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Chicago

PROFOUND HUMANNESS AS ACTION

We do a lot of sighing and it takes many forms. We have some folks here who are psalmists and sigh, "oh." I've really been caught by my own sighing and I suspect we didn't sigh as much last year as we do now. I have to talk about it' in this way: in sighing we touch heavenly sorrow, and in touching we become vitality. Or in the sigh of deciding to move, we take in all the innocent suffering of the world and find ourselves moving in action that is profound humanness. It goes something like this: "Representational historical engagement occasions a particular deed to be appropriated as accomplishment, and it allows the decisional victory to be you. It always necessitates unmitigated engagement and manifest intentions."

One guardian friend of mine has a fine position in his company. He has a timeline that goes to the year 2005. His job is to make that company number one in the world by 2005, with all its flanks covered. He buys forests the size of Rhode Island so that they'll have packing material in the year 2005. But he no longer belongs to that job. Something happened to him, and his life is now out to be the appropriate deed. When you find the action that is profound happiness, that is the appropriate deed.

When we were talking about Town Meeting or awakening, this friend would say, "Every community must have one or they'll die. Every town must have a Town Meeting or they'll die; we'll all die." He is forever hunting for the contradiction to move on any particular phase of the campaign. You call him to talk through the issues we have on our hands.

I remember one conversation when our block had to do with funding. He said, "It sounds like we need to have the Chamber of Commerce fully behind us, and maybe the Manufacturer's Association. I'll do that.'" Two hours later, he called back saying, "You have a conference with the state Chamber of Commerce man whose name is such and such. We did this and this together." He's always seeking out the appropriate deed. He is no longer concerned about being a good guy, but with releasing the future. He is always working on a particular deed, one particular deed after another. That is profound humanness that is action.

"We need 10,000 brochures by next Tuesday. There is no money. We've tried all the inkind printers." His response is, "Well, we can do that here at the office. Give me a couple of hours to set it up." As soon as he says that, he knows that his head is on the block because if he gets caught, he's in trouble. But he does it for the particular deed.

I once asked him (and I had to get my nerve up), "Why do you do this?" He paused a long time, then said, "I remember my little town in the Carolinas when I was a young man. I walked to the edge of town and for the first time I saw the shanties. I suppose I do it for all the shanties of the world." After that, there was no more conversation. He's not simply out to do something; he's out to throw himself into the breach where his life needs to be placed. He, for me, is the man who is grabbing the wheel at every moment, and has become action beyond the act, which is historical engagement.

The last conversation we had went something like this: "We seem to be blocked in the eastern section. There are 12 counties there and nothing is moving. We discovered some companies there related to your company." He simply picked up and moved and did a couple more counties. Action is historical engagement.

Secondly, action that is profound humanness is a particular deed that becomes genuine accomplishment. One time this spring I did nine or ten Town Meetings in a row. The weeks went like this: circuittown meeting, circuittown meeting, circuit-town meeting. What I discovered was that I wasn't doing circuits and I wasn't doing Town Meetings. What I ended up doing was rolling tape every Friday night. On more than one occasion I asked myself, "What in the world is a 49yearold man doing rolling tape every Friday night?" Profound humanness that is action shows up looking like boring, hard work.

It is always a precise deed that you are doing so that history becomes humanness; becomes what it was meant to be. For Gandhi, it was the salt. As soon as the salt fell through his fingers and he declared what was happening, it was over all was done that needed to be done. I've thought, "What is it for Town Meeting?" For me it's become the room. Maybe underneath the five pillars, you put the ROOM SPACE. It's a precise deed that releases the civilizing process.

In the Ohio Town Meeting Assembly we spent 20 hours getting all of the symbols and slogans on the wall. Above that was the Town Meeting Ohio sign and above that, just Town Meeting. At every place setting was the songbook from Town Meeting: Ohio. In the center of the room was a table with every document carefully arranged. People gathered in another room for coffee. They talked and talked. When they walked into the assembly room, they were not talking any longer. They sat down and found themselves staring into each others' eyes. Someone leaned over and said, "We can go home now. All has been done that needed to be done." The precise action that releases creativity that is profound humanness, had been done.

Action is always a completed maneuver. It is finishing all that you are out to do in every act. I remember being compelled to wait for the mailing to mayors to reach their desks. I couldn't find stamps fast enough. All four circuit teams had to wait two days for that mailing to hit the desks before we initiated maneuvers in that section of the state. It was incredible waiting. The action was the waiting, and the waiting had become all that you needed to do to complete the task. Once the mailing arrived on the mayors' desks, all was done.

We all know that in profound humanness that is action, you are at every moment on the edge of being destroyed. It is always win or lose, win or lose. Either the county is white or yellow, period. But in that, something else happens. It is not just the white or the yellow that is significant. You discover that in the doing you have been blessed; that in the integrity of your doing is all that there is.

Third, profound humanness as action is decisional victory; in action, decisional victory occurs. It is in the first instance, the orchestration of your selfhood in history. Every act is out to give every community the life that is life. It is always orchestrated. The campaign in Ohio had 84 little boxes to be done in 84 tactics. Half of those boxes had nothing to do with being in a particular community. We'd go along for awhile and I would start bleeding (this is after we've been running all over the state getting names for a brochure). I'd get a circuiter in the corner and I'd say, "Now, how many Town Meetings did we set up today?" The reply would be, "We set up all of them." That was a ritual we had with each other, one box at a time.

