

PROFOUND HUMANNESS AS CONSCIOUSNESS

Today I would like to talk about that facet of profound Humanness called "Consciousness." In some ways this might seem to be the easiest one to talk about because, I think, everyone here, in a real sense, knows about it to the bottom. I'm not concerned today about saying something profound, or new; I am concerned about how you and I point to what we now know is true about life.

As I look at the Profound Humanness chart before us now, it reminds me of an electronic grid, any part or combination of which can light up with varying intensity at any given moment. The fascination lies in never knowing which category is about to flicker on, which will shine with steady intensity. Although there is a high degree of rational relationship among the categories, there is no implied progression as one reality of profound humanness. In the last two days as I have listened to my colleagues speak about event and mystery, I found myself somewhat resenting the fact that their talks spilled over into "my" category of consciousness; I thought they could have exercised a little more restraint. But I discovered that all of these categories spill into one another, for they are all interrelated aspects of one reality.

I like the image that together the touchstones of profound humanness form a web, or a net. When you participate in any one of them you get "caught" in profound humanness. Today we might consider four aspects that could provide a screen for grasping consciousness as a state of being that is profound humanness: the dynamics of that internal state of being; the inherent indicative; the fundamental characteristics; and the foundational resolve.

I have heard many of you observe over the last few days how well we all look. It's as if we never expected us to look so good! I have found myself thinking that about my colleagues. Some times I have just come right out and said "You look great!" At other times I've been astounded when someone has said it about me. When you take a look at all of us together, we certainly bear out the fact that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; corporately we do look better together than we ever have at any other time. This has something to do with our having experienced or touched profound awareness, having participated in the depths of humanness. Whatever else these last few months of intensive engagement have been, you and I have been given back our lives in a strange and rather wondrous way. We shouldn't be surprised if it shows on us. It is visible. Although we didn't feel particularly comfortable at the time it happened, that's what happened. We have been given our lives back intensively.

First, I would like to observe something that is so fundamental we sometimes overlook it, although we know it to the depths of our own being, life is consciousness. Without consciousness, life would not be what it is. That observation is not a profound statement, but it is one that needs to be said to allow us to step back and grasp what we have experienced.

Consciousness is given. It is a very objective happening. It is given in the simplest, most mundane experiences of our lives. It is given in the most spectacular, dramatic experiences of our lives. It is given every single day of our lives. It is given to every single man. The fascinating thing about consciousness is that you never know when it is going to be given. To deal with consciousness is to deal with event and mystery. The three have become for me almost indistinguishable.

Life - yours and mine - is always being intruded upon. We are continually being assaulted by the "other". We are forever being held over against the possibility which comes to us as far more than we think we can possibly assimilate. Life is disruption; life is interruption; life is assault. It has never been any different, and we should never expect it to be any different. Consciousness itself, therefore, is under assault. The consciousness that you have at any one moment is under the assault of "otherness." When the other impinges upon consciousness it comes in almost any form. Any object or person or happening in the midst of life can be the vehicle which occasions consciousness. When it happens, basic assumptions become all scrambled. Then they are revealed in a new light, and I am presented with a whole new operating picture of reality.

This is familiar territory for us because we have worked through this dynamic in a time of knowing. Our grasp of it has taken shape in one of our methodological gifts to history, imaginal education. We know that in a split second, an "aha" can happen through which everything becomes transformed; everything seen before is seen in a different light and is then seen through to reveal that which is utterly new. A sudden grasp of hidden relationships presents itself in a wholly new image, and the universe explodes. When this happens, you are left with the articulation of a new rationality which goes beyond any rationality that you have ever known or experienced before, and all previously defined logic is left behind. We have called that transrationality or seeing through to a third, fourth or fifth dimension, that had not been apparent before.

I remember a woman in the village of Nadlapur, who participated during the Consult in the education team. Throughout the Consult she had not said a word, but she had been present every day. During the last session of team work she suddenly stood up, walked up to the board, took a piece of chalk and scribbled across it. Then she turned around and asked in Telagu, "What does that say?" We looked and discovered it didn't say anything - it was just scribbling. No one knew quite how to respond, but she didn't wait for an answer. She said in her native Telagu, "I'm ready to learn what that says." Her life had been assaulted by the sheer "other" during the Consult, and in that happening a breakloose had occurred. In the midst of all that we do with those blackboards - brainstorming, and swirls, and gestalts - she grasped herself in terms of a new paradigm that revealed a reality that she previously had not realized existed. She had never before seen the possibility of being a literate person who could handle the spoken and written language. But at that moment she could claim, "I'm ready to learn; I'm ready to write."

