**Words along the Way**

**By**

**Ezra Gebremedhin**

**A Greeting and a Request**

*InQwa’E aHagosäna!* Roughly translated, ‘*God be praised that joy has become our lot!*’

I was walking when my mobile rang. I recognized the voice of an Eritrean woman.

Today (at the time of writing of this message) is Eritrea’s 22nd birthday. Tomorrow, May 25, Eritreans in Uppsala will be celebrating the event officially. The woman who called knows me well as a pastor. I told her that I was coming to the celebration but that I couldn’t stay long. Not unexpectedly she answered: “The flag will be hoisted at 16 hours (4p.m.). Your presence, though short, and your words of advice, would be appreciated.”

A man, a good friend, to whom I had talked on the phone the day before, had commented, “It does not matter that your stay with us must be short. It is enough that you give us your blessing!”

Here were two Eritreans, a man and a woman, representatives of a people traditionally known for their respect for age and grey hair! Echoing the longings of thousands upon thousands of Eritreans! One feels small in the face of such expectations.

Now back to the telephone which rang on my way home. I had been in town with it. There was something wrong with the phone. I couldn’t recharge the battery. In spite of vigorous efforts to push my refill-wire into a side-hole, there was no sign of pulsating current moving into my phone. I was afraid that my small voice box would soon be lifeless. I had to go to a repair shop for mobile phones. The proprietor asked where I had bought the phone and if I had the receipt from the purchase of my phone, two years earlier.

I didn’t have the receipt. I don’t even remember where I had placed it. The man couldn’t repair my phone. That was it. The price of neglect or carelessness in small things!

**Weighty Thoughts at a Telephone Shop**

But a simple, non-functional telephone awakened weighty thoughts in me, suddenly and unexpectedly. As I was waiting in line to be served at the Tele2 repair shop at the Central Station of Uppsala the following thoughts, which have occupied me for many years, emerged once more:

1. Don’t live a lie. Be truthful.

2. Don’t speak or act hastily. Haste makes waste. (Say that to me again!).

3. Don’t flee from life’s challenges. Cowardice is degrading.

I thought to myself: If I do get an occasion to address my Eritrean brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, in Uppsala at the celebration of Eritrea’s 22nd birthday on May 25, I shall name these pieces of advice for them.

On my way home with my unrepaired telephone I came upon a further piece of advice:

4. *Remain committed to Eritrea.*

And why? Because there were genuine dreams and ideals, ideals compatible with sober self-respect, behind her emergence. And much has been paid for her existence, much of the stuff which resides in heart and mind, much of limb and life, much of sighs and tears, much of hope against the seemingly impossible.

A relative once said to me, “*Ab wurayka aytigayesh!”* (Don’t consider yourself a stranger at a feast (undertaking) which is irrevocably yours!). And Eritrea is our *wuray*, through thick and thin!

I know that my four pieces of advice are tall orders. And I don’t enumerate them with the pride of someone who has observed them. But they deserve to be lifted forth by a person of grey hair. If I am to believe my brothers and sisters, my sons and daughters in Uppsala! Honour to many an Eritrean, in the past and in the present, for truthfulness, for a sense of sober judgment and for courage in matters that touch upon an embattled homeland. Virtues still knocking on the doors of our hearts as we celebrate Eritrea’s 22nd birthday!

And what about my mobile phone, whose battery risked running dry and which, therefore, needed speedy recharging? Perhaps it too wants to put in a word, a greeting to Eritreans far and wide. Who knows? Would it be wrong to suggest that we all need ‘an inner recharging’ a renewed and reinforced vision, new pulse as it were, as we move into the future with Eritrea, all Eritreans and all our neighbours. God grant us such a recharging!

Peace and blessings

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