



Annual Founder's Kwanzaa Message
**"KWANZAA AND THE WELL-BEING OF THE WORLD:
LIVING AND UPLIFTING THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES"**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 12-24-20, p.A1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

6260 | DECEMBER 20 | 2020

| *H*ERI ZA KWANZAA, HAPPY KWANZAA TO African people everywhere throughout the global African community. We bring you Kwanzaa greetings of celebration, solidarity, and continuing struggle for good in the world. Kwanzaa is a special season and celebration of our sacred and expansive selves as African people. It is a unique pan-African time of remembrance, reflection, reaffirmation, and recommitment. It is a special and unique time to remember and honor our ancestors; to reflect on what it means to be African and human in the most expansive and meaningful sense; and to reaffirm the sacred beauty and goodness of ourselves and the rightfulness of our relentless struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves and contribute to an ever-expanding realm of freedom, justice and caring in the world. And Kwanzaa is a special and unique time and pan-African space to recommit ourselves to our highest values that teach us to live our lives, do our work, and wage our struggles in dignity-affirming, life-enhancing, and world-preserving ways as we continue forward on the upward paths of our honored ancestors.

But our celebration this year is, of necessity, different, even though it is no less needed and necessary. For we gather together this year to celebrate Kwanzaa in the midst of the devastating pandemic of COVID-19 which continues to cause great loss of life, widespread disabling illness, economic havoc, immense suffering, and a health crisis of monumental proportions. The infectious and deadly nature of the disease has compelled us to practice physical distancing, to limit face-to-face contact everywhere and this has taken a heavy toll on us as persons and a people.

Thus, we are compelled to reconceive our choreographies of closeness, to rethink the familiar rhythms of our daily lives, and to realign our lives to deal with the new realities we face. And we must do this, our people, without conceding or compromising our relational closeness, and losing the soul-defining essence of who we are. Moreover, we continue to suffer, not only from the pandemic of the coronavirus, but also from the persistent and pervasive pathology of oppression in all its vicious and various forms.

And still our history and culture and the demands of our times, call and compel us to be resolute and relentless in our resistance to oppression and resilient and resourceful in our struggles to recover and care for each other in righteously African ways. Here our poet laureate, Gwen Brooks, reminds us we will weather this winter as others before. For we are the people who constantly "conduct (our) blooming in the noise and whip of the whirlwind." We who have survived the Holocaust of enslavement, colonialism, imperialism, and numerous hurricanes of history, will, as Howard Thurman challenged us to do, "ride the storm and remain intact." For as Nannie Burroughs reassured us as a people, "We specialize in the wholly impossible."

The conception and practice of Kwanzaa is rooted in both ancient African harvest celebrations and the Black Freedom Movement and thus it calls for and urges an active and ongoing commitment to African and human good and the well-being of the world. This year's annual theme is "Kwanzaa and the Well-Being of the World: Living and Uplifting the Seven Principles." It seeks to call rightful attentiveness to the immediate and urgent need to be actively concerned and caring about the

well-being of the world. For as Kwame Nkrumah taught us, the affairs of Africa cannot be isolated from the world as a whole and the united world African community must "become one of the greatest forces for good in the world."

And the crisis and challenge are, not only the daily and destructive assaults on the earth and its ecosystems, its soil, fields, forests, waters and waterways, its air and atmosphere, its animals and their habitats, and the resultant disease and devastation, but also the domination, deprivation and degradation of humans themselves by systems of interrelated oppression. This results in unfreedom, un-healthiness and illness, homelessness, loss and lack of income, police violence, food insecurity, and lack of access to pure water, income and quality education and other necessities of life. And this must be resisted and overcome.

For in such a context of devastation and oppression, there is no real and reliable remedy except resistance, and serious and sustained struggle dedicated to African and human good and the well-being of the world and all in it. And Kwanzaa and Kawaida philosophy, out of which Kwanzaa and the Nguzo Saba were created, pose the Nguzo Saba, The Seven Principles, as a foundational way forward in this awesome and urgent challenge to each and all of us. Indeed, the Nguzo Saba offer us an African value system that provides morally grounded guidance for our lives and living. They serve as a mirror and measure of our living up to our highest and most beneficial values.

