

I AM THE LIFE

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I say that without pride for I am chosen. Being's life flows through me. In every moment I take a relationship to that fact of history but the anointing of me just is. I believe the first manifestation of being chosen, that all of us share, is the experience of showing up as a stranger; as the one who doesn't fit, the one who sees things differently, whose insights are a twist of the dial different from other people's. Seeing the band the other evening reminded me that one of my first experiments with the style of the odd one was that I belonged to a band. We never seemed to play anywhere. We practiced once or twice with a few old tape recorders or radios as our amplifiers. We took endless pictures of ourselves in preparation for our album covers and drove around town in a 1949 Ford with one side bashed in, painted patchwork on that side and black on the other.

My first experience of being the anointed one happened in my own family. We as a family, decided to adopt a young girl, who, after a couple of years, proved to be schizophrenic. What this ultimately came to mean was screaming hysterics from 8 o'clock bedtime until one or two in the morning two or three times a week. It involved smashing glass, smashing mirrors, the destruction of anything that had ever been important to her or that she felt was important to any of the rest of us. One night, I recall, we had all gone to bed early with my father, brother and I, leaving her to my mother to deal with. I found I couldn't sleep. And then, though I would not have talked about it this way then, it was as if a hand came and rested on my shoulder and said, "My presence here flows through you. You are the life." And it was almost as if I had discovered myself already in that room with my sister, not even having made a self-conscious decision. And then two or three nights later a hand on the shoulder, and again into her room. Then again, two or three nights later, again and again. One night the scene shifted to the kitchen for some reason and I encountered my sister saying that she no longer wanted to live. She wanted to die and have done with it. Before I could do anything to stop it she picked up a fork from the table and drove it into the palm of her hand. In that one act, my whole world came down. My picture of ever changing the situation with my sister through my own efforts, my hopes of creating a better society through my own best efforts all crumbled into dust in the midst of that situation and I was submerged in the futility of ever making any difference with my life. And yet, a few nights later, there it was, the hand on the shoulder.

Now, we now talk about it as "hope appeareth" the mysterious just-there-ness of hope beyond hope. Or we have said that hope is, first of all, context; a context for existence beyond all human experience, a state of being in which the universal itself is sustained. We glimpse this underlying context as that which is sustaining us in election as the anointed in history. For those who have the eyes to see, events in the world shock us, in spite of everything, with their wholeness, their meaningful destiny. We have all been moved by the independence of Zimbabwe and by the efforts of Mugabe, not without struggle, to create a viable nation that can take its place on the stage of history. Perhaps even more startling is the coming into being of the European Community as a unified force on the political scene, creating for itself one destiny; one presence across the planet. That is to say, hope takes on structured, concrete form in the world.

Hope is, secondly, a structure. These concrete events in the world open a window for us into the context that is hope.

Hope, thirdly, is a climate, a sense that somehow our time itself has been anointed. This year in Europe we built a relationship with the second largest bank in the world, Credit Agricole in France. We'd done a number of development calls with no success and then someone came up with the idea of inviting Credit Agricole's regional managers, representing 1,500 banks across the nation, to sit down with representatives of all of the Town Meetings in France and think through the future of the rural areas of that country. It was met with deep excitement. One of these managers left the meeting saying, "We have only ten years. We don't have until the end of the century. It's not too late for rural France. But the time to move is now."

In order to meet a development contradiction we approached our six patrons in the six nations we've been working in and said, "Who do you know that hasn't given up on the future, who'd be willing to come to lunch and think through the future of their own nation, the future of this planet?" Seventy-five people from six nations came to those luncheons; people whose hopes for a better world had collapsed, but who had been looking for a way to live the hope that they, nonetheless, had in the future. Finally, a British aristocrat, Lord Harding, was approached for 10,000 dollars from Britain in order to release a grant from the European Community for the Woburn Lawn Project in Jamaica. In a twenty minute meeting, his response was, "For a sign of hope in Jamaica, Yes, I'll get it." And a month later we had the money.

Finally, hope is a style, a posture embodied over against the seeming futility of day to day efforts on behalf of a human future. There are the strange ones in history; the Anwar Sadats, who get on a plane and fly to Jerusalem in the midst of the seeming futility of ever being able to work out relations between Israel and Egypt. Or the Mrs. Gandhis who detonate an atom bomb and launch a satellite, not, in the first instance, for the sake of flexing their muscles, but for the sake of restoring faith in the future for 600 million people.

Another way to talk about these people who embody the hope beyond hope is those of the universal presence. I recall, in my first experience of being anointed to care for my sister, the consciousness that Being was not about to let me stop at that point. I moved on to a point where I would listen to the news or watch it on television and find myself personally involved in every one of those situations. I finally reached a stage where I decided that the only hope for the future would be the selective removal of various of the world's leaders. Fortunately for me, since I don't have the courage to shoot anybody, I encountered the order at about the same time. My decision to join the order was sparked by an encounter with the social process triangles, and the revelation of the existence of pressure points. This was the first time I had seen that it was possible to be responsible for every last human being on the planet.

