

SO WHAT IS MRA?

(Moral Re-Armament)

Some Notes on an Abstract Reality

As Europe prepared for war in 1938 Dr. Frank Buchman, a Lutheran priest who initiated this work, held a public meeting in London at which he said that 'moral and spiritual re-armament' was Europe's greatest need. The Press headlines reporting the event said 'Moral Re-Armament Needed', but omitted the words 'and spiritual'. This is a pity for it is hard to understand MRA without this concept.

Essentially MRA is a simple approach to daily living which begins to change one's own life and outreach. This may lead to interest from others as they notice and appreciate the positive effect. Buchman suggested simple ways to focus common moral and spiritual ideas and suggested a self acceptable but effective spiritual discipline by which a person could, within their own traditions make, and embody into their life, steady moral and spiritual progress. The basics of what he outlined are:-

- 1) That God has a plan in which each of us has a unique part, and that anyone who sincerely seeks their role can learn to discern God prompting how to proceed. (Many people, the author included, first tried MRA in private and gradually through personal experience came to recognise the reality of God.)
- 2) Having tried to hear God's promptings, one must carefully test what is 'received'. First test against absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, then against the more detailed authority of scripture, and other devotional literature, to see if the thoughts bear the marks of God, yourself or evil. In serious or delicate matters it is also valuable to share such thoughts and be ready to consider the opinions of trusted friends.
- 3) If and when you have conviction that the prompting could be from God, you are encouraged to risk acting on the matter, with responsibility, modesty and in faith.

These are only some essentials but they form the basis by which people begin to move according to a higher wisdom and plan than their own. From this begins a life-long process of positive personal change which can lead in time to local or national and sometimes international change for the better. One becomes more sensitive, perceptive, effective and active for reconciliation and hope, in whatever role life has cast you.

When adopted, these ideas invigorate one's inner and outer life and have come to be called 'Moral Re-Armament', for that is their tendency, to morally and spiritually reinforce those who proceed this way.

MRA is not a religion or a sect. Nor does MRA suggest it is an alternative to, or a summation of scripture. It is only a set of tools, (there are others) which help people to clarify and focus their spiritual convictions. MRA also helps to bring the deepest convictions from one's inner life into steady out-going application, in one's daily life. It helps one know oneself and relate to other people better, from where to offer them one's deepest and best.

Interestingly, spiritual people of many faiths can hold to their beliefs but still benefit by using these tools. With them they too can conform their lives to their deepest moral and spiritual promptings tested against absolute standards and then act in faith accordingly. This common basis of standards, faithful action and resultant moral integrity enables people to work co-operatively together. It is the basis for a trust that runs deeper than people's differences.

MRA enables people of faith from all backgrounds, denominations, religions and races to co-operate in tackling the practical issues of the World, almost without friction or the self interests and tensions that otherwise result. There is a world need for something that has proved able to do this! In our troubled times MRA's ability to transcend barriers which normally bedevil life, and create understanding, trust, respect and practical cooperation between diverse people, is one of its most valuable features.

Those who live this way of life find a rich, open and international fellowship. Not surprisingly they associate with others of similar convictions. World wide there are many people who feel called to give

their full time to bringing these ideas to bear on today's issues. They give their time, without pay, simply because they have conviction to do so, knowing that MRA is not an employer. Their daily needs must be met by using their own money or by the support of others who value their commitment and the results of their work.

MRA does not seek to be or to promote any denominational, social, political, or other such grouping, though people who live this life may have such affiliations themselves. One cannot 'join' MRA. It does not exist in that sense so it has no Officers, Committee or Members, no resolutions, subscriptions, rules, or structure. One either lives this way or not and is part of MRA or not accordingly. Informal associations of MRA people do form to address areas of shared concern, and they do then organise themselves to progress the work. At this point the 'fruits' of MRA begin to exist 'on paper', but still without the normal structures typically necessary to achieve things. MRA initiatives are always an informal, personal co-operation flowing from the deep convictions of the individuals involved.

