

AN ARCHITECT OF OUR BEINGNESS- NELSON R MANDELA



by

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Despite our tenacity largely as Africans to cultural mythologies, the science of death, as formalised into a field of study termed thanatology, assists to demystify death, but not to the extent of coming to terms with it. Life precedes death. There is no death without life. Death is part of life, or perhaps, conversely, life is part of death? Irrespective of how death is philosophised, the fact is death is an inevitable certainty. However, what is uncertain is the time of its occurrence. Be that as it may, it does not matter at what stage of human development death occurs, or how much thanatology provides a scientific rationale for its occurrence, when it strikes, it inflicts piercing pain in our hearts so much so that a deathless life is our wish, especially if it is that of a colossus whose omnipresence fills our lives. South Africa is grieving, Nelson R Mandela is no more! He “now belongs to the ages”; this is how, in a Stantonian parlance, the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, reacted to his departure from our physical space.

Likewise, the nations of the world are mourning the death of this colossus of the 20th century, whose tome of life is timeless and instructive to humanity. The South African Association of Public Administration and Management (SAAPAM) joins the world in this moment of grief, with an understanding that, as the knowledge-based organisation, the death of Mandela presents an opportunity for reflective thinking, with a view to theorise the traits that constituted the essence of this great personality in the public space and develop a coherent body of knowledge on public leadership for the 21st century. We are at same time bidding farewell to him greatly appreciating his selflessness as the servant of humanity, big-heartedly leaving us with the template of our beingness as its architect.

The generosity of his life, defined by altruism, humility, honesty and justice, immensely enriched humanity. What more do we need to secure the future of humanity

beyond the virtue of selflessness he bequeathed to us? Mandela determined his immortality by simply being true humanity. The absence of his physical being in our living space marks the beginning of his new and different presence in our lives, not the finality of his absence. Death does not punctuate the end of this great life. It means, in the words of Mark Speece, “noncorporeal continuity”. His teachings, as etched in his martyrdom, are boundless, destined to shape the future of the present and the future of the future.

As the nation is preparing for the sepulchre of this colossus in the small rural village of his upbringing, his words at the time of his inauguration as the first black President of the Republic of South Africa, reverberates in our memory: “never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world”. This message ought to be graven in our consciousness as we imagine the future of humanity. We dare not stray from his exemplary teachings; lest what he fought against rehistoricizing the future of humanity.

Thank you so much Tata, you fought the good fight for the future of humanity; thank you to your family that gave you all to us. You have run the good race. The doors of Heaven are surely wide open to embrace your entrance having fulfilled your mission of salvaging humanity against its self-destruction. You were blessed with a long life; we are blessed to have had your life for a very long time; a life dedicated to the cause of humanity. Your life as we are accustomed to in our physical space is no more. It is, however, with us in another form. The torch you carried is now passed unto us. We dare not let it switched off as this will disturb your eternity in our lives. If we dare stray from the moral compass of your exemplary leadership, the progenitors of our being, which you recently joined, would unleash their wrath.

“Lest We Forget”