

## Ode to timidity - the Ethiopian experience. By Yilma Bekele

I knew something was missing. It kept nagging at me, the little voice in side kept saying ‘you know you have been here before.’ I was driving south on the 580 Freeway when it hit me. It was 2005 deja vu. How could I forget? I ask for forgiveness, I am an Ethiopian and memory is an option. Our long-term memory is intact and is usually retrieved at a drop of a hat. Now short term is a different matter. We are very selective about that. Why do you think I keep writing about the crimes of the regime? It is my humble attempt to act as a reminder, to help us visualize and store for easy recall.

This is what I wrote in 2009 during the Kinijit debacle “Psychologist Ellen McGrath calls it ‘the rumination rut’ .... a style of thinking in which, like a hamster in a cage, you run in tight circles on a treadmill in your brain. It means obsessing about a problem, about a loss, about any kind of setback or ambiguity without moving past thought into the realm of action.’ This in turn makes us loose our focus. While our problem stays constant our focus wonders aimlessly. It is like trying to hit a moving target.”

See what I mean, what we got here is mirror image of our situation then. I am not that much of a religious person. But I am beginning to see what we commonly refer to as the Ethiopian God or Allah. What ever the force is it looks like we got some body, someone looking after our ancient land. It is too much of a coincidence to be dismissed lightly. The force is with us again. Despite our weakness it always shows up to salvage all that we mange to squander. This time it came in full glory with trumpets, whistle and drums.

There was the time when the TPLF regime in consort with Shabia declared us superfluous and discarded us as old shoes. We lost use of a port, we let our army march in shame, we opened our border as a one way highway, shared a common National bank, contemplated changing the name of our Airlines and even took a second fiddle to exporting the mighty coffee. Then the force showed up. Need I say more? No.

There was a time when Somalia and Ogaden were quiet. Poor Somalia was going thru growing pains. The whole world was dumping on our brothers. Literally dumping toxic waste on their coast and fishing their resources out of existence. The brave and fierce Somalis said enough. The arrogant west decided to practiced target shooting on live humans. Well, well, well guess who decided to be part of this game. Thus we marched into Mogadishu dressed, armed and driven with foreign sponsors. It was not long before we left in the middle of the night whipped, demoralized and in a hurry. The force showed up.

In 1993, during the conclusion of an interview, a reporter asked the lately departed Ashebari on his views of Ethiopian history and he replied, “ Ethiopia is only 100 years old. Those who claim otherwise are indulging themselves in a fairy tale.” The arrogance, the hubris boggles the mind on the other hand it leads one to do reckless stuff. Thus Waldeba Monastery was condemned to be a sugar plantation. Over fifteen hundred years of treasure was to be replaced by a farm so we can sweeten our coffee. The mighty force was not amused. Shall we say the Christian God and the Muslim Allah got together and decided to declare a recall of a defective specimen. I am not being presumptuous but some things have to be explained in a manner we can all understand. This is my take on this situation.

I believe we have been cashing our credit once too often. There should come a time when we should help our selves instead of relying on an outside power to straighten our never-ending screwups. What better than now to acquire some stiff spine or an extra pair of balls if you don’t mind my expression. Is

it possible to trade in timidity with bold action? I know it is a tall order but you know what it is actually possible. May I be allowed to whisper Arab Spring in your ear please? I really don't want to startle you, so I will try to jog that short-term memory into the front for easy recall.

I associate Arab Spring with rage. Our cup has runneth over and it is time, don't you think? That is what happened with our Arab neighbors, their cup runneth over and they exploded.

Who would have thought forty years of Gadaffi, thirty years of Mubarak, thirty years of the Assad's and whatever year of Ben Ali will be such a push over? It is all about rage my friend. Did the Arabs have elaborate plans of what comes next when they decided to do away with the garbage? I am afraid not. There was no user manual. There was no formula and there was no divine guidance. Just your everyday dream of hope and optimism is all they needed. There were no leaders showing the way, there were no grand coalitions, there were no Fronts and no organized Parties. It was just your average ordinary citizen taking matters into their own hands and drawing and redrawing the future one-day at a time.

The few scattered voices turned into a tsunami of screams. Some took long while a few were done in a short time. As I said there was no blueprint. What they got in common was rage. What runs thru their story is the common theme of a relentless confidence that tomorrow whatever it is cannot be as bad as today. Yesterday stank, today is more of the same thus the only thing left is to try to change tomorrow so it would be a better day. There was nothing to lose. If we can call the happenings in the last few months' as history, no question it will be judged a success. A few hiccups but it is work in progress and no one promised a rose garden.

It could be said it is a pivotal moment in our long history. We got a choice to go forward in good faith, unsurpassed optimism or march on the same spot till we fall due exhaustion. No one can make that choice for us. As psychologist McGrath said 'we can run that tight little circle in our brain obsessing about our problems' or go past that rumination stage and commit our selves to act.

