

January 21, 1971

SPIRIT CONVERSATIONS

1. The Spirit Revolution that we are in is trying to do three things, one, it is trying to recover the Scriptures; the second thing it is going to do is to recover the layman; and the third thing it is going to do is to recover popular preaching. We have been experimenting with popular preaching probably for a long time, and didn't know what we were doing, until we got clear that that was going to be recovered. One of the areas of popular preaching, one of the first places we got really clear on that is in the Spirit Conversations.

2. We've talked about what happens in lots of different ways. One is that it is a metamorphosis that goes on in the interior being. Another way we talk about it is that it is a re-sensitizing of ourselves to the spirit deeps. That is kind of abstract. The re-sensitizing yourself to the experience of the awe which is the foundational experience of all your affections - fear and fascination. We've talked about it as creating a whirlpool within your interior being. I like the word metamorphosis, in which everything is changed but nothing is different.

3. If you draw an upside down triangle -- you have got the objective dimension of interior being over here and you have the subjective dimension, or if you'd rather use a word like the psyche dimension of the interior being - or the existential maybe. I sometimes put existential here to get rid of the kind of - subject object kind of thing - as though that were two emphasis - it's one entity that you are talking about. Then you have the transparent dimension of the interior being.

4. Now the subjective dimension is made up first of all of your operating images. All of us have within our interior being certain images that we operate out of. Take the images of male. What does it mean to be a male? I've discovered in the midst of all this that the images I operate with of maleness come from my grandfather. I never knew that before. The more we went into these spirit conversations, the more it was disclosed to me that every time I had to make a decision about what it meant to be a male, I found I was operating out of the images of my grandfather whom I spent a couple of summers with when I was very very young. What you are dealing with then in the spirit conversations is the basic operating images of the human being. You begin to get the feeling of the seriousness of this kind of business. The second thing you are dealing with is the accompanying affections. I'm not talking here about feelings so much as foundational affections. These are the affections that every human being deals with - the fear and fascination of the experience of the mystery of human existence, or the foundation of all of our affections is our creatureliness which is experienced as fear and fascination, as dread - as awe. The third thing you are dealing with is decision. It is the third level down of decisions. You make a self conscious decision here, or you self consciously do something - decide you are going to do something. Or, there is the level below that in which you are just self conscious of the imperative that you are going to have to do something. And then there is a third level in the decision before the decision. The decision underneath every single decision. This is where your freedom lies. The free man is the man who creates his own context that is a man of prayer - a man who intentionalizes his own internality, or he is the man who at the bottom doesn't allow anything else to create his own context except his own intentionality. This is the pre-disposition, I sometimes call this your stance toward life. When you are dealing with the spirit conversations you are dealing with decisions on this level. You decide your context, and out of your context comes what ever you decide. This is decision at the very base of decision. That is what you are dealing with here in interior dimension. You are creating, or you are tampering with a persons fundamental operating context.

5. Now that is the subjective part of the interior being that you are dealing with. Then you have what I call the objective. That is made up first of all of just the events of your life. We call them episodic events. There are certain events in your life that inform or that make up your interior being. We often remember the ones that were meaningful, but deep down at the bottom of our being there are events which are meaningful to us which we don't even realize are meaningful to us. One of the things you are out to do is to recover those events. One way you talk about what you are doing here is that you are recovering your memory. What are the episodic events that you are able to bleed the meaning out of. These are the events where - for some reason or other - the meaning that was in them from the foundation of the earth was bled out of them and delivered to your self-consciousness. Then you

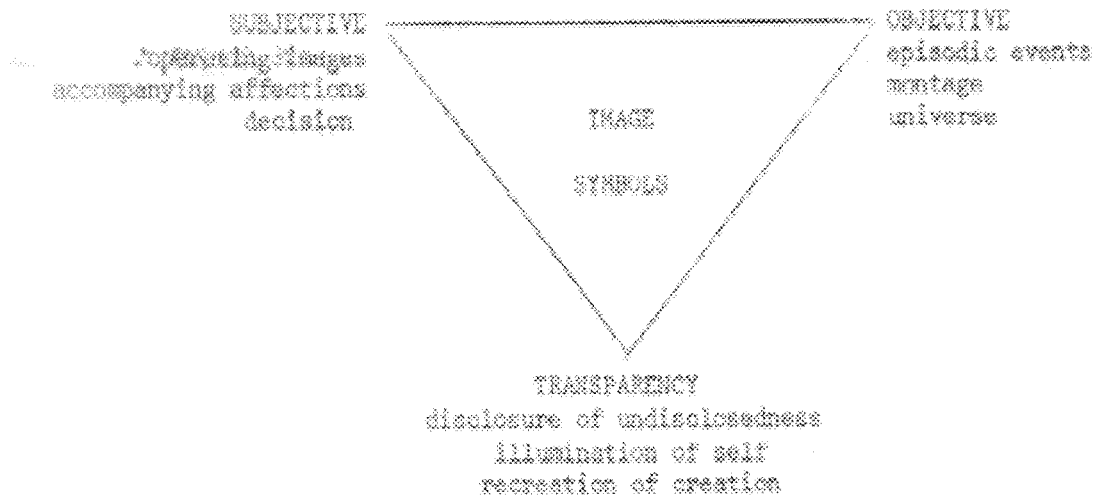
have the montage. Your montage is made up of all those events or all those pictures. All those episodic events form the images and affections make up your objective montage in your interior being. Then your universe - the world or picture that you have - the common picture of the universe is also his picture of what mankind itself is. That is what you are dealing with.

