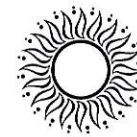


HEARING VISIONS, SEEING VOICES



MMATSHILO MOTSEI





Homecoming

I am in the bush in a thatched house, with butterflies and a mosquito net as my curtain. I am in the house in which this book was born. Outside, just a few metres away from my room, there are snakes. Despite my deep fear of them, I nevertheless find myself asking for their guidance and inspiration in the writing task I have set myself.

As a healer who has spent a significant part of her life running away from herself, could it be that my fear of snakes is rooted in the difficulty I have in embracing my spiritual calling?

African legend regards snakes as powerful creations associated with healing and ancient knowledge. Unlike Biblical teachings, which portray the serpent as a source of evil, doomed to crawl on its belly as a punishment from God, ancient earth-based teachings revered the snake as a medium of healing and a helper to the Goddess. The snake's cyclical shedding of its skin is perceived as symbolic, a metaphor for the cycle of birth, life, and death in which we humans also participate. At the heart of this cycle lies the willingness to conquer fear and embrace a path to love, truth and light.

This book is an insider-outsider look at my life, with all its beauty and imperfections. It is a story of contradictions because:

I am modern and traditional,
Western and African,
masculine and feminine,
body and spirit.

It is the chronicle of my journey towards healing and acceptance of my spiritual gift. It is the story of a girl child born of a family of healers and chosen against her will to receive and live out the legacy of healing. Disempowered by Christian National Education and ensnared by the comforts of modern life, I at first made endless and fruitless attempts to disown the gift. Given the choice, I would have opted for a career as a musician – I would have liked to be a saxophonist or a guitarist. But although the thought still makes me wistful, if I had become a musician, would I be here, conquering my fears and writing this book?

Why are we so afraid of not being afraid? What makes it so difficult for us to look ourselves in the eye? It is because if we do, we come face to face with our own greatness. Why are we afraid of our greatness? Because it confirms our Godness; it is evidence that we are our divine source. The courage to heal and live life in spirit while in the flesh indicates our acceptance of our essence and magnificence. Having spent so much time and energy running away from myself, I am now ready to confront my fears and ask the most dreaded questions: Who am I? What have I come here to do?

With these questions in mind, I press the button on my CD player and the room is filled with the sound of the Temptations classic "Hey Girl". I have heard this song so many times before. I have even danced to it with my vibrant daughter, Kgalalelo, who sang along and danced with an unselfconsciousness and freedom that any adult

would envy. It has been a pleasure and a blessing to be guided by my daughter's light. It has also been hard to face parts of me in her; the parts of me that I have been struggling to embrace. She is a giving child who is ready to accommodate others; an energetic and frank girl who seems to know exactly what her mission in life is. Because she appears so open and independent, when engaging with her one tends to focus on her exterior and overlook the child within. Living with her has helped me to give attention to my own inner child. As a girl growing up, I was so much like her; outwardly strong and independent, yet inwardly fragile and sometimes lonely.

Being raised as a girl destined for greater things in life has in many ways robbed me of the licence to be vulnerable. I found myself unable to learn the art of loving and being loved unconditionally. Throughout my schooling, I was one of the best. It was only when I excelled and received attention from my teachers and parents that I felt wanted and loved. Being a highly achieving little girl in a society that devalues women brought out the best in me, yet took away my right just to be. In my adult years, I have continued to make harsh demands on others and myself. As a gender activist, I have equated vulnerability with non-achievement, and so taken it as a sign of weakness. On the few occasions when I have gathered the strength to be weak, those around me have assured me, "We know how strong you are. You'll get through this". Fulfilling societal expectations of who I am, I used my work to bury my vulnerability, and went all out to rescue and fix the world, not realising that I am the world. As a healer, I tended to other people's wounds while my own were left gaping and bleeding.

Yet I have learnt to be vulnerable again. As a friend of mine once said to me, "Mmatshilo, you don't have to be strong all the time. Just let that heart break a little". Once I was ready, as if to prove the saying "When the student is ready, the teacher appears", the universe was loving enough to present me with endless heartbreaking situations. In the midst of my pain and confusion, the Goddess reached out to me:

Safe in the Bosom of the Goddess
I rock like a little girl
Sucking her thumb
Nursing a bruised knee after a fall
From the Bosom of the Goddess
I wail in pain, only to
Fall into a deep slumber
That dries away my tears
Safe in her Bosom, with her
Tender hands to hold me
I learn to break a little
To make room for yet
Another life experience
It is in her Bosom that I
Become an innocent child
Ready to love again without fear
As she mends my torn spirit with love
I know that it will be okay

Yet as I come closer to achieving my own peace, I find myself wishing for peace for all of South Africa. Peace and love – a tall order, one might say, given the violent and conflict-ridden world we live in. Incurable dreamer that I am, for a moment I pretend that I live in a different

South Africa – a South Africa where all African mothers are well fed both physically and spiritually, able to produce enough milk for their babies. I pretend that South Africa is a country where you would never see groups of spiritually shattered African men waiting along the road for a white man to pick them up in his truck to offer them a job, and thereby a sense of purpose. *Setlhare sa mosotho ke lekgoa* – a lie that we no longer utter, but continue to live. I yearn for an Africa where no mother, her baby on her back, waits at the gate of a construction site in bad weather for a man who has never laid eyes on his child. I wish and pray for a continent full of parents who love themselves enough to love and care for their children. Loving oneself enough gives the strength to nurture others.

