

Closing Address: TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

We have worked with three campaigns this summer. Campaign one is Town Meeting, or profound awakening, and the image that holds it for me is "Fire upon the Earth". Campaign two is Social Demonstration, or historical engagement, and my image is "Journey to the Center of Care". Campaign three is Intra Global Movement, the "Campaign of the Not Yet". That one is probably held best by the group working on Strategic Essays except all of us have been participating in this invisible campaign.

Through the spirit life of the summer we have laid a screen of tactical thinking upon these three campaigns. Resting on even more primordial ground is the insight that the winning general is a man of the Tao. The man of the Tao is a person of the Dark Night and the Long March who lives out of faith. Before we leave this assembly I thought I would just remind us of the Dark Night and Long March and that we live out of faith. Since studying the general, this particular passage has come back to me with white hot heat:

"Finally then, find your strength in the Lord, in his mighty power.
Put on all the armour which God provides,
So that you may be able to stand firm against the devices of the devil. For our fight is not against human foes, but cosmic powers, against authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the super-human forces of evil in the Heavens.
Therefore, take up God's armour; Then you will be able to stand your ground when things are at their worst, to complete every task and still to stand.
Stand firm, I say. Fasten on the belt of truth;
For coat of mail put on integrity;
let the shoes on your feet be the gospel of peace, to give you firm footing;
And, with all these, take up the great shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

I heard a few days ago that a young couple left the Order. They were not an ordinary couple to me. You could look into her eyes and see the depths of the spirit and he could really get things done in a fantastic way. He ran circles around me and yet they are gone. I ask myself, "Why? Why?"

The shift into global mission, into building the whole earth puts the weight of the planet upon us. When we were out to build a Movement, we built something we could control, something that seemed manageable and something that we could get our minds around. But when you are out to build the earth, there is no stopping, no way to release the pressure and no way to get away from it. And that very struggle makes giants out of some of us. We know how to do things we never knew how to do before. A clergyman I talked to recently said that all his life he had thought of himself as a lowly creature. You can see how the collapse of the symbol system and our culture has allowed him to see himself as a second class

citizen. Then he said, "I have been meeting people on these Town Meeting circuits. In the largest city where I have been to work on Town Meeting, the mayor wants me to serve as a key man on his council. Nothing like that has happened to me before in my life. And I know I can do the job." That type of thing is taking place over and over again and brand new temptations come to us and the Dark Night and the Long March are radically intensified.

It is almost as if we forgot what we have been through. When we began working with the Dark Night a few years ago, it was a great struggle and great pain for us. But when we got through our first bout all right, we seemed to think perhaps we could forget about it. That doesn't happen, of course.

I recall how we used to say that we never get over our birth. It did not mean too much to me then, although existentially I felt it. But several years ago when Joseph Campbell spelled out the terrifying images the newborn infant has on its journey through the birth canal, you got a terrifying picture of what goes on in each of our minds upon being born. A similar thing has been brought about by the Dark Night and the Long March. It is like a siren that goes off in the midst of our being. It wails to the highest pitch until we cannot handle it. We take that siren down to the bottom of the basement and bury it under layers and layers and layers of earth until we cannot hear its scream.

It is no wonder we talk about our solitary space being gone or our spirit depths having dried up. Yet there is a sense of comfort. We feel we have passed through the Dark Night and the Long March and now we are getting along pretty well. But then, some small happening takes place and explodes the whole abyss of our being wide open. We stand exposed to the radical intensification of the Dark Night and the Long March. It feels like that quote: "Despair is like a man-eating tiger waiting around the turn of the corner to pounce on you."

We have moved miles into the spirit deeps. We are not even able to keep up with our experiential wisdom in that realm. You get the feeling now that it can only be interpreted through stories that, although you never understood the meaning of them, you knew in some way that they were about the human dimension of life. It is like walking on burning coals or participating in the trial by fire.

The issue of taking care of yourself has been discussed again and again and what we have said has been extremely helpful. In the turn to the world, we have seen that only through radical engagement can we talk about taking care of ourselves. To attempt to do that without engagement is catastrophe. But engagement is not enough.

We have also talked about the necessity for symbols in taking care of ourselves. We would not last at all without participating in the Daily Office, in the rites and in the rituals we have created. That is gives us a base for being the Order, for being a Movement. But that is not enough.

We also talked about meditation, talking with the great heros of the past, in our memories and history, that sit on our meditative council. Without these friends we would not have made it. But that is not enough.

There is another element but what that element is I am not quite sure. We need to understand that whatever it is, it has to do with the clothes of RS-I or, if you will, the clothes of faith. How do you, every morning, constantly put on or clothe yourself in the faith out of which to live that day? Last summer a colleague was telling us all how he gets up early every morning and strides down the halls speaking to everybody. My God, I am sure he didn't feel like striding and I am sure that he didn't feel like speaking to everybody, but he was doing it to take care of himself. And incidently, each person has to weld out his own symbols.

