

How to Observe The Holiday of

KWANZAA

A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture

|| December 26 -- January 1 ||

The Nguzo Saba

(The Seven Principles)

Umoja – Kujichagulia – Ujima – Ujamaa – Nia – Kuumba – Imani



Kwanzaa was created by Dr. Maulana Karenga

The Holiday of Kwanzaa was created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, professor of Africana Studies at California State University, Long Beach, author and scholar-activist who stresses the indispensable need to preserve, continually revitalize, and promote African American culture.

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KWANZAA: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

DR. MAULANA KARENGA | DECEMBER 2016



Kwanzaa is an African American and pan-African holiday which celebrates family, community and culture. It was created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, a professor of Africana Studies. Kwanzaa, a seven-day cultural festival, begins December 26 and ends January 1. It joins communitarian values and practices of Continental African and African American culture.

During the holiday, families and communities organize activities around the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles): *Umoja* (Unity), *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination), *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility), *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics), *Nia* (Purpose), *Kuumba* (Creativity) and *Imani* (Faith). Participants also celebrate with feasts (karamu), music, dance, poetry, narratives and end the holiday with a day dedicated to reflection and recommitment to The Seven Principles and other central cultural values.

(www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org)

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Kwanzaa: Roots and Branches

The Continental African Roots

Kwanzaa is an African American and Pan-African holiday which celebrates family, community and culture. Celebrated from 26 December thru 1 January, its origins are in the first harvest celebrations of Africa from which it takes its name. The name Kwanzaa is derived from the phrase "matunda ya kwanza" which means "first fruits" in Swahili, a Pan-African language which is the most widely spoken African language.

The first-fruits celebrations are recorded in African history as far back as ancient Egypt and Nubia and appear in ancient and modern times in other classical African civilizations such as Ashantiland and Yorubaland. These celebrations are also found in ancient and modern times among societies as large as empires (the Zulu or kingdoms (Swaziland) or smaller societies and groups like the Matabele, Thonga and Lovedu, all of southeastern Africa. Kwanzaa builds on the five fundamental activities of Continental African "first fruit" celebrations: ingathering; reverence; commemoration; recommitment; and celebration. Kwanzaa, then, is:

- a time of ingathering of the people to reaffirm the bonds between them;
- a time of special reverence for the creator and creation in thanks and respect for the blessings, bountifulness and beauty of creation;
- a time for commemoration of the past in pursuit of its lessons and in honor of its models of human excellence, our ancestors;
- a time of recommitment to our highest cultural ideals in our ongoing effort to always bring forth the best of African cultural thought and practice; and
- a time for celebration of the Good, the good of life and of existence itself, the good of family, community and culture, the good of the awesome and the ordinary, in a word the good of the divine, natural and social.

Rooted in this ancient history and culture, Kwanzaa develops as a flourishing branch of the African American life and struggle as a recreated and expanded ancient tradition. Thus, it bears special characteristics as not only an African American holiday but also a Pan-African one; for it draws from the cultures of various African peoples, and is celebrated by millions of Africans throughout the world African community. Moreover, these various African peoples celebrate Kwanzaa because it speaks not only to African Americans in a special way, but also to Africans as a whole, in its stress on history, values, family, community, and culture.

Kwanzaa was established in 1966 in the midst of the Black Freedom Movement and thus reflects its concern for cultural groundedness in thought and practice, and the unity and self-determination associated with this. It was conceived and established to serve several functions.

Reaffirming and Restoring Culture

First, Kwanzaa was created to reaffirm and restore our rootedness in African culture. It is, therefore, an expression of recovery and reconstruction of African culture which was being conducted in the general context of the Black Liberation Movement of the '60's and in the specific context of The Organization Us, the founding organization of Kwanzaa, and the authoritative keeper of its tradition. Secondly, Kwanzaa was created to serve as a regular communal celebration to reaffirm and reinforce the bonds between us as a people. It was designed to be an ingathering to strengthen community and reaffirm common identity, purpose, and direction as a people and a world community. Thirdly, Kwanzaa was created to introduce and reinforce the Nguzo Saba (the Seven Principles.) These seven communitarian African values are: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith).

This stress on the Nguzo Saba was at the same time an emphasis on the importance of African communitarian values in general, which stress family, community, and culture. It speaks to the best of what it means to be African and human in the fullest sense. And Kwanzaa was conceived as a fundamental and important way to introduce and reinforce these values and cultivate appreciation for them.

Finally, it is important to note Kwanzaa is a cultural holiday, not a religious one, thus available to and practiced by Africans of all religious faiths who come together based on the rich, ancient and varied common ground of their Africanness.

Kwanzaa was created to introduce and reinforce seven basic values of African culture which contribute to building and reinforcing family, community, and culture among African American people as well as Africans throughout the world African community. These values are called the Nguzo Saba which in Swahili means the Seven Principles. Developed by Dr. Karenga, the Nguzo Saba stand at the heart of the origin and meaning of Kwanzaa, for it is these values which are not only the building blocks for community but also serve to reinforce and enhance them.

