



ANNUAL FOUNDER'S KWANZAA MESSAGE—2017  
“PRACTICING THE PRINCIPLES OF KWANZAA:  
REPAIRING, RENEWING AND REMAKING OUR WORLD”

*Los Angeles Sentinel*, 12-21-17, p.A6

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**P**ART I. OF ALL THE RICH, INSTRUCTIVE, UPLIFTING and expansive ways to express the central meaning and message of Kwanzaa, none is more vital or valuable than our seeing and embracing it as a season and celebration of creating and sharing good in the world. Even Kwanzaa's most essential definition as a celebration of family, community and culture, is a celebration of the shared good in and of family, community and culture, and ultimately what all this means for the good of the world. This derives from a righteous reading and emulation of the ancient African model and practice of cultivating, harvesting, and sharing the first fruit of field and forest, i.e., life-sustaining good in the world. It is an ancient model rooted in cooperative agricultural practices which taught us the enduring value of our sowing seeds of goodness everywhere, of cultivating them with loving care, and harvesting and sharing the products in community binding and building ways.

An African American and pan-African holiday, Kwanzaa is, in both conception and practice, a world-encompassing celebration. It is world-encompassing in that it is practiced by millions of Africans throughout the global African community. And it is world-encompassing in its roots in ancient African agricultural celebrations and their concern with the earth and their conception of humans inter-related with the world and their responsibility to it.

Although people tend to believe that Kwanzaa is essentially a modern holiday founded in 1966 by this author, actually it has two origins: ancient and modern. In its origins in agriculture celebrations, Kwanzaa is as old as agriculture itself and the celebrations of the first fruits. Indeed, it can be said that Kwanzaa is older than agriculture, that is to say, older than large-scale planned and organized farming. For Kwanzaa, as a first fruit celebration, is rooted in the natural cycle of the season when the first fruits of tree, bush, plant and vine appeared and were harvested by our people; and our people gathered together to celebrate the good harvest, to give thanks for the good earth and the abundant blessings from

it, and to recommit themselves to protect, preserve and care for the earth in life-affirming and world-respecting ways.

Kwanzaa also has modern origins rooted in the Black Freedom Movement of the 1960's. It is part of the liberation struggle to free ourselves and be ourselves. Thus, it is an act of freedom, of self-determination, for it was created and declared without input or permission of the dominant society. Moreover, it was a defiant act to celebrate our African selves, our families, community and culture in dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and liberating ways. It was also a liberating act of *sankofa*, cultural recovery and remembrance of ancient visions and values directed toward grounding and enriching our lives and advancing the interests of our liberation struggle. For again, as always, it was a central part of our people's struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves culturally as well as politically.

Thus, Kwanzaa, standing in the midst of a dynamic and ever-pressing present, looks back while facing forward to ground and orient ourselves, measure our thoughts and practices of today by the best of our past thought and practice and develop the most ethical, effective and expansive ways for moving forward. And in today's world with such packaged and peddled fear and confusion, structural poverty, severe suffering and oppressions of all kinds which violate the dignity and rights of human beings and the integrity of the earth, a solid cultural and moral ground on which to stand is imperative. Thus, our world, in both the natural and social sense, while not irretrievably broken, is severely damaged and in need of an ongoing repair, renewal and remaking in the most ethically sensitive, profound and promising ways.

The Kwanzaa theme for 2017 (6257) “Practicing the Principles of Kwanzaa: Repairing, Renewing and Remaking Our World”, foregrounds and focuses on the ancient African ethical imperative of *serudj ta*, which means *to repair, renew and remake our world, making it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it*. The concept *serudj*

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*ta*, a Maatian (ancient Egyptian) principle and practice finds its modern reaffirmation in the eminent African American education and institution-builder Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune's challenge to us all when she says, “We must remake the world. The task is nothing less than that”. And it is also reaffirmed in the distinguished Martinican/Algerian psychiatrist and revolutionary theorist, Frantz Fanon's challenge to us to “start a new history of humankind”, to “reconsider the question of humanity”, “turn over a new leaf...workout new concepts and try to set afoot a new human being”.

