

The Four Fold Way for Congregations

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Last May, when I was with you for Candidating Week, I shared my admiration for the work of Dr. Angeles Arrien with you. I told you how I've tried to incorporate The Four Fold Way into my personal repertoire, and that I've found it a way to live more congruently with who I aspire to be.

An author and cultural anthropologist, Dr. Arrien shares her learning about people in community from her studies of indigenous cultures in her book, **The Four Fold Way**. She writes about the kinds of roles and behaviors she has identified which contribute to how we can effectively be as individuals and communities within society.

We humans are social by nature, for the most part. All of us enjoy a bit of alone time, now and then. But, when push comes to shove, we typically choose to live in and amongst others of our species, in tribes and villages, communities and towns. We find ways to create social circles through clubs, churches, interest groups, and activities. We establish rules and customs, protocols and procedures. And, as we establish our communities, we institute structures to deal with power, possessions, security, and socialization, among other concerns.

There are, as you know, thousands of theories and theoretical models in the literature that provide possible insight into how human communities work, for what purpose, and to what end. I like The Four Fold Way because it makes sense to me, from my experience of living in social systems and from the personal guidance it provides me for living my life in a way that meets my needs. I want to expand on our conversation last spring to share with you more depth in understanding this particular framework of thought. This morning, I want to once again turn to the Dr. Arrien's framework for community to talk about how what she has learned applies to faith communities, to congregations. I hope we can use it as a language together as we move forward as a congregation, as we shape our future and work to become the faith community we yearn to be for each other.

You may remember that The Four Fold Way encompasses these paths:

- First, the way of the Warrior, whose energy is focused on getting things done and moving action forward. The Warrior shows up and is fully present in the moment.
- Second, the way of the Healer, focused on creating a safe and nurturing community environment. The Healer pays attention to what has heart and meaning.
- Third, the way of the Visionary, whose energy focuses on a vision of future possibilities, hopes, and dreams. Visionaries speak the truth, without blame or judgment. And,
- Fourth, the way of the Teacher, focused on structure and order to insure the community is well-managed. Teacher energy encourages us to find solutions, but not be attached to specific outcomes.

Every community is a collection of individuals, who together create something more than they could be on their own. Each of us is a *mélange* of these four energetic pathways; we each possess aspects of the Warrior, Healer, Teacher, and Visionary as a part of our innate make-up. Some of us prefer one path over another – we're more

naturally skilled or comfortable in one area, perhaps. Communities, too, can be more heavily weighted toward one of the paths than the others.

However, it is possible, with focus, for both individuals and communities to develop skills and learn to balance ability in each of these four areas, which represent our human resources of power, love, vision, and wisdom. Dr. Arrien believes that the more balanced we can become, the more health we can create, both personally and communally.

So, let's look at each of these paths in a bit more detail, in relationship to being a balanced, optimal congregation.

The first of the four ways is the way of the Warrior. I want to acknowledge that the word "warrior" can be off-putting. Maybe it feels like a term that only applies to men or to those who are aggressive. But, both men and women have "warrior" energy; and in this model, the term is not associated with aggressive behavior. Another word we might substitute is "Leader." This path is about being present, personally, and, in community, about being "on the same page" in regard to our mission, goals, and values.

Being present gives us the ability to use our human assets of power, presence, and communication. Using these assets, Leaders/Warriors make things happen, break through barriers, and see things through to completion. When Warriors see something that needs to be done, they take it on and they do it. They are action-oriented. When expressed positively, Leaders demonstrate appropriate action, good timing, and clear communication.

Well-developed Warriors/Leaders are able to show up and choose to be fully present in the moment. They are skilled in doing this because they understand the usefulness of practice and discipline. In choosing to be fully present, they demonstrate honor and respect for themselves and for others.

Those who are skillful Warriors value the art of judicious communication. They understand the meaning of promises and avoid misunderstandings by respectfully saying what they mean and honorably doing what they say they will do. By choosing to show up in life, and being present in the moment, effective Warriors not only are aware of their personal power, but are also able to discern the best ways to express and use that power.

Communities need Leaders; those with both big "L"s and little "I"s. Congregations have all kinds of tasks that need to get done for the benefit of our community. Without those who make things happen, there wouldn't be a building and gardens, programs, worship, or coffee. We need people who make things happen.

Each path has a shadow side, as well. We see negative Warrior energy in the form of unchecked power, bullying, change for change sake, and so forth. Each of these four paths requires a sense of self and a level of self-esteem that allows one's personal aspects to be used to their best purpose. This is especially true for the energy associated with the Warrior.

The path of the Healer, is next; and these folks can also be called "Caretakers." Healers pay attention to what has heart and meaning, allowing us in community to access our powers of love, gratitude, acknowledgement, and validation. To nurture the spiritual health of our community, we look to our heart-centeredness and attend to each other from that place.

