



ANNUAL FOUNDER'S KWANZAA MESSAGE

"PRACTICING THE CULTURE OF KWANZAA:

LIVING THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES"

Los Angeles Sentinel, 12-25-14, p. A-6

DR. MAULANA KARENKA

AT THE heart and soul of the celebration of Kwanzaa is *the ancient culture* which serves as its source and sanction, the *Nguzo Saba*, the Seven Principles, which are hub and hinge on which the holiday turns and *the creative, resourceful and resilient people* who embrace the culture and principles as a living practice and an essential way of understanding and asserting themselves as Africans in the world. Indeed, the celebration of Kwanzaa reminds us that our culture is our unique and equally valid and valuable way of being human in the world and it urges us to self-consciously celebrate and *practice our culture, live its highest principles* and pass this sacred legacy on to the future generation.

This season of Kwanzaa, as we celebrate family, community and culture around the world and recommit ourselves to bringing and sustaining good in the world, we find ourselves deeply involved in the continuing quest and struggle for justice for our people. Indeed, it is an ongoing struggle to free ourselves and be ourselves as Black people, as an African people, and live the secure, good, fulfilling and meaningful lives we all want and deserve. This year in the midst of a rising tide of resistance against police violence, general systemic violence, and racial and social injustice, we remember and reaffirm Kwanzaa's ancient and modern origins and the cultural views, values and practices which undergird and inform this global pan-African celebration. For they offer us excellent ways forward on the upward paths of our ancestors and culture.

Kwanzaa has its earliest origins in the ancient first fruit or first harvest celebrations of Africa and is thus, a time of remembrance, reflection and recommitment, and of focus on the cooperative creation and sharing of good in the world. The modern origins of Kwanzaa

are in the Black Freedom Movement and are informed by conversations and activities around freedom, self-determination, justice, cultural grounding, cultural revolution, return to the African source for models of human excellence and achievement and stress on righteous and relentless struggle to free ourselves.

Thus, the original and enduring language of the *Nguzo Saba* and *Kawaida* philosophy call for "striving, struggling, building, developing and sustaining" in the interests of our people and the world. Rightly read and reflected on deeply, the *Nguzo Saba* reveal a rich array of cultural values—especially emphases on life, community, culture, spiritual and ethical grounding, and the ethics of struggle for good for ourselves and the world. And as cultural values and practices, they reflect the way we conceive and live our lives; build and nurture our relationships; understand and carry out our obligations, decide on and do our work; and determine, plan and wage our struggles.

The principle of *Umoja* (Unity) teaches and cultivates in us an active commitment to a caring togetherness in our families and communities as African people. It fosters a genuine sense of kinship and shared interests of common good with other humans and calls for a special solidarity with other oppressed and struggling peoples in righteous resistance in the world. And it urges respect for the sacredness and interrelatedness of life, a profound sense of oneness with the world and an ethical responsibility for its well-being and flourishing.

The principle of *Kujichagulia* (Self-determination) reaffirms the right and responsibility of each people to determine their own destiny and daily lives, speak their own special cultural truth and make their own

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unique contribution to reconceiving and reconstructing society and the world. And it commits us to mutual respect for all persons as possessors of dignity and divinity entitled to equal rights and treatment to shared goods of the world and for each people and culture as a unique and equally valid and valuable way of being human in the world.

The principle of *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility) teaches us that we are each and all responsible for building the life we want to live and the caring community, just society and good world we want to live in and leave for future generations. It calls on us to engage the problems of our brothers and sisters as our own and to solve them together and to recognize we are responsible to and for each other in our shared work and struggle to bring and sustain good in the world.

The principle of *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics) teaches us an ethics of shared work and wealth and the good and rightfulness of the cooperative creation and sharing of the good of the world. It calls on us to give rightful respect and just treatment to workers and due consideration and care to the poor and vulnerable; to care for the environment and resist corporate and other plundering, pollution and depletion of the earth.

The principle of *Nia* (Purpose) commits us to work for the realization of the collective vocation and ancient African ethical imperative found in the *Odu Ifa* to bring good in the world. For it is written, we humans are divinely chosen to bring good in the world and must choose to be chosen, and act in ways worthy of the divine choice and assignment to constantly bring good in the world. Moreover, as Marcus Garvey taught, we must restore Africa and African people to their proper

place as “a bright star among the constellation of nations in the world”.

The principle of *Kuumba* (Creativity) teaches us to do all we can in the way we can in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it. Thus, the ancient Maatian ethical imperative of *serudj ta* calls on us to be responsive to and responsible for the well-being of the world and all in it. In a word, we are to raise up what is in ruins; repair what is damaged; rejoin what is severed; replenish what is depleted; set right what is wrong; strengthen what is weakened; and make flourish that which is fragile and undeveloped.

The principle of *Imani* (Faith) teaches us to embrace the beautiful and unbreakable faith of our forefathers and foremothers who believed in the good and its eventual triumph, and who linked their faith to hard work, their hope to righteous struggle, and their prayers to transformative practice. It is a faith founded and forged in millennia of righteous and relentless struggle and tested and tempered in times of increased oppression, seeming hopelessness and delayed victories and setbacks that would have defeated those less steadfast and determined. But this faith shelters no illusions, and knows from insight and experience that practice proves and makes possible everything and that only righteous and relentless struggle will redraw the map of human history that leads to a hard-won world of kindness and caring, mutual respect, justice, peace, well-being, security, substantive freedom and rightful flourishing. And thus, it is on us, to hold our ground, build on and expand our gains and continue to push the battlelines and lives of our people ever forward.

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