

spending time in both an urban and a rural environment will give my children a balanced view of life. There is so much more to life than an addiction to technological gadgets and the trap of consumerism.

The fact that my mother was raised amongst four robust boys probably explains why she is so vocal and outspoken. She is a woman of boundless energy and zest for life, and completely fits the saying "*Mmangwana o tshwara thipa ka fa bogaleng*". She occupies her space powerfully, and I can see why my father was attracted to her and later chose her to raise his children.

As I say this, however, I wonder about the extent to which she was influenced by the common view of a mother as a strong woman. Now that I am an adult woman myself, I know that as a woman she has experienced pain. While I have no memory of her in a state of fear or panic, I know that there were times when she was afraid. As someone who is consulted by a multitude of people who are going through life's challenges, I can't help wondering: does she have somewhere to go when she feels overwhelmed? She is a selfless and giving woman, but she is human too. As children, we expect our mothers to cope for our sake. Society is not structured in a way that supports mothers who may break down, either permanently or temporarily, when the pain and suffering become unbearable. Mothers know just how heavy the burden of "being a good mother" under very difficult circumstances can be. Some mothers don't make it, and turn to alcohol and other addictions, suffer psychosomatic illnesses and ultimately take their own lives. Indeed, many mothers have died in pain and distress. They all did the very best they could. May their Souls rest in peace.

At this point in my life, my mother and I have become the greatest of friends. I have rediscovered myself as a woman in my relationship with my mother – talk about a cycle of nourishing womanist healing energy! I am who I am because of having enjoyed the warmth of her womb and nourishment from her physical breasts. I continue to grow in leaps and bounds because of the strength I draw from her spiritual breast.

In many ways, an honest and loving relationship with one's mother is crucial for the health of the earth. Have you ever thought deeply about the name "Mother Earth"? Have you considered why Vusi Mahlasela composed the song "The earth I know is a woman"? Did Jimmy Dlodlu perhaps take his inspiration from Mother Earth when he penned "Motherland", which happens to be one of my all-time favourite tunes (and he my favourite artist)? What do you think was Paul Hamner's inspiration when he put together "Meeting of the women"? Can you conceive of what the atmosphere in the studio must have been like during the recording of this powerful song, pregnant with feminine energy? This is the time for a collective healing of a wounded womanhood; it is time to heal and nurture the relationship between mothers and their daughters. This is the moment in our evolution for mothers and daughters to speak honestly, truthfully, openly and lovingly. Only then can we reclaim and embrace both our womanhood and femininity in a world that has been largely defined by manhood and masculinity.

It is time to return to Mother Earth. However, a return to Mother Earth is not a pilgrimage exclusively for women. The time also calls for men to embrace their positive feminine and masculine energy. I hear many

leading black men speak with the utmost respect and compassion about their mothers, yet sadly I find that this reverence for black womanhood does not apply to other black women in their lives, such as their wives and girlfriends. Similarly, I have witnessed a great number of black women using their masculine energy in collaborating with the erosion of the black male psyche. This is something I myself have been guilty of. Yet the truth is that we can no longer support a revolution that makes others or ourselves vulnerable and invisible. It is time to heal.

Our healing as a nation requires that we go beyond breaking the chains of racial oppression. We must also eradicate the negative effects of patriarchy and sexism on our individual and collective psyche. To live harmoniously as women and men, we must nurture both the intuitive feminine and action-oriented masculine to create a balanced union. It is indeed the time for the sacred integration of the feminine and masculine.



From girl child to womanhood

I was born at Holy Cross Nursing Home in Lady Selbourne in November 1959. My date of birth makes me a Sagittarian, rough edges and all. I have never really been a firm believer in horoscopes, except when the predictions revealed what I wanted to hear. Any comments on my shadow side or anything negative I quickly gloss over as not being meant for me, but for another Sagittarian living under different planetary influences, and probably in another part of the world!

My evolution as a woman born and living in Africa has been influenced by so many factors that I cannot even begin to capture them in a single publication. While many are visible and can be experienced consciously, some are abstract and invisible. Wailing for the first time outside my mother's womb, little did I know that Baas Verwoerd had a few years earlier passed legislation intended to make me "a hewer of wood and a drawer of water" and to prevent me from discovering my essence or determining my own destiny.

I attended pre-school in Lady Selbourne and Atteridgeville in Pretoria as well as Makapanstad in Hammanskraal. This sort of perpetual motion was the lot of all black families, moved about at random as the result of a host of socio-economic and political factors. My father, who was a civil servant, a Bantu school board secretary, to be precise, was always faced with the

finger-wagging First World leaders publicly lying about global attacks on civilisation and freedom, I can't think of anything else to do but laugh in their faces. Their time will come. The truth always triumphs.

