



**LETTERS TO LIMBIKO:
LADY WITH A RAINBOW IN HER HAND**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

It began as a flowering and overflowing of memories and meditation on your birthday, May 3, musings on the uplifting and enduring good you brought me, us, family and friends you love, the many students you taught, and all the people whose lives you touched, enriched and turned around and away from impoverished and unpleasant places. Now it unfolds as a letter to you, Seba Limbiko Tembo, following in the tradition of our ancestors of ancient Egypt. For it was their custom to write letters to loved ones who had passed and ascended and whom they called *akhw*, blessed, beautiful and radiant spirits.

Let me begin this letter, then, as they began theirs, by greetings you. Hotep. It is your beloved brother and sacred friend, Maulana, who speaks to his beloved sister and sacred friend, Limbiko. Let it be said a million times, you live in our lives and hearts forever. May Ra, Lord of the World, bless and benefit you throughout eternity. May you listen and hear us well, and may you be gracious in your ancestral guidance of us and be pleased with our humble efforts to honor your memory, keep and live your legacy and continue and expand your work for good in the world.

This is a reminder to us and you of all we've shared and share in life, love and struggle and which we will never let go, value less or leave behind and "move on". You're always a vital part of our life and lives, and an essential way we understand ourselves and others, imagine and experience beauty, and do and define good in our lives and the world. And because your meaning for us and our love for you are eternal and ongoing, we don't change our

tense from present to past when we talk of our love for you. For if we claimed when you were alive in this world that our love for you was eternal, then after your passing and ascendance, it does not end, but like your spirit, lives on forever.

I am coming to the end of writing my book on *The Liberation Ethics of Malcolm* and I am more than mindful and full of memories of the research Tiamoyo, Chimbuko and you, Limbiko, have done for me, the discussions we have had on it and our looking forward to our finishing it. It will be dedicated first and foremost to you all, not only because of this project itself, but also because you, each and all, have had and will always have a central and irreplaceable role in how I conceive and carry out my work, feel joy, find peace, wage struggle, understand friends, experience love and enjoy the beauty of the sound of laughter and the sight of falling leaves dancing in the wind.

You will always be for me a special *Simba*, a lion even in winter, an unwilling warrior woman who waged a life-and-death struggle against the deadly disease of cancer with courage, dignity and determination. It was a battle no one wanted and certainly not you, but you waged the struggle well, the fight for your life, to hold on to life for as long as you could, in spite of the diagnosis of the disease as terminal.

You had asked me before your illness if we all needed to be *Simba*—lions, soldiers, like we saw ourselves in the Sixties and as the *Odu Ifa* teaches—"constant soldiers, never unready, not even once". I had answered that not all people had to be soldiers in the technical sense of the word,

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but we all had to embrace struggle as central to life and progress, regardless of what vocation in life we choose. For I said, struggle is one of the most important characteristics of the human personality. We struggle to come into being; that's called birth. We struggle to make the most of our being; that's called life; and we struggle not to go out of being; and that's called the quest for immortality. Little did we know then that you would be confronted with the struggle for your life and that you would do it so well, exhibiting always the resolve and resilience which defined you.

Tiamoyo, Chimbuko and I still talk about taking the trip the four of us wanted to take to San Francisco to again have a whirlwind lunch on the wharf, see Nathan and Julia, bookshop and be back that evening in L.A. We will do it eventually and when we are ready, we know you too will travel and return with us. Sometimes we talk about how we, as Africans, are culturally cultivated to see passing as a natural transition, a precondition for passage to the spirit world. As the ancients of Kemet said "It is the way we begin our journey to eternity, i.e., eternal life". But as bodily beings, we still miss you, want to see your smile, hear your voice and be uplifted by your laughter. Even four years after your passing, pictures of you cover the back wall at the Center. Also, there is a *Patakatifu*, a

sacred place to pay homage to you, Halifu, Baba Pamoja and Dr. Brown and burn incense and say good words and wishes for you, our people and the world. And each year we gather together in your name and honor, share your favorite foods, poems and music and speak of the awesome legacy you left as teacher, Seba, Simba, sister and friend.

We miss the many years of sitting on the floor around our table forming a circle of such inexpressible good, talking abstract and deep, and sharing a feast of foods from wherever we wished. Your place remains there always, not only for tambiko, but also as a sign of your always being present, always being needed to complete the circle of our collective conception of ourselves, and our work and struggle to bring good in the world and not let any good be lost.

As always, we will look and listen for you everywhere and all the time. We feel you in wind and rain; see your life in the legacy of love, work and memories you left us; and hear your voice in every value orientation and conversation on African culture we encounter. Sometimes we see you dancing joy in the sky and hear you singing happiness in the rain. The clouds cling to the music and movement you make. And you are holding a bright colored kente cloth called rainbow in your hand.

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