Healers know that love is a powerful force in our relationships with ourselves and with others. They help communities identify where we are wounded and how we can

heal from our hurts. Caretakers remind us of the importance of acknowledging, including, welcoming, and nurturing others in our midst. From the place in each of us that holds this capacity for love, we acknowledge the impact that we have on each other and we find ways to extend ourselves to each other in friendship, fellowship, and support.

The shadow of this Healer energy is found in poor boundaries, in allowing ourselves to be overcome with demands outside ourselves or in coping through addictive behavior. Many of the world's wisdom traditions point to the need for balance in our lives, spiritually, mentally, and physically. Practices that help to maintain balance are essential to walking the way of the Healer, both personally and in community. We express the way of the Healer through attitudes and actions that maintain personal and congregational health and support the welfare of our community.

The path of the Visionary is third, and here we tell the truth, without blame or judgment. Visionaries in our community are also creative problem solvers. With a gift for truthfulness, authenticity, and integrity, they help us develop our congregational vision, dreams, goals, and plans. This visionary aspect includes our creative purpose and dreams; what we hope we can create together as a blessing to the world.

Here we are called to know and act from our authentic self, coming forward fully with our creativity. Creating and holding a vision is not for only a few select people in the congregation. We are a better community when we encourage all members to seek and express their truth, to be open to the creative aspects of our spirits which open us to possibilities and options. Visionaries live in the future, and their truthful witness to what they see as a possibility there offers the community hope, encouragement, and options.

Truth-telling means speaking from this authentic place, the capacity to say what is so. At times, it can be challenging to speak without blame or judgment, because we get caught up in our desire to be loved, or be right, or to place responsibility outside of ourselves. That's the shadow side of the Visionary – abandoning our own truth or getting so lost in the ideal, in the dream, that we lose contact with what is realistic and achievable.

Lastly, embracing the way of the Teacher, we allow ourselves to be open to outcome, but not attached to specific results or conclusions. In this state, we approach situations with the gifts of the path of the Teacher: clarity, objectivity, and discernment.

The way of the Teacher is a practice in trust and detachment, calling on us to develop and use our wisdom to discern. "Openness and non-attachment help us recover the human resources of wisdom and objectivity," Dr. Arrien says. "Wisdom is at work when we are open to all options."

Of course, being on this path confronts us with the need to be comfortable with uncertainty, with being in a state of not knowing. To facilitate this process, Teachers, who may also be called Counselors, are good at creating covenants and formal organizational structures that help define the "playing field" in which we do our work together. These structures also help create a safe place for us to explore our options.

The shadow side of the Teacher is attachment to the "rules," an over-emphasis on structure, and an aversion to change. To truly allow ourselves to be open to outcome, we must develop the skill of detachment, not because we don't care, but because we care so much, we want the best possible outcome to emerge in our community, even if that outcome isn't the one that we thought was the right way to go. Even if it isn't the outcome we proposed.

The Four Fold Way – learning and integrating the paths of the Warrior, the Healer, the Visionary, and the Teacher - has a role, I think, in creating vibrant, well-balanced, effective, and sustainable congregations. Each of us has capacity in these four paths, and all of us have gifts to bring to our Church. Some of us are more comfortable or skilled in one area.

Like creating Stone Soup, this morning's children's story, when we add our contribution to the mix, miracles can happen. When we bring our gifts to this congregation, when we allow ourselves to recognize and honor the contributions of others, when we encourage each other to develop new skills, we are contributing to the health and well-being of this beloved community. And, when we are loved, acknowledged, well-used, and energized in this congregation, we are more able to take our gifts out into the world to build a better way.

How can you bring your self to this community? How will you continue to develop your capacity as a Leader, Caretaker, Problem Solver, and Counselor?

We humans are social beings, and we find ourselves drawn to be in each other's company in myriad ways. One of these ways is in religious communities of support of our spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and human growth and expression. You have warmly welcomed me into this community of faith, and I'm learning so much about you as you share with me your lives, your hopes, your struggles, and your joys. I am so honored to be your minister, to be with you on this journey together.

We share dreams and visions and hopes for this sacred and meaningful place. Your gifts are welcome here. Your talents are needed and appreciated. Because as we individually show up in this faith community, we influence how this Church works together as a whole to become our collective vision for the future. No matter how long we've been a part of this congregation, we are part of the history of this place and we are part of the future, because those of our dreams which cannot be achieved during our lifetimes will be accomplished as one lifetime touches another, and another, and another.

Let's remember to use the power of the Four Fold paths, the power we have within this congregation, to enhance our communication and presence with one another, to express our love and gratitude for this place which is sacred to so many of us, to live our vision and mission with integrity and authenticity, and to speak our truth to the world.

May it be so.