As he told the story, my grandfather got up to show me two photographs of Kgosi Seaparankwe Makapan and Kgosi Nchaupe Makapan. He once had a visit from men closely related to the royal kraal, who wanted to take the photographs. They couldn't understand why he should keep such treasures when he had no close association to royalty. He soon put them right, explaining that he was not just a dedicated citizen of the village, but that his mother, Mamoletse Makapan, was from the royal family.

I also learnt from him that my great-great-grandfather, Poo Ramokolokolo Manyane, who left Lehurutshe to avoid a war, was of royal origin. He came to Mosekwa and was given the role of making fire at the chief's kraal, *motsei wa mollo*.

Mogolo kenosi wa ba Manyane maya bokgolwa go ya go tlhama lesika la ba RaMotsei a Manyane. Ke kgakgathiba ya bo Serake serakalela letsibogong la boNkoto. Ke setlola mafura a phofu, mafura a kgama, mafura a sebata segolo ntswe a tshwene a le teng. Setlola mafura a mothouwane a ntseng le a tlola mekokotlo dipale badidi e tswe a tlola ke Poo Ramokololo. Kgomo Ila!!!

My paternal grandmother Mmatshilo's mother, Mankoko, was a princess of the Matlala monarchy known to live adjacent to an ancestral mountain called Thaba Mogosi.

Motho was bo Tlhankga a mehlaba, o ana nonyana, ke tlhantlhagane e kgolo, ke tlhantlhagane ya Mogosi, Ke thaba ya Badimo le batho. Mogosi a Mmatlala, Batho ba rile ba re fora ba re thaba yeso ga e namelwe, ra e namela ra e fologa, ra e fologa ka morago.

Great-great-grandmother Mma Matlala is my link with my Pedi ancestry. She married a Mokgatla man, Ramogomotsi Moloisane, who was said to be so huge that he could single-handedly pull a bull down to its slaughter, holding on to its horns. Their daughter was Mmatshilo Moloisane, my father's mother.

Motho wa boMpadia thata a maiyane, o iphata sesadi marumong, o iphara sesetsanyana motsopye, mosetsana wa mereleba, a re le se nnyatseng mmala mofitshwana, rona batsopye ga re ikgalale, ga re ikgalale e bile ga re ipelaele.

I left grandfather late in the afternoon, stopping to pick up a stone at his gate to put on my ancestral shrine at my home in Johannesburg. Instead of heading straight back home, I decided to drive through Kgomo Kgomo to spend some time with my parents. I reflected on the stories that grandfather had shared with me, and on what he had had to say about traditional, healthy eating habits. Soul food from the soil.

They did not just take our land from us. They also took our indigenous ways of farming, only to repackage them and give them foreign labels such as "permaculture", "organic farming" and "sustainable agriculture". Surely, if we were dependent upon Nature

in the way that our foremothers and forefathers were, there would not be a way of tilling our lands without giving back to the Source. Yes, our ancestors were unlettered in the Western sense, but their spiritual connection to the earth and all that lives on it served as a mighty Open University.

As I reflected about food and nutrition, I thought of the fine job corporations and junk food outlets are doing in creating a global culture of malnutrition. While these international giants have a reputation for marketing excellence and sizeable social responsibility programmes, what is not mentioned is their long-term impact on the quality of the life of the majority of the poor. I have interacted with women participating in microfinance schemes intended to alleviate widespread poverty in the rural areas, and it has been impossible not to notice the deliberate dislocation between the lending process and broader development imperatives. The commodities that these women eventually sell, alcohol and fizzy drinks, create addiction and dependency, and have no human or social value.

We are faced with the challenge of opening avenues that encourage indigenous communities to rediscover culturally embedded methods of production and consumption. Rising to this challenge implies acknowledging the failure of development imperatives based exclusively on models derived from Western market economies, whose primary goals are profit maximisation and capital accumulation.

Economic instability in Africa is only ever attributed to corrupt governance. While some governments in Africa are corrupt, certainly, current analysis of the economic situation in the region chooses to overlook

corporations that continue to drain and channel dividends from local subsidiaries to international conglomerates. We are a nation that does not believe in itself, a continent that still looks up to the West, particularly the European Union and United States, as our economic and spiritual saviours. It is no wonder that we are so drained, so lost.

I arrived at my parents' home and joined in their conversation under a *Motlopi* tree. I shared the stories told by grandfather, and what he had had to say about the notion of the earth revolving around the sun. "White people seem to think that we have no brains", he had said. "We first moved from Suiwerskuil in 1915 and I have been living in the same house for years. I never woke up in the morning to find this house in Moretele (a nearby village). Even this house next door, it has always been in this position. Not once did I get up in the morning to find it in front of our gate. Now, you tell me, is it the sun or the earth that is moving?"