THERE IS NO WAY TO UNDERSTAND and appreciate the meaning and message of Kwanzaa without understanding and appreciating its profound and pervasive concern with values. In fact. Kwanzaa's reason for existence, its length of seven days, its core focus and its foundation are all rooted in its concern with values. Kwanzaa inherits this value concern and focus from Kawaida, the African philosophical framework in which it was created. Kawaida philosophy is a communitarian African philosophy which is an ongoing synthesis of the best of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world.

The Nguzo Saba

(The Seven Principles)

Nguzo Saba
The Seven Principles

Umoja ▲ Unity
To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.

Kujichagulia ▲ Self-Determination
To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.

Ujima ▲ Collective Work and Responsibility
To build and maintain our community together and make our brother's and sister's problems our problems and to solve them together.

Ujamaa ▲ Cooperative Economics
To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.

Nia ▲ Purpose
To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

Kuumba ▲ Creativity
To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.

Imani ▲ Faith
To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

Dr. Maulana Karenga
Creator of Kwanzaa
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The Symbols of Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa has seven basic symbols and two supplemental ones. Each symbol represents values and concepts reflective of African culture and contributive to community building and reinforcement.

The basic symbols in Swahili and then in English are:

Mazao (The Crops) - These are symbolic of African harvest celebrations and of the rewards of productive and collective labor.

Mkeka (The Mat) - This is symbolic of our tradition and history and therefore, the foundation on which we build.

Kinara (The Candle Holder) - This is symbolic of our roots, our parent people -- continental Africans.

Muhindi (The Corn) - This is symbolic of our children and our future which they embody.

Mishumaa Saba (The Seven Candles) - These are symbolic of the Nguzo Saba, the Seven Principles, the matrix and minimum set of values which African people are urged to live by in order to rescue and reconstruct their lives in their own image and according to their own needs.

Kikombe cha Umoja (The Unity Cup) - This is symbolic of the foundational principle and practice of unity which makes all else possible.

Zawadi (The Gifts) - These are symbolic of the labor and love of parents and the commitments made and kept by the children.

The two supplemental symbols are:

Bendera (The Flag) - The colors of the Kwanzaa flag are the colors of the Organization Us, black, red and green; black for the people, red for their struggle, and green for the future and hope that comes from their struggle. It is based on the colors given by the Hon. Marcus Garvey as national colors for African people throughout the world.

The Nguzo Saba Poster of The Seven Principles

Candle Lighting on The Seven Days of Kwanzaa

Day 1. **Umoja** is represented by the **black** candle.

Day 2. **Kujichagulia** is represented by a **red** candle

Day 3. **Ujima** is represented by a **green** candle.

Day 4. **Ujamaa** is represented by a **red** candle

Day 5. **Nia** is represented by a **green** candle.

Day 6. **Kuumba** is represented by a **red** candle

Day 7. **Imani** is represented by a **green** candle.

Greetings - The Swahili Way

Greetings

The greetings during Kwanzaa are in Swahili. Swahili is a Pan-African language and is chosen to reflect African Americans' commitment to the whole of Africa and African culture rather than to a specific ethnic or national group or culture. The greetings are to reinforce awareness of and commitment to the Seven Principles.

It is: "Habari gani?" and the answer is each of the principles for each of the days of Kwanzaa, for example, when asked, "Habari gani?" you respond, "Umoja", on the first day, "Kujichagulia", on the second day and so on.

Gifts

Gifts are given mainly to children, but must always include a book and a heritage symbol. The book is to emphasize the African value and tradition of learning stressed since ancient Egypt, and the heritage symbol to reaffirm and reinforce the African commitment to tradition and history.

Colors and Decorations

The colors of Kwanzaa are black, red and green as noted above and can be utilized in decorations for Kwanzaa. Also decorations should include traditional African items, i.e., African baskets, cloth patterns, art objects, harvest symbols, etc.

Celebration Preparation

There is a traditionally established way of celebrating Kwanzaa. We should therefore observe these guidelines to make our Kwanzaa the most beautiful and engaging one and to keep the tradition. Without definite guidelines and core values and practices there is no holiday.

First, you should come to the celebration with a profound respect for its values, symbols and practices and do nothing to violate its integrity, beauty and expansive meaning. Secondly, you should not mix the Kwanzaa holiday or its symbols, values, and practice with any other culture. This would violate the principles of Kujichagulia (Self-Determination) and thus violate the integrity of the holiday. Thirdly, choose the best and most beautiful items to celebrate Kwanzaa. This means taking time to plan and select the most beautiful objects of art, colorful African cloth, fresh fruits and vegetables, etc. so that every object used represents African culture and your commitment to the holiday in the best of ways.

