

THE COURAGE QUASHIGAH MEMORIAL ADDRESS

By

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Please, rise. Let us observe a minute silence in honour of seer: Courage Quashigah.

STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENTATION

Quashigah is larger than life. On occasions such as this, Quashigah should not be preached. Quashigah should be performed. The performance is in three parts. Part 1 is a poem done in *symbols*. Part 2 is the essence of Quashigah captured in one symbol. Part 3 is a wrap-up.

PART 1: GHANAINS' GHANAIN

GHANAINS' GHANAIN is poem written the day I heard that Courage was dead. It has 17 lines and 80 words. *Souvenirs* are available as Book Marks. The recital will be performed in dance by Professor Tarin Hampton, along with Ms Freda Haggan.

<i>GHANAINS' GHANAIN</i>	<p>Questions, questions, questions! Unsought, they rained, beaming Answers pregnant with meaning. <i>Sankofa's</i> path is not that far. Hero of our time, silenced in your prime Inspire us across the Gulf. "Restore Every wall, every stall. Mend them all." Ghanaians' Ghanaian! Ancestral portals, stand ajar! Heavens', too! Behold, your <i>prem</i> star.</p>
<p>Comrades Compatriots. Please, stand by. Over here, buried, let Korshie lie. Unfinished mile in the human eye Re-burnished soul for a higher I: Acquitted and relieved of tribal pull. Ghanaians' Ghanaian: Exception which proves the rule.</p>	By LADE WOSORNU

PART TWO: QUASHIGAH AS A WELLNESS GURU

Two attributes are required of the symbol to capture the essence of Courage Quashigah. It must be monosyllabic. It contains four alphabets. To me, the symbol is *ash*. But, this ash is an invention. We spell it A, S, and double H.

• **A = Authenticity; S = Strength; H² = Humor; H= Humility**

WHY ME?

Writing a memorial address about anyone is an insider's job. But, inside the circles of Courage Quashigah, an insider I am not. I claim NOT that I know the man...Let alone, that I know him well. He *is* not my relative. We share no alma mater. I went to PRESEC. The original PRESEC, Odumase Krobo. He went to Keta.

never worked in the Ministry of Health. Believe me. *That* particular gap was not for want of trying. He tried. I tried. We both failed. Forces beyond our comprehension blocked the move. *Clearly, man pass man.*

Equally clearly, our paths had been destined to cross, and, until his sudden departure, we stayed fused at the hips.

THE BEAST WHICH HAS NO TAIL

Therefore, to me, all fruitful doors leading to vaults of info for insiders might have been shut. In such scenarios, this is the proverb which takes care of business: "The beast which has no tail, has God to fend off the tsetse flies!" That same God came to my certainrescue.

I heard this voice. "*Lade, Let me speak for myself. Let the audience hear my words. Lade, be self-reliant.*"

IN THE BEGINNING

The first time Quashigah and I met was in his house, *August 2006*. The meeting was initiated by this letter. "By God's grace, I'm a columnist for the Ghanaian Times . Your *Paradigm* became a powerful source of inspiration. I'll be returning to base this Friday. I hope meet you one of these days.... Yours Sincerely, L.W." I sent a copy to one person: Prof. Felix Konotey-Ahulu.

The day came. We met in his house. It was an evening. The audience included two gentlemen I never met before. The rest is history.

"LET ME SPEAK FOR MYSELF"

The source which now follows is not top secret. It is likely that insiders had had access to the same source. But, today is another day, another group, another tongue. The source is question is called simply: *My Life*.

Our symbol, ASH², re-enters the equation. The first alphabet meet is not A. It is S-- S for Strength.

STRENGTH

I'll illustrate physical strength with three examples from Quashigah's own lips: Viz. endurance, a powerful voice and swimming. Listen.

"My name is Courage Emmanuel Kobla Quarshigah. Courage is a nickname given to me by my classmates...For speaking fiercely and fearlessly against what I think is wrong. You have to have God with you to be courageous.

"I used to possess *physical and mental strength*. I'm also a Jungle expert...Parachutist...A Ranger. The training rebuilds you physically, and makes you mentally tough. Some see *our duties* and call us 'brutal killers'.