I left to the sound of my father's fond laughter in response to the logic behind this philosophical, if not geographical, wisdom, and drove back to Johannesburg from Kgomo Kgomo listening to Segale Mogotsi of Kaya FM playing the discs of yesterday. Pretending to be Brenda Fassie (who cares, there's no-one listening!), I sang along at the top of my voice, tapping my fingers on the steering wheel in a way that would rival that fine drummer Mabe Thobejane.

At home, I recounted grandfather's stories of our foremothers and forefathers to my children, and experienced the light in their eyes and their appreciative laughter as testimony to the healing power of storytelling.

May stories of love and care, peace and health, abundance and spiritual wealth, good governance and self-reliance in Africa continue to be told across generations and centuries.
NKOSI SIKELELA.



Parents and parenting

This chapter is meant as a sharing of my philosophy of parenting. My focus, though, will be on mothers raising children on their own. This is a deliberate choice, based on my personal experience. However, while I feel that the majority of men do not play a significant role in parenting, I by no means mean to dismiss the handful of men who choose to raise children on their own. As a society, we know very little about the challenges that these men face as single parents, and I hope that as more is written about their experiences we will be able to correct the common myth that parenting is an exclusively female responsibility. The choices and experiences of some caring fathers are living proof that men can and should participate actively in raising children.

What does single parenting mean in an African context? Single parenthood in our communities goes beyond the situation where a man has died, divorced or even deserted his wife and family. In a country whose riches have been built on a foundation of influx control and a migrant labour system, many women in rural South Africa have to contend with raising children on their own. For many black children, their relationship with their father is limited to irregular visits from a man who is almost a stranger to them.

This is a phenomenon that is not exclusive to working-class fathers. Increasing numbers of middle-

about a past that we can never alter, we are better off focusing on a future that we have the power to influence. This future, however, does not begin tomorrow, or even in five minutes' time, but right now.

I have been significantly influenced by a Buddhist way of living documented in contemporary writings of authors such as Jon Kabat-Zinn, who views parenting as a mindful and spiritual practice. In his book *Wherever You Go, There You Are*⁶, Kabat-Zinn views children as our own private mindfulness teachers who have been brought into our lives for a purpose and whose presence and actions are guaranteed to push all our sensitive and hidden buttons. This, he asserts, give us a never-ending range of opportunities to recognise our limitations and attachments. He sees parenting as a high-pressure job that calls for us to be observant and learn from our children – a task that gets more challenging as the children grow and develop their own ideas and viewpoints.

Being able to live physically with our children and therefore learn by observation is complicated by the fact that many parents have biological children from more than one relationship. The general trend is to dismiss parents with children from more than one relationship as having no morals. However, the current state of well-being in our families does not grant any of us licence to take the moral high ground without acknowledging the reality of high divorce rates and other factors. The current state of the family, whatever its configuration and composition, calls for a collective, intense and in-depth exploration of the possible answers to the complex questions facing us today.

Some of the answers may lie in eliminating any economic and social structure that keeps men from being

actively involved in the lives of their children. Modern society often tends to reward men for overwork, feeding them the message that tangible economic outputs are more valuable than their presence at home as nurturing fathers. Other answers may be found in applying some of our ancient socio-cultural wisdom in order to solve modern problems. A renewal of our subscription to the age-old belief that it takes a village to raise a child may assist in reclaiming the collective responsibility that each adult has towards their biological and non-biological children. Yet other answers lie in the individual. For instance, many adults of my generation have children from more than one partner without having married them. Already, a significant number of young people are following in our footsteps. Unfortunately, it is often the children who ultimately suffer. They are expected to make a life founded on their parents' past errors of judgement.

Increasing access to birth control has brought with it an increasing inability to control birth. Besides, the phenomenon of childbirth is as much a man's responsibility as it is a woman's. I often encourage my son never to put his life in the hands of another individual. I emphasise that a decision whether or not to have a child out of wedlock lies squarely with him, he alone is responsible for pursuing his dreams and goals. Discussions about teenage pregnancy hardly ever include teenage fathers, which means that young men are excluded from a fundamental life education process that has a crucial bearing on their future.

As a nation, we endeavour to fight corruption and greed in our political and economic institutions, yet we fail to accept that our attitude to sex comes from the

same source, a dis-eased soul. We rationalise promiscuity as a demonstration of an evolved and liberated personality. A continued refusal to do inner consciousness work is reflected in our tendency to hold up the condom, often imported from foreign governments at a cost of billions of rands, as an answer to HIV/Aids prevention. All that that little piece of rubber does is inhibit physical contact – it has no power to change a course of action. For that you need the power of the mind and heart. Advocates of the exclusive use of condoms are not interested in finding a lasting solution that comes from the full realisation that outcomes in our lives are the result of our choices. Much as we are products of our past, we all have the intelligence and the capacity to make life-affirming choices that influence our future positively.

