

Celebrating Kwanzaa at Home



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Kwanzaa Charlotte
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THE ORIGINS

KWANZAA is the only non-heroic, non-religious African American celebration.

It was founded in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga. It was created out of the cultural nationalist philosophy of Kawaida. *“The philosophy of Kawaida argues that the key challenge in the life of Black people is the challenge of culture, and that what Africans must do is to discover and bring forth the best of their culture, both ancient and current, and use it as a foundation to bring into being models of human excellence and possibilities to enrich and expand our lives.”*

Kwanzaa is celebrated from December 26 through January 1. It is based on the agricultural celebrations of Africa called “the first fruits” celebrations which were times of harvest, ingathering, reverence, commemoration, recommitment and celebration.

Kwanzaa was created in the midst of our struggles for liberation in the 1960’s and was part of the Us organization’s efforts to create, recreate and circulate African culture as an aid to building community, enriching Black consciousness, and affirming the value of cultural grounding for life and struggle.

Kwanzaa is celebrated by millions of people of African descent throughout the world African community. The celebration has been embraced and joyfully celebrated by the Charlotte community for more than thirty (30) years. It has continued to grow and reach people from all religious traditions, all classes, all ages and generations.

**All the information contained in this document comes from Dr. Maulana Karenga’s book Kwanzaa A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture, University of Sankore Press, 1998.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ACTIVITIES

➤ **INGATHERING OF THE PEOPLE**

➤ **SPECIAL REVERENCE FOR THE CREATOR AND CREATION**

➤ **COMMEMORATION OF THE PAST**

➤ **RECOMMITMENT TO OUR HIGHEST IDEALS**

➤ **CELEBRATION OF THE GOOD**





THE ESSENTIAL VALUES

Dr. Karenga created Kwanzaa to introduce and reinforce seven basic values of African culture which contribute to building and reinforcing community among African American people as well as Africans throughout the world African diaspora.

These values are called the Nguzo Saba (En-goo'-zho Sah'-bah). It is in the Pan-African language of Kiswahili and it means the Seven Principles. These inspirational and instructive values serve as the building blocks and social glue for the community.

Umoja (Oo-moh'-jah) Unity

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

Kujichagulia (Koo-jee-chah-goo-lee'-ah) Self-Determination

To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.

Ujima (Oo-jee'-mah) 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 (Oo-jah-mah'-ah) Cooperative Economics

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

Nia (Nee'-ah) Purpose

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

Kuumba (Koo-oom'-bah) 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 (Ee-mah'-nee) Faith

To believe with all our hearts in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.



THE SEVEN BASIC SYMBOLS

Kwanzaa has seven basic symbols and two supplemental ones. Each represents the values and concepts that reflect African culture and contributes to community building and reinforcement.

Mzao (Mah-zah-oh) The Crops

These are symbolic of African harvest celebrations and of the rewards of productive and collective labor.

Mkeka (Em-kay-kah) The Mat

This is symbolic of our tradition and history and therefore, the foundation on which we build.

Kinara (Kee-nah-rah) The Candle Holder

This is symbolic of our roots, our parent people---continental Africans

Muhindi (Moo-heen-dee) The Corn

This is symbolic of our children and our future, which they embody.

Mishumaa Saba (Mee-shoo-mah-ah Sah-bah) 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 (Kee-khom-bay cha Oo-moh-jah) The Unity Cup

This is symbolic of the foundational principle and practice of unity which makes all else possible.

Zawadi (Zah-wah-dee) The Gifts

This is symbolic of the labor and love of parents and the commitments made and kept by the children.

The Two Supplemental Symbols:

Bendera (Bayn-day-rah) 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. It is based on the colors given by the Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey as national colors for African people throughout the world.

Nguzo Saba Poster (En-goo-zoh Sah'-bah) Poster of the Seven Principles

Some written form of the Seven Principles should be present on your Kwanzaa set-up. These Seven Principles represent the core and cultural focus of Kwanzaa.



