Edward Snowden: A Healing Voice

Like many people, I was surprised to hear of Edward Snowden’s decision to leave his job and move toward Hong Kong in search of a place where he could reconcile his conscience with his understanding of humanity and the US Constitution. Ever since, I have been trying to understand how he had come to a decision that, one may be certain, others contemplated, but then did not pursue for reasons that are not important, at this point, to figure out.

As days, weeks, months passed, most citizens of the US had difficulties in assessing Edward Snowden’s act: was he a hero or a traitor? In the midst of these hesitations, his father embraced him tightly. (His mother may have done the same, but more discretely, so discretely in fact, that no one but herself and Edward and his father know about it). It was a very encouraging and courageous act even if it had to be handled, as too many things have to, in these days, with the help of a lawyer.

Is this lawyerly mediation of father-son love a sign of the times we are living in? Solidarity, generosity, love, – natural as humans for thousands of years – cannot be expressed without consulting lawyers, expert navigators in protecting humans from being liquidated by other humans.

So blinded by the exercise of power with impunity, they and/or their lobbyists cannot see how such insanity has led to a slow, possibly Irreversible process of annihilation of values that once defined humanity.

In these turbulent and confusing times, the striking quality of Edward Snowden’s voice may account for the silence it has tended to generate among his fellow humans. In the ideological dictionary of how to catalogue him, the specialists are at a loss, between honouring him as a hero and castigating him as traitor. Yet, his voice has come out as clear as crystal, as simple as a healing voice echoing his own conscience, a conscience fine-tuned to how it was defined thousands of years ago when humans began to gain a conscience of themselves as different from animals.

As one reads Ancient Egyptian texts, especially around the concept of Mâât (justice, balance, ethics, solidarity, etc.), it is not difficult to see the connection between Snowden’s Ba (inner spirit, soul, conscience, according to the Ancient Egyptians) and that of The Man In Dispute of His Ba, a text from the 12th dynasty (see Miriam Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature. Vol. 1: The Old and Middle Kingdom, UCLA Press, 1975). It is not difficult to imagine Snowden debating with his Ba on how to decide what to do in the face of doing work that told him that it was not right.

As in that text from the 12th dynasty (1990-1785 BC), one could imagine Snowden thinking like that man:

To Whom Shall I Speak Today
The Constitution shows one way
My bosses kept messaging me: stay away
From your conscience
They would say
Insisting you are
Too young to know anyway
The right from the wrong way...
Still I kept asking myself
To Whom Shall I speak today
While being encouraged to go
against the right way
To Whom Shall Speak Today
Facing solitary incarceration
Because I cannot help say
Yes to my conscience
Knowing what he did and what he was
being asked to do, it is not difficult to
imagine how he first tried to push his
conscience away, silence it, telling himself
that his job was to follow orders and not
think about the bigger issues of whether
it was right or wrong. But his conscience
or his Ba kept coming back, sometimes in
the middle of the night. He may not have
taken the same as The Man from the
text in Ancient Egyptian 12th dynasty, but
it is also clear that it is those words that
led him to look for people with whom he
could share the load weighing on his
conscience/Ba. The pain from the load was
too much. Like any reasonable human
being he looked for help, searching for
someone he could speak to, without
facing punishment concocted by
generations of misguided, gone astray
guardsians of laws built on lies, violence,
still unacknowledged crimes against
humanity.

We do know that our brain/body still react
physically/psychically in ways that were
learned from thousands of years ago,
whether in the face of threatening danger
or in the face of dilemmas dealing with life
issues. Living as human beings means
that one is permanently connected to
one’s conscience. That umbilical cord that
connects us to primordial times has never
been severed, but it will come under severe
strain, now and again. In times past, land
and conscience were as inseparable as
any of the organs that make humans what
they are. Inheritors of that crime against
humanity see nothing wrong in cashing
in on that original impurity by invading
the soul/conscience of every single
human being to own it as they owned the
land they conquered.

Could it be that the difficulties of figuring
out how Edward Snowden decided to do
what he did stem from a station in the
evolution of humanity that is showing
signs of being split from its conscience?
Put in another more brutal fashion: could
it be that one of the consequences of the
way humans are being organized
economically, politically, scientifically,
culturally, religiously [is that] humanity
as we have known it is being liquidated,
along with its history, and being replaced
by a species fashioned to respond without
resistance to the rules and regulations that
are being imposed in all spheres of life, all
of them rooted in the impunity that
sanctioned the severing of the land from
people whose conscience kept repeating:

You are the guardian of the land
Earth, air, water one way
As Corbin Harney used to say
Only one way to stay
The integrity of humanity
Let no one take your land away

Because not long after
They will take your conscience away
They turned the land into a commodity
With names like plantation, reservation,
Bantustans, colonies, commonwealth,
francophony, Lusophony
How far is humanity from unrecoverable
cacophony/hibernation, isolation,
desolation?
Liquidation?
The signal is clear: do not listen to your
conscience, especially if tells you to
denounce something that is damaging to
other members of humanity.

Looked at from such an angle, Edward
Snowden’s voice and action can be seen
as healing gestures in a world increasingly
being pushed to self-annihilation by
practices that emphasize, single-
mindedly, the competitive search for self-
enrichment. In the face of such a disaster,
should one be surprised that a person with
a highly sensitive conscience could not
help but follow it? When a healing voice,
like Edward Snowden’s, emerges in the
midst of an undeclared war against
humanity, one can be certain that such a
voice is the result of massive healing
energy being expressed from different
segments of humanity. This voice is not
an isolated cry. Could it be the water
breaking preceding the birth of a renewed
conscience and affirmation of fidelity to
humanity?

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