



**REMEMBERING AND HONORING HAJI MALCOLM'S MARTYRDOM:
A MODEL AND MIRROR OF SERVICE, SACRIFICE AND STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

THIS FEBRUARY 21, 2025, MARKS THE 60TH Anniversary of the assassination and martyrdom of El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, Nana Min. Malcolm X, noble and never-tiring witness to the world for us and the shared sacred cause of freedom, justice and inclusive good in the world. Since 1966, a year after his assassination and martyrdom, we of the organization Us have commemorated his self-conscious sacrifice for our people and our liberation struggle. Indeed, we named the day, *Siku ya Dhabihu*, which means the Day of Sacrifice in Swahili. For we wanted to emphasize his awesome sacrifice, the offering and giving of his life and death in conscious commitment to our people and our freedom struggle. And as Nana Ossie Davis said, he “didn’t hesitate to die because he loved us so”. As we say, he gave his life so that we could live freer and fuller ones.

In enduring appreciation of all that Haji Malcolm did for us, we remember and honor him as both a model and mirror for our organization Us and our people, and also for the world, especially for those in oppression and righteous and relentless resistance to end it. This means he offers us an ethical model of service, sacrifice and struggle. He offers us the model of the faithful and fearless servant of his people whose love of his people and commitment to serve them knows no limits, including the willing sacrifice of his life, and his working and struggling until the very day of his death as a martyr and monument to a whole 'nother world and way forward. And he is not only a model to emulate, but also a mirror by which we measure ourselves in our commitment and courage to serve, sacrifice and struggle for liberation and shared good in this country and the world.

It is important, then, that at every commemoration that we hold for him that we emphasize his martyrdom, his self-sacrifice, rather than his assassination. For as we teach, his assassination is what his enemies and the enemies of our people, of humanity and human freedom have done. But his courageous and committed self-sacrifice is what Haji Malcolm did. And so, we must not let the oppressor, his acolytes and allies become the subject of all our sentences in the majority of the points we make. The point is not to reduce our commemoration to recalling who killed him and why he was killed by the oppressor’s assassins. The point and proper way forward is to raise up the lessons of Haji Malcolm’s life and death and use them in meaningful ways. Haji Malcolm, then, has taught us by insightful instruction and lived example how to live and die, how to serve, sacrifice and struggle. And he has taught us how to show in persistent and unwavering practice our love of our people and our commitment to freedom, justice, truth, love and other goods, regardless of the odds against us and the number of others less willing.

He comes into the liberation struggle as a Black man who set aside his negro and unwoke ways, and who gained consciousness of himself as a Black man and Muslim and committed himself to be both *shahid* and *mujahid*, witness and warrior for good in the world. Indeed, from the outset when he first becomes a Muslim in captivity, he hears and answers the Quranic call for joining the liberation struggle. It is found in many places but here it is found in Quran 4:75 which asks Muslims and ultimately all of us, “And why would you not fight in the cause of Allah, and for those weak, mistreated and oppressed

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among men, women and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord, rescue us from this town where people are oppressors; and raise for us from You one who will protect, and raise for us from You one who will help'?"

In his liberation theology and liberation ethics, Haji Malcolm believes God is on the side of the oppressed, that the Divine will is for an inclusive freedom, justice and equality in the world. And he is also clear and teaches, as it is written in Quran 13:11, that "Allah will not change the conditions of the people until they change what is in them". And so, he teaches a liberation ethics of both self- and social liberation, calling on his people, to take control of our own liberation inside ourselves and in society. He calls on us to "wake up, clean up and stand up". To wake up is to come into critical consciousness of ourselves and the world and our role in the liberation wave, sweeping the world and recognize we are part of it. He teaches that "A new world order is in the making, and it is up to us to prepare ourselves that we may take our rightful place in it".

Haji Malcolm wants us to "wake up to our own humanity", to our soulfulness and sacredness, to our power and potential, and to be ourselves without disguise and disfigurement. He wants us to decolonize our hearts and minds and make an irreversible commitment to be free and to serve, sacrifice and struggle to achieve that freedom. And he wants us to clean up, to ground ourselves morally, to speak truth, do justice, care for the vulnerable, free the prisoner from the prison without and from the prison ways within and to love and respect each other in mutually supportive and beneficial ways. Indeed, he wants us to stop self-injury and injustice to ourselves among us, called *zulm al-nafs* in Islam, and to practice peace and loving kindness with each other. Many of us, he taught, are greatly unjust to ourselves, not only in

what we do to our personal selves, but also by what we do to our collective selves, our people in all their beautiful and divinely endowed diversities. He tells us that "We Black (people) have had a hard enough time in our own struggle for justice and already have enough enemies as it is, to make the drastic mistake of attacking each other and adding more weight to already an unbearable load".

And clearly, he wants and urges us to stand up in love and struggle, in love of ourselves and our people, and in righteous and relentless struggle for liberation and ever higher levels of human life. From the beginning, he prioritizes our standing up in unity. There are three bases for our unity which he repeatedly refers to: our peoplehood, our oppression and our need to struggle to overcome oppression and build the good communities, societies and world we and all humans deserve. Thus, he also teaches us mutually respectful and beneficial alliances in struggle.

First, he teaches that it is our peoplehood, often called our race, and what Kawaida calls our unique and equally valid and valuable African, Black way of being human in the world that is the foremost basis for our unity. Therefore, Haji Malcolm tells us, "My Black brothers and sisters - of all religious beliefs or of no religious beliefs - we all have in common the greatest binding tie we could have. We are all Black People". For Min. Malcolm this is a special, beautiful and unique identity with the most ancient of human histories, and a creativity, resilience and resourcefulness second to none. *And this sacred identity of Black peoplehood is the ground of our unity, our resistance and our working our will for good on and in the world.* He, thus, asks us "to learn to forget our differences" that divide us and practice what Kawaida calls *operational unity*, a unity in

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diversity, to end the suffering caused by racist and White supremacist “political oppression, economic exploitation and social degradation” of us and similar others.

FINALLY, HAJI MALCOLM WANTS US TO BE prepared and willing to sacrifice to achieve and enjoy our quest for a liberating, liberated and shared good in the world. Sacrifice, Kawaida teaches, and Haji Malcolm demonstrated, is a serious and sustained self-giving. It is, Kawaida teaches, the self-giving of our heart and mind, our time, our effort, our material possessions and

ultimately the wholeness of ourselves. This courageous and committed self-giving is inherent in Haji Malcolm's signature battle call, “Freedom by any means necessary”. For its dual meaning is not only *the necessary which the oppressor compels* us to do by his willingness or unwillingness to concede and respect our human right to freedom. It is also our readiness and willingness to give to our liberation struggle *all that is necessary* to achieve its goal and build the conditions and capacities for ongoing African and human good and the well-being of this threatened and vital world of ours. ▲

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