When free people follow the deepest guiding idea in their lives, the still small voice, their conscience, God's illuminating voice, whatever it may be called, positive, co-operative action is the result. The History of MRA is full of such examples. They go forward together looking for 'What is right' rather than 'Who is right'.

The potential of these ideas has been seen by many who live them out world wide. They form a growing network of people who operate their lives from their deepest convictions; who co-operate as a team on what needs to be done, because they feel called to do so - and because they can! Many positive well documented developments in personal, local, national or international situations have been the result.

For MRA to receive gifts of property or money for its work it needs to exist as a registered trust or charity. Only in this sense does MRA have a formal identity. Such bodies exist to receive and make resources available for MRA use, but have no input to or influence over the life of individuals.

Funds are used to make MRA's outreach as widely available as possible, including travel and subsistence, publishing, conferences, seminars, courses, plays, etc. wherever conviction leads a team to be involved. The reconciliation work of MRA has recently been officially recognised by the UN.

Hopefully these brief notes will clarify some of the questions that can surround MRA. It's great simplicity, lack of normal structure yet worldwide inter-activity and effect can make it a hard thing to grasp. It is indeed an interesting rather 'abstract' reality!

It has not been my intention to define MRA, but to explain some of its main features. Since MRA has no 'official' view of itself I have tried to give the reader a sketch, an overview. Another author might express the matter in different ways, however I believe that the reader would get the same flavour.

These notes are the first in a trilogy. The next set of notes '*The Practical Steps of MRA*' give details of how anyone can try out MRA's ideas in private to evaluate them. They describe the process of growing insight and change that so energises one's life and circumstances. Please ask if you would like these other notes - or anything else more fully explained.

Some Thoughts on Moral Re-Armament

A personal attempt to illuminate what I have understood so far

On hearing of Moral Re-Armament, people are curious and ask 'What is MRA?' There are various answers, depending on how one looks at MRA, conceptually, organisationally, practically and personally or at its methods and effects. All such answers can be accurate enough but inadequate, rather like the answers given by blind men describing an elephant. Before a fair picture can be given we need to feel the whole animal.

Conceptually, MRA is rather like electricity or magnetism. It is readily available to anyone, has known characteristics and powerful effects, but like electricity and magnetism it is rather hard to define or describe. I believe it is a work of the Spirit, a very direct means by which God can make his will known for individuals and situations so that a person may co-operate with God's Master Plan and other people in a harmonious and purposeful way. MRA is not a religion or a sect, rather it invigorates how people practice their own beliefs while encouraging them to live according to the best they know.

Organisationally, MRA has little need for conventional structures. Individuals who submit themselves to God's guidance and direction find themselves forming informal alliances with others of like mind, often across barriers that more usually divide people, simply because God leads them to do so. These alliances develop around convictions which lead to some practical outcome. While everyone is equally responsible, the practical work that results may, by agreement, be divided up and shared to avoid wasteful duplication and to give the outcome clearer focus.

MRA is not an organisation in the conventional sense; it is a movement of one's spirit, a freely chosen way of life - being available to God, to the best of one's ability. One does not join MRA. One either lives MRA or not, and is thus part of MRA or not. Only when money or property are given for MRA use does it become necessary for MRA to exist as a legal identity. In some countries assembly or organisation of meetings and conferences has to be done by registered bodies. In such places MRA may be a registered body but existing only for such specific purposes and not to levy subscriptions, confer membership or place rules or preconditions on those who 'live the life'.

At a practical and personal level one needs to distinguish between the 'Seeds' of MRA and the 'Fruits'. The seeds are those concepts, attitudes and practices which, if planted by an individual in their own life, will in time bear typically MRA fruits. The seeds are all simple and often widely known but watering and growing them takes dedication and effort. The fruits that ripen from any one individual may be many and varied, as God guides, for each person is unique, with abilities and talents that God gave and will use. What is typical and characteristic of such varied

fruits is the sense that they all come from the same seeds, have the same authorship, and all fit together, each with another, in a marvellous, positive and constructive way, far more 'coincidentally' than anyone could devise. One sees the hand of God at work and it further deepens and strengthens one's faith.