I applaud the work that single mothers have done in raising their children through years of immense sacrifice. While acknowledging that these mothers have made the best of their circumstances amidst financial and other constraints, we cannot leave the entire responsibility of raising children to them alone. A father's contribution and influence is essential. I urge fathers (biological and non-biological) to take their rightful place in taking care of their children. I also urge mothers to heal their wounds and redefine what being a good mother is all about. Being ruled by pride and not asking for help and support does not make us good mothers. Women and men need to work together for the survival of the species and the planet. In my view, there will never be a more effective crime prevention strategy than effective parenting.

It is time to bring the age of absent fathers to an end. We are no longer interested in media reports about

fathers, even those tasked with the responsibility of leading the country, failing in their role as leaders in their own homes. The current attitude towards and practice of child support does little to reconstruct and practice of ravaged threads of our families and communities. Child support should be a demonstration of compassion and the acceptance of responsibility for a soul that came through our bodies. It is a serious indictment on us that we have to rely on an Act of Parliament and the courts to enforce loving and caring for our children. The amount of money, time and energy that we spend on tracing absent fathers and engaging with the legal system to enforce something that should come naturally is utterly wasteful. We could be spending such resources on many other developmental priorities that our country is faced with.

We are faced with the challenge of transforming the family into a unit that provides full support for our children. I call on parents to make a commitment and take a stand in support of family and community reconstruction. Taking a stand begins with our own healing. We cannot allow past errors to ruin events in our future. It is always possible to make a new beginning.

Medical School. One of my duties included accompanying fourth-year medical students on field trips to Alexandra Health and University Clinic as well as through the township itself. It was during this time that I was exposed to the gross deprivation that the majority of people experienced and the squalor in which they were (and still are) expected to live.

With my rural upbringing, I had never before been exposed to urban degradation. While I was deeply affected by the appalling living conditions to which a great number of South Africans were subjected, I was at the same time moved by the power of the human spirit to transcend physical trappings. It was in the deepest squalor that I encountered the most spirited and spiritually evolved human beings. It was in this space that I reviewed the common notion of black ghettos as nothing but a breeding ground for hard-core criminals. In spite of reports of horrific forms of violent crime from colleagues, friends and members of the community seeking counselling, it was here that I met and interacted with some of the most beautiful human beings on earth.

Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training (ADAPT) was conceived in 1992 following a research project that I undertook to examine the rate of identification of and attitudes towards battered women in health care settings. The completion of the study was followed by a process of consultation with the clinic management and members of the community, during which I shared the findings and recommendations of the study. The recommendations included setting up a counselling service for abused women.

It was during this process of consultation that I encountered a group of women leaders in Alexandra who

questioned my motives for the research and proposed service. I was accused of being an academic and a researcher more interested in furthering her career than in the welfare of the people of Alexandra. Furthermore, I was not born and bred in Alex – an accusation that I heard levelled at many in the nine years that I spent in the community.

Here I was, a black woman who had just broken off from a previously white academic institution and from having to fight intense ideological battles, driven by a passion to engage in community-based research, having to answer to black women who asked me: Why Alex? Why not consider setting up such a service in Mabopane, your resident township? This challenged my sense of belonging in two worlds, the world of academia, dominated by white women, and that of grassroots, community-based activism, dominated by black women. Hurt, disappointed and almost discouraged, I crawled back to base to lick my wounds and process my feelings. There is a famous phrase in Sepedi: "*Go chechela morago ga se so tshaba, ke go tsea maatl'a*". That is precisely what I did. I reflected a lot about leadership, and the qualities, roles and responsibilities of a good leader. Does leadership entail making decisions for others? If so, what criteria do we use to make such decisions? What tools should we employ to ensure that the outcome is in the best interest of the greatest number of people?

The women with whom I met were not necessarily the direct beneficiaries of the proposed service. I say this with caution, however, because domestic violence is not only the lot of the unemployed and the poor. Indeed, some of the very women with whom I met may, just like me, have been subjected to violence in their lives. During

the course of my work in this field I have encountered prominent women who have suffered in silence and lived their private lives at the mercy of their abusers, who were respected business, political and community leaders.

After a week of reflection, I phoned and asked for a follow-up meeting with the group. I went back driven by a resurgence of energy and a determination that I could not explain rationally. I wanted them to tell me to my face that I was not allowed in the community and that they, as representatives of the community, did not approve the establishment of the proposed service. I went back with a sense that although I might not have been born and bred in Alexandra, I could claim any township as my home. At our meeting I was not given either a clear green light or a red no-go sign, but something in between.

