

PROFOUND HUMANNESS AS DECLARATION

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I am going to talk on Declaration. Everybody is looking in one way or another at what it means to be a profound human being. Some common statements people make today like "I want to be a real person" are pointing to the desire to be engaged in a meaningful life or to be profoundly human. This is a time to experiment with declaring what profound humanness is all about. These talks are just experiments to give us an idea of how we articulate profound humanness. We want to around it.

The quotes on the walls which have moved us so are declarations or proclamations, if you like. I was struck by the one from the Sioux of Inyan Wakagapi, who says "The fresh air of the future feels good for future generations." If I had not seen that proclamation on the wall, I would not have known that. I would never have realized that Maliwada could make an old man feel like a young lion, were it not for another quote on our walls.

The quotes point to profound humanness, which declaration is. Proclamation of the spoken word has power to change the situation. My situation was changed just walking up the stairwells and seeing what was declared on the wall. The spoken word has the power to create history. A happening which elicits a response can be created just by the spoken word. I didn't know that I had any drive until someone told me. I bet you never knew you were a fine human being until someone actually told you. You never knew you were accepted as you are until somebody named your name and allowed the Mystery to communicate that to you.

Declaration is necessary for awareness, for awakenment, and for consciousness in its profundity. This is why Town Meeting is so important. There is no demonstration without awareness. Declaration is more than the spoken word. Every oral articulation is deed and presence just as every deed is a declaration. It's like in striking a pose, you proclaim the way it is. You just say that, and history has a chance to be changed. But it is not just saying something. It is getting out there and being what you say that alters things.

Look at some of the great declarations in history. I was thinking of the Magna Carta which gave justice to local man in England so many years ago. At one time, the United States was an amorphous mass of land and people. Then someone had the guts to create the Declaration of Independence and from that day on, this piece of land took a different direction.

Marriage is the same thing. Two people are declared man and wife and history goes a different way. It is never the same as before that declaration was made. The New Testament preaching or declaration was out to declare that you are loved of God, to give everyman the chance to be the human being he was created to be. Preaching these days has lost that as its aim.

When you declare what it is to be a human being, you find yourself continually exposed. The whole of your life is revealed as an exposed declaration. It took a long time to get said to myself that there is no use in hiding what you are. The Bible says it well: "Don't hide your life under a bushel." It does not matter how good your model is. If it is never proclaimed, it will never have a chance to go into the stew of history. You come to see that you are exposed anyway.

During a recent busy period of time when I delivered a lot of babies, my youngest daughter, whom I hadn't seen very much, asked me, "What is it that keeps you going, Mom?" That was a hard question to answer, especially after the year that we have had. We have heard the most incredible reports in the past few days. There is more

possibility than I ever thought I would hear about. Yet, it's been a painful year, a hard year, and a year that has been difficult to get my mind around. It is difficult to articulate what has happened while participating in the victories of this year.

I tried to answer my daughter's question. I thought, "Was it the global grid? Was it the 85% that sustained me?" I have seen suffering and I will never forget it. I have seen the aboriginals, with their 50% infant mortality rate. I have seen beggars in India. I will never forget that, especially a scene one morning in front of the Bombay [louse. There was a man with lead around his neck and all four limbs cut off. He was being beaten along the street so he could get money, or somebody could. We have all seen that kind of suffering. I have also seen the impact of being the blue and being part of a team in many parts of the world where you experience the possibility of changing the situation. You experience that your life makes a difference and that it is significant. But that didn't answer the question my daughter was asking.

Suddenly I realized what kept me going. Something had happened in 1973 which let me see that life for me was very different from then on. I was flying to India and as we were about to arrive, the captain announced "Ladies and gentlemen, something is seriously wrong with the nose wheel of this plane." He then added, with his nervousness adding to ours, "Ladies and gentlemen, we have 18 minutes left." When you've taken off your shoes and sunglasses, your knees are knocking together in the crash landing position, and you are wondering what is going to happen, you realize that it is sheer style all the way to the bottom.

The plane did crash land and I am still here. The front of the plane caught fire and they couldn't get us out for 20 minutes. But when we were rescued what occurred to me, and what I have proclaimed ever since, is that life is nothing but sheer gift. I could have skipped through the streets of Bombay-taking every beggar by the hand and saying, "Whether you like it or not, it doesn't matter. Life is a sheer gift. It is just given." There is no way to say that morally. Life is just given. I was able to declare with the rest of my life that you have just one life to live and it is given to you by the Mystery. That's what keeps me going and that is what I began to tell my daughter. It is in gratitude that you say that life itself keeps you going.

It's something to declare your story and the source of your motivity because there is no concrete proof of what keeps you going. In some ways, you seem like a fool before the word although it is right in the Other World. When you proclaim what it is to be a human being you become a visible sign of what is possible for humanness. You don't have to try to be a sign. You just are. And you want to cry when people waste the one chance they have to live.

