

LIFE DYNAMICS AND FIVE MASTER IMAGES

(RS-I in a Nutshell)

What you and I know about life is that that Life is a struggle. It is both awesome upagainstness and fascinating possibility. We tend to forget one or the other of those at various times. And so there is need for some kind of rock-bottom story about life to use as a constant reminder of The Way Life Is.

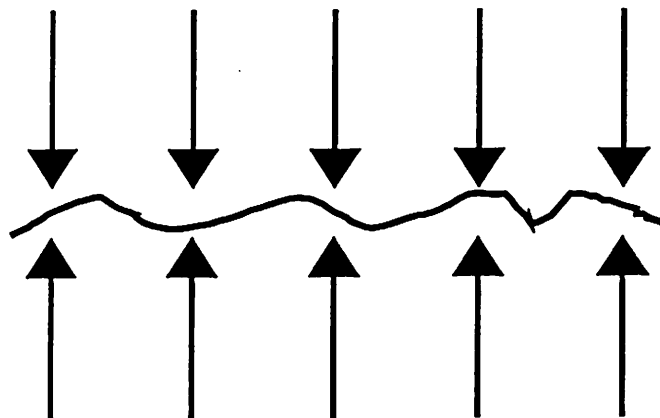
The Ecumenical Institute / Institute of Cultural Affairs out of its research developed a course featuring such a rock-bottom story. We called it RS-I. It attempted to say as clearly and forcefully as possible what life is like, how life comes to us, how we can relate meaningfully to life, and why we are on this earth. Although we do not use these learnings directly in facilitation, they keep on bleeding through in lecturettes, short courses and one-line zingers, as well as the method itself.

Several people have sensed that there is something deeper behind the methods, and suggested we pull back the curtain. That is what we plan to do. Formerly it took a weekend, 44 hours, to stage this course. It will now be done, at least in outline, in two hours.

If you wanted to relate this more directly to facilitation, I guess we would have to say that the five images we'll talk about in laying out this rock-bottom story are really describing the LIFE STANCE of the ICA facilitator. You will have to make up your own mind on whether this is the way you experience life, and whether this is the life stance, that, as a facilitator, you wish to adopt. No one can do that for you. We're going to get these five images up front here, say a word about each and do a bit of grounding in our own lives.

I. THE BIG SQUEEZE

Life comes to us both as dread and fascination, as OH NO! And OH YES! That's just the way life is. Sigmund Freud or someone like him, described the human situation this way: "Life is an infinite passion; the problem is that there is no infinite satisfaction." There, now, How do you deal with that?!



This first image is often called THE BIG SQUEEZE. It's a symbolic description of

the life dynamic that every human being encounters. The top arrows hold the 'Drivens' in life related to knowing, doing and being. Consciously or unconsciously, every human being is driven by care: care about the sustenance of life, about knowledge of life, and about living life.

The bottom arrows stand for the limits of life, the finiteness of all of life that means that sustenance is never satisfied, knowledge is cut off, deeds are not completed or miscarried, and longing for perfection is never realized. There seems to be a kind of enigmatic power that makes a comedy of all our care for the morrow, that brings to an end all our great experiences, that casts love into final solitude, that calls us out of life just as we are getting somewhere, and is always throwing us into the struggle between self-assertion and duty.

Where are we in this diagram?

What do we say when we realize we are there?

On your grocery list, you figure you've thought of everything and ...

You have put n a great party, and you are about to congratulate yourself on how well it is going, when...

Your strategic planning is going along just as you planned, when suddenly...

Others???

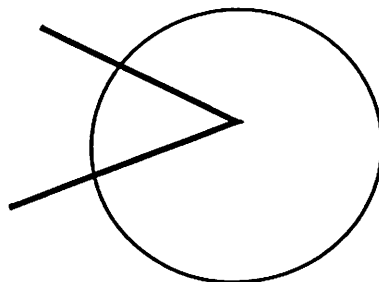
We laugh at this, but we all know that when it's happening to us, we experience real angst.

What does a truck driver call this?

The big question here is not whether or not this is the way life is?! Anyone who is half aware, knows it is this way. The really big question is how we relate to it: that is, how we name it? We all know people who say: 'Life is a bitch and then you die!' We can relate to the crunch as cynics, or romantics, or as those who dare to affirm the Big Squeeze as life-giving. But what does it take to affirm life this way?

II. THE INTRUSION

Every human being is an illusion-maker. We flee from the radical insecurity of life by manufacturing illusions. Illusions about ourselves and the universe that give us a way to deal with the dread of being alive.



The intrusion is an occasion in which reality destroys the picture of our self and the universe that we have created, and reveals the actual situation to which we must respond. The intrusion is not an idea, but an event in the middle of everyday life that calls one's whole life perspective into question and throws you into a struggle to come to terms with it -- either to deny its relevance or to create a new life out of the new situation.

There is a second part of this dynamic in the form of a word about life, a word of life. It is a word of possibility that can speak to you in the midst of this struggle you are in.

