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# Nelson Mandela and the Power of Ubuntu

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**Abstract:** Nelson Mandela dedicated his life to fighting for the freedom of his South African kin of all colors against the institution of apartheid. He spent twenty-seven years fighting from within prison, only gaining his freedom when his fellow South Africans could claim it as well. This article demonstrates how his faith, his spiritual development and his noble purpose can be conceptualized through the lens of Ubuntu: the

African ethic of community, unity, humanity and harmony.

**Keywords:** Ubuntu; botho; unity; community; Afro-communitarianism; humanity; apartheid

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## **Nelson Mandela and the Power of Ubuntu**

In 2006, Nelson Mandela gives us his explanation of the African spiritual ethic, Ubuntu, in an interview with South African journalist, Tim Modise:

“A traveller through a country would stop at a village and he didn't have to ask for food or for water. Once he stops, the people give him food, entertain him. That is one aspect of Ubuntu, but it will have various aspects. Ubuntu does not mean that people should not enrich themselves. The question therefore is: Are you going to do so in order to enable the community around you to be able to improve?”.

[1]

The word Ubuntu comes from the Xhosa/Zulu culture, the community into which Nelson Mandela was born, and has been summarized in the phrase, “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” in the Nguni language of Xhosa, Zulu, or Ndebele. The concept of this phrase can be translated to mean, “A person is a person through other persons,” or “I am because we are.” In his explanation, Mandela touches upon the

multi-faceted nature of Ubuntu, as well as the way one feels Ubuntu as an innate duty to support one's fellow man. People should enrich themselves, meaning grow in their own Ubuntu, but true enrichment will naturally align with the duty to act towards the spiritual growth of one's community. Mandela found that the power of Ubuntu, the inner core of every person's humanity, could move mountains.

Ubuntu is a spiritual ideal, a way of life that is conceptually represented in a wide range of sub-Saharan African societies. While Ubuntu exists in many variations within different African cultures and languages, each conceptualization retains the same core of meaning that is both a goal and a guide for humanity. The representation across widespread African cultures, unified by a common message represents a duality that is in itself the foundation of Ubuntu.

In the Tswana language of Botswana, this concept is represented as the ideal of Botho, captured in the phrase, "motho ke motho ka batho," which retains essentially the same conceptual translation as its Nguni brother. Botho is one of Botswana's five national principles and was embodied in the Botswana's Vision 2016 strategy which states:

"The Botswana people use the term botho to describe a person who has a well-rounded character . . . and realizes his or her full potential both as an individual and as a part of the community to which he or she belongs. Botho is

an example of a social contract of mutual respect, responsibility and accountability that members of society have toward each other and defines a process for earning respect by first giving it, and to gain empowerment by empowering others.”.

[2]

Treating others with respect, thus receiving respect in return will be a significant aspect of Mandela’s spirituality.

In Malawi, this concept is called uMunthu. In the national language of Malawi, Chichewa, uMunthu is explained through the proverb, “kali kokha nkanyama, tili awiri ntiwanthu,” meaning, “when you are on your own you are as good as an animal of the wild; when there are two of you, you form a community.” Community will also play a central role in understanding Mandela’s spiritual development and noble purpose.

The concept runs through a range of other cultures, often combining the concept of generosity with genuine humanity. “Ubuntu” means ‘human generosity’ among other shades of meaning in the Kinyarwanda language of Rwanda and Burundi. “Obuntu” in Kitara and “obuntu bulamu” in Ganda, the languages of western Uganda and central Uganda respectively, both refer to the concepts of human generosity and harmonious interaction in one’s community. In Kiswahili, a Kenyan and coastal east African language, “utu” means humanness and originates from a governing concept that every action

should be done for the benefit of the whole community. Even in popular culture today, the American professional basketball team, the Boston Celtics, have chanted 'Ubuntu' when breaking a huddle since the 2007–2008 season, the year they won their 17<sup>th</sup> NBA Championship Title, after twenty-two unsuccessful years.

While individual African regions and cultures have each developed their own conceptualization of Ubuntu, it is clearly a common thread in sub-Saharan African spirituality, moral thought, and overall way of life. This duality of individuality and simultaneous unity is a fitting conceptualization of Ubuntu itself and in order to understand the uniquely African spirituality and faith pattern of Nelson Mandela, one must first understand the full concept and spiritual pathway of Ubuntu.

## **The Nature of Ubuntu**

Ubuntu differs from many common religious and spiritual words like “faith,” or “grace,” or “divine,” which are essentially descriptive of a state of being, rather than having a prescriptive, moral meaning that refers explicitly to the moral directive to create community. A person can have more or less Ubuntu in proportion to his conduct towards his fellow men, thereby making himself more or less of a genuine human being. The drive of the Ubuntu spirit is to become more fully, genuinely human, in unity with one's fellow man. The active nature of Ubuntu does not limit it to a static state, and the ability to gain

Ubuntu lies in the center of every human. If all human individuals contain within them a common “core of decency” as described by Mandela, then every individual must also have the ability to access this core and, “if their heart is touched, they are capable of changing.” ([3], p. 462). This core of decency and humanity is a core of Ubuntu itself. As Mandela touches upon his explanation of the concept, Ubuntu is a multi-faceted concept, and this core is one of the several key facets.

This developmental, animate nature creates two other important and distinct facets of Ubuntu. First, a concept capable of development necessarily suggests that there is some goal to develop towards, and in the case of our spiritual exemplars, this goal is often described as their noble purpose. It is our exemplars’ own particular brand of strong personal faith that drives them towards their own fated noble purpose. The concepts implicit in African Ubuntu reside at the core of Mandela’s personal faith and the recognition of his noble purpose, the goal towards which his Ubuntu developed.

The second form of Ubuntu, created from its developmental nature, is a conceptual framework for how to progress towards this spiritual goal. Ubuntu prescribes that only through harmonious integration into one’s community of fellow man can oneself become more genuinely human. Specifically, it requires that this integration be largely comprised of direct, face-to-face, positive interaction with one’s community members. The essential Ubuntu

humanity of every person is necessarily entwined in the Ubuntu of his or her community. The benchmarks of Mandela's spiritual development will, then, be defined by his concept of and involvement in the building of a truly human community. These benchmarks will show that Mandela's development can be understood in terms of three evolving 'community stages' through which his faith matures and strengthens, so that it slowly but steadily carries him and his people to freedom.

