



**KWANZAA AND THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES:
WILLING THE WELL-BEING OF THE WORLD**

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The celebration and significance of Kwanzaa are deeply rooted in the concept and practice of creating and sharing good in the world. Kwanzaa's ancient history has its origin in our ancestors' celebration of the first fruits of the harvest, which was a celebration, not only of the shared good produced, but also of the cooperative process used to produce it. In its most expansive form, the celebration of Kwanzaa, like the philosophy of Kawaida in which it is grounded, is world-encompassing in its conception and concerns. For its ancient African rooted cultural teachings carry with them principles of thought and practice which not only guide how we relate among ourselves as families and communities and a people, but also how we relate to others, the earth and indeed the world and all in it. As a first-fruits harvest celebration, Kwanzaa invites and encourages us to be thankful for the abundant good of the earth and to act in ways that show we will and consciously work for the well-being and wholeness of the world.

Certainly, cultivating, harvesting and sharing good in the world always begins with family, community and culture. But we must also understand and assert ourselves as self-conscious and responsible inhabitants of the world. Anchoring ourselves in the rich ancient and current resources of our own culture, we must extend outward, and be rightfully concerned not only with the well-being and flourishing of our families and community, but also with the well-being and wholeness of the world. As if to remind us of this responsibility, one of the three ways to say human being in Swahili is "*mlimwengu*" which literally means "world dweller", one who lives in the world. And we know from the *Odu Ifa* that we are

divinely chosen to bring good in this world in which we live, grow and ground ourselves.

It is here that the vision and values of Kwanzaa call on us to think and act in such a way that we not only prevent and counter evil and injury to the world, but also create the foundation and framework for its health, well-being and wholeness as a shared and ongoing good. Clearly, this calls for us to embrace principles and engage in practices which support and achieve this aim, and Kwanzaa offers as a clear path to pursue this in the *Nguzo Saba*, the Seven Principles. For these core values are not simply principles, but also at the same time required practices.

The *Nguzo Saba*, of necessity, begin with the principle of *Umoja* (Unity), for it is the base on which we build, the first field and the foundation on which we stand and step forward, whether in family, community, society or the world. And it teaches us to practice principled togetherness in all we do, to see the sacred in our oneness and to embrace relatedness, reciprocity and responsibility as core concepts and practices of good in and for the world.

The second principle of *Kujichagulia* (Self-determination) is a requirement to define and name ourselves in the dignity-affirming and life-enhancing ways of our ancestors, and always to strive and struggle to bring forth from within ourselves the special truth and unique contribution we have for the world as persons and a people. And it cultivates in us a profoundly ethical mutual recognition of the rights of others, our shared claim to a life without domination, deprivation or degradation and our equal and unique way of being human in the world.

The principle of *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility) reaffirms the unchanging and challenge-laden truth that we must and can build the good world we all want and deserve to live in and that we must do it together as self-conscious men and women, who are equal peers and partners in life, love and struggle for the good. And it cultivates in us a deep and enduring appreciation for cooperation and shared responsibility for all things good and beautiful by which we and the world are raised up, renewed and made whole.

Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) teaches the essential principle and practice of shared work and shared wealth in and of the world. Indeed, the *Husia* teaches us that the earth belongs equally to all of us, not as a possession but as a shared resource and responsibility, and that the good of the world and the good in the world are a shared heritage that we must enjoy equitably and responsibly, hold in trust and transmit as a sacred legacy to future generations who must do likewise.

The principle of *Nia* (Purpose) reinforces the central ethical teachings of our ancestors that humans are chosen to bring good in the world and that we should and shall never rest until the goodness and well-being of the world and all in it are secured. It cultivates in us an active consciousness of this sacred assignment given by heaven and compelled by history and reminds us to be rightfully attentive to the awesome duty our identity demands of

us in our personal and social relationships and lives.

The principle of *Kuumba* (Creativity) encourages us to avoid doing to each other and the earth anything which damages the world and to do that which heals, repairs and renews it, making it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it. This is called in ancient Egyptian *serudj ta*. And this repairing and renewing the world the *Husia* teaches, requires us to speak truth, do justice, care for the vulnerable, satisfy the needs of the have-nots, welcome the stranger, be kind and considerate, and to halt and reverse the degradation and destruction of the environment.

And finally, the principle of *Imani* (Faith) teaches us to believe in the good and embrace it, to do the good and increase it, and to will the good and work tirelessly for it. It is this unbending belief in the good undergirded by the work and struggle that gives it life and lifts us up that makes us have faith that Darfur, Haiti and all oppressed people will eventually be free, that the victims of Katrina will rise above the ruins around them and rebuild, that justice will actually be for everyone, that we can find and follow a way to a worthy peace in the world, that the critical needs of health care, housing and hunger will be honestly confronted and met, and that we can together conceive a way to a new world, begin to walk towards it, work tirelessly for it, and eventually achieve and enjoy it together.