

HAPPY 89TH BIRTHDAY, MADIBA!

Co-ordinated by: Special Projects,
Independent Newspapers Cape – 021 488 4175

FORMER South African president Nelson Mandela and his wife Graca Machel sharing a happy moment.



Nelson Mandela: Our nearest and brightest star

Carole Knight
Author: *Miracles of Hope: Surviving and Thriving in the 21st Century*

IN times long past, saffron-robed Tibetan lamas were able to contemplate the world from the serenity and isolation of their many gompas.

In these high mountain monasteries, detached from the mundane workings of humankind, the meditations of the lamas led them to believe that it was in Tibet, where the wind constantly buffets its inhabitants, that the human soul first became aware of itself, for it is in pushing back against the wind and, metaphorically, the world, that a soul is defined.

Character or moral strength is interpreted differently by different cultures but, for many people, it represents the outward manifestation of a soul that is in alignment with itself despite having been sorely tested.

Having more to do with what is right than what is expedient, character is not the exclusive preserve of the world's highest and mightiest, being as likely to wind its way among the humble huts of a peaceful rural village as it is to find a path through the loftiest global corridors of power.

Character cannot be inherited or conferred by influence or position. It cannot be taken by force or won by popularity. It cannot be sold, bartered

or bought. Its value, therefore, lies in the fact that it has to be earned by transcending the trials of life and, although in the frenetic cybernetic pace of the early 21st century character has become a somewhat outmoded concept, its attributes are still highly prized by our global community.

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, buffeted for much of his life by hurricane-force winds that whipped away those dearest to him, including his wife, children, mother and sisters, as well as his freedom, profession and business, has become a universal symbol of the transcendent power of character and there is much that we can learn from the man once described by President Thabo Mbeki as "our nearest and brightest star to guide us on our way".

'Man makes himself'

When Mandela emerged from prison on February 11, 1990, he was greeted by a tumultuous welcome from a world dazzled by his stature. From an intensely personal perspective, the unrestrained adulation which showered down on him from every corner of the globe must have been a vindication of his principles and ideals as affirmed by his landmark speech at the Rivonia Trial.

At that moment, with the world at his feet, he would have been excused for being seduced by all the flattery and attention. He would also have

been forgiven for climbing onto a peak of moral high ground.

However, with a belief in the value of "honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, purity, generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve your fellow men – qualities within the reach of every soul", as he once described the markers of development as a human being in a letter to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, he resisted both impulses, showing such a sensitive, forgiving and conciliatory aspect to the nation that he was able to disarm previous enemies and bridge racial divides.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has said, "If this man wasn't there, the whole country would have gone up in flames" and certainly it is probable that in the worst of times it was Mandela's leadership that prevented South Africa from descending into a cauldron of civil war.

But, in the context of a new South Africa, his most lasting legacy could yet be his example, borne out of his belief that a "man makes himself", that by subjugating one's weaknesses and developing one's strengths, character can be forged in the fires of adversity. For we individually constitute the building blocks of this nation and in the final analysis, it will be our degree of shared national character that will determine the level of success our democracy brings.

factors, such as one's social position, influence and popularity, wealth and standard of education...but internal factors may be even more crucial in assessing one's development as a human being".

Eddie Daniels, a fellow prisoner on Robben Island, said in an interview: "He (Mandela) gave us hope when everything was rock bottom and we saw no future. But character, not religion, was his strength". Mandela learnt moral authority and ideological depth the hard way; through reading voraciously, studying extensively and reflecting deeply on past actions, relationships, principles, beliefs and ideas – through his brains and not his blood, as he later put it.

'Iron will and necessary skill'

Just as his example of tolerance and reconciliation teaches us that it is possible to change ourselves for the better, another important lesson that we can learn from Mandela is that we each have the capacity to transcend difficult circumstances, actively seeking light amid the darkness.

He once urged his daughter, Zindzi, "There are few misfortunes in this world that you cannot turn into a personal triumph if you have the iron will and the necessary skill." At the time, this injunction reflected his absolute refusal to be defined by the harsh conditions of his imprisonment and his belief in using whatever resources presented themselves to forge a new reality.

