

The Other World
Summer 72
Trek III

THE TRANSFORMED STATE

Grace is yours and peace.
From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have embarked upon the journey into the Other World and that initial journey takes us through the Land of Mystery. And in our first day we saw that entering that Land of Mystery was an awefull encounter. On the second step, we took after that encounter, we saw that we were upagainst an inescapable power that finally crushed and destroyed all our illusions until we were utterly exposed. But a strange thing happens when that takes place. We are now ready to go on the next trek, where everything is transformed and we are in a new state of being the Transformed State. But before we discuss that state, I would like to read something for you from someone who has seen that state and probably participated in it many different ways. You have to remember that this is a secular poem that I am reading.

i thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings; and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any lifted from the no
of all nothing human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

I enter the Land of Mystery. There I am confronted by awe on every side. I am up against the inescapable power. I acknowledge from the inside of my own being that there's no way out, and that the Mystery wins. The Awe has enveloped me and crushed me to nothingness, and I stand guilty and exposed. Then I begin to experience an uncanny stirring in the deeps within me, yet not only within me but without and everywhere that I look. For I sense now hidden springs of a strange life beginning to flow. It's like unknown vital powers of the universe are loosed within me and burst out upon me, and I scream out "My God. I'm alive!"

And an uncanny wonder begins to grasp me. Not only does that scream come out of me but I know it! I know that I'm alive! Like Sartre said, when you are stuck with a pin, you know you are alive. It is not because pain is there but it is because of your reaction to the happening that you know you are alive.

I remember the first race I ever ran in school. They put me to running the mile, of all things. On my first race, I ran and I ran and I ran and I ran and I ran and I ran. I didn't know the proper way to run the mile, but thank goodness the other people running did not know either. After running and running and running and running and running the pains began to come. I began to hurt all over, I was short of breath I did not know what was going to happen, and yet I kept running and running and running and running and running. I think all of us about tied for it seemed that we all fell down on the finish line. Suddenly a great aching elation came over me. I knew that I had run the race and more than that I knew I was alive. Power was there in the midst of my tired aching being.

And then we also know that when you cease to cling onto your life, when you quit boxing it off or trying to protect it, and give your life up then, life begins to flow into you. Energy is unleashed. Life flows on. And you remember the poem that we have often read of D. H. Lawrence which talks about, "Life still more life rushes into us to compensate, to be ready, and we ripple with life through the days." It is almost as if there is strength, not your own, that comes out of the bowels of the universe that flows into your life. And it is an eerie sort of strength. It is not the kind that comes from exercising or sleeping a long time or eating the proper food or anything like that. But it is a strength that seems to come up out of nowhere from the Mystery itself, that bubbles up into the midst of you. And when you become the nothing that you are before the Mystery then life flows in with greater strength.

Suddenly in the midst of that you know what it means to let go. You let go when that life comes. Suddenly life begins to just gush forth, it fills you up. It is like a floodgate has opened and the whole of the dammed up water is let loose into your being and into the midst of whatever you are doing. It's like a little child upon going to a picnic or to a strange place. He gets so excited that he wets his britches. He just lets it go! Everything just runs out. Well, it is the same sort of thing. You just let your whole life flood into history at that point. You give your whole being to the situation.

When I was a kid one of the strange and great happenings of my life was a coon hunt. I did not really know what a coon was; neither did I know what it meant to hunt them. Well, we went out late at night with dogs to chase the coons and flash lights to spot them. They let the dogs loose. I do not know whether the dogs were chasing each other or the coons or what, but they would start out baying and running, and we would try to follow them. the first thing we did was lose the flashlights. So we hurled ourselves into the darkness. We would run at top speed in the pitch darkness down hills, into rocks, trees, brush, cactus, a dog or another person. We would stumble, fall down, hit branches, trip, run up hill, slip, roll down, would run into something we thought might be a coon or even a panther and would turn and run in terror. Then we would hear the dogs and change directions and run into each other. I came out with most of my clothes torn off. One of my socks was gone and how I don't know for I never took my shoes off. My face was torn open. My arm was bruised badly and hurting. I had a big gash in my leg and both palms of my hands were raw. A glorious coon hunt that night. Life was there. It was sort of like an exuberant expenditure had just come out of me. In the Other World exuberant expenditure gushes out in the midst of your daily life.

