



LUNCH WITH LIMBIKO: A MOTHER'S DAY MESSAGE

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Again and for the fifth year, we celebrated this month your birth and life, your work and the way you walked in dignity and grace as an African woman in the world. And as always and ever, we did *tambiko*, offering sacred words and water in honor, memory and love of you. Once again too I, early in the morning, began again to write you a letter in the tradition of our ancestors as a way to remember and reaffirm and continue to share with you my and our love, lives and the work we continue to do to bring good in the world and of which you remain a vital and eternal part.

Let me begin by greeting you the way we used to greet—at the start of every day: *Subalkheri*, peace in the morning. 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 that you live in our lives, hearts and minds forever. May you be blessed and always and everywhere be at peace. And may you listen and hear us well and with all our other ancestors, guide and guard us in the work we do and the struggles we wage to bring good in the world which you will always be a part of.

This year we celebrated your birthday with a Mother's Day luncheon, a *kikoa*—a communal meal prepared and shared together. It was a joyful remembering and honoring you as a rightfully respected social mother of so many, in your role as teacher and nurturer, mentor and molder of young hearts and minds yearning for knowledge, gentle guidance and loving care. And we remembered and honor you also as a *Seba-Maat*, a moral teacher of that righteous and responsive village it takes to raise a child.

In preparing for our celebration of you in your eternal goodness, I read from some of the texts of our foremothers which you had read, underlined and made notes on that spoke to teaching and being African mother and woman in the world. This was an anthology of 19th century teachers, intellectual and social activists, read in a shared activity of the Senut Sisterhood. And you had chosen to focus on the writings of Maria Stewart and Francis Watkins Harper which I shared with the advocates and guests as a way to share some views and principles you valued highly and used in the context and interpretive framework of Kawaida philosophy to inform your life and work and to teach your students principles and practices of great and enduring value.

Clearly, you heard and responded to the call of our foremother Maria Stewart who called women to blossom and flower against all odds and for all of us, women and men, to “improve your talents; let not one lie buried in the earth. Show forth your power of mind”. And this too you underlined and marked off as a central teaching of hers: “O’ you daughters of Africa, awake, awake, arise...distinguish yourselves, show forth the world that you are endowed with noble and exalted faculties”. And she asked these same daughters of Africa to do that which will “immortalize your name”; “set examples for the rising generation” and lay “the foundation for generations yet unborn”.

You call to our attention and invite us to think deeply also about her questions to our sisters (and in a real way also our brothers) “where are our love and unity”, our loving kindness and care for each other? As a Christian, she wanted us to love one

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another and avoid self-righteous judgment that makes us want to throw stones rather than do justice, show compassion and walk humbly. And as an African, she would want us to remember the ancestral ethical teachings of the *Odu Ifa* that “those who do good, do it *for* themselves and those who do evil, do it *to* themselves”. So “speak truth, do justice, be kind and do not do evil”. Indeed, “those who act (and relate) righteously are favored by the Divine”.

Our foremother, Maria Stewart, you reminded us, wanted Black women to see themselves as you saw yourself, as noted above, as one of those righteous and responsive mothers key to the whole village that self-consciously raises their children and do not leave them to the wiles and false wonders of the world. Thus, you underline her call to these community mothers: “O you mothers what responsibility rests on you. You have souls committed to your charge. It is you that must create in the minds of little girls and boys *a thirst for knowledge, the love of virtue, the abhorrence of vice, and cultivation of a pure heart* (emphasis Limbiko’s).

You liked and underlined also Frances Watkins Harper’s assertion that “woman’s work is grandly constructive”. She says to African women and others who will listen to her liberational message, “It is yours to create a healthy public sentiment, to demand justice, simple justice, and to brand with everlasting infamy the lawless and brutal cowardice that lynchings, burns and tortures

your own countrymen”, i.e., Black men. It is courage she calls for here, the courage you showed in your social activism and your personal battle for life against a deadly and terminal disease. And in this, you will always be a model of unannounced and unparaded resilience and strength in struggles of every kind.

You noted too, our foremother’s praise of character, saying that men may boast of the aristocracy of blood, talent and wealth, “but there is one aristocracy which must ever outrank them all and that is the aristocracy of character” and women’s role in molding the character, of children and of the people is decisive. It was good to have lunch with you, with your special place at the table and your permanent place in our hearts, and to discuss things and thoughts that moved and made you the teacher-mother, mentor and molder you became. May the goodness you gave us last forever and may we honor your legacy by learning and living it as best we can.

The *kikoa* and gathering was good and uplifting, but we still miss you in the form we are so familiar with and we long as always to again see you, hear your voice and experience the joy of your presence. And so we turn again to signs and symbols and hear and feel you in gentle wind and soft rain, experience you in the ordinary and extraordinary good received and done every day and as always see you high in the heavens, holding a bright colored kente cloth called rainbow in your hand.

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