"We could jump from an aircraft at 2,500 feet *at night*, with the same weight of equipment, *plus* seven days supplies of combat ration, *and*, ammunition.

"Nobody taught anybody how to swim. But, by the age five, we were good swimmers. This art of swimming put me above my class in the Ranger School, USA. There, I was one of the few who could swim with full military gear, holding, high and dry, my weapon in one hand"

STRENGTH OF A DIFFERENT ORDER

Let us now turn to *mental strength*. I'll illustrate this in two broad ways. One is the courage of one's convictions. The other is true grit to withstand pain.

The evidence of the courage of his conviction is his commitment to *the New Paradigm for Ghana's Development*. It made him sprint north, when most around him were marking time, or, at best, crawling, as they headed south.

AS A RESULT OF HIS COMMITMENT, GHANA WAS AMONG THE FIRST OF NATIONS TO MAKE WELLNESS A NATIONAL POLICY. *Let no one forget that.*

4TH OCTOBER 2005

Let us all remember that date. Year 2005 was when the promotion of wellness became our national policy. From that year on until he died, Courage Quashigah flew the flag and preached sermons on wellness. *He placed wellness at the centre of gravity for the Ministry of Health*. That was tough enough. He trespassed into other ministries. He touched the hallowed ground called "Inter-sectorial territory".

THE FACTS: GHANA-2005 vs. USA-2009

Allow me to repeat. *Ghana was among the first of nations to make wellness a national policy*. There are similarities between Ghana's national advocacy for wellness and the USA's *Their* take off year was 2009. *Ours had been 2005: four good years earlier.*

FOUR CATEGORIES OF SIMILARITIES

Let us look at four categories of similarities. The specifics are important. First, the hit list is the same. We both tackled ‘life-styles’ and key conditions which are risk factors for disease: alcohol smoking, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, eating deficient foods or too much fat, sugar and salt; lack of exercise, rest and recreation.

The second is “the common good”. Live healthier lives such that *we* all benefit. *Adefudie* at its best. The third is this. *Wellness is central to the enterprise* called keeping healthy, while avoiding disease. Incentives are the fourth and final category.

Even Jesus Christ couldn’t do without incentives. The son of man could walk on water, turn water into wine and do kindred Jesus stuff. But, when it came to the small matter of *the changing of human behavior*, even Jesus needed help. He found that, in order to extract results from many folks, He had to give away *incentives*. Or, at least, He had to give promissory notes on *incentives*.

MENTAL STRENGTH II: TRUE GRIT TO WITHSTAND PAIN

The true grit to withstand pain is the second measure of the man’s mental strength. Hear his own words: “I have badly damaged my spinal column jumping from one storey floor onto hard ground during my incarceration.”

He wrote: “I have had little rest since I joined the military and became a politician, except for a short spell of two and years rest in incarceration granted me by a government which I served faithfully and dutifully. Being put in maximum security detention, totally incommunicado in a cell with hardly any ventilation, is bad for your health.”

There was something else. The night I went to visit Quashigah, he shared with me things I had neither imagined, nor dared to expect. *If he did not tell you, you’d never know when he was in agony*. He’d grit his teeth, and smile through the pain.

He and I switched meter bands, and moved into “Channel Nine”. We spoke in the dialect of our tribe. He said: “*Ngutsu meyor’a mo’o. Egbi’e woyorna.*” “Men squeeze not faces. Men tighten sphincters!”

AUTHENTICITY

In our symbol, ASH², ‘A’ stands for authenticity. For Courage Quashigah, the synonym which best sums him up is *genuineness*, the real McCoy.

RUTHLESS

His authenticity was ruthless, especially upon himself. “Physical fitness training and games were compulsory. They were exciting to those of us who did *not* like classrooms. There were all sizes of canes for those of us who were academically weak.”

I turn to THE item which best illustrates Quashigah’s authenticity. That item must surely be dance. Listen to what he wrote in “My Life.”

“The local dance is Ewes’ *Agbadza*. This dance has been classified as one of the most complete physical and mental exercise. In *Agbadza*, the dancer has to coordinate the movement of all parts of the body in sweeping moves.”

