



**HAJI MALCOLM, PALESTINE AND THE MEANING OF MARTYRS:  
DEFIANT OF DEATH, UNALTERABLY DEDICATED TO LIFE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**T**HE FAST-PACED, FIERCE AND FALSEHOOD generating times in which we live and struggle leaves us precious little time to relax and reflect deeply on what's happening and to be hoped for in the world. And such reflection is vitally important as we continue to struggle to stop the Israeli genocidal campaign in Palestine; end the awesome suffering of the Palestinian people; bring the Palestinian and Israeli hostages/prisoners home; end the occupation; renew and increase the urgently needed aid; rebuild the country of Palestine; and help achieve a Palestinian state for the Palestinian people that is free, sovereign and secure. And this need for reflection is also true regarding the Palestinian people's incredible resilience and inalienable right to resistance, distorted and denied by the media's masking and marketing Israel's savagery as self-defense, and White people's claimed racist right to do as they please with the different and vulnerable.

And I seek to bring again this critical issue in the immediate arc of our moral vision, as our ethical tradition would have us do, as Israel and its co-imperialists do an early man dance over the assassination and martyrdom of numerous Palestinian leaders, intellectuals, journalists, doctors et al and the people as a whole and moves to repeat this in Lebanon. Yet everyone, including Israelis in their more rational moments, knows this will not break the will to be free of the Palestinian people and their resistance movement, and that eventually and inevitably Palestine and the Palestinian people will be free. And I want to bring Haji Malcolm in this conversation who stood in solidarity with the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian people in the early 1960s and taught us lessons of solidarity in struggle and self-sacrifice for

freedom and justice in our lives and the world.

In the midst of the Black Freedom Movement of the 1960s, Haji Malcolm defiantly declared that "It is a time for martyrs, now". And by this he meant it was time for all those who want freedom and are willing to defy imprisonment and death and to unalterably dedicate themselves to life, their people and their liberation struggle, to stand up and offer their life and death in irreversible active commitment. I thought of Haji Malcolm as the number of Palestinian people martyred continue to grow by the tens of thousands in Israel's genocidal campaign against them and how the Palestinian people call every person killed, even babies, murdered in this cruel and inhuman total war against them, martyrs. For in Islam, martyrs are not only those who die in righteous struggle for liberation, justice and other good in the world, but also those who die undeserved and horrible deaths, like babies asphyxiated in disconnected incubators, children deliberately shot in the head, and blown to bits and burned alive in indiscriminate bombing, and all tens of thousands unarmed and innocent civilians mangled and murdered in this savage, sadistic and total war against the Palestinian people.

But as we always see and say, *where there is oppression, there is also resistance*. And there is righteous and relentless resistance among the Palestinian people, who daily and in countless ways reaffirm *their radical refusal to be defeated*. I speak here not only of the people as a whole, but especially of those who chose to be martyrs, to offer their life and their death in the liberation struggle of their people. Indeed, these martyrs know with Haji Malcolm that in the

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virulent, victimizing and pathological context of oppression, freedom is not free. And as Nana Harriet Tubman said with struggle on her mind, freedom in her heart and weapon in her hand, “we must go free or die”. For her, both freedom and offering our lives and death to achieve it were a right and responsibility, and we must always remember freedom comes with high costs and heavy casualties. Or as she taught, “freedom ain’t bought with dust”.

Thus, Haji Malcolm, a martyr, himself, and Nana Harriet, who daily risked her life and a horrible death promised by the enslavers for the liberation of our people, and the Palestinian resistance which cannot be defeated, all demonstrate a resolute defiance of death and an unalterable dedication to life. Indeed, the resistance movement chooses the self-sacrifice of martyrdom, not because they want to die, but in defiance of the threat of death by the enemy oppressor, and because it is a demonstration of their love of life, their love of their people, their commitment to the liberation struggle and *a radical refusal to be defeated* or to be deprived of the right to freedom and a life of dignity, possibility and promise. And as Haji Malcolm taught, it is to affirm and secure “our right on this earth...to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being...on this earth, in this day...”

And for Haji Malcolm, after life, freedom is the most fundamental and inalienable right. In fact, he argues that “Freedom is essential to life itself. Freedom is essential to the development of the human being. If we don't have freedom, we can never expect justice and equality. Only after we have freedom do justice and equality become a reality”. Moreover, he rightly and repeatedly contends that a just and real peace cannot be separated from the right and practice of

freedom. He states, “You can't separate peace from freedom, because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom”. It is this essentiality, indeed, indispensability of freedom to a good and meaningful life that morally compels freedom fighters to offer their life and death to achieve and secure it.

Haji Malcolm, then, is a martyr, a *shahid*, one who bears witness to the world in service to his faith, his people and their righteous and relentless liberation struggle. Here, to bear witness is not only to speak the truth, but also, to serve in life and death as evidence of what is real and right, true, good and beautiful. Thus, Haji Malcolm tells us in his *Autobiography* that he hoped that his “life’s account, read objectively. . .might prove to be a testimony of some social value.” And as I have stated elsewhere, “surely, it is a testimony of great social value. Indeed, it is both testimony and testament, righteous witness and a sacred will, awesome evidence and instruction on how we can live our lives, and if need be, give them up with the unwavering commitment and uncompromising courage Haji Malcolm modelled and mirrored for us”.

Haji Malcolm speaks a liberating truth to the people and a courageous critical condemnatory and uncompromising truth to the oppressor, having “pledged on (his) knees to Allah to tell the white man about his crimes and the Black man (and woman) the true teachings” of Islam as he knew and continued to learn them. And he taught this truth as he said, “without hesitation or fear”. Seba Malcolm in speaking truth to power sees himself not only as a self-conscious severe critic of society, but also understands and exposes the American oppressive society as self-condemning and anti-itself, generating its own self-destruction by its oppressive, unjust and evil ways. The essential point is that he is

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compelled to speak the truth of America's oppression of Black people and the Dark peoples of the world.

**H**AJI MALCOLM SUGGESTS AT THE END OF his autobiography that in spite of the obvious threat to his life for teaching and standing up for truth and justice, he is compelled to continue. Thus, he states, "if I can die, having brought any light, having exposed any meaningful truth that will help . . .," to end racism and bring freedom and justice,

then, "all praise is due to Allah, only the mistakes are mine". It is this morality of self-sacrifice, the willingness to give up one's freedom and one's life in the cause of the liberation of one's people and in the cause of a better society and world that is at the heart of Haji Malcolm's liberation ethics. And it is the upward and forward way of the freedom fighter and resistance movement which opposes the oppressor, affirms the people and aspires in struggle for a new world and good ways for every person and people.▲

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