

WHAT THEN MUST WE DO

Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More serious still we may forget that God was there before our arrival.

The Primal Vision
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I. Introduction

1. My last talking paper, "Towards Profound Ecumenism", dealt with some major contradictions we face as an Order relative to pluriformity and indigenous leadership. This paper is an effort to share my experiences and learnings in the Order with the hope that my colleagues would benefit from them. It gives some helpful pointers to my Western colleagues in dealing with the Eastern style and mindset. It mentions some of the gifts of the Brown, Yellow and White Urs and their usefulness to the world today. I have also tried to convey the image of how we could work collectively using the gifts of the globe. There are some proposals for the future; the vital role of the spirit and the momentous Year of the Order Council.

II. The Six Traits

2. The world has grown so small that whether we like it or not we interrelate and interact with different nations and cultures. The Order has intensified this reality with its living and working with over 35 nations in the last 10 years. Pluriformity has been both a bold and pain-filled experience to us. Yet it is a crucial demonstration to the world that it is possible for people of different races, cultures, religious beliefs and political ideologies to co-exist. The demonstration is on behalf of the conflicting Iranians and Iraqis that they in future may live in peace. It is on behalf of the Christians and Muslims in Beirut that they too could live together, and likewise with the Hindus and Muslims in India. We are demonstrating that it is possible for USSR and USA to live in peace without a global conflict.

3. We have decided to take seriously what it means to live in a global village. We are experimenting and building models on living in a global community. This experimentation is mainly on ourselves as the Order and that is why it is so painful and also difficult to get distance to reflect on what has happened to us. Having lived in the Order for 13 years, six in the States and the rest in the East, I wish to share with my colleagues some important and helpful facts to bear in mind when working in the East. What follows is not new or

unknown to us, nevertheless it could be of some use, I hope. It may even throw some light on why we have not been successful in getting indigenous leaders and also why we fail to communicate at depth level with our colleagues.

4. There are six key helpful traits for anyone working in the East to understanding . They are, (a) winning the heart, (b) underlying relationship, (c) action supersedes word, (d) giving and taking, (e) communal spirit and (f) honouring the other. Let me try and explain these.

5.(a) Winning the Heart

Sometime ago one of our colleagues was assigned to the East. He approached me as he wanted to know something about the culture and the people of the country he was about to enter. We met together over coffee. The first thing I told him was that he had to win the hearts of the people he would be working with. What this means is that in the East the emotional attachment of people is important. In the first instance, people are not interested in your intellectual abilities, or how well you organize and get things done. They will admire these qualities later, but at the start establishing good relationship is key. Your first task is to win them over. Once you have won their hearts, they will be very good friends and see you through thick and thin. You will be their life long friend and will always be welcomed and listened to. If on the other hand you offend them, they will be bad enemies and you will cease to be of any use.

6.(b)Underlying Relationship

The Easterner in relating to life and people uses the rightbrain more than the left. This means that he uses his intuition, feelings and senses in understanding and deciding. This allows him to detect any sense of insincerity or arrogance on the part of the other and this is stored in the mind. behind a smiling face. To the Easterner the attitude, whether it be hostility or sincerity, is of utmost importance even before the act. The approach to a problem is more important than its solution. One of our colleagues once yelled at a Japanese leader before his people and we took many years to recover from that act. There is a tendency for Easterners not to retaliate immediately or openly disagree. Do not mistake this passive facade to be a sign of acceptance or weakness on his part or permission for you to do as you please. If you do, sooner or later you will find out that you were mistaken. Once a colleague went recruiting for RS-I in India. He approached 25 people who said yes to him. When the day arrived he was the only one present!

