



## ANNUAL FOUNDER'S KWANZAA MESSAGE - 2019

### “LIVING KWANZAA AND THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES: AN ALL-SEASONS CELEBRATION AND PRACTICE OF THE GOOD”

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

EACH YEAR KWANZAA PROVIDES US WITH a special and unique time to see and celebrate ourselves as African people in beautiful, uplifting and liberating ways. But it also offers us a set of principles which, if practiced throughout the year, ensure that *Kwanzaa* and the *Nguzo Saba*, the Seven Principles, are not only subjects and references for a season, but also a lived and living tradition. Indeed, making *Kwanzaa* and the *Nguzo Saba* what Seba Malcolm called “a living reality” is made more compelling by their origins in a history and culture of righteous and relentless struggle by our people to bring and sustain good in the world.

*Kwanzaa*'s origins are both *ancient* and *modern* and both sources serve to urge us to constantly strive and struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves, to live good lives and to bring forth the best of what it means to be African and human as both a personal and social practice. *Kwanzaa*'s rootedness in ancient African first fruit or first harvest celebrations offers a framework of activities that are not simply seasonal, but are all-season practices of building family and community, preserving and expanding culture, and doing good in and for the world. For it is a people-focused, environmentally caring and morally concerned holiday dedicated to cultivating, harvesting and sharing good in the world. Also, *Kwanzaa* was conceived and developed in the Black Freedom Movement and was understood as part and parcel of that two-fold struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves. It was a struggle to be Black, to be African and to be free from domination, deprivation and degradation and to be free to live good, meaningful lives, bring good in the world and come into the fullness of ourselves.

*Kwanzaa*, then, is a time of serious and sustained remembrance, reflection and recommitment. And thus, it calls on us to sit down

and to meditate deeply on the awesome meaning and responsibility of being African in our community, society and the world. And it requires us to remember as Mary McLeod Bethune taught us that we are heirs and custodians of a great legacy and we must bear the glory, beauty and burden of that legacy with strength, dignity and determination.

This year's *Kwanzaa* theme is “Living *Kwanzaa* and the Seven Principles: An All-Seasons Celebration and Practice of the Good.” Implicit in the theme is the question of how we make *Kwanzaa* more than an annual celebration, a seasonal and episodic engagement with our culture and the beautiful, uplifting and liberating sense of ourselves it gives us? But embedded in the theme is the answer - it is by holding fast to the spirit and principles of *Kwanzaa* in the way we live our lives, do our work and wage our struggles to bring forth the best of ourselves and to bring and sustain good in the world.

This requires embracing the principles of *Kwanzaa* as a continuous and daily practice, to use and embrace them as moral imperatives, obligations born of our history, our struggle and an active concern about the current conditions of our lives, and the forging of a new and expansive future of maximum human freedom and flourishing. And as we embrace and practice these principles, we not only transform the conditions of our lives as a people in liberating ways, we also transform ourselves, expanding the human sense and moral substance of ourselves through dedication, discipline, sacrifice and achievement of the Good.

The principle of *Umoja* (Unity) asks and urges us to think relationally and act accordingly “to strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race” and by extension the whole world. For it teaches a deep

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sense of relatedness, togetherness and oneness in the world and a constant concern, work and struggle for common good and the well-being of the world and all in it.

The principle of *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination) asks and urges us “to define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves” and to respect the right of other peoples to do the same. It is a claim and commitment to freedom in its fullest and varied forms in dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving ways. It is about appreciating and speaking our special cultural truth to the world and bringing forth our own unique contribution to initiating a new history of humankind, as Frantz Fanon challenged us.

*Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility) calls on us “to build and maintain our community together and to make our brothers’ and sisters’ problems our problems and to solve them together.” It is a call for the cooperative creation of the good community, society and world we all want and must work and struggle for in varied and ultimately victorious ways.

*Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics) asks and urges us “to build and maintain our stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.” It puts forth the foundational principles and practices of shared work and shared wealth in the world. And it opposes the plunder, pollution and depletion of the shared resources of the earth and the monopoly of wealth for the few at the expense of the shared good of society and the world that belong to all in common.

The principle of *Nia* (Purpose) asks and urges us “to make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.” It is a call to greatness based in moral conceptions of ourselves, our needs and aspirations, and our obligation to place our

knowledge, resources and righteous and relentless efforts in the service of our people, the shared interest of humanity and the well-being of the world.

*Kuumba* (Creativity) calls on us “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 it reminds us that we belong to concentric circles of community, as members of the global African community, humanity and the world. Indeed, our ancestors called us in Swahili, not only *watu* – human beings, but also *walimwengu* – world beings. And they taught us the Maatian ethical imperative of *serudj ta*, to constantly repair, renew and remake the world, making it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it, and leaving it as a rich legacy for those who come after us.

**F**INALLY, *IMANI* (FAITH) REMINDS US OF THE indispensable foundation of confident, righteous and rewarding belief, calling on us “to believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our leaders, our teachers and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.” Indeed, there is no real, relevant or righteous moving forward without faith in our people. For parents, leaders, teachers and all others who are beautiful, good and essential to our lives are composite parts and representatives of our people. It is faith in our people and service to them that grounds our lives, gives meaning to our work and victorious movement to our struggle. And we must believe in the righteousness and victory of our people, regardless of delays and disappointments, setbacks, desertions and defections for reasons and excuses of endless kinds. For there is no substitute for freedom, no alternative to justice and no possibilities for a good life and future not forged in righteous, relentless and victorious struggle.

*Heri za Kwanzaa!!! (Happy Kwanzaa!!!)*

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