

| **Annual Founder's Kwanzaa Message** |

"Practicing the Seven Principles in Dimly-Lit Times: Lifting up the Light, Hurrying the Dawn"

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Dr. Maulana Karenga

This year, as always, we wish for Africans everywhere throughout the world African community, "*Heri za Kwanzaa*. Happy Kwanzaa". And we bring and send greetings of celebration, solidarity and continued struggle for an inclusive and shared good in the world. Moreover, we wish, especially for our people and all other oppressed and struggling peoples of the world, the shared and indivisible goods of freedom, justice and peace, achieved and enjoyed and passed on to future generations. Also, in the Kawaida Ma'atian harvest celebration tradition of our honored ancestors, we wish for African peoples and all the peoples of the world, all the good that heaven grants, the earth produces and the waters bring forth from their depths. *Hotep. Ase. Heri*.

This year's Annual Kwanzaa Theme is: "Practicing the Seven Principles in Dimly-Lit Times: Lifting Up the Light, Hurrying the Dawn". To speak of dimly-lit times is to talk of the thick fog of falsehood, fear, chaos, confusion and uncertainty that has emerged in this historical moment and settled heavily over the land. Indeed, it is to speak of the rise of authoritarian and anti-democratic governments and practices, and increased levels of mean spiritedness, human alienation from others and official and unofficial violence of varied kinds, including live-streamed genocide.

And it is to speak too of the dimming of the light and life of the heart and mind. That is to say, the cultivation of the narrow and uncritical mind and the constricted heart which embrace illusions as real life and have a diminished capacity to fight through the fog, to rightfully reason and consciously demonstrate moral sensitivity for others, especially those different and vulnerable. And to speak of hurrying the dawn is to stress Nana Dr. Martin King's assertion that "We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now". And this calls, not for delay or indecision, but rather for immediate and sustained "vigorous and positive action."

Yes, we are living and celebrating Kwanzaa this year again in difficult, dangerous, demanding and dimly-lit times. But as the sun sets, it also rises, drives away the shadows, dimness and darkness and lights up the world. And the best of our culture tells and teaches us that we must be the light that drives away the shadows, dimness and darkness and opens the way to the good world we all want and deserve. Indeed, the lessons of our history and our sense of our own humanity tell us we must defy the darkness and darkness makers that seek to dispirit and diminish us and demonstrate a radical refusal to be defeated or dispirited in any way. Following in the footsteps of our honored ancestors, we must, in the midst of the deepest darkness hanging over us, lift up the light and dare to hurry the dawn, only achieved in righteous and relentless struggle for an inclusive and shared good in the world.

Indeed, the sacred teachings of our ancestors tell us in the *Husia* that "it is wrong to walk upside down in darkness and we

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must come forth today and bring forth the *Ma'at,* (the light of truth, justice, righteousness and good) within us. For surely it is within us". And this teaching of the light and good within us finds its voice and practice in every place and period of our history. Thus, Nana W.E.B. DuBois relates in the sacred narrative of our people, that even during the Holocaust of enslavement, in the darkest of days, nights and centuries, they "sang to sunshine". They embraced and evidenced a radical refusal to be dispirited or defeated. Indeed, they became the sunshine they sang to each day, regardless of the weather and the evil and inhuman ways of their oppressors. They sensed and saw a great light lifted up within them and they lifted it up and called it freedom. They taught their children to remember, reimagine and cherish freedom, and together they moved and marched irresistibly and irreversibly towards it.

And if we are to honor our tradition as a living, uplifting and liberating tradition, then we too must "sing to sunshine" irregardless. Indeed, we too must embody and be the sunshine that calls forth the day and hurries the dawn, a new dawn and day of inclusive freedom, justice and other shared human goods through our continuing and expanded work, our service and sacrifice and our righteous and relentless struggle.

Also clearly, during the Black Freedom Movement, our people dared to drive away the darkness and darkness makers and lift up the light. This is overwhelmingly evident in the life and struggle history of Nana Fannie Lou Hamer and her co-combatants in our liberation struggle. One of her favorite songs was "This Little Light of Mine". And she sang to sunshine and for freedom, singing, "This little light of mine. I'm gonna let it shine. I've got the light of freedom. I'm gonna to let it shine. Everywhere I go". This was a resilient and audacious defiance of the darkness and the darkness makers, singing and being sunshine in the midst of the darkness around them, and audaciously bearing witness to their steadfast faith, undiminishing hope and relentless resistance to evil, injustice and oppression.

And let us remember the teachings of Nana Haji Malcolm X who emphasized the importance of the light of self-knowledge, knowledge of ourselves and each other as we also study and learn the ways and wisdom of the world. He tells and teaches us, "We need more light about each other. Light creates understanding, understanding creates love, love creates patience, and patience creates unity", a unity we need to repair, renew and remake the world.

In the practice of Kwanzaa, in the candle lighting ceremony, then, we follow in the footsteps of our ancestors and we lift up the lasting light of the *Nguzo Saba*. Born in and out of the Black Freedom Movement, Kwanzaa stresses our ongoing struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves and achieve a shared African and human good and the well-being of the world and all in it. Therefore, in lighting each candle, we are committing to lifting up the light and hurrying the dawn by practicing the Nguzo Saba, as our freedom songs say, everywhere we are and everywhere we go and in liberating and uplifting ways. In this way, we honor the ancient African imperative to "bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place, especially among the

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voiceless and vulnerable, the downtrodden, devalued and oppressed.

Our awesome task in the world changing assignment that Nana Dr. Mary Mcleod Bethune has given us "to remake the world" is to be a source of sunlight that gives the shared goodness of light, life and warmth in the world. And it calls for *Umoja* (Unity), the sacred togetherness of our people in the small and large circles of our lives, the solidarity of humanity and a profound sense of oneness with the world and all in it; *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination), the right of every people to be free, control their destiny and daily lives and make their own unique contribution to history and humanity, whether in Haiti, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Palestine, and anywhere else in the world; and *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility), our self-conscious shared efforts and obligation to conceive, build and sustain the good world we all want and deserve to live in.

And the task calls for and requires *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics), shared work and shared wealth based on kinship with and concern for the well-being of each other and the world, especially the most vulnerable and on our right to share equitably and responsibly in the natural and created good of the world; *Nia* (Purpose), the liberation and upliftment of our people and our shared fundamental meaning and mission of human life to create and increase good in the world and for the world and not let any good be lost; *Kuumba* (Creativity), our shared obligation to do all we can to constantly repair, renew and remake the world, making it more beautiful and beneficial than when we inherited it; and *Imani* (Faith), a shared belief and confidence in the good and ourselves rooted in the sacred teachings of our honored ancestors Nanas Howard Thurman, Gwen Books and Nannie Burroughs that we are a people who "ride the storms and remain intact", "conduct our blooming in the noise and whip of the whirlwind" and "specialize in the wholly impossible".

Given this, what dark or dimly-lit times can truly dispirit us, what makers and demons of the dark can defeat us or divert us from our commitment if we continue the struggle, keep the faith and hold the line regardless and irreversibly?▲

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