

where in the Israelite camp and not fighting, he said to them, "Whatever are you doing here? Why have you not gone to fight the Philistines?" They said to him, "You wait till tomorrow morning and you will see why". The next morning, at sunrise, the Philistines sent forth their champion, a man called Goliath about eight feet tall. His spear was as massive as a weaver's beam and his armour was so heavy that it took three men to lift it and put it on him. Goliath strode out in front of the Israelite camp and challenged them to send out their champion. His voice was so loud that it made the ground shake, and when the Israelites saw him they said, "We can't fight such a man". They said to David, "Run away! You are only a little boy, you are not even wearing shoes. Run away!" But David persisted and in the end the Israelites were so thirsty they said, "Well, if David says he can fight Goliath, let him go out and fight him". So they sent for the smallest suit of armour they could find but David said, "No, no. I don't want this. I will go and fight him tomorrow morning without the armour". When the next morning came, David went out and when Goliath looked down and saw David he roared out, "Am I a dog that you send this child in front of me?" Then David put a stone into his sling, which he threw and hit Goliath, who dropped down dead.

The Book of Samuel is very clear on the moral which we draw from this story. It says that David slew Goliath with a sling and a stone, and that there was no sword in the hand of David. For as soon as a sword is put into a man's hand he has to fight with a sword, and no ordinary man could fight Goliath with a sword. The Israelites were thus asking themselves the wrong question. They so idolised their past success (for they had won so many battles with swords and armour) that they could not see, when faced with a totally new situation, that swords and armour were of no use to them. They were asking themselves the wrong question. They were saying, "Where do we find a bigger man who can have a spear heavier than Goliath's, armour thicker than Goliath's and an arm stronger than Goliath's so that he may kill Goliath within the terms of our established military technology?" That was the question they were posing themselves. David saw that it was the wrong question. He realised that the right question was, "How do we get rid of Goliath?" People who think like the Israelite soldiers are experts, professors and consultants. There is a critical and fundamental difference between experts and leaders.

I quoted David and Goliath from the Old Testament. Now let me quote from the New Testament. St. Paul, in Corinthians (chapter 3, verse 18) says this: "Let no man deceive himself. For if any of you feel himself wise in this world let him become a fool that he may be wise". And what is St. Paul saying? He is saying, "You think you are very clever. You have got your head full of all kinds of predisposing opinions. If you really want to be wise, throw them away, become a fool and then you will really be wise because then you have the opportunity of asking yourself

what are the right questions'. There is an even higher authority. Jesus Christ (in Matthew chapter 18) is reported thus: 'And at the same hour came the disciples unto Jesus and enquired, 'Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?'. He took a little child and sat him among them and said 'Lest we become again as little children, we cannot come into the Kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever, therefore, humbles himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven!'

Now, you may say, Book of Samuel? St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians? Gospel according to St. Matthew? What have any of these to do with management education? We have our case studies, computers and behavioural science! But after you put aside what you think you are so clever at, you then have a chance to think. This is what we are doing in our Action Learning programme. We are taking high level managers perfectly capable of running some accounting department or marketing department or production department: they need have no worry about their technical skills. Then we convert them into little children, in the words of Jesus Christ, or we convert them into fools, in the metaphor of St. Paul, by putting them into some totally different organisation where their expert knowledge is of no use to them. They can no longer think in the terms that they have been used to. Education as we know is like pouring cement over a man's head. Until we can break it up there is no hope for him. What we are trying to do in Action Learning is to take a few favoured men, give them the opportunity of rethinking what they know and in so doing help the staff of the enterprise that receives them to rethink what they themselves know.

Because learning of this type is symbiotic, each learns from the other. There are no Robinson Crusoes in the world of learning. Two or three people learn together. This point has for a long time been recognised by English law, which takes an extremely serious view of conspiracy. If you have a political opponent and want to get rid of him, get him on a charge of conspiracy. Now why has English law learned to take a serious view of conspiracy? Because, since the eighth century it has been realised that when a group of people do something together they are very much more powerful than when all of them do it independently of each other. When people work together they learn not only about the problem which they are trying to solve, but they also learn a lot about each other. Quite often the most important hindrance to your solving a problem is not the inward technicality of the problem but your own obliquity of vision, the infirmity of your own intellect. In a conspiracy men learn a lot about themselves and about each other. When we send a highly intelligent and clever expert, one who has become again as a little child, into another enterprise, a highly interactive, symbiotic reaction takes place. But we go a great deal further than that. In India, for example, we have 12

top managers exchanged. They are not only each creating a ferment in the enterprises which they have visited but they meet together in small groups inside the universities. The twelve are split up into three sets of four. Four of them meet at the Indian Institute of Management at Bangalore for two days a fortnight. Four of them meet in the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmadabad, for two days a fortnight and four meet alternately at the University of New Delhi and at the Staff College at Hyderabad. So we have not only the symbiosis between the men and the receiving enterprises but also between small groups of men. These small groups, which we call project sets, are really the essence of the Action Learning programme. They are organised in and around a university or an institution of higher learning.

We are trying to do three things in an Action Learning programme. We are trying to help senior managers see more clearly how they should be posing questions in conditions where nobody can be clear about what to do. We are trying to take a number of men and develop them as leaders from their existing status of experts. That is the first point. The second thing that we are trying to do is to give the enterprises that receive them a clearer view of their own internal dynamics and their own internal resistances to change. Having a non-expert coming in to ask all kinds of questions which you would never ask yourself, having a David coming into the camp, immediately

stimulates learning among the staff of the receiving enterprise. But then by organising the regular meetings of these committees in adversity, these men who have been exchanged at the university centres, we are trying to do what I think is the most difficult of all. And that is to change the universities. Universities, since their ideas are without exception in the dead and in the past, are extremely difficult organisations to change. They are the toughest, the least responsive to challenge of any institutions that I know. Since I spent half of my life in them I assure you that this is true. But there is hope for them. In Belgium, we had a programme which was organised around the universities and we have even taken Action Learning into the doctoral programme. The doctoral programme is normally the most sacred cow on the university campus and I tried to introduce a few ideas there which may be very difficult but which I think, in the end, will achieve results.

So, Madam Chairman, this is my message for tonight. How you would adapt these ideas in Malaysia, I have not the least idea. But I cannot believe that you would be incapable of following the example and improving upon it. I hope that each time a new programme is started, we may learn a great deal about the learning process of experienced adults, about the change processes of large corporations, and even about the resistances of the academic mind to novelty.