### **Three Community Stages**

In their article, "The African ethic of Ubuntu/Botho: implications for research on morality," [4]. Thaddeus Metz and Joseph B.R. Gaie point out that one aspect in which African spiritual concepts characteristically differ from more western philosophies is their perspective on interpersonal relationships, specifically, their strongly communal perspective. Rather than more western ideas of positively relating to others as respecting individuals' rights to live how they want to live, or being involved in a political sphere in order to act on concern for the general welfare of others, Ubuntu's clear focus is on joining in harmony with one's community, and becoming an active, direct, positive part of this whole. This cosmic wholeness of Ubuntu inspires a different kind of spirituality than one in which the bulk of worship can be expressed within the structure of an institutional religious service. In Ubuntu, the community itself is the focus of "worship" and one worships by direct

positive interaction with ones fellow men.

As Mandela's spirituality develops, the scope of this community widens, eventually leading him and his people, towards freedom. By examining the stages of Mandela's extending community, we can trace his spiritual development. There are three overarching stages of Mandela's concept and practice of an Ubuntu sense of community. The first stage is found in Mandela's Xhosa childhood; the second stage widens as his education and profession connect him with a diverse mix of marginalized and oppressed Africans; and the third stage became possible only after Mandela's imprisonment, when he embraced one diverse community that included apartheid Afrikaners.

### *First Community: Xhosa*

Nelson, his Christian name, was given to him when he was baptized as a Methodist at age seven, a necessary precursor to attending the small, British-influenced schoolhouse. However, his first seven formative years were spent as Rolihlahla, meaning, "pulling the branch of a tree," or more colloquially, "troublemaker," the Xhosa name given to him by his father. This proud, spiritually Xhosa community is the soil in which the seed of his noble purpose takes root.

Mandela was born in Mvezo, a village just south of the town of Qunu, where he would soon relocate with his mother, Nosekeni Fanny. His father was given the chieftainship of Mvezo by the king of the Thembu tribe, who were incorporated into the Xhosa nation in

the sixteenth century. However, to the chagrin of Mandela's father, under British rule, his position as chief became legally under the direction of the British government and his position was reshaped as a "local magistrate." Gadla Mphakanyiswa lost this title early in Mandela's infancy when he refused a summons from a superior local magistrate to whom he was legally accountable. His obstinacy was derived from a Xhosa matter of principle, that the magistrate had no legitimate claim to power over him and that his own accountability was solely due to the Thembu people. This disobedience lost him his position and his family relocated to neighboring Qunu. Though Mandela was much too young at the time to be cognizant of his father's actions, he maintains, "nurture, rather than nature is the primary nature of personality, but my father possessed a proud rebelliousness, a stubborn sense of fairness, that I recognize in myself." ([3], p. 6). Indeed, challenging the fairness and legitimacy of a corrupt, violent government defined Mandela's life.

Though Gadla Mphakanyiswa lost his official chieftaincy of Mvezo, he did not lose, and perhaps even strengthened his connection to the Xhosa beliefs and way of life. This had a noticeable effect on the young Mandela as community and kinship within the community became central to Mandela's childhood, as they are to the Xhosa way of life. Mandela's father had four wives, of which Nosekeni Fanny was the third. Each wives' kraal was usually located in a town where she would be surrounded by family relations, the majority of whom were other women and

children. ([3], p. 8). Unlike the specificity with which western familial relationships are defined, Mandela explains, “In African culture, the sons and daughters of one’s aunts or uncles are considered brothers and sisters, not cousins... My mother’s sister is my mother; my uncle’s son is my brother; my brother’s child is my son, my daughter.” ([3], p. 8). The wide range of specific familial connections—stepfather, half-sibling, son-in-law, first cousin once removed—utilized in western extended families demonstrates the importance of establishing individual place within a family structure. In contrast, the familial vocabulary described by Mandela, demonstrates the importance of close connection and wholeness rather than distinction within a family, which is also necessarily one’s community in an Ubuntu mindset.

At age nine, the passing of Mandela’s father marked a significant change in the course of his life. His father likely died from a lung disease, though it was never diagnosed, as Gadla never visited a doctor. After a short mourning period, Mandela’s mother told him that he would be moving away from Qunu. Unlike many of his childhood friends in Qunu, he was not destined to become a mineworker, but through his father’s respected Xhosa position, he was offered an educated life in Mqhekezweni. The Great Place, as Mqhekezweni is also called, was the provisional capital of Thembuland and the royal home of Jongintaba Dalindyebo, the regent of the Thembu people. Upon his father’s death and unbeknownst to Mandela, the regent offered to become young

Mandela's guardian. Though his mother would miss him greatly, she could not pass up such an offer for the betterment of her son's life. So it was that Mandela became a son of the regent of Thembuland and brother to the regent's daughter, Nomafu, and son, Justice.

Mandela reflects that there were two aspects that most heavily influenced his life at Mqhekezweni: the Church and the chieftaincy. As discussed above, Mandela does identify himself as a Christian, though much of the early influence of the Church was necessarily connected with education and the wishes of his guardian who was a firm Methodist. Though admittedly never a natural student, Mandela was diligent and persistent in his studies, earning him the approval of the regent and his worthiness of receiving even higher education ([3], p. 20).

The other most influential aspect of life in Mqhekezweni was naturally, the importance of the chieftaincy, and the power and respect of the position was, to Mandela, "the very center around which life revolved." ([3], p. 20). His observations of the regent and the way in which he lead his people, deeply influenced Mandela's own future conceptions of leadership. Tribal meetings of the Thembu people were held at the Great Place, occurring not on a set schedule, but whenever there was a need to come together to discuss something as a people, be it a drought, cattle, or new legislation by the Afrikaner government. All Thembus were free to attend these meetings and many came from far away to speak their

opinion, as all men from farmers to warriors were allowed to speak without interruption as equal citizens of their great tribal community. Mandela does concede that women were unfortunately still deemed second-class citizens. The regent would begin the meeting by welcoming everyone and describing the issue at hand. He would not speak again until the very end of the meeting, which could last for many hours as every man had his turn to speak. Some criticized the regent with vehement words, and most with a candor of familiarity that comes when every member of your community is also your brother or sister. The regent would sit quietly and listen, pokerfaced with concentration ([3], p. 21). At the end of the meeting, the regent would summarize what had been said and offer the framework of a consensus to the gathered Thembu people. If no consensus could be agreed upon, the issue would be re-addressed at a second meeting. Mandela describes it as “democracy in its purest form... Democracy meant all men were to be heard, and a decision was taken together as a people. Majority rule was a foreign notion. A minority was not to be crushed by a majority.” ([3], pp. 21–22).

Mandela says that as he grew into a leader, he followed the principles that he learned in watching these tribal meetings. Often, his opinion would simply represent a consensus of the various discussions he had heard, and he would venture to have discussions with as many people as were willing. He disp-quotes a favored axiom of the regent, “a leader, he said, is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most

nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind.” ([3], p. 22). Nelson Mandela does exhibit a soft, but powerful influence around others. He leads by strong and sometimes bold example, but in such a way that draws others, ‘enemies’ included, towards him in mutual respect.

