



Annual Founder's Kwanzaa Message

KWANZAA AND THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES SHARING AND SUSTAINING THE WORLD

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The celebration of the 45th Anniversary of Kwanzaa is a significant marker and milestone in itself, not only because of what it says about the expansive message and enduring meaning that Kwanzaa has for millions throughout the world African community, but also because of what it says about us as a people. For it speaks to our profound commitment to self-determination; to cultural reaffirmation and the celebration of ourselves; to our right and responsibility to speak our own special cultural truth in a multicultural world; and to the practice and promotion of Kwanzaa's core principles, the *Nguzo Saba*, the Seven Principles, the hub and hinge on which the holiday turns.

As always, the season and celebration of Kwanzaa rightfully calls to mind its origins in the ancient African first-fruit harvest celebrations and the model of the harvest which stresses the cooperative creation, gathering and sharing of good, specifically food as a life-sustaining good; gratitude for the bountifulness and beauty of the world; and the commitment to protect and preserve the earth as both a source of life and a site of the sacred. This Kwanzaa comes with an increased concern for the well-being of the world because of the continuing injustice and oppression imposed on humans and the injury and injustice inflicted on the earth. And as Dr. Wangari Mathaai stated, "today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking," a shift that stops us from destroying the very basis of human life on the planet, and causes us to "assist the earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal ourselves."

It is here that we link the concept and practice of sharing the world with that of sustaining the world, for the well-being and

flourishing of humans are tied to the health and wholeness of the world. Therefore, for our ancestors and us, sustainment is a dual concept of both *well-being* and *right-being* of and in the world, a world of social and environmental justice, peace, physical and spiritual well-being and ongoing development. Here the *Nguzo Saba* are again posed as a vital and valuable way to walk, work and struggle in the world for the well-being, wholeness and flourishing of ourselves and the world. And their central and summary message is: *walk gently, act justly and relate rightly in and for the world.*

The principle of *Umoja* (unity) speaks to our need to develop and sustain a sense of oneness, righteous and rightful togetherness in the small and large circles and significant relations of our lives, from family and friendship to community and the cosmos. It urges us to practice a principled and peaceful togetherness rooted in mutual respect; justice; care and concern; security of person; and equitably shared goods. And it calls on us to stand in solidarity with the oppressed, suffering and struggling peoples of the world in the cooperative achievement of these goods.

The principle of *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination) instructs us to assert ourselves in self-defining and dignity-affirming ways in the world; and to create the miracles, monuments and meaningful relationships and achievements we want in our lives. And it reaffirms our right and responsibility to live liberating and liberated lives; to value and dialog constantly with our own culture; retrieve and bring forth the best of what it means to be African and human, and speak this unique and equally valid and valuable truth to the world. And it upholds the

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right of all peoples in the world to demand and do likewise.

The principle of *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility) teaches us that we must build the good and sustainable communities, societies and world we all want and deserve to live in and leave to those after us. This means, as Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune taught us, that "We must remake the world. The task is nothing less than that." This means engaging and solving the major problems of the world, including: poverty; famine and food insecurity; housing; environmental degradation; economic security; HIV/AIDS and other health issues; education; racism; sexism; corporate plunder; war; occupation; crime and the criminal injustice system.

Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) reaffirms the ethics of the harvest, shared work and shared wealth. It thus is opposed to inequitable distribution of wealth, and resource monopoly and plunder by the rich and powerful. And it teaches us to privilege the poor and vulnerable, and uphold the right of all peoples to live lives of freedom, dignity, well-being and ongoing development. *Ujamaa* also urges us to give rightful recognition and support to the small farmers and farm workers of the world for the vital role they play in feeding and sustaining people and the planet, especially in the context of the globalization of agriculture and its destructive effects on the lives and lands of the people.

The principle of *Nia* (Purpose) teaches us to embrace and respond creatively to the collective vocation of restoring to our people the position and possibilities of great achievements thru doing good in the world.

For the sacred teaching of our ancestors in the *Husia* say that "the wise are known by their wisdom and the great are known by their good deeds." And in the *Odu Ifa*, they tell us that we "humans are divinely chosen to bring good in the world" and that this is the fundamental mission and meaning of human life.

The principle of *Kuumba* (Creativity) teaches us the moral obligation "to do always as much as we can in the way we can in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it." Thus, we must practice *serudj ta*, constantly repair and remake the world, a Maatian concept with ethical and aesthetic, as well as natural and social implications, and which expansively means: to repair the damaged, raise up the ruined, replenish the depleted, rejoin the severed; strengthen the weakened; set right the wrong; and make flourish the fragile and undeveloped.

Finally, the principle of *Imani* (Faith) teaches and urges us to hold fast to the faith of our ancestors, that reassures us that through cooperative work and struggle, the famine and food insecurity in Somalia, the Horn of Africa, and the rest of the world, can be ended; that the human-caused catastrophe of Katrina will not occur again; that the fields and forests of Haiti will blossom, grow abundant grain and fruit again; and that every other plundered, polluted and depleted place will do likewise. And it is a faith that assures us we can truly transform ourselves and the world, and insure clean air, pure water, safe and nutritious food for everyone, and a free, just, secure, dignity-affirming and flourishing life and future for all the world.