



**BEING MINDFULLY MEASURED IN THESE HOSTILE TIMES:
BALANCED BUT NEVER NEUTRAL ABOUT EVIL AND INJUSTICE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IN THE MIDST OF THE EVERYDAY MADNESS, the extreme cruelty, the vulgarness and viciousness, and the greed, grift, graft and gangsterism in high and low places, we can be easily tempted to imitate our oppressor, set aside essential things that make us African and human, let loose, get down and go for broke. But as always our oppressor cannot be our teacher and must never be able to claim with diabolical self-satisfaction that his greatest triumph over us is that he has made us like him, lowlife, unloving and genocidally immoral. Still our response is not to be passive or silent in the face of his aggressions, evil, injustice and oppression. But we must measure ourselves, hold on to the best of what it means to be African and human and continue to wage righteous and relentless struggle for an inclusive and shared good in the world.

It is a fundamental and continuing contention and teaching in Kawaida philosophy that regardless of circumstances and other considerations, we must be constantly concerned with how we live our lives, do our work and wage our struggles for good in the world. And we must live, work and struggle in the most moral, meaningful and fruitful ways. This means, our honored ancestors teach us, that we must master the heart and mind and be mindfully measured in all we do. Indeed, the sacred teachings of the *Husia* inform us that “one who can master the heart and mind has the equivalence of all the teachings”.

For every virtue we want to achieve and every vice we want to avoid depends on mastering the heart and mind. And this means disciplining, developing and rightfully using the heart and mind in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways. Here heart and mind means sensibilities, thoughts, emotion and reasoning, especially moral sensibilities and moral reasoning, although other forms of sensibilities and reasoning must be cultivated also for humans to flourish and come into the fullness of themselves.

If we are to live good lives, do good work in the world and struggle for the good everywhere, the sacred teachings of the *Odu Ifa* say, we must be measured in all things. Indeed, it teaches *iwon* – measuredness, moderation and balance as a cardinal virtue. The emphasis on being measured in all things appears throughout this sacred text, explicitly and implicitly. In fact, the *Odu Ifa* has as its opening verse and instruction a teaching on being balanced in the life we live. Thus, *Odu 1:1* says, “Let us not engage the world hurriedly. Let us not grasp at the rope of wealth impatiently. That which should be treated with mature judgment, let us not deal with in a state of uncontrolled passion. When we arrive at a cool and peaceful place, let us rest fully. Let us give continuous attention to the future. Let us give deep consideration to the consequences of things. And this because of our eventual passing”.

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This, then, as I have taught and written, is a teaching on having a measured approach to achieving the good life. It reflects the Odu stress on the virtue of *iwon* or balance, and the *amuwon*, the balanced person. We are not to engage the world in a hurried, heedless or reckless manner. Nor are we to seek material gain impatiently. For although Odu ethics poses wealth as one of the main blessings in life as well as an important condition to live a truly full life and a means to aid and share with others, there is continuous concern that pursuit of material gain not be excessive or all-consuming (Odu, 82:1). The good or moral life, the teaching tells us, also necessitates that we treat important matters with the reasonableness and calmness they require. Moreover, the text suggests that the good life also requires that we know when and how to rest. It poses rest as an essential condition not only for the good life in general, but also specifically for serious moral and critical reflection.

Finally, the text tells us that we should give full and ongoing attention to the future and be constantly and profoundly concerned about the consequences of things. This dual moral emphasis speaks to our need to be concerned with the effect of our actions, not only on the quality of life and relations in the contemporary world, but also on the future of the world and generations to come. And thus, it has particular moral meaning not only for the quality of human relations, but for the integrity of the environment (Odu, 10:5). Such moral concern, the text

suggests, is to be embraced not only for the good life here, but also to secure our place in eternity given our eventual passing. In a word, it speaks to our need to live a life that leaves a legacy of goodness in this world which not only promises respectful memory in this world but also eternal life in the next.

In Odu 155:1, the central figure Owon, whose very name means “the balanced or measured one”, is depicted as a person happy, satisfied and successful, having attained every good in his house: a wife, children, money and a life that is, the text says, “exactly right”. And the reasons given for this inclusive good is that “Owon weighs everything in the balance”. In other words, he measures everything in terms of its rightness and goodness before he embraces and acts on it. Thus, the Odu says that Owon does not eat, drink, use cloth, or builds a house without first measuring it in terms of quantity, quality and consequence. I read this measuring as a mindful measuring, exercising thoughtful, self-watchful sensibility and reasoning with concern for the right and the good.

THE VIRTUE OF BALANCE IS RELEVANT also even in struggle, in the context of and compelling need of righteous and relentless resistance to evil, injustice and oppression. The central verse for this teaching is Odu 152 which says, “may the battle we wage always add to our honor”. Thus, the sacred teaching tells us that we must not wage unjust and dishonest wars especially against the vulnerable and we

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must not run away on the day of battle, and always be courageous and steadfastness in struggle (Odu 33:3; 153:1; 185:1). Also, we must not enjoy war, but wage war reluctantly and with restraint (170:1). And we must know when to fight and when to withdraw (187:1) and always

struggle for the good. And in our righteous and relentless struggle for good in and for the world, we must stay mindful, ever-ready and engaged, for the *Odu Ifa* (159:1) says in the pursuit of good, “a constant soldier is never unready, not even once”.▲

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