Another explosion takes place in your life. It is "My God! I'm in a different world." Everything has been transformed by the Mystery. Everything is different, there has been a metamorphosis of reality. It is an incredible situation now. The world has taken on a new quality. It seeps with the Mystery at every point.

The world takes on a new wonder. It begins to bleed with meaning at every place that you touch it. You are in an utterly different world.

I remember one time in India, after I had been there several times. I had great compassion for India, I told myself. But what I had not told myself was that I had great hatred for her also: the starving masses, the poverty, the sick, the degradation of the physical situation, and the painful struggle that was going on in the masses, and, of course, me. One evening, it was about one hundred and fifteen degrees Fahrenheit that day, I was hot, tired, and worn out, and walked into this overcrowded market. The smoke and the sweat that rose up out of the fires and the crowded bodies could not escape the haze just hung there. People were trading wares, bicycles were going by, little children were shouting, beggars were hawking, goods were being sold, and I was being bumped this way and that way. I was numb in my suppressed hatred. And then all of a sudden the situation changed. The situation changed! Whereas I had hated India; now the situation was transformed. It was just like "My God! Here was a culture that is an utter gift just as she is to the universe." I do not know very well how you talk about transformation, but a different world was given to me. Instead of hatred, there was great appreciation and an opening up of my whole being to India. Radical anticipation came over me in the midst of it, and of great warmth swept over my body for the situation and for the given which was there. Hatred dwindled into nothingness.

And yet it was the same world? It was the same world! Transformation doesn't mean you get rid of the givenness. You are in the midst of the same things, the same people, doing the same things, having the same aches and pains you have always had. And it has been there all along and it is going to be there the next step in the future. But you see it in a radically different way. India had literally become a different place. I mean India had literally become a different world! It was part of the Other World in which I was participating. Everything had exploded. And I just stood there in astonishment and wonder.

Once that happened then the situation began to vibrate. You see that the good and the bad and the ugly are all now beautiful. And you begin to get a whole new idea of what it means to walk in a world that once was ugly and horrible. And as I mentioned, India has the same beggars, the same suffering, the same crowdedness, the same sweating bodies, and the same strange smells. But it vibrates. It is alive. The scene is one of a beautiful world. But India is far away. Shall we go to our job? The church we are in? Our family? or wherever? In the Other World all of it comes alive, and is beautiful. Everything is seen with different eyes.

Then you see that you are sort of disoriented. It is sort of like you are walking through life on the ceiling. You cannot look at things straight. Everything is turned over. And you have to learn to walk anew in that kind of world which yesterday was drudgery, pain, self-pity and hate.

You have to learn anew now to walk in a world that is beautiful at every point you touch. I never did like the story, "Alice in Wonderland." I guess because when I was a kid and they first read it to me I did not understand what was going on. And they kept reading it to me over and over. But I surely do like the title. "Alice in Wonderland!" "Alice in Wonderland." "Joseph in Wonderland." "Joseph in Wonderland." You are constantly astounded at everything that takes place and everything that happens.

It is like having a second birth. You become a different person, and up out of you wells the cry, "My God, that new world is in ME!" It is not just out there, a new world is now living in me! I am an utterly different person. And what a sense of incredulity here. It is like you had amnesia and suddenly woke up, and did not know where you had been or what is going on. You are now in a new situation. Or to put it another way, India had changed so to speak, and I do not want to take one thing away from that. But I had changed also. A new happening had happened inside of me. When that change comes your skin begins to tingle. It's as if the Mystery is seeping out through every pore of your being. Not only have you bumped up against the Awe but the Awe has captured you. It tingles you and begins to bubble up inside you. It sweeps you along with it and gives you a brand new relationship to everything.

