-1990s and the response to 3.11. In the mid-1990s, most people seemed to think Japan was headed in the right direction. This was not the case in 2011. Sivaraksa (2012) and Ariyaratne (2012) both point to a rising dissatisfaction of materialism and consumption as a gauge for happiness and an ensuing quest for a new future and a new quality of life.

In this quest for a new and uncertain future, we have seen that people in Japan have been finding their way forward, guided by certain stepping-stones that have helped them recreate their lives.

Grieve What's Gone

At times the grief has been overwhelming, not only in Tohoku itself but across all of Japan.

A month after the disasters, Bob was hosting a dialogue in Nagoya, far from the disaster area, and asked a man he knew from other sessions how he was doing. His response was casual: "Oh, you know, just working along." Later, in deep dialogue, he said: "I don't watch the news anymore. I can't. I pretend everything is normal with my family, and then I go to my office and pretend even more." Tapping on his heart, he said: "It is all different in here, and I am sad and confused."

More than a year and a half later, the owner of a fish processing plant in the once prosperous fishing community of Ishinomaki told the story of a friend who had died and asked, "Why did I live while he died? Why was it he who was trapped in the car, unable to open the doors or windows, as the waters rose? Why was he allowed only that last gasp of air before the waters closed around him?" He talked about how his view of life had shifted dramatically: "What about all those families in

Japan that have found success? You know, they have a nice house with new appliances and a shiny car. Their children have gotten into good schools. But are they happy? Is this all there is to life? I'm okay today, but sometimes it is so hard to go on. Each time I would begin to give up, volunteers showed up to help shovel the ten tons of mud out of my factory. Some days I was all alone. Just me, the mud, and my grief."

Sometimes it is a tsunami that heralds sweeping change. Other times, the change is less dramatic, perhaps almost invisible. As we have listened to many stories from people whose lives were dramatically changed by this disaster, we have concluded that it is essential to step into grief and let it transform us if we are to offer our leadership from a place of authenticity.

Stand Up

Disaster has provoked people in Tohoku to stand up for whatever they really care about. It has enabled them to set aside their fears and hesitations. They have found clarity and courage to offer themselves in service to whatever is needed now. A tapestry woven with big and small actions begins to emerge and, within it, a picture of the future being born.

In Otsuchi, after three days of finding and removing bodies from the rubble, a former car mechanic could not close his eyes to sleep. Each time he had tried, for the last two nights, all he saw were the bodies. Instead, he went out and watched the fires burning his beloved town. Town, fields, fishing boats: all gone. He turned his back on the ocean and looked to the hills and saw they were still filled with healthy trees. He knew then he would dedicate his life to the descendants of those who had died, and he would help the community learn how to create an economy from the forest. He's doing that today, developing forest-based businesses employing people from the community.

To the south, another man moved to Minamisoma, the largest city near the Fukushima reactors. Arriving as many were

leaving, he had come from his nearby village of Itatemura, destroyed by radiation and uninhabitable for the rest of his life. He came because the people of Minamisoma needed help. Today he leads volunteer efforts to decontaminate buildings, soil, and trees in the community. He's also a leader of the Minami Mirai Center, where people are discovering how to build a new future together.

While other young women who could were trying to find a way out of Fukushima, three decided to stay. They created Peach Heart as a support community for young women whose lives were now filled with questions: Would anyone want to marry a woman from Fukushima? Did they want to have children with the radiation danger? Should they if they could? What kind of a life could they make for themselves now?

We've encountered hundreds of stories like these: people coming together to create a "karma kitchen" in Tokyo; people leading efforts to revitalize their village in Shikoku by recreating a village plan from two hundred years ago; those who started intermediary foundations in Tohoku. All over Japan, people are standing up for what they see as possible. None of them expected to be doing what they are doing today. They were spirit called. They stood up to do what was needed now.

Stay Together

Many times we witnessed people turning to each other and entering into deep dialogue. We have seen people speak their own truths with powerful authenticity. They have found places to stand, knowing they were not alone.

