



ANNUAL FOUNDER'S KWANZAA MESSAGE  
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PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF KWANZAA:  
REPAIRING AND RENEWING THE WORLD

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

The core message and expansive meaning of Kwanzaa is rooted in its role as a rightful and joyous celebration of family, community and culture. Indeed, it is a celebration of a people in the rich and complex course of their daily lives and in the midst of their awesome and transformative movement thru human history. It is a holiday that grew out of the ancient origins of first-fruit harvest festivals which celebrate the abundant good of life and all living things and the good of earth itself and all in it. It rises also out of our modern struggle for an inclusive freedom, a substantive justice, a dignity-affirming equality, and a life-enhancing power of our people over our destiny and daily lives. And it bears the mark and message of both models and movements.

It is this ancient, fertile and constantly cultivated soil and source of our culture that explain the extraordinary and constant growth of Kwanzaa throughout the world African community. Surely, Kwanzaa would not have lasted if it had simply been a seasonal trend, a consumerist fad or the purchasable product of a corporate-cultivated consciousness. Moreover, its resilience and relevance, like its origins and future, do not lie in official approval, presidential greetings or governmental recognition and endorsement by resolution on any level.

Rather Kwanzaa was conceived, created and introduced to the African community as an audacious act of self-determination, a cultural creation that is rooted in and rose out of the wish and will of a people who saw its message deep in meaning, world-encompassing in reach, highly relevant in addressing critical issues of our time and the practice of its principles, as a valuable way to ground, guide and enrich their lives.

Each Kwanzaa we are called upon to think deeply about our lives and the world,

and ask ourselves how do we as a person and people understand ourselves and address the critical issues of our times in ethical and effective ways. Then, we are to recommit ourselves to our highest ideals, our best values and visions, and to a sustained and transformative practice of these principles. And at the heart and center of Kwanzaa are the *Nguzo Saba*, The Seven Principles.

Indeed, the *Nguzo Saba* offer us a foundation and framework to address issues of our time thru both *principles* and *practices*, a unity which cannot be broken without damaging and diminishing them both. This means prefiguring in our daily lives and practices the good world we all want and deserve to live in, and it requires constant reflection on and practicing the *Nguzo Saba* and interrelated values directed toward bringing good in the world.

Surely, in a world ravaged and ruined by war, defined by division, oppression and varied forms of greed, hatred and hostility, the principle of *Umoja* (Unity) invites an alternative sense of solidarity, a peaceful togetherness as families, communities and fellow human beings. It teaches us the oneness of our people, everywhere, the common ground of our humanity with others and our shared status as possessors of dignity and divinity. But it also encourages us to feel at one with and in the world, to be constantly concerned about its health and wholeness, especially as we face the possibility of climate change and other disasters around the world.

In a time in which occupation and oppression of countries and peoples are immorally presented as necessary and even salvational, the principle of *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination) rejects this and reaffirms the right of persons and peoples to determine their own destiny and daily lives; to live in peace and security; and to flourish in freedom

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everywhere. In opposition to alienation and isolation from others, fostered fear and hatred for political purposes, and a vulgar individualism at the expense of others, the principle of *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility) teaches us the necessary and compelling commitment to work together to conceive and build the good community, society and world we want and deserve to live in. And this means cooperatively repairing and renewing the world.

In a world where greed, resource seizure, and plunder have been globalized with maximum technological and military power, we must uphold the principle and practice of *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics) or shared work and wealth. This principle reaffirms the right to control and benefit from the resources of one's own lands and to an equitable and just share of the goods of the world. In a world where there is an urgent need to move beyond petty and perverse purposes and narrow and narcissistic concerns, the principle and practice of *Nia* (Purpose) provides us with an expansive ethical alternative. For it teaches us the collective vocation of bringing, increasing and sustaining good in the world, and insuring the well-being, health and wholeness of the world.

In a world where war lays waste the lands and lives of the people, where depletion, pollution and plunder of the environment put the world at risk and climate change threatens devastating hurricanes, floods, famine, millions more of refugees and the submersion by rising seas of whole communities and

nations, the principle and practice of *Kuumba* (Creativity) is imperative. For it puts forth the ethical ancestral teaching from the *Husia* of *serudj ta*, the moral obligation to do all we can in the way we can to heal, repair, rebuild, and renew the world, leaving it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.

Finally, in our world and time when words of hope and change evaporate into business as usual, when peace is postponed for war, social programs put on hold, bankers bailed out and the poor erased from the agenda, *Imani* (Faith) offers a shield against despair, cynicism and paralyzing disappointment. Faith calls us to believe in the good we seek to create, to work for it, and to live it in our daily lives. Indeed, only in this way will we be able to repair and renew ourselves in the process and practice of repairing, rebuilding and renewing the world.

In the spirit of the steadfast faith of our ancestors, let us meditate on and give ever-deeper meaning in actual practice to this Kwanzaa wish of good and prayerful request of our ancestors: May we speak truth and do justice everywhere. May we always evaluate rightfully and not act in disregard of the sacred and the people. May we enter praised and leave loved everywhere we go. May our speech be wholesome and without blame or injury to others. May we reject evil and embrace joy. May we live a lifetime of peace. And may we pass in peace having done *Maat* and brought good in the world.

*Heri za Kwanzaa* (Happy Kwanzaa)

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