In the years that I spent in the community, I persevered in my attempts to involve some of these prominent women leaders in my work. Painful and strenuous as that perseverance proved to be, I used the experience as an opportunity to learn the art of turning my enemies into allies. As with other battles, this one was never fully won.

In spite of my attempts to involve these women in my programme, some never set foot in my office, let alone organised a meeting to discuss how we could collectively confront violence against women in the community.

So, while I had expected my most hostile response to come from men, it was from women that I received tacit disapproval and attempted sabotage. Without resorting to the simplistic and biased perception of women being their own worst enemy, I recognise and have experienced gender transformation as a deeply personal and sometimes painful journey. As we move on in our attempts to change gender roles and attitudes, I suggest

that the conscientisation of men should be accompanied by women's honest reflections on the possibilities of moving beyond the personal to a much deeper understanding of revolutionary feminism.

I started off in a small office at Alexandra Health and University Clinic, where I received wonderful support from David Robb and the rest of the clinic management. Just a few weeks after I had started, however, my office was broken into. In spite of burglar bars and security personnel on site, my computer, disks, including back-up disks that I had locked in the cupboard, were stolen. In just one night, all the data that I had accumulated over the years disappeared. I had bought the computer out of my own pocket, and hadn't the money to replace it.

I was feeling alone and was thinking of giving up and finding another job when a colleague, friend and revolutionary, Dr Dumo Baqwa, walked into my office, having heard about the break-in. In his usual, laid-back way he gave me a long lecture about resistance, internalised racism and the political economy of development in Africa. I use the word "lecture" deliberately because for the first time in any of our discussions about these matters, I didn't say a word. I simply hadn't the energy to respond, and he must have loved it. Those who knew Dumo will recall how he would take his time to make a point, occasionally interspersing his words with bursts of loud laughter. Dumo is no more; he too has been called to join the cadre of revolutionaries tasked with the attainment of spiritual liberation for Africa. And I did not leave. After that lecture, how could I have?

I worked in Alexandra for nine years, the longest I have ever been in one place. There were immense

challenges along the way, and I would not have survived without my family. My mother, Boitumelo, sent packets of tomatoes and onions from Mabopane for the children and me. My father, Rantebo, took over the instalments on my little car. Kgalalelo, still in nappies, kept me company from her pram as I was setting up the office. There were times when I could not afford to buy her milk or juice, and all I could give her was a bottle of warm water before she went to sleep. Katlego loved me unconditionally throughout that period. My sister Lenyalo and my brothers Mosire, Manyane and Setake were the most wonderful co-parents that anyone could wish for. My brother-in-law, Lehlohonolo Moagi, supported me with office stationery and marketing, accompanying me to meetings with potential funders in the early and most challenging stages of the journey.

I could have changed jobs. I could have gone for a "secure" position with a good package, but I would not have learnt the lessons. I would not be who I am today. I have paid the price for sticking it out; my marriage crumbled and for a while I was a bitter and angry person. I also suffered immense financial strain over the years. The cost, however, has been more than outweighed by the reward of finding my purpose in life.

I was taught amazing lessons by various teachers, notably the black working-class women whom I encountered in Alexandra and beyond. I acknowledge with gratitude and respect the contribution they made in my life. I am particularly grateful to Lerato Masango and Mme MaMthethwa, who used to work in the nearby Alexandra Childminders' Project office, for their occasional gifts of R5 or R10 for petrol. There were women who bought food for my children whenever the

going got tough. When I arrived in the community, Mme Beauty More was one of the women who supported ADAPT all the way in spite of immense challenges that she herself faced at Thusong Youth Centre. I cannot name all, but I was supported by many. I am who I am today because these women carried me. I truly rode on the shoulders of giants. I am visible today because they carried me high. I have grown because of having studied their philosophy of life. It took me some time; their philosophy is very simple, and for a while it proved incomprehensible to someone like me, already negatively affected by a Western education.

Beyond our northern borders I have worked with women in countries such as Zimbabwe, Kenya and Somalia. Somalia was a shock to my system. In 1997 I left South Africa for Mogadishu with a fellow trainer and friend, Penny Plowman, on a NOVIB assignment to facilitate gender training with specific focus on violence against women. We left Johannesburg, flying South African Airways to Nairobi, Kenya, arriving in the afternoon. We overnighted in Nairobi, with plans to proceed to Mogadishu the next day.