That kind of dynamic occurs again and again in life. It is available to every person; it is available to every community, too. Maliwada left an indelible impression upon all of us who were there this past year. I remember being somewhat disturbed during the Consult when people came up with a pictorial symbol for the village. They wanted to hold something of the history of the landmark, Daulatabad Fort together with their grasp of the dawning of a new day. When they came to depict that visually in a symbol, they used the rugged outline of the fort with a bright red-gold sun rising right over it. As one stands in Maliwada, the fort appears due north. The sun rises in the East and sets in the West, nowhere within the view of the fort from the perspective of the village. I was deeply disturbed that they had created something as jarring to my western rationality as that sun rising in the north. I came to realize later that those people knew what they were doing when they insisted upon their symbol. It illustrates what we might point to with that category on the chart "impactful imagery." For that symbol

revealed the relationship that the whole community had taken to the future, to itself and to the very mystery of life. That relationship was unsynonymous with anything the people had ever experienced in their lives. It allowed them, as a community, to stand present to wrenchingly new possibility. That symbol defied logic. When you look through it you behold life as more than it ever appeared to be. Life had become filled with a dawning newness that betrayed all rationality. The community of Maliwada, giving shape to and claiming that symbol, demonstrated what it means to participate in profound humanness as profound consciousness.

I would like to mention one more illustration. There is a man who lives in Maliwada whom I believe will be with me for the rest of my life. Some of you know him, although you may not know his name. It is Chokibaba. You've seen his photo, I'm sure; he stands holding a picture of the Iron Man which Lela Mosely presented to him during the Consult. To be confronted by the dynamic of Fifth City in the presence of Lela Mosely is an overwhelming address in itself. Chokibaba wears his Iron Man pin daily - he is never seen without it. He talks about his own life as having come alive during that week in December of 1975. He has learned to articulate "Iron Man" in English, and uses that image to refer to his own stance in life. When Chokibabe uses his own rather incredible Marathi poetry, he speaks of having been caught up in a profound consciousness that has literally blown open the dimensions of his life and given him a whole new grasp of what it means to be Chokibaba, a human being who can stand before the possibilities of life itself.

The dynamics of profound consciousness are held then by the four subcategories of the chart: illuminated relationship, impactful imagery, paradigmatic insight, and transrational interpretation. In the first instance, the quality of consciousness is immeasurable. You cannot accurately calculate how much consciousness you have or how much your neighbor has.

For profound consciousness has to do with standing present to the breaking in of the painfully new upon your life which occasions a paradigmatic insight and discloses the profound mystery of life. It illuminates every relationship you have with your colleagues, with yourself and with the mystery itself. It throws you into a consciousness of consciousness. That is, it enables you to stand outside yourself and see yourself watching yourself observing yourself. That experience is one that comes with a two fold of intrusion plus pain.

It comes with the pain of having to make a decision. That decision is, I am my consciousness. I have inescapable freedom to decide what my life is going to be about. However that decision is not only that I am my consciousness. It involves the acknowledgement that consciousness itself is unequivocal, that consciousness carries with it the unequivocal requirement of an ultimate "yes" or "no" being given by you or by me. You and I are not in charge of consciousness.

We are only in charge of what we do with it. What I do with the consciousness which is given, is who I am. Sometimes we wish that we didn't have the consciousness we have. We are flooded by consciousness and with consciousness. At times we agonize, "If there is one more thing I have to become conscious of ..." And yet, there is no maybe about it. We either say "yes" or "no." We say "yes" and life is given to us, however painfully, it is given. We say "no" and life is taken away. That should be no surprise to us at all. There is nothing wrong with that, just don't expect it to be otherwise. It is unequivocal.

Some familiar poetry comes to my mind in connection with this: "As we live we are transmitters of life and when we fail to transmit life, life fails to flow through us...Give and it shall be given unto you is still the truth about life. But giving life is not so easy. It doesn't mean handing it out to some mean fool or letting the living dead eat you up. It means kindling the life quality where it was not. Even if it is only in the whiteness of a washed pocket handkerchief."

