

Es'kia Mphahlele. *A Lasting Tribute*. 2013. Johannesburg: Stainbank & Associates.

The following is the Publisher's Note, page 10 in the book

*A Lasting Tribute*, reflects Es'kia Mphahlele's intimate connection with *Tribute Magazine* from its inception in 1987 until 1998. During those twelve years, Mphahlele wrote a monthly column for the magazine in which he shared the wisdom accumulated over a lifetime of experience in South Africa, in African countries and in the United States. And this collection of his articles has been put together as a lasting tribute to the man himself.

Mphahlele was an educator, journalist, poet, novelist, satirist, short story writer, philosopher and patriot, and in these essays, his passion, compassion and sincerity transport us through time to experience with him diverse environments, encounters with a variety of human beings and the pain and sadness of witnessing man's inhumanity to man. An independent thinker, unshackled by party politics and adherence to limiting ideologies, his is a clearly humanistic perspective based on the norms and values inherent in traditional African culture.

Like Steve Biko, Mphahlele saw how much African people had lost in spirit as a result of dispossession and he too was bent on restoring the African to the African. That meant, primarily, belief in one's African self, in the same way as people of other cultures understand who they are, and secure in their identities, carry themselves with the confidence derived from their traditional backgrounds. Mphahlele propounds his philosophy of African Humanism in order to restore traditional African pride and *joie de vivre*.

Though his articles in *Tribute Magazine* cover the wide scope of his interests, they are driven by his vocation as an educator and reflect his desire to disseminate the freedom that comes with ever-expanding knowledge and understanding. But education for Mphahlele is not the same as schooling:

When we speak of "schooling" we refer to the process of going through school. We go through it by stages up to the highest class available, or else drop out along the way. Education, on the other hand, is a process of development through learning, inside or outside school. Something more profound happens within the learner when education is happening; something more than the mere mechanical act of attending school from day to day. ... It is a humanistic act, which

means the interests of the individual in relation to the community are the uppermost concern.

("Chunks of Knowledge or What," *Tribute Magazine*, June 1997)

Schooling is about formal instruction; education is about the individual's personal pursuit of knowledge through experience and reading. "Read, Read, Read", he urges; form reading groups, read, debate, discuss and grow. Read about the African experience and learn to appreciate what it means to be African. Read in order to increase your understanding so that you can break out of narrow limits to embrace the universe. His own wide understanding, as revealed in the articles, encompasses an appreciation of the writings of great African thinkers in Africa and in the diaspora, and the great minds of Western and Eastern art and philosophy.

Through education, he suggests, one develops independence of thought, action and enterprise. One does not think of oneself as a victim suffering at others' hands. One acts as an empowered person who knows that her/his destiny lies in her/his own hands. In three articles entitled, "The Curse of Dependence," Mphahlele shows how Africans were turned into dependents under colonialism and apartheid. He says of white rule: "Their sole aim: absolute control. Happily entrenched for 300 years  
supreme through an immoral legal system and constitution. All this has left us a dependent people.

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("The Curse of Dependence 1",  
*Tribute Magazine*  
, Feb 1994,)

As African people have bought into the culture of consumerism, they are still economically and artistically dependent. Consequently, it is difficult to break free of white control. To be free of control, it is necessary to educate oneself.Â Education, not schooling, is the key to freedom and independence; schooling is only an introduction to knowledge.

Underlying all of his writing is Mphahlele's commitment to education. His mission is to challenge and make us think more deeply about the meaning of our existences. And this is his way of offering us the greatest of gifts, the gift of true freedom.

Mphahlele's articles in *Tribute Magazine* are not confined to education; in them he freely shares his understanding of diverse social, economic and political issues. The essays include his thoughts about poor people queuing for hours under gruelling conditions to collect pensions, the ludicrous behaviour of people in the Tri-Cameral parliament and Siphso Sepamla's powerful contribution to poetry and theatre arts. Aspiring writers will find many articles with advice especially for them.

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