



**FOUNDATIONS FOR BLACK FATHERHOOD:  
PRINCIPLES AND RIGHTEOUS PRACTICE**

*Los Angeles Sentinel, 06-14-18, p.A6*

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**T**HIS IS THE WEEK WE PAUSE TO PAY SPECIAL homage to our fathers, those on earth and those who have risen in radiance in the heavens and now sit in the sacred circle of the ancestors, among the doers of good, the righteous and the rightfully rewarded. And so, following in their footsteps and taking to heart their sacred teachings. I remember them and raise and praise their names. Performing *tambiko*, sacred offering and honor to our ancestors, I burn incense, pour sacred water and say sacred words of remembrance and raising up, and of recommitment to continue on the righteous and upward path on which they and our mothers set us.

But for me, there is always special words, thoughts and acts for honor for our immediate father, our mother's husband, co-creator of us, our brothers and sisters, with her and her life companion in all things good and beautiful. I mention our mother, for it is what she and our father taught, to honor our father and mother together, while always allowing for special recognition and unique appreciation for each of them. So, this is Father's Day and Mother's Day has just passed, but on each of these days, although one is prominent, the other is always there and central and indispensable part of whatever narrative I share and whatever event I remember and relate, regardless of whether the other is mentioned directly or not. It is how our ancestors conceived the world, lived their lives, raised their children, worshipped the Divine, and brought and sustained good in the world, i.e., together in love, life work and struggle.

As we move this month towards Father's Day, let us pause and pay due homage to those fathers who have kept their commitment, honored their obligations, and sacrificed and struggled to take care of their families, and give them rightful guidance in the good and time-tested ways of our ancestors. And let these fathers in the midst of their rightful praise, remember and raise in respect the names of all those who have made their achievements possible, especially the mothers of their children who

in partnership with these fathers brought the children into being, loved, nurtured and raised them and set them on the path to a good and meaningful life.

And let us pay special homage to those fathers who stayed steadfast in spite of unfavorable circumstances and less money and means than others, who have waded waist-deep in the murky and merciless waters of the surrounding society to save, support, and righteously raise their sons, rescue, reinforce and righteously raise their daughters, and with their wives and partners in parenthood created a love-filled place of peace, harmony and hope they all could call home. But let us also show appropriate sensitivity and support to those who have tried and try, but have not been as successful, those who make good-faith efforts but for reasons complex and compelling cannot and do not always do as well.

And finally, let us, as the *Husia* teaches, "stretch forth our hands to those on the road to ruin" and to those who've already reached that unpleasant place. Let's criticize wrong and unrighteous behavior, laxity, laziness and the loss of will, triflingness, betrayal, dishonesty and destructive behavior. And let us work tirelessly to help them turn their lives around. For as the *Husia* teaches us, "the good we do for others we're actually doing for ourselves," for we are building the moral community we all want and deserve to live in.

There is no hard and fast formula for being a good father, no easy answers on the internet or at the barber shop or on radio and TV talk shows. And there is no simple solution available in self-help manuals made for those designated as "dummies". But there is a foundation and framework in our own culture, rooted in millennia of moral and spiritual teachings on being a good person and parent, living a good, caring and responsible life, and leaving a legacy for future generations worthy of the name and history African. Therefore, to talk of fatherhood or motherhood in the African sense of the word

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requires our understanding and approaching it in the context of our own culture as an ancient, ongoing and honorable tradition. It is a tradition rooted in and reflective of fundamental principles and corresponding practices, principles which orient and ground us and encourage and sustain rightful and righteous practice.

In the African tradition, a father is first and foremost a man in the most expansive sense of the word. This includes his recognition and respect for the process of becoming a man and the practice necessary to sustain it; respect for women, our species half which makes us and humanity whole; moral and mental maturity; and willing acceptance of obligations to family, friends, community, and humanity as a whole. A father is a man among men and a man among women. Rooted in his culture and community, he moves smoothly thru the seasons of his life, from teen to adult, young man to middle age and eldership, learning, teaching and serving appropriately at every stage.

Fatherhood also requires a mutually respectful and supportive relationship with the mother. The best fatherhood whether in marriage, divorce or separation is rooted in a complementary partnership of parenthood with the mother that recognizes the cooperative character of the creating and sustaining life and elicits respect from each partner. Indeed, the well-being of the children and their respect for each parent depends on the respect and support parents give to each other. And we know that parenting, like love and life, works better and is best as a shared commitment and practice of mother and father, male and female, bound and balanced together in righteousness and duly respectful of the awesome responsibility they share.

Thirdly, fatherhood requires that a man be a model of the life he wants his children to live.

He will practice the Seven Cardinal Virtues of *Maat*—truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity and righteous order. He will speak truth, do justice, act properly and appropriately towards his children, wife and other women, as well as others, cherish and work for peaceful togetherness, avoid extremes in thought, emotion, speech and conduct, return good given and give goodness knowing it will return, and discipline himself so that his life is in order and everyone benefits from the rightful expectation of his doing good in his family and the world.

Fourthly, a father must realize and act on his shared right and responsibility with the mother of his children to guide and give direction and discipline to their children. Parents may humbly and properly sometimes doubt the rightness of their decisions and thus review and amend them. But they should never surrender or even doubt their right and responsibility to provide guidance, direction and discipline or their children's need for these.

Finally, a father and mother must wage constant struggle for the hearts and minds of their children, to cultivate in them a commitment to excellence and also the avoidance of evil. This translates as a struggle to keep the stranger and oppressor out of our house and minds, and keep them free from images, ideas, literature and language destructive of life-and-dignity-affirming African values which are as essential as breath and blood flow.

**O**UR TASK, THEN, IS TO INTENSIFY OUR STRUGGLE against our oppression on every level, overcome our own weaknesses and build a new and good world in which our families and people and the peoples of the world can be really free and flourish and walk in the world in a whole 'nother way. *Heri za Siku ya Baba.* Happy Father's Day!!!

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Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture* and *Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis*, [www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org](http://www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org); [www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org](http://www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org); [www.MaulanaKarenga.org](http://www.MaulanaKarenga.org).