ALL IS
GOOD

THE PAST
IS TOTALLY
APPROVED

THE FUTURE
IS OPEN

MY LIFE
IS RECEIVED
BY THE UNIVERSE

This is an in-spite-of Word. Not Pollyanna!
In spite of the pain and tragedy of life, life is good just as it is.
In spite of my bag full of neuroses and faults, I am received.
In spite of all the pain I have brought to others in the past,
and my own foul-ups, that past is approved.
And the past of the whole human race in spite of
And in spite of all the problems and crises and bad news,
and my own fears, the future is wide open.

ALL IS POSSIBLE.

This is a scandalous word and it has its own set of dynamics.

The two dynamics of intrusion and word only achieve their full impact when one dies to all previous understandings of life and the self and rise up to live the new understanding and style that goes with it. This is a death and resurrection. It is the stuff of change and transformation.

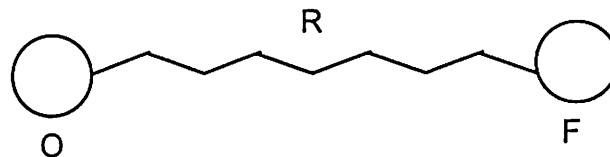
PAUSE.

The impact of this word is to destroy all excuses for escape from the real situation and releases the possibility of creative engagement in what was previously seen as an impossible situation.

III. THE TENSION

This symbol reflects the two poles of obedience and freedom. On the one hand we show up as obligated human beings in a network of duties and obligations, all crying for our attention. On the other hand we are free human beings, who decide for ourselves what is right and dare to act without support. The figure shows that both are connected and are in tension with each other.

If, to make decisions easier, we just pick one of them and ignore the other, we cut off the tension and become either a slave to duty (O) or an irresponsible floater who does exactly what she likes and to hell with everybody else.



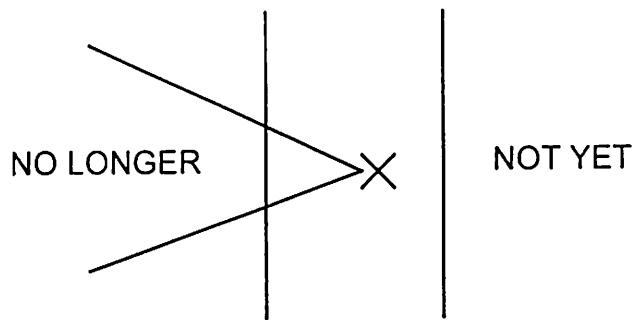
The guide to which we turn is the concept of RESPONSIBILITY to world, self and neighbor, and the coming generations. It is Responsibility which holds the tension between freedom and obedience.

When faced with a tough decision, the freely obedient one asks, "What does it mean to decide and act with responsibility in and for this situation?"

In our time we are clear that right and wrong are relative terms, and we refer to the twilight of good and evil. Decisions are made in ambiguity, in not knowing whether the decision is right or wrong, only that it is necessary. Who says it is necessary? I say so! It is I myself who must observe, judge, weigh up, decide and then act. Responsibility to all of life provides the context for the decision which must then be surrendered to history for judgment.

IV. THE WEDGEBLADE

The image of the Wedgeblade is about creating the future. It shows where the future is built -- between the No Longer and the Not-Yet. Back behind the No Longer are the established structures of society that care for people more or less adequately. That is the territory of the Establishment. Back there everyone knows what is right and wrong, and how things are done. And it is the land of the Disestablishment who spend their time telling the Establishment what is wrong with the present structures.



Out beyond this line is the Not Yet ---the unknown future and the future generations of people who will inherit the kind of society that we create. In between these two lines is "No Man's Land"; out here you tend to get shot at by both sides, both the Establishment and the Disestablishment. The Wedge is the direction history seems to be moving in.

Between the No Longer and the Not Yet are self-conscious people with selfhood who observe the trends of the times, see which way history is trying to go, have a model and work together to get it into history. The "X" holds the commitment, the bodies on the line, laying down their lives to create the necessary future. And the deed of building the future is done on behalf of all those who do not choose this path, and on behalf of the future generations.

These people have always existed in history. They are "Those Who Care"; Hermann Hesse referred to them as "The League"; Kenneth Bolding called them "The Invisible College". They are people committed to the future; they receive none of society's rewards; no brownie points; they prefer a low profile over publicity. And the decision they have made to play this role is a very solitary one. No one else can make it for you. There is, however, a strange peace and joy that comes to those who expend themselves for the sake of the future.

We believe these are universal dynamics of life. Different traditions give them different names. The Christian tradition refers to them as God, Christ (Event and Word), Holy Spirit and Church. The Hindu tradition: Brahman, Shiva, Vishnu and Ashram. The Aztecs: Quetzalcoatl.

Two Questions:

Where did you identify with any of these images?

How are these images related to, or helpful in, the task of facilitation?