



**BEYOND SPECIES ARROGANCE:
LIVING LIGHTLY AND HUMBLY ON THE EARTH**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Clearly there are hard and humbling lessons to be learned from the human and ecological disaster directly caused by British Petroleum (BP) in its perverse pursuit of profit, regardless of costs and consequences to others, the immediate environment and the planet as a whole. But there are equally important questions to raise about our indirect and direct complicity in the routine roguish behavior of corporations which brought us to this greatest environmental disaster in U.S. history which is still relentlessly unfolding in the ocean, on land and in the air.

Indeed, we must seriously question a society that fosters and supports such reckless and rapacious behavior in the interest of profit for an elite under the guise of progress and prosperity for all, still to be delivered. We must question also a system of “casino capitalism” that gambles with the lives, finances and future of the people and the planet, and feels comfortable draining the public treasury when it collapses and calls for resuscitation and life support, claiming erroneously that if it dies, so will society itself.

And shall we not also question past and continuing government patterns of catering to corporate will and wish, relaxing and removing needed regulations and oversight, giving them routine permission to drill, dredge, drain and dig almost everywhere, postponing serious efforts for clean and renewable sources of energy and appointing officials committed to corporations in deep and still to be determined ways? Moreover, must we not also question ourselves—stockholders, consumers and citizens who are not consistent or convincing in our demand for corporate accountability, or our episodic engagement with environmental issues only at select and ceremonial occasions or like now, in the midst of a disaster too horrible to ignore?

We are, by open confession, addicted to our oil and the products of consumption and convenience from it. We are too numerous in our hugging the chains of creature comforts, technological toys and illusions of invincibility and control over all things human, natural and yet to be met. But to live a life of such illusions and unreflectiveness about ourselves, society and the world is to invite disaster and self-destruction, as recent events remind us.

No one can honestly think or argue that we can plunder, pollute and deplete the earth without grave consequences, and yet we allow corporations to do it every day. Thus, we must untangle ourselves from the web of complicity that makes BP’s routine roguery seem normal. And we must reorder and realign our lives and walk lightly and humbly on the earth. Indeed, the lost lives and livelihoods in this country and elsewhere, the dead and disabled animals, the eaten-away ozone layer, the melting polar caps, the vanishing forests and plants, and the polluted and poisoned air, waters and lands—all call on us to make such an ethical and indispensable commitment.

In the *Million Man March/Day of Absence Mission Statement* (1995), we called on our people to be “self-critical and self-corrective” and “to protect and preserve the environment through practicing and struggling for environmentally-friendly patterns of consumption and production.” We called on the government to halt “dismantling regulations that restrained corporations in their degradation of the environment and . . . check a deadly environmental racism that encourages the placement of toxic waste in communities of color.” And we called on the corporations “to show an appropriate care and responsibility for the environment; to minimize and halt pollution, deforestation and depletion of natural resources, and the destruction of plants, ani-

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mals, birds, fish, reptiles and insects, and their natural habitats; and to rebuild wasted and damaged areas and expand the number, size and kinds of areas preserved.” These positions remain cogent and compelling today.

Corporations have come down hard and heavy on this earth, arrogantly assuming the conqueror’s right to rule and ruin the lives and lands of the conquered, occupied and oppressed. And we have too often accompanied them—actively or passively. To lift this heavy and horror-filled hand off the back of the world and ourselves and walk lightly and humbly on the earth, we must engage in serious inward and outward struggle against corporate global plunder and destruction, and the government and citizen active and passive collaboration in this.

The struggle, as always, begins with ourselves and the self-conscious choice we must make and keep to save the planet and ourselves, reduce consumption and waste, live a good life and leave a worthy and unfettered future for those who will come after us. This means ridding ourselves of human species arrogance, denouncing the mistaken “religious” right to subdue and dominate the earth and all in it, and the amoral code of the powerful to conquer, occupy, kill, exploit and oppress other humans and rob them of their resources.

We must also learn to share the world and the responsibility for its care and constantly repair and renew it, transforming it and making it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited (*serudj ta*), as the *Husia* teaches. Indeed, in this world-encompassing Maatian ethic, everyone and every people must be able

to live a good life. As Mary McLeod Bethune taught, the good life cannot be only “for the chosen few, for the select, for the ‘right’ religion or the ‘right’ race,” but must be for everyone.

We must also respect the life and place of other beings on earth. The *Husia* says, the Creator “gave life to all things, gave light to the world and cleared a path for every creature . . .” to live, move and walk in its own way. Moreover, as the *Odu Ifa* teaches, “the world should stop making sacrifice for wealth and instead make sacrifices to protect the earth from its enemies”: i.e., plunder, pollution and depletion. For “In this way, we will live.” Indeed, it is this imprisoning commitment to comfort, wealth, and convenience that poses, perhaps, the greatest threat to the well-being of the world. And we must build and rebuild a Movement which has a complex and interrelated vision of society and the natural world, understands ecocide as genocide, and cultivates social and environmental justice, and the virtues of service, sacrifice and struggle for good in the world.

Ken Saro-Wiwa, the martyred Nigerian environmentalist and activist against the oppression of his people and the savaging of his homeland, said at his trial on trumped-up charges, “We all stand before history” and must account for the wrong being done to others and the earth by Shell and other oil companies and their governmental and citizen collaborators. The question remains, will history indict or absolve us? And yet we know, only righteous struggle can free and absolve us and ensure the health and well-being of the world.

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