

## PROPHETHOOD

"I have a dream that, one day, this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. I have a dream that, one day, slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that, one day, the heat of oppression and injustice will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will, one day, live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. I have this dream today."

This was Martin Luther King's prophecy. This was his dream for the black brothers and sisters of America. This one man's dreams transformed the lives of thousands, and this is just one example. Throughout history, people have emerged who have been called prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Mohammed, Zoroaster. Then there are people like Gandhi, King, Simone Bolivar, Kenneth Kaunda, Barbara Ward, Peter Drucker, Galbraith, Willie Brandt, Toffler - all types of people who have emerged over the ages to speak out their dreams and make prophecies.

I have checked a few dictionaries to see what they had to say about prophets and prophecies. One said that prophets are those who organize the new assumptions and articulate them. They are listened to and found acceptable. Prophets carry the interpretive role of the diviner. Prophets are generally believed to have access to a source of inspiration that transcends man's ordinary wits. They either symbolize the new themselves, or are vehicles by which the outlines of new society become known. Historically, prophets have been recognized when they have discerned the situation and articulated the trends. In other words, they articulated the truth. They described the way life is.

The dawning of truth happens only when one experiences the pain of the situation he is in. I don't think Gandhi would have launched the Freedom Movement if he had not experienced the pain and humiliation of being a second-class citizen. I don't think Martin Luther King could have launched what he did if he had not had that same experience.

A prophet does not stop at articulating the truth. He experiences the pain, describes the way life is, and then stands and stares at that contradiction. He looks at it. He battles with it. Then he sees a vision of the time in which this contradiction will be removed. Then he starts motivating and mobilizing his troops or his people into overcoming those contradictions.

I am reminded of a story about Mahatma Gandhi after he had decided that he would launch the Freedom Movement, and in an unorthodox way. He decided to use the weapon - and I want to use that word - of non-violence. He gave lectures and talks in which he said that India's freedom would be assured if non-violence was followed. After one speech, a person in the crowd, J. B. Kripalani, who later became a close associate, said, "Mr. Gandhi, you may know a lot about the Bible, about the Baghavad Gita, but you don't know anything about history. You don't know that freedom is not given to those people who don't fight. You have to be violent. You must fight for your freedom." Gandhi smiled gently and said,

"First of all, I want to correct you. You are wrong. Freedom is available to those who don't fight." And then he said, "The first thing you have to learn about history is that because something has not taken place in the past does not mean it cannot take place in the future." Those were his prophecies, and the rest is history, not just for India but for the world.

Prophecies are declarations: declarations of the way life is; declarations of the way contradiction is; and declaration of what is possible in the future. But, prophesying is not hollow. It's not just saying things, lest it become phoney. Prophesying is being prophecy. The prophet is the embodiment of his prophecy.

A few years ago when we initiated Maliwada, sixteen to eighteen of us were preparing for the consult, living there. At first, our children were not with us. Later, they joined us, and I think the first jolt of my decision came when, within a few days, they were full of scabies. I had never even heard of scabies. I did not even recognize it. When they broke out with sores on their legs, their hands, all over their bodies, I asked myself, "Why have I come here? What is this all about? Is this the way I am going to care for my family?" My whole decision was called into question.

Then it came to me that if Maliwada is to be the pilot, it has to be a demonstration of what any small village in a depressed situation can do, and I have to stand by my decision. I have to be the prophecy of what I am saying. We have to stand behind whatever declarations we make. That is the journey of prophethood in our time. We are not saying that any one of us is a prophet; we are the corporate prophethood, and therefore this is the journey of all people.

Anwar Sadat symbolizes that kind of journey. Here is what he said when he presented his autobiography, In Search of Identity:

"I, Anwar El Sadat, a peasant, born and brought up on the banks of the Nile, where man first witnessed the dawn of time, present this book to readers everywhere. This is the story of my life, which is, at the same time, the story of Egypt since 1918, for so destiny has decreed. The events of my life have coincided with those which Egypt has lived during that period. I, therefore, tell my story in full, not merely as the President of Egypt, but as an Egyptian whose life has been intimately bound up with that of Egypt. It is, I believe, like everyman's life - a journey in search of identity. Each step I have taken over the years has been for the good of Egypt, and has been designed to serve the cause of right, liberty and peace. This is the image I have had of myself since childhood. Now, as the landscape of my life unfolds before my eyes, can I claim that this image, which is, in effect, that of Egypt, has been realized, even recognized?"

