



ANNUAL FOUNDER'S KWANZAA MESSAGE

**EMBRACING KWANZAA'S PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE:  
CREATING AND CELEBRATING THE GOOD**

*Los Angeles Sentinel, 12-24-15, p.A6*

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**T**HIS YEAR'S ANNUAL THEME IS "Embracing the Principles and Practice of Kwanzaa: Creating and Celebrating the Good". It is so named in order to reaffirm the centrality of the *Nguzo Saba*, The Seven Principles, on this the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their introduction in the lives and liberation movement of our people in 1965. Surely, if we truly value Kwanzaa and believe in its principles, we must embrace those principles and the practices that are rooted in and rise out of these principles. By "embrace", I mean to grasp and hold tightly and firmly as an expression of affection and commitment. Its original meaning is to hold in the arms, but we must embrace the *Nguzo Saba* in heart and mind grasping them and holding them tightly and firmly as an expression of our love of them and commitment to them as the source, ground and impetus for some of our most essential commitments, thought and practice.

For these principles are not just words we speak, but commitments of the heart and mind that undergird and inform what we feel and think about ourselves, each other and the world. They are values that express what is important to us, what we hold as priorities and thus the arc and ground of our self-understanding and self-assertion in the world. And thus, they express the human possibilities opened to us in our ongoing efforts to free ourselves and be ourselves and constantly create good in the world.

All around the world, on every continent in the world, throughout the world African community, African people, in the name and framework of Kwanzaa, will gather together to celebrate themselves. And this year as always, they will celebrate family, community and culture. That is to say, they will celebrate the good, beauty and sacredness of their lives, the indispensable caring, sharing and shielding foundation of family and community and the ancient, rich, varied and instructive cultural values and practices that ground Kwanzaa, define us as a people and direct us forward on the upward paths of our ancestors. Indeed, at

the heart and center of the holiday, Kwanzaa is its concern with and stress on embracing and practicing its core values, the *Nguzo Saba*, The Seven Principles, and related communitarian African values.

As I point out in my book, *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family Community and Culture*, "There is no way to understand and appreciate the meaning and message of Kwanzaa without understanding and appreciating its profound and pervasive concern with values". As we said in the '60s, the *Nguzo Saba* are a Black value system, a set of communitarian African values which aid us in grounding ourselves righteously and rightly, directing our lives toward good and expansive ends, and toward conceiving and bringing into being the good communities, societies and world we all want and work and struggle so hard to bring into being. We have not changed in this position. And that is why it is so important and even urgent that on this 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kwanzaa and as we move toward its half-century anniversary celebration next year, that we are clear about the core values of Kwanzaa, the views and practices that are rooted in and rise from a real embracing of the *Nguzo Saba*.

The Seven Principles, the *Nguzo Saba*, prove their enduring and daily relevance in the life we live, the work we do, and the struggle we wage on every front to expand the realm of freedom and justice, peace, security, well-being and other goods in the world. In a world in which war is as "normal" as the news and conflict and fighting rage at home and abroad, taking its terrible toll on countless innocent victims, and alienation from others is accepted and explained away, *Umoja* (Unity) teaches us the oneness of our people, the common ground of our humanity, the interrelatedness of life and the indispensability of family and community in our righteous togetherness in love, work and struggle.

In a world where there are ongoing invasions, bombing, occupations and other mass assaults on vulnerable peoples and lands, and

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there are outrageous denials of the rights to freedom and independence, the principle of *Kujichagulia* (Self-determination) reaffirms our right and everyone's right to control our destiny and daily lives, and build the good communities, societies and future we conceive, aspire to and struggle to bring into being. And it reminds us also to hold fast and firm to our own culture which calls us into being, reaffirms the ultimate meaning and sacredness of our lives and gives us grounding for our unbreakable will to refuse and resist our oppression and erasure as a people.

In a world where degraded forms of individualism claim the day and people are taught conflict over cooperation and rush ruthlessly ahead at the expense of others, *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility) teaches us that we come into being, thrive and flourish in needed and principled relationships. And it teaches us that it is together that we must conceive and construct the good communities, societies and world we all want and deserve.

In a world where corporate pillage and plunder of the wealth of the world and alliances with invading and occupying armies are understood as normal and necessary by citizen beneficiaries, and where silence in the face of slaughter and suffering is justified for "reasons" of the false right to be secure in that brutal robbery and repressive rule, the principle of *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics) teaches the value and practice of shared work and shared wealth, the right of people to their own resources and the ethical imperative of a just and equitable sharing of the good of the world.

Likewise, in a world where evil and injustice flourish and the poor and vulnerable are held in contempt by the rich and powerful and by the wanna-be's that worship and follow them, the principle of *Nia* (Purpose) reminds us of the ancient ethical teaching in the *Odu Ifa* that we and all humans are divinely

chosen to bring good in the world and that this is the fundamental mission and meaning, i.e., purpose, of human life. Thus, we are to embrace the collective vocation of building and developing our people, increasing our capacity to do good and being rightfully and actively concerned with the well-being of the world and all in it.

In a world in which worldwide destruction is digitized and brutally imposed on the world, and the police and vigilante taking of Black lives has become almost epidemic, and where countries and whole peoples are devastated, and the environment laid waste with wanton disregard and disdain, the principle of *Kuumba* (Creativity) urges us to practice the ethical teachings of *The Husia* that put forth the concept of *serudj ta*, the moral obligation to heal, repair and transform the world making it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.

AND FINALLY, IN A WORLD WHERE FAITH is unfunded, religion is racialized and used to indict and discredit whole peoples and their faith, and God is given the blasphemous and sacrilegious role of co-signing oppression, land and resource robbery and claims of racial and religious supremacy, *Imani* (Faith) teaches us to hold tightly and firmly to the faith of our ancestors who taught us to respect each person, people and culture as a unique and equally valid and valuable way of being human in the world. It teaches us to audaciously reaffirm our faith in our fundamental and cherished values and in the capacity of humans for good, in spite of the racist, class and sexist sickness and savagery of some, and the chaos and the confusion around us. Indeed, *Imani* teaches us that a fundamental way of worship is righteous practice, constantly struggling against evil, injustice and unfreedom in the world and always raising, praising, doing and pursuing the good.

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Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture* and *Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis*, [www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org](http://www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org); [www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org](http://www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org); [www.MaulanaKarenga.org](http://www.MaulanaKarenga.org).