What we got today is a very peculiar situation that can only happen in Ethiopia. We are always different, aren't we? Looks like our dictator is gone. The evil that has polluting our very existence has been removed by the grace of God. He was the center around which eighty million people revolved. The center has collapsed on itself. When the Sun dies an about five billion years or so all the planets revolving around it will disappear too. That is the law of physics. The death of evil Meles will result in the withering away of his evil TPLF party and those hodam teletafis revolving around him. No one can stop that.

What should our response be like? You know us; it is as muddled as anytime before. Right now we are on a freeze mode. We are unable to go beyond the 'talk' stage. Looks like we jabber so much we substitute that for action. I have been the beneficiary of so many incredible responses by my friends and acquaintances I consider myself immune to farce, idiocy, ignorance not to mention comedy. I had people admonishing me for celebrating the death of an evil tyrant, folks lecturing me about my giddy disposition regarding the demise of the cancerous cell in our body politic or rebuking me for falling on my knees and thanking God almighty. As you can see I am one confused Abesha. How exactly I am supposed to view the death of my countries and people enemy is not clear to me.

Our Amharic saying goes 'helm teferto kuch belo aytaderm' A very simple and beautiful statement. Should we have prayed to God to allow the idiot to live a little longer since we are afraid what would come next? No one seems to have told this Ethiopian insight to the Tunisians, Libyans or Egyptians. Aren't you glad? I believe since we screwed twice before in this business of trying to bring change we

area little gun shy now. It is understandable but definitely not rational. Life does not work like that. How many times have each one of us made mistakes in our everyday life? It has not stopped us from trying again has it? Of course there is no guarantee of success now but that should not deter us from trying, should it?

We also have this issue of a leader. It is associated to a simple lack of self-esteem. Following comes natural to us due to our old culture of fear of family, fear of elders and fear of authority. Thus we are always looking for a leader, a redeemer or a fall guy. We expect Dr. Berhanu, Ato Bulcha, Professor Mesfin, Judge Bertukan or others to lead us to the Promised Land. We also insist they form a Front, unite or be one for us to approve. Why do you think that is so? Is it possible that we want to avoid responsibility in case things do not work out? Is it because we always seem to prefer that others stick their neck out for our benefit? Or could it be that we can always have someone to assign blame to? Again I wonder how this philosophy would have translated in the land of the Arabs.

Fear of failure is our number one enemy. Fear of assuming responsibility is our Achilles heel. Lack of self-esteem is our undoing. I love Judge Bertukan. I respect Dr. Berhanu. I miss Eskinder. They all stood up for what they believe and paid a price. The net effect on me is that they inspire me. I pay them compliments by emulating their unselfish act. My resolve to be free makes them a better leader. By fighting for their freedom and dignity they inspire me to demand for mine too. We complement each other. We are equal human beings; they just have the added responsibility of standing in the front with my consent. It is true we are all leaders it is a matter of degrees. The difference is some of us lack faith in our good judgment.

Today same old Woyane bastards are toying with us. The evil man is dead but his evil system is still functioning by remote. Absolute idiot like Berket Semeon, a high school graduate that won his last election by cheating is giving out incoherent press conferences. A senile fatherly figure like Sebat Nega with mind stuck in the '70s, and no authority from anyone we know of is trying to explain to us how things work. There is no such thing as a legitimate Ethiopian Constitution, there is no such thing as a freely elected Ethiopian Parliament and here we are trying to interpret and split hair of a non-existent phantom situation. All ado about nothing.

All I see in my head is Arab Spring. All I think about is the power of rage. I remember the brave Egyptians burning Mubarak's headquarters to smitten and I grin from ear to ear. I dream of my brave fearless people smashing the walls of Maekelawi and letting my brothers and sisters out. I lounge for the day when the doors of Kaliti are flung open and my people march singing and dancing all the way to Merkato and Kebena and Gulele. I smile when I see in my head Meskel Square full of my people celebrating their freedom and hugging, kissing shouting "Free at last, thanks God almighty we are free at last!!" I jump with joy when Ethiopian Airlines lands at Bole with the scattered children of Ethiopia from the four corners of the world bring her future back to build and make our ancient land the center of African freedom and dignity. Yes you can make that happen but you first have to have faith in yourself, respect for your fellow human and a heart full of love and tolerance the rest will take care of itself. It is all about you talking personal responsibility and rising up to the occasion. Hate of dictatorship is acceptable. Celebration of the demise of evil is a human duty. Wanting to be free and live in dignity is as important as breathing and eating.

Meles died in Europe. Meles should be buried in Europe. Alive he did not care for Ethiopia. Dead there is no place for him in Ethiopia. We want to be free of his body and spirit. This is not about hate but a perfectly normal closure for the pain and agony he inflicted on our country and people. TPLF

should be warned regarding this notion of a state burial for a tyrant. Do not tread on our sensibilities and bring the ugly in all of us. Let us open a new chapter in peace and harmony.