



**CENTERING AND CULTIVATING BLACK LOVE:
A COMPLEMENTARY AND SPECIES-COMPELLING NEED**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

AS WE CLOSE OUT TWO MONTHS OF commemoration and celebration of the history of our people, I reach back to retrieve and reaffirm thoughts on centering and cultivating Black love. It is not an exaggeration to state that there is no issue of greater importance, urgency or enduring impact in terms of the foundation, functioning and future of us as a community and a people than the quality of male/female relationships. Indeed, this speaks not only to the health and wholeness of our people, but also of each member of the community and to how we imagine and either forge or forfeit a good future for our children. So, the issue of quality relationships between men and women and boys and girls is not just about coupling, cuddling and masterful moves. Nor is it about sexual seduction and consumer things about which they think they will die if they don't get. And it is not just about the increase in desperate and hope-to-die claims that they will never love, be hurt or hassled, trust or try to build a relationship again. *Indeed, the intensity of the denial only demonstrates how deep and enduring the need to love and be loved is.*

Surely, then, it is about something deeper, more ancient and indispensable, something our ancient sacred texts tell us is inherent in the conception, creation and functioning of the world - the complementary and species-compelling need for male and female love, presence and cooperative practice in the world. For the *Husia* and *Odu Ifa* speak to the need we have not only for each other in spiritual,

natural and social ways, but also the need of our togetherness to create and sustain the good in family, society and the world. And it is within this ancient and ongoing African understanding that we must conceive, build, sustain and make flourish our relationships and teach our children likewise by the most careful instruction and self-conscious example.

There are so many things that block the road toward realization of the togetherness in love we long and live for. There is racism that degrades and devalues, sexism that teaches submission and domination, and materialism that makes things and money the measure and meaning of everything. There is also unemployment and vulgar individualism, Eurocentric drama, drugs and unrealizable dreams, the prison system and broken promises, the media and the mean and merciless streets, and a long history of Holocaust, horror and other forms of oppression at the hands of our oppressor. So, the wonder is not that we have problems, but that so many of us have survived and solved them and went on to build rock-strong, stable and loving relations worthy of the highest praise and promise. Indeed, the point is not that we have problems - for that's only human; the issue is how we solve them in the most gentle, loving and effective ways.

Love is the heartbeat and hope of any real, reciprocal and enduring relationship, and we must understand it not simply as an emotion, but also as a practice. For at its best, love is ultimate appreciation, attentiveness and consider-

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ation that expresses itself in the mutual investment in each other's happiness, well-being and development. It is ultimately a reciprocal, deeply rewarding and awesome giving of ourselves and receiving the same from another as a sacred exchange.

Here it is important to make a distinction between pleasure and happiness. For pleasure is satisfaction of the senses, but happiness is satisfaction of the heart and mind. Pleasure is a time and space limited satisfaction of desires by external events and experiences, but happiness is an enduring inner satisfaction. And love, as mutual giving, engenders such an enduring inner satisfaction, enhances our sense of well-being and enriches our development as persons and human beings.

At the heart of the practice of love is active commitment to an Afrocentric value system which teaches and reinforces our essential identity as bearers of divinity and dignity, and requires us to approach and treat each other and our relationships as sacred and worthy of the highest respect, care and consideration. Since the Sixties, I've taught that the *Nguzo Saba* is that African-centered value system and that we can use it to build our relationships and community and enrich our lives.

The first principle is *Umoja* (Unity) which stresses the good and need of togetherness in the most principled and purposeful ways. It teaches us to remove all thoughts, emotions, speech and conduct which undermine our togetherness and pull us apart. At one with each other, we will see ourselves in each other and sense our divinity, reaffirm our dignity and develop an identity meriting a high

respect and place among men and women.

Kujichagulia (Self-determination) teaches the right and responsibility to choose, to choose who we will be and it requires that each of us be allowed and encouraged to be who we are in the most positive and progressive sense without crass criticism, hindrance or negative questioning, but always within the framework of the requirements of togetherness and common ground. And it teaches us that the ground of our choosing must always be from within the context of our own culture and its highest values. *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility) teaches us active working, building and struggling together to clear space for our love to grow, to transform ourselves so that we feel and fit right and rightfully together and to take collective responsibility for the good and bad, right and wrong, the beautiful and ugly that strengthen or undermine our relationships.

Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) teaches us the principle and practice of shared work and shared wealth, that we not make money the measure and central meaning of all things and to reject debilitating disputes and disagreements about it. And it requires us to avoid materialism and consumerism of the dominant society, value each other more and those qualities that reflect strength of character and depth of commitment.

The principle of *Nia* (Purpose) teaches us that we must live purposeful lives, share goals, aid each other in realizing our different yet interrelated goals and work toward things that strengthen each of us. At the heart of this practice

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must be the goal of building a friendship defined by our thinking good of each other, wanting and working for the good of each other, doing good to and for each other, and sharing good with each other as a fundamental principle and practice of love and life.

Kuumba (Creativity) urges us to pursue the positive, avoid the negative, to constantly reaffirm the dignity and worth of each other, and our need for each other and to avoid all conversation and acts that degrade and violate the sacredness of each person and the relationship itself. And it means that we, as the ancestors taught in the *Husia*, must strive always to quickly and eagerly to

raise up what is in ruins, repair what is damaged, rejoin what is severed, replenish what is depleted, set right what is wrong, strengthen what is weakened, and make flourish what is insecure and undeveloped in our relationships.

Finally, *Imani* (Faith) urges us to trust and believe in the good, and in our capacity to create it and share it. It encourages us to produce a new paradigm and practice of Black love and live it as a conscious need and undeniable necessity of life. And this means bringing into being a new man and woman who truly live for and through each other and pass on this lesson and legacy to future generations.▲

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