



FOUNDER'S ANNUAL KWANZAA MESSAGE

“KWANZAA, US AND THE WELL-BEING OF THE WORLD: A COURAGEOUS QUESTIONING”

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

The celebration and season of Kwanzaa is a deeply meaningful and special time of remembrance, reflection and recommitment for us as a people throughout the world African community. It is a time of *appreciative remembrance* of our ancestors, great and ordinary, of the models of human excellence, achievement and possibility they offer, and of the enduring legacy of the good they left in the world. It is too, a time of *sustained reflection* on the moral and expansive meaning of being African in the world, especially on how we understand and live our lives and engage the critical issues confronting our community, society and the world. And Kwanzaa is also a time of *self-conscious recommitment* to honor the awesome ancestral legacy left us by preserving and expanding it; to uphold the time-resistant moral and cultural values that ground and guide us in our daily lives; and to follow and hold fast to the ancient African ethical mandate found in the *Odu Ifa* to constantly bring good in the world and not let any good be lost.

At the heart of this ethical imperative to bring and sustain good in the world is our ancestors' and our profound concern with the well-being of the world in both the natural and social sense. This comes not only out of Kwanzaa's ancient roots in agricultural harvest celebrations and the accompanying respect for the earth and its life-sustaining role, but also from a cosmic conception of human beings, and the resultant moral obligation to care for the world and all in it as part of what it means to be a responsible and worthy human being.

At the center of this concern and care must be a constant and courageous questioning first about how we understand and assert ourselves in the world and what this means. Thus, the Day of Meditation during Kwanzaa which is the culminating point and place of our

remembrance, reflection and recommitment calls on us to sit down, think deeply about ourselves in the world, and measure ourselves in the mirror of the best of our culture to determine where we stand. We are to do this by raising, reflecting on and answering three basic questions. And these are: who am I; am I really who I am; and am I all I ought to be? Each and every one of us must ask these questions on this day, but in a larger sense, ask every day and at every moment of our lives. For they are centering questions, questions of identity, purpose and direction; questions of anchoring principles and compelling practice to bring and sustain good in our lives and in the world.

Courageous questioning also, of necessity, is a rightful and righteous calling into question, offering a severe and sustained criticism of the evil, wrong and unjust in the world, and seeking corrective and alternative answers without fear of consequences or deference to convention, customs, hierarchies or oppressive structures of various kinds. Indeed, Kwanzaa came into being, courageously questioning the established order of things and pursuing ways to affirm, celebrate and sustain ourselves, our history, culture, identity, dignity and right to freedom as a people. It came into being in the midst of the Black Freedom Movement as an act of self-determination and as a self-conscious contribution to a conversation about reconceiving the world from an African-centered perspective and to the struggle to radically transform society.

Kwanzaa was not intended to be nor must ever be symbolic association with our culture, but must draw from, build on, and celebrate and put forth the best ideas and practices of our culture. The moral message and concern of our culture is ancient, clear, compelling and continuous and we must constantly ask and answer the three questions of Kwanzaa and

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Kawaida philosophy through a self-conscious practice that defines who we are, reaffirms us in our most dignity-affirming identity, and bears witness to our humble efforts to become and be the best of what it means to be African and human in and for the world.

Central, even indispensable, to this is the hearing and response to the voice and needs of the vulnerable—the ill and elderly, the widow and orphan, the poor, prisoner and troubled teen, the suffering and oppressed, the grieving and those grasping desperately for a different and more righteous and rewarding way to assert themselves in the world. And to honor the world-encompassing conception of ourselves and our responsibility, we must answer the call of our injured earth, constantly subject to plunder, pollution and depletion, and dare to practice the ancient ethical obligation of *serudj ta*—to heal, repair, remake and renew the world, making it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.

This ancient and honored call is rooted in the profound respect for the scared and the Transcendent, the rights and dignity of the human person, the well-being and flourishing of family and community, the reciprocal solidarity of human beings, and the health and wholeness of the world. It reaches from the Seba, the ancient moral teachers of ancient Egypt, to social justice advocates and activists of our time.

It is from Khunanpu, the peasant in the *Husia*, calling for a justice that gives and sustains life and is the true balancing of the land. It is in the Husitic teaching that we are not to turn a deaf ear to truth or a blind eye to injustice, but rather bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place, especially among those who have no voice.

It is found in Harriet Tubman's commitment to an indivisible and shared freedom; Frederick Douglass' discourse on the indispensability of struggle; Malcolm X's call for a new logic and language of liberation; and Mary McLeod Bethune's challenge to us to dare remake the world. And it is in the expansive message and meaning 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). In all this is expressed the beauty and expansive message and meaning of our culture, born of a long history of work and struggle to repair and make the world good, to end suffering and oppression, to do and demand justice, seek and speak truth, and point toward a new history and hope for humankind, so that we will always understand and assert ourselves in dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving ways.

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