7.(c)Action Supersedes Word

It is not how well you state your case nor your well thought through model that counts in the long run. You may not even have stated your proposals, but if you have personally demonstrated them, then you are likely to have a following in India. Gandhi through the demonstration of his style, his dress, his fasting, his living with

the poor and his spinning cotton, communicated to the masses in India more effectively than all the words he spoke or wrote. There is a tendency on the part of some of our colleagues to spend a great deal of time trying to gain rational clarity before implementation. I am not saying that we should not have rational, clear models, we need them especially in India. What I am trying to get across is that the Brown person is more interested in practical involvement than getting absolute rational clarity on a theoretical model. To him involvement is the key and his motivation. Naming the act is of secondary importance and it is not a prerequisite for action. Have you tried to get an Indian to explain why he fasts, rubs ash on his forehead or the meaning of the numerous festivals and rituals? What is his usual response --- a shrug, a nod and a smile. To him it is enough that he has participated in the redeeming act. To our Western colleagues naming and rational understanding is a prerequisite for action and the source of motivation. It is extremely important to realise these differences so that we could take advantage of them in the local situation and not be blinded by our parochialism.

8. (d) Giving and Taking

In the East people have a tremendous capacity to take life as it comes. They live out of the indicative rather than the imperative. Bultman's statement of the mysterious power that gives life and takes life away is an all too familiar and fundamental basis of relating to all of life. This attitude of give and take is exercised in the apparent chaos of road traffic and in crowded bus and railway stations, to name a few situations. Surprisingly there is order in the chaos or none of us would have survived. There is a sense of respect for the individual and quiet dignity in the ever present masses of people. There is no question of winning all the time or losing all the time. Today you win and tomorrow you lose; that's the way life is. There is a negative aspect to this attitude in accepting one's situation too readily and not wanting to do much to improve or change. The gift, however, is flexibility and accommodation and a rigid moralistic approach comes as a jarring intrusion. Have you ever tried bargaining for an article in the market? If you have, you know what I am talking about. If you have not, then try it sometime and you will get clarity on this ritual of taking and giving.

9. (e) The Communal Spirit

The communal spirit is very strong in the East. The family, the extended family, the clan, the village or the community is very much an integral part of the daily life of the people. There is no welfare system. Families shoulder the responsibility of caring for the needy members. There is very little scope for individualized space or possessions, except for the rich. The corporate style is symbolized by the round dining table and by the large bowls of food from which each individual serves his particular bowl, making sure that there is enough food to go round. This is a common sight in Chinese homes and small businesses where all the workers eat together. In Malaysia anytime a friend meets you in a restaurant he

is sure to invite you to join him as a sign of courtesy. Sometimes even a stranger sitting at a table may invite you to share his food with you. At a wedding the total community not only participates but also helps in the preparation of the festivities. If we are not careful our individualistic approach may violate the corporate body.

10. (f) Honouring the Other

This is a subtle set of modes of relations from a symbolic yes to saving face and honouring the symbolic. I don't intend to go into all the intricacies or pretend to know a great deal. Let me state that in honouring the other you honour yourself. The other is part of you and in destroying the other you destroy yourself. There is no one-man wrestling. Wrestling is only possible with the other. Wrestlers begin by bowing to each other, wrestle, and end by bowing. The victor to the vanquished and the vanquished to the victor. Many a time our insensitivity and ignorance is akin to a bull in a China shop.

11. Let me give a practical example of an incident to illustrate how an Easterner and a Westerner approached a certain situation. A few days ago I had to cut a circle in a sheet of plexiglass for decor. I borrowed a mechanical saw from a colleague who suggested that I do the cutting in the Guild Hall where a table was set up during the weekend. When I arrived at the Guild Hall, there was a group getting ready to clean. Immediately I was told not to work there, but to go to the basement. The cleaning could have started at the opposite end of the Hall and by the time they reached my end I would have completed my job and been out of the way. Acting on my attitude of give and take I suggested to my colleague to accommodate me for a short while by allowing me to do the job. Being a rational human being with his clear cut model in mind he was not about to accommodate anyone and retorted by asking why I couldn't accommodate him by going to the basement. I would have but for the fact that it was easier for me to do the job there and then and not be in anyone's way. I told him so without much avail. On reflection, the interesting part of this incident is how each of us approached the situation through our particular characteristic mindset. His approach was rational and direct without any deviation and rightfully so. I used the flexible approach of give and take and I too was right. What was helpful to me about the whole affair was how I saw his approach and the analysis of my approach. This knowledge was a releasing experience to me.

