**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project**

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Start of Transcription

00:00 Group Captain Leonard Cheshire: The recording that’s about to come is in Auckland New Zealand, Monday 19th of May, a talk to the Rotary, Auckland Rotary.

[Applause 00:21 to 00:28]

00:29: President Peter, and fellow Rotarians, and guests. I am very happy indeed to, not only to be back in Auckland once again, this time with my daughter Gigi, instead of my wife - who at the moment is visiting our homes in Poland - but also very happy to be - and grateful to be - your guest at Rotary Lunch. Standing here in front of you reminds me of the many occasions - particularly far back in the early days of our work when we were when we were struggling to get known - when one or another of your clubs in different parts of the world came to our help, not so much in giving large sums of money which is not what we were looking for, but making us known, opening doors that otherwise had been closed to us. And then I have a particular memory - last year I think - of being present at your international conference in Rome where there were 16,000 delegates. I never knew you could have a conference of 16,000 delegates, so it was something new for me. And I think it was new for some of the delegates, because at the inaugural meeting in some vast sports arena, the amplification system didn’t work, and your chief guest, the United Nations, delivered a very good speech which only the two people on her left and right were able to hear

[Audience laughter 02:27]

02:28: When it came to my turn to talk, we were in a smaller hall but still a pretty huge one, and the delegates came from all over the world, and the chairman - who very kindly hosted me and was trying to put me at ease - he said, ‘There are many many different languages here so you’ve got two interpreters, and they’ll each interpret as you go along into different languages.’ And I was thinking, ‘Well, how am I going to manage? I speak a sentence or three sentences, then I wait while it’s translated into five different languages, then I’ve got to try and remember where I left off!’ And I was expressing my concern to him and he said, ‘Well, we’ll just try, and see what we’ve got to do.’ So he stood up and he said, ‘Would everybody in the hall who can’t understand English put their hand up?’ Well nobody put their hand up

[Audience laughter 03:32 to 03:35]

03:36: So I looked at him in some relief and said, ‘Well we’re saved!’ And then a voice from the back said, ‘Those who can’t speak English haven’t understood you!’

[Audience laughter 03:46 to 03:53]

03:54: Well we haven’t that problem today have we President

[Audience laughter 03:56 to 03:57]

03:58: The title that I’ve been invited to talk about is ‘The Meaning of Disability’, and in attempting to talk about disability, and in particular - in so far as it is possible - to try and look inside the heart of the disabled person, and especially the young disabled person, and try to see what it is that disability has meant to him or her. I would like to put it in the framework of our responsibility, as members of the world community, to do something for those who either through poverty, or illness, or disability, or whatever it might be who are deprived, and do not have the advantages that most of us are able to enjoy.

05:08: And as an introduction to the subject of disability, I think it’s necessary to stress something which I know is very obvious, but sometimes may be overlooked. We have a tendency - anyway in my country, and one or two other countries I know - to talk about ‘The Disabled’, as if they belonged to a separate - and formed - a separate group. But in fact, that is a distortion of the reality of the situation. A disabled person is first and foremost a person. An individual human being who happens to have a disability. He isn’t really any different from the rest of us in his basic nature as another human being.

06:24: And when we come to look at disability itself, and consider, ‘What does it mean?’, I know that we usually think about it as meaning a physical disability. But the real meaning of disability is something wider. It can be defined as an impairment of any one of our faculties, physical, mental, or emotional. Now that means that if I, for instance, have a severe personality defect which means that I can’t cope with an ordinary social situation that the rest of us are quite happy in, if for instance I was suddenly to have a fit of the nerves and ask your president if I could sit down and finish my talk now, you could truthfully say that in that respect, I am disabled. Now I know you can’t press that point too far, and I don’t wish to, but I make it in order that we are clear in our minds that there isn’t a real absolute distinction between the disabled person and ourselves. We are all members of the one human family, each striving towards the same goal, and each having to carry our own particular difficulties, shortcomings, in other words, our individual cross.