We boarded our Air Afrique flight around midday the next day. From the outside, the plane looked perfectly alright. Once inside, though, we were assaulted by a revolting smell from a dysfunctional air conditioning system. With my nostrils still adjusting to the environment, I noticed that even though we had seats allocated to us, everyone seemed to be sitting just anywhere. I later discovered that many of the seats were broken and some did not even have seat belts. Settling next to a window and looking out to see a British Airways jumbo jet on the runway next to us, I

I left Masana Hospital to work as a registered nurse in the casualty department of Ga Rankuwa Hospital for two years before leaving to study for a degree at the University of the North, where I majored in Psychology, Nursing Education and Community Health. I spent my time at Ga Rankuwa suturing lacerations on the bodies of a great number of men, mostly from Ramogodi, Winterveldt and Oukasic. It was also at this time that I encountered a number of women who had been severely injured after being attacked by men in their lives. It was in this experience that my work in the area of violence against women began to take root. At the time I did know what to do about the situation except to suture the lacerations and give medication. Silently, though, I prayed that one day I would find ways of addressing this serious crime against women that would go beyond a limited medical model of intervention.

Questioning a limited and oppressive model of nursing training was later to be the focus of research that I undertook with a colleague at the Centre for the Study of Health Policy at Wits Medical School. When I presented the findings at a seminar in Pretoria in 1989 I was almost eaten alive by one Professor Grobelaar from Unisa for commenting that nursing education produced subservient and stereotyped individuals who never questioned orders from above. However, at that time many nurses viewed health care as something separate from politics, since politics involved fighting for power and against inequality, actions in which they had been led to believe they had no role to play. These views were even more strongly held by black nurses, who had received an inferior education and had been socialised to believe in their inferiority.

Because nursing is a career that has always been easily accessible to women, it has the potential to be used as a liberating tool. Freedom from oppression, however, required a rejection of the stereotypical and oppressive nature of nursing education. From the study that my colleague and I conducted, it was clear that while most of the nurses interviewed had some understanding of the effects of political and socio-economic factors on health, their understanding was superficial and did not influence their attitude, actions and behaviour. Instead, many of the nurses blamed communities for their ignorance rather than recognising that deeply entrenched political factors were contributing to ill health. Although many were aware of the injustices in health care, they were afraid to speak out for fear of victimisation by nursing authorities and because of the way they had been socialised as women. Many nurses are concerned about professionalism. Certainly this is valid, but what is also required is an acknowledgement of the challenges that nurses are facing, including racism in nursing, so that they can provide leadership in the present health care crisis.

A review of history in South Africa must include a review of nursing history that acknowledges more than just the role of white nurses who were, by virtue of their easy access to quality education, well positioned to introduce changes within the field. While many of these interventions benefited the profession positively, others were racist and hampered the development of black nurses. Even though racism in nursing is a reality, it is rarely addressed openly and honestly. Black nurses are in the majority and form the backbone of health care delivery in rural South Africa in particular. Their

working conditions should therefore reflect a conscious recognition that they are not just pairs of black hands, but patriots committed to quality of life for all. Without them, our health services are doomed to collapse, and this may soon become a reality given the exodus to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Britain and the United States.

Having left Bushbuckridge many years ago, I recently visited what is now Mapulaneng Hospital on my way back from Acornhoek. The hospital surroundings were clean and certainly very different from some of the urban hospitals that have become so filthy that you would not consider them a place for health and healing. Everything looked the same except for the large number of undertakers.

The reality is, we are sinking as a nation. HIV/Aids, venereal and other preventable diseases of poverty continue inexorably to claim the lives of both young and old. Faced with the increasing prevalence of HIV/Aids in Africa, we are challenged to develop a scientific awareness and treatment campaign that is rooted in ancient teachings that focus on healing beyond the physical. Unlike the current exclusive focus on scientific research and Western interventions, such a campaign will acknowledge the powerful role that African values play in the prevention of any illness. Modern scientific interventions need to be adapted to draw on some of the most fundamental teachings inherent in African healing systems.

This kind of multidisciplinary intervention will be in line with the current call for an African Renaissance aimed at uplifting African civilisation. The union of science, spirit and community-building, the combination

of drugs with herbs, prayers and rituals will go a long way towards restoring a balance to people's healing systems. While the billions of dollars in foreign aid for Aids is welcome, Africa must match it with an equal amount of determination and reclamation of ancient wisdom as a means of healing.

Aid for Aids is about accomplishing
an impossible dream

not because we are wealthy or wise
but because it's time to face our ruins
beneath the shadow of death
with our wounds gaping, our soul wailing
faces twisted, screams muffled
yet

aided by the light of ancestral fire
travelling to a place of our becoming.
No wealthy man or powerful government
stands to make a profit from such a mission
because the soul of my ancestors
unlike their land and children
is not for sale.

As I drove back home from Mapulaneng through Marite, I was reminded of all the men we treated for very serious injuries, most of whom came from this area. What is it about Marite that makes it so violent? I noticed any number of restaurant and eating house signs in shops that do not sell much to eat, but enough to drink. I also noticed how many billboards advertised alcohol.