A second influential lesson of these tribal meetings on young Nelson was the power of public speaking. Listening to hour upon hour of such varied speakers, he learned to recognize the various shades and styles of public speaking, and from the audience, he felt which styles worked most effectively. Some spoke with emotion and evocative language to try to sway the room, while others were succinct, logical, and even emotionless. Mandela witnessed first hand the power of public argument, debate and opinion. This, within a sincerely democratic system in which each opinion carried distinct weight, certainly influenced Mandela’s career aspiration to become a lawyer, which he achieved some sixteen years later.

The importance of these early life influences—his father’s Xhosa stature and spirituality, Qunu community life with his mother, moving to Mqhekezweni after his father’s passing, the Church and the chieftaincy in the Great Place—created the seed for Mandela’s purpose in life, his duty to Ubuntu and to his community. In particular and as is the case with spiritual exemplars, we see in these early life influences the seed of taking on a noble purpose developing a distinctive faith pattern. The regent and

the power of democracy helped nudge Mandela towards the realm of social justice through law, but the goal and driving purpose of Mandela's spiritual path, was the pursuit of a making the South African community whole again, towards an Ubuntu equilibrium.

*Second Community: Native Africans, Indians, Communists, Coloreds and a Handful of Progressive Whites*

Mandela's second understanding and faith in community can be characterized more as a steadily widening circle of fellow men, rather than the distinct, but fairly static Xhosa community of his youth. At the beginning of this second stage, Mandela reflects, "I looked back on that young man who had left Mqhekezweni as a naïve and parochial fellow who had seen very little of the world," ([3], p. 85). He was just beginning to question his predetermined role as a future advisor to Xhosa tribal leaders. Nonetheless, this second community stage will end with Mandela's realization of his noble purpose. As he fittingly titles this section of his autobiography, this second stage is, "The Birth of a Freedom Fighter." ([3], p. 93).

At sixteen, Mandela underwent the lengthy Xhosa ceremonies and rituals that initiate a boy into manhood. At nineteen, Mandela joined his adoptive brother, Justice, at Healdtown, the Wesleyan College in Fort Beaufort. Though still heavily Xhosa, Healdtown gave Mandela his first exposure to Africans from other tribes and he recalls a feeling of daring at making his

first Sotho-speaking friend. ([3], p. 37). Mandela hinges his experience at Healdtown on a particular incident that, “for me was like a comet streaking against the night sky.” ([3], p. 40). The famous Xhosa *imbongi* or praise-singer, Krune Mqhayi, a poet and oral historian, came to speak. Mqhayi first shocked the Healdtown students by a bold and impromptu criticism of the white foreign interlopers who did not care for, nor respect African culture and who had stolen much from the native Africans. Mandela recalls his astonishment that Mqhayi would be so audacious as to say such things in front of Dr. Wellington and the other white educators. Mqhayi then spoke the praises of the African people as a community of different African tribes. However, he reserved the highest and final praise for the Xhosa people alone. Mandela reflected that Mqhayi’s speech mirrored his own confusion as a proud Xhosa man who was also just beginning to find a second identity within a community encompassing all native Africans. He says, “I had many new and sometimes conflicting ideas floating in my head. I was beginning to see that Africans of all tribes had much in common, yet here was the great Mqhayi praising the Xhosa above all; I saw that an African might stand his ground with a white man, yet I was still eagerly seeking benefits from whites, which often required subservience.” ([3], p. 42). It was with these confused and budding notions that Mandela left Healdtown and entered the University College of Fort Hare, about twenty miles east of Healdtown.

At Fort Hare, Mandela began to make his first forays into a leadership role within the structure of organized student representation. However, during his second year Mandela chose to be expelled rather than capitulate to holding a position on the student representative board, the SRC, which had no longer become an accurate representation of the student body, as only one sixth of the students had placed votes. Mandela would not serve in a government body that did not represent its people. The principal, Dr. Kerr, gave him a choice: he would either serve on the SRC, or he would be expelled.

Mandela struggled with this decision through the night; it was one of the most substantial thus far in his life. He was still uncertain of his decision when entering Dr. Kerr's office the following morning. Only when Dr. Kerr asked if he had made up his mind, did he know what his answer had to be. He "could not in good conscience serve on the SRC." ([3], p. 52). Though he admits to feeling foolhardy for choosing to leave Fort Hare, he found that he could not yield in his position.

Within this incident ending his career at Fort Hare, Mandela demonstrates not only his willingness to sustain personal loss in the name of moral principle, but also the fact that he felt he had no choice but to do so. This sense of "no choice but to," is one of the distinct qualities that we are ascribing to the spiritual exemplars. Mandela describes that at the moment of decision when, "I needed to compromise, I simply could not do so. Something inside me would not let

me.” ([3], p. 53). Furthermore, the moral principle that he felt he must inescapably uphold was of the inclusively representative duty of a government to the community that it governs. This essentially becomes the focus of the freedom fighter he becomes for all South Africans, but at this point in the narrative, his community sphere is not yet wide enough to demand the kind of spiritual maturity and noble purpose we see later on.

When he returned to Mqhekezweni after his frustrating exit from Fort Hare, he and his brother Justice were informed that in the regents advancing age, he felt compelled to fulfill his duty to see his two sons married and that wives had been arranged for both of them. The regent’s decision had already been carried out; the *lobola*, meaning bride-price, had been paid. Mandela appealed to the regent’s wife, but he would not be dissuaded. Both Justice and Nelson were equally principled and refused to accept the regent’s decision for them. They felt they had no choice but to flee to Johannesburg. Mandela admits that they probably did not think so carefully as to consider all of the options available to them as respite, but their course was determinedly set on the prospect of eGoli, the city of gold, Johannesburg.

In Johannesburg, Mandela was introduced to an estate agent named Walter Sisulu, a prominent community leader and businessman. Upon hearing Mandela’s aspirations to become a lawyer, Sisulu referred Mandela to a Lazar Sidelsky, a progressive Jewish lawyer with whom he worked. Sidelsky agreed

to hire Mandela as a clerk in his law firm while Mandela worked to complete his law degree through UNISA, short for the University of South Africa, a well-respected correspondence institution that offered credits degrees ([3], p. 71).

At the law firm, three distinctly different people deeply influenced Mandela's developing sense of community: Lazar Sidelsky, Gaur Radebe, and Nat Bregman. Through these three, Mandela was directly introduced to many fellow South Africans of much more varied cultural backgrounds and political stances.