The 188 homes in the small village of Osawa were all destroyed in the tsunami, and 150 people died. And a miracle happened. Across Tohoku, when certificates were being issued for temporary housing, a lottery system was used. Done to ensure fairness, the result was that people who had been separated for months from family and neighbors in emergency shelters were

scattered even farther to the winds, landing in small new housing settlements with strangers.

In Osawa, three people saw that they were assigned to the same new location. Quickly they went to a government official and asked if certifications could be traded. The miracle was that the official said: "I guess so." Immediately they arranged a massive trade of certificates. Most of the residents of Osawa moved into the same temporary housing. Over the next months, together they built awnings and porches, started their own security patrols, began growing their own food, and organized a festival to celebrate life. Within eight months of the disaster, they told the nonprofit assisting them to go help someone else; they were doing fine.

To the south, in another case that involved temporary housing, the families from the small village of Jusanhama went together to clear land. When the land was clear and ready, they went to the government and said, "Please build our temporary houses here." The government agreed, and now those fifteen families are rebuilding a village that once supported forty.

Rather than turning away and separating, people in Tohoku turned to each other. They knew that if they were able to stay together, they could begin to create a new future.

Go Alone

Sometimes you must go alone before you can stay together.

One of the most dramatic stories we encountered also comes from Jusanhama. When they heard that the tsunami was coming, ten fishers made their way to the harbor and their boats while others were rushing to high ground. Their fathers and grandfathers had told them: "When the big one comes, get to your boats and go out to sea. Get to a depth of more than fifty meters or you will die." They left families and everything they knew behind and raced out to the sea. Ancestral wisdom guided them, but they had no idea if they or their families would

survive. Against all odds, they did. Their families were the ones who later cleared the land, together, for their temporary housing.

One of the great tragedies of 3.11 was the number of children who lost their lives. In the village of Ogatsu, the principal of the junior high told his students to run to the hillside and mountains as quickly as they could. It took him eight days to first search the mountains and then the shelters to discover that every child had lived. To the north in the town of Kamaishi, the schools had developed a unique way to train children for disaster that used three principles: don't try to guess what's going on, go as quickly as you can, and go as far as you can—and one piece of ancient wisdom—don't look for your families—to guide them. The last one was the most difficult, but the ancestors knew that most people died because they went looking for others. Fewer children died in Kamaishi than in any of the other coastal cities.

They found the courage to go alone. They took first steps into an uncertain future and with no idea of what would happen. They opened to new possibilities.

Work with What You Have

In Japan working with what you have is called *jimotogaku*, which translates roughly as “learning from the local area.” In the United States, it is called asset-based community development. It means that we don't wait for anyone; we assess what we have and imagine new ways in which it can be used. *Jimotogaku* produces a changed attitude—a new look at what one has—and an orientation to start with what you have and follow it wherever it leads.

In Kesenuma, the family that owned a fish processing plant saw almost every part of their fishing community destroyed. What was left? Canvas. Lots of ship's canvas. How could it be used? First, they dyed it deep blue, stenciled in white the names of the communities torn apart by the tsunami, and made big handbags with bright pink, orange, and green handles. Over the coming

months, they added new products: iPad covers, coin purses, baseball caps, and a host of other things. A micro-industry was born.

In the Iwate town of Otsuchi, a series of four dialogues were held to help people reimagine their future. They looked at what they had: clear water once used to grow wasabi that could be grown again. Their pure water might be an attractor in creating a tourist destination. Local knowledge of flowers could lead to a new dried and pressed flower business that could be competitive with flowers from Europe popular in Tokyo.

Jimotogaku is the story of beginning with what you have, right now, without waiting. These are not complicated ideas. They are the first steps that can begin to change the entire way in which you see your life.

Hold Hands across the Generations

We believe that the deepest authenticity arises with diversity. One kind of diversity that is almost always present is that of different generations coming together.