6. I don't know how to draw that ---I used to draw different shapes up here to represent operating images of the way things fit together. Down here at the bottom I always put symbols ---symbols are the keystone in the midst of your interior being that holds everything together. When ever anything pulls apart in your interior being it means your symbols have in some way collapsed. What these conversations are to do is to get your images and montages loose- or to get them spinning so that they can be re-arranged in a more depth experience of self-consciousness. It is to get your montage or operating images spinning in such a velocity that you are blown open into a new context-blown open to a new universe -- blown open to a new grasp of a new depth of self-consciousness. Now when that happens you are blown open to the transparency of life -- we say the bottom is blown out of your being.

7. Blown open to the transparent dimension of humanness and that is the focus of this model -- the disclosure of the undisclosedness -- or the disclosure of God. God is always that which is undisclosed so you say the disclosure of the undisclosedness. You experience awe -- you experience mystery -- you experience the fear and fascination of your existence at the bottom of your existence.

8. Secondly, the illumination of the self -- in which your self is illuminated. I don't mean there that you know something new about yourself. It is not that you have new data about yourself -- its kind of like the Old Testaments knowing -- or man knows his wife -- or sort of like the penetration into the deeps of your own being. It is where you know what you know -- you know your own being. Illumination of the self-who it is that you are is known or illuminated.

9. The third dimension is the recreation of creation. That's hard to talk about. In this experience everything is recreated -- everything is made new -- everything is transformed. The Bible says that "all things are made new." That is probably the hardest one to talk about. Every single aspect of your life and of the whole universe is somehow made new. What you are out to do then, you see, is to create a spinning or a whirlpool that gets the montage moving and blows your interior being out into the transparency of this being and thereby gives your self-hood -- your self-consciousness back to you in a brand new way. That is the basic theory behind what we are doing in the spirit conversations -- as best we have been able to grasp it. I realize that this is a rough draft of what is going on that we are just now struggling with.



10. What I want to do now to get clarity on this is to layout for you the operating principles in doing a spirit conversation. The only way we are going to discover this is by doing it -- and not spend more time on the theory except as we come back and talk about it in relationship to actually doing a spirit conversation. Then I went to layout the format of a spirit conversation.

11. The first operating principle in these conversations is the ontological. You are not dealing with the person's morals, you are not dealing with his feelings. You are not dealing with his abstract view of life. You are dealing with his being itself. You are not dealing with his philosophy of life, you are not dealing with his psychological make-up, but with his Being. You are dealing with objective awe. The objective experience of awe. You are dealing with the fundamental relationship -- with the relationship which is the fundamental relationship which defines what it means to be a human being. That is a person's relationship to the fear and fascination of his own existence. To put it theologically his relationship to God. This is his Be that you are dealing with and not any part of his being.

12. The second operating principle in doing these is that you always have to come in a side door. You cannot go at this head on -- you can't go in and announce to someone that you're going to deal with his being. You can't go in and announce to somebody that you are going to get his operating images spinning or, "look baby, I'm going to whirl your montage." It's sort of like how at night you can see out of the side of your eyes when you can't see straight ahead -- you can only deal with this tangentially. You have to be looking way over here -- or get him looking about a half mile down the road then you come in and twist his montage. You get to talking about something that is apparently totally irrelevant to his montage or his being or his universe and then you spin that. That's why this is probably the key to popular preaching. It is what you can do while you are sitting in your office talking about -- whatever it is you talk about in offices. How we buy the next 3000 of -- what ever it is you buy. How is it that while you are dealing with that you start interior being spinning. Anyway you come in the side door - tangential -- you know what a tangent is.