Lazar Sidelsky's stressed the importance of mass education for Africans and argued that education would liberate the oppressed Africans as, "an educated man could not be oppressed because he could think for himself." ([3], p. 71). He strongly supported Mandela's ambitions to become an attorney, which Mandela would later pursue at the University of Witwatersrand, studying towards a Bachelor of Laws degree, or LL.B.

Gaur Radebe was the one other African employee at the law firm and also worked as a clerk, interpreter and messenger. Radebe was a communist supporter and though he never proselytized for communism, his boldly and vocally expressed rancor towards the South African political and social climate made an impression on Mandela whose own political leanings were in their infancy. Radebe was both an audacious and eloquent speaker, and in Mandela's eyes, better educated than many Fort Hare graduates, though

Radebe did not have a B.A. degree. For so long, Mandela had hinged the ideal of community leadership upon receiving a degree, but he was humbled in the realization that a degree is not the only road towards leadership. He says, “Although I intended to finish my degree and enter law school, I learned from Gaur that a degree was not in itself a guarantee of leadership and that it meant nothing unless one went out into the community to prove oneself.” ([3], p. 74). Again, we see direct interaction with one’s community, a central tenant of Ubuntu, featured in Mandela’s spiritual development path towards the recognition of his noble purpose. One cannot lead simply based on one’s education, but rather on the sanction and unity of one’s people.

Nat Bregman, another articled clerk at the firm, became Mandela’s first white friend. Bregman was also a communist supporter and over lunch one day in the office, he first explained the central philosophies of communism to Mandela. He took a sandwich that he had brought for lunch and instructed Mandela to take hold of half and pull, upon which the sandwich roughly split in half. Bregman explained that their action symbolized the ideals of the Communist Party: “to share everything we have.” ([3], p. 74). Mandela listened, but was not inclined to join, in particular because of the party’s disregard for religion. However, he added that he did appreciate the half of that sandwich. In fact, years in the future he will use the sharing of a sandwich to foster a positive relationship with a particularly harsh guard while imprisoned on

Robben Island.

Despite their differences of political opinion, Mandela enjoyed Bregman's company and they would often attend lectures and Communist Party meetings together, Mandela primarily out of intellectual interest. They also attended parties organized by the Party, during which Mandela was introduced to a convivial group of whites, Africans, Indians and Coloreds who seemed to pay no attention to color whatsoever. He was admittedly mostly a wallflower at these parties, spending his time listening and absorbing the enthusiastic and intellectual conversation around him. Through Bregman, Mandela was directly exposed to a more racially and politically diverse group of disenfranchised, no longer silent Africans.

In 1943, he enrolled at the University of Witwatersrand in pursuit of a Bachelor of Laws degree. It was here at "Wits" that he met many of the people who he would fight beside in the liberation struggle. It was his friendship with these visionaries that sealed his future as a freedom fighter. Mandela says,

"I had no epiphany, no singular revelation, no moment of truth, but a steady accumulation of a thousand slights, a thousand indignities, a thousand unremembered moments, produced in me an anger, a rebelliousness, a desire to fight the system that imprisoned my people. There was no particular day on which I said, From henceforth I

will devote myself to the liberation of my people; instead, I simply found myself doing so, and could not do otherwise.”.

[3], p. 95

Some of his Wits peers included Joe Slovo and his future wife, Ruth First: children of Jewish immigrants to South Africa, he a fervent Communist and she an eloquent and outgoing writer. George Bizos was a child of Greek immigrants with a sharp mind and kind temperament. Bram Fischer remarkably belonged to one of the most powerful, high-ranking Afrikaner families and he could have easily assumed a lofty governmental position, yet he chose to be one of the, “bravest and staunchest friends of the freedom struggle that I [Mandela] have ever known.” ([3], p. 91). As the progressive nature of Ubuntu suggests, just because one is born into one skewed point of view does not mean that one cannot break free from it, recognizing ones own core humanity in the humanity or Ubuntu of others. His community of new brothers and sisters in the struggle also included many influential Indian freedom fighters including Ismail Meer, J.N. Singh, Ahmed Bhoola and Ramlal Bhoolia, on whose floor Mandela would often sleep when the heat of a conversation carried them late into the night.

At Wits, Mandela found his noble purpose. True to Ubuntu, he felt an undeniable pull towards his duty to his people, his community. His second community-stage widened as he moved through schooling and eventually to Johannesburg. His developmental

pathway leaned towards law and social justice. The second community reached its' apex as Mandela gave up on pursuing his LL.B. at Wits after failing the examinations multiple times. Instead, he takes and passes the qualification exam to become a full attorney, opening his own office in August 1942 ([3], p. 148). Soon, Mandela would launch full tilt in to the center of the African National Congress leadership, as the ANC was the one political organization that was an all-inclusive community, "a great umbrella under which all Africans could find shelter," and in line with his newly developed second community stage ([3], p. 95).

### **Fighting for and Defending the Faith**

Mandela now fully entered the ring in the fight for freedom and has already become swept up in the surging unrest of his country, which will not be stymied over the next thirty-odd years. For the most part, this secondary stage of community had now become as wide as it could within the sociopolitical climate of South Africa in the fifties and early sixties. Up to this point, Mandela had been more of an active listener than a participant in the struggle, but now he dove full force into one of the other central pillars of Ubuntu: to become a part of your community means that you must directly interact with your fellow man, your community, in a positive way. This was a large part of Gaur's lesson, when Mandela was a fellow clerk at Sidelsky's firm: that a leader must go out into his community. Respectful, positive and most

importantly, direct interaction between peers of varied racial and cultural backgrounds is the anathema of racism. Racism requires the bigoted system to maintain distance and limit conscientiousness of those whom they oppress. The National Party's apartheid government acted as if cognizant of this fact and one of its favorite and most widely used strategies against Mandela and other ANC leaders was banning. At points, Mandela was banned from speaking with more than one person at once, banned even from attending his son's birthday party. He talked about the psychological effect that life under a ban can bring saying, "Banning not only confines one physically, it imprisons one's spirit. It induces a kind of psychological claustrophobia that makes one year not only for freedom of movement but spiritual escape." ([3], p. 144). This psychological claustrophobia is the incompleteness of an individual's Ubuntu spirit, isolated from the holistic Ubuntu of his community.

## **The Treason Trial**

In the early hours of the morning on December 5, 1956, the Security Police came to Mandela's home with a warrant for his arrest. The charge was Hoogverraad, High Treason. Mandela was taken to Marshall Square, a prison in Johannesburg, where he found more of his ANC colleagues who had been arrested earlier that morning. Their trial would last from 1956 to 1961. The state was out to prove that the ANC had the intention of overthrowing the

government and establishing a communistic government. The defense's agreed-upon position was not only to refute the claims of treason, but also to demonstrate that all of their actions, though objectionable to the state, were still morally warranted.