You begin all over again. You have never been here before. And you will never be the same again. And if you want to call me Joe at this point in the Other World I would not know who you were talking to. My name is Adam, because I have never existed before. That is the way the new birth comes to you in the Other World. Oh, let me read to you here.

Risen, not to the old world, the old, changeless I, the old life, wakened not to the old knowledge but to a new earth, a new I, a new knowledge, a new world of time.

Ah, no, I cannot tell you what it is, the new world. I cannot tell you the mad, astounded rapture of its discovery. I shall be made with delight before I have done, and whosoever comes after will find me in the new world a madman in rapture.

This is just the way it is. It is not an imperative, nor is it a shift in character or anything like that. It is just the way it is. It is not open for discussion. It is not open for question. You can never go back again. You are just exhilarated with Being Itself. And you stand there dumb in your rationality to articulate it. You find yourself sort of incognito wherever you go. You would scarcely recognize me. If you looked closely you would probably not be sure I was me. Sure, I was bald headed, you know, a little pudgy here and there, and all that sort of thing externally. But even there you have to be careful; you may not even recognize me there. Maybe I am not too incognito externally, but inside, ho, ho, ho, I may not even recognize myself; that is how incognito I am. You can't imagine what has happened. Oh, man! The hopeful expectation, the delightful anticipation; everything is possibility. You have been given new ears, new eyes, and a new capacity to bleed wonder from the Mystery itself.

Then a scream comes out. "My God this is the way it will always be." For to be a human being, to be a self in the Other World means to be up against this kind of change. In whatever takes place newness will happen tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. All I have to expect is change. It sort of leaves you dizzy. Life is continually spinning, spinning before you as you are participating in it.

You now understand that life in the Other World is perpetual surprise. You stand there continually amazed. New spectrums are revealed, new depths open up in life, and new possibilities are exposed. In one sense, once you are in the Other World, you are never surprised and yet you know that you are always going to be surprised.

Being in World War II and seeing many dead bodies and even being as old as I am you would think I would know a little bit about the presence of death. But I was in a situation not too many months ago where I bumped into all sorts of things: bodies floating down the river, some facing up and

unrecognizable, others facing down; old people sitting around with a look as though they would be gone in another hour. People were maimed, twisted, and lying there, with wrecked and emaciated bodies. All of them were in some sort of horrifying form that reminded you of death. As I walked through and looked at that minute after minute, somehow I must have internalized death. All of the sudden, it seemed like the world had become a one dimensional world and the unknown scene up against me was a deep dark brown world. It was the world of death. It was so sudden, so weird and in one sense so frightening that I reacted, "What is going on? Get it away from me! Get away! Get away!" Suddenly it disappeared. Then I was swept with overwhelming distress. I had never seen anything like that before. "Wait a minute; wait a minute; wait a minute! Give it back! Give it back!" But it did not come back. It was gone forever. I had been refusing to be perpetually surprised. And yet in the Other World one anticipates that he will be perpetually surprised. One is alive with fascination at everything that comes and at everything that is given.

Then you are aware that life itself is change. Selfhood is dynamic. It is change itself. Not that there is something new all the time, but there is something new about myself every moment that I bump into myself. I remember my first contact with a kaleidoscope, one of those things you look through to see geometric designs, and when you turn the barrel it changes into all kinds of fantastically different designs. We were at a carnival and the man selling them said you can turn it six million times and never see the same picture. I remember how overcome with amazement I was at his statement. That is sort of what it is like being in the Other World. Every moment is a new picture never to be repeated.

