



**RIGHTFULLY REMEMBERING MIN. MALCOLM:
VALUING OUR LIVES, WORK AND STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IF WE ARE TO RIGHTFULLY REMEMBER MIN. MALCOLM, we must seriously grasp and practice what he so meticulously taught us about valuing our lives, our work and our struggle. Here I use grasp to mean take in hand and heart his legacy, study and understand it, and hold it firmly as a valuable heritage and framework for continuing forward. Whether it is on his day of birth or his day of sacrifice and martyrdom, or any other day of the year, remembering and honoring him must offer some meaningful expression and evidence that his life and teachings help shape how we live our lives, do our work and wage our struggles to be ourselves, free ourselves, develop ourselves and come into the fullness of ourselves.

So, our ceremonies and rituals of remembrance, of raising and praising his name and drawing lessons from his life, work and struggle are all good. But in the final analysis, Min. Malcolm would ask how does it translate into a meaningful and transformative practice? That is to say, how does it help inspire, anchor, orient and expand what we think, feel, say and do? In other words, how does our honoring him reflect and reaffirm that we use his life lessons to bring out the best of who we are and must become and continue to be as persons and a people?

In his famous eulogy for Min. Malcolm, the esteemed activist actor, Ossie Davis, tells us that “in honoring him, we honor the best in ourselves.” And this honoring of him, must be thru emulating him in the way he lived his life, did his work and waged the struggles of life and liberation. It is what we see as best in him that we must raise up, praise and pursue. For that which is the best in him is the best in us in, capacity and potential, perhaps in lesser measure, but in no less value or meaning.

For we all have inherent, transcendent, equal and inalienable worthiness, and we bring to the world our own unique gifts, talents, capacities and potentials. And we must, Minister Malcolm teaches us, strive mightily to fully realize them and use them to bring good in the world as both

persons and a people. This is the meaning of his teaching that “a race of people is like an individual . . .; until it uses its own talent, takes pride in its own history, expresses its own culture, (and) affirms its own selfhood, it can never fulfill itself.”

Indeed, this means that we must think in new, liberated and liberating ways about how we live our lives, do our work and wage our struggle. For as Min. Malcolm taught, “the logic of the oppressed cannot be the logic of the oppressor, if they want liberation.” And if we want to live good, meaningful and expansive lives, liberation and the liberation struggle as well as the practice of freedom on every level must be at the center of what we consider important and urgent. Here he teaches us that it is in the knowledge, embrace and practice of the best of our culture and history that we affirm our selfhood and fully realize the best of ourselves.

Min. Malcolm wants us to see our lives as sacred, endowed by the Creator with a nature that leads toward righteousness, but which must be fully realized and reaffirmed in our daily striving and struggle to practice the good and to be caring, just, truthful and upright in our relations with each other. He wants us “to recognize (and respect) each other as brothers and sisters,” and to self-consciously stop and avoid injury and injustice to ourselves and each other. For we, like other humans, intentionally and unintentionally, sometimes and too often in the context of our oppression, injure and act unjustly toward each other thru physical violence and the psychological violence of disrespect and degradation. But here again we must resist, resist emulating our oppressor and struggle to prefigure in our daily lives the good world we want, work and struggle for.

Also, Malcolm taught, we injure ourselves and each other by bad habits that harm or destroy our health and by negative practices which make us unworthy in relationships of love, work and struggle. And again, given the shared nature of our lives, work and struggle, even if it seems

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persons are only injuring themselves, in a larger sense, they are injuring us also, causing suffering in the community, and weakening its capacity for the life it must live, the work it must do and the struggle it must wage. Seba Malcolm, as a communitarian moral teacher, i.e., one who always places what we do in the context of community and its affect on the community, in addition argues that we are also greatly unjust and injurious to ourselves when we are unjust and injurious to each other. For we are linked in community and shared humanity with each other.

It is worth noting that Malcolm argues that failing to work and contribute to the best of our ability is an injustice and injury to oneself and also to the community. He calls such half-stepping and being trifling “sinning against oneself,” against our personal and collective self. Thus, he says, “idleness and laziness (are) among the Black man’s greatest sins against himself.” Indeed, he says, “Heaven requires hard work.” Here he speaks not only of heaven related to the promise of the good in the afterlife, but of that also which promises a good life in the here-and-now, free from the hell of oppression in its various evil and earthy forms.

Seba Malcolm, then, is not offering any narrow notion of personal purging and self-strengthening but wants us to link all we do to a more expansive concept of our identity, purpose and direction as a world historical people, self-consciously and actively committed to freedom, justice, physical, psychological and material well-being, peace, reciprocal respect and caring and other shared goods in the world. Thus, our beloved teacher Malcolm wants us to struggle to end human suffering and oppression and to honor our history and culture of struggle and of being a moral and social vanguard in the world. And he

wants us to free ourselves from any of the varied vices, values and practices which diminish or undermine our capacity to develop our full potential, and exercise our capacities in the work and struggle for liberation, human flourishing and ultimately the well-being of the world.

Finally, Seba Malcolm, El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, wants us to live, work and struggle for liberation and the good “in unity and harmony,” born of knowledge, understanding, love and patience. He says we must constantly study and learn each other, even when we think we already know each other as persons and a people. Often, he says, we injure ourselves and each other and are unable to unite and act for common good out of lack of knowledge or light as he calls it. “We need enlightenment” concerning the whole world, he teaches. But especially, “We need more light about each other.” For “Light creates understanding; understanding creates love; love creates patience; and patience creates unity.” And thru this unity “a united front can be brought about” with which we can confront our oppressor, end our oppression and contribute definitively to ending oppression in the world.

[MIN. MALCOLM X, THEN, WANTS US TO take our lives, work and struggle seriously. He sees us in world-encompassing ways and wants us to do likewise. Indeed, Seba Malcolm assures us we are a key part of the global struggle for freedom and justice in the world. And thus, he tells and teaches us that “What we do here in regaining our self-respect, our manhood (and womanhood), our dignity and freedom helps all people everywhere who are fighting against oppression” and also contributes significantly to opening up a new history and horizon of possibilities for humankind.▲

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