Hundreds and hundreds of young people, called “U turns” and “I turns,” have come to the region because they feel called to be there. “U” turns are people who grew up in Tohoku and went away to Tokyo for school and jobs; they came back because either the disasters or their grandmothers called them. “I” turns are people with no previous connection to the region who felt called to be there. We’ve spent many hours in conversation with them. Frequently they came thinking of themselves as the outside experts and quickly came to appreciate the knowledge and experience of the local people. They realized in the process they had come to learn together, not to teach. The power of these relationships was multifaceted. We recall one fisherwoman speaking of how incredibly challenging the first six months were after the tsunami: “So many times, we wanted to give up. It was just so hard,” she said. “But these wonderful young people had come to help us. It was because of them that we couldn’t give up.”

These intergenerational relationships have given both older and younger people access to wisdom and a presence that was unavailable in their lives. They led each other, making a path forward together.

Start Anywhere; Start Now

Jimotogaku leads to the idea of starting, now, anywhere. Make a new path into the future with your own spirit and presence, step by step. We think that authenticity means being willing to be a little unusual and to try things that will, perhaps, not be successful. In Fukushima and in the coastal areas, there is not a past to return to. What future will be built?

In Rikuzentakada, a former government official talked with us about how government can't create anything new: "People need to do that. Government goes in circles, ending up in the same place. Upward spirals are needed now. We need to really unleash the creativity of people to make a new future that combines old traditions with new technologies. We need to plan and build differently for a future we want, not the past. We need crazy ideas."

A farmer in Fukushima says, "We have to open our minds and hearts and become aware of what we are feeling. We have to open up and accept other people. We must change our ideas. We need to tell our children that college probably isn't all that important for them. We must learn how to live in and open up to nature and we must learn how to relate differently to our natural world. Colleges don't teach these important things."

It takes courage to start right where you are. It requires staying in the present moment, looking at what you have, and beginning.

Grieve what's gone, stand up, stay together, go alone, hold hands across the generations, work with what you have, start any way, start now. These are some of the main stepping-stones people have discovered in Tohoku. Each of these stones is a pathway

into self and a new future. They lead us into an uncertain future by also leading us into ourselves.

Enspirited Leadership

Ten years ago Bob's dissertation research was on the practices of younger leaders in different parts of Europe and Africa who were creating new organizations to build community. Using a qualitative methodology called organic inquiry, he engaged with a group of seven people in their late twenties and early thirties in a cooperative inquiry about the landmarks that guided their work and their lives.

Just as Bob was finishing his dissertation, he decided that he ought to look back at what scholars had to say about the nature and leadership of the social movements he was part of in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Various works caught his attention. One in particular led him to the metaframe of enspirited leadership.

Doug McAdam and his colleagues (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996) defined the social movements of the twentieth century as protest movements designed to create political change. They saw these movements as ideological, strategic, and tactical. People had ideologies—ways of thinking about the world—that guided them, and they developed strategies and tactics to pursue known goals and objectives. Looking for the words that had the same clarity that could describe the new movements of this century, he saw those he worked with as being enspirited, appreciative, and emergent.

The same can be said of the people we've been working with in Tohoku, Japan. They are guided by a deep presence of spirit, they work with what they have, and they follow the path that emerges before them.

We have used the six key landmarks of enspirited leadership (Stilger, 2004) to guide our work in Tohoku:

- *Work from a sense of true calling.* Each time that we have been in deep dialogue with people in the region, we encouraged

them to find the work that was meant for them. We invited them to find clarity and courage in stepping into work that they can do best. This counsel has been particularly important for the many young people who have left their career paths behind in Tokyo that felt lifeless and have begun to discover more of who they truly are through their service in Tohoku.

○ *Journey in the company of others.* We have reminded those working in the area that they don't need to do anything alone. They need to keep turning to one another for counsel and support. Sometimes the challenges and the grief are almost overwhelming. We have reminded them not to take on more than they can handle and to rely on each other's honest counsel.

○ *Live with a spiritual center.* Spirit is always near in Tohoku. A glance at vacant land where homes stood, a walk through towns completely evacuated, or a stop at a graveyard that has been carefully restored: all call in the presence of spirit. We have invited people to find time to be quiet, to meditate, or to engage in other spiritual practice to keep their balance.