When life itself forces consciousness upon you, you either be a transmitter or you be a zombie. I never liked that term zombie. It was always too offensive to me, but it is helpfully descriptive. When people are faced with the consciousness that comes in the intensity of dealing with life as it is, one attempts to withdraw from the onslaught of consciousness. He defends himself against the painfully searing light of consciousness that impinges, intrudes upon his life and literally rips off his face and strips from him every means he ever had of assimilating any new thing. That intrusion tears deeply at his entrails. Such defensiveness is death or it throws one into the state of living death. Consciousness itself is highly contingent. When it is given to you, you must care for it or it goes away. You cannot keep hold of it. Consciousness does not belong to you or to me. Either you embody it or your very life becomes reduced and finally, taken away.

Recently I had occasion to acknowledge before this body something that marked a new dimension of consciousness to me, when I indicated that I am in my 50th year. That in itself is not the shocking thing. The shocking aspect is that I experience more life flowing through my veins now than I have ever experienced before. This year I have experienced my life as having been given back to me and I do not attribute that entirely to being 50. For awhile I was running around this year saying, "Well, I'm 49. Got another year to go." Then I realized that was not true. I am in the 50th year. That's a great gift because I don't know what it means to be 50. I've looked around and I'm not sure anyone else knows either. What I do know is that I have to go out and create what that means. However it was not that symbolic year alone, but its convergence with my encounter with India and the offense of facing my own death.

This year I was introduced by my consciousness of consciousness to the finality of my own life and to the awareness that I was participating in that finality. I have known this intellectually for some time. I have stood before death in other people. I've stood before dead bodies. I have understood intellectually that every one of us is going to die and that someday I am going to die. But I was birthed into a new consciousness that my death was taking place and I was directly participating in it. This new consciousness was rooted in the intensity that India is. There is the assault of so many people. You are never by yourself, you are never anywhere where someone else is not looking at you. You experience the assault of having your style stripped away. Having that by which you have previously identified yourself and the style you decided to mold ripped away, torn apart by the assault of everpresent innocent suffering. There are so many experiences that grounded this. One day while walking down a street in Aurangabad, I turned a corner and was confronted by a young lad whose arm was just a leprous stump which he shoved before my face and began to wave. That experience was the intensity of India.

When I came here a colleague remarked that he had seen a picture of me. He had heard I was wasting away and literally did not believe I was going to live. Well, I didn't think I was going to live either at one point.

I experienced being assaulted in that place of so much innocent suffering by an insignificant virus, being laid low and undone by it, and seeing my own physical life being totally stripped away. I was thrown over against the raw consciousness of my own death which finally, is what profound consciousness does. When consciousness introduces you to the finality of life, what a gift that is. I had formulated images of the other world and eternity before, but intellectually. Now the consciousness I live with is grounded at a gut level. I have been introduced by consciousness itself to the finality of my life; and I find that it is good. I was given the chance to stand present to the totality of my life, its beginning and its end. Now, in the midst of the intensive, radical engagement, it does not make any difference whether I live or die. That doesn't mean that I am not afraid or that I want to die. To the contrary, I have a lot of living to do yet, but it doesn't make any difference whether I live or die. I am conscious of having been stripped of everything that I was or possessed and being thrown against the sheer nothingness and inconsequence and total disposability of my own life. I am conscious of having been thrown over against the completion of my life and the realization that long afterwards, who will know the difference of my having been here? I am conscious of having been thrown over against the fact that my life can come and it can go, and when I stand before mystery and state that, I am aware that the stars will still continue in their course. Yet, it does not make any difference whether I live or die. What makes a difference is whether the life and consciousness I have is engaged and re-engaged at the point where history is turning, at the point where innocent suffering takes place or where the moral issue of our time is manifest. I didn't ask for this, but that's the way it comes.

Since then, I have been aware of a new alertness in myself which is part of what it means to have this consciousness. This alertness to live allows everything to be birthed anew. It allows the new to break in on you and give your life back to you at the same time it allows for the painful but essential growth that the human journey is. I've been left with that kind of residue. But the resolve I have and the resolve that I sense is in you is -- "By God, I'm going to see to it, with the kind of consciousness which has been given to me, that I am going to live the one brief, complete life that is mine in such a way that it does not go for nothing." This is a declaration of war on reduced consciousness. It is a declaration of war on any social structure that restricts human life and dehumanizes. It is a declaration of war on anything that stands in the way of men and women across the face of this earth knowing what it means to be profoundly human. Consciousness is having the apparent ripped apart and seeing through that which is given to that which you never dreamed could be.