

## GOMOLEMO MOTSWALEDI – THE LION OF SEROWE

A speech in memory of a life well-lived, a life of abundance

Its been one-year today, since our friend gave his last breath

Its been one year today, since fate slammed a door to a remarkable life

And opened a new chapter which we who are here must now write

Its been a year today, since Mozart lost a father, and Tax lost a son, and Gape lost a brothe, and Aus'kealeboga lost a friend

And an entire nation lost a leader,

A leader of great promise,

A year it has been

He was a man of beautiful speech and words

And with words, he changed an entire generation of people

He made them see the promiseland ahead

He caused them to believe in themselves

He inspired them to embrace a possibility that one day, we in Botswana will become free

We will be free to become anything we wish to become under the sun,

Anything,

If we applied ourselves diligently and creatively

What many did and do not know, is that Motswaledi could also use his extraordinary craft of words to court controversy

Many times, jokingly so,

He would stoke the ambers of conflagration by,

on occasion, sponsoring extravagant jokes

At one funeral prayer, we met three of our lady friends

One hug each for me, but he refused to partake in the hug session

“..nna багаetsho le a itse, ke wa dipounama, go sa nneng jalo a mongwe le mongwe a mpolelele gore ha ele gore go nale bothata ka dipounama - a bue gore bothata e ka tswa e le eng..”

By this time I had walked ahead and did not hear the rest of the conversation

I did hear behind me, however, laughter, and more laughter

His social aptitude was remarkable

He understood his friends and foes like he did the back of his hand

And knew how to navigate their strengths as well as their weaknesses

He referred to this capacity, or capability, as “possessing an antenna”

He used his “antenna” to bring out the best in people

He depended on his antenna to heal the weaknesses of others

This matter was a subject of many of our shared jokes

He often joked that that we both had good antennas for the country’s direction or what course the country should take

But that our antennas for finding wives was poor and a source of much disappointment

In our earlier years we offered ourselves for manual work at many functions we have had the privilege of being associated with

And on some occasions we drove his Branco into the forests

To collect firewood for the functions we attended

A good operator of the axe while I did much of the wood collection and packing

On few occasions we exchanged roles

We always got the job done

If there was a man you could trust to get a job done, he was such a man.

He lived for his music, his melodic notes

He hummed and sung while driving, while in the shower

He belted on bass and sometimes on tenor,

Hymns that were soothing to the soul, so soothing

We found ourselves on tour, on many occasions

Chasing his musical dreams, chasing his yearning

To spread his musical gospel

First as a church choir conductor,

and then as the esteemed founder conductor of KTM choir, one of the most celebrated choirs of our land

Born as the first of three boys, into a musical and teaching family

Gomolemo would emerge as a towering political figure of our time,

Like Churchill, he would inspire an entire generation with words of hope at a difficult time

Like Biko, his consciousness would plant a seed of belief among those who had not realised their moral and political power, that they could be the key-holders to a prison that held minds captive, a prison that held back an entire nation from realising its full potential, individually and collectively

Like Mao, he would lead a nascent movement, and breathe into it a fighting chance to foment a new Government in years to come, even as no one could have envisaged it in the beginning

Like Nkurumah, he would bring together swathes of people and communities, political parties and unions who had never thought they could ever sit at the same table

Like Tambo, he would turn raw and young talent into polished and refined leadership, and prophetically prepare many young men and women for turbulent times ahead

As much during his life as in his physical absence, his spirit as a builder and liberator continues to be the thread that holds the fabric of our existence together as a movement and as a people

The images of his life and pictures may now, through no fault of their own, portray him as a perfect and faultless leader

Something his humility would never have embraced or encouraged

His self-awareness was remarkable, and often sought to manage his shortcomings by surrounding himself with those that he felt complemented him

“ke ne ka ikgalemela gore ke seka ka akgela, ka gore ha nne ke ka ntsha lehoko, ke itse gore o ne o ka topogelwa ke ditlhong”