III The Gifts of Three Urs

12. As we strive to live peacefully in this global village, I want to highlight a unique gift of the Brown Ur which could go a long way towards making this globe more safe and peaceful. It is the gift of co-existence. Co-existence acknowledges the validity of different ideologies, religions and beliefs without considering them to be a threat but as part and parcel of life. It acknowledges the fact that we can exist without trying to destroy each other or take sides. In the fifties at the height of the cold war between

capitalism and communism, nations were categorised as either supporting one camp or the other. Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, stood up and said that there was a third alternative, neutrality, and that India would have relations with both the USA and USSR. Since then there has been the development of the 3rd World block countries as a helpful buffer between the two world powers. The point I am trying to make is that the world has had for thousands of years different races, cultures, political beliefs, and religions and will continue to be so and there can be no domination by any one system. The Brown Ur, which sees the world as a unified whole, is a tremendous gift which offers the possibility for human beings to co-exist and even benefit by the differences by drawing from the rich human heritage rather than separation and conflict. Now more than ever before the world needs to hear this.

13. Not long ago I attended a banquet down town. The subject of Hong Kong and 1997 arose. The British had leased Hong Kong from the Chinese and the lease expires in 1997 when it will revert to China. Negotiations between the two countries are currently going on. The Chinese want to claim sovereignty over Hong Kong but not lose the capitalist system that has made Hong Kong a global financial, trade and communications centre and biggest dollar earner for Red China. The feeling round the table was that China could not have it both ways. It was either communism or capitalism. At this point I interjected and said not necessarily so. The Chinese could accept Hong Kong with its capitalist system with some changes. In fact they had already established a trade zone on the China, Hong Kong border fashioned after the capitalist system as an experiment. The point of this illustration is that the Yellow Ur with its complementary dualism can accept the other and make it work. It is not either black or white, but black and white and both. Always maintaining a balance is also another gift of the Yellow Ur. Reagan's recent visit to China illustrates this aspect. The Chinese by welcoming Reagan signalled to the Russians that they were friendly with Russia's enemy. However all Reagan's remarks against the Russians were censored. This was their way of maintaining the balance by not falling totally into the US camp or totally alienating themselves from USSR. The Yellow Ur's gift of complementary dualism and balance could be a great gift to humankind today.

14. The White Ur's power of rationality, organization and technical ability is a marvelous gift to the globe. The practical implementation of our presupposition that all the earth belongs to all the people lies in the hands of the White Ur. Their gifts are the key to unlocking the world's resources and making them available to every human being on this planet. It is the means by which every human being has the possibility of realizing his or her potential. Imagine the great loss of human resources caused by hunger, malnutrition, disease and unnecessary premature deaths. The resources are present, the technical know how and organization are there, and the world is desperately waiting to bridge the gap within the human species.

IV. Mutual Co-creators

15. Up to this point in our history there has been a one way trend. Basically, white Christians moving out to the rest of the globe provide the leadership, sustenance and polity. About five to six years ago the composition of the Order began to change with more non-Westerners joining and Westerners leaving . At present about one third of the Order are from outside the States. About two-thirds of the Order and its activities are outside this continent. The time has come to look very closely at ourselves in order to make some very basic changes. For us to be truly global it is required of us to be multifarious in unity. By this I mean that we have to be open and even pursue the many gifts and wisdom that are present in the globe and utilize them for our missional purpose. We are required to work with the East and the South and be co-creators of the global mission. We cannot pretend to be the sole arbiters and inheritors of wisdom to be passed down to others. We need to interact with the multi-faceted globe with all its human richness to create the authentic new.

16. How do we prepare ourselves to meet the new challenges before us? What do we need to do to play this new role? One thing we could do is to require all those who have served in another culture to write what they have learned about its people and culture. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the people? How can their strength be used to make the mission more effective and bring about constructive change. Latin America has done some work in this direction. More of this needs to be done in other areas of the globe and the learnings shared with the total Order.

17. Every Order member needs to take the Ur Images course. We should teach it and ground it with our experiences with other cultures. We need to use it as an effective tool and make it available to others. The Ecumenics Course newly developed by the Global Academy needs to be worked on and taught to the Order. A study of the dynamics of movements in history might give us some clues to the dynamics of change and renewal. We could use the cultural triangles as a screen to get a better grasp of the local and national situation.

