



**THE MESSAGE AND MEANING OF KWANZAA:
BRINGING GOOD INTO THE WORLD**

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The central message and meaning of Kwanzaa, a celebration of family, community and culture, is rooted in its raising up and bringing forth the ancient African model and practice of producing, harvesting and sharing good in the world. Kwanzaa stresses the importance of our sowing the seeds of goodness everywhere, of cultivating them with care and loving kindness, of harvesting the products of our efforts with joy and of sharing the good of it all throughout the community and the world. Thus, of all the rich and expansive ways we can express the meaning and message of Kwanzaa, none is more important than seeing it and embracing it as a season and celebration of bringing good into the world.

And key to this commitment to bringing good into the world is practicing the *Nguzo Saba*, The Seven Principles: *Umoja* (Unity); *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination); *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility); *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics); *Nia* (Purpose); *Kuumba* (Creativity); and *Imani* (Faith). Although the *Nguzo Saba* are to be practiced throughout the year, special stress is placed on the teaching and practicing of them during Kwanzaa. Lessons are taught to explain them; songs are sung to emphasize the benefit and promise of practicing them; dances are performed to demonstrate them; narratives are told to illustrate them and daily activities are conducted with an increased concern to place them at the center of our thought and practice.

Certainly, one of the most significant ways to raise up and reaffirm the *Nguzo Saba* is through the Kwanzaa candle lighting ceremony. This ceremony called “Lifting Up the Light that Lasts” reflects the Sebaic teaching found in the *Husia* of ancient Egypt that says we, as a people, are “given that which endures in the midst of that which is

overthrown” and that this enduring legacy is our spiritual and ethical values. And so at Kwanzaa we lift up these lasting values which light the path to bringing good into the world.

In lifting up the light of the principles, we think deeply about them, discuss them and recommit ourselves to them in an ongoing effort to make them truly a vital part of our daily lives. As we light each day one of the seven candles which represent the Seven Principles, we make a wish for the good each principle, when practiced, will bring into the world. And each wish unavoidably carries with it a commitment to work to bring it into being.

This year as we light the candle for *Umoja* (Unity) let us wish and commit ourselves to work for a continued and heightened unity of African people in their families and communities throughout the world as they continue to forge their future in the historic struggle to expand the realm of freedom and increase shared good in the world. And let us wish and work for an increased unity for common good among the peoples of the world based on mutual respect for each person, people and culture; liberation for the oppressed, justice for the wronged, power for the people and a just peace at every site of conflict and war in the world.

As we light the candle for *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination), let us wish for and commit ourselves to work for the right of every person and people to determine their own destiny and daily lives, to speak their own special cultural truth and make their own unique contribution to the forward flow of human history. Let us practice self-determination by embracing everyday as an opportunity to choose the good, remembering the teachings of the *Husia* that we are bearers of dignity and divinity and must constantly

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strive to bring forth the best of who we are and the inherent worthiness and good we have inside us. This is the meaning of the Husitic verse which says, “It is wrong to walk upside down in darkness. Therefore I will come forth today and bring forth the truth and righteousness which are in me. For surely, they are within me!”

Let us in lighting the candle of *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility) wish and commit ourselves to work for the good world we all want and deserve to live in, a world, as the *Odu Ifa* of ancient Yorubaland says, where there is full knowledge of things, happiness everywhere, peace, well-being, security of person and where everyone can live lives of dignity and decency in a context of maximum human freedom and human flourishing.

And as we light the candle for *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics), let us wish and commit ourselves to work for the strengthening of the principle and practice of shared work and shared wealth in society and the world. And let us also wish and work for economic practices that reflect due respect for the dignity of work and the rights of the worker, that link a right to a life of dignity with a right to a decent life, and that demonstrate appropriate care for the poor, responsibility for the ill, disabled and aged, and a right relationship with our environment.

Let us light the candle for *Nia* (Purpose) with a wish and commitment to work for the realization of the collective vocation of restoring the rightful power and proper place of African people in the world and of daring greatness through the amassing and using of knowledge to serve and do good in the world. For it is written in the *Husia* that “the wise are known by their wisdom, but the

great are known by their good deeds.” And let us remember that our ultimate purpose is found in the teachings of our ancestors in the *Odu Ifa* which says that human beings are *chosen* ones (*eniyán*), divinely “*chosen* to bring good in the world” and that this is the fundamental meaning and mission of human life.

As we light the candle for *Kuumba* (Creativity) let us wish and commit ourselves to work for a world which is better and more beautiful than we inherited it. And in doing this, let us reaffirm the ancient African ethical commitment to constantly heal and restore the world, a practice called *serudj ta* in ancient Egyptian. This moral obligation calls on us, everywhere and at all times, in society and in nature, to raise up what is in ruins; to repair what is damaged; to rejoin what is severed; to replenish what is depleted; to strengthen what is weakened; to set right what is wrong; and to make flourish that which is fragile and undeveloped.

Finally, as we light the candle for *Imani* (Faith), let us wish and commit ourselves to work for a sustained and steadfast belief in the good and the possible in people and in the world, and in our capacity to create good, to find it, cultivate and harvest it and share it in an unlimited number of meaningful and mutually beneficial ways. And let us remember to hold fast to the faith of our forefathers and foremothers who taught us in the *Husia* that “doing good is not difficult. Just speaking good is a monument for those who do it. Indeed, those who do good for others are actually doing it for themselves.” For they are truly building the world they want and deserve to live in. *Heri za Kwanzaa* (Happy Kwanzaa)!

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