

# KWANZAA



# A Kwanzaa Libation

*By Rev. Jesse Jackson Jr., M.Div.*

We gather to celebrate the unbroken chain between the past, the present and the future; our ancestors, ourselves and those unborn. Libation is as old as religious ritual itself, and in fact was practiced in both the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible. All you need is water and a living plant (or the ground). As the person leading the libation calls the name of an ancestor, those present affirm that name by saying "Ase" (I – Shay), and at that time, a little water is poured out either in the living plant or on the ground. Libation is created to thank our God for those ANCESTORS who have blessed humanity. In order for a name to be included in a Libation ritual, that person must be deceased. A great deal of African cosmology is like a circle, we move from one stage of life to the next in a circle with the belief that even after a person dies they are not separated spiritually from the "circle of life". This is very different than looking at life in a linear fashion where the stages of death give the appearance of walking the proverbial plank, which upon death severs the ties between the living and the dead. However, death alone does not make one an ancestor. You must have lived life in such a way that you blessed and impacted those you met in a positive way. Libation honors those who left humanity better than they found it.

## The Seven Principles of Kwanzaa



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.

*Kwanzaa symbols include a decorative mat on which other symbols are placed, corn and other crops, a candle holder with seven candles, called a kinara, a communal cup for pouring libations, gifts, a poster of the seven principles, and a black, red, and green flag. The symbols were designed to convey the seven principles.[7]*

**December 26 — Umoja (oo-MO-jah) Unity** - stresses the importance of togetherness within the family and within the community, which is reflected in the African saying, "I am We," or "I am because We are." **Luke 9:46-48, Luke 11:17**

**December 27 — Kuujichagulia (koo-gee-cha-goo-LEE-yah) Self-Determination** - requires that we define our common interests and make decisions that are in the best interest of our family and community. **Nehemiah 4:6, 6:15;**

**December 28 — Ujima (oo-GEE-mah) Collective Work and Responsibility** - reminds us of our obligation to the past, present and future and that we have a role not just as individuals but also as members of a larger body -- the community, society, and the world. **Matthew 5:14-16**

**December 29 — Ujamaa (oo-JAH-mah) Cooperative Economics** - emphasizes that we should pay attention to the resources that come through us and that we should constantly monitor how we use and share our resources for the collective strength to meet common needs through mutual effort and aid. **Luke 19:28-32, Acts 4:34-35**

**December 30 — Nia (NEE-yah) Purpose** - encourages us to look within ourselves and to set personal goals to benefit the one and the many for the good of the community. **2 Kings 2:11-14**

**December 31 — Kuumba (koo-OOM-bah) Creativity** - is an affirmation of our ability to create and make what we do and how we do it beautiful and transcendent and distinguishes our culture as one of great power and energy without end. **John 6:5-14**

**January 1 — Imani (ee-MAH-nee) Faith** - this principle requires that we believe in our own self worth, have confidence in our ability and capacity to excel, honoring the best of our traditions, while drawing upon the best in ourselves to succeed in building a better future. **Matthew 17:20.**

# Litany

*(From the African American Lectionary)*

A Christian Affirmation of THE NGUZO SABA (pronounced: n-GU-zo SAH-bah)

**LEADER:** Ruach Elohim (The Spirit of God), enable us to acknowledge and accept the deity of the Triune God who is the Creator, Provider, Sustainer, and Savior of humanity. We ask You to bless our worship experience as we embrace the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa: THE NGUZO SABA. Bless this assembly and all African and other symbols used in this service.

**PEOPLE:** All Wise God, grant us wisdom and understanding as in the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to honor the call to be Your chosen people. Having been brought to an unfamiliar land, and marked by this history, allow us to acknowledge You as the God who never left us.

1st Principle: Umoja (Unity)

**LEADER:** O Ancient of Days, we invoke Your holy presence as we identify, recall, and relay the first principle of Kwanzaa: UMOJA, the principle of unity. "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." (Psalm 133) Help us to be a unified people while interacting with various communities: family, neighbors, friends, believers, nations, and races, as unity is a blessing from God.

**PEOPLE:** UMOJA! May we employ the element of unity as we continue to acknowledge the Triune God. May we strive to maintain the true spirit of unity as we walk as your people around the world. Umoja!

2nd Principle: Kujichagulia (Self-Determination)

**LEADER:** O, Elohim, as we call and relay the second principle of Kwanzaa: KUJICHAGULIA, the principle of self-determination, teach us how to be self-determining believers as You created us. Help us to know Your will for our lives so that we may help others. "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please lift his neighbor for his good to edification." (Romans 15:1-2)

**PEOPLE:** KUJICHAGULIA! We will learn to live self-determined lives knowing that our actions must help others and ourselves. Kujichagulia!

3rd Principle: Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility)

**LEADER:** Adonai, as we call and relay the third principle of Kwanzaa: UJIMA, the principle of collective work and responsibility, grant us the wisdom to develop and maintain collective interests. Teach us how to think collectively and build collectively the family unit and our neighborhoods and to truly be our brother's and sister's keeper as You are the Keeper of our souls.

**PEOPLE:** UJIMA! We will strive to embody a spirit of collective work and responsibility, building and maintaining our communities as did our ancestors. Ujima!