I'd never been a joiner. So my parents were a little surprised when I said I'd decided to join a religious order. Now, this was not a very opportune time in my family for this decision as my sister's hysteric fits continued every few days. I recall a very emotion-filled meeting with my parents where I indicated that I intended to leave home in ten days and join the order. I recall my father asking, "What about your sister? What about your mother? Don't you care for them?" Without thinking,

I blurted out, "I do care for them, but I care for all the sisters, all the mothers." In that moment, my parents saw that I was gone, that I was a stranger. I was first of all Being's man, not their son. It was a time of incredible emotional pain but I had been captured and there was no going back.

In the midst of this experience when Being rests its hand on your shoulder you see that you have no option but to embrace all of life. It's the new social vehicle or nothing. At the same time in the midst of this experience you find yourself at one with all people who have ever lived. It happened to me first listening to the news and personally agonizing over every separate situation. Later it happened in much more practical form, as it has happened with many of you; boarding an Indian train and going to sleep on the luggage rack only to wake up and discover that to turn over I needed to seek the cooperation of three other people sharing the rack with me. Or going to the toilet, which takes the active participation of every one of the 450 people in the carriage.

Even in the midst of the anguish of deciding to leave a desperate family situation, I found that I could not be what I'd been called to be unless I was able to give everything I had. I felt like I was trying to direct the river of history through a garden hose, that I was going to explode if I couldn't give everything I had.

Finally, I knew there was no other way to be the self that I had been called to be save I presenced the fullness of life in the world. The decision to be this presence, this embodiment of hope for our time, is not, in the first instance, related to joining the order or limited to the order, through I believe that we will see the order grow in the next four years. It's already begun in Europe this past year. Whatever else there has been for us, we have all seen, in the course of the last year, those who, in a shocking way, have joined what I like to call the league of universal presence. I was assigned, much to my surprise, to the Kreuzberg Ost Community Extension Module. As a Developer, I was naturally impatient with an assignment to go and be Operations in a community, but it turned out to be one of the most profound experiences of my life. When I arrived the core of the community was agonizing over whether or not to even hold the event. They were clear, as never before, that if they went ahead with it, they were entering onto the global stage, that the eyes of the world were upon them and what they'd done. Finally, in the midst of a meeting, four or five people stood up and said that they were going to go ahead. The world needed to know what had happened. Two nights later it opened with sixty people around the table. I'm not sure how corporate anointment happens, but at the center of that event was a young man, 25 years old, who gave up his job to work as the project director of the Kreuzberg Ost Human Development Project. It's not limited to Kreuzberg; everything that we've heard about Cannon Ball says that the same thing has happened there. At an international level, what's going on with the European Community points at the same kind of awakenment to the anointedness that just is our time.

I'd like to say a few words now on the dangers. I'd like to call this "Satan" and the temptations of futility. As we all know, Satan strikes at your relationship to the relationship that you take to life. In a time of justification, Satan attacked the embodiment of faith with the despair of emptiness. In a time of sanctification, the attack on the embodiment of love came at the point of the despair of cynicism. In the intensification of these to hope beyond hope, the attack comes at the point of futility of investing your one unique life, day after day, on behalf of the future of local man. But your vision becomes clouded as this attack is pressed home. All you can see is that your life really hasn't made any difference in the last year.

I'd like to point to three specific manifestations of the temptations of futility. The first is , living life at the surface. In response to futility, you narrow your world down until it's two inches wide. You reduce the depth of your life until it's two inches deep. I believe the popular term for this life style today is called "being mellow". It's reducing life to the means of existence and giving your whole being to them. I recall coming out of a particularly difficult development call in Toronto a couple of years ago and encountering Mrs. Mellow at the bottom of the stairs. Her question was, "Where is your smile today?" I walked right over her. I recall working in Area Calcutta where, in the midst of a city of eight million people, we often had conversations in which we tried to persuade ourselves that just being the movement presence in that city was enough.

Secondly, opportunism: Over against futility we take the path of least resistance, of maximum significance. Rather than the global strategy, it becomes whoever knocks first, whichever network likes us best. I recall when, in India, our continental strategy was the recruitment of RS-I and the launching of Primal Community Experiments in four areas. Those of us assigned to the house were off doing Imaginal Education courses that were very enthusiastically received. We even had good-looking Indian high school teachers writing letters to my colleague and I in gratitude to us as individuals and for the course. Or, in development, over against the futility of ever seeing another dollar raised, we drop our transrational systems and chase after good ideas for money.

