



**THE SACRED NARRATIVE OF AFRICANS:
A CHOSEN AND CHALLENGED PEOPLE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 11-14-13, pp.6-7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Each day and beyond the set-aside celebration and commemoration of our history, it is essential that we reaffirm who we are and our obligation to honor this identity and the awesome legacy in which it is grounded. It is a fundamental teaching of Kawaida philosophy that we African people must understand and assert ourselves as *chosen* and *challenged* by both heaven and history. And in this regard, we say no other people are more chosen, elect, holy or divinely endowed than our own; and likewise, no history or narrative is more sacred or serves more as a source of lessons and light than our own.

As we always remind ourselves and the world, it is African people who first brought life, light and lessons to the world, and expanded the horizon of human thought, practice and possibility. Indeed, it is our making and movement thru history that serves as the sacred narrative of the everyday and extraordinary things, the people we call African have done and do in meeting the challenges of human life and enhancing human living.

For Us, there are two major ancient sources for our self-understanding and self-assertion as a chosen people: the *Husia*, the sacred text of ancient Egypt and the *Odu Ifa*, the sacred text of ancient Yorubaland. Here it is important to note at the outset that this concept of chosenness is unique in that it is not in opposition to or elevation over others, unlike those who claim exclusive status for themselves. On the contrary, it is in harmony with and reflective of equal respect for all other humans who are also understood as chosen and challenged in their own unique yet similar ways.

The *Husia* teaches that humans are bearers of divinity and dignity, that they are “noble images of God” and that they have an inherent worthiness, dignity, that is transcendent, equal and inalienable. This is a key concept in the evolution of the ethical and spiritual consciousness of humanity. Indeed, the hub and hinge on which human rights turn is this concept of humans as bearers of divinity and dignity, an inherent worthiness which gives them ground for rightful claims to life, freedom, justice and other indispensable goods.

The *Odu Ifa* teaches that “humans are divinely chosen to bring good in the world” and this is the fundamental mission and meaning of human life. Again, all are chosen and we are chosen not over and against any one but chosen with everyone to do one overarching thing: bring good into the world. And it is here again that the identity and duty of being chosen and challenged compels us to act rightfully and righteously toward each other and the world. In Kawaida, the Seba, historically called Mwalimu in Us, take a vow of five commitments which serve as a ground and guide for the good we seek to bring in the world. But it is a guide also for all others, for at our best we all are and must be Seba Maat—moral teachers in word and deed.

The first commitment is *to be a good person in the world*. To do this the *Odu Ifa* says we must “speak truth, do justice, be kind and do not do evil.” Moreover, the *Husia* says we must “love justice, hate wrong-doing and always do what is good.” And what is good is *Maat* as expressed in a life of the Seven Cardinal Virtues: truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity and rightful order.

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The second commitment is *to be a consistent servant of the people*. It is in service to others that persons and people truly realize themselves and achieve the status of greatness. For it is written in the *Husia* that, “the wise are known by their wisdom but the great are known by their good deeds.” Thus, the *Husia* says “serve one who serves you; serve anyone so you may benefit from it.”

The third commitment is *to be a constant soldier in the struggle*. The struggle is one to secure and sustain good and right in the world which begins with ourselves in an ongoing effort to prefigure the good world we want to bring into being, but ultimately it involves social struggle for that good world. The *Husia* assigns us the ongoing task and struggle of *serudj-ta*: to repair, renew and transform the world, making it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it. And the *Odu Ifa* assigns us a similar task and struggle of *mure lo s'aye*: to constantly bring good in the world. Finally, in the struggle against injustice, falsehood and oppression, the *Husia* says, we “are commanded to struggle against those who struggle against us,” but to act for those who act for us and to do *Maat* to those who do it.

The fourth commitment is *to be a continuous student of the teachings*. The *Husia* teaches that we must emulate the excellence of our ancestors, study their wise teachings, great works and good deeds in everyday life, and struggle to embody and

add to the legacy they’ve left. It states that the wisdom of the ancestors are “teachings for life, instructions for well-being and flourishing, for directing one on the path of life and causing one to flourish on earth.”

And we are to “love learning, seek after truth,” and constantly bring forth that which is useful for the people and the future. The *Odu Ifa* says that the first criterion for a good world is full knowledge of things. And it’s listing of things required to create a good world begins with moral “wisdom adequate to govern the world” and continues with sacrifice, character, love of doing good and struggle.

The fifth and final commitment is *to be a tireless teacher of the good, the right and the possible*. The *Husia* says we are each to be “a source of knowledge for those who don’t know and one who teaches people that which is of benefit to them.” But it is important here to note that of all the various ways we can share knowledge, being an example and living the truth and good of what we teach and participating in transformative struggle is ultimately what brings good into being for the world. This is the meaning of Malcolm’s teaching that we must live our lives so that they become a “testimony of some social value.” In a word, we must live in such a way that we prefigure and help make possible the good people and good world we imagine and dare struggle to bring into being.

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