Celebration Procedures

First, a central place in the home for the Kwanzaa Set, the symbols of Kwanzaa is chosen. A table is then spread with a beautiful piece of African cloth. Then, the mkeka (mat) is placed down and all of the other symbols are placed on it or immediately next to it to symbolize our rootedness in our tradition. Next the Kinara (candle holder) is placed on the mat and the Mishumaa Saba (seven candles) are placed in the kinara (candle holder).

The colors of Kwanzaa are black, red and green; black for the people, red for their struggle, and green for the future and hope that comes from their struggle. Therefore there is one black candle, three red and three green candles. These are the mishumaa saba (the seven candles) and they represent the seven principles. The black candle represents the first principle Umoja (unity) and is placed in the center of the kinara. The red candles represent the principles of Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujamaa (cooperative economics) and Kuumba (creativity) and are placed to the left of the black candle. The green candles represent the principles of Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Nia (purpose) and Imani (faith) and are placed to the right of the black candle.

And then the mazao (crops), and ears of corn are also placed on the mkeka. At least two ears of corn are placed down on the mat regardless of whether there are children in the immediate family or not for the children of the community belong to all of us and every adult in African tradition is considered an immediate or social parent.

Next the kikombe cha umoja (the Unity cup) is then placed on the mkeka (mat). It is used to pour tambiko (libation) to the ancestors in remembrance and honor of those who paved the path down which we walk and who taught us the good, the Tamshi, and the beautiful in life.

Then African art objects and books on the life and culture of African people are also placed on or next to the mat to symbolize our commitment to heritage and learning.

The black candle is lit first on the first day of the celebration. And the remaining candles are lit afterwards from left to right on the following days. This procedure is to indicate that the people come first, then the struggle and then the hope that comes from the struggle.

Tamshi La Tambiko

(The Libation Statement)

Our fathers and mothers came here, lived, loved, struggled and built here. At this place, their love and labor rose like the sun and gave strength and meaning to the day. For them, then, who gave so much we give in return. On this same soil we will sow our seeds, and liberation and a higher level of human life. May our eyes be the eagle, our strength be the elephant, and the boldness of our life be like the lion. And may we remember and honor our ancestors and the legacy they left for as long as the sun shines and the waters flow.

Say: "For our people everywhere" then, For Shaka, Samory, and Nzingha and all the others known and unknown who defended our ancestral land, history and humanity from alien invaders; For Garvey, Muhammad, Malcolm, and King; Harriet, Fannie Lou, Sojourner, Bethune, and Nat Turner and all the others who dared to define, defend, and develop our interests as a people; For our children and the fuller and freer lives they will live because we struggle; For Kawaida and the Nguzo Saba, the new system of views and values which gives identity, purpose, and direction to our lives; For the new world we struggle to build; And for the continuing struggle through which we will inevitably rescue and reconstruct our history and humanity in our own image and according to our own needs.

- Maulana Karenga

The Day of Meditation

(Siku ya Taamuli)

The last day of Kwanzaa is the first day of the new year, January 1. Historically this has been for African people a time of sober assessment of things done and things to do, of self-reflection and reflection on the life and future of the people and of recommitment to their highest cultural values in a special way. Following in this tradition, it is for us then a time to ask and answer soberly and humbly the three Kawaida questions:

Who am I; am I really who I say I am; and am I all I ought to be?

And it is, of necessity, a time to recommit ourselves to our highest ideals, in a word, to the best of what it means to be both African and human in the fullest sense.

This Day of Assessment or Day of Meditation is noted in the first-fruits celebration of the Akan by J. B. Danquah. He states that the Akan have one day during the first-fruits harvest in which they simply engage in quiet reflection. "The idea on this (day) is to maintain a quiet, humble and calm attitude with regard to oneself and towards one's neighbors." It is thus a good time for reassessment and recommitment on a personal and family level. Closely related to this is an activity also noted by both Danquah and Sarpong, the Day of Remembrance of the ancestors or the Adaye. Dr. Maulana Karenga, wife Tiamoyo and children enjoy celebrating the traditions of the Kwanzaa holiday celebration. We referred to it above as Akwasidae, but one could also use one of the days of Kwanzaa to pay special homage to the ancestors, those of the national community and those of the family. And this Day of Remembrance may also be a part of the Day of meditation or more precisely, the Day of Assessment.

The Day of Meditation

(Siku ya Taamuli)

The Odu Ifa meditation
K'a má fi kánjú j'aiyé.
K'a má fi wàrà-wàrà n'okùn orò.
Ohun à bà if s'àgbà,
K'a má if se'binu.
Bi a bá de'bi t'o tútù,
K'a simi-simi,
K'a wò'wajú ojo lo titi;
K'a tun bò wá r'èhìn oràn wo;
Nitori àti sùn ara eni ni.

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 anger. When we arrive at a cool place, Let us rest fully; Let us give continuous attention to the future; and let us give deep consideration to the consequences of things. And this because of our (eventual) passing.

--Eji Ogbe, The Odu Ifa

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