



**PURSUING THE SEVEN-FOLD PATH OF BLACKNESS:  
PRACTICING PRINCIPLES OF LIFE AND STRUGGLE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**P**ART 1. AS WE CONTINUE TO MARK, celebrate and commemorate the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of our organization Us, 6205 | September 7 | 1965, I want to continue to draw from some of our early ideas and practices and discuss and demonstrate their current and enduring relevance. This is especially important for these troubled, troubling and trying times in which we live and die such undeserved deaths from both biological and social disease. For in this context of such pervasive oppression, there is no sanctuary for us outside ourselves and thus, we are our own sanctuary and source of self-conscious strength and continuing of struggle.

And in the midst of this devastating illness and ongoing racist oppression, as we say, *there is no remedy except resistance, no real testing except in struggle, and no reliable vaccine except a decisive victory that ends our oppression.* Thus, we must be self-consciously community and people focused, deeply committed and active in our caring and, resolute and unrelenting in our commitment to struggle until we achieve victory.

In dealing with life and any issue, we always move to the center of ourselves, into the depths of that which defines us, grounds us and serves as an infinitely rich and rewarding resource for the way we live our lives, do our work, and wage our struggles. We speak here of grounding in our culture, that ancient and ever flowing well-spring of life and goodness for us, if we learn it, embrace it and live it in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways. We are talking here about a life of Blackness, Africanness, as culture and consciousness. That is to say, self-conscious practice of principles that undergird, anchor and orient our lives and serves as an active means and inspiration for us to direct our lives toward good and expansive ends. Today, then, I want to pose a path of principle and practice called the Seven-Fold

Path of Blackness. It was to define Blackness in terms of our practice – how we actually live our lives, do our work and wage our struggles.

That Seven-Fold Path of Blackness is: Think Black, Talk Black, Act Black, Create Black, Buy Black, Vote Black, and Live Black. We begin with thinking Black. To think Black, African, is to think in culturally grounded, ethical, relational, communitarian, life-enhancing, dignity-affirming and world-preserving ways. It is to think good, positive and in uplifting and liberating ways. It is to think collectively as well as personally and to strive always to create and maintain a balance between the two.

It is to think of oneself as part of a larger whole relationally rich and with reciprocal responsibilities, to give what is given, return the good deed done, and the love and understanding shared. To think Black is to think deeply about the good of our people, human good and the well-being of the world. And to ask what can I, personally and together, do to bring, increase, and sustain good in the community, society and the world? And then dare to do it. It is to think of the past, present and future and commit ourselves *to know our past and honor it, engage the present and improve it, and imagine a whole new future and forge it in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways.*

Secondly, we say we must talk Black, talk African. Talk Black to our people is to talk all kinds of good to our people. So, talk truth, talk freedom, justice, love and caring. Talk possibility, power and righteous and relentless struggle to our people. Talk Black. Talk the beauty, goodness and inherent worthiness of Blackness, the people and the principles, the culture, and the self-conscious practice of it. Talk the dignity and divine image and endowment of Black people.

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Talk Black to our people. Talk to them in liberated and liberating ways, ways that free the heart and mind, and cause their spirits to soar and their will to become unbreakable in this good and beautiful, righteous and relentless struggle we wage to be ourselves and free ourselves, expand the realm of African and human good, and secure and ensure the well-being of all the world. Talk struggle to the people; expose the evil, injustice and vulnerability of the oppressor. Tell them he is as weak as he wants to be strong and that in the end, he will be defeated and a new history and hope for humanity will be brought into being.

Thirdly, we must act Black, always striving to be and become the best of ourselves. To act Black is more than a single act or a series of episodic acts. Rather, it is a self-conscious and persistent practice of doing good in the world. It is to engage this pursuit of goodness as an ethical imperative and an urgent and ongoing social need. And it is to constantly strive to be and become the best of ourselves by the good we do and share.

Here, to act Black, to act African, is to act within the Black value system of the *Nguzo Saba* which is essential to our struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves. For it offers values and views deeply rooted in African culture and represents and invites us to practice a communitarian African way of life. By this we mean, a way of life that stresses and seeks to strengthen communitarian togetherness as an anchoring principle in the way we understand and assert ourselves in the world. The stress on community reminds us that we come into being in relationship. And the quality of those

relations can either make our day or ruin it, either causes us to live and flourish, or fail and waste or lose our lives.

The *Nguzo Saba* teach us the principle and practice of *Umoja* (unity); *Kujichagulia* (self-determination); *Ujima* (collective work and responsibility); *Ujamaa* (cooperative economics); *Nia* (purpose); *Kuumba* (creativity); and *Imani* (faith) as the ancestors taught, faith in that which endures in the midst of that which is overthrown. And it calls on us to hold high the ancestral given light that lasts, i.e., our moral and spiritual principles, and pursue practices that make these living and transformative principles in our lives and the world.

**A**LSO, WE MUST CREATE BLACK, THAT IS TO say, create good and beauty and human possibility and promise in the world. Do *Kuumba*, do always as much as we can in the way we can in order to leave our community, and by extension the world, more beautiful and beneficial than when we inherited it. We must remember and practice the teachings of our ancestors in the *Odu Ifa* that says: if we are given birth, we must bring ourselves into being again. In a word, we must recreate ourselves out of the best of our cultural ideas and practices, making ourselves into the models and mirrors for the next generation as those before did for us. And we must always link this self-transformative practice with the struggle to repair, renew and remake the world as our foremother, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, taught and urged us.

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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.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org](http://www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org); [www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org](http://www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org);  
[www.MaulanaKarenga.org](http://www.MaulanaKarenga.org).