The prophet's journey is a perpetual journey in revelation. It is not going to end, and it is oftentimes solitary. It begins as a solitary journey, and later it becomes a corporate journey. I remember what Jawaharlal Nehru said on the eve of Indian Independence, just before midnight on August 14th, 1947: "I have a tryst with destiny." He then went on to say that it was not just his tryst, but it was India's tryst as well. It's a perpetual revelation.

All of you have seen the picture of Lela Mosley presenting the Iron Man photograph to Chokababa, the old man from Maliwada. Chokababa has made prophetic statements over the years since the project began. Inevitably, after every stake meeting or leaders' meeting he would rise and say, "All this will not be done if you are not one people. We have to be one people. We have to be a united people. You can get your electricity; you can get your water; you can get your houses, hybrid seeds, roads, drains, whatever; but it will not be done 'til we are one people, 'til our barriers are removed." That man has been a symbol of the prophetic element in society. Even at the end of the CEM in Maliwada, he stood up and said, "We have to meet again and again to be one people."

Fifth City would not have gone to the world if Joe Mathews had not given his prophetic revelation to the group that was present the night the riots broke out on the West Side of Chicago after Martin Luther King died. Many of you were there, and remember the electricity that was in the atmosphere, the tension, the threat to life, the chaos, and the people who were ready to leave. Joe said, "If we leave Fifth City now, Fifth City will never be done." People stayed. That was the prophetic element in the community. Somebody dared to stand and look at the contradiction, and, despite the threat to his life and the lives in the group, decided to stay on.

We know what has happened. Fifth City has gone to the world, and we see the evidence of it right here in this room. Ivy City 43% crime reduction. Water gushing out not just in Bayad but elsewhere. People standing in responsibility for their communities. Houses, food, education, health, all because Fifth City went to the world. Isn't it a joy to hear what Serusup has done, what drip irrigation in Conacaste has done, what Bayad has done! The symbol for me is the 43% crime reduction in Ivy City, a place where crime is an everyday happening. In this kind of perpetual revelation, we know the consequences: people are standing tall, trends are bending, the world is picking up the sign.

At Bombay, we decided to do a little Shramdan every morning outside the house on Sankli Street. Sankli Street is crowded, dirty and smelly; it's really a toilet for a lot of people. We decided to do a little clean-up there each day. We were both brown-skinned and white-skinned people doing it, and passersby just wouldn't believe their eyes. The milk vendors, the early bus riders, the people on their way to work, kept looking at us, in disbelief. We also put up a little sign at the spot where most of the defecation was taking place: "Sankli Street is the Pride of Byculla. Keep It Clean." The sign was there for one or two days and then it got torn down. We put it back up. It came down again. We put it back up. This happened several times. One day, the head of the Bombay Municipal Corporation came and saw some difference there. When he asked about it the people told him there were some people who came out every morning to clean it up. When he finally discovered us, he met with us and said, "This is the job the Corporation is supposed to do. We are very pleased that you have reminded us of our job." Sankli Street is a bit cleaner now than it used to be. We are not doing the Shramdan any more. But now, regular clean-up does take place. Regular disinfection does happen. That is what happens when the consequences of prophetic revelation are present in society.

Prophetic revelations occasion resolves. We have resolved to stand with local people everywhere and with local communities everywhere. Whatever we do, whether it's awakenment or engagement or working with multi-nationals, or schools, or colleges, or hospitals, our aim is human community.

As we do this, people in authority oftentimes become a bit frightened, seeing our work as a threat to their relationships to local people. Though this is a misconception of our motives, nonetheless we feel the consequences of it. After we had received the renewal of our 35cca tax-exempt status from the central government for the ICA and for the first 25 district projects, we applied for all 232 villages to be under the exemption. We were in negotiations with the government, and finally they called us for a meeting. In the meantime, they contacted the Secretary of Rural Development for the State of Maharashtra, who has been a bit threatened by his erroneous impression of our work. He sent directives to all the District Collectors and Chief Executive Officers to check the first 25 district Human Development Projects and compare them with their consult documents. All these officials went everywhere checking us out. As we showed up for the big meeting with the government, they had put up a big chart of what we had said we would do, and what they saw had been accomplished. Narain Muley, from Maliwada, and K. K. Tupe, who has been with us for two or three years, were the team with us. As we walked into the meeting hall, Mr. Innocent, the Secretary of Rural Development, said, "Oh, here these people come again, and, as usual, they have villagers with them." In my being I cried out, "Why not! That's what we are doing!" Throughout the meeting, Mr. Innocent was very cool and kept saying that we had not done what we said we would do, and absolutely refused to give us a further extension. After a lot of struggle, and because there was one who cared on the committee, they decided to extend the status to twenty-five additional projects, so now we have fifty projects under 35cca.