The First Principle, *Umoja* (Unity), begins with ourselves, but expands outward to include others and the world. It reaffirms Anna Julia Cooper's assertion that "We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness of all special favoritism whether of race, sex, country or condition." *Umoja* urges a moral sensitivity and caring kinship with each other, other human beings, all living beings, and with the

world itself. For as our ancestors taught, we are not only human beings (*watu*), but also world beings (*walimwengu*). And thus, they taught in the sacred text, *Odu Ifa*, that we must "take responsibility for the world and do good for the world."

The Second Principle, *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination), teaches us we must think and act for ourselves and define ourselves by the good we choose and do in the world. It speaks to our right and responsibility to be ourselves and free ourselves and make our own unique contribution to the radical reimagining and remaking of our societies and the world. And *Kujichagulia* stresses our moral obligation to reaffirm and support this right for others, especially those oppressed and struggling for freedom, those wronged and injured and struggling for justice, and those disempowered and struggling for power over their destiny and daily lives.

The Third Principle, *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility) speaks to the ethical obligation and transformative practice of building together the good world we all want and deserve to live in and leave as a rightful legacy for future generations. It teaches us to recognize and respect the common good in and of the world, to cultivate and harvest it together and practice an ethics of sharing this and other goods of the world.

The Fourth Principle, *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics), lifts up and promotes the values of shared work and shared wealth; the right of all people to a decent and dignity-affirming life, and thus the right of all people to a just and equitable share of the common goods of the world. Indeed, as Wangari Maathai taught, "We must now rethink our relationship with the living world, (and) the way we manage resources." And we must resolutely and continuously resist mindless consumerism and the plunder, pollution and depletion of the world by corporations and countries who ride roughshod over the earth and the vulnerable peoples in it.

The Fifth Principle, *Nia* (Purpose), teaches us the collective vocation of constantly building and developing the capacity of our people to be ourselves and free ourselves to pursue an expansive good and come into the fullness of ourselves. And it reaffirms the interrelatedness of the pursuit of African and human good and the well-being of the world. For it remembers and reaffirms the sacred teachings of our ancestors in the *Husia*, that the good we do for others and the world we are also doing for ourselves. For we are building the moral community and good world we all want and deserve to live in.

The Sixth Principle, *Kuumba* (Creativity), uplifts and promotes the practice of the ancient African ethical principle of *serudj ta*, the moral obligation to repair, renew and remake the world, making it more beneficial and beautiful than we inherited it. And it interprets this as both a social and environmental practice. For oppression is damaging and destructive to us and others as well as to the world. And as a moral and social vanguard, we must see ourselves in our ultimate agency, as injured physicians, who will heal, repair, renew and remake ourselves in the process and practice of repairing, renewing, and remaking the world.

For as Mary McLeod Bethune taught "Our task is to remake the world. It is nothing less than this."

THE SEVENTH PRINCIPLE, *IMANI* (FAITH), teaches us to believe in the good and our capacity to achieve it, share it, and leave it as a worthy legacy for those who come afterward. Let us have faith, then, in the sacred teachings of our ancestors which say to us across millennia: "Let's do things with joy for surely humans have been divinely chosen to bring good in the world" and this is the fundamental mission and meaning of human life. Thus, chosen by history and heaven to constantly strive to bring good in the world, we must audaciously and ceaselessly dare to do so. So, let's continue the struggle. Keep the faith. Hold the line. Love and respect our people and each other. Seek and speak truth. Do and demand justice. Be constantly concerned with the well-being of the world and all in it. And dare help rebuild the overarching movement that prefigures and makes possible the good world we all want and deserve to live in and leave as a legacy worthy of the name and history African. ▲

DR. MAULANA KARENGA, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture* and *Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis*, www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org; www.MaulanaKarenga.org, www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org; www.Us-Organization.org.