



**THE ETHICAL IMPERATIVE OF SERUDJ TA:
TO REPAIR, RENEW AND REMAKE THE WORLD**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 01-27-22, p.C1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

THE ANCIENT AFRICAN ETHICAL IMPERATIVE of *serudj ta*, to repair, renew and remake the world, remains as relevant today and perhaps more urgent for us and all human beings, given the times in which we now live and the damage, devastation and dangers we sense and see all around us. This sober and sobering assessment is drawn from a close, depthful and continuous reading and reflection on the conditions of the world and the *Husia*, the sacred texts of our ancestors in the Nile Valley civilization of Kemet, i.e., ancient Egypt.

It was during my studies for my second doctorate that I developed and formally introduced the concept of *serudj ta*, in an 804-page dissertation titled *Maat, The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt: A Study in Classical African Ethics* (1994). As with my philosophy *Kawaida*, the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles), and *Kwanzaa*, I first shared, discussed and further developed the concept with advocates (members) of my organization Us, an invaluable circle of intellectual collaborators, co-workers and co-combatants in our varied projects and practice of striving and struggling for African and human good and the well-being of the world.

In my book, *Maat*, I posed *serudj ta* and continue to pose it as an ethical imperative and practice for our times in a relational, societal and environmental sense. For it addresses relational alienation and antagonism, societal structures and policies of oppression, and environmental degradation through human plunder, pollution and depletion of earth, waters and sky. The term *serudj ta* appears in Pharaoh Ramses III's enumeration of his good deeds (*akhu*) for the Divine, earth and human beings. He says as one of these good deeds, "I restored the

whole land (*serudj ta*) with trees and vegetation." Moreover, he makes these declarations of doing good in the world in the midst of restorations of temples, walls, groves and the city itself. Also, he says that he restored the land to rightful order where it was laid waste. And elsewhere, he relates as part of his *akhu*, his restorative actions, that he brought peace, freed prisoners, ensured security and shared abundance.

Given the Maatian conception of the interrelatedness of the Divine, the natural and the social, these good deeds, this doing of good in and for the world, are not only physical acts, but also moral and spiritual acts of repairing, renewing and remaking the world. In modern Kawaida Maatian ethics, building on this ancient concept and practice, it is put forth as an ethical imperative to repair, renew and remake our relations, society and the world in the interest of African and human good and the well-being of the world. In a word, it is an ongoing moral, social and ecological or environmental practice.

This coincides with *Kuumba* (Creativity), the Sixth Principle of the *Nguzo Saba*, which I authored years before, i.e., the moral imperative "to do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it." And as we know, we are, as Africans, human beings (*watu*), and world beings (*walimwengu*), and thus, our community is not only our local, national and world African community, but also our world human community. Thus, we are to work and struggle for good within both the small and large circles of our lives.

Using the language from the abundance of references in the *Husia*, the sacred

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texts of Kemet, Kawaida Maatian ethics poses as our duty in the practice of *serudj ta*: *to raise up what is in ruins; to repair what is damaged; to rejoin what is separated; to replenish what is depleted; to set right what is wrong; to strengthen what is weakened; and to make flourish that which is fragile, insecure and undeveloped.*

Clearly in repairing, renewing and remaking the world, we can't start overseas or in another city. Indeed, we cannot save humanity if we cannot and do not save ourselves. And we must do this self-saving not in isolation or achieve it fully before we act for others. For it is emphasis, not exclusiveness, we speak of here. Indeed, as Lady Ta Aset teaches us, we do good knowing that "the good we do for others we are also doing for ourselves." For we are building the good, reciprocal, caring and supporting community, society and world we all want and deserve to live in. So, we must begin with ourselves but not end there. Thus, beginning and continuing emphasis must be placed on the quality of our own lives without neglecting what we can do for others to end the evil of poverty, suffering, aggression, war, injustice and oppression, and help build a new world of shared good and flourishing for all.

We must, then, begin by building ourselves, our families, our communities, and all our essential relationships as sites and sources of mutual respect, genuine caring, reciprocal support and shared goods of all kinds. And we must together, in small and large circles, develop not only ways to repair, renew and rebuild our relations with each other, but also to strengthen and expand our capacity to achieve full freedom, real justice, and the good and meaningful life. In a word, so we can be ourselves and free ourselves and come into the fullness of ourselves.

The Black Freedom Struggle, by any honest measure, has been a critical forma-

tive factor in the reconception and transformation of American society since our first contact with the colonialists, enslavers, segregationists, racists and others of the world's rogue gallery of oppressors. And we remain obligated to finish the unfinished and ongoing fight for freedom, justice, equality and other human goods. It is our legacy and as Nana Dr. Martin Luther King tells us, "This is our challenge and overwhelming responsibility." And the repair, renewal and remaking is not the "saving of the soul of America," but saving, securing, freeing and uplifting the peoples of America as a moral imperative, a material necessity and a central political goal.

Likewise, we are to honor the ancient African moral imperative "to bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place," especially among the voiceless and devalued, the disempowered, degraded and downtrodden, not only in society, but also in the world. Indeed, Nana Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune rightly reminds us of our *serudjic* duty to repair, renew and remake the world. She tells and teaches us in word and deed that "Our task is to remake the world. It is nothing less than this."

For clearly the problems in U.S. society are reflected in the same and similar problems in the world: issues of unnecessary and undeserved poverty and suffering; insecurity of persons and peoples; fractured and false claims of peace; continued enslavement and human and sex trafficking; the absence and inadequacy of healthcare and housing; unemployment, and the grossly immoral, unequal and inequitable distribution of personal, communal and public wealth; and ultimately the planetary threats and devastating results of environmental degradation: climate change, extreme weather events, drought and flood, famine and forced migration, and cycles of suffering that are severe

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and sustained among humans and also for the whole world and all in it.

It is in this context of great damage already done and continually being repeated and expanded that we must center and strengthen ourselves, recommit ourselves to our highest values and best practices as African persons and peoples, and actively embrace the awesome relational, societal and ecological task of repairing, renewing and remaking the world, ever conscious of our role as a key moral and social vanguard in this country and the world. And as the sacred texts say, we are to make the world more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it. For it is a legacy left us born of righteous and relentless struggle that we are obli-

gated to leave for those who come afterwards.

ut again, it is also a sacred good to be achieved for us now, so that even in our time and no matter in what land or place, we and all others can self-consciously participate in creating and living well in a radically repaired, renewed and remade world in a real moral, material and political sense. And we must engage this world-encompassing and world-transforming task remembering the sacred Husitic teachings of our ancestors that “every day is a donation to eternity and even one hour is a contribution to the future.”▲

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