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Honoring Nelson Mandela and Reflecting on the Symbol of the Archer

Steve Nation

During the past week, as we have been moving in to the Sagittarius Festival, it seems as if the entire family of people of goodwill across the world has been immersed in the after-glow of Nelson Mandela's transition. The popular imagination has been flooded with light and the collective mind inspired as we have been absorbed in endless stories of the role of a great leader and a father figure, not just for South Africa, but for all people of goodwill.

The struggle to defeat the philosophy and practice of apartheid has been of incredible significance in the post war world. The story of this time has been a story of humanity's on-going transition out of the battles of the two World Wars towards a future molded around the inspirations of the Four Freedoms, the Declaration of Human Rights and a dawning sense of Oneness and Unity. Separateness was enshrined in law in a unique manner in apartheid during the years 1948 – 1994 and so the struggle to end apartheid, primarily of course the struggle in South Africa, but also involving hundreds of thousands of people and movements throughout the world, transformed a whole generation. In many countries the struggle against apartheid outside of South Africa awakened people to issues in their own land and contributed to countless national movements seeking to replace relationships of hatred and injustice with relationships centered in universal principles. Mandela emerged as a global symbol during this time. Little was really known about him, he was hidden from view, imprisoned as a military leader of the armed struggle to end apartheid – there were not even any photos of what he looked like after he was jailed in 1962. Between 1962 and 1990 no photographs of him were ever released. So it was as a 'silent', 'hidden' presence that Mandela, the leader of a military struggle, became a symbol of global attention with streets in cities around the world named in his honor, and globally televised concerts celebrating his birthday.

The Mandela story as it has echoed through endless news reports, images, and interviews with those who knew him during the past week, has been told as the story of a human being who became a leader with an exceptional ability to lead and inspire others in shaping a national atmosphere and climate of thought and of purpose imbued with Aquarian energies. Perhaps no other national leader has contributed to the shaping of a nation in modern times in the way that Mandela has – certainly no other national leader has been so strongly and pragmatically focused on generating a political climate that would mine the goodwill of the people as its primary and fundamental resource. The fact that his leadership so easily reached out beyond his own land to embrace the world is a sign that we should expect more leaders of this ilk to emerge in the future. We want leaders today that can be trusted, that have an authentic vision of future possibilities, and that have the political skills needed to move towards those possibilities.

Commentators have been regularly saying we should not expect to see any more world leaders like Mandela. President Obama repeated this thought. Our work is to affirm how very wrong this is. Everything in the teachings tells us to expect leaders who transparently draw upon the goodwill of their constituents and whose political instinct is to empower, mobilize, inspire the people of goodwill – and to do so courageously, even if it may at some times be against the advice of others. Mandela is a sign of the leadership we can expect in the future – skillful politicians, one pointed, tactical, willing to know the

opponent, to charm the opponent, find the seeds of goodwill within the opponent where they exist and, when appropriate and when tactically wise, fully engage with the opponent. After the end of apartheid Mandela kept his eyes on the big picture of inspiring the people to believe in the possibilities of a rainbow nation.

During the Memorial Service for Madiba on Tuesday last week, while rain was falling on the crowd, a great world disciple was honored with ritual, with exuberance and vitality, with the presence of countless world leaders - and, perhaps most significantly, witnessed by an audience of television viewers around the globe. One event during this service stood out. Mandela's great brother, a colleague in the band of Elders established by Mandela, and a fellow leader of world thought, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, stood to give a blessing.

As we prepare ourselves to work with the energies of Sagittarius we might note something of the ritual that took place. Tutu is not one to stand on ceremony – his mischievous laugh and sense of humor is what makes him so endearing – this relaxes people, disarms them, but it also masks a fire that enables him to lift a group into a common experience – even if only for a moment. There is a sense in which Tutu, the disciple-priest of the nation, at times leads his people in prayer and invocation in the manner of a true warrior leader.

Tutu began by saying how South Africa had got to this point in its history because of discipline. In order to thank the world for celebrating the life of Nelson Mandela he commanded the noisy and exuberant crowd in the stadium to “show the world that we are disciplined”. “Stand up”, he told the crowd: “Stand for amani” – stand for Madiba!. And then he asked for silence, absolute silence. “I want”, he said, “to hear a pin drop”. After a moment to settle, the thousands in the crowd dutifully obeyed. There was a moment of quiet. Tutu, the former archbishop, Tutu the magician we might say, or perhaps Tutu the warrior, used that moment, that important moment, to figuratively shoot an arrow into the future – an arrow that we might imagine piercing the heart of the nation. “We thank you God and we promise you God that we are going to follow the example of Nelson Mandela. “