08:16: It means also that every disabled person is different, and when we come to think in terms of solutions to his particular situation - or her particular situation - we have to understand that one cannot generalise. One cannot say, ‘This should be for all disabled people.’ The solution to each person’s problem - each disabled person’s problem - is individual to himself or herself, but I do find that in the world of disability - of those working in the field of disabled people - there is a great tendency to dogmatise. People have ideas that, ‘This is right’, or something else is right, and they state it as an absolute. Well, we should not do that. We should remember that we’re dealing with human beings, and that each one will need his own particular kind of help, and kind of opportunity.

09:37: And now to come to the situation of the disabled person herself. Obviously, in these few moments, I can’t say a great deal about the whole range of disability, cause disabilities are so various and so many, so different in their cause, so different in their nature, and so different in their impact upon the particular individual, depending on his temperament, his financial situation, and most of all - I would claim - on the relationship he enjoys with his family, or those close to him. And so I would like to take out of that vast field of disabled people just one particular category - the young person who becomes disabled. Somebody at the age of 17 or maybe 20, or a little older. Particularly the person who is suddenly disabled through an accident, or even as can happen, through a disabling disease which operates very quickly. And if we picture somebody - say of 18 - going out on a sunny day like today, suddenly being hit by a car, or perhaps going out swimming, diving into water that she’s quite accustomed to, as seems to happen so often, but without noticing that the water’s a bit more shallow or that there’s an underwater obstruction, dives in, hits her head, and - in our layman’s language - breaks her neck, and therefore immediately becomes a quadriplegic, who is totally paralysed from the waist down, and with only partial movement of her arms. What she’ll probably do is go, first of all, into an intensive care unit, and while she is there there’s hope, because she’s surrounded by a very sophisticated instruments and machines, by people in white coats who obviously know what they’re doing and are highly professional, and whatever may be the outward indication, she thinks in her heart, ‘No, it won’t really be so bad.’ But then the day comes when he or she is moved, either to a bed in a general ward, or perhaps to go home, or perhaps - as very often happens - to be put in a - what we call at home - a chronic ward which means amongst old people. And there somebody - in one way or another - is going to tell her, ‘You will never get any better.’ And so from that moment on, she has to live with that realisation.

13:14: Now I think we can say that one of the basic human needs which we all feel is the need to be valued. Valued as the particular person that I am. I want to be liked and admired and accepted for me myself, not for the person I should be, my faults as well as my strengths. But we also want to be valued for something we’ve done, that people can look at us and say, ‘Yes, he’s done so and so.’ Even if it’s only being a good father of a family and having brought up one’s children well. That after all is a great achievement. But the young person at the age of 18 will realise that she will never have the chance - or so she’ll think - ever to do anything for which she’ll be valued. Now I know that that realisation won’t suddenly come across her, it doesn’t work that way it takes time, but nevertheless that feeling is deep down inside her, and sooner or later it’s going to come out. I say this with hesitation because I know one cannot generalise and who can really look into the heart of somebody who has been - had their life broken in that way, but I believe that the first reaction - in such a situation - is to feel a sense of mourning, of loss. You mourn for what you’ve lost, in a similar way that you mourn the loss of a close relative, and for many I believe that that sense of mourning will remain all their lives deep down inside them, coming up to the surface every now and then.

15:27: But this is followed quite quickly by something very different - a revolt. A feeling, ‘Why? Why has this got to happen to me?’ And they look at their friends, and they see them perfectly well and going their way in life, and here they are confined - for the moment - to bed, and this revolt - and I don’t believe there’s anybody who won’t feel it in one way or another, though some manage to repress it, to sublimate it, to overcome it - this revolt will take all kinds of different forms. It may take the form of withdrawal, refusing to co-operate with anybody, not wanting to know anything about anything at all, or it may take the form of anger. They’re angry at this, that, and the other. Perhaps it’s against their closest friends, against the nurse, against anything that’s happening. It isn’t really anger directed at the person, it’s anger at what has happened. ‘Why should I be the person to have my life broken?’