○ *Demand diversity.* We have counseled people to keep inviting those with different ideas together. It is easy advice for most. They are not concerned about being right; they want to build a new future. People seem more able to listen to the ideas and perspective of others because there is so much work to do.

○ *Use reflective learning as a guide.* This is a time of rapid prototyping in the region. People are trying things. We have reminded them that their early efforts will frequently meet with limited success and that they need to take what they have done, come together, and learn. We have suggested to them that their learning will tell them what comes next. They make a path forward, one step at a time.

○ *Befriend ambiguity and uncertainty.* The qualities of stillness, calling, receptivity, and reflection present in these first five landmarks lay the foundation for what may be the most

important: the capacity to work without certainty. People know there is little certainty in Tohoku. Some still hope for a return to the old normal; others know they must make a new future. We have encouraged them to learn to be at ease with the uncertainty that surrounds them. It is not going away.

Three Questions

As Japan turns to the long task of rebuilding the Tohoku region, what will sustain those who bring their whole being to their work? We've identified three key questions that we think need to be explored:

1. Where will the leadership come from to create a new Tohoku?
 - What can invite people to step forward?
 - Who are the people who are willing to lead but have no need to be followed?
 - Where will they find and support those who know how to work with their own emotions, have clear purpose, and know what they know and what they don't know?
 - What leadership will help people find the clarity to set a course for the future without much attachment to how it will happen?
 - How will they connect with others in honest relationship?
 - How do they learn to prototype at a systems level, proceeding step by careful step?
2. How will spaces for deep relationship and trust be created?
 - How can people find safe and generative spaces, often referred to simply as good *Ba* (Nonaka & Konno, 1998)?
 - How do they create the spaces in which respect, curiosity, and generosity are present and creativity and possibility prosper?

- What will support people in Tohoku in continually inviting in more and more diversity?
 - How will they avoid falling back into ways of thinking and doing that isolate one town from another and that segment different people and endeavors into silos where their impact is minimized?
 - How can these many voices be connected so that transformation becomes possible?
3. Will people look to their own wealth of resources and knowledge rather than waiting for someone else?
- What will help people remember they are part of a rich web of possibilities and that they don't need to wait for anyone?
 - What will help support them in looking inward toward the resources they already have and in discovering new ways to use those resources?
 - What will help them build a strong foundation that invites partnership and collaboration from others in Japan and the rest of the world?

Spirit, Presence, and Authenticity

Stepping into these questions seems to us to require leadership that draws on spirit, presence, and authenticity. Such leadership is deeply aligned with Japanese culture, where deep meaning is conveyed beyond words and requires a stillness to understand. In Japan, the cultural competence for communication is listening. In cultures like the United States, the communications competence is speaking. In Japan, listening is a whole-body sport that relies on the presence of spirit and authenticity. Many years ago, Edward Hall (1976) told a lovely story in a book that laid the groundwork for the field of intercultural communications. He talked about how when the husband

arrived home from work, he would know something was not okay in the household when he noticed a tiny branch out of alignment in a flower arrangement or that his tea was just a little cool. While Bob developed the concept of enspirited leadership in the global south, both of us have come to understand it deeply in Japan.

This is a time between myths. The old one is dying, the new yet to be born. It is an unusual time. Many names get tossed around: *new paradigm*, *postindustrial*, *cultural creative*, *Gaia*. People cannot actually see what is coming, but many of us sense that we are in the rapids of change where much of what we've relied on for order in our lives is disintegrating. As the myths that have given coherence to our lives have shattered, people seem to have become spiritually ill (Loy, Goodhew, & Goodhew, 2000). Part of our journey now is one of recovering our human spirit.

It is no surprise that a different kind of leadership is needed, one that is sourced in not knowing and is comfortable with proceeding to a destination not yet knowable. The old expression was, "If you don't know where you're going, you'll never get there." The new expression is, "We make the path by walking it together, one step at a time."

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