4th Principle: Ujamaa (Collective Economics)

**LEADER:** Ha Shem, as we call and relay the fourth principle of Kwanzaa: UJAMAA, the principle of cooperative economics, grant us the wisdom to have the tenacity to build and maintain businesses within our communities. Teach us how to think and build cost-effective businesses that will be profitable for both the owner and consumer. Teach us to be mainly savers not consumers.

**PEOPLE:** UJAMAA! God has provided for us. We will be good and faithful stewards over all that you have provided. Together we will build and profit. Ujamaa!

5th Principle: Nia (Purpose)

**LEADER:** As Christians, we call and relay the fifth principle of Kwanzaa: NIA, which means purpose. We exist for the purposes of worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship. Ecclesiastes 12:13b (KJV) says, Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man [and woman].

**PEOPLE:** NIA! We will keep God's commandments! This is our purpose. We will love God and our neighbor as ourselves; this is our purpose. We will live as a beacon to the world; we will live as those who give light to the world; and as salt that gives flavor to the world. This is our purpose. Nia!

6th Principle: Kuumba (Creativity)

**LEADER:** The creativity of Yahweh Elohim is unsurpassed! We call and relay the sixth principle of Kwanzaa: KUUMBA: creativity. Help us to continue to share our creativity with the world through music, painting, food, dance, worship, and all endeavors in which we engage. We honor the creativity of our people.

**PEOPLE:** KUUMBA! We acknowledge the creative genius of God that is provided for all creation to enjoy. Allow us to keep our minds and hearts open so that God can create what the world needs through us. Kuumba!

7th Principle: Imani (Faith)

**LEADER:** "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) As we call and relay the seventh principle of Kwanzaa: IMANI, the principle of faith, help us to be greater people of faith "for without faith it is impossible to please you." (Hebrews 11:6b)

**PEOPLE:** IMANI! We have come this far by faith. We affirm the values and customs of our ancestors and give thanks for their sojourn as we seek to emulate the best of what they have bequeath to us. We have faith in God, faith in one another, faith in our race, faith in our selves, and faith in humanity. Imani!

**ALL:** "Shadowed beneath Thy hand, May we forever stand, True to our God, True to our native land."

(From "Lift Every Voice and Sing," by James Weldon Johnson)

# A Kwanzaa Prayer

**We give thanks to God for all the blessings of the earth, and honor for the great goodness which is manifest in all of creation.**

**We ask that the spirit of Kwanzaa be infused into every aspect of our daily lives, that we may constantly remember the benefits and obligations of family, community and nationhood.**

**May the light of the seven candles illuminate our daily affairs and guide us into fulfillment of our true potential.**

**May we always remember our ancestors with reverence and love, and may they share with us their great wisdom and strength as we seek to preserve and continue the heritage they have left us.**

**May the NGUZU SABA become beacons to us to live lives in service, humility, unity, faith, love and strength.**

**Amen**

(Resource: Excerpts taken from a Kwanzaa Service – Resource Watchnight Service held at Light of the World Christian Church. This Kwanzaa Service, led by youth, was written and directed by the Rev. Teresa Hord Owens.)



The first Kwanzaa stamp was issued on October 22, 1997. It was designed by Synthia Saint James.



The second Kwanzaa stamp was created by artist Daniel Minter. It has seven figures in colorful robes representing the seven principles.

# Resources

**Kwanzaa on the History Channel online location:**

<http://www.history.com/topics/kwanzaa-history>

**History Channel Video online location:**

[http://www.history.com/minisite.docontent\\_type=Minisite\\_Video\\_Clips&content\\_type\\_id=52698&display\\_order=4&mini\\_id=1047](http://www.history.com/minisite.docontent_type=Minisite_Video_Clips&content_type_id=52698&display_order=4&mini_id=1047)

**The Official Kwanzaa Web Site - Kwanzaa African American**

[www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org](http://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org)

## Other Worship Recommendations

**Descriptions of various instruments may be found at:**

<http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/teachers/curriculum/m13/activity2.php>;

**Free samples of great African drumbeats and music may be obtained at:**

[http://www.theholidayspot.com/kwanzaa/kwanzaa\\_music.htm](http://www.theholidayspot.com/kwanzaa/kwanzaa_music.htm)

## The Seven Symbols of Kwanzaa

**kikombe cha umoja** — Meaning: the unity cup — Action: Celebrants drink from this cup in honor of their African ancestors. Before drinking, each person says "harambee," or "let's pull together."

**kinara** — Meaning: the candleholder, which holds seven candles — Action: It said to symbolize stalks of corn that branch off to form new stalks, much as the human family is created.

**mazao** — Meaning: fruits, nuts, and vegetables — Action: These remind celebrants of the harvest fruits that nourished the people of Africa.

**mishumaa saba** — Meaning: the seven candles that represent the seven principles — Action: A different candle is lit each day. Three candles on the left are green; three on the right are red; and in the middle is a black candle.

**mkeka** — Meaning: mat — Action: The symbols of Kwanzaa are arranged on the mkeka, which may be made of straw or African cloth. It symbolizes the foundation upon which communities are built.

**vibunzi (plural, muhindi)** — Meaning: ear of corn — Action: Traditionally, one ear of corn is placed on the mkeka for each child present.

**zawadi** — Meaning: gifts — Action: Traditionally, educational and cultural gifts are given to children on January 1, the last day of Kwanzaa.

<http://www.holidays.net/kwanzaa/index.htm>

Other Kwanzaa Celebration Resources can be found at: [www.discipleshomemissions.org/](http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/)