Likewise, it finds reaffirmation in the Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and environmentalist Dr. Wangari Maathai's challenge to us to “assist the earth, to heal her wounds and in the process, heal our own”. This, she says “requires a new consciousness where we understand that we belong to the larger family of life on earth”. And this principle and practice is also reflected in the challenge to us given by the Imhotepian master of many disciplines, Dr. George Washington Carver, botanist, agronomist, chemist, chemurgist (biological engineer), artist, conservationist and environmentalist. He urges us to care for the earth, share its abundance, “to take your share of the world and let others take their share” and to listen to and “learn the various language spoken by all forms of nature (around) us” for the good of the world and all in it. Indeed, Dr. Carver says, “the singing of the birds, the buzzing bees, the opening flower and the buddy trees, along with other forms of animate and inanimate matter, all have marvelous creation stores to tell”.

Our ancestors taught that we damage the world and all in it not only by what we do wrong, but also by what we fail to do right. And this injuring and wounding of the world and all in it, requires that we

constantly repair, renew and remake the world, i.e., *serudj ta*, making it more beautiful and beneficial than when we inherited it. Indeed, our ancestors posed this process as an ongoing moral, social and environmental obligation and practice. It is, they taught, an ethical imperative: to raise up that which is in ruins; to repair that which is damaged; to rejoin that which is separated; to replenish that which is lacking; to strengthen that which is weakened; to set right that which is wrong; and to make flourish that which is insecure and undeveloped.

Our task this Kwanzaa and always is to ask ourselves, within the overarching framework of the *Nguzo Saba*, the Seven Principles, how do we repair renew and remake our world and develop strategies and practices to achieve this? In other words, how do we face and deal with the social and environmental challenges, problems and issues that confront us, as persons, peoples and human beings in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways at this critical juncture of history.

**T**Hese grave issues include: genocide; group and state terrorism; war and warmongering; homelessness; personal insecurity; hunger, famine and food insecurity; military occupation; climate change; environmental damage and degradation; denials of human rights; the lack and inadequacy of health care; poverty and oppression of various forms? And how do *each* and *all of us* participate in building the good community, society and world we all want and deserve to live in? And again, the solution Kwanzaa offers is serious and sustained practice 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).

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**P**ART II. CONCEIVED AND FORGED IN THE FIRES and furnace of the Black Freedom struggle of the 1960's and rooted in a radical history of resistance, and community building, development and maintenance, the *Nguzo Saba* offer a value system and language which reflect and reaffirm this history and culture of struggle. Thus, the *Nguzo Saba* explanations for each principle give us a language of work, service, commitment, institution-building and righteous and relentless struggle. These principles call us to a committed and sustained practice of: striving and maintaining; defining, naming and creating; building; active caring and problem-solving; sharing responsibility and benefit; developing; and demonstrating an *active faith* in the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

The principle and practice of *Umoja*, unity, commits us to strive for and maintain a harmonious togetherness in life, love, work and struggle. It seeks and sustains a togetherness that is principled, purposeful, peaceful and productive. It is about coming together to reinforce the bonds between us, to continue to build new ones and to increase our capacity to do our work, wage our struggle and achieve and enjoy good in the world. It teaches the oneness and sacredness of life and the interrelatedness and interdependence of humanity and of humanity and the world. And it expands our arc of ethical concern and human sensitivity to the suffering, needs, aspirations, and struggles of others, calling on us to stand in *active solidarity* with other peoples and struggles for the expansion of human freedom, flourishing and good in the world.

*Kujichagulia* (self-determination) advances the fundamental principle of the right and responsibility of our people and all peoples to determine their own destiny and daily lives in dignity and freedom, practice their own culture, control and benefit from their own human and natural resources, pursue their aspirations and interests with due respect for the interests of others and the well-being of the world, and rise in righteous resistance to those who would deny them. Also, *Kujichagulia* calls on us to define ourselves by

the good we do, and the dignity affirming ways we walk and do our work in the world; to name ourselves in ways that reflect rootedness in our history and culture; to create for ourselves in ways that affirm and advance life and contribute to human flourishing and the well-being of the world; and to speak for ourselves as self-conscious contributors to critical conversations addressing the fundamental issues confronting African people and humankind.

