



**THINKIN 'BOUT THINGS THAT MATTER:
LIFE, LOVE, TRUTH, JUSTICE AND STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

S*ankofa*. EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THE RISING tide of struggle in which we are now engaged against racism in its openly violent and hideous forms, as well as its disguised and hidden aggressions, it is good to sit down and meditate on meaningful things, i.e., things that matter—things like life, love, truth, justice and struggle. And we should do this because these things are things that shape and determine how we understand and assert ourselves in the world, as persons and as a people. Indeed, how we engage these things actually define who we are and provide a framework for deciding what we will be, become and do as persons and a people. In a word, it is a question of considering whether and how we: live or die; love or hate ourselves and others; seek and speak truth or are satisfied telling and believing lies; do and demand justice or accept and practice injustice; and struggle righteously and relentless for liberation and a good life or simply settle for fantasies and a self-deluding comfortable place in oppression.

As African people, we will, at our best, do this meditation on meaningful things, this thinkin bout things that matter, from a Black perspective, an Afrocentric position. In a word, if we are true to ourselves, we will stand on our own cultural ground and measure ourselves in the mirror of the best of our culture, the best of our views, values and practices as a people throughout history. And we will do this knowing well and defiantly affirming that there is no people in the world more sacred, chosen, elect or worthy than our own; no history more sacred or worthy of being taught and told than our own; and no culture more sacred, ancient or richer and more relevant than our own. And we make this affirmation in the truth-denying face of White supremacist racial and religious claims which are no more than a racialized mixture of fantasized faith and manufactured facts.

Now to think seriously about things that matter, we must first think about ourselves as persons and as a people. Indeed, if we ourselves don't matter, then nothing else can matter—

neither our lives, our loves, truth, justice or the struggle which is necessary to define, defend and advance these and other things of great or lesser meaning. Moreover, if we don't think of ourselves, we remain disoriented, culturally groundless, seeking solutions and answers in somebody else's way of life—or way of death, depending on which culture we connect with and pretend to be a part of, especially that of our oppressor. Thinking of ourselves, first, means thinking of the whole of who we are, our initiatives and aspirations, the wide-range of things happening to us and our need to resist not only one particular oppressive thing, but also the system of oppression as a whole.

Thus, we must not forget when we rightly talk of Black lives mattering, we are talking about real people, Black people, not an abstract idea or moral position others can easily accept, but never have to act on or join us in struggle for societal goods, like equitable wealth and power and equal status, that would demonstrate they really think our lives have meaning or matter. Indeed, it is really Black people that matter, Black people as real people, living in concrete conditions of life, love, creating, building, and of oppression and struggle, repression and resistance. And not only do Black people's lives matter, but so do their rights and freedom; their education, housing and healthcare; their just and rightful treatment and equitable, effective and meaningful participation in every area of social life. All, except the most unrepentant and rabidly racist will declare "Black lives matter". But the question is who will *declare* and *demonstrate Black people matter*? It is within this framework that I want to talk about several things that matter to Black people and ways to protect, promote and pursue these invaluable human goods, i.e., life, love, truth, justice and struggle.

Beginning with life as the most essential good, we will want first and foremost to protect and preserve it, but we soon realize that it's not only an issue and concern that we live, but also about *how* we live. This means we must be con-

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cerned about the consciousness, capacity and conditions that enable and ensure our living a good life, truly a life worth living, a life we demand, deserve and righteously and relentlessly struggle to achieve. If we are to have a life worth living, we must have a relevant education and a critical consciousness of self, society and the world. And we need in life the effective capacity and economic, political and cultural conditions to live a good and meaningful life, a life of dignity and decency.

To talk of love is to talk about an indispensable good. It is clearly a good we must strive to bring and increase in the world and not let any of it be lost as is taught in the *Odu Ifa*. There is a beautiful teaching by Malcolm on unity that I read as relevant to building love as ultimate unity. He says we are not as united as we might be because we lack adequate knowledge of each other. And he suggests we need to learn each other, listen to each other and feel and reason with each other and struggle gently and with principles and patience to achieve that unity we call oneness. Min. Malcolm says, "We need enlightenment. We need more light about each other (as persons and a people). Light creates understanding, understanding creates love, love creates patience, and patience creates unity". And this patient listening to and learning from each other, feeling and reasoning for and with each other, and acting together to create the good relationships and world we want and deserve as persons and a people is at the heart of our life, love and struggle.

In turning to truth, we immediately recall and raise up the ancestral ethical imperative that

we are obligated "to bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place, especially among those who have no voice"—the poor, ill, aged and infant, the disabled, the stranger, the refugee and prisoner and all the vulnerable. The ancestors in our sacred texts linked truth and justice. Thus, they tell us in the *Husia* to "speak truth, do justice and always do what is good". And in the *Odu Ifa*, they tell us to "speak truth, do justice, be kind and do not do evil". We, thus, need always to speak truth, to live a truthful life and constantly seek to know the truth and share it. "Speak the truth, let it cling to your speech", the *Husia* tells us. Thus, we must live the truth we speak and not misrepresent our identity, character, intentions or nature as a bearer of dignity and divinity. And we must do, demand and struggle for justice in the world.

TO SPEAK OF LIFE IS TO SPEAK OF STRUGGLE, the ceaseless striving to be and become. We struggle in life, in love, about truth and to achieve justice. We struggle in love to make it deep and enduring, to adjust to each other and to fit together firmly so that two will become one in the most important matters and ways. We struggle to seek, determine and test truth so that we know it's real, relevant and reliable. Indeed, truth not born of honest and earnest struggle can't always be counted on. We struggle to achieve justice, to get our due, to get what is rightfully owed us and others—rights, respect, an equitable share of wealth and power, control over our destiny and daily lives and a life of freedom, peace, security, ongoing development and open-ended flourishing.

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