To today's recreational day-tripper, it could perhaps seem that Robben Island has few resources to offer prisoners for self-improvement. Lonely, windy and stark, it has poignant reminders of previous periods when it was used as a leper colony and lunatic asylum. However, with the only audience being "ourselves and our oppressors", the political prisoners used dialogue to create a "culture of comradeship, co-operation and learning, of fierce debate coupled with political tolerance", turning the blinding bowl of the limestone quarry in which they worked with pick and shovel into a debating club and campus.

During the physically and mentally arduous days of his imprisonment, Mandela honed his intellectual powers and deepened his interest in ideas, "from year to year...changing and revising his views". He refined his political ideology and taught a course on political economy, tracing the development of societies from feudalism to capitalism to socialism. Seeing the prison as a microcosm of a future South Africa that he believed the ANC was likely to govern, he also studied Afrikaans and read many Afrikaans books on history and literature.

He learnt to exercise a steely control over his temper and to tame his strong will. He also learnt to empathise, persuade and extend his influence over his fellow prisoners as attested by Botswana prisoner Michael Dingake, "Every day, but every day, in addition to his organisation's programmes, he had numerous appointments with individuals, always on his own initiative, to discuss inter-organisational relations, prisoners' complaints, joint strategies against prison authorities and general topics".

'A leader too sows seeds'

Despite the psychological strains and physical hardships of the "sad, dry days" of prison life,

'I'm no angel'

Oliver Tambo once told a colleague, "When I want a confrontation, I ask for Nelson". Today, this statement is completely at odds with Mandela's international reputation as a conciliator. However, in his 30s, he was regarded in some quarters as a maverick, a hotheaded revolutionary (his own assessment of himself) and something of a loose canon within the African National Congress (ANC).

Although his aggression and anger were undoubtedly fuelled by the Nationalist government's unjust laws of the time and the grim realities of grinding poverty in the townships, Mandela's pugnacity during the 1950s may also have been a result of a deep personal conflict between his belief as an attorney in the rule of law and his conviction that "an armed struggle would be absolutely necessary".

With his candid pronouncement that "I'm no angel", Mandela's transformation from defiant and contemptuous agitator to endearing and pragmatic statesman is all the more remarkable because it was accomplished in the grim austerity of Cell 5 in the B-Section of the prison on Robben Island.

There he found that "the cell is an ideal place to learn to know yourself, to search realistically and regularly the processes of your own mind and feelings. In judging our progress as individuals, we tend to concentrate on external

1 DAY SALE!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

18th JULY

NOW OPEN IN CANAL WALK!

***SILVER MEDALLION WORTH R750!**

BUY 1 : GET 1 FREE!

Silver Mandela worth **R750**
FREE with every one purchased for R750.

Call in or visit one of our shops to see the great Mandela offers we are having on the 18th July in honour of Nelson Mandela's birthday.

A royalty is paid to the Nobel Institute, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the F W de Klerk Foundation.

THE SAGOLD SHOP
A Real Store of Value!

The retail division of The South African Gold Coin Exchange
Open 7 days a week!

- Sandton City •Nelson Mandela Square •Brooklyn Mall •Canal Walk
- Cape Town International Airport - International Departures Area plus Domestic Departures Area;
- O R Tambo International Airport - Domestic Departures Area PLUS
- MasterCurrency at O R Tambo International Airport

The South African Gold Coin Exchange
The Market Leaders

5th Floor, Twin Towers West, Sandton City
Tel: (011) 784 8551 0861SAGOLD Fax: (011) 784 8524 info@sagoldcoin.com www.sagoldcoin.com

- Countrywide courier service



TONY BLAIR meets Nelson Mandela at the Nelson Mandela Foundation in Houghton JHB. PHOTOGRAPH BY ANTOINE RAS

Mandela milestones - part of South Africa's backbone.*

PricewaterhouseCoopers is proud of its association with former President Nelson Mandela through his Children's Fund and would like to wish him many healthy and fulfilled years ahead as he celebrates his 89th birthday on 18 July 2007.

Mini Emnandi Kuwe Tata!

The role he has played in our country's history has improved countless lives and PwC is mindful of his contribution and thankful for all he has achieved.

www.pwc.com/za

*connectedthinking

PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS

© 2007 PricewaterhouseCoopers Inc. All rights reserved. PricewaterhouseCoopers refers to the network of member firms of PricewaterhouseCoopers International Limited, each of which is a separate and independent legal entity.