During the trial, in late March 1960, the government imposed a State of Emergency after a massacre in Sharpeville: sixty-nine nonviolent protestors were killed, most shot in the back as they fled. This State of Emergency made it almost impossible for the accused to adequately consult with their lawyers, so they unanimously decided that their defense team would withdraw from the case and instead, two of the accused, Mandela and Duma Nokwe, would run the case ([3], p. 246–247). It was the time for Mandela's keen lawyerly skills and oration to be put to the test. In his own testimony Mandela preached moderation and even posed a solution to the court of how a compromise might be reached. He portrayed this compromise as a discussion between two equal sides, logically working together with mutual respect for the other party. By giving respect to his opponent, Mandela commanded respect in return. Mandela was asked if he believed democracy could be reached through gradual reforms. He responded,

“We demand universal adult franchise and we are prepared to exert economic pressure to attain our demands. We will launch defiance campaigns, stay-at-homes, either singly or together, until the

Government should say, “Gentlemen, we cannot have this state of affairs, laws being defied, and the whole situation created by stay-at-homes. Let’s talk.” In my own view I would say, “Yes, let us talk” and the Government would say, “We think that the Europeans at present are not ready for a type of government where they might be dominated by non-Europeans. We think we should give you 60 seats. The African population to elect 60 Africans to represent them in Parliament. We will leave the matter over for five years and we will review it at the end of five years.” In my view, that would be a victory. My Lords; we would have taken a significant step towards the attainment of universal adult suffrage for Africans, and we would then for the five years say, we will suspend civil disobedience.”.

[3], p. 251

In this testimony, Mandela demonstrated his eloquent, logical style of argument as a lawyer; his interpersonal, relational ability to speak with others on their own plane; and his skill as a negotiator as he provided a reasonable and concrete solution as part of his argument. These were not the words of a violent radical with communist sympathies and this was not the dangerous, uneducated version of an African that the racist apartheid government had been feeding to its white supporters. The naïve stereotypes began crumbling away.

On March 29 the verdict was announced in the Old Synagogue in Johannesburg: the three-judge panel found the accused not guilty. The government had failed in their first big move against the freedom struggle and was embarrassed. Mandela recognized and respected the judges' fairness in following and upholding the law. He said, "the three judges rose above their prejudices, their education, and their background. There is a streak of goodness in men that can be buried or hidden and then emerge unexpectedly . . . I commend these three men as individuals, not as representations of the court or of the state or even of their race, but as exemplars of human decency under adversity." ([3], p. 260–261). It is this core of decency, the inner Ubuntu of every man, which enabled the concrete possibility of a unified, harmonious South African community, involving equal parts Africans and Afrikaans, Indians and Coloureds alike. Seeing a group of powerful white Afrikaners exercising their inner human decency and ruling in favor of the African defendants is an important pre-cursor to the third communal stage, which is defined by the direct inclusion of the white apartheid supporters in the form of Mandela's jailors, wardens, and eventually presidents.

### **Umkhonto we Sizwe ("The Spear of the Nation")**

Mandela immediately went underground following the sentence, but he was frustrated and began to rethink the nonviolent commitment as perhaps not enough to move the cause forward. He explained his

new frame of mind with a disp-quote from an old African expression: Sebatana ha se bokwe ka diatla (The attacks of the wild beast cannot be averted with only bare hands) ([3], p. 271). He did not hide his views from his ANC colleagues, but argued his point with the lawyerly logic and candor in which he was comfortable. He advocated that they turn to their people to see the next move; they were already forming militant groups on their own, and the ANC was the only large enough, most influential organization to unify and direct this militancy ([3], p. 272). Mandela was give the task to create Umkhonto we Sizwe (The Spear of the Nation), abbreviated as MK.

MK's directive was to organize acts of violence against the state in an attempt to catalyze some sort of progress. Its goal was to inflict the most damage possible to the government without harming any individuals directly, so they first turned to sabotage. Mandela explained the use of sabotage, "Because it did not involve loss of life it offered the best hope for reconciliation among the races afterward. We did not want to start a blood feud between white and black." ([3], p. 283). Mandela and the ANC's goal was to unify the future South African community in harmony. Their vision had gained Ubuntu, but Mandela was not quite in a position to actively practice interaction with this full community.

## **The Rivonia Trial**

In 1963 nineteen key leaders in the underground

struggle were arrested at a farm in Liliesleaf, a covert ANC meeting place, and though already serving a prison sentence, Mandela was implicated with them. Unfortunately, the raid happened while the fledgling plans for Operation Mayibuye, all-out guerilla warfare in South Africa, were upon the table. This time the charges were serious and the state made it clear that they would seek the maximum penalty: the death sentence.

As a group the defendants had long since decided that this trial would not be like the lawyerly, by-the-rules Treason Trial. This would be a platform for their beliefs. They would admit to certain charges that were incontrovertible like the various acts of sabotage, but they would challenge other charges, such as the charge of active guerilla warfare. Their main argument was that Operation Mayibuye was merely a contingency plan ([3], p. 361). As the first witness, Mandela declined to give testimony, instead electing to read a statement from the dock. He admitted his central role in Umkhonto we Sizwe, but strongly refuted that these actions were influenced by foreign or Communist forces. Mandela clarifies, "I have done whatever I did, both as an individual and as a leader of my people, because of my experience in South Africa, and my own proudly felt African background." ([3], p. 364). He recounts learning his heritage in the Transkei, which inspired his strongly felt duty to serve his people. He also reiterated the ANC's devotion to a nonracial democracy, indicated by their focus on milder forms of violent struggle like sabotage, which

carry the least chance of loss of life on both sides. He also refuted all claims that the ANC's policies were influenced by communism or were communist in nature and argued that they stood instead for African Nationalism, including all South Africans equally. He pointed to the Freedom Charter as the key political document of the ANC's policy. He also described in detail the horrific disparities between the lives afforded to black Africans *versus* white Africans. Black Africans were robbed of their human dignity under the current political state, and this policy was keeping South Africa from her potential. He concluded his speech from memory, addressing Judge Quartus de Wet face-to-face:

“During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”.

[3], p. 368

The courtroom was silent. Mandela had spoken for over four hours, and though his words would eventually be banned, a favorite Nationalist Party strategy, they were first printed word for word in the Rand Daily Mail so that the message was effectively

heard.