18. For the past 16 years our perspective has been from the global to the local. Globally developed programs like RS-1, the Local Church Experiment, the Human Development Projects, planning and training methods were directed to the local. Most of the Order came from the globe to the local. What if we changed our perspective and began with the local, moving slowly to the global in the next 16 years? What if we designed our missional thrust standing in the local? What if we drew our economic and human resources from the local? What would it take to release local creativity and leadership lying dormant at our feet?

V. Some Future Directions

19. We need to get all our non-Western Order colleagues on board.

We need to operate out of a common fundamental context. Many are clear on our missional intent but have little or no understanding on how we operate as on Order. The secular-religious aspect of our being is crucial for them to understand. They need to know how our economics work and our structures for care for children and education. They need to know the polity dynamic and the power at the center of the table. When these are known then we can expect them to participate and contribute in the corporate struggle of being the Order.

20. Economic self-sufficiency is foundational. Every house needs to be self supporting. Regular stipends and funds for children's education and health care are a must. This may be extremely difficult in some countries. We have yet to fully explore all the options in these places. I mentioned some concrete ways of doing this in my last paper. The time has come for us to create the economic structures that will care for every member of the global family Order.

21. Before we started the Human Development Projects we taught courses in the cities and churches out of which came people who joined the Order. These were educated people in business and professions and were readily trained to play leadership and priorship roles. We need to work with the four sectors in the urban areas and tap from this pool of educated talent for indigenous leadership. It takes many years to train a village person.

22. The next direction is difficult to understand and even more difficult for us to implement. I have already alluded to this earlier. How do we incorporate local wisdom and modes in all our planning and implementation? What does an authentic Order ashram look like in India? What is its equivalent in Africa? We could benefit by exploring and studying experiments done by others in this arena. Leading intellectuals and spirit gurus might be able to help us. We need to be courageous enough to try some experimentation.

23. Here is a direction for training indigenous priors. What if we selected 15 to 20 indigenous experienced colleagues, this summer, and paired them with experienced priors for a year's assignment, after which the indigenous prior would take over? What other training or journeying methods could we use? I remember in 1975 we had a corporate deanery of an American, an Australian and a Malaysian and pulled off a great ITI.

VI. Spirit is Key

24. The only way to accomplish the impossible task before us is through the spirit. This has got to do with humility which reminds me of my contingency as I stand before the Mystery. Repentance allows me to take new relationships, to trust and to surrender to the will of God. We are a forgiven people even before we ask it, and because we are forgiven we are reconciled with each other and with God.

25. We experience pain and doubt as we experiment with liturgy. We will continue to experience meaninglessness as we leave behind familiar liturgies and reach out for new ones. The important thing to remember is that throughout history the religious have always participated corporately in a common liturgy that rehearses the Word before the Mystery. This is why we continue to struggle with liturgy.

26. The Order to sustain itself in the long haul has participated in spirit intensification exercises at regular intervals. In the past we have done the watch, the fast, solitary exercises and the Odyssey to mention a few. These exercises have played a major role in the life of the religious, and we will be doing ourselves a dis-service if we neglect them. We need to do more work in this arena. As each individual intensifies his engagement in the mission, there needs to be a parallel development in the life of the spirit. The holy life is as important as our prowess in social methods and skills. We need to discern the marks of the spirit life and intentionalize them.

27. In the past we continuously rehearsed the word by recruiting and teaching RS-1. How do we inject this dynamic as we go about our day to day activity? How do we occasion the RS-1 happening in the life of those we encounter daily? How is my life a demonstration of RS-1? What is the new form of RS-1?

VI. The Destinal Moment

28. The coming together of the total order this year of the Order Council is no accident. We have arrived at a destinal moment in the life of the Order. The Council is a watershed event. We stand at the brink. Will we make the plunge? Will we have the courage to move in bold new ways? Will we have the resolve to push through to new vistas, and will we have the undergirding of the spirit to strengthen and sustain us?