



HONORING OUR MOTHERS WITH OUR LIVES: LESSONS OF LOVE, LIFE AND STRUGGLE

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

THIS IS A SPECIAL MOTHER'S DAY MESSAGE delivered at our Sunday Soul Session and dedicated to all our mothers, but especially to *our mother*. The mother I share with our brothers and sisters. For she is for us the model and mirror of the good that offers us lessons of life, love and struggle. Indeed, it is she, who with our father, brought us into being, bathed us with infinite love in the sacred waters of her womb, nursed and nurtured us and taught us good and meaningful ways to be boys and girls, women and men worthy of the name and expectations of our family and our people. It was, as she and our father taught us, the good and godly way, the way of loving care, good doing, truth seeking and speaking, and pursuing and practicing justice in every place.

And so, as is our custom, as Africans, I do *tambiko* for them, libation, offering sacred words and water in remembrance and honor of them, in ever growing gratitude and everlasting appreciation for all the good our mother gave us and left as an eternal lesson and legacy for all. As our mother would wish, I pour libation also for our father, whom our mother loved, understood and honored as her other half, who made her whole and who with her in love, faith and constant striving, laid the foundation for how we understand and assert ourselves in dignity-affirming and good-bringing ways.

Also, I pour libation for all our ancestors who left the rich life-enhancing and world-preserving legacy which our parents added to and passed on to us. I pour libation also to all the mothers who made transition and ascension and now sit in the sacred circle of the ancestors, among the doers of good, the righteous and the rightfully rewarded. And we take special note of all those who lost their lives in this pandemic: mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles, sisters and brothers, and all relatives and loved ones.

The honoring of our mothers each year with gifts, flowers, visits, outings, special meals and more is to be praised and practiced with joy,

rightful attentiveness and a love that is deep rooted and self-consciously reciprocal for all the good they have given us. And even in this time of pandemic restrictions and restraints, which are put in place in the interests of their health, ours and others, our celebrations and marking of Mother's Day remains central. For they speak to how we recognize and appreciate the profound meaning our mothers have for us and demonstrates *a love unbounded* by restrictions and restraints of any kind.

However, in addition to the real, righteous and meaningful things we do, I would like to suggest a way of honoring our mothers that is even more powerful, permanent and ongoing. And that is *honoring our mothers with our lives*. By this, I mean honoring them by the way we live our lives, embracing and practicing the lessons of love, life and struggle they taught us with word and deed. Indeed, what better way can we honor our mothers and our fathers, our foremothers and forefathers, our ancestors all, except by emulating what we love in them most and the good and beautiful ways they taught us to understand and assert ourselves in the world. For it is these views, values and practices and the love that informed and undergirded them that offer us their most essential lessons and legacies.

So, we speak here of motherhood in its finest form, as a life-giving, life-shaping, life-determining loving practice of bringing children into being, nurturing and sustaining them and giving them the foundation and support to flourish and come into the fullness of themselves. It is within this framework I talk of honoring our mothers with our lives, i.e., our self-conscious and sustained life practice.

If we understand motherhood in its finest form, we know that the first and most foundational gift and lesson our mother gave us is the gift and lesson of love. To really learn the lesson of love and appreciate it fully, we must know or imagine how the absence of love or its inadequacy can wreak havoc on our lives. And with this knowledge, we can appreciate, not only the

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love we have, but also appreciate what pain and suffering others undergo who lack adequate love or even any love at all.

As I said earlier, our mother bathed us with infinite love in the sacred waters of her womb. It is within this understanding the *Husia* tells and teaches us: “Double the goods that your mother gave you and care for her as she cared for you. She bore a heavy burden in you and did not abandon you. Even after you were born, she was still bound closely to you with her breast in your mouth for three years. She cleaned you when you soiled yourself and was not disgusted.”

Moreover, “She placed you in school where you were taught in the writings and she kept watch over you daily.” And here the *Husia* tells is that if we are to honor our mothers, we must give our own children a similar loving care. Thus, the sacred text says, “Therefore when you marry and have children, be rightfully attentive to them. And raise them in every good way as your mother did you.” In a word, give the love and care you, yourself, received. I speak here of love as ultimate appreciation and attentiveness that expresses itself in joyful investment in others’ well-being, happiness and development.

At the heart of love is sacrifice, a self-giving, giving of yourself what you deem others deserve as a parent, child, relative, friend, associate or fellow human being. Certainly, in times like these, sacrifices, i.e., giving of heart and mind, time, effort, material goods, and ultimately as deserved and required, the wholeness of ourselves for someone or something else of great and compelling value, are indispensable.

Another lesson is our mother’s lesson of unity, closeness, a togetherness in love, life and struggle. We must not leave each other alone. We know from scientific data and lived experience that social relations, especially family and

community, are important to our psychological and physical health and that loneliness and lack of real and reliable relations lead to early deaths. Indeed, the *Odu Ifa* tells and teaches us that we should “gather together and not walk alone.” And “all goodness comes from gathering together in harmony.” Therefore, our mothers appreciated, more than our physical gifts, the goodness of our coming together in loving harmony as family.

Our mother also taught us the indispensability of spiritual and ethical grounding. It was a spirituality that was not self-righteous, that did not seek or need to degrade or deny the truth and value of other faiths and their adherents, and that taught us to measure ourselves by how we treated the most vulnerable among us. It was a spirituality that linked faith and deed, prayer and practice, and believing and bringing good in the world.

LINKED TO THIS LESSON IS OUR MOTHER’S lesson of shared good. It is a fundamental African ethical understanding that the greatest good is shared good. Love is a shared good, so is family, community, friendship, marriage, parenting, peoplehood, freedom, justice and all the common goods of life and the world. Again, the stress is on a loving and mutually respecting togetherness in love, life and struggle. And this, too, is a central and sustaining lesson and legacy of our mothers, a commitment to ceaseless striving and struggling for good in our lives and the world. They taught us way-making, resilience, resourcefulness, adaptive vitality, human durability, and the refusal to be defeated and dispirited or diverted from the pursuit and practice of the good. These are some of the central legacies and lessons of our mothers and how can we honor them more than to learn and live these in real, righteous, beautiful and world-transformative ways? “*Heri za Siku ya Mama*” (Happy Mother’s Day)!!!

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