The rest of the accused gave testimony and underwent cross-examination by the chief prosecutor, Percy Yutar. They admitted to the truths, clarified the discrepancies, and denied the falsities. Yutar's closing statement on May 20 was not well constructed and its objective was unclear. The defense's response was well crafted and comprehensive. The court would adjourn and return with a decision in three weeks. In the meantime, the accused gathered to discuss their response to the sentence. Eventually, it was agreed that they would not appeal de Wet's decision as it could weaken the moral impact of their trial, all the while keeping in mind that the death sentence was a possibility for all. Though their legal counsel urged them to reconsider, they were resolute in this decision. Mandela explains, "Our message was that no sacrifice was too great in the struggle for freedom." ([3], p. 373). On June 12, 1964 de Wet gave his sentence of life imprisonment. The spectators' reaction to the sentence was loud and many could not hear the decision. Dennis Goldberg's wife called to him, "Dennis, what is it!?" to which he joyfully replied, "Life! Life, to live!" ([3], p. 376). They were taken to Pretoria Local before going to Robben Island. Mandela recounts how every night before lights out, the prisoners would all sing freedom songs. Then, the chorus of voices would fade to silence and a group of prisoners would begin to yell "Amandla!" meaning power in Xhosa, to which everyone else would reply, "Ngawethu!" assuming this power as a collective

people ([3], p. 378). Mandela recalls the feeling of unity and support which bolstered them as they looked towards the island, which would force Mandela into his third community stage.

### *Third Community Stage: Robben Island*

Mandela's imprisonment on Robben Island is the context for his developing into a spiritually mature exemplar, for imprisonment allowed him the direct contact with the country's Afrikaner community that had been previously impossible. It allowed him to communicate with the South African government and forge a relationship that would begin repairing the country. With the principles of Ubuntu guiding Mandela's spiritual development, he came to recognize that his noble purpose and vision for South African included fair representation and unification of all South Africans into one just and caring community.

As previously mentioned, Ubuntu requires that individuals have direct, positive interaction with all community members. Though Mandela's spiritual vision included white South Africans, his previous position as a radical freedom fighter oft in hiding, had prevented him from practicing the inclusion of whites. Now, at Robben Island, he had the opportunity to directly interact with the prison guards, warders, and eventually higher-ups thus spreading his Ubuntu to them, and including them in his community.

Often, in the narrative of a spiritual exemplar's development, their noble purpose and personal faith

will be harshly tested, but will also reemerge stronger, as is the mark of exemplary faith. Mandela's faith showed its strength as it flourished from inside the prison, in isolation on Robben Island. Upon first entering the island and witnessing the absolute racial divide of the island—no black warders, no white prisoners—Mandela said, “My dismay was quickly replaced by a sense that a new and different fight had begun.” ([3], p. 387). His and his comrades faith would allow the freedom struggle to continue, but in a very different milieu. As all things in prison, this struggle was slow, and the benefits painstakingly felt, but nonetheless the prisoners were afforded some proofs along the way that their influence was having an impact.

### **Robben Island: “The Dark Years”**

For Mandela, prison was designed, “with the idea of stamping out that spark that makes each of us human and each of us who we are,” which we assert to also be an inner core of Ubuntu ([3], p. 390). The way in which this core can stay strong against such a force is, logically, by practicing Ubuntu and seeking strength in one's community. Mandela says that sharing this understanding of the enemy's mindset with his fellow prisoners allowed him to persevere through that which would have killed him standing alone. He said, “the authorities' greatest mistake was keeping us together, for together our determination was reinforced.” ([3], p. 390). However, we would do well to remember that it is the apartheid system that is

inhuman and not the individuals who have been indoctrinated within it. Each guard, each warden is an individual human, presumably with a core of Ubuntu that can be reached if one goes about it the right way.

Mandela and his comrades mirrored their behavior to the warders, showing anger and becoming more difficult when disrespected, while returning respect and consideration when it was given to them. It behooved the prisoners as a group to befriend the warders, and this was best done on an individual level. Therefore, sometimes certain prisoners were asked to befriend particular warders, which usually made them milder overall. Much earlier in Mandela's spiritual development, I referenced the important symbolism of a sandwich that he shared with Nat Bregman, demonstrating the sharing of wealth in communism. In prison, Mandela recalls another sandwich that helped forge a connection and a sign of hope.

Laboring at the quarry was one of the best opportunities that the prisoners had to discuss amongst themselves. However, there was one warden at the quarry who was particularly difficult, and would not allow them to talk. Mandela asked one of his comrades to befriend this warden, and after a while the warden began to relax around this one prisoner. One day the warden asked for the prisoner's jacket on which he wished to sit, and though against the prisoner's pride, Mandela nodded to give the warden the jacket. A few days later, the same warden tossed an extra sandwich on the ground next to a group of prisoners, including the befriending comrade, with a

gruff, “Here.” ([3], p. 418). On the one hand, it was beneath the prisoners’ dignity to accept an offering that treated them as animals thrown a bit of table scraps. On the other hand, refusing the offer would humiliate the warder in front of his colleagues and undo the work it took to befriend him in the first place. The prisoners opted for the second path and were rewarded when, over time, the warder became kinder and eventually began asking questions about the ANC. Mandela says, “as we quietly explained to him our non-racialism, our desire for equal rights, and our plans for the redistribution of wealth, he scratched his head and said, ‘It makes more bloody sense than the Nats’.” ([3], p. 419). Person by person, the message kept getting through.

Even in these dark years of painstakingly slow improvement, we can start to see the benefit and change being wrought through the prisoner’s directly fostered relationships with their white warders. As with the warder with the sandwich, their prejudices weakened and they began to listen, learn and ask questions as one individual to another. Understanding was growing, though still on the lowest level, between individual prisoners and the lower-level warders in their sections. Mandela began to hope that their message could continue to spread as he encountered and communicated with higher and higher level white penal, and eventually, political figures. If ignorance is the root of racism, then direct, respectful interaction is the enemy of ignorance.

## **Robben Island: “Beginning to Hope”**

In 1969 the atmosphere on Robben Island was distinctly different from when Mandela and the others first arrived five years earlier. As both the warders and prisoners became more accustomed to one another's presence, the familiarity bred a more relaxed atmosphere. This shift was largely created by a collective of smaller changes: they received their own prison uniforms which actually fit and they could wash themselves; they were given board games and cards to play on weekends; they were left to talk freely at the quarry and warders would even whistle a warning when a higher officer was nearing to keep the peace; they were essentially allowed the freedom to assemble amongst themselves and were rarely interrupted unless it was deemed too conspicuous ([3], p. 451).