13. The third operating principle is that it is always a groan -- and by that I mean you have to deal with something that you don't have wrapped up. If the group senses at this is something that you are struggling with at the bottom of your being -- unless they sense this is something you are just groaning about -- then it is not a spirit conversation. Unless it is something that's got you spinning then it is not something that is going to grab the group -- unless the group senses that you are out beyond your limits in the midst of this -- unless the group senses that you haven't wrapped this up in a box -- that it is something that you are in agony about -- you've already been scarred by the struggle -- nobody else is going to come into the water with you.

14. The fourth operating principle -- the code word is passion -- or entice in parentheses. Unless the group senses that you are passionately involved in it they aren't going to get into the conversation and start spinning. Another way of saying that is that what you are out to do is to entice them into the water. And the way you entice them into the water is that they sense that this is something you are passionate about -- something that is a life and death issue for you -- not something you are toying with on an intellectual level -- not something that you are just mildly interested in -- you are passionately engaged in.

15. The fifth operating principle is that it has got to come out of your own experience. You've got to have dealt with this in your own experience before you can lead someone else into it. And it is not like you have wrapped it up but that you have mastered it in the sense that you have pushed it down to the bottom. You are still in the whirl of it, but you have mastered it in so far as you are capable of it at this point. You've pushed it to the bottom of your own experience.

16. The sixth one and this one is maybe the most important. I just use the word universal. This has gotten clear in the Bible conversations what you are talking about here. The guru in the conversation never confesses his own experience. He takes his own experience and he translates that into the experience of mankind. That is he shares

with the group his own experience -- it is never a confessing of his being. It is where he has taken his experience and pushed it to the bottom of humanness itself. The way we talk about it in the Bible conversations is you see your own spirit journey and then you see through your own spirit journey to the journey of man. The guru, as part of the conversation, has to get out his own experience, but never confessing his experience, he is sharing the experience of mankind himself. You've taken your experience and translated that into the experience of every man. You could go back and talk about that in terms of bleeding -- where you take your experience and drain the foundational meaning out of your experience -- then it becomes the objective experience of every single human being across the globe. That is maybe the most important next to the ontological category.

17. The seventh operating principle that I would list is that this is a soliloquy. It is a story told by one person. It's like it is only one conversation going on. Nobody ever says anything but the guru, but the guru that is leading the conversation says it through the mouths of the other people. Like he puts everybody in a trance and then he calls on certain people to pronounce the oracle. By that you mean that the guru is always in charge or in control of the conversation. It is not just an open discussion. It is always the guru calling forth the experience. The conversation is always open ended and completely uncontrolled, but at the same time the guru is always controlling it. It's uncontrollable and anything and lots of things can happen, but it is always the guru is doing the talking. That is a little confusing, but I think that will come to you.

18. The eighth operating principle is that you never turn corners. It is always curves. These conversations as opposed to the art form conversation where you are going this direction and all of a sudden you turn a corner. In the art form conversation you have the objective, then the reflective, then you turn a corner into the subjective, the interpretive. This conversation always goes in curves- very slow curves -- it's like all of a sudden going in another direction but you didn't know where you started going in the other direction. We'll come back to talk about how that happens.

19. The ninth operating principle is that the conversation is a spectrum of one reality. By that I mean it's circular -- it has only one focus. It has lots and lots and lots of questions, but it only asks one question. It has lots and lots and lots of innuendoes but it really is only doing one single thing with many many different kinds of facets.

20. The tenth operating principle is that you have in the midst of it a pearl. Every conversation has one direct pedagogical push in which you break into the conversation. At the appropriate time you drop a pearl. Sometimes people never even know it happened. It's more like just suddenly your context is expanded -- suddenly your universe is given a whole new picture. But it is the one pedagogical push that you stick into this conversation at the moment of highest intensity. The conversation begins to build -- it reaches its highest intensity -- you slip in your pearl and then you atop. They are left hanging in mid-air. The pearl is the one direct pedagogical shove that you put into the conversation. -

21. Maybe we should look at the format now. In the format -- first of all you have the question and then you have lots of other questions, but they are really the question in disguise. You begin the conversation with the questions -- first of all you ask the question -- and then you do some patter and then ask your question then there is a period of silence. This is generally not helpful. The only time that silence is helpful is when it is a screaming silence. If it is an embarrassing silence or if it is just a vacuum the silence can destroy or tend to negate your conversation. The way your format begins is that you somehow raise the question. They may not even know that you've raised the question directly -- though I like to raise it directly. I like to say something like, "I've been wondering lately -- why is it that I just hate to go up on high places?" Then they are thinking about that and I tell a story about how I got sick one day on a high place. They are just waiting to tell you about their experience of why they don't like to go up on high places. That wasn't a good example or the key question. My question on the conversation on heights is, "I've been wondering lately what it is about heights that make a person more deeply human." Then I tell a story about heights, but they are thinking about heights and then they are ready to answer your question.