The other day I saw a friend of mine that I used to know long ago. He is in his forties but he was shuffling along like an old man, and I thought, "He's forgotten to take care of himself." And so, we clothe ourselves in faith, always intensifying our consciousness of that final relationship that is always there. And, if we miss even one morning of clothing ourselves with faith we are double down, and if we miss two we are squared into the abyss, and if we miss three we are cubed. And then one day we wake up and we are surprised at ourselves, for we find that we have our two suitcases in our hands and are standing outside of the situation, gone, just GONE. And we hadn't growled externally about the situation, we hadn't argued, we hadn't screamed, we just woke up one day and found ourselves gone.

Each day we rise naked as the day we were born and have to put on the garb of faith anew. We start anew; we are raised up anew. You know, someone my age who has been in the Order a couple thousand years, who knows all I have known and has experienced all I have experienced, has been where I have been, has been trained like I have been trained, should be able to sit back now and rest on his laurels or his symbolism or whatever. That might seem right and fine, but let me tell you something: before the Lord that idea is a pile. In the turn to the world I am just as much a babe as a brand new intern, and I wet my diapers more than they do because of the collapse of all I thought I knew. And you wonder why you didn't know that would happen when your world changed. Oh, you knew it, but you didn't KNOW it, You hadn't embodied it. You hadn't enfleshed it.

The Community Forum post was assigned to raise \$500,000 in one quarter last winter. What a fiasco it turned out to be; what a humiliation. Why just this week a large international bank committed \$50,000 to Town Meeting. That is twice as much as we had raised to that point on our \$500,000 drive. What a humiliation that quarter was - but what a gift. Now, you say that is a decision. Of course it is, but on the other side of a decision is creation itself. There is a whole new picture that what life is all about is having to start over. It is not that it happened last winter but that it is a rough terrible shocking thing that will happen over and over again.

Sun Tzu, in the Art of War, talks about taking care of yourself when he talks about knowing yourself and knowing your enemy. We recently saw a movie about Harry Truman. He was a man who had thought himself through to the bottom and had grasped a clarity about who he was and what he was out to fight in this world. You could say he was part of a society that existed before society's morés started to collapse -- the last man of another era, so to speak. Today we wake up with collapsed images of who we are and what it means to be in the midst of the world we

are in. Any idiot -- and I am not talking about Truman here -- can know who he is in the Greek sense when the morés of society are glued together and tell him at every moment who he is. But we live in a time of collapse and resurgence which are both equally shattering and therefore cannot possibly have clarity. Yet, as men of faith we live in the midst of the good creation no matter what it is the Lord gives us, period. That is what it means to have clarity.

I have clarity on who I am; I tell you I have clarity. Now that doesn't mean I don't have flaws or that you can't see the radical changes I ought to make here or there or that I am not constantly homeless and homesick and wandering around with no place in this world to anchor my life. But I tell you, I have clarity that that is my life . . . my LIFE . . . my one unrepeatable life to live.

I say I don't have clarity about my family. Yet I stand up and I speak back to that. What do you mean? You bet I have clarity about my family. Again, you can see the flaws and the difficulties in the roles of the male and the female and you can see that the family doesn't bring fulfillment, finally, at all. But I tell you, my family is my life . . . my LIFE. And I intend it to be my life - my life in its fullest.

You say I don't know my vocation or my paravocation or my task in this Order. But, I tell you, I do have clarity. That doesn't mean that I don't wake up feeling like I am on the outside looking through a peephole into where everybody else is at the center of what is going on, or that I am not always stumbling on myself being finally ineffective and not coming off as need be. But by God, what I am doing is my life . . . my LIFE . . . how can I say it? . . . MY LIFE! I have clarity.

When you say you have clarity it does not mean you are boasting or that you are indulging in temporal hope, it is just fact -- fact that is borne out whether you know your ground or your stance -- on whether you are clothing your Dark Night/Long March self in faith, or whether you are taking care of yourself.

Sun Tzu has been great, hasn't he? Expecially when he says that only a person of the Tao can be a successful general. When you live at the center of life beyond contradiction, there lies perfect action: perfect action that is inaction but then, incidently, out of which all right action flows. Isn't that great? I would like to convert that into our own language if I may. It is this: When are you and I going to learn that there is only one thing you and I have to deal with for the rest of our lives and that is God, period. That is all. I don't even like to use the word mystery here. It seems too benign. Rather, the mysterious power, Yahweh, that rips and snorts through our lives.

Yet, once we live before that One everything else is added to it. Or, when you get the "poursoi" nailed down, then the "ensoi" is there. It is given back to you. I like the way Paul put it: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." So the rest of our lives is to be spent in fear and trembling: working as people who foul up their diapers, working as people who have to become like little children again, struggling - struggling - struggling - and it is always going to be a wrestling with your Long March role, your Long March generalship,

your Long March family, your Long March assignment, your Long March vocation, your Long March social demonstration, your Long March community forum.

There is no end. It is just a march. That is all it is. A March. There is no fulfillment. No effectivity. No rest. No end but heaven. But that is to be on the march.

Well, as I said, I just wanted to remind you of the Dark Night and the Long March and that we live out of faith. Take up "the great shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one." You are going to get shot at this year and you are going to get scorched, but if you enclose your naked self in faith you will be safe. May our corporate prayer for this year be that we all be faithful to our task and that we take care of ourselves.

And, incidently, I'll see you next year.