

## Ray Barrington

# MEETINGS AND FAREWELLS

When one of the witches in Macbeth asked — “When shall we  
“When shall we three meet again  
In thunder, lightning or in rain?”

she showed a practical knowledge of psychology if not meteorology. (After all, thunder is the sound made by lightning and if there is thunder and lightning about the chance of a shower is pretty high.) Perhaps her arcane powers *were* up on the Met. bureau and she was giving the others damn all choice. She liked lousy weather.

Be that as it may. She demonstrated one reason for a meeting, there *needed* to be a meeting. How else could they plan further witchery?

Yet meetings, whether of two people or a hundred and two, do not have to have a clear reason. Instance those meetings of most local councils that take so long and achieve so little.

Why then, one might ask, do we spend so much time attending meetings? When you come right down to it, why have meetings assumed such importance in our lives? So much so that it is considered odd not to attend. A regular non-attender is classified as “a bit of a loner” or more ambiguously, “a bit queer.”

What is so different about these non-meeting-goers? Is it that they hold themselves aloof from their fellows to demonstrate their superiority? Are they anti-social perhaps?

I have been doing a bit of thinking about this and after long and extensive research I’ve come to the conclusion that it’s nothing like that at all. These people know, whether they know it or not, (if you see what I mean), that for every meeting there must be a farewell, and they’re positively paralysed by the prospect!

Alliteration aside, meeting involves parting, (at the very least), and the prospect of separation is fraught with unpleasant emotions. Parting is such sweet sorrow, as the Immortal Bard says — and some people will go to almost any lengths to avoid farewells.

An example from the Bible. Consider the discomfort felt by Heber’s wife Jael at the thought of parting from Sisera, who, poor mug, had sought shelter in her tent. Such is the mental anguish suffered by the lady at this prospect that she decides to avoid the whole business. She takes this dirty great iron tent peg and drives it bang,

bang, right through his head and into the ground (thus securing his immediate attachment to the place).

The answer's simple. People who do not go to meetings do not go to meetings because they can't stand farewells. That's my theory. I do hope that after the example of Sisera, you get the point.

**David Brooks**

## **RED AND BLACK**

I am going to try to tell you how it was, back then, or is, because there seems to be such pressure on me — on us to do so, to take what we have collected or remembered, and try to put it into words. Indeed, that goes to show the problem: that there is an *I* that must try to reach out to *you*, through sentences like these that seem themselves to be so much responsible for the whole business of difference in the first place. In any case it's that, "the first place", that I want to talk about — how far, far away it seems, and yet how near it all still is.

It isn't as if there is really very much to say in the usual way. There were, after all, so few *differences*. I mean, there were really none to *speakef*. We were there, that's all. And it was very "dark" and very "huge" and very "warm", though at that stage, with no language going on, all those things seemed one. It also may have been very "soft", for there were certainly no edges or things that were hard to the touch. Which doesn't go to say that nothing is solid, for indeed it all was in a way; *massy* and, well, *there* and not ever going to go away.

I don't want to give you the impression that it was really all that dark either. There was also this big red thing that was sometimes there and sometimes wasn't. When it was there we would be on the dark part — on the soft surface of its hardness — and sometimes look up to the big red thing and at other times not, though whichever way we looked we would always be very conscious of it, because of the redness that was in everything, even making the black we lay on a sort of red-black.

Of course, when I say *the black we lay on*, I create all sorts of problems, for "lay" may not be the best word for it; position didn't seem very important. We were just there, and sometimes the red was and sometimes it wasn't, and whichever way it was it had a way of seeming to have been that way forever.