So let us be thankful and let us honor the passing of a great leader for humanity – a symbol of the leaders we can expect to emerge in the immediate future. Let us pause for silence and then, imaginatively standing as a world group, shoot an arrow into the true Spiritual Sun as we say together the Gayatri:

*O Thou Who givest sustenance to the universe,
From Whom all things proceed
To Whom all things return,
Unveil to us the face of the true Spiritual Sun
Hidden by a disc of golden Light
That we may know the Truth
And do our whole duty
As we journey to Thy sacred feet.*

The image of Sagittarius is the archer on a white horse. There are three elements to this image: the archer; the archer's bow and arrow; and the horse. The archer is holding the bow taut, taking aim, looking down the arrow towards the clearly identified target - the goal. It is an image of total absorption in the moment. But all the time this is happening, all the time that the attention is focused on that one-pointed gaze along the arrow, the archer is riding a horse. Think about the balance and focus that is needed to send the arrow on its path, and consider how this has to be achieved while on horse-back. This can only happen when there is complete confidence and trust between horse and rider. To extend the bow prior to releasing the arrow both hands are needed so the reins sit loose on the horse's neck. While horse and rider are very much at ease with each other, it is the rider who is in control, knowing that if a change of direction is needed, the horse will respond instinctively to pressure from the rider's seat, from the thighs, the legs and knees.

We might consider this image as an illustration of the ideal relationship between the thinking conscious part of the personality and the unconscious, animal part – the Lunar Lords, the natural organic elements of desire and self-interest that are a fundamental part of the personal vehicle – part of the nature of the human. We might also consider it as a symbol for the relation between the centers above the diaphragm and those below the diaphragm: the control the rider has over the horse is based on understanding, respect and is the result of years of training and education leading the horse to serve its master's purposes.

The thinker has the potential ability to govern the sensitivities, desires, insecurities and vulnerabilities of the personal self with confidence and perfect control – yet also with respect and acknowledgement of this part of its person-hood. In the Sagittarian image, the thinker is clearly in control; there is a trusting, confident bond between rider and horse; the desire body and animal nature is the willing servant – yet the rider needs to respect the possibilities and innate characteristics of the horse – to be firm but loving and appreciative of the raw material of the personal instrument.

It is also worth considering that the rider has got to this relationship with the horse through training, requiring a lot of patience on behalf of both horse and rider – but more importantly than anything requiring time – experience. Often in our desire to rush forward on the path we forget the importance of time, and so we get disheartened when we find that intention does not immediately lead to obvious accomplishments. Transformation takes time, it needs experience to go deep. This is as real for the individual treading the spiritual path as it is for groups, for nations and for humanity as a whole.

There is an interesting passage in Esoteric Astrology where DK tells us that Sagittarius rules *the activity of the lunar lords who build the body of man out of their own substance*. Because of this it becomes possible for the person who begins the *one-pointed activity of Sagittarius to rule his personality and to govern it so that eventually it becomes the vehicle of his soul*. Indeed the suggestion is made that in the future when astrology has become a major science special efforts will be made to gain *certain aspects of control of the personality during the month when the Sun is in the sign Sagittarius*. [pp. 277 - 8] Whatever our sun sign may be, it makes sense, during the month of Sagittarius, to reflect on the time and attention that we need to invest in training our own personal vehicles so that we might become more proficient in spiritual archery.

As through time the rider builds a relationship of control, trust and confidence with the horse then the image for Sagittarius begins to focus in on the face of the archer, the bow and the arrow. It is as if everything else in the image, including the rider and the horse, falls away below the threshold. The

archer's hand holds the string of the bow taut, holding the string with three fingers; the hand touches the chin to steady itself; and the eye looks along the arrow directly at the target. As much as anything else this is an image of poise, creative tension, latent energy, and one-pointed orientation. It is followed by the moment when the grip on the bow string is released and the arrow is fired ... we can sense the trajectory, the path, the arrow takes as it goes straight to the target. Remember in this image we are not thinking simply of an arrow hitting a bulls-eye on a target. The symbol is of an arrow sent forth by the mind to penetrate the livingness, the Life of the target – the very core and essence of some future possibility. The Thinker sends an arrow to enter into the heart of the soul ... or pierce the veils that surround the Higher Mind ... or that higher potency of the astral body – Buddhi, the source of intuition, of direct knowledge, of supramental insight. All the potency held by the Thinker in the image of the taught bow is sent forth. In a dedicated moment of aspiration or an invocative cry, the whole being is oriented towards a future accomplishment – towards initiation.

