

Spiritual Growth for the Sake of Our Environment

Introduction

My initial heart's guidance for my practicum came after much brainstorming and remembrance following Sidi's command to move back to Morocco. While I was well prepared academically with a Masters in Earth and Environmental Resources Management, and a PhD on the way, in Environmental Governance, the spiritual education I was receiving at USHS filled my heart and soul, and enticed me to reflect on the ways in which I can be of service and explore the role I was to play in society, and how to best utilize my education.

After much reflection, remembrance, and careful analysis of the Moroccan institutional and organizational landscapes in term of sustainable development, I felt that an NGO favoring cross-sectoral collaboration in order to promote cleaner industrial production would bring about a new way of engaging with the environmental imperative; and perhaps change the way we think about business and industry. In thinking about the best way to enable this change, I envisioned the NGO to have a business incubation activity, a trans-disciplinary research activity, and cross-industrial collaboration. And I knew it would require tremendous spiritual growth on my part if I were to successfully achieve my aspirations. I named this NGO: Le Cluster Industriel pour les Services Environnementaux (CISE) Maroc or the Industrial Cluster for Environmental Services-Morocco.

My practicum specifically focuses on the green business incubation activity, which was funded by a US Department of State grant; to which I applied in summer 2015. This grant was approved for 250,000 USD. This project currently counts 13 start-ups in waste recycling and 10 entrepreneurship professors, who provide paid coaching for the 13 start-ups, while being trained in the latest trends of green entrepreneurship.

Waste constitutes a major challenge for the country of Morocco. The entrepreneurs participating in this project provide innovative alternatives to burying waste in landfills as they turn it into a resource, a raw material, for their entrepreneurial endeavors. This project allows them to receive the necessary training to be successful.

My Spiritual Walking:

Envisioning this project and then developing it and making it a reality has been a journey of self-discovery, intense walking, and deep surrender. While I continued to believe in the necessity of making environmental stewardship profitable to businesses; taking matters into my own hands and creating an NGO, CISE, whose sole purpose is to do just that, was an endeavor of a magnitude I never thought I could face. Further, transforming the concept of a project into a reality, getting it funded, and then implementing it, did not exist in my realm of possibilities.

My first major walking step was accepting my guide, Sidi's, strong instruction to move back to Morocco and build a career in my home country, after 16 years of life and career development in the US. For me, a move to Morocco essentially meant confronting demons I had conveniently ignored for 16 years. When I left the country at the age of 20, it was not just to seek higher education, but most importantly, to leave a context and a living circumstance, which I experienced as toxic and highly inhibiting. So much this was the case that for the following seven years, I only visited my family once. Sidi wanted me to go back to all that! The thought was unbearable for me, and it took me two years to bow my head and say yes. The active ingredient in my surrender included my complete trust in Sidi's love for me and in his certainty in the guidance he received for me, and the use of practices taught at school, especially the qualities for specific needs, and the wurd reflection practice to calm my emotional states. I also received innumerable healings from fellow classmates and at times from faculty members. The saving grace was the promise of seeing my grandmother, the source of love in my life, at will.

The next walking block was building immunity against the negativity, the destructive comments, and the anticipations of failure that my environment, and especially my father, abundantly provided. While I worked in secrecy at all times, I could not ward off my father's comments such as: nothing good will ever come from you, I should have had a son instead, or you are an infinite disappointment. Eventually, I stopped all communication with him as I had not found a better way to protect myself.

Ultimately, I learned how to hold my father's negativity in my heart so that it no longer impacted my freedom to be myself at my best. This allowed me to move beyond the hurt caused by his words, and also beyond my wish for validation and encouragement, since it was clear I was not going to get it. In fact, I became free from the desire to impress or please... him.

Another major block I had to walk through was to overcome my feelings of inadequacy in the presence of high ranking officials and people in power. My project rested on the support and acquiescence of such individuals, and in Morocco, the path to reaching them is fraught with intimidation, bullying, and straight-out verbal abuse. Staying the course, and identifying and reaching out to potential allies took tremendous energy, courage and perseverance that I could only find through prayer.

One specific example of this courage was following a plenary meeting, which I was leading, where one participant stood up, pointed his index at me and said: "you will never make it" several times. It was the same message I had learned to protect myself from that had originated with my father but was now occurring in a business setting. The worst part was that this person's support was key for CISE to be recognized as a legitimate cluster. Getting over the initial shock during the plenary,

finding a polite, yet firm response, and preserving the legitimacy of the endeavor and other partners' support after this incident required a courage I didn't know I had. I only found this courage after a couple of hours of serious crying and heartfelt prayer, but I did find it all the same.

Finally, I had to learn to discern various people's qualities and modes of communication, and also to respond to each situation appropriately. The practice of looking through my heart instead of my fears, of knowing that this was Allah's endeavor and all I had to do is show up and present my case, leaving Him the task to do the rest freed me to a large extent. I still find places where I see myself as the doer, but I am better at catching them now.

My Intentions Going Forward

While CISE is a lot more developed now than it was two years ago, it still necessitates attention, strategizing and hard-work. My plan for the next couple of years is to continue establishing the Green Incubator, while strengthening CISE's other activities. For example, I would like to create more interaction between industry and university research centers, further bridging the gap between academia and the world of business. Another area needing more attention is on the side of existing industry. One of the goals of CISE was to create various opportunities for interaction between existing companies in order to promote the identification of synergies and the development of collaborative green solutions. I would like to spend more time planning such networking/ problem solving sessions.

In addition, and in order to increase my income, I have recently decided to start a consulting business. Securing a better income will help me continue to serve CISE, while providing me with more security and comfort.

And, of course, while I pursue these ambitious intentions I know I will need to continue to face my demons and deepen my reliance on Allah's Love and Mercy.