



**“BUILDING RIGHTEOUS RELATIONSHIPS:
ENDING UNRIGHTEOUS DEALINGS”**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Having just past the month of March in which so much of our interest and attention was rightfully turned toward the ways, wonder and well-being of women, it is important, even imperative, that a serious conversation be continued about the quality of male/female relations, especially concerning strengthening and building righteous relationships and ending unrighteous dealings among us. And this is so not because we are confronted constantly with stereotypical new and old media images and indictments of relational violence with all its personal and racial implications. Nor is it to respond to the feigned and hypocritical concern of the dominant society whose record of violence is as early as its apocalyptic founding in Native America and as recent as its rampage in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya; its criminal negligence and continuing injustice in New Orleans and Haiti; and the daily and devastating racism it imposes routinely in various visible and camouflaged forms.

Rather, we concern ourselves with these vital issues because of the standards we set for ourselves, because of our ongoing need to build and strengthen righteous relationships, and because violence and unrighteous dealings can play no part in them. Indeed, whatever else is argued and asserted elsewhere, the abundant data of our history and culture and the overwhelming evidence of our daily lives suggests that the quality of Black male/female relations determines the health and wholeness of our families and community and defines the course and content of our future.

This was one of the central contentions and concerns of the Million Man March/Day of Absence as outlined in its *Mission Statement*. Indeed, we called on Black men to stand up and take the initiative and responsibility for repairing, rebuilding and

strengthening our relationships, families and community. And we asserted that “In doing this, we self-consciously emphasize the *priority need* of Black men to stand up and assume this new and expanded responsibility without denying or minimizing the equal rights, role and responsibility of Black women in the life and struggle of our people”. On the contrary, the initiative was and remains directed toward reaffirming the equal dignity and rights of the Black woman and the indispensability of her presence and full-participation in all things of importance in life, love and struggle.

We asserted that “Our priority call to Black men to stand up...is based on the realization that the strength and resourcefulness of the family and the liberation of the people require it”, and that many of the problems for our families and our people as a whole are tied to the Black man’s stumbling, falling and staying down. This is the meaning of the statement “that some of the most acute problems facing the Black community within are those posed by Black males who have not stood up” for whatever reason.

For whether we talk about domestic violence, the lumpen life of gang and street subcultures, absent and uncaring fathers, the decline of two-parent families, and bleak education and employment futures, the Black men who have not stood up in righteous and responsible ways are deeply implicated. Likewise, on the positive side, “the caring and responsible father in the home; the responsible and future-focused male youth; security in and of the community; the quality of male/female relations; and the family’s capacity to avoid poverty and push the lives of its members forward, all depend on Black men’s standing up”. Clearly, many of us have done just that,

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but there remains so many still to be reached and raised up.

A primary responsibility for raising up the irresponsible, weak or wayward brother, we rightfully place on the shoulders of the conscious and committed Black man. As we said, “in the context of a real and principled brotherhood, those of us who have stood up, must challenge others to stand also and that unless and until Black men *stand up*, Black men and women cannot *stand together* and accomplish the tasks before us”. None of this is to suggest that Black women have no major role or responsibility in building the righteous relationships and strong families we all want and deserve. On the contrary, the project is an *ujima* one, one of collective work and responsibility, and one that will confront and change the social as well as personal conditions that foster and feed on the negative factors that infect and undermine the health and wholeness of our relationships.

And both men and women must not only struggle to refrain from all negative behavior, but also share responsibility and work to conceive and create day-by-day the shared goodness that enriches our relationships and expands our lives. For, the indispensable partnership we seek to establish and sustain must be a righteous relationship in which respect is mutual and mandatory; truthfulness and trust are deeply rooted’ and the understanding and treatment of each other as sacred is evident and demonstrated daily in countless ways. Moreover, we as men, women and moral agents must always start with critical self-assessment, otherwise we end up caught in the counterproductive practice of mutual indictment and recrimination. Indeed,

we must make sure we ourselves are walking in the righteous and upward ways of our ancestors and culture, constantly bringing forth the best of what it means to be African man and woman in the world.

The word “righteous” is used here not in a narrow religious sense, but in an expansive moral sense, meaning genuinely good, exhibiting obvious excellence in character and conduct, as for example when we say “a person is a righteous sister or a righteous brother”. Thus, a righteous relationship is a genuinely good relationship, defined by several ethical aspects which appear as both necessary and normal. These include mutual respect, quality communication, trust, faithfulness, and shared responsibility in love, life and struggle, and always the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles): *Umoja* (Unity), *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination), *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility), *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics), *Nia* (Purpose), *Kuumba* (Creativity), and *Imani* (Faith).

But the hub and hinge on which everything turns is the uncompromisable principle of mutual respect. For any real and righteous relationship calls for a principled togetherness, a sense of oneness rooted in a profound respect for each other as bearers of dignity and divinity, i.e., as sacred and thus secure against devaluation, violation and degradation. Anything less will not create that sought-after context in which we speak truth, do justice, conscientiously avoid evil and injury to each other, and righteously practice care and loving kindness as not only *necessary*, but also *normal* in the way we live our lives and look forward to our future.

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