THE BASIC ACTIVITIES OF KWANZAA

Lighting of the Mishumaa Saba (Mee-shoo-mah-ah Sah'-bah) Seven Candles

The lighting of the candles is in honor and reinforcement of our commitment to the Nguzo Saba, the core values of Kwanzaa. Any member may light the candles, **but it is important that children participate in this activity where possible. This not only gives them a central role in the Kwanzaa celebration, but it also gives them the responsibility of learning and being able to explain the Nguzo Saba. This in turn reinforces their respect and absorption of these values which are vital to their growth and development.**

The number of candles used is seven, and include one black, three red and three green candles. The black candle is placed in the center of the Kinara, the three red candles are placed on the left, and the three green candles are placed on the right. Each day a candle is lit to symbolize one of the Nguzo Saba. After it is lit, it is explained by the person lighting it and used as the main topic of discussion for that day.

The black candle is the center candle because it represents black people in unity, and unity is the central or foundational principle. Also, the black candle is the first candle lit, because it represents the First Principle of the Nguzo Saba. Beginning with the second day, the candles are lit on the left and the right alternately, and so on, until all seven candles are lit. This sequence is done because the red candles on the left represent struggle, and the green candles on the right represent a brighter future. Thus, the seven-day practice of lighting the black, red and then the green candles is a statement and reinforcement of the fact that there can be no future unless and until there is struggle.

Each day of Kwanzaa, the family or community enjoys a meal while engaging in a discussion of the principle for that day. The principles are discussed in such a way that children receive practical day-to-day examples to support and encourage their understanding of each principle and their ability to practice and appreciate it.

Tamshi La Tambiko (Tahm-shee La Tahm-bee-koh) Libation

One of the most important activities during Kwanzaa is pouring the Tambiko or libation for the ancestors. Traditionally the Mzee (Em-zay'-ay) - Elder pours the liquid (water or juice) and leads The Tamshi La Tambiko/The Libation Statement (page 8) honoring, praising and committing our people to the historic tasks begun by our ancestors.

The Karamu (Kah-rah-moo) Feast

The karamu is also a central activity of Kwanzaa. The night of the Karamu on December 31 had traditionally been for adults, but children can participate if the activities are scheduled early enough.

Tamshi La Tutaonana (Tam-she La Too-tah-oh-nah-nah) The Farewell Statement

A final reinforcing gesture is the Tamshi La Tutaonana and Harambee (page 8). The farewell statement is used to close out the karamu and, in fact end the year. It, like other Kwanzaa activities and procedures, contains praise of our value system and is a call for commitment to it and ourselves. It ends with the community standing and being led in the Harambee by the person who makes the Tamshi.

The Harambee (Hah-rahm-bay) All Pull Together

Harambee is a chant used by continental African when pulling and thus the general meaning of the word is “let’s all pull together.” The Harambee is a call to unity and collective work and struggle. It is usually done in sets of seven in honor and reinforcement of the Nguzo Saba.

Siku ya Taamuli - Day of Assessment or Day of Meditation

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. Danquash. 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.



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 build and move in unity and strength. Here, too, we will continue their struggle for 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.

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; **ASHE!**

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; **ASHE!**

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; **ASHE!**

For the new world we struggle to build; **ASHE!**

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. **ASHE! ASHE! ASHE!**

- Maulana Karenga



TAMSHI LA TUTAONANA (The Farewell Statement)

Strive for discipline, dedication and achievement in all you do. Dare struggle and sacrifice and gain the strength that comes from this. Build where you are and dare leave a legacy that will last as long as the sun shines and the water flows. Practice daily Umoja, Kujichagulia, Ujima, Ujamaa, Nia, Kuumba and Imani. And may the wisdom of the ancestors always walk with us. May the year's end meet us laughing and stronger. May our children honor us by following our example in love and struggle. And at the end of next year, may we sit again together, in larger numbers with greater achievement and closer to liberation and a higher level of human life.

HARAMBEE! HARAMBEE! HARAMBEE! HARAMBEE!
HARAMBEE! HARAMBEE! HARAMBEE!

NEGRO NATIONAL ANTHEM
(Lift Every Voice and Sing)

Lift every voice and sing, till earth and Heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise, high as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet,
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered;
Out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou Who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou Who hast by Thy might, led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee.
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee.
Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand,
True to our God, true to our native land.

Words: James W. Johnson, 1899
Music: John R. Johnson

***** NOTES *****