Many individual warders began to ask questions about the ANC and their policies, to which most had only a rudimentary and highly skewed understanding. And true to Ubuntu philosophy, the positive, direct interaction between warders and prisoners eventually paid off. For example, Mandela recalls one particularly difficult commanding officer, Colonel Badenhorst, who had been forced to leave the island after facing prisoner's complaints and irrefutable evidence of his brutality. A few days prior to his departure, Mandela was called to the main office where Colonel Badenhorst waited to inform him that he would be leaving, adding, “I just want to wish you people good

luck.” Mandela was amazed at this surprising show of human decency and solidarity. He said, “It was a useful reminder that all men, even the most seemingly cold-blooded, have a core of human decency, and that if their heart is touched, they are capable of changing.” ([3], p. 462). Badenhorst, like so many apartheid supporters, was not inhuman himself, but had simply been conditioned to be rewarded for inhuman behavior. In a way, Badenhorst’s comment was proof that the core of Ubuntu exists in all men, even the most outwardly malicious.

### **Pollsmoor Prison, Tokai**

In March 1982 Mandela was ordered to pack his belongings as he was being transferred immediately. This same order was given to fellow prisoners Walter Sisulu, Raymond Mhlaba, and Andrew Mlageni. Within the hour, all four comrades were on a ferry back to the mainland where they were transferred to Pollsmoor Prison in Tokai, a few miles southeast of Cape Town. The four of them were housed together in what Mandela calls a kind of “prison’s penthouse,” that had actual beds with sheets, individual showers and towels and even a terrace with an open outdoor lawn for their free use. A significant change has certainly occurred: they are afforded a great deal more freedom and luxury, while simultaneously being moved physically closer to their community. This also allowed for a much greater ease of direct contact with significant outsiders, namely paving the way for discussion and negotiation.

In January 1985 Mandela was offered his conditional freedom, the condition being that he, “unconditionally rejected violence as a political instrument.” ([3], p. 521). He was given a week in which to decide and draft his response. His daughter Zindzi, a dynamic speaker as was her mother Winnie, read his statement in which he refused the state’s condition. In the statement he refused to assume responsibility for aggression, since the apartheid state was the true aggressor. He stated, “Only free men can negotiate. Prisoners cannot enter into contracts . . . I cannot and will not give any undertaking at a time when I and you, the people, are not free. Your freedom and mine cannot be separated. I will return.” ([3], p. 523). This response cuts to the essence of Ubuntu: I am because we are. Just as an individual’s Ubuntu is contingent upon his community, Mandela said that his freedom and the freedom of South Africans are indistinguishable. Soon after, Mandela was moved again, this time to a separated, though spaciouly laid out cell on another floor of the prison.

Isolation was always a key component of apartheid aggression, but in this case, Mandela did not view it in the same light as previous times. Instead, he believed that separation would allow him to push the struggle forward without the “scrutiny” that organizational effort entailed. Furthermore, with his new situation, he would be more easily approachable by influential political figures. His firm, but egalitarian manner of communication naturally created a genuine, direct connection that helped put his white subjugators at

ease. He realized that the time for negotiation had come. This meant that he would have to push forward without the discussion and sanction of his organization or even his closest comrades, but spiritual exemplars are bold and sometimes must simply follow the compass of their noble purpose. He said, "There are times when a leader must move out ahead of the flock, go off in a new direction, confident that he is leading his people the right way." ([3], p. 527).

Tambo and the ANC were working hard throughout South Africa, organizing and rallying its supporters to make the country ungovernable by the oppressive minority government. In June 1986, the government imposed another State of Emergency, and Mandela recognized that sometimes an unstable moment could be a good opportunity to offer an olive branch to your opponent in a vulnerable situation. In a one-sentence letter to General Willemse, the commissioner of prisons, he requested to meet on a "matter of national importance." ([3], p. 529). Mandela was taken to the General's residence within Pollsmoor where he directly requested a meeting with Kobie Coetzee, the Justice Minister. Though Willemse maintained that he had no political power, he did know that Coetzee was in town and he could inquire. Upon hearing Mandela's request, the minister ordered Mandela to be brought to his house in Cape Town. Coetzee and Mandela spoke for three hours during which the minister asked astute and serious questions at the heart of the freedom struggle against the

government. He asked under what conditions would they be willing to suspend the armed struggle? Mandela felt increasingly optimistic, but he kept this encounter a secret from his colleagues, “wanting the process to be underway before I informed anyone.” ([3], p. 530).

Coetzee reinitiated contact in 1987 and had a handful of private meetings with Mandela at his house as before. Soon, he offered the government’s first official proposal to begin secret talks with a board of officials, under the blessing of the state president. Though he recalls the first meeting being “quite stiff,” they met every week for a few months and soon were able to discuss comfortably and candidly. Many of his “new colleagues” ([3], p. 536) had a very basic or skewed idea of the ANC and what it represented. He outlined the background and development of the ANC and laid out its policies and hopes, its vision for one collective South Africa. The minority would always be an essential part of the majority in this nonracial South Africa because both are part of one community, and being so, one cannot flourish without the other: I am because we are. Mandela reassured them, “We do not want to drive you into the sea.” ([3], p. 539).

### **Victor Verster, Paarl**

In December 1988 Mandela was moved to a private cottage within a prison facility, Victor Verster. This would be the last place that he would be incarcerated before freedom a couple years later. After moving, he was informed by Coetzee that these last

accommodations were designed to facilitate private discussion in relative comfort. Mandela was finally granted a meeting with National Party president Pik Botha, after which they drafted a simple statement that they had met to promote peace in the country.

A little over one month later, Botha announced his resignation and F. W. de Klerk assumed the office of acting president. Though de Klerk was the picture of a National Party leader, Mandela paid attention to his speeches and writings and saw in him a genuine force for change. In October 1989 President de Klerk pronounced that Walter Sisulu and seven other colleagues on Robben Island would be released unconditionally. Shortly after, he desegregated public spaces and dismantled an important apartheid governmental organization. In February 1990 in an impassioned pronouncement, de Klerk officially unbanned the ANC, the PAC, and dozens of other organizations; he freed political prisoners accused of only nonviolent crimes; he suspended capital punishment and slackened the State of Emergency. Mandela describes it as, “a breathtaking moment, for in one sweeping action he had virtually normalized the situation in South Africa. Our world had changed overnight.” ([3], p. 556).

One week after the momentous speech, Mr. de Klerk summoned Mandela to his home in Cape Town as before, and informed him that he would be released from prison the following day. He was set to be flown back to Johannesburg the next day and released from there, however, Mandela insisted that when released,

he greatly wished to, “walk out of the gates of Victor Verster and be able to thank those who looked after me and greet the people of Cape Town,” where he had lived for the better part of the past three decades ([3], p. 557). De Klerk acquiesced and Mandela’s release was slated for three o’clock the following day. Mandela says that despite his great excitement, he did not have any difficulty falling asleep that night with the promise of freedom the follow day.