It is essential that, whatever prophetic revelations we make, that we have resolve for them. Tracing the history of our body, we began in Austin, Texas, as a small group of six families. After struggling with what it meant to be the religious in the Christian tradition and the creation of RS-1, we decided to move to another setting, to Evanston, Illinois. We decided to look at the world and created courses like CS-1. Then it was time to move from suburbia to the inner city, so we went to Fifth City. All of these moves were made after reading the trends of the times. From the local churches to the local communities and then to all communities everywhere, that has been our past. And now, as we stand at the threshold of a new decade, what are we saying? What is our prophetic role to be?

One of the things that is related to authentic prophethood is comprehensive vision. We cannot afford to limit our vision. Our vision is limited when we don't stand and look at the contradictions, when we don't see where the gaps are. And our prophecies become false. We have to watch out for statements that seem overly simplistic. We have to watch out for "good ideas", and for personal attacks. When we are being the prophetic role, our authentic style is comprehensive vision.

We have to be prophets to everyone. We cannot limit our prophetic role. I want to read a quotation from Gandhi's autobiography, for to me he symbolizes the authentic style of prophecy:

"We have to make truth and non-violence not matters for mere individual practice, but for practice by groups and communities and nations. That, at any rate, is my dream."

In our prophetic style, the vision is wide and comprehensive, a vision that touches every person. For we stand for "the last fat lady", the last person in any community. We stand for the last human settlement in the world.

I stand here in utter humiliation, and, on behalf of corporate prophethood, dare to declare a few prophecies:

I have a dream that someday, we will be a pluriform Order. We have begun to think about it seriously. We know it cannot be done in a hurry, but we also know that it cannot be delayed. There is an urgency in being the pluriform, in embracing the whole universe. For the first time, we really have the whole world before us. We really have all six Urs amidst us. It is not just academic any more; it is our real situation. How do we be the pluriformity that we now are?

I have a dream that someday, we will be agents of structural change. After battling in the projects, after battling in the local communities, it's become very clear that we have to be catalysts, not just to the local communities, but to the structures in society. It was very invigorating for me to be part of the Chikhale campaign last quarter. There is a new tar road from the highway to Chikhale. The filtration tank is up and is gushing out pure water, so the guinea worms will not be a problem next year. The Ambar Charkar - the local community development organization - has become a sign of what it means to create employment for rural villages. People from New Delhi and Bombay have come to see what it looks like. The pre-school had a great impact on the Chief Executive Officer and the Chief Engineer of the Kulaba District when they came to inspect the road. They really came to inspect the road as an excuse to inspect Chikhale itself, for they had heard that something new was going on. There were seven or eight officials in their party, and they saw it all - the new road, the tank, the Ambar Charkar. But what impacted them most was the little pre-school of about thirty children, all in uniform. Every child had a plate of steaming, nutritious porridge before him. They were impacted because they had just visited the government primary school ten yards away. The Chief Executive Officer turned to the others and said, "Can't we do in our schools what these people are doing? Why is it that these teachers have smiling faces? And why is it that three teachers are absent from the primary school today, and the one person that is there is not interested? Is there something we can do? Can we learn from these people?" Then he said to us, "Can you teach our people? Can you train us? I've never experienced a group like this."

How is it that we motivate people in authority so that we become their allies, that we complement them, that we give our shoulders to them? People like Willie Brandt and Toffler are saying this on a global scale. The Brandt Commission says that we have to do short-term programs, but that, finally, long-term structural changes are needed in society.

I have a dream that someday we will adequately demonstrate an authentic life-style. We have talked about the despair that has crept into the First World: the drug situation, the alcohol situation, the disintegration going on within people who have the "good life". In other parts of the world, the yearning for the good life is the trap. There is nothing wrong in having comfort. There is nothing wrong in leading a good, decent life. The trap is in yearning for some other situation. Wouldn't it be fine if we did demonstrate the authentic life-style, making our ashrams and our religious houses showcases where people would come and see what the new style is for families and communities! We are the ones who demonstrate a people bound in faith, hope and love. We are those, who, in our daily nitty gritty-ties, our daily tensions, our daily frustrations, humiliations, loss of self-

confidence and disappointments, finally win as we demonstrate our corporateness and our corporate prophet-hood-ness. We are those who live out of hope beyond hope.

Finally, that's what we are doing: demonstrating hope beyond hope. I want to close with this quotation from Tagore:

"Where the mind is without fear, and where the head is held high; where knowledge is free; where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; where words come out from the depths of truth; where tireless striving stretches its arms toward perfection; where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habits; where the mind is led forward by deed into ever widening thought and action; into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let all human communities awake."