Thirdly, it's hiding in the corporate, where the team is the life, not me. This is perhaps more subtle than the other two, for the team is the embodiment of hope that the world is waiting for. So this is going to be the point of Satan's strongest attack. It's the flip of status and this has been more my experience during the last year. It's the "no status for me, I'm just a nobody in history, just part of the team", waiting on the general. We used to get deeply offended, some of us, in the Brussels Nexus that the Brussels House would invite people to events, to Ecclesiola, and then take off for Paris and leave the Nexus to host them when it was quite clearly not our job.

I believe the key to sustaining our electedness, our anointment, is the ability to detach ourselves from our situation and self-consciously dialogue with Satan. It's a method of distancing as we now call it. In this regard, our spirit exercises are going to take on a new and crucial form. Going back through some of the old Taking Care of Yourself lectures, I discovered that we had talked about meditation as being such a method, a method which self-consciously grounds you in three different ways. These are a useful screen in the creation of exercises. First, to be grounded in history, to be related to the broad historical thrusts, to be anchored in history, to see your relationship to the people of god. Secondly, to be grounded in humanness, to rehearse the awareness that the dark night and the long march are just the situation of consciousness itself. Thirdly, to be grounded in Being itself, rehearsing the just-thereness of the world of hope.

I believe that of all our spirit exercises the solitary office is going to emerge as the critical one. This is an occasion when we self-consciously trigger the process of brooding which goes on constantly but has to be triggered. I've not done the Corporate Solitary that we've been doing in the evenings, but reading the construct, it appears to be moving in the direction that we require here. I've found that the immediacy of living today often tends to cloud the significance of events until much later. Without the process of brooding constantly, and intentionally being triggered, futility seeps in. This was particularly true of us in Development in Brussels this

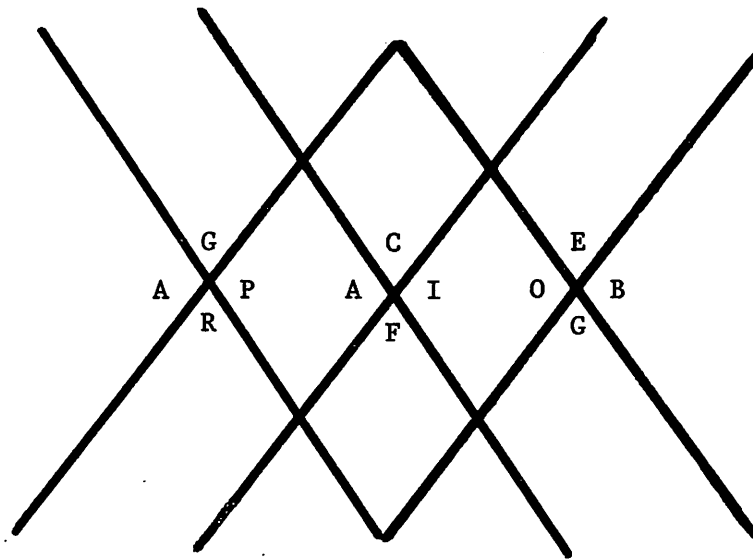
last year where, though we saw that we were headed for our 1.2 million and, in fact, raised it, we somehow felt an emptiness at the center of our year, that we hadn't really done the job that we'd set out to do. In the final reflection on the year, we saw that the significance of our year had been the release of 75 influential individuals to be the presence of hope in our time.

About a month ago, two of us went to visit the director of a company in Europe. He was recommended to us by a patron whose recommendations have always been rather good, so we were looking forward to the call. When we arrived, he had a devastating cold and obviously was of two minds as to whether he could see us. He was sniffing and uncomfortable. We screwed up our courage and launched into our pitch, except that we decided to do something we rarely did this past year, which was to tell the whole story, to illuminate who we are as a religious order. When we came to the end of it he looked at us and said, "That's the most amazing presentation I've ever heard! Why haven't I heard of you before? I've been looking for this for years. This presentation alone must have taken months to prepare. Do you live here in Brussels? Could I come and visit you as a guest?" And it went on like this for a couple of minutes. In the midst of that it was as if a weight had descended on our shoulders, but it did not come as a burden. It came more as a privilege.

Take care of your electedness for the world is watching those of the blue for a sign of hope in the future.

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THE PRESENCE OF HOPE BEYOND HOPE



HOPE BEYOND HOPE

Context
Structure
Climate
Style

THE SPIRIT EXERCISES

Grounding in history
Grounding in humanness
Grounding in being

WORD

All is good
All is approved
All is received
All is possible

DEED

Comprehensive
Archaic
Intentional
Futuric

PRESENCE

Embracing all
One with all
Giving all
Being all

THE TEMPTATIONS

Life at the surface
Opportunism
Hide in the corporate