



CHAPTER FOUR

AN OVERVIEW OF THE MAN AND HIS GIFT

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people, I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if it needs be it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

Nelson Mandela,
Rivonia Trial

In his historic negotiations with the apartheid government that began while he was still their prisoner, Nelson Mandela accomplished the seemingly impossible. He persuaded the regime to give up apartheid. To appreciate the magnitude of this is to understand the cultural climate of the time.

Apartheid literally means “apartness” or “separateness.” For three hundred years, most Afrikaners simply believed that the white race was superior to all others. The racial supremacy that apartheid sought to legislate represented their white South African values of three hundred years. They saw any threat of the removal of apartheid as a threat to their fundamental personal and cultural identity. As Nelson Mandela and his colleagues began their negotiations for the peaceful removal of apartheid, they understood what they faced.

In 1948, the National Party, led by Dr. D. F. Malan, won the all-white election. They ran on the apartheid platform relying on white fear and anxiety—and there was plenty of that to spare. As the new prime minister acknowledged victory, he addressed the “colored question” and reflected the attitude of a majority of Afrikaners:

“The colored question is rapidly increasing in seriousness and urgency. I consider apartheid—that’s the separation policy—to be South Africa’s last chance to remain a white man’s country...It lays a tremendous responsibility upon those who govern the country. A responsibility which the white man feels is his duty to help these underdeveloped people who are not capable of governing themselves. It would fall to pieces if we were not there to look after them.”

In fairness, not all Afrikaners embraced apartheid’s goals. The outgoing prime minister, General Smuts—himself an Afrikaner—saw apartheid as “a crazy concept, born of prejudice and fear.” He was correct.

How best to describe the injustice and horror of apartheid? After apartheid ended, South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued a report. The forward to Volume 7 would help shine a light on the evil that was apartheid:

“This volume is a tribute to the victims of Apartheid and a living monument to those

who sacrificed so much in order that we could all enjoy the fruits of democracy. It contains the stories of those who came forward to speak of their suffering...

These summaries cannot do justice to the magnitude of the violations experienced by victims. They do not always convey a sense of the lasting impact of the violations, nor do they describe the wider picture of abuse, discrimination and human rights violations that Apartheid wreaked primarily upon the black citizens of the country.

It has been very difficult to describe acts of torture in these summaries. In most cases, acts of torture have been abbreviated to state that a person was tortured without necessarily specifying each method such as electric shocks, suspension from a tree, the 'helicopter' method, attempted suffocation by the 'tubing' method, submersion in water and so on.

Although rape and other forms of sexual torture were undoubtedly part of the repertoire of torturers, details are generally not included.

Where details are specified in the summaries, these should serve to remind readers of the full horror and scope of the use of torture in South Africa during the mandate period."

WHAT HE FACED

The government created an internal security force that the KGB would have envied. They gave it enormous power. Generally, its enemy was anyone involved in the anti-apartheid movement. Specifically, its enemy was the African National Congress and its most eloquent spokesman, Nelson Mandela. *He was the face of the enemy.*

After Mr. Mandela was arrested and convicted, the government was convinced his stature would fade over time. It was also convinced that he was more dangerous dead than

alive. It did not need a martyr on its hands to rally the angry young blacks. Its main concern became to keep him alive.

In her book, *The Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of South Africa*, Patti Waldmeir described how, within the walls of the Robben Island prison, Nelson Mandela was scheming to outsmart and seduce the government into dismantling apartheid. Amazingly, he succeeded.

He knew he would have to begin by persuading the government to negotiate with him and with the African National Congress. While he was convinced he could handle the negotiators, he also knew his greatest obstacle would be to get them to the negotiating table. Only then could the seduction begin.

An obstacle to those negotiations was not just the three-hundred-year old Afrikaner culture. It was also the United States and the United Kingdom, who saw the apartheid regime as an important ally in the fight against communism. *Each wanted to keep the status quo in South Africa.* Each was prepared to look the other way as the apartheid government trampled lives and rights.

In 1984, for example, Prime Minister Thatcher referred to the African National Congress as “a typical terrorist organization.” She said that anyone who thought the ANC could ever form a government was “living in cloud-cuckoo land.” That same year, Dr. Niël Barnard, the head of the National Intelligence Service, South Africa’s equivalent of the KGB, recalled believing that some settlement between the government and the ANC was a necessity. He later described Nelson Mandela in this way:

“[H]e has this strange charisma, being a man who people want to listen to...so there was, in our minds, looking from an intelligence perspective, never the slightest doubt. This is the man—if you cannot find settlement with him, any settlement will be out.”

