



**MESSAGE FROM MALCOLM:  
ANCHORING INSIGHTS IN UNSETTLING TIMES**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**E**ach year since 1966, we of the organization Us have publicly celebrated the birth and commemorated the martyrdom of Min. Malcolm X, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz. Indeed, in the midst of much fear and silence that followed in the wake of Malcolm's assassination and martyrdom, we dared to stand up to bear witness to the awesome weight of his work in the world, to share and discuss his life-enhancing teachings and to recommit ourselves to keep alive and continuously lift us up his legacy, especially in the way we lived and live our lives.

We called February 21 *Siku ya Dhabihu* or simply *Dhabihu*, the Day of Sacrifice; and May 19 *Siku ya Kuzaliwa* or simply *Kuzaliwa*, the Day of Birth. For the first Kuzaliwa celebration, we called on the community and, especially young people, to take off from work and school to join in the celebration of this day which we declared a *sacred day*, a holy day. And the surrounding schools emptied out and many came to the African American Cultural Center, the Us headquarters, to celebrate Malcolm with us.

The D.A. had explored the possibility of indicting me for disruption of the schools, but after consultation with a group of lawyers and leaders from the community, decided against it. They had explained to him our position that this was a sacred day for us, covered under the freedom of religion, and that if we were going to be indicted, so should others for keeping their children home during their holy days. Lacking support in the community and seeing this indictment might prove counterproductive, they dropped the issue but not their intention. And as history shows, it would not be the last time they would seek a politically motivated indictment against me and members of our organization Us.

But we had already seen ourselves as sons and daughters of Malcolm and Malcolm had taught that one of the greatest obstacles to our acting in our own interests as a people is fear of our oppressor. And he had also taught that to free ourselves, we must free ourselves from fear and all the other self-disabling attitudes, ideas and emotions that are formed and fostered in conditions of oppression. Indeed, Malcolm had already opened the way and modelled the courage we would dare to emulate, not only in his audacious defiance of certain death, but also in defiance of political imprisonment and the disinformation and discrediting campaign waged against him in the corporate media.

For Us, then, there is a history behind the celebration of Malcolm's birth and the commemoration of his martyrdom. And it is a history about how we of Us have strived to mirror his life; to put in practice his disciplined commitment to struggle; to model his courage and love of learning; and to constantly share his teachings as anchoring insights in both ordinary and unsettling times. And this also sets the context for teaching the life lessons of Malcolm. For his very life is a treasure trove of endless lessons and his teachings are born not only out of deep reflection, but also out of self-conscious practice, a multidimensional struggle to raise and reconstruct, and free himself and his people. And those processes with him were simultaneous, interrelated and mutually influential.

In his liberation ethics, Malcolm especially calls the Black community to their *original righteousness*, a concept which has both spiritual and social dimensions. As a Muslim, he accepts in his early years the doctrine of the Nation of Islam as taught by the Hon. Elijah Muhammad concerning the divine nature of the human person and the naturalness of Islam

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as posited by the Quran. The Quran (95:4) states that Allah, God, “created humans in the best of stature”. And that stature reflects a primordial nature that leans toward righteousness. Malcolm thus, taught that our unrightful, wrong and self-injurious actions against ourselves and each other were a reflection of our having forgotten or being ignorant of our true selves because of our oppression. For we are possessors of divinity and dignity, but lacking knowledge of our best selves, we act in contrast and contradiction and thus are often greatly unjust to ourselves. This Malcolm understood as self-injury, in Quranic language, *zulm al-nafs*, injustice and wrong to oneself. Malcolm calls this state, “being in the grave of ignorance”, unaware of one’s nature, potential and thus disabled, and unable to rise up, return to our original righteous tendencies and free ourselves.

Now, this is both a spiritual and social ethical message and here Malcolm offers his classic foundation and framework for rising up and returning and for waging a righteous and relentless struggle for freedom, justice and other essentials of a good life. It is the ongoing ethical imperative to “wake up, clean up and stand up”. To “wake up” is to come into critical consciousness; to “clean up” is to achieve and sustain moral grounding; and to “stand up” is to engage in ongoing transformative struggle to recover and remake ourselves, and simultaneously reconceive and remake the world. When asked what are our people to wake up to: Malcolm replies that they must “wake up to their humanity, worth and heritage”. It is a humanity and worth grounded in a

status as possessors of dignity and divinity, worthy of the highest respect and a history of awesome achievement in life and struggle we must emulate and extend.

By moral grounding, Malcolm means developing and sustaining “a moral discipline that makes it easy...to walk the path of truth (justice) and righteousness” and prepares us for the good and righteous world we struggle to bring into being. And by transformative struggle, Malcolm means “fighting for recognition (and respect) as human beings...the right to live as free humans”, to achieve a righteous realm of human good and come into the fullness of ourselves, as Marcus Garvey taught him and us. And in engaging this self-, social and world transformative struggle, Malcolm reminds us it is multidimensional, “material as well as spiritual, political as well as religious, racial as well as non-racial”.

Malcolm envisions and calls us to an unrelenting liberating struggle that brings into being a liberated space which provides the social, material, intellectual, spiritual and psychological conditions and capacities for a truly good and meaningful life. He lists among these: “knowledge, understanding and wisdom (intellectual capacities); freedom, justice and equality (social conditions); food, clothing and shelter, etc. (material well-being); and love, peace and happiness (spiritual and psychological capacities and conditions)”. And he urges us to not rest or relent until we achieve this righteous realm wherein these and all other life “essentials will be natural products flowing for us and to us like ‘milk and honey’.”

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