



**ASA'S COMING HOME TO KEMET:
RETURNING TO THE UPWARD WAYS**
Los Angeles Sentinel, 08-23-07, p. A-7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

To enter life loved and leave praised; to live life well and leave a legacy of service and self-giving; and to pass in peace in the midst of all you love and rise in radiance above the horizon of history and heaven, rightfully mourned and joyfully remembered is, the ancestors teach us, the righteous will and work of everyone. In a word, we must not only wish and will a good life and legacy, we must also work daily and diligently to bring it into being. And so, when I heard of the transition of our elder brother and colleague in work and struggle, Dr. Asa Hilliard III, Nana Amankwatia Baffour II, I remembered and reflected on this teaching.

I thought about his life's work and the lessons it offers and his meaning to us as a people. And I remembered our meeting and working together when I invited him and Drs. Jacob Carruthers, Yosef ben-Jochannan, John Clarke, John Jackson, Chancellor Williams, Wade Nobles, Na'im Akbar and others to join our organization Us in holding the First Annual Ancient Egyptian Studies Conference and in founding the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations (ASCAC) in 1984. I thought about the constant crossing of our paths in the pursuit of common good at conferences, colloquia and smaller gatherings like the Sodayi Leadership group chaired by Dr. Freya Rivers.

Moreover, I thought about our planned panel with him, Drs. Molefi Asante, Charles Finch, Theophile Obenga and me on Ancient Egyptian Culture and Civilization at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia on August 16 put together by MEE Productions, and his e-mail looking forward to it. We had all looked forward not only to a rigorous intellectual defense of an African Egypt, but also to sharing the beauty and deep meaning

of the culture and enjoying our exchange with each other and a conscious activist audience. And I unavoidably thought about the meaning of his passing in the sacred land of Africa, in Kemet (Egypt) and what signs and significance those who delve in ancient mysteries and deeper meanings would see in this.

Certainly, it seemed as if he were answering the call of the ancestors as expressed in the Book of Sinuhe in the *Husia*. For Pharaoh Senwesert I writes to Sinuhe in exile saying: "Come back to Kemet, the Black Land. See (again) the royal residence where you came into being. Kiss the ground at the Great Double Gate. Mingle with royal companions. You should not die in a foreign land. You have roamed the earth too long. Think of your passing and return (home)."

Indeed, Nana Baffour returned home in a triple sense: first in a return to the source in the *sankofa* project of cultural recovery and grounding; second, to tour and teach in context, and finally, to make his transition, ascend and begin his journey into eternity. There are lessons in every life and a message in every death and we must read them rightfully and repeatedly, if we are to benefit from them. Nana Baffour's life is a classic lesson of a life well-lived and his passage sends us another message of our need to build for eternity so we can live for eternity and leave a legacy worthy of the name and history African. And as the *Husia* teaches, we work knowing "every day is a donation to eternity and even one hour is a contribution to the future."

Nana Baffour was, above all, a teacher, an activist-intellectual whose vocation was reawakening the African mind, bringing forth its "genius, spirit and humanity," and placing it in the service of liberation. "The

education of African people is an urgent necessity. It is a matter of life and death," he said. But key to the content and quality of this education and to the people whose life and liberation it serves is its rootedness in African culture. Thus, he stated, "*We must return to the upward ways of our ancestors*" and draw from those "great African civilizations . . . which were the center of the most sophisticated education and socialization systems ever developed on earth."

For him, teaching is "a sacred calling" of education/socialization, in which a whole community not only cooperates in raising its children but simultaneously raises itself in an ongoing striving and "constant journey toward mastery," i.e., excellence in knowledge, life and the way we relate in and to the world. He wanted us to put behind us the "brutal pessimism" inculcated in us in the Arctic of oppression, rekindle the warm humanity of African relations and "bring light to the world again." And he wanted us to lift ourselves up without illusions and longings for outside saviors. We are to look inside ourselves and remember the Husitic teaching that "it is wrong to walk upside down in darkness. Thus, I will come forth today and bring forth the truth (*Maat*) which is in me. For truly it is within me."

Nana Baffour tells us that "Nothing is more important than an independent reconceptualization of the place of African people

in the world." But having reconceived the world in African ways, our task, then, is to aid in reshaping and remaking it. Therefore, "Activist educators are crucial ingredients in the struggle. It will be from this base that other aspects of the urgent movement to strengthen peoplehood will be built."

As I write this, word has come of the passing of another nationalist activist and institution-builder, Baba Mzee Moyo, co-founder of the International African Arts Festival in Brooklyn. (May he too rise in radiance and be received among the ancestors, the doers of good, the righteous and the rightfully rewarded). With every passing of an elder, there is the reminder of the mortality of the generations behind them, and the importance and need to uphold the legacies of our ancestors and at the same time, work in such a way that we leave our own.

In one of his last e-mails to our sister and colleague, Dr. Linda Myers which she graciously shared with the National Council for Black Studies family and others, Nana Baffour left us this challenge: "It is time to rise to the challenge before us. We must not bring shame to our ancestors. We have all the resources that we need to be victorious in our liberation struggle, and in our enhancement of our progress towards our purpose and our destiny." And this clearly is to bring good into the world in and on the upward ways of our ancestors.