The image speaks to us then of the energetic components of a purposeful life, and throughout the period of this full moon it is helpful to reflect on the role of purpose and goal in the discipleship life. The keynote for meditation in the sign is *I see the goal, I reach that goal, and then I see another*. This does not refer to artificially created goals, nor to contrived idealistic images of an impossible future that seems out of keeping with where we are or who we are. Sagittarius calls us to focus on realistic possibilities in our life - possibilities that we can accomplish if we keep them before us.

One key to understanding the energies of this sign, and the enormous potency of the image of the archer, is to reflect on the fact that this is a sign of balance - measured progress - moving forward step by step. There are two dominant signs of balance in the path of spiritual aspiration and discipleship. Libra suggests either the balance of a pause, an interlude to absorb all that has been achieved or, on the discipleship path, a balancing process leading to a period of equilibrium during which a deep and fundamental choice is made. This choice sets the environment for all the trauma and chaos of the tests of Scorpio when we prove our metal, ultimately emerging as the warrior triumphant. Then there is a new cycle of balance - this time balance in Sagittarius where, through time, there is the steady progress forward on the path - orienting the life towards initiation in Capricorn, the shattering of all that is crystallized and the final emergence of the unicorn atop the mountain.

It is interesting to consider a balanced, forward moving, purposeful life as a life in which the personality is wisely controlled, trained with respect and disciplined with love. The result is a settled, balanced personal life in which the higher orientation of the soul can begin to come into prominence. DK writes: *The Archer has to acquire and hold a steady eye, hand and stance prior to firing the arrow which, when rightly directed and correctly followed, will carry him through the portal of initiation.* [Esoteric Astrology, pp. 189-90]

Another key to our understanding of Sagittarius and of the archer is to reflect on what they tell us about possibilities in the development of mind and of consciousness that lie before the disciple or the disciple in training on the probationary path. Scorpio, the sign of testing, gives conditions that ultimately enable the mind to be released into full governing activity. This happens in two stages. First the intellect controls the emotions and then later the intellect itself is illumined by the light of the soul. And then in Sagittarius

conditions are right for the developed and illumined intellect to become sensitive to the intuition and to intuitive perception.

Again, the symbol of the archer can be used to lead us into a deeper understanding of this potential. The eye of the archer is directed along the length of the arrow towards the particular goal, a meditation seed thought, for example, or an attempt to understand right action or to some problem facing humanity and the opportunities inherent in the problem from the perspective of the unfolding Plan. With concentration the mind fixes on the object, the goal until, with the speed of the arrow, the gap between the understanding of the intellect and the subject of the meditation is instantaneously bridged - the essence of the meditation seed is penetrated. And then the story presents us with the magic of this sign, the magic of the intuition. After the arrow to pierce the heart of the meditation seed has been released an arrow returns; not the arrow we sent forth – another arrow, a new arrow returns. It comes, as if by an act of grace, as an insight, a knowing - as *direct knowledge bringing flashes of light upon problems and a distant yet possible vision of attainment*.

In pondering the nature of intuition in Sagittarius we might think about those ‘fleeting, deep impressions’ that have a direct bearing on our sense of purpose and direction – impressions that reach right into the core of our being. These insights into truth have the power to change our vision of ourselves, who we are and where we are going. Right action, following an intuitive impression, becomes inevitable.

We can also work with the idea of the intuition and the symbol of the archer in the practice of invocation and use of the Great Invocation. The meditator, trained and skilled, sends forth a call. Like the arrow that call can be expected to penetrate the unknowable reality of what we refer to as ‘the mind of God’, ‘the heart of God’ and that center ‘where the will of God is known’. The call, the cry is released ... and then there is an imaginative expectation of the returning arrow: Light, streaming forth into human minds; Love, streaming forth into human hearts; the purpose of divinity guiding the little wills of humanity. The key is to expect the returning arrow, the outpouring of lighted energies, to flow into the collective mind and heart, conditioning the atmosphere of thinking and planning in human affairs.

In the light of the wave of idealism and the focus on goodwill that has accompanied Nelson Mandela’s transition during this past week; and of Archbishop Tutu’s call to the spirit of the people of South Africa affirming before God an intention, a promise, to ‘follow the example of Nelson Mandela’ – in the light of these archetypal events can we sense something of the possibilities of this Sagittarian energy of intuitive, deep, purpose and direction – sense it in the real way of our own discipleship lives – and in the awakening of our own communities, of our nations and of the great process whereby the nations of the world are learning to harmonize their actions for the common good. The nations means specific collections of families, communities, peoples, organisations, businesses, local and national governments, students, researchers, artists. The nations are the embodiment of humanity as a great centre of activity. Now, at this time of opportunity and initiatory maturing of human nature – let us invoke the concentrated focus of the archer, sitting at ease on the horse, in full control, imagining how a refinement of purpose and direction would subtly change the dynamics of our own lives and the societies we live in.