



## CONCERNING LIMBIKO'S LEGACY OF GOOD: KAWAIDA PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF EDUCATION

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**A**S WE CELEBRATE THE GRADUATION OF OUR young people stepping into the world and continue the critically important struggle for quality education for our children, I think of all the Seba, the teachers of the good, the right and the possible, that I've known. I think of my beloved mother and father, my sisters and brothers, and of my grade-school teachers and my college teachers, and all the ancestors and contemporaries who taught words and ways of wisdom and life, of striving and struggle and doing good in and for the world. And I value them and all they gave me as a great, continuing and eternal gift and good. And I think of my colleagues, co-workers and always and especially in the month of May, of Seba Limbiko Tembo, beloved sister, sacred friend and honored ancestor to whom I dedicate this commentary on Kawaida principles and practice of education. For May is the month of her coming into being and beginning the journey of life that would lead her to the moral vocation of teaching, the deep commitment to Kawaida and to our family and community with which she would co-create a context of shared goodness in which she would ground herself and flourish.

This is both in remembrance and reflection on the good we shared, the lessons taught and learned, and the loving friendship that is not undone or diminished by her untimely death and physical distance from us. And so, as always, this is *tambiko*, sacred words and water to you, Limbiko. Indeed, as we always say: You shall always be for us, a glorious spirit in heaven and a continuing powerful presence on earth. You are counted and honored among the ancestors. Your name shall endure as a monument. And what you've done on earth shall never perish or pass away. *Hotep. Ase. Heri.* And how can we best honor you except by always lifting up your legacy of good done and shared in the world. Clearly, your contribution to the moral vocation of education and our community in this dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving Kawaida way is definitive of this legacy of ongoing good.

The Kawaida understanding of education is rooted in and revolves around the Maatian African-centered conception of it as a preparation and capacity for an enhanced and expansive life. The Seba

Maat (moral teacher) Amenomope of Kemet establishes this pivotal understanding at the very beginning of his *Sebayt* (Book of Instruction) in the *Husia*. He says, "This is a teaching for life, an instruction for well-being; to direct one rightfully on the path of life; to cause one to flourish on earth; to cause one to steer clear of evil; to save one from the (negative) mouth of the multitude; and to cause one to be praised in the speech of the people." Education is posed here as a moral vocation because it concerns teaching and learning about life, about the world, about ourselves living in the world, about how to function rightfully and effectively in the world and about how to direct our lives toward good and expansive ends.

There are five fundamental principles that ground and inform the Kawaida understanding and practice of education. These principles are rooted in the following core concepts: *dignity, relatedness, knowledge, thoughtfulness* and *agency*. The Kawaida understanding and practice of education, of necessity, begins with respect for the *dignity* of the human person, a concept conceived and contributed by our ancestors of ancient Egypt. The concept of human dignity, of an inherent worthiness in every person, is indispensable to how we conceive of our students, their culture and capacity to learn, and their right to knowledge and their responsibility to learn. This means treating all students with equal respect, while recognizing and respecting their differences. It especially means respecting their cultural identity and differences as equally valid and valuable ways of being human in the world. And it also means engaging these differences as an invaluable source of enrichment and expansiveness of life, learning and relational exchange.

A second pivotal principle of Kawaida education is *relatedness*. The hub and hinge on which the whole of human life turns is relations, relationships, relatedness. We come into being in relationship with those before us, those present with us, and those who will come after us. We say in Kawaida, *we are related and relate, therefore, we are*. This is expressed in the Zulu concept of *ubuntu*, i.e., "*ngingumuntu ngabantu*, I am a person through other people." We speak here of human beings in an

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African sense as both a center and source of relations. Thus, relations between teacher and students are critical to both life and learning. Appropriate respect must be shown to their relations in family and community in culturally respectful and responsive ways. Here it is important to stress that students should not be lifted out of or alienated from their community and culture which denies their equal dignity in difference. On the contrary, their culture should be used as a central source of *reflective problematics*. That is to say, as a source of principles, problems, paradigms and concepts central to the teaching of every discipline.

Thirdly, the Kawaïda conception and practice of education stresses *knowledge* as a shared good and process of expanding our sense and capacity of being human and our capacity to enhance our lives. Our ancestors in Kemet posed knowledge as central to what it means to be human. This is expressed in one of the words for human being in *Medu Netcher*, the language of ancient Egypt. That word is *rekhyt*, which means knowing and wise being. Teaching is sharing knowledge, a critical awareness and understanding of things, and skills that enhance our capacity to live good and meaningful lives and come into the fullness of ourselves. For it is by the acquisition of knowledge, learning and awareness that we bring ourselves into being, make ourselves into the persons we want and will become and be, choose and pursue our vocation and live good, meaningful and expansive lives.

A fourth fundamental principle of the Kawaïda understanding of education is *thoughtfulness*. It is about teaching the student the disciplining of both the heart and mind. In *Medu Netcher*, the word *ib* means both heart and mind requiring an education that joins the capacity to know and reason with the ability to be morally sensitive to and care for others and the world and all in it. The parallel word for this educational principle and practice is *thoughtfulness* in its meaning of thinking carefully about things and

being considerate of others. The *ibic* person, then, is a careful and critical thinker and a considered and caring person as the ancestors taught. Education, then, is directed not only toward cultivating the excellent mind, but also a good and beautiful character. This is summed up in Seba Ankhsheshonqi's teaching, "Examine every matter that you may understand it. And be gentle and patient so that your heart and mind may be beautiful and excellent. *For it is in the development of character that education succeeds.*"

FINALLY, THE KAWAIDA UNDERSTANDING OF education advances the principle and practice of *agency*, the capacity and will to act and in the African ethical conception, to act in dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving ways. The goal here is to enable all to become and be self-conscious agents of their own lives. And in the context of our people in oppression and resistance, it seeks to enable students to become self-conscious agents of their own lives and liberation. And it is also to cultivate in them a sense of responsibility for the world, so that, as the *Odu Ifa* says they may do good for the world. Indeed, the *Odu Ifa*, the sacred text of our Yoruba ancestors teaches that we "humans are divinely chosen to bring good in the world," and that this is the fundamental meaning and mission of human life. Limbiko Tembo, you brought great good in life that will last forever. We greet you each day in love and struggle to bring good in the world and not let any good be lost. As always with every sunrise and falling or remembered rain, we see and sense you high above the horizon, holding that bright kente cloth called rainbow in your hand. And we are assured in endless ways that you and all our ancestors are powerfully and permanently present in the lives we live, the work we do and the struggle we wage to bring, sustain and increase good in the world.▲

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