



ANNUAL FOUNDER'S KWANZAA MESSAGE—2017
“PRACTICING THE PRINCIPLES OF KWANZAA:
REPAIRING, RENEWING AND REMAKING OUR WORLD”

Los Angeles Sentinel, 12-21-17, p.A6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

PART I. OF ALL THE RICH, INSTRUCTIVE, UPLIFTING and expansive ways to express the central meaning and message of Kwanzaa, none is more vital or valuable than our seeing and embracing it as a season and celebration of creating and sharing good in the world. Even Kwanzaa's most essential definition as a celebration of family, community and culture, is a celebration of the shared good in and of family, community and culture, and ultimately what all this means for the good of the world. This derives from a righteous reading and emulation of the ancient African model and practice of cultivating, harvesting, and sharing the first fruit of field and forest, i.e., life-sustaining good in the world. It is an ancient model rooted in cooperative agricultural practices which taught us the enduring value of our sowing seeds of goodness everywhere, of cultivating them with loving care, and harvesting and sharing the products in community binding and building ways.

An African American and pan-African holiday, Kwanzaa is, in both conception and practice, a world-encompassing celebration. It is world-encompassing in that it is practiced by millions of Africans throughout the global African community. And it is world-encompassing in its roots in ancient African agricultural celebrations and their concern with the earth and their conception of humans inter-related with the world and their responsibility to it.

Although people tend to believe that Kwanzaa is essentially a modern holiday founded in 1966 by this author, actually it has two origins: ancient and modern. In its origins in agriculture celebrations, Kwanzaa is as old as agriculture itself and the celebrations of the first fruits. Indeed, it can be said that Kwanzaa is older than agriculture, that is to say, older than large-scale planned and organized farming. For Kwanzaa, as a first fruit celebration, is rooted in the natural cycle of the season when the first fruits of tree, bush, plant and vine appeared and were harvested by our people; and our people gathered together to celebrate the good harvest, to give thanks for the good earth and the abundant blessings from

it, and to recommit themselves to protect, preserve and care for the earth in life-affirming and world-respecting ways.

Kwanzaa also has modern origins rooted in the Black Freedom Movement of the 1960's. It is part of the liberation struggle to free ourselves and be ourselves. Thus, it is an act of freedom, of self-determination, for it was created and declared without input or permission of the dominant society. Moreover, it was a defiant act to celebrate our African selves, our families, community and culture in dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and liberating ways. It was also a liberating act of *sankofa*, cultural recovery and remembrance of ancient visions and values directed toward grounding and enriching our lives and advancing the interests of our liberation struggle. For again, as always, it was a central part of our people's struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves culturally as well as politically.

Thus, Kwanzaa, standing in the midst of a dynamic and ever-pressing present, looks back while facing forward to ground and orient ourselves, measure our thoughts and practices of today by the best of our past thought and practice and develop the most ethical, effective and expansive ways for moving forward. And in today's world with such packaged and peddled fear and confusion, structural poverty, severe suffering and oppressions of all kinds which violate the dignity and rights of human beings and the integrity of the earth, a solid cultural and moral ground on which to stand is imperative. Thus, our world, in both the natural and social sense, while not irretrievably broken, is severely damaged and in need of an ongoing repair, renewal and remaking in the most ethically sensitive, profound and promising ways.

The Kwanzaa theme for 2017 (6257) “Practicing the Principles of Kwanzaa: Repairing, Renewing and Remaking Our World”, foregrounds and focuses on the ancient African ethical imperative of *serudj ta*, which means *to repair, renew and remake our world, making it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it*. The concept *serudj*

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ta, a Maatian (ancient Egyptian) principle and practice finds its modern reaffirmation in the eminent African American education and institution-builder Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune's challenge to us all when she says, “We must remake the world. The task is nothing less than that”. And it is also reaffirmed in the distinguished Martinican/Algerian psychiatrist and revolutionary theorist, Frantz Fanon's challenge to us to “start a new history of humankind”, to “reconsider the question of humanity”, “turn over a new leaf...workout new concepts and try to set afoot a new human being”.

Likewise, it finds reaffirmation in the Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and environmentalist Dr. Wangari Maathai's challenge to us to “assist the earth, to heal her wounds and in the process, heal our own”. This, she says “requires a new consciousness where we understand that we belong to the larger family of life on earth”. And this principle and practice is also reflected in the challenge to us given by the Imhotepian master of many disciplines, Dr. George Washington Carver, botanist, agronomist, chemist, chemurgist (biological engineer), artist, conservationist and environmentalist. He urges us to care for the earth, share its abundance, “to take your share of the world and let others take their share” and to listen to and “learn the various language spoken by all forms of nature (around) us” for the good of the world and all in it. Indeed, Dr. Carver says, “the singing of the birds, the buzzing bees, the opening flower and the buddy trees, along with other forms of animate and inanimate matter, all have marvelous creation stores to tell”.

Our ancestors taught that we damage the world and all in it not only by what we do wrong, but also by what we fail to do right. And this injuring and wounding of the world and all in it, requires that we

constantly repair, renew and remake the world, i.e., *serudj ta*, making it more beautiful and beneficial than when we inherited it. Indeed, our ancestors posed this process as an ongoing moral, social and environmental obligation and practice. It is, they taught, an ethical imperative: to raise up that which is in ruins; to repair that which is damaged; to rejoin that which is separated; to replenish that which is lacking; to strengthen that which is weakened; to set right that which is wrong; and to make flourish that which is insecure and undeveloped.

Our task this Kwanzaa and always is to ask ourselves, within the overarching framework of the *Nguzo Saba*, the Seven Principles, how do we repair renew and remake our world and develop strategies and practices to achieve this? In other words, how do we face and deal with the social and environmental challenges, problems and issues that confront us, as persons, peoples and human beings in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways at this critical juncture of history.

THESE GRAVE ISSUES INCLUDE: genocide; group and state terrorism; war and warmongering; homelessness; personal insecurity; hunger, famine and food insecurity; military occupation; climate change; environmental damage and degradation; denials of human rights; the lack and inadequacy of health care; poverty and oppression of various forms? And how do *each* and *all of us* participate in building the good community, society and world we all want and deserve to live in? And again, the solution Kwanzaa offers is serious and sustained practice of 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).

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