



**HERI ZA KWANZAA TO LIMBIKO:
BEAUTIFUL, BLACK AND RADIANT SPIRIT**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 12-31-20, p.C1

DR. MAULANA KARENKA

HERI ZA KWANZAA, HAPPY KWANZAA TO you, Limbiko. In the tradition of our Kemetite ancestors, this is a letter long overdue since May, the month of your coming into being and beginning the journey of life and love, work and struggle that would lead you to us and a new way and wonder of being African woman and man in the world. Indeed, it was, we agreed, a destined journey to this sacred place where we made miracles and fashioned memories out of our personal and collective striving to bring and share good in the world.

Let me begin by offering *tambiko*, sacred words and water, to you Seba Limbiko Tembo, beloved sister and sacred friend, greatly valued teacher, and highly honored ancestor. It is an uplifted and uplifting tradition, a shared good for those for whom it is done and for those who do it. For it is a rightful remembering of them and a reminding of us of the awesome legacy they left and our obligation to honor it in the good and beautiful ways we live our lives, do our work, and wage our struggle.

So, homage to you, Limbiko Tembo, beautiful Black and radiant spirit, you shall always be for us a glorious spirit in the heavens 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 earth shall never perish or pass away. *Hotep. Ase. Heri.*

May you always and everywhere be at peace. May you and all the ancestors guide and guard us in the lives we live, the work we do, and the struggles we wage of which you are so much a part. May we meet again in the sacred land of our ancestors, Africa. May we embrace and exchange goodness in love, laughter and joy throughout eternity. And may we the living be blessed with continuing Blackness, a sacred commitment of heart, mind and practice to dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving ways in our lives and living.

It is our custom to write you in May, the month of your birth, or in June, the month of your transition and ascension. But I know you remember, we never observed our birthdays on the same day or even month, but rather noted them in passing and found ways to celebrate in little, large, and loving ways as time allowed and space opened up in our overextended lives.

Still, this is the first time I've gone so long without putting on paper what is always on my mind and in my heart: the thought and goodness of you, the memories and missing, and a deep affection and friendship that will never lessen or lose its uplifting light and strengthening warmth. But this has been a difficult and demanding year for all of us. A pandemic called COVID-19 has swept over the world, killing and hospitalizing millions and taking away family members, friends, neighbors and associates. And unfortunately, we lost Sebati Wasifu Tangelifu to this devastating disease. Like with our losing you, we bore the burden well, but also like with you, we will never get used to his absence and will always long for his presence.

Tangelifu had been with Tiamoyo and me since I came home from captivity, my political imprisonment. He was there when we had our first meeting to rebuild the organization at a restaurant down the highway from the prison. We all had laughed about the audacity and defiance of the act. Also, it was Wasifu and Chimbuko who came to Los Angeles from San Diego to open the way for Tiamoyo and me to follow and begin rebuilding and doing the work and waging the struggle we had all committed our lives to without hesitation or reservation. He was a Simba's Simba who embodied one of his favorite *Odu Ifa* verses: "A constant soldier is never unready, not even once" (159:1).

I am thinking too, in remembering him, how I assigned him to teach you *yangumi* (martial arts) and how you and he saw that

**HERI ZA KWANZAA TO LIMBIKO:
BEAUTIFUL, BLACK AND RADIANT SPIRIT**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 12-31-20, p.C1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

wasn't going to work. For you had no interest at all in that aspect of initial orientation. You would wage your struggles by other means as a teacher of the good, the right and the possible. And you would be a key ambassador for the Organization Us, reassuring all they had found their family and a good and peaceful place.

It is Kwanzaa time and I wanted to make sure I wrote you before it was over and the New Year came. I think of you always in special ways at Kwanzaa remembering you in your teaching, talking concepts, doing workshops, asking questions, decorating, making calls, lighting candles, making wishes, and our sitting and eating together, Tiamoyo, Chimbuko, you and me at *karamu* enjoying an "Evening in Africa." Due to COVID-19, we did and will do all our Kwanzaa activities virtually. And we miss you at every meeting and moment of shared joy.

This Kwanzaa, as every Kwanzaa, I pick up and read from the gold-stamped 40th anniversary edition of *The Message and Meaning of Kwanzaa: Bringing Good in the World*. And I remember when you searched for and found a specialist who could do the stamping for Sankore Press and you and Wasifu drove for hours to a town where they were located to get it done. We have a larger edition of the book which adds more years of my Annual Founder's Kwanzaa Statements. But I always read from this edition because of its meaning and memories.

My BCCLA co-chair and friend, Larry Aubry, also made transition and ascension this year, but not from COVID-19. It was a great loss to us and BCCLA. I always counted on his advice and insights, his hard line and gentle reminders concerning work in service of our

people. Tiamoyo and I stay in touch with his beloved wife, Gloria, and offer whatever solace and support we can.

As always, I remember you in joy, but unavoidably feel the ache of your absence in your physical form. Still, as I do *tambiko* this Kwanzaa and every day, you are there uplifted and honored. And I am every day reminded of how memories are an indispensable substance out of which life and love are cultivated, nurtured, and sustained; how they make present the absent and turn longing into smiles and laughter.

One of my favorite memories is driving you to your first teaching job at Roosevelt Elementary in Compton. It was good that you, who were born and raised in Compton, would choose to begin your professional career where you, yourself, began to grow and flower. It was a beautiful morning, soaked in sun and lined with laughter and a sense of expanding good, and happiness hung heavy in the air. This was the first day and we named it "good" and shared its promise.

HERE WE ARE AT THE END OF OUR LETTER and as always, I am imagining you here and there at the same time. Again, the rains have come and washed the world clean and the skies clear. And emerging with the morning sun is the sense of you here and yet there above the horizon holding your signature piece of kente called rainbow in your hand. And I smile and get lost in the evergreen forest of magical memories. But then I catch myself, recover and resume writing, trying to finish my manuscript on Malcolm, with you still powerfully and permanently present.▲

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture* and *Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis*, www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org; www.MaulanaKarenga.org, www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org; www.Us-Organization.org.