Liquor companies need to be held accountable for a degree of the dis-eased mental state of the majority of men in poor black communities. Go to any village,



Learning to love without fear

I have spent time going through some of my earlier journal entries. In some ways, I feel as if I haven't moved much. In other ways, though, I have made significant progress. I have worked damn hard on myself. For a long time I was reluctant to face what I myself had done to contribute to my own unhappiness and pain. It is always easier to blame others for one's failures rather than interrogating oneself, asking: Am I in any way contributing to my unhappiness? If so, what can I do to change the situation? What do I stand to gain from staying stuck in an unhappy situation? If there is no benefit, no trade-off, why am I still here?

After all the hard work, I have arrived at a point where I am becoming comfortable with looking at my image in the mirror, facing my shadow side. One of the most fundamental steps in the journey to healing is to acknowledge and accept our shadow, that part of ourselves that we dislike and have even repressed or rejected. In an era that encourages values such as success, competitiveness, courage, resilience and power, there is often no room left to express feelings of vulnerability and failure. While it is important not to disown the energies, it is equally important not to disown the negative aspects lest they go underground and from the

continue to rule our life's choices. It has taken me several years to grasp this important lesson. Pride, arrogance and the false belief that I was o

township or informal settlement across the country and count the number of taverns and liquor stores compared with other development and business ventures. This is a job creation strategy, some may argue. But it is also a self-annihilation strategy. The impact of alcohol on our families and communities is well known. So many black artists, intellectuals, leaders and visionaries have crumbled under the might of this disease. We are a nation that does not know how to heal our wound. Instead, we search for ways of numbing the pain.

We have to admit that we are victims of various forms of addictive thoughts, patterns and behaviour, a situation which is further compounded by our vulnerability to the power of irresponsible advertising on radio, television and in the print media. It is time to name our pain.

Health is not just the absence of physical illness, but the presence of a positive psychological and spiritual sense of self. Unless we confront racism, sexism and poverty, we as South Africans will never achieve cultural equity and true health.

different from me may choose to oppress me from the outside, but I refuse to oppress myself from the inside. They may look at me and see a woman or a black person and nothing more. That is their limited view. I am much deeper, brighter and bigger than meets the physical eye. I am whole; who I am is enough, I am complete.

For those of us who dare to search for unconventional ways of becoming, the issue of racism is not limited to a theoretical critique of the status quo. It is also about inner consciousness work, and it includes confronting inner thoughts that present an obstacle to our healing. In her book, *The Bluest Eye*¹⁵, Toni Morrison asserts that many of us turn away from reality because the pain of awareness is unbearable. But it is only by becoming aware, by facing our reality and our suffering, that we see things clearly.

In my endeavour to love and embrace my blackness without rage, I need to face the challenge of accepting that white people can love their whiteness without guilt. In my quest to connect with my femininity, I open my heart to images of men loving their masculinity. As I take what are sometimes faltering steps on the path of wholeness I become conscious and take ownership of my own oppressive thoughts – “What did you expect, she’s Jewish”; “*Ke letebele*”; “He’s a man”. I will take the time I need to reclaim the purity of my yesterday as well as redefine my existence as a *Motswana*, a woman and an African in this lifetime. Healing and forgiveness lie at the core of that redefinition.



Searching for a matriarchal African spirituality

Many feminists have protested at the scarcity of black women leaders globally. Even though the literature abounds with references to male leaders, South Africa is gradually witnessing a change in this regard. More women in general, and more black women in particular, are becoming involved in the active running of the country from within political, business and community-based structures.

This change is taking place against the backdrop of a number of traditional practices that are still disempowering to women. High maternal death rates as well as physical, sexual and emotional abuse further undermine women’s capacity to contribute fully to the country’s economy and future prosperity. Young and married women have been identified as the groups that are most vulnerable to HIV.

It has been a struggle for women to find a voice beyond their role as mothers. It has been a further struggle for women to redefine women’s health as extending beyond maternal and reproductive issues to include other political, economic, and socio-cultural factors that affect their well-being. The many layers of oppression along race, class and gender lines and what is perceived to be women’s passive acceptance of these have called the existence of working-class led feminism in Africa into question.

While literature on the struggle against imperialism acknowledges the powerful role played by male workers, a perusal of feminist literature does not reveal the same degree of reference to the role played by working-class women in the struggle for women's emancipation. Instead, rural and working class women are often viewed as beneficiaries of policies and services rather than as leaders and agents of change. Instead of establishing partnerships with working-class women, finding ways as amplifying their voices and facilitating processes that allow them to speak for themselves, feminists, white and black, have assumed the role of spokespersons and speak on their behalf.