### **Freedom is Indivisible**

Surrounded by colleagues and family members, Mandela walked towards the prison gates a little before four o’clock in the afternoon on February 11, 1990. A motorcade escorted Mandela to City Hall where a dense crowd of South Africans had gathered to witness his release. In his speech, Mandela reminded his people that he was no messiah, but simply a part of their greater community, and he reminded them that the community itself that spiritual power, the united power of Ubuntu. He said, “I stand here before you not as a prophet but as a humble servant of you, the people. Your tireless and heroic sacrifices made it possible for me to be here today. I therefore place the remaining years of my life in your hands.” ([3], p. 566). He reaffirmed that apartheid would not survive in South Africa and though the tides had already been irreversibly turned, he encouraged the people to not slacken in their active struggle.

Talks of negotiation and peace continued over the next four years, sometimes making strides forward,

sometimes taking steps backward after the continued eruptions of violence. Though most of the harshest violence was committed by the state, many young, angry and marginalized South Africans were impatient with the pace of negotiations and there was significant support for further violent, retaliatory action. The irascible mood of the country was pushing it to the edge of a dangerous precipice.

At long last, a date was set for the first countrywide, one-person-one-vote election: April 27, 1994. The ANC won 62.6 percent of the national vote, entitling them to 252 of the 400 seats in the national assembly. Though some were disappointed that they had not captured a full two-thirds of the vote, Mandela viewed this in a beneficial light. He reasoned, “had we won two-thirds of the vote and been able to write a constitution unfettered by input from others, people would argue that we had created an ANC constitution, not a South African constitution. I wanted a true government of national unity.” ([3], p. 619). Here, Mandela showed his astute logic, as well as his ability to view a situation from many sides. He had repeatedly said that his goal was not to “win” against the whites, but to coalesce under universal freedom.

On May 2, de Klerk gave his concession speech. He not only conceded his position, but for the first time in over three centuries of exploitive power, he conceded South Africa to the black majority. Mandela spoke after de Klerk, his fellow Nobel Peace Prize laureate, applauding him for his strength and courage in the face of change. He then turned to address South Africa:

“. . . Free at last! Free at last! I stand before you humbled by your courage, with a heart full of love for all of you. I regard it as the highest honor to lead the ANC at this moment in our history. I am your servant . . . It is not the individuals that matter, but the collective . . . This is a time to heal the old wounds and build a new South Africa.” ([3], p. 619). Again, we hear echoes of the collective, the community as an entity, but for the first time in so many centuries, this community legally and inclusively recognized each of its individual citizens. The Ubuntu within each South African man and woman would be able to reunite with the Ubuntu of their true, collective South Africa.

A person is a person through other persons; I am because we are; Ubuntu, in its manifold nature, is both at the heart of Mandela’s spirituality and at the wheel of his spiritual development. His core of humanity, the core he sought in others, radiates through his character and his interactions, exerting a soft but strong influence on those around him. Like the shepherd in the regent’s axiom, Mandela’s influence encourages others to exercise their own core of Ubuntu, “not realizing all along they are being directed from behind.” ([3], p. 22).

### **Concluding Remarks: Mandela as a Spiritual Exemplar**

Mandela evinces many of the distinguishing and common characteristics that we ascribe to spiritual exemplars. We talk about the necessary balance between “hard” virtues, such as courage,

determination, and persistence, and “soft” virtues, which are emphasized in connecting with others. Mandela’s faith is essentially defined by the importance of a connecting with one’s fellow men, yet it is “hard” enough to give him the courage and strength to persevere undaunted through decades of imprisonment. We talk about the importance of an exemplar’s driving force, their noble purpose, and here we explore Mandela’s journey towards the realization of his noble purpose. We also point to the fact that most exemplars feel that they had no choice but to pursue this purpose, and many times Mandela has echoed feeling this indivertible drive. We talk about our post-Enlightenment spiritual exemplars being able to integrate both reason and faith. Reason and logic were two of the strongest weapons in Mandela’s acute intellectual arsenal, and also provided an egalitarian plane on which to sincerely communicate with others. We talk about the plurality of these spiritual exemplars in our ever-shrinking world, and how in each exemplar’s faith pattern, there is room for respecting the beliefs of others. Mandela’s would perhaps not even wish to emphasize the “pluralism” of South Africa, so much as its unity as one whole community, though respect towards others as individuals does still lie close to the center of his principles.

We also talk about how in many of our exemplars’ narratives, their faith is called upon to carry them through some great adversity that challenges the human spirit, and that they emerge stronger or even

transformed. At the end of his biography, Mandela reflects on all of the intrepid, incorrigible men he fought with—Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Chief Luthuli, Yusuf Dadoo, Bram Fischer, and many more—and that perhaps such inhuman times necessarily produce such great man, as the human spirit will always be driven to fight its oppression. He says, “Perhaps it requires such depth of oppression to create such heights of character. My country is rich in the minerals and gems that lie beneath its soil, but I have always known that its greatest wealth is its people, finer and truer than the purest diamonds.” ([3], p. 622). Mandela’s test of faith lasted for twenty-seven years, but he and his colleagues soldiered on from inside prison. His unique brand and strength of faith allowed him to readjust his fight, and he worked tirelessly with his comrades till freedom came, not just for them, but for all South Africans. In prison, change happens so slowly, but “a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, perhaps just for a second . . . was enough to reassure me and keep me going. Man’s goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished.” ([3], p. 622). The Ubuntu at the core of Mandela’s faith is made of this same glimmer of humanity. “I always knew that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.” ([3], p. 622). By exuding

Ubuntu in his manner and interactions, he was able to access the Ubuntu in others, coaxing it forth through direct, respectful, and empathetic human connection. After all, as I only am, because you also are, my Ubuntu is also your Ubuntu in the collective whole.

He says, “Freedom is indivisible . . . It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black.” ([3], p. 624). He recognizes that the two freedoms cannot be separated, and both the prisoner and the oppressor needed liberation: the prisoner from the oppressor and the oppressor from his hatred, which was exogenously imposed on his Ubuntu being. He says that, “the oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.” ([3], p. 624). Lastly, Mandela leaves us with a reminder that the journey is only beginning and that South Africa had, “merely achieved the freedom to be free. . . For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning.” ([3], p. 625). This idea of freedom is truly another conception of Ubuntu, in that a genuine human being is one who lives in a way that supports and furthers his fellow man. The power of Ubuntu innately carries with it a message of hope and a promise of change, and as Mandela found, Ubuntu can spring from even the most deeply buried well inside of a man, and then spread across a country.

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