16:45: Now the question is, what should be our response? Assuming that we are the person that is close to them, or one of the people close to them. Well the one thing we must never do is to try and gloss over it, to pretend it hasn’t happened, to turn their mind onto something different. We have got to realise that this is a nettle that has to be grasped, and we have somehow got to help that person work it out of their system, cause only then will they be able to build a new life, a meaningful life. And in order to do that - I think - we need to establish a relationship with them in which they will feel secure. In other words they will feel completely free to say anything they want that they really feel, however regretful, however shocking it may sound, knowing that they won’t be judged, and only if they are put into that relationship will you or I be able to help them get this out of their system, but it is something that just has to be done. Once it is done, if that person is put in the environment that he or she wants and that conforms to their particular needs, is given the supportive care, aids and gadgets, and so on, then - I think it is no exaggeration to say - that nobody no matter how disabled they may be is unable to lead a meaningful life.

18:48: You could quote the case of a girl who died a few years ago who was completely paralysed by a disease - very quickly - having been an athlete and she was a physical trainer training instructor, or she was learning to be one. She was totally paralysed to the extent that she could only move the big toe on her right foot. She couldn’t eat, she couldn’t breathe, she couldn’t see, and she couldn’t talk, and she could move no part of her body. She couldn’t ask for anything she wanted, but the doctors had managed to retain this little movement in her big toe, and an electronics engineer adapted an electronic POSM to be activated by a little microswitch on a board that was strapped to her foot, and by operating that switch, she could turn on her hi-fi and her radio, she was very musical and she could hear. But in addition to that, she could type, she learnt to type. You’d talk to her and she’d answer you on the typewriter. She then moved on to using her typewriter to send out appeals to people to give money to buy equipment for other people disabled. So that was the way Hilary put the little movement she had to good use, and if anybody says, ‘Well perhaps if that was her disability it would’ve been kinder just to let her slip away,’ one can only answer that Hilary was determined to live and make something out of her life.

20:43: And our work - my wife’s and my own, with hers in her field and mine in mine, cause we each started before we were married, and we tried to merge our organisations but couldn’t, cause our supporters wanted to remain separate - our work is designed to try and provide the opportunity - and the facilities - in which the disabled person can live the life that they want, and I feel that the objective that we should all have when we work for or with disabled people is to give them the maximum range of choice of what kind of life they want. Some to live in their own homes, some in a group home, for some it’ll be a big group home, for others a small group home, but always very personalised. And all our homes - even in the poorest countries - and locally funded and locally supported, except for one, a big centre that my wife and I have joined forces to start and to run in India, where there are 300 people - leprosy, TB, mentally retarded children, a little hospital, an orphanage and so on. And that centre, Raphael, is entirely supported at a cost of 400 dollars per person per year from groups in Australia and New Zealand. and I would like to record my gratitude to you in Rotary for the help that you have given us, on one occasion sending John Baker, our secretary, 750 dollars at the moment when we was almost on the verge of a nervous breakdown, because he didn’t have enough to send for the monthly contribution of February, which would’ve left Raphael short. Raphael is far from here, and it’s difficult to keep a personal contact with it, which is the basis of all our homes, and will be the basis of the home in Palmerston North - to our great joy, my wife and mine - the first in Australasia, with the second coming in Melbourne, though of a different kind, and third in the Hunter Valley in Singleton. But we do try to make support for Raphael personal by linking everybody’s gift to a specific person or a project and supplying the donor with photographs and personal stories.

23:48: I would like to say in sitting down that what this has taught me is two things. First that when we’re faced with deprived people, we think we are the givers, and in a sense we are, but in fact we soon discover we are the receivers, because they set up an example of how to remain cheerful, purposeful, and normal, despite having lost everything in terms of freedom of action, and what an example that is. But secondly, they give us a challenge, and I think that what we all need is a vision. We need to hold before our eyes the essential unity of a whole human family, and the need - the necessity - to go to the help in however small a way of those who are deprived, to make them feel that we care, that we want to see their condition improve, and if we want a united world, a world that lives in peace, then one of the things we’ve got to do is to remove the injustice of the enormous areas of deprivation in the world. And whatever we do, I think should be done in a personal way. It doesn’t how small our help, make it personal. And I can only say that it is always an inspiration to be with you in Rotary, and to see for myself the way that you in your different areas.

[25:40 Speech ends]

[25:40 Recording ends]

End of Transcription