How does MRA work; what are its methods and effects? Firstly, its ideas work in individuals to bring a transformation in their motivation. MRA suggests that one aligns one's life and behaviour with four absolute moral standards, honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, while seeking God's inspiration at the deepest level and in the light of one's own spiritual context. As one does so one becomes a changed person, point by point, and the quality and vision and outreach of one's life begins to develop and to be noticeable to others. This in turn attracts their attention and either their strong opposition or a desire to live an unselfishly dedicated life too.

MRA is practical rather than theoretical. No amount of intellectual discussion will prove or disprove its worth. It is caught (rather than taught) when people see its effect on individuals and their circumstances. Such things can be seen either 'on the ground' in someone's day to day life, or it may be evident at MRA meetings and conferences, in the stories told.

What about effects? One thing is clear: God can powerfully use a willing and obedient servant in ways we just cannot foresee or imagine. The history of MRA is crammed with stories of marvellous and positive change in people, relationships and circumstances - from the most personal and humble through all levels to the most diplomatic and international.

MRA is a way of life; a life of faith. We cannot and do not predict the outcome. Our role is to do the sometimes very simple things that God suggests, so that He can bring about the necessary miracle. He is the great architect and co-ordinator, His is the Master Plan. The wonder and excitement is that, for some reason, God has chosen to work out the completion of His creation with the help of such fragile assistants as you and me! All we must do is accept His authority in all aspects of our lives. It is quite a challenge, but Heaven on Earth is quite a prize!

MRA does not draw people away from their religion or traditions - it points them directly at their religion and traditions! It helps them to live by their God given convictions. Such people become part of a global team of God led individuals dedicated to bringing renewal and hope to this much troubled world.

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THE PRACTICAL STEPS OF MRA

(Moral Re-Armament)

How To Bring Your Deep Beliefs To Bear On Everyday Reality

FIRST STEPS

Are you ready to be completely honest with yourself whenever you discover that you are fooling yourself? Proceed if the answer is unequivocally YES. Don't waste any more of your time if you are in any doubt! Being prepared to face the truth, first about yourself, is essential before MRA can help you make any other progress to develop your inner life.

People ask, 'Where should I begin' but only they know the answer. These notes will help you determine the exact point from which to begin putting things right, but first you need to develop four basic tools for future use, without which further progress will be rather limited!

These are four key concepts: Absolute standards of Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love. ('Absolute' in this context means the highest possible standard.) You need to carefully define each of these four standard yourself. What do each of them really mean? Write them down as if you were compiling a dictionary. But don't think in circles - for instance saying 'honesty is not being dishonest' is true but it explains nothing about honesty!

Your early definitions will certainly not describe the highest possible standard needed to be 'absolute'. You will have to work more to lift your definitions higher. Never lower your definitions - they would not then be the highest possible standard!

When you have got written definitions for these Absolute Standards, ask yourself -

"How do my attitudes and daily behaviour look against Absolute Standards?"

You will notice some big differences between your definitions and your actual daily performance. Begin by reducing these big differences. Decide to improve your day to day performance. Just HOW to do that is found by regular daily steps.