*Ujima* (collective work and responsibility), as a principle and practice also, reminds us and reaffirms that we must indeed build the just, good and sustainable world we want and deserve, and that it is a cooperative project, a shared responsibility to bring, increase and sustain good in the world as *Odu Ifa* teaches. It teaches us “to make our brothers’ and sisters’ problems our problems and to solve them together” so that their cause becomes our cause and together we do the work and wage the struggles necessary to end domination, deprivation and degradation in their various forms in this society and throughout the world. For the battlefields for freedom, justice and good in the world are everywhere there is unfreedom, injustice and evil. Thus, we must stand in active solidarity with the oppressed, enslaved, brutalized and suffering peoples of the world, including the enslaved and abused Africans in Libya, the Middle East, Europe and everywhere; the peoples of occupied Haiti and Palestine; the peoples of Puerto Rico and Yemen; and the Aboriginals of Australia and the Rohingya of Myanmar. This means resisting and removing oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, age, ability, nationality and other constraints imposed on human life, human freedom and human flourishing everywhere. And, of course, it means again imagining a new world and new future and building and struggling for them together.

*Ujamaa* (cooperative economics) is the principle and practice of shared work and shared wealth central to the ethics of the community harvest. *Ujamaa* means familyhood and speaks to how we should do economics as familiars who care about

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each other's well-being and the well-being of the world. *Ujamaa* upholds the rights and dignity of workers and the rights of all people to the good and wealth of the world and to be free from plunder by predatory corporations and countries. It rejects crass consumerism, vulgar individualism and market driven practices which pose plunder as progress, destruction of the earth as development, and ecocide as the salvation of the human species. It means imagining and putting in place economic cooperative structures that bring people together to increase capacity, satisfy needs, and learn and live life-enhancing values which can be transferred to other areas of life.

*Nia* (purpose) teaches us to develop a collective vocation as a people which has as its core aim and end the restoration of our people to their traditional greatness. Now, our ancestors taught that greatness is above all a moral conception and achievement in practice. Indeed, they remind us that greatness is not determined by the size of the buildings we build, the discoveries we make, the innovations we achieve or even the knowledge we acquire. Rather, it is how we use these capacities in the service of ourselves and others and for the well-being of the world. Speaking to the issue, they say in the *Husia* “the wise are known by their wisdom, but the great are known by their good deeds”. It is, thus, in doing good in and for the world that greatness is achieved and it is service to others and the world that opens the way to greatness as all the great women and men in our history have taught us and demonstrated in righteous deeds.

*Kuumba* (creativity) is the principle and practice of doing “all we can in the way we can in order to leave our community (and by extension the world) more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it”. It is to reach inside ourselves and constantly bring

forth the best of what it means to be African and human in the world and to open new ways to understand and assert ourselves in life-enhancing, world-preserving and good-advancing ways. Here we are to create and recreate the world i.e., to repair, renew and remake it. We are to be placemakers and way-makers who through creative imagination and transformative action open spaces and ways for others which point toward a new history and future of humankind in harmony with the world.

The principle and practice of *Imani* (faith) begins with belief in the Good, the good of our people, our lives, our struggle and the world. It is also an active belief in our people's right to the shared good of the world without denying or diminishing the right of others. Moreover, it calls for belief in our capacity to transform ourselves, society and the world and with other oppressed, struggling and progressive people bring into being a new history and hope for humankind. And finally, *Imani* requires faith in “the righteousness and victory of our struggle”. As Seba Malcolm said, our cause is just, our reasoning morally right and our desire and demand for freedom, justice and equity are compelling and uncompromisable.

**I**F WE ARE TRULY TO ACCEPT AND ASSUME THIS awesome task of radically transforming the world, we must see ourselves in world-encompassing ways as injured physicians who have the capacity, both present and potential, to heal, repair, renew and remake ourselves in the process and practice of repairing, renewing and remaking the world. And this means, at a minimum, transforming it into an ever-expanding realm of human freedom, justice and flourishing in the context of the assured well-being of the world.

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