



Annual Founder's Kwanzaa Message
**“KWANZAA, CULTURE AND THE PRACTICE OF FREEDOM:
A MESSAGE AND MODEL FOR OUR TIMES”**
Los Angeles Sentinel, 12-22-22, p.C1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

HERI ZA KWANZAA. HAPPY KWANZAA to African people everywhere throughout the world African community. And we share these greetings also with all peoples of goodwill and especially with all the oppressed, progressive and struggling peoples of the world. Again, this year we bring and send you all Kwanzaa greetings of celebration, solidarity and continued struggle for a shared good in the world. And in the words and way of our ancestors, we wish for you all things good, pure and beautiful, all the good that heaven grants, the earth produces, and the waters bring forth from their depths. *Hotep. Ashe. Heri.*

Kwanzaa is a unique and special season and celebration of our beautiful, sacred and soulful selves as African people, grounded in and profoundly respectful of our culture. It is a unique and special pan-African time of remembrance, reflection, reaffirmation, and recommitment to the good, the right, and the possible. It is a unique and special time to remember, raise up and honor our ancestors whose legacies we strive to live and build on; to reflect on what it means to be African and human in the most profound and meaningful sense and ways; and to reaffirm the rightfulness and moral imperative 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.

Again, this year in this our season of celebration, we find humanity and the world are in severe and continuing crisis, including: the resurgent pandemic of Covid-19, constantly producing deadly variants; failed and predatory economies and expanding hunger,

famine, homelessness and suffering; continuing conflicts and wars; massive displacement of peoples; unjust and irrational immigration policies; and continuing environmental degradation through plunder, pollution and depletion. And all these oppressive practices and impositions are carried out by the rich and powerful, the obscenely armed and aggressive, who are irresponsibly and immorally unmindful and uncaring about the cost and consequences they savagely impose on humanity and the world and all in it, especially the most vulnerable among us.

Indeed, we live in a world of domination, deprivation and degradation of every kind, in a word, a world plagued with the persistent and pandemic *pathology of unfreedom*. And thus, there is an urgent need for us to engage in self-conscious, righteous and relentless struggle on every level and at every site to lessen and eliminate it. Here we remember and reaffirm in struggle Nana Paul Robeson's teaching that "the battlefield is everywhere. There is no sheltered rear." And so, it is with Nana Haji Malcolm's parallel instruction that "wherever a Black person is, there is a battle line." Thus, we in the organization Us say, "everywhere a battle line; every day a call to struggle." And that struggle is always a dual struggle to be ourselves and to free ourselves.

I created Kwanzaa in the midst of the Black Freedom Movement, in the wake of the assassination and martyrdom of Haji Malcolm X and the Watts Revolt, and in the supportive context of my organization, Us, a vanguard organization of the Black Freedom Movement and dedicated to cultural revolution, community self-determination, and rad-

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ical and revolutionary social change. Thus, the creation and values of Kwanzaa reflect my philosophy, *Kawaida*, the concerns of my organization Us, the Movement and those times, i.e., cultural consciousness; cultural revolution; radical and revolutionary social change; community unity; self-definition; self-determination; economic well-being; and self-conscious participation in the liberation struggle.

This year's Kwanzaa theme self-consciously focuses on the foundational right and practice of freedom. I speak here of freedom in its inclusive sense, not only freedom from domination deprivation and degradation so rampant and ruinous in the world, but also of freedom to be ourselves, to express and develop ourselves, to grow and flourish and come into the fullness of ourselves. Also, I pose practice as the path to freedom, emphasizing its necessity and the required characteristics for it to contribute meaningfully to the struggle for freedom and good in the world. As we say in *Kawaida*, *practice proves and makes possible everything*. Indeed, every principle must ultimately find its meaning and value in practice. And I define practice, from a *Kawaida* perspective, as self-conscious, thoughtful and transformative action toward a chosen objective.

Kwanzaa was conceived, created and developed, then, in the context of the organization Us and the Black Freedom Movement and was understood as part and parcel of a two-fold liberation struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves. As part of our liberation struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves, Kwanzaa was and remains an *act of freedom*, an act of reaffirmation and resistance, reaffirmation of ourselves and our right to be our-

selves and free ourselves, and in resistance to European cultural hegemony and political domination. It was and is a conscious and conscientious choice again to be our culturally-grounded selves, free ourselves from all forms of oppression and celebrate ourselves, and thus, reaffirm our unique and equally valid and valuable African cultural way of being human in the world. Indeed, we did not seek permission or petition for Kwanzaa to be recognized by the state at any level. It was a holiday and work of love and creativity I conceived and carefully constructed out of our own rich, ancient, ongoing, soulful and sacred history and liberating culture.

Kwanzaa was and is also *an instrument of freedom*, a means of cultivating liberated and liberating consciousness, returning us to our history and culture, and building and strengthening our families and communities in culturally-grounded ways that are good and transformative and cause us to flourish and come into the fullness of ourselves as African persons and peoples. Indeed, it opens up horizons of sensitivities, thoughts, possibilities and practices essential to reimagining and successfully struggling to bring into being a new history, hope and world for African peoples and humankind as a whole.

And Kwanzaa is and has always been also *a celebration of freedom*, a celebration of hearts and minds free from the negative conceptions, the catechism of impossibilities, and forms and practices of oppression taught and imposed by a racist society. And it was and is a celebration of our freedom to see, express and sing ourselves in dignity-affirming, life-enhancing, world-preserving and liberating ways. And Kwanzaa is a liberating

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celebration of the awesome beauty and possibilities of being ourselves, of seeing ourselves as sacred and soulful and equally worthy of every right and common good of any and everyone, and freely reaffirming this without question, apology or erasing and deforming ourselves for the comfort or convenience of others.

Kwanzaa and its core principles are a powerful force for good in the world. Its central message and meaning urge us to think deep about our lives, our families, our communities, and our struggles to bring and sustain good in the world. And its values speak to the best of what it means to be African and human in the fullest sense, and these values at the heart of Kwanzaa and its central message and meaning are the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles), a communitarian African value system. These dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving principles offer rightful, reciprocal and rewarding alternative ways to relate to each other and the world in these difficult, demanding and turbulent times.

THEY URGE US TO REFLECT ON, CHOOSE and practice: *Umoja*, unity, over needless division and manipulated divisive-

ness; *Kujichagulia*, self-determination, over the impositions of the majority or the mob mentality; *Ujima*, collective work and responsibility, over selfish individualistic irresponsibility and willful negligence; *Ujamaa*, Cooperative economics, shared work and wealth and care for the vulnerable over greed, disparities and deprivation of others. And these essential values and ways of engaging each other and the world also urge us to reflect on, choose and practice; *Nia*, purpose, bringing and sustaining good in the world over wasteful wandering and mindless meandering; *Kuumba*, creativity, repairing, renewing and remaking the world over destructive practices against each other and the environment; and *Imani*, faith, believing in the good and our future over a paralyzing pessimism and fear and distrust of others which problematizes and limits our relationships and the open-textured promise of our future. For we and what we do are the future unfolding, and in honoring our past and improving our present, we must strive mightily to forge our future in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways.▲

Happy Kwanzaa. *Heri za Kwanzaa.*

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