

Daily Meditation 11/29/2021

The Prophetic Gifts of Robert Bly

'Morning.

We're continuing our meditations with and about Robert Bly, who died this past week. And today's meditation is about his prophetic spirit.

And Rabbi Haeschel says, of course, "A prophet is one who interferes." And I think that Robert Bly really did interfere in so many ways with some of the shadows of our culture. And he interfered like prophets traditionally do, and that is with imagination.

Walter Brueggemann, a great scholar of the prophets, wrote a book on the prophetic imagination. The prophets speak to the imagination, from the imagination. They're not glittering sentences of doctrine and dogma so much as challenging the images that we're running with, the archetypes that we're running with.

And I think that Robert Bly, in a lot of his public work and his work with the men's movement, but also his dialogues with Marian Woodman, the Jungian psychologist, was addressing real issues in our culture and our souls, and with the help of Carl Jung, who was very important to him. And he did it, of course, through the medium, very much, of poetry.

Now mentioning Carl Jung, I'm going to tell you a story that applied to him that always makes me laugh. He says when he's lecturing in colleges, and afterwards people come up to him--a lot of them students, of course--and he asks them, "What are you majoring in?" And they say "psychology." And he says, "Well, are you studying Carl Jung?" And if they say no, he turns his back on them. (laughs)

Well, that's a lot of students he's turning his back on, because the academic establishment in America is not terribly eager to teach young people about Jung. And his whole point is there's so many of them who are being taught about rats and mice, but not about the human consciousness and human potential.

In so many ways, Robert Bly, well, he did kick against his Lutheran Christian roots, for sure. To me, he really was on a spiritual quest. And he wasn't afraid to say that, at least from time to time. But he obviously did not choose theology as his path. He chose poetry--mythopoetry. And it's another path and a very important one.

I think in that respect he was very intuitive and very prophetic. I think that he anticipated the flight from organized religion, and he went into places, like Jung and the poetic tradition, to bring forth the real questions of values and the sacred.

When he would recite his poems from Kabir, playing a small mandolin on his lap (which a musician in my program, a teacher with us, said was always out of tune.) Nevertheless, it was effective, because he loved to recite. But then that music he brought in brought some of the feminine energy in, too.

And I remember for example, one line from Kabir. He translated it--Bly translated it: "You cannot love God with a loaded gun inside of you. How can you love God with a loaded gun inside of you?" And then Bly would comment on things like that, and he looked up and he said (this was in the 70s), "Well, Richard Nixon has a loaded gun inside of him," and then he went on with his music.

So he would apply his poetry--the poetry he was enamored of--to the current political and cultural discourses that were going on. And prophets do that all the time.

And the very fact that he chose poetry, and invited men into the sphere of poetry--and of course, he championed people like Rilke and people like Rumi, and encouraged men to memorize these poets--this itself is a breakthrough. That heterosexual men, and he was pretty explicit about his heterosexuality, can enjoy poetry and learn from it, too. That is part of the spiritual heritage of a culture, of a people. And that alone was prophetic. He was taking on academia. And he was, explicitly.

I told you the story the other day about how he loved our school. He dreamt about it! Because he would go to colleges on the road, and they didn't get it. They didn't get that he was trying to teach spirituality. They thought that he should be graded on his poetry. So it was a left brain response to what essentially was his invitation into mysticism, into spirituality.

And so from that point of view, too, Bly had this balance of the mystic and the prophet.

William Hawking says the prophet is a mystic in action. And Bly had a very non-sentimental understanding of mysticism, but he certainly had it, and he was obviously in love with it, because he searched for it. He was a hunter-gatherer, after healthy mysticism, whether it came from the East--Kabir and so forth, and the wonderful poetry of Meera--and also from the West or from the Mideast.

He was a hunter-gatherer, and for that, too, I honor him. And I see him as a figure that will appreciate more, even as the years go on.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.