You know how your neuroses are always hanging out here or there, and you're a little ashamed of them, and how everybody sees them a little better than you. Back in the psychological days, your enemies would use that kind of knowledge to jab you. The other day we were in a situation where we were wrestling with a depth issue and I was pushing a certain point a person said, "That is just your neurosis." And they were probably right. But something happened when that person said that. It brought me through a sort of haze and I saw that my neuroses, peculiarities and consequent shame or guilt was giving me a sensitivity which was allowing me to see a brand new understanding of the depth issue that we were dealing with. And that is just the beginning when you see that selfhood itself is dynamic.

Not long ago I was sitting in a meeting, and someone made a cutting remark. I do not know why but that cutting remark threw me into a deep despair. My reflective action was to analyze why it hurt me and try to transcend it to deal with my relation to the meeting and the mission involved. Suddenly it dawned on me that being thrown into despair was making me sensitive to a far greater struggle that was going on in the group. The group was trying to deal with a major contradiction at that time, but could not get down to the depth level where the struggle was actually taking place. Now by virtue of the painful struggle I was suddenly catapulted into the depth arena of struggle which I would have missed without that "death." And by that little death or whatever you want to call it, I was thrown into the deep contradiction. Everything of that Other World dynamic is always breaking in to give you a new grasp of yourself. We never see ourselves as this or that little, guilty person. But we always see ourselves as Man. And we are part of that grand drama whose borders end only at the edge of creation itself. That is what we are present to; not our personal guilt or petty struggles. We participate in moment by moment new deeds of the Mystery in the Other World.

One time visiting a circus I saw a team of two men. One was fairly small as I think back. He rolled his knees up against his body and wrapped his arms around his knees to roll up like a ball. And they place him on top of the feet of the other man who was lying on his back. The man lying down began spinning the man wrapped up like a ball in the air. That is sort of what life is like in the Other World as the Mystery gets a hold of you. You are juggled like that for the rest of your life. Change, Change, Change. And you're spinning, spinning, spinning. That the way life goes on.

Not only is life itself change, but life is overflowing in the Other World. Life becomes more and more and more. And you are glad and excited. But then it keeps coming and keeps coming, and you begin to get terrified. You have more life than you need. Your being is engulfed, and everything new is feeding you. Life is a banquet. But, it is choking me to death. I am getting more than I need. I get terrified with the bursting loose of life with its ripping and its tearing and inundating. And it is sort of like you have slipped over into the psychotic abyss and, yet at the same time, brother, you are having the time of your life. How could you be so elated? And you are like what D. H. Lawrence in his poem is talking about: "A madman in rapture." That is what it is like to be in the Other World.

There are practical applications, consequences, or resolves of being in the Other World. Whenever you awake with, "My God, I am alive," an eerie uncommon liveliness sinks into you. And you see you are going to live like that the rest of your life. You know this is the way life is going to be from now on. Once you have seen this you can never change what you have seen.

Power is always there breaking loose, bubbling into you. A new kind of seriousness comes into your life. And once you let go, a wild kind of creativity takes place in your being.

And when the awareness comes, "My God, I am in a new world." There comes with it a kind of joyful anxiety. Joyful but it is still anxiety. Now everything you see is a wonder. Everything is a wonder. You have a different relationship to the past and the future. You are no longer paralyzed. It is sort of like, now you can reenter the battle. You can pick up the stage of history from where you are.

And when you come to the point: "My God, a new world is within me." There is a quivering expectation. Life dances in you. The situation is alive and transformed and the dance goes on, even when you are the most irritated, negative, or vehement. And you get a whole new sense after style, and the form of your identity becomes fluid and malleable.

And then the last awareness: "My God, this is the way life will always be." You are up against constant change which produces a kind of exhilarating terror. Yet everything becomes an opportunity for creativity. The character of your next encounter is changed. You have permission to stay on this merry-go-round so to speak. You have permission to continually be surprised to live your life at loose ends. You have permission to be a "madman in rapture." A "madman in rapture." That is the Other World.

Joseph Slicker