



**LIFE LESSONS OF HISTORY:  
OUR ANCESTORS OF ANCIENT EGYPT**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

At the center of our celebration of our history is recognition of the fruitful resources it offers us in both learning and life and our conscious commitment to pay rightful homage to our ancestors, those unbuckling bridges of righteous, resistant and resourceful men and women who carried us over troubled and treacherous waters and gave us the foundation and framework to go forward and flourish. Here it is important to realize that our history and the awesome legacy our ancestors left us do not begin in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia or even New England, but in ancient Africa, home of the elders of humanity and the fathers and mothers of human civilization. In this regard, Cheikh Anta Diop has taught us the importance of recovering and reconstructing the legacy of ancient Egypt, Africa's premier classical civilization, in order to "reconcile African and human history, create a new body of human sciences and renew African culture."

Of all the contributions ancient Egypt has made to the disciplines of human knowledge, none is more important and enduring than the moral and spiritual legacy it has left us and the world. It is of value to note, however, that I am ever mindful and profoundly appreciative of the moral and spiritual foundation our father and mother gave our brothers and sisters and me. It is our parents, who first taught us the non-negotiable need and ethical obligation to speak truth, do justice, shun evil and share good, and be kind and considerate, especially to those less capable, less fortunate and less favored. Indeed, they taught us it was how we treated each other and again especially "the least among us"

that determines our worthiness before God and among men and women and our worthiness of the promise of eternal life.

We understood these core principles as the practice of the Christianity of our people. For we thought that, although they used the same name, Whites did church, religion and human relations differently for their own unchristian reasons of race and culture. But we never knew, as I would later learn and as America's pioneering Egyptologist would concede, that "It is now quite evident that the ripe social and moral development of mankind in the Nile Valley, which is three thousand years older than that of the Hebrews, contributed essentially to the formation of the Hebrew literature we call the Old Testament," and of course, the New Testament also. Indeed he said, "our moral heritage, therefore, derives from a wider *human* past enormously older than the Hebrews, and it has come *through* the Hebrews to us rather than *from* them." As his study reveals and Diop's work reaffirms in scholarly detail, the central source from which this heritage evolves is the ancient African civilization of Kemet (Egypt).

Thus, in spite of the unjust and relentless religious demonization of ancient Egypt and parallel willful and grossly uninformed denials of its vital contribution to the intellectual and moral development of humankind, Kemet has provided the world with some of its most important moral and spiritual concepts. And it is always good to remember and reflect on them and engage them in addressing our most important and urgent issues.

Indeed, in these times and this society where dogs have become children of choice

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and troubled and alienated youth slaughter each other in streets, schools and on college campuses, and many parents play only the limited role of doting ATM's, Kemet's teachings on our obligations to our children and future generations offer needed moral insight and instruction. The *Husia*, the sacred text of ancient Egypt, says that we should cherish our children, but also challenge them to do *Maat* (rightness, good) in the world, that we should "teach them the righteous ways of the ancestors" and "do for them all that is good." Moreover, it says "Everyone teaches as s/he acts." Therefore, "Set a good example; Uphold Maat and your children will thrive." Indeed, "the result of doing good deeds is a fortune which children will find afterwards."

In this context where official killing is passed off as capital punishment and still considered civilized, and the country practices and tries to legalize torture and wages war based on fantasies of chosen race and religion and an imperialistic addiction to superpower thuggery and theft, Kemet's teaching on the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of life and the rightness and reward of peace are refreshing. It is ancient Egypt, in the *Husia*, who first taught that humans are bearers of divinity and dignity, that "humans are the images of God" and that they have an inherent worthiness which is transcendent, equal and inalienable. And concerning taking life or experimenting on humans, "It is not permitted to do such things to the noble flock (images) of God." Furthermore, the *Husia* says "Do not terrorize people" or plunder. Rather, "speak truth, do justice" and "plan to live in peace

and what is to be given (or shared) will come of itself."

In a country where poverty is blamed on the poor, and let's not forget where hurricane victims of a devalued and inconvenient color are left to die or rescue themselves from flooded houses, buildings, streets, rooftops, overpasses and overcrowded "holding pens" called coliseums while those in charge go off to dinner and ask not to be disturbed, the ancient African teaching that the moral measure of society is how we treat the most vulnerable among us offers a much-needed alternative understanding and way of being human in the world. Indeed, the *Husia* teaches that we are to give "food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked and a boat to cross over to those who have none." We also are to be "an advocate for the wretched, a protector of the weak, a supporter of the poor and an ally of the oppressed."

Finally, in a world where genocide in Darfur, the bludgeoning of Haiti, and the brutal collective punishment and imprisonment of the whole Palestinian people is met with shameful and self-indicting silence, the *Husia* teaches us that we must "stand up in the midst of silence," injustice and oppression in the world, and "bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place (especially) among those who have no voice." Moreover, we are to "seek after that which is good for the future," striving constantly to repair and remake the world (*serudj ta*), ever mindful in all we do that "everyday is a donation to eternity and even one hour is a contribution to the future."

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