



RESOURCES

SUPPORTING MEN INTERESTED IN FORMING
AND MAINTAINING A BROTHERHOOD

INTRODUCTION

(1/4)

A Viral Proliferation Of Brotherhoods Of Self-Education & Purpose.

Can we travel the path of honesty alone? Of course we can. But travelling together, for most of us, is advantageous, if not essential. Why?

Firstly, there's the question of self-image. I might think I relate to everyone in loving equality – but how do my brothers feel I relate? I might feel I am 'over' that relationship – but what do my brothers see in my body posture, in the gaps between my words, in my eyes? I might feel I am just sad, but my brothers might feel that under that thin lid of sadness I am hiding an explosive fury. Alone there is no mirror. We can imagine whatever image we like. Travelling with my brothers, each one a mirror (as I am for each of them), I am surrounded by a variety of slightly different reflections – the net effect of which supports me in sensing how I am actually showing up in the world.

And although I can practice self-educational techniques like 'Honest Relating' or '50/50' (see 'Togetherness', and 'Self Educational Suggestions' in *The Uprising of Man*), with anyone, anywhere – practicing with a brother who is himself practicing and then comparing notes ("Did we stay in our own experience? Did we merge or distance ourselves from each other? Did we both stay in our own authority? Did we get mind-identified? Did we latch on to judgements of self/other? Do we fear deep connection?" and so on), is not only a more textured experience, but it supports me in refining my capacity to really relate.

Entering brotherhood I exit isolation, and begin to sense both the uniqueness and the commonality of our experience. Witnessing my brothers' life journeys, being privy to their privacies, I intuit how they are passing through this world much as I am. Without compromising my individuality in any way, I open to our collectivity. I observe the similarity of our conditionings, and the similarity of our strategies to survive them. In empathic openness to my brothers, the sense of belonging – that is so crucial to my ability to remain rested in centre – becomes more and more of an undeniable, felt reality.

And if I travel alone, there is no one to hold me. And when I say 'hold' I mean both physically and emotionally. Sometimes we feel we just can't go on. Sometimes we need to collapse. Sometimes we need to sob without censor. And this utterly contradicts our indoctrination into masculinity – which is what we're in the group for in the first place – so great! It contradicts our conditioning in two ways: by violating the taboo on emotional expressiveness and vulnerability, and by violating the taboo on not-coping, and receiving.

And just as there are many advantages to practicing techniques like '50/50' with someone who understands the point of it, a brotherhood of honest men provides the appropriate setting for taboo transgression – in a way that a pub, say, does not. It is an ideal practice arena for shared self-education.

In offering us the opportunity to receive, it also offers us the opportunity to give – to care for each other. Another taboo transgression! Another blasphemy upon our masculinisation! But caring for each other – travelling together in fraternal love – offering each other our wisdom, offering each other practical help with jobs that need more than two hands... all further deepens our sense of belonging, and pries further open the creaky doors of our hearts.



one for one

*"We must straighten our backs, and work for our freedom.
A man can't ride you unless your back is bent."
- Martin Luther King, Jr*

We see how each brother engages with the ups and downs of the apparent fortunes and misfortunes of his work, his relationships, his health.... We are inspired by one brother's moment of courage, learn from another brother's moment of cowardice – recognising ourselves in them all.

Over the years, our connection with each other thickens. We come to feel we walk down the street accompanied by an invisible tribe of brothers, that we no longer walk alone, that there are men who care for us, and for whom we care, who we could call upon, and for whom we would drop everything if need be.

There is also, usually, a certain 'no nonsense' feel to brotherhood – one that in no way conflicts with this mood of fraternal love. On the contrary: it is because that brother cares for me that he takes the risk to challenge me. It is because another brother is practicing speaking his truth without apology – even if it contradicts the group consensus – that he says what nobody was daring to say... landing the group in a deeper openness and intimacy. In essence, every brother is saying to every other brother: "Be all you are. Give all you have. Don't half-live your life! I am with you all the way!" Every brother is saying both: "Know that I am counting on you – that your presence in my life is important to me!", and, "I am walking alongside you. You can count on me!" This affirmative atmosphere is almost the opposite of the familiar, mutually-frustrating mood of male jostling and put-downs.

And then there is the question of united purpose – of meaningful action undertaken together for the welfare of the world. Not only does our collaboration open up untold possibilities, and our co-creativity enliven us all, but 'in the doing' all we have been practising is tested and strengthened.

By sharing a purpose we place ourselves in a situation in which we have to discuss, disagree, gather information and opinions, make group decisions, depend on each other, and go out into the unknown together.... Then, when one of us loses centre, gets contracted, and starts shouting at everyone (for example), this is not just seen – it is seen by brothers who themselves are working, each in their own way, to hold and flow in centre. The atmosphere is non-judgemental (we are all learning together). The other men (rather than judging) share their own experience while so-and-so was shouting at everyone, and become the mirror within which he can see himself, and choose the return to centre. We self-educate together on the adventure of shared purposeful action.

These are the kind of brotherhoods that I talk about in *The Uprising of Man*, in the introductory piece, 'The Vision' – brotherhoods of self-education and purpose. As I say there, my vision is of a 'viral proliferation' of such brotherhoods. I can imagine an incredible variety of styles of brotherhoods that could emerge if many (very different) men created brotherhoods – without anything being centralised or standardised. I can also imagine limitless possible ways in which they could connect, and inspire each other, and collaborate.

Brother – spark off a brotherhood! Talk to your friends. Use social media. Connect. Put it out there! Make it happen!



Establishing Group Cohesion

In the following three resource documents, on Vision, Practice & Structure I offer a few suggestions for establishing group cohesion - for getting together with other men, and co-creating a brotherhood that will work. I have seen men gather to form brotherhoods, each say what he's looking for, inevitable differences result in laborious debate, and, even if they do manage to agree to proceed, doing so with a shaky sense of togetherness, only a vague commitment to a united purpose, and little or no shared methodology ("How are we to structure our meetings? What do we do when we're together? Is there leadership?", and so on).

Footnote

Each of us must go it alone. My body is my body, my pleasure and pain my own. I cannot see out of your eyes. I can empathise, but I cannot feel your feelings. I can agree, but I cannot think your thoughts. I am not you. I cannot go through your death for you. But your courageous commitment to your aloneness emboldens me in mine. It is easier to walk alone next to you in yours. Your gravitas sobers me. Your humour unburdens me. Your compassion soothes my heart. Your clear intellect is the doctor of my mind. You and you and you and you are the brothers alongside whom I walk – brothers who intoxicate and sober me, who persuade me astray then set me straight – pragmatic and ridiculously idealistic, irresponsible and devoted – brothers who mock my pomposity, brothers who ennoble me, brothers who serve me and who I am honoured to serve. Without brotherhood I could not walk alone

This does not mean that I can't be a heart-brother to my sisters, or to anyone, however they might define their bodies or their gender. Brotherhood is not about re-segregation, or reversion to any sort of limitation-by-gender. It is about co-creating a global network of radical-evolutionary, educated men who are ready to stand by each other as each one lets go of his self-deceptions, opens to not-knowing, and becomes the unique, gifted, powerful, vulnerable being he already is.

End Notes, p. 422

EXTRACTED FROM
" THE UPRISING OF MAN, A PROPOSAL "
By Mark Josephs