



**NEEDFUL RESOLUTIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR:
REFLECTION, REAFFIRMATION AND RECOMMITMENT**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

As the edges of the old and New Year meet and overflow into each other, we are again confronted with the need to sit down and think deeply about the awesome meaning and responsibility of being African in the world and recommit ourselves to our highest cultural values. And this becomes even more important at this critical time of heightened hope, historical turning and increased possibilities which we must insure become a shared good for everyone in the world.

Certainly, this pausing and turning inward as persons and a people for reflection, reaffirmation and recommitment is at the heart of the meaning of the Day of Meditation (*Siku ya Taamuli*), January 1, the last day of Kwanzaa. It is an essential self-questioning which is placed at the beginning of the year so that we may begin the New Year with a practice and process of self-assessment which is at the same time an orientation toward recommitment to our highest cultural values. And this is important to establish an indispensable practice in the beginning of the year, for as the ancestors taught, "if you know the beginning well, the end will not trouble you".

So this year, as always, our resolutions for the New Year must come from serious reflection on our lives as persons and as a people: on what we've done and must do and what we failed to do or have not yet done, and are compelled to do if we are to be what our sacred history and ethical self-understanding demand of us. And if we follow tradition, we will begin by asking ourselves and answering these three fundamental Kwanzaa questions: who am I; am I really who I am; and am I all I ought to be? This self-questioning is designed to aid us in measuring ourselves in the mirror of the best of our culture and determining where we stand in relation to the principles we

hold dear and the daily and continuous practice we offer to prove it.

The question of who I am is asked as a repeated reminder to always define and understand ourselves in the dignity-affirming and identity-expansive ways of our ancestors. For it is they who taught us and the world that we must begin by recognizing ourselves as possessors of dignity and divinity, sacred beings with an inherent worthiness that is transcendent, i.e., beyond all social and biological attributes; equal in everyone; and inalienable, that is to say, untouchable and untakeable by anyone. And with this comes the responsibility to act in ways that honor this divine and sacred status, to be able to openly and honestly say in the tradition of our ancestors: "I know myself as a noble image of the Divine; I am beautiful of character and godly to behold. I am aware of the Divine presence and possibilities in everyone and treat everyone in a manner reflective of this. And I strive daily to make myself worthy before the Divine, before nature and before other humans in the world".

Also we must reaffirm and celebrate our identity as fathers and mothers of humanity and human civilization; sons and daughters of the *Maagamizi*, the Holocaust of enslavement; and authors and heirs of the reaffirmation of the 60's, a terribly taxing time in which we reaffirmed both our Africanness and our social justice tradition in intense and transformative struggle. The second question, am I really who I am, is asked so that we may reaffirm the realness of our commitment to this rich and ancient identity as Africans in the world, conscious of the dignity and responsibility it reflects and requires. And it reminds us to avoid wearing masks to conceal ourselves from ourselves or others. For as Frantz Fanon says, in the context of oppression, those

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among us unable to resist the degrading and destructive process often wear masks to hide ourselves and transform ourselves into “acceptable”, but “obscene caricatures” of our oppressor. Moreover, we can wear masks by collaborating in our own oppression and not only being what our oppressor defines us to be, but also by refusing to resist imposition and oppression and deforming ourselves in other ways.

The third question, am I all I ought to be, encourages us to reaffirm our commitment to constantly be and become the best of what it means to be African and human in the fullest sense of the words. It encourages us to speak truth, do justice, be kind and considerate, resist evil, cherish and pursue peace with justice, and to care for the world and all in it, understanding the world as sacred space and acting accordingly. It is in this context of striving and struggling to be the best of what it means to be African that we are, as Kawaïda says, morally obligated to seek and speak our own special cultural truth and use it in expansive and varied ways to make our own unique contribution to the forward flow of human history and to the freedom and flourishing of humankind.

When the Hon. Marcus Garvey called for “race first,” it was a necessary moral call to give first consideration to the building and

liberation of our community as an extended family, to commit and prepare ourselves to carry out our tasks as defined in the *Odu Ifa* which teaches us that we are Divinely chosen to bring good in the world and that this is the fundamental mission and meaning of human life. Indeed, Garvey’s call was right and necessary. For we are our own liberators and a people that cannot save itself is lost forever. But a people who only wants to save itself can never be considered or called great or truly moral.

This is instructively clear when we consider the moral status and claims of those nations who have developed the technological capacity to destroy themselves and the world and who wreak havoc and ruin on the lives of the world’s people and the planet itself. But they can never be seriously considered moral or truly wise except in their own self-deluding and self-congratulatory narratives offered as evidence of racial and religious superiority. Even if considered wise, they are still not great, for as the ancestors taught, “the wise are known by their wisdom, but the great are known by their good deeds.” May we be blessed to be continually both wise and great as a people, strong enough to bear the burden and glory of our history and humble enough to know we must each day make ourselves worthy in the world.

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