REGULAR STEPS OF MRA

- 1) **PRAY** (or inwardly reflect)
Be thankful for what you DO have. Express honestly what you see is good, what is not and what needs to change, including you. (Aloud is quite helpful) Review how you behaved yesterday and consider what and who you will be involved with today. Consider these things one at a time and ask God questions such as; **"What could and should I do to improve matters?"**
- 2) **LISTEN** - to your inner voice.
You have asked questions; so listen within for some answers. (If listening is a new concept try this exercise first. With eyes closed try to hear everything going on around you, the loud sounds, then fainter sounds and finally the quietest ones. Note how your mind searches past the loud sounds when trying to catch the quiet ones.) With eyes closed, ask yourself such question as in 1) above. Now listen in the same searching way with your heart to what is going on deep inside you. Try to reach past your loud thoughts to the deep quiet ones.
- 3) **WRITE DOWN** - all your thoughts, unedited.
Jot down thoughts as they occur, without 'adjusting' them. (Jotting captures thoughts and clears them from your mind.) Search for the quieter thoughts. Capture each one, until nothing else comes.
- 4) **CHECK WHAT YOU GET** - using the best you know.
Consider each noted thought. Does it reflect Evil or Good, or just you? Use the Absolute Standards and your scriptures to check each one. Beware thoughts which look good by some standards but poor against others! Those that are good against all standards are sometimes from the voice that people call God.

*If you still remain uncertain about a thought you can start again at 1), in order to clarify it.

5) **ACT** - when you reach firm conviction.

If conviction is firm, are you prepared to follow your thoughts? Don't be hasty. Share more serious thoughts with people whose spiritual integrity you trust. Pray, ask for more clarity if necessary. Pay attention to thoughts that keep coming. Value wise counsel, but don't simply accept it. Weigh your own deepest convictions and make up your own mind. Decide how, when or if to act. If a certain action is your measured conviction, move ahead humbly. Make your step - in Faith.

6) **BE RESPONSIBLE** - for the consequences.

Take full responsibility for what you do. Even though you move very carefully you will still make mistakes. You never KNOW if God was prompting you until after you act on it. You act in Faith, not from certainty! If it was guided you will see amazing Grace spreading about. Give God thanks and ask how to go forward.

*If it becomes clear that God did not give you the thought you acted on, go back to 1) above. Ask God in prayer for His forgiveness and for what to do next. You may need to apologise to other people for harm you have done. Then try to correct it and move humbly forward again.

Steady progress depends on steady practice! Go through the REGULAR STEPS on a daily basis. Many people find that first thing after waking is best, but any regular time is suitable.

The attached chart '*The Moral Development Scale & MRA*' shows how MRA can help people become obedient to their deepest and best convictions and how the six steps (seeds) of MRA help people to deal with evil.

These steps are practical not theoretical. Discussion does not evaluate their effectiveness, only honest regular use of them demonstrates their power.

A Note on MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

Many people around the world use these tools and regular steps to discern their daily direction with greater assurance. They find their way in life with standards that enable, liberate and unite people co-operatively.

These ideas are the heritage of all mankind, but people who live life this way often find common cause, and have a positive effect. These ideas and way of life have come to be called 'Moral Re-Armament' (MRA).

MRA is not a church or organisation, but a free movement of the Spirit. It does not take people away from their religion or traditions, rather it points people directly at their religion and traditions and encourages them to live by the best they know. People do not join MRA; they either do run their life with these ideas or they do not. MRA has no formal membership, seeks no subscriptions and puts no rules on people. It offers ways that people have found helpful and enabling. People who live similar moral convictions tend to work together. In this way MRA people world wide find common foundations and effective ways for cooperative working, often through otherwise impassable barriers.

There are earlier notes '*So What is MRA?*' and further notes '*Working Together As A Team*' which you may like to see. If so, or if you would like to find out more about Moral Re-Armament please contact:-

FREEDOM FOR PRISONERS OF THEIR PAST

Many people regret things from their past, sometimes only incidents, sometimes the entire past. Regret is quite a mild word, but some people's regret is very deep. They are ashamed.

Shame can be the result of your own actions, or because of what has been done to you, but at whatever level, your regret comes from recognising, in human terms, that your actions, decisions or even your involvement in the particular circumstances, were inadequate.

