

# 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 — Kujichagulia (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**

# Habari Gani (What's the Good News?)

## A Call to Worship for Kwanzaa Service

**Leader:** Harambee! We have been called together in the presence of the Lord. We are called to Umoja! Habari Gani?

**People:** God calls us to dwell together in UNITY and to be on one accord. We are one in the Spirit. That's good news!

**Leader:** We are called to Kujichagulia! Habari Gani?

**People:** We bow in the presence of our Almighty God. He calls us to SELF- DETERMINATION, our wills submitted to his will, his will to be done in our lives. That's good news!

**Leader:** We are called to Ujima! Habari Gani?

**People:** We practice COLLECTIVE-RESPONSIBILITY; Christ calls us to love and to care for each other and ourselves. He watches over us all. That's good news!

**Leader:** We are called to Ujamaa! Habari Gani?

**People:** We steward our ECONOMIC RESOURCES as we are blessed by God, to develop, build up, and provide stability to our communities. As we give, it shall be given back to us—but not merely given back, but given back with bonus and blessing. That's good news!

**Leader:** We are called to Nia! Habari Gani?

**People:** We live lives that are PURPOSE-driven, to live for and to lead others to Christ Jesus; for he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. That's good news!

**Leader:** We are called to Kuumba! Habari Gani?

**People:** We are called to CREATIVITY, through him all things are possible. Old men will dream dreams; young men will see visions. That's good news!

**Leader:** We are called to Imani! Habari Gani?

**People:** We affirm our FAITH in Jesus, for according to our faith, it will be done to us. Because of our expressions, the world may believe in the promises of his Word. That's good news!

**Leader:** We are called together today in the presence of our God. Habari Gani?

**ALL:** There is good news today! We come together in his presence in worship and service to God, so that all men will know God through his Word, and through our God-directed unity, determination, collective responsibility, economic resourcefulness, purpose, creativity, and faith. That's the good news!

*Written by Michelle Riley Jones  
The African American Lectionary*

# **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.

# Making It a Memorable Learning Movement

The celebration of Kwanzaa is organized around five fundamental kinds of activities rooted in the ancient first-fruit harvest celebration. First, Kwanzaa, like the ancient harvest celebrations, is a time for ingathering of the people to reaffirm the bonds between us, as persons, families, community and a people. It is a time to celebrate the joy and rightness of being together, of sharing good, and of cultivating and sustaining righteous relations at every level and in every form.

(a) visit and share with relatives and friends;

(b) hold virtual community events of reaffirmation and unity;

(c) Send greetings and cards to the ill and aged reaffirming their meaning to us as a community; and

(d) reconcile, where possible, with those from whom we've become alienated even if it's difficult.

**Reverence the Creator and Creation:** Kwanzaa, like the ancient celebrations is a time of special reverence for the Creator and creation, a special time of giving thanks for the harvest of good in our lives, the good given and the good received. It is a special time to reaffirm our recognition of the world as sacred space, reaffirm our sense of oneness in it and our responsibility to care for and preserve it.

(a) collect and distribute items for the needy;

(b) do environmentally friendly things in a more conscious and intensified way; and

(c) give lectures, and hold forums on the environment, its meaning, value and our relationship to it.

**Commemorate:** Kwanzaa is a time for commemoration of the past, a time to remember, teach and reflect on the rich and limitless lessons of our life and history as a people. It is a time to raise up and praise the ancestors and honor our elders. For as we say in Kwaaida philosophy, "they are those models of human excellence and achievement who lifted up the light that lasts—the light of the spiritual and the special, the ethical and eternal." And it is they who taught us to walk as Africans in the world—as bearers of dignity and divinity, as pursuers of excellence, and as creators and sustainers of the good in the world.

(a) Have ceremonies to pour libation and raise up names;

(b) tell historical narratives of persons and events at meals or special family or community occasions;

(c) honor elders in special ways; and

(d) teach lessons of ancestors and elders in various forums and spaces.

## **Making It a Memorable Learning Movement Continued...**

**Recommit:** Kwanzaa is a time for recommitment to our highest values, those values which represent and call forth from us the best of what it means to be African and human in the world. It is values that teach us to speak truth, do justice, honor our ancestors and elders, cherish and challenge our children, care for the poor, needy and vulnerable among us, have a rightful relationship with the environment, struggle constantly against evil and always raise up, praise and pursue the good. And, of course, Kwanzaa calls on us to hold fast to and practice daily the Nguzo Saba, the Seven Principles, which are at the heart of the holiday and are life-affirming, life-preserving and life-enhancing.

(a) organize each day around one of the Seven Principles;

(b) involve children and adults in reciting and explaining its meaning to them and how it affects their lives; and do the same for all Seven Principles;

(c) do art and craft work to illustrate the symbols of the Principles;

(d) hold forums of various kind around discussion and demonstration of the Principles; and

**Celebrate:** Finally, Kwanzaa is a time of celebration of the good, the good of family, community and culture, the good of life, love, friendship, and peace; the good of earth, water and all living things, of field and forest, star and stone, rain and river—in the words of the ancestors, the good of “all that heaven gives, the earth produces, and the waters bring forth from their depths.”

(a) have forms of good and meaningful celebration: song, poetry, dance, music, story-telling, discussions, meals, recreational activities, etc.; and

(b) find creative ways to celebrate Karamu (Feast of African Food) on December 31 before the Day of Meditation which follows on January 1.

# Resources

## Kwanzaa on the History Channel online location:

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

## The Official Kwanzaa Website - Kwanzaa African American

<https://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/)