The Ghana Dance Ensemble will now perform *Agbadza*. Behold, “the most complete physical and mental exercise.”

DOUBLE H - HUMOUR & HUMILITY

The third and final alphabet in ASH² is double H. The first ‘H’ stands for humour. We re-visit ‘My Life’

HUMOUR

“Childhood experiences...We would take breakfast on the move as we jogged to school. We would cover miles. *The girls swept the house and washed the dishes- Now, that’s what I call division of labour.*

“The sea was *also a saviour*. We would flee and dive into the sea and swim beyond the break waves. We would leave those chasing us, especially our mothers, standing helplessly on the beach, with canes in their hands.

“These days, in the name of civilization, parents collect excuse duties for their children to have them exempted from Physical Education, games, and, weeding.”

“SERMON ON CREATING WEALTH

Twice he laughed at himself in the narrow confines of one paragraph. He wrote: “When I started *delivering my sermon* on a new paradigm for Ghana, I had books presented to me. The donors included Mr. Cofie, chairman, Unilever Ghana, and, Emmanuel Asenso. The fourth book was “The Doctors Book of Food Remedies” *I bought that one myself.*”

He castigated himself with this confession: “*I have not read many books on Medical Care as the Minister of Health of Ghana. Instead I read a lot of books on Health rather too late in my life.*”

HUMOUR AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Courage Quashigah reserved some of his acidic humour, and scorn for *our* environment. “In those days, our houses were made of swish or coconut fronds. Today, cement blocks and tiles roofed with *aluminium sheets that retain heat* are the most civilized way of putting up houses. Of course, they must be followed by other products of civilization: electric fans and air-conditioning to cool the heated rooms.

“We clear trees to put up super slums. The trees provide freshness of air. The western world deals with the same situation by providing parks in the communities that have sprung up to replace trees in order to serve the same purpose.”

STORING HEAT IN OUR BODY

The scorn continues. “We wear neck ties and don jackets as hallmarks of intellectualism and affluence, when in fact, they were designed to keep out the cold. We use them to store heat in our bodies. For this, we have to incur extra expense of sitting in air-condition cars and offices.”

HUMILITY

And so to the second H in our double **H: Humility**. Quashigah said this during one of his speeches. “When I was appointed Minister of Health, an illiterate woman from the opposition in my village made a comment in the local market. She said: ‘*Who has sent this illiterate Quashigah to go and be in charge of intellectuals?*’”

He continued: “I never took offence. I decided that I must learn, and learn very fast. I believe that it doesn’t matter when I leave this Ministry. But, by the time I do, the world would realize that I have become educated.”

Quashigah then delved into the science of nutrition, and, came up with this line. “Animal meat also has 15 amino acids.” *Then he poked fun at himself, with this punch line: “I wish that woman was here.”*

Observe the subtlety. One word was missing. He said: “I wish that woman was here.” He did not say: “I wish that *illiterate* woman was here.”

PART III- A WRAP UP OF A DIFFERENT ORDER

Before the wrap-up, let us hear some final reflections from the man himself.

“Perhaps our observers were right after all..... Looking back now, I think we were truly mad. Almost everything we did defied the rules of securing health. But I’ll still recommend that you continue to train as *mad people* because there is always *some enemy to be killed*. We need to secure people who are in perfect health and could live to be a hundred. But, they can have their programmed long lives terminated, abruptly, by a single bullet.

“I have already made too many mistakes in my 59 years of life. I have eaten too much, and many types of meat. The MRI report on my Lumbar Spine reads: “Severe canal stenosis. All I know is this. I am dead, walking. But I am refusing surgery. I am trying to regenerate my health through nutrition. If I live through a few more years, then: ‘To God be the Glory’.

“The light is dimming on me. But I am not scared. When it finally goes off, don’t forget to write on my grave, RIPP -- Rest In Perfect Peace. I need that perfect peace to reorganise myself, and come back again a very different person. So, what is Health Security? The answer is .’My Story’”.

OUR LAST TANGO- ATSIASGBEKOR

Here is the promised wrap-up of a different order. The Ghana Dance Ensemble shall do our last tango. It is called *Atsiasgbekor!*

I thank you all