Recognising and Inadequacy are interesting words. Let us look at inadequacy first. If there were no standards for Human behaviour people could not violate them and no such regret or shame could occur. But such standards do exist and even if we are unclear about their definition we recognise when we have gone beyond them!

Then we feel regret or shame and we are often unwilling to admit we were involved in the circumstances. There is a stigma involved. To admit our involvement would in some way mark us among other people as suspect, or lesser, or outcast.

As was said, many people regret things from their past, but if this is such a common state, why does one so rarely hear about these regrets? Why are they just submerged? Our desire to be accepted as part of society is so strong that when we transgress norms of behaviour we are at best troubled or at worst terrified, even when we know that these 'standards' are, by their nature, not ancient or everlasting.

One can see such mechanisms clearly in the small 'clubs' that young children form. They make up arbitrary rules, but anyone who transgresses them is outcast and made to feel very unhappy. It is the fear of rejection that keeps our shame un-shown and secret. Hidden shame becomes a sense of guilt, and we assume that society will condemn us if our shame were known. So we stay silent and make our past our prison.

But the truth is that everyone transgresses these 'standards' in some way at some time. It is often in childhood or youth, when we are exploring the 'limits' of our society and discovering where we fit in and how we feel about ourselves and life. Sometimes we develop bad habits and find that we regularly transgress and feel ashamed, but just don't know how to stop. Sometimes our transgressions are more serious, but the fact is that we all transgress. Some of us do so quite often.

People's awareness of their own failures, their fear of rejection and the consequent desire to appear better than they actually are, makes them point critical fingers at those who are caught out. There is group solidarity in doing this. It diverts attention away from the guilt that everyone in the group feels onto the unfortunate individual. We are surely not as bad as he is!

But note the words 'who are caught out'. It is the discovery of someone else's secret shame that evokes this reaction in us. It is as if we cannot tolerate such a shameful thing to exist in our society - and have to stamp on it! The group acts to purge such nasty things from its midst, as if to protect the norms and values of our society. But transgressions do occur, and in our hearts we all know that we are guilty. And we are so sensitive to the possibility of rejection, and its terrible consequences, that our own transgressions seem worse than they really are - certainly worse than other people's failings!

While we carry such guilt our own solidarity with society becomes questionable, even blameworthy. So we point fingers at others, stay silent about what we could deal with in ourselves and we make our past our prison.

But for those who have not criminally ignored all the norms of human society, there is a doorway out of this prison, and the key is in their own hands. But there is a price to pay for using it. Even for the criminal the key exists, but the price is higher.

So what is the price; can anyone afford it, and is release worth it? The answer to the last question is a personal judgement, but anyone with fair character and courage can afford it. Moral Courage is the price. It requires moral courage to face the truth within you and then confess it to those you have wronged, hurt or treated badly. It requires moral courage to ask for their forgiveness and to retribute what you can. The alternative is to stay trapped by your past and abandon the fullness of life.

Interestingly, people point fingers and penalise those whose wrongdoing has been '**found**' out, but have a very different reaction to those who freely confess their failings with genuine remorse - and who request forgiveness.

Such a confession once again takes the focus off our group guilt. We feel relief and thankfulness. The confessor has done us all a service, shown a way forward, and can be forgiven much and credited with integrity and courage. The confessor clearly shows that he recognises and values what society (we!) says it stands for, even though we often fail to achieve it ourselves.

People honour the cost of genuine repentance. They recognise and admire Moral Courage and believe they could do the same. They are delighted and relieved that these particular covert failings no longer exist concealed in society's midst.

Anyone can take constructive steps towards freeing themselves from their guilty past, through genuine repentance and forgiveness. We are only trapped if we fail to choose freedom! It also helps to know that people want an answer to the problem and to see such 'prisoners of the past' able to fly free, for then there is hope for us all. And we feel good again, because being compassionate, merciful and forgiving transgressors not only eases our own collective guilt, but more importantly, it demonstrates and affirms to each of us our aspirations to great Humanity.

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