In my work with rural women I have witnessed subtle but powerful ways of resistance and independent thinking related to matters of family reconstruction and gender relations. The lives of rural women, rather than being miserable and hopeless, are pregnant with immense strength, wit and courage in confronting oppression in both the public and private sphere. Some of the feminist views I had adopted from foreign practice and literature have been radically challenged in my work with rural women on issues of gender, sexuality, and HIV. In many ways, my eyes and soul have been opened to a wealth of information found in the midst of our kind, our mothers and grandmothers. It is from them that I have learnt that in respecting our partners, we gain respect. I have learnt that submission is not necessarily a sign of weakness, but recognition of one's own innate power as well as the power of the other. The fact that one is powerful does not render others less powerful. Being powerful has nothing to do with being better than others, but has a lot to do with being the best that one can be.

The most powerful individuals I know are humble. One of the many significant lessons I have learnt from rural women is that humility involves seeing oneself in relation to the other, as well as putting oneself in a lesser position in order to understand the other holistically.

It was at a rural workshop on African culture and gender violence that I facilitated in Kgomo Kgomo in 1997 that I learnt about the concept of *go hupa kotana*, which literally means keeping a stick in your mouth to prevent you from talking – the English equivalent would be “don't answer back”. When I heard this for the first time, my initial reaction was to reject it outright because it reminded me so much of what girls growing up are told: never answer back when a man speaks to you. To my mind, that reinforced the voicelessness imposed on women the world over. However, when I explored this concept further with women elders, I gained a new insight. Yes, the expression does mean that a woman should not answer back. However, there is more to this silence than simple subservience. The difference, these women elders explained, is that not answering back is a conscious and strategic choice rather than a reaction rooted in fear of the repercussions, which may even include a physical beating. Learning to choose our battles and how we fight them, they explained, is one of the most crucial strategies that anyone requires in the fight against dominant forces.

I have spent time discussing this and other lessons with my colleague, Nteseng, who has now taken over as Director of ADAPT. She told me that her grandmother used to tell her “*Nke le ithute go fenngwa*”, meaning “Allow yourself not to win all your battles” – in other words, there is value in losing too. This, of course, is

closely tied to the ability to practise humility. In my view, it is essential for both women and men to revisit this very crucial element in our interaction. The sexes have been so tightly locked in battle for so long that we have forgotten how to interact in the most natural and humane way.

The world is crying out for a leadership that is founded on spiritual values of sharing, compassion, interdependence and mutual respect. In this as in other life matters that involve humanity and human relationships, Africa is well positioned to lead the way. I am grateful to be part of a nation that is embarking on a search for sacred spiritual spaces and reclaiming ancient transformative and liberatory tools used by our elders over decades and centuries.

One such space is the village of Dikebu in the district of Makapanstad, a region led by the late Kgosi Seaparankwe Makapan.

On 25 May 1969, Mme Kubele Motsei, married into the Motaung family, who was at the time a domestic worker employed by Mrs Levine of 28 African Street, Orchards, Johannesburg, had a revelation. Mme Kubele, now called Mother Toloki because she has the power to communicate directly with the ancestors, was in the maid's room when, with her physical eyes, she saw ancestors in her room. For several consecutive days, after cleaning the madam's house and doing all the other menial chores that domestic workers do, she returned to her room to interact with her ancestors.

On 5 August 1969, one of her great-grandfathers came to her to announce the arrival of a very important guest. She was made to kneel down facing the door just before midnight. Instead of opening in the normal way, the door

cracked down the middle to let in a blinding light, followed by the appearance of Jesus Christ, now called Rara Konyana. As His spirit in the flesh filled the room, a blue cloth covering utensils on a tray on a table mysteriously caught fire. Mme Kubele quickly extinguished the fire with her bare hands, and was left with a burn mark on her right hand. Rara Konyana called her name several times, but because she was frozen with fear, she only managed to respond with a whisper after the third call. Announcing his mission to her, the Lord told her that she had been chosen by the Holy Spirit and that from that day onwards, He would dwell in her so that she would become Him in her.

She was told of the dawning of the Third world, the time of the reclamation of African spirituality, and of the return of the Holy Spirit to Africa to heal and spiritually liberate all people of African descent. In the new century, the world would turn to Africa for guidance. New knowledge and a spiritual curriculum would be developed by the ancestors of all races and religions. *Badimo ba ba kgobokaneng*, and taught in the classes of Sewagodimo Spiritual School. The sick would be nursed back to physical, emotional and spiritual health by ancient healers of Africa, visible and invisible, as well as by Western healers led by the compassionate healing power of Florence Nightingale, in the sacred rooms of Candle Hospital. In the past, in the time of the Second world, the Holy Spirit came through a white person and a man. In the time of the Third world and in Africa, the Spirits would heal the world and communicate through a black person, and a woman. Because she was black, a woman, and from the working class, with limited formal education, Mother