

## Listening to our whole self Part II

(from Cynthia Bougeault's "Four Voice Discernment Approach")

### Setting up the Whole Self Playing Field: Asking Two Questions

1. How do you feel about the situation?
2. What should I do next?

	<i>Nafs</i>	<i>Soul</i>	<i>Spirit</i>	<i>Heart</i>
<i>1. How do you feel about the situation?</i>				
<i>2. What should I do next?</i>				

#### **Nafs:**

*How do I feel?* I feel freaked out, frightened, invaded [by the loss of my bag on my way to teach the Wisdom School]. Unsafe. My mind is racing. I can't let it go. See, I'm tossing and turning at night in this strange bedroom, far away from home. I'm compulsively turning over scenarios of what could have happened. Jumping up at night to check the phone messages and email ... My security/survival programs are on full alert.

*What should I do?* Bolt. Cancel the Wisdom School and take the next flight home.

#### **Soul:**

*How do I feel?* I'm mostly in deep grief and nostalgia about those special items I've lost: my red hat, the notes from all those Wisdom Schools. I'm wondering why it happened in the first place, trying to figure out if this is a "lesson," and if so, how I can get it right so my bag will come back.

*What should I do?* Be by myself. Absorb this hit with proper mourning and inner reflection. Get back to home ground where I know how to be me, where my familiar things, and the cat and grandkids are there to give comfort, to make it all feel okay again. The last thing I want to do is teach this Wisdom School. I'll do it because I agreed to, but maybe I can compromise, curtail my trip by a few days, and get back to my REAL life as soon as I can.

#### **Spirit:**

*How do I feel?* Bag? What bag? What part of non-attachment do you not understand?

*What should I do?* Return your attention to the present moment, let go, and lead the Wisdom School. The missing bag is a spiritual trifle. You know that you must—and can—let it go.

### **Heart:**

*How do I feel?* Listen up good here! You have two choices. You can either run home or you can take this on. Remember how Rafe said, “It takes a gambler’s heart to do the spiritual journey.” Step up to the plate and see where it leads you. Bring curiosity as a counterweight to fear.

*What should I do?* Go into town and buy some essential clothes so there is no orphan drama around the retreat. And stop checking the phone messages and email.

### **Discussion: The Law of Three in Action**

Once everyone has individually weighed in, the essential process is to hold every voice in respect and love. Each part is doing the best it can with the situation as seen from its perspective, and each has my best interest in mind. I now simply have to get them on the same page.

Essentially, as I have come to see it, the task is to find an inner place where you can hold the two irreconcilable opposites, Nafs and Spirit [heaven and earth]. In this case, Nafs wants to bolt and run home. Spirit wants to “keep calm and carry on.” Spirit is right, ultimately, but that wise, slightly impersonal “highest right action” is unsustainable as long as Nafs (which holds the key to the action) is flatly defiant and soul is lost in nostalgia. If one simply represses or overrides the Nafs—essentially spiritual dissociation—there will be hell to pay later.

If this sounds like a set-up for the Law of Three, you’re right. But the way it works is a little bit surprising. Let’s for the moment, call Nafs “affirming” or first force, since the force of its desire for action, however panicky and dysfunctional, is vividly palpable. And let’s call Spirit “denying” or second force because it pushes back with the voice of lucidity and wisdom, but feels a bit disembodied: an ideal me rather than a real me. What could be the third force bridging them?

Soul? Wrong. Third force is “Heart.”

Remember how I talked about having to “tease Heart out,” how it emerges only situationally? This is according to the Law of Three corollary (which I don’t make much of in my Trinity book but is certainly the chief operative in this situation): *“The higher blends with the lower to actualize the middle, which then becomes the lower to the preceding higher and the higher to the preceding lower.”*

In other words, as I sit, bearing the paradox willingly in the embodied space of my heart, allowing the painful clash of viewpoints and competencies to simply be, the Heart, the middle, begins to actualize as “third force.” You can actually feel it “come online” as a force-field—or more accurately, a new system of perception—within your body. The energy shift is sudden and vividly palpable. One moment there were two; **in the next heaven and earth have somehow miraculously joined**. The power is suddenly there to see and be what Spirit is envisioning, but the energy is personal, coming from within the center of one’s personal, finite being, with no repression or “cleaning up the act.” Heart will speak only when it is ready, but when it speaks, the quality of “seeing” the solution combined with the power to do is suddenly released.

Earlier I stated that it is Heart speaking, but this is not actually so. Heart is actually *the operating system through which the speaking happens*. But the speaker is actually Self—by which I mean that

deep, integrated, fully finite and personal yet integrated and unboundaried Self which is who we actually are, but have no dependable access to in this earth plane. That Self—essential Self [embodied Spirit??]—emerges as the “new arising,” or fourth in a new dimension, which emerges when that dyad of Nafs/Spirit is brought into new relationship through the reconciling force of Heart. Then discernment will come, and it will be sustainable.

You’ll find essentially this identical configuration described by Kabir Helminski in his *The Knowing Heart* (pages 76-80), as the linchpin of Sufi transformational practice.

### **Discernment Attained**

So the bag has still not shown up, I have an oddball new wardrobe to get through these next five days, and Wisdom School is off to a flying start. I do not know whether there will be some pot-of-gold-at-the-end-of-the-rainbow, with the bag mysteriously appearing on my doorstep. It doesn’t need to. Unlike Soul, this Heart-Self is not dependent on a meta-narrative, an external meaning structure to confirm the coherence of a course of action. [cf. struggle with need for affirmation/“proof”—which is all at the level of faculties!] No need for happy endings. If the cherished items are gone forever, so be it. What they were pointing to all along, like clumsy props, has been found deeper inside.

### **What about Soul?**

A parting thought: where does Soul fit in all this, then? Is it simply a superfluous bystander in this conversation? Not at all. Again in Law of Three language, the Self that speaks through the Heart is actually the *counterstroke* of the Soul: the same basic quality but now manifesting on a higher plane. That’s what gives the speaking its intimate force when heart finally weighs in; somehow Soul knows this already, but was waiting for a way to make this knowing its own. Soul is what “I” look like when I construct myself from the outside, using my faculties to “take a picture” of myself and project it into time and space. Heart-speaking is what “I” sound like when I am expressing myself from the center of my essential beingness. The images drop out, but the quality of aliveness remains the same. I am no longer seeking for myself in a painstakingly constructed picture of myself; rather, I spring like a coiled tiger from the center of my own being directly into the situation at hand. All the self-translation drops out.