22. I called the second part patter but what your patter is is setting your context for your conversation. Then you ask the questions. After I've said my question and they are thinking about their experiences of heights while I tell my story -- then I may ask a question like, "When was the last time you were on a high place?" Or a question like "Do you ever get sick on high places?" Or, "Think of one time you were on a high place." -- "Now forget that and think of another one." There are various ways you could begin to ask this one question. You see that these questions in one way or another are always asking the question. Your format has another item called turning

context. That's what I meant about the curves. You've asked your question, set your context and then you started one line of questioning. Now some questions about heights are different than other questions about heights. It seems to me -- I've not quite figured out why -- some questions seem to fit together and flow as a series of questions and then there are other questions that flow together as a series of questions and then there are other questions that flow together as a series of questions. You can't go from this series to that series without putting in a turning context. Otherwise it becomes a wrenching experience and it doesn't flow. Everytime you wrench them you lose the spinning. You wrench and the spinning stops and you've got to start the spinning again.

23. Then you've got your series of questions. Some where in your conversation you want to have questions that go brrrrrrrrrrrr. You may ask one question and let one person answer it -- and just as another person is getting the first word out of his mouth you ask the next question. Then you may not even let any body answer that question and you ask another question. And then another -- and another -- and another. Sometimes with just going brrrrrrrrrr with questions it will explode the imagination in a way that having a person stop and reflect on a question will not do. You are never after in a spirit conversation reflective wisdom. You are after immediate wisdom. You could put that down as one of the operating principles if you wanted to have eleven, but I decided to have ten so I have that over under methodological principles. I generally do my series of questions after I've dropped my pearl. I don't think that is necessarily true-you might do it in two places, if you have time enough to get that many questions together, it uses a lot of questions. Sometimes it takes a long time to think of questions.

24. The sixth part of your format is your pearl. The key is to know when and how to drop it. What you are doing in this conversation is contemplation, meditation, and prayer. This means that this is not an exercise in contemplation, meditation and prayer. Your Vespers are an exercise in which sometimes contemplation, meditation and prayer takes place, but it is an exercise which rehearses for you the fact that contemplation, meditation and prayer go on all through your day. This spirit conversation is an actual participation in contemplation, meditation, and prayer. I think that is a twelfth operating principle. This is a real actual experience of contemplation not an exercise of contemplation. It is not simulated. You are after as a matter of fact a way in which people can contemplate, meditate, and pray secularly. That is all this finally is about.

25. Let's begin with meditation. The experience of meditation is accompanied by the experience of warmth as we've experimented with it. The kind of warmth of having encountered another human being -- not togetherness or anything like that. It is the authentic warmth of having encountered another human being on a depth level. It is where you experience in the group that that kind of warmth has reached some kind of intensity. When it has reached some kind of intensity it is sort of like things were crowded. It is like you got more warmth from meditative friends swirling around in your being than you wanted to have at the moment.

26. Prayer comes more as anxiety. It is like you have to go out and do something -- you have to act now. Kind of an uneasiness. Contemplation is a little bit harder-sort of like a vacuum. We called it a tremor. We also use the word shutter. Where you feel the hairs on the back of your neck begin to rise -- or your spine begin to shake. When you sense the group is in some kind of a tremor then you drop your pearl. You do one of these three conversations, but any time you do one of them you do all three of them. All three of these will be present in any one conversation but one would be most predominant.

27. The seventh part of this is that you always distract the group after you drop the pearl. One of the worst mistakes we made here was we drop our pearl and then we close the conversation. Everybody goes away thinking what a wonderful guru he was -- what a wise old man the guru was. You don't do the job then. What you want to have happen is that they begin this conversation and you drop the pearl and then you just leave them hanging and for three hours they go around spinning. Now if you drop your pearl and then you close the conversation with them thinking, boy he sure is a great guru, then they leave and they don't think about it again. So after you drop your pearl you have to have a distraction or I sometimes call it an underscoring. Some way underscore the question so they are left with it on their hands and you have seen to it that you have not in some way appeared through your pearl to solve or to wrap it up or to end the mystery of the conversation.

. . . George West