At every consult I have been to, I have been impacted by the consult team as they stand in the blue. They declare by their very presence the greatness of life itself. I was startled to find during the Maliwada consult that somebody was conscious of you and what you were doing at every step you took. People were conscious of how you dressed, who you talked to, who you sat next to, how you greeted people and the way in which you said good morning. If you waved, the children waved back. If you smiled, they smiled. If you didn't smile, they didn't smile either. It was very clear that, like Jesus in the movie "The Gospel According to Matthew", there is no time off from being a human being. There is profound humanness in grasping that awareness.

I am awed by the local people and project auxiliaries. History is being changed by these people who have proclaimed that places like Sungai Lui, Maliwada or Fifth City are fantastic places to be alive. Many people who have walked through Fifth City even eight years ago would have been staggered to think that was a great place to be alive. You don't have to raise that question now; you see it in the faces of the people as well as in the physical symbols there. I was amazed at the transformation in Oombulgurri. When you arrive, people walk up to shake your hand. They have clean shirts on. This comes out of the sheer dust there. The people have decided that Oombulgurri is a great place to be alive with their whole lives.

Declaration involves living what you have said you are about. I had a headmistress as a young girl who was a

walking RS-1. She understood herself to be a visible sign of profound humanness. I remember her striding across the lawn one morning when it was raining very hard. She looked awful with mud on her stockings and her hair hanging down. But she still had a smile on her face. She said, "Good morning, Elizabeth," as she always did. "What on earth is good about it?" was my reply. She said, "It is good because this is the only morning you have and you are alive." I never forgot that.

It's amazing to watch what happens to people when they grasp that they are a sign of what it is to be human. When you grasp this possibility of your life as a sign, no occasion can go by without the chance to proclaim what it is to be human. We do this in House Church in illuminating the events of births and marriages. Every House Church reminds me again how it is possible to push the deeps of those events.

In declaring what the profundity of humanness is, there is constant reinterpretation of what is going on in your own life, what is going on in the world, and how you stand before the Mystery. Life forces you to do this. Constant declaration and redeclaration cuts over against encrustation or getting stuck in a rut. Life forces us out. It's God's way of looking after us as human beings.

A woman I work with once said that her life was about raising her family properly. This was the one thing she considered important in her life. Life did to her what it does many times. Her husband became an alcoholic and two of her three sons became heroine addicts. The third one didn't do well either. A new awareness came to that woman that life, if it had any meaning, was about something different. When she finally was able to appropriate what had happened to her, to see that she had been cared for in that situation, her declaration on why life was worth living was really worth hearing.

Now, let's look at what is happening at this Council. Once again we are calling the shots before the game. We are saying we are going to have six balls in one hole. It's like playing pool, where you say where the ball is going before you take the shot. We are creating maneuvers to see that these things happen. We are setting our priorities. We have talked about awakenment and replication. We are awed with what has been proclaimed for next year. We have restated that we are not about a "Boy Scout" operation. We are on death ground as never before. It is strange that at this time, we don't want to be anywhere else. Declaration this year is that it is possible to win where we are.

History is reshaped by continual proclamation throughout the ages. This has been true for all people. History has always been shaped when someone stands up and paints a picture of what the future is going to be like, then moves with it. I am reading in the book "Exodus" how the Jews decided to resettle Israel after thousands of years in the ghettos of the world. There were proclamations in the ghettos about the promised land that no one had ever seen. But they went ahead and many people predicted their defeat. Now, a whole new Israel has been created. A few people stood up and declared, "We are going to take this piece of geography and turn it into a country." They actually did, and that is an amazing event in our lifetime.

Gandhi did the same thing when he decided to defy the British empire over the salt taxes. That little old man thrust his being into history, put his body behind his declarations, and India hasn't been the same since. Neither has the British empire.

When you declare what it is to be a human being, life itself holds you accountable. Everyone in development knows that. Everyone who has set up a project site or done Town Meeting circuits knows that also. I remember one development call I was on recently. We visited a company president and asked him for money. He skeptically asked why we wanted it and why he should be the one to contribute. We painted the picture of shaping the future of Oombulgurri and talked about expansion of the egg industry. He asked about our part in all of this. Well, our lives were literally on the line. Once you paint that picture, and declare publicly where you have decided your life will go, you are held accountable.

When I think of the number of people before whom we are accountable now, it's frightening. I guess that president is going to come along one day and ask what we have been doing and if the egg industry has been done. He may even go to Oombulgurri to see if it is there. It is very clear at this point, that humanness is not to back out, but to appropriate that accountability and to stand before that in the eyes of the world.

You find yourself creating stories, not just facts, which release people to engage in the greatest battle of all time, the battle to claim life for everybody, to claim the greatest time to be alive. You shine your shoes and you brush your hair to release local man. It is clear to me that there is only one life to live and you have nothing to lose when the decision is made to be the dead ones we are.

My final declaration is that every human being has this one life. Every human being has one chance to build the earth. The Mystery has given me my life and all of history is waiting to see what I'll do with it.