I believe we all long for warmth, love and care. The world is crying out for a sense of spiritual connectedness. Yet we forget that heaven is here on earth – *legodimo le mo lefatsheng*. Earth-bound, we tend to perceive heaven as a place remote and high above us, which we get to inhabit only once we die. Yet heaven is in the here and now. Without doing so consciously or understanding, we interact with angels every moment of our lives. When we look into another's eyes, we are greeted by a reflection of the divine. Every human being is an embodiment of the highest and greatest form of existence, and yet we live our lives preparing to go to heaven "someday", ignoring the fact that we can enjoy a heavenly life on earth. We don't have to wait for our flesh to be buried in the earth before we ascend to heaven – we have the capacity to experience the majesty of being human angels living a spiritual life in the flesh.

As I write the opening chapter of this book, I feel blessed to be in Limpopo, furthering my studies in soul-

building as taught by the uncertificated custodians of cultural knowledge. Having spent the day with rural women, often referred to as the poorest of the poor, I am privileged to acknowledge their abundant spiritual wealth. I recognise in them a sense of worth and dignity that many of our generation of women have lost. They are full of life; in fact, they are life itself. As we sat together today beneath a *morula* tree, their babies stayed close to the circle, each returning from time to time to its mother to receive the reassurance of a word, smile or touch, and I was reminded of the saying, "It takes a village to raise a child". These wise and dignified human beings are my teachers and I am honoured to be their pupil.

Many of the leaders of my generation who are in government, business and other spheres come from these simple beginnings, having been raised by these humble yet tenacious women. In close contact with the earth and therefore speaking the language of the soul, which the majority no longer understand, these women are often perceived as silent and voiceless. Lacking access to formal education, they are often mistakenly taken to be uninformed and uneducated. Those who take this view wonder whether these "uneducated" women are capable of educating the young and preparing them for the future, and feel that feminism can surely have no roots in such poor African soil. Yet we come from a long line of strong African women with a passion for life, although they may not have spoken out publicly. As Africans, we have experienced what it is like to be raised and touched by women who are powerful in their silence. Our undocumented life stories are pregnant with the teachings of our mothers and grandmothers.

Drawing from a limited documented African herstory, I feel the spirit of Queen Modjadji in the sacred northern parts of South Africa. I draw strength from Ambuya Nehanda, who led the Shona in a war of liberation against the British. I celebrate the spirit of Me Katilili, a woman who organised her Kenyan people against the British in the early twentieth century by refusing to pay taxes and perform forced labour.

Indeed, we come from a long line of powerful female ancestors. A return to their legacy requires that we relearn to decipher the language of the Soul. Opening ourselves to their guidance requires that we truly listen to the language of the Spirit, and no longer hear it as just a faintly remembered whisper. Opening our lives to their gifts requires that we stop theorising about the African Renaissance in abstract terms during conferences reserved for the few, and participate joyfully in a true rebirth. A return to their legacy requires that we care for the Divine in the self and others through a living connection with our ancestors.

An African's expression of ancestral prayer
is celebrated not kneeling on a velvet cushion
in a stone building with stained glass windows on a
Sunday

but with sacred rituals and a dance
performed each night thanking the gods
for a life lived to the fullest
in spite of widespread spiritual genocide.

It is a dance of life performed
not on a multi-million dollar neon-lit stage
but in a circle of fire
under the watchful eye of the Moon and the Stars

with bodies robed not in fabrics made in foreign lands
but in those of our own design
and bare feet gently massaged by the sand.

It is a life dependent not on foreign aid
but anchored in the power of the invisible.
A life whose policies are drafted
by the United Angels of Afrika.

An African's prayer is a way of life
A return of humans to humanity
and humanity to humans.
Motho ke motho ka batho.

A wonderful thing about being in the business of soul construction is that every brick that you lay for another transforms itself into a mirror for you. As I help others to reflect on their lives, I see myself in them. One of the most difficult and often painful lessons that I have had to learn was to confront my dark side as reflected in others. Yet we will benefit from this kind of experience only when we learn to live our own truth.

What is my truth? What have I come here to do?
Who am I?

I am a sparrow that flies
High above the mountains
To listen to the messages of the wind.
Like a mermaid who sinks deep
Into the womb of the earth
To learn the teaching of the rocks.
Soaring like an eagle

Across the Afrikan lakes
To learn the language of the soul.
As I spread my wings with
The storm as my companion
I become one with my fear.
Who am I?
Some call me free spirit.

I am afraid. Yes, my truth does fill me with fear. However, it is when I learn to be one with my fear that it is suddenly transformed from a crippling force into nothing more than mild stage fright as I prepare to receive my legacy from the spirits of Onkgopotse Tiro, Sol Plaatjie, Robert Sobukwe and Joe Slovo. As I step forward, out of the corner of my eye I see the shadows of Pythagoras, Jan van Riebeeck, Cecil John Rhodes and Sir Winston Churchill leading a delegation from the West charged with the massive responsibility of giving back to Africa what belongs to her – her teachings, innovations, wealth and health.

I am going home
armed with a bosom full of
compassion and fierce tenacity
from the African Matriarchs
A calabash of wisdom
from the ancient healers residing in
the womb of Modimolle
Led by the guiding light of
Senakangwedi emanating from
the mouth of Limpopo
I am ready to come home.
Africa is my home.