It felt like that whenever our doing had nothing to do with what we had set out to get done. It always pointed toward that which allows history to be recreated and it is knowing your doing. I don't know how to say that. I don't know much about it yet. It has something to do with tactical thinking. It's knowing what to do with the arrangements of your troops and your weaponry. At one point this year, the weaponry and troops looked like this: a good bit of authorization, not much money, 20 cautious colleagues, six well-heeled guardians, four tired house staff, and an incredible cat.

In that situation you knew what you were doing; you were defeated. You were losing. All you had to do was decide that you needed to rearrange those forces and weaponry and move. And once you moved, it was like the barefoot boy turning toward Jerusalem. Action that is profound humanness is framing. It is accounting for every act within your decisional maneuver. My image is, before you draw your long sword, you know what damage it can give with any particular move. You know that before you draw the sword.

In action that is profound humanness, you bury your druthers and move. I kept looking at New York and saying, "How did that group of people decide to do New Jersey?" That's an incredible question. They had to know that they were precisely on target before they could move and they had to know what they had decided to do was called for in history. They took out their long sword and swung.

A friend or mine calls every now and then and says, "Booher, are you winning?" It's a ritual which says, "Are you standing before all that needs to be done in history in order that civilization survives and be the greatness that it is? Are you winning?" In that, there is something called effortless style. When you know that what you are doing is winning, there is no effort. It's like the bullfighter. He knows he's over against being annihilated at any moment, but he dances like a ballerina. My other illustration is, I could be sitting in a room with my wife and that she is just done in. Then, one of you calls and it sounds like she has just jumped out of the middle of a cake at a bachelor's party. It is effortless doing.

Finally, profound action that is humanness is manifest intentionality. It is the unshakable resolve that is always required. It is like riding a Brahma bull. You have to decide to ride that critter and if you don't you'll die a silly death. Yet, it's not 12 seconds on the back of a bull. It's long enduring tenacity, and what you experienced as a residue is a very tired and aching body. It even hurts to close your eyes and open them again. It is resolve to be all that is needed.

It's something that ends up with you making six visits, doing 12 telephone calls, setting up tables and chairs, running over to get some printing done, finding some money to buy gas, checking the assignments with centrum for next weekend, unblocking the mayor about the use of his equipment, or blocking him relative to a long speech he wants to make, and on and on and on. Then you go to McDonald's for lunch and start again. Or it's wanting to sleep at night. When you finally get to a place where you're prone, it's lumpy couch that smells a bit like urine, and you can't sleep, even though you thought about sleep all day long.

The unshakable resolve for me, is something like sitting across the table from a colleague who is the doctor's picture of complete exhaustion. In your weakest moment, you suggest that he call and cancel that meeting in Podunk and get some rest. At that moment, your colleague is enraged, angry that you would even suggest such a thing. Your colleague is the unshakable resolve that is always required. The strange thing is, you knew it even before you asked the question.

Action as profound humanness is incredible power unleashed. It's the head down charge of a great fullback. A colleague of mine was assigned to promotion for our state campaign. Once she decided to do that, she did more work in two months than I've done in the last five years. You simply got out of her way, stood there, and shook your head in disbelief. It was incredible to watch. It was Niagara Falls dammed up, and suddenly released.

In all our debriefing sessions we could hardly keep people in their seats. You were itching, itching to go. All you wanted was enough data to know what the contradiction looked like this week so you could move again. Then you started packing to leave again. There is an unnoticed cost in that happening. But you don't notice it. You only notice it in others.

I have a meditative friend called Victory, the Cat. I walked into the House last May and there was Victory. I counted 27 scabs on his body. Another hunk of his ear was gone and his nose looked like someone had rubbed it with sandpaper. But I wasn't looking at Victory the Cat. Action that is profound humanness ends up looking like that. You and I all know what it means to be turned to ashes and picked up and blown into the Way that is Life.

Action is also exposed contingency. In whatever you're doing, you know there is at least one flank that isn't covered. It's like going to Kentucky to do Community Forum. We had nothing. But you know the only way to do Kentucky is to do Kentucky. The only tool you've got is your own body. You simply drive into Kentucky, and you begin to stand long enough so you know what you're doing, then you do it. But you die in the meantime. We found some Jaycees who could take us to the Lieutenant Governor so that she might give us a smidgen of public permission to be in Kentucky. We held on to the coattails of this Jaycee till we saw the Lieutenant Governor. I died inside. You know this needs to be done, but you die. The Lieutenant Governor has only to ask two questions, and you won't be in Kentucky long.

There's always in that, the weeping. I don't know how you do your weeping, but in profound action there is weeping. There is genuine weeping not only for the innocent suffering that you act on behalf of, but for the fact that you are also that innocent suffering. For most of us, weeping went on in the front seat of a car, in the lonely hours between five and seven every afternoon when most of creation is doing something other than racing through the countryside to get to another meeting. I found a phrase that says, "Action is Life." I think it's Mao. Without action, civilization collapses. And in profound humanness, you know what action is. It is action where life is given, but incredibly received. I would not give up last year. All of you said you would not give up last year. You would not give up what you did or who you were. Somehow, we've become a new people. We've become the people blessed by the heavenly sorrow. I was talking with someone last night and I slipped and said, "Profound Happiness" instead of "Profound Humanness." That's true too, isn't it? We've become people of Profound Happiness.