

## HAMBA KAHLE, BABA MBHELE

### *A eulogy at the funeral of Mr Elmon Governor Shabangu*

Date: 1 November 2015

Thank you, Programme Director.

Family members, Family Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen, greetings. I am not able to say “good morning” to you because for us this morning is anything but good. It is, instead, a terrible day whose possible dawn we have long dreaded.

We are grateful that you are here to support us, to mourn with us and to bid farewell to our Beloved Father, *uMbhele oluhlaza othe cwe ofana nencoshana*. We appreciate the fact that you are here to wipe our tears and to commiserate with us at so difficult a time. We are certain that our Beloved Father would have wanted it no other way.

At a time like this, one is at a loss for words. Lying before us is a colossal man who defies description, a man who cannot be put neatly into one or some other category, and whose hallmark throughout his life was an independent, incisive mind. Lying before us is a consummate nation builder, a man whose life-long passion has been to enrich and empower others academically and otherwise. Lying before us is a man who has been generous to a fault, a man who would happily give somebody the shirt off his back and retire to bed on an empty stomach.

Our Loving Dad always wanted the very best for all of us, his children. With education being his ultimate passion, he wanted nothing more than to see all of us excel at school and graduate *cum laude* from tertiary institutions. Like all parents, he wanted to see us going in different directions professionally and reaching for the stars. He did not just have all these wishes for us; but, more importantly, he worked tirelessly to help make them a reality.

All of us – my dear brothers and sisters who are his biological offspring and the many promising young men and young women like myself and Harriet Mkhonto that he encountered during his days as a caring educator and took under his wing – can attest to how he would make time to talk patiently to each one of us, to counsel us sagely as a loving father, to cheer us up when we were down and to cheer us on when we made some little strides in life.

I speak as one of Bab’ uMbhele’s children because that is what I became to him and Mom more than three decades ago, and my late brother Adonis and I acquired new younger brothers and sisters in the Shabangu children and in us they acquired elder brothers. Like the Father that he was, Dad has been a very important part of my life from the time when Adonis and I first met him at Mshadza Secondary School in January 1980 – more than 35 years ago now!

I have known him as a revered and even feared school principal, as a caring and loving benefactor and as a very supportive father.

Since then, Mbhele has been intricately involved in every aspect of my life. He was there when we approached the Mlangeni to ask for my wife's hand in marriage. He and Mom were there when Gugu and I got married two decades ago. They were there when we buried my father in Jerusalem in 2004 and they were there when we laid my mother-in-law, Mrs Tholi Mlangeni, to rest in Greytown in 2010.

He was there when I was invited to speak at Sidlamafa High School and at Mapulaneng College of Education respectively just over two decades ago, and he and Mom were there when my penultimate book, *Incomplete Without My Brother, Adonis*, was launched in Johannesburg **exactly a year ago today** and later that month here in Nelspruit. He has been a loving Grand-father to my children, who have all known him as such from their early years as children.

When my father passed away in 2004, I took comfort in the knowledge that in Mbhele I still had a father and my children still had a Grand-dad. Our anchor has fallen now, and today we have come to bid farewell to him and to take him to his last resting place.

Whenever I came to see him, Dad always made time to talk and to give wise counsel. He also shared with me his dreams and concerns as a parent and listened patiently as I shared my tuppence's worth of thoughts with him.

To the end of his days in this cruel world, Dad wanted nothing more than to make a difference in the life of a black child by owning a private school that he would run. He always spoke wistfully about getting a piece of land and partnering with philanthropists to build a school where black children would receive quality education and be instructed in gardening and wood work, among other disciplines.

Dad was born to be a teacher and was one to the end. Whenever he spent time with my children – and, I imagine, other children – he would quiz them on general knowledge or give them some mathematical challenge to solve. He would delight at their positive responses and privately caution us never to put the children under pressure academically or to compare them to their elder siblings.

With your indulgence, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like now to address myself to my brothers and sisters. *Zingane zakithi*, please know that there are many things about which Dad was very unhappy. On numerous occasions he asked me to talk to some of you about your conduct which he found objectionable, outright unacceptable or even destructive. He and Mom felt that they had done everything that they could do to get said behaviour to be jettisoned, but they had reached a point where they felt that they had not succeeded, hence the request for my involvement.

Now the worst thing that we can do to our parents in their old age is to hurt them and give them reason to be sad, at a time when they should be enjoying the remaining days of their lives. Often I did not manage to find time to talk to you, brother or sister about whom our parents had concerns. This is because I wanted to do so in person, when I was home, rather than over the phone.

I know that you know who you are and what I am talking about. I ask now, in the presence of all these people, that, in loving memory of Dad, you jettison the said behaviour once and for all. That will certainly make Dad happy as he lies in his last resting place and, more importantly, it would also ensure that Mom does not continue to worry and be hurt by that unacceptable behaviour on her own, at a time when she is mourning the loss of her life-long partner. Please kindly take my request to heart. Nothing would please Dad more than that.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words to an amazing woman, our Mother, Mrs Shabangu. Mom, although we, too, feel the loss of our Father, we know that none of us can ever feel it in the way that you do today and will over the days, weeks, months and years to come. You have lost your husband, your partner, your friend and your soul mate – and that can't be easy.

You have been a great wife to our Loving Dad and an amazing Mother to us, your children. You have stood by Dad throughout his life, in good times and in bad times. You have always been by his side, supporting him, and not pulling him down. When Dad introduced you to young men like me or brought young women like Harriet Mkhonto home, you welcomed us warmly as your children and loved and supported us.

Thank you for your unending love and support for our Dad, and thank you for your love for all of us, your biological children and your inherited or adopted children. You are no less important to us.

*Lala ngoxolo, Baba. Lala ngoxolo, Shabangu omuhle.*

*Mbhele!*

*Wena oluhlaza othe cwe ofana nencoshana.*

*Uqomondo olumashiya*

*Olubuka umuntu engathi lizomakhela umuzi,*

*Usigejane siyakhula siyahluma ezaleni,*

*Unondilileki umthimude wezinkomo zakwaNxumalo,*

*Ohlabana ngesikela abanye behlabana ngezijula.*

Ends

nnnn