He gave and also valued loyalty

And was willing to sacrifice his name for all those he trusted and believed in

He stood by them in the face of all criticism, in the face of any fall-outs

He often said the people who will fight for us when or if we were in trouble are the ordinary citizens,

The suffering citizens, the citizens who had nothing, the citizen who the system had abandoned

What many may not readily realize, is that Motswaledi was a huge risk-taker,

Willing to travel roads no one dared explore,  
Yet his decisions were nourished and inspired by prayer and years of hidden preparation  
For he took time to make decisions, but once he made them, they were far-reaching and decisive  
Once he made decisions, he offered his life to seeing them through,  
Always willing to bear the consequences of his actions

On many platforms, those who encountered him talk about his laughter  
They swear they never saw him on a bout of anger or holding grudges  
Sure, he never held a single grudge, but anger, it raged in him and propelled the energy that defined his punishing drive  
But it was a different type of anger, it was a highly disciplined anger, a highly trained and channelled anger  
It was not an anger occasioned by a sense of personal violation  
It was an anger at the loss of opportunity for the majority of our people  
Anger at the collapse of democratic institutions on our land  
Anger at the extra-judicial killings metered on our people, it didn't matter if it was a single case or more than a single case  
Anger that the system could not bring out the best out of our people  
Anger that we could do much better than we were doing as a nation

Motswaledi was a professional political fighter,  
He knew how and when to defend or launch a war for a political cause  
Shrewd, pragmatic, resilient and tactical, Gomolemo was at times mischievous in his adventures,  
Even humorously so

“Nnyaa rraetsho, e kgang go tile ke seka ka go bolelela ka yone, ba re o tloga o re senyetsa ka  
“diplomacy”, ba re ga se nako ya “diplomacy”

I would know then, and then, that he was up to something

He understood the trust so many placed in him, and he never would do anything to squander that trust in him.

If he was here today, I imagine he would draw from the words of Mbeki:

“All this I know and know to be true because I am an African

Because of that, I am also able to state this fundamental truth that I am born of a people who are heroes and heroines.

I am born of a people who would not tolerate oppression.

I am of a nation that would not allow that fear of death, torture, imprisonment, exile or persecution should result in the perpetuation of injustice.

The great masses who are our mother and father will not permit that the behaviour of the few results in the description of our country and people as barbaric.

Patient because history is on their side, these masses do not despair because today the weather is bad. Nor do they turn triumphalist when, tomorrow, the sun shines.

Whatever the circumstances they have lived through and because of that experience, they are determined to define for themselves who they are and who they should be.”

He was always inextricably connected to the truth

He lived by the light of what was right

The guiding principle for him was always, “is this the right thing to do?”

He was immersed in truth, he was the truth, and he departed by it

This is what freed him, that is why he was a free man

He was no prisoner, a prisoner to no man, he feared no man but his God

And that is why his people will one day be free, because they were led by a free man

Although he was a team player of note

There was a disciplined rebelliousness to him

He could break ranks, with those around him, if his core values and convictions came under threat

Everyone remembers Gomolemo Motswaledi in some special way

A prophet of freedom

A champion of democracy

A captain of teamwork and unity

A fountain of love  
A ray of hope  
A pillar of strength  
An ointment of healing  
A wordsmith, man of beautiful words and language  
A pastor and bearer of good news  
A shrewd political navigator  
An operator of national projects  
A conductor of melodic tunes  
A songbird in baritone  
A spokesperson and representative of ordinary people  
A bank of wisdom  
A chef and man of humour  
An incisive public intellectual  
A history teacher  
A father, son and family man  
A remarkable visionary

We may give him the highest accolades, and shower him with all the admiration

Yes, this is good, and he deserves it

But the real test, a test for our memory of him, a test of our love for him

Is not measured by how we craft our words about him

It will be measured by history and by whether we will live by his ideals and achieve his vision of freeing our people

This is the most appropriate and greatest memorial we can offer a man of his historical significance

Our memorial of him will be determined by how comfortable we are in embracing the words of his hero, Martin Luther King:

“With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful

symphony of brotherhood

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to climb up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day”