



**SEBA LIMBIKO TEMBO:
AN UPLIFTING LIFE AND ENDURING LEGACY**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

For most of us who celebrate the sacred lives of heroes and heroines of our history, the month of May immediately brings to mind the towering moral teacher and freedom fighter, Min. Malcolm X and African Liberation Day, but we of The Organization Us also celebrate and commemorate in this month the uplifting life and enduring legacy of Limbiko Tembo (Laurinda Maxine Neal), who was a seba, a moral teacher in the ancient Egyptian Kawaida-Maatian tradition, a public school teacher, and a teacher and principal of our independent cultural school now named in her honor, the Limbiko Tembo School of African American Culture. Seba Limbiko was also in the fullness and embracing character of her life a self-conscious servant of the people, a good and wonderful woman like in a Sonia Sanchez and Lucille Clifton poem, a greatly loved and sacred friend and sister in the Kemeti sense of the word, and a tall and graceful tree on a mountain top of beautiful virtues, bowing humbly in the winds of well-deserved praise.

Even in her early years, Seba Limbiko had longed to be a teacher, to share knowledge and cultivate the life of the mind and heart in rightful and meaningful ways. She had come gently and joyously in our lives as a student in college and community, seriously searching for ways to culturally ground her chosen vocation as a teacher, deepen her knowledge of her culture and practice in community a tradition of sharing knowledge and shaping hearts and minds that expands consciousness, increases capacity and cultivates commitment to excellence of every kind in the interest of ourselves and the world. And she had come to join in building the special space she wanted and deserved to live, serve and develop in, within an organization and family forged in the struggle to be African every day and in

every way, and committed to the good and beautiful, the right and rational, the uplifted spirit and elevated mind, the sensitive, loving and life-affirming heart and the liberating struggle to create conditions favorable to these goods.

Teaching, for her, like leadership as a principal, was a moral vocation that required cultural grounding, professional excellence and a profound sense of social responsibility. In addition to her grounding in Kawaida philosophy, she read and studied the *Husia* and the *Odu Ifa* regularly as well as the master teachers and educators of the 19th century and other periods, like Anna Julia Cooper, Mary McLeod Bethune, W.E.B. DuBois and others. In her journals and the books she read, there are quotes, notes and underlining that give us a useful outline of essential principles and practice of her Kawaida pedagogy.

Seba Limbiko's pedagogy begins with the fundamental ancient African understanding that teaching, as a moral vocation, begins with appreciation of each person as a possessor of dignity and divinity worthy of the highest respect. From this Kawaida understanding, she sought to teach her students: knowledge of the world, knowledge of themselves in the world, knowledge of how to successfully engage the world, and knowledge of how to direct their lives toward good and expansive ends.

Also, from the *Husia* of ancient Egypt, she understood and related to her students as *rekhyt*, an ancient Egyptian word for human beings which means "wise and knowing beings," and respected their capacity to learn and develop ways to cultivate and expand that capacity. Thus, she requested and principals and fellow teachers sent her what was called "difficult students." For as they reported and parents wrote in letters of commendation to and for her, "she has helped students to

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succeed who have not been successful academically or behaviorally in other classrooms (and) transformed(ed) students who were disruptive and not performing or on task.”

In addition, she upheld the Kawaiida principle, derived from the ethical and intellectual understanding of humans as knowing, wise and worthy beings, that each person and people is a unique and equally valuable and valid way of being human in the world. Thus, she stressed respect for the dignity, culture and potential of each student, affirmed them in their culture and gave value to the particular voice and vision they brought to enrich and expand classroom discourse. Again, as a letter of commendation from parents of one of her students to the administration of the last school she taught at, she is praised as “a remarkable teacher” who “has the ability to place herself in the role of her students, regardless of culture, academic ability or disability.”

Here it is important to note that Seba Limbiko did not practice a self-disadvantaging multiculturalism that further marginalized African American students who had become outnumbered and often assigned less importance throughout the area. On the contrary, she was their able advocate and special mentor, working for their equal regard, retention and success, valuing their voices and teaching Black culture in ways not covered or even conceived in the established-order standards. Indeed, it required of her extra study and work to teach what was culturally and educationally needed and that she constantly develop materials to supplement

and correct the Eurocentric focus and balance the Latino emphasis that was being implemented often in neglect or disregard of the needs of African American students.

Seba Limbiko loved her work, cherished her culture, enjoyed teaching her culture in our independent cultural school, and also in the public school as a world-historical culture, second to none and anterior to all in its development of the earliest major civilization of human history. She loved teaching narratives of African heroes and heroines, best African values and practices, Kwanzaa, the Nguzo Saba, the Seven Cardinal Virtues of Maat, and many other lessons from the rich, ancient and ongoing resource of African culture—continental and diasporan.

Born on May 3, 1958, Seba Limbiko made her transition, rising up in radiance, June 16, 2009, following a courageous struggle with ovarian cancer. But as she, herself, said, facing the imminent probability of her premature death, in spite of this, she had lived a good and meaningful life in the love and happiness she experienced and shared; the work she did and enjoyed; and the enduring good she rightly hoped she had brought into the world. A good way to understand her aspirations and self-understanding may be found in her journal in two lines from the *Husia* in which the writers say: “I am one who searching for happiness found excellence” and who knew “the good we do for others we are also doing for ourselves.” Thus, may the good she left last forever, never being forgotten, perishing or passing away.

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 *Introduction to Black Studies*, 4th Edition, www.MaulanaKarenga.org.