At the time, the government did not share his impression.

The negotiations about the negotiations began slowly. By 1990, President de Klerk recognized that the country was

on the verge of exploding. A new generation of young blacks was making the country ungovernable. The president had only two choices. He could either bring in his military to provide yet another temporary reprieve, or he could choose another path. He could attempt to negotiate a peaceful settlement with a legitimate and respected black leader, while maintaining as much power as he could.

Both the president and Nelson Mandela recognized South Africa was looking into an abyss. Both knew that any solution would have to address the rage of the neo-Nazi groups of the Afrikaner right wing, on the one hand, and the rage of those younger victims of apartheid who were demanding vengeance and retribution, on the other.

The president reluctantly came to accept that only Nelson Mandela had the stature to control the anger in the streets. What perplexed him was that the longer he remained in jail, the more his stature grew. With the demand for his release growing around the world, and with the anger on the streets becoming uncontainable, it became clear the government could wait no longer. The president needed him.

Although Nelson Mandela had already been in jail for the past twenty-seven years, in a strange irony, the president effectively became Mr. Mandela's prisoner. When the president would later release him from jail, South Africa and the world would hold their collective breath.

For President de Klerk, this was a calculated decision—and a risk. He reasoned that the newly released seventy-one-year-old would be unable to cope with the strains of life and leadership outside prison. He was certain that disillusionment and disenchantment would follow the euphoria of his release. It was inconceivable to the president and his Cabinet that Mr. Mandela could meet his followers' impossible expectations. They were totally convinced that his charisma and standing would quickly wane. They were therefore in no rush to begin negotiations. To the contrary, they were waiting for the euphoria that greeted his release to die down. They wanted to give him the time to fall on his face. They wanted to show that the former prisoner was not

a savior, but was instead a fallible man who had lost touch with the new world he had just entered.

As the negotiations eventually began, two questions persisted:

- How would a man, who had been imprisoned for twenty-seven years be able to withstand the negotiating pressure the government could exert?
- How would a man with such humble roots be able to match wits—let alone outwit—the government's sophisticated team and the military might that was available to it?

The answers to these questions lay in the man himself—and in the negotiating skills he had acquired throughout his life. Looking back, even his adversaries grudgingly acknowledged that Nelson Mandela was a *leader and negotiator extraordinaire*.

The South African apartheid-era foreign minister, Pik Botha, for example, provides an insight into how Nelson Mandela approached his epic negotiations with the South African government:

"When we started negotiations, Nelson Mandela, in his very first opening statement, for at least 20 minutes or more, said he made a study of the Afrikaner history, merely telling us, 'Look, I know you and I respect what you've gone through.'

He didn't come up with a statement of bitterness, retribution. No. A man, after 27 years of being robbed of his freedom, and to then come forward and start negotiations on that basis—remarkable. There's no way you can argue against that."

The issue wasn't whether or not he felt bitterness. He did. He also simply appreciated that the expression of bitterness would not help him reach his goal of eliminating apartheid.

HIS GIFT

His life had prepared him well for those negotiations. It had resulted in him developing extraordinary negotiating, decision-making, and leadership skills.

He understood that knowledge was power. Throughout his life, and in many different contexts and circumstances, he discovered what I have called “Ten Powers of Negotiation.” These 10 beacons of knowledge made him a *negotiator extraordinaire* and a leader of unsurpassed moral authority. They would also be his gift to us for our journey:

- The power of the *process*
- The power of *preparation*
- The power of *positioning*
- The power of *common sense and logic*
- The power of *dignity, congeniality, and humor*
- The power of *truth and fairness*
- The power of *observation—listening and seeing*
- The power of *morality, courage, and attitude*
- The power of *patience*
- The power to *walk away*

DISCOVERING HOW HE DEVELOPED THOSE SKILLS

Many of his skills were learned and developed early in his life—long before his imprisonment. Other skills were developed and refined during his long days at Robben Island. During that time, he nurtured and honed his skills until they became a scalpel that he would wield with the precision of a surgeon.

His early life had a profound and lasting effect on him. It shaped both his future and that of his country. It provided him with lessons in leadership and negotiation that would form the foundation of the Ten Powers. And those Ten Powers could have helped us better detect and avoid the scam.

To appreciate fully his quite remarkable skills and qualities is to understand the context in which developed them and the circumstances in which he applied them. What we now know with absolute certainty is that, if he could apply those skills and qualities in the face of an overwhelmingly powerful adversary, we could apply them in our everyday lives—if we could summon the moral backbone to do so.