

# Family Living

## Kwanzaa: Celebrate the Days with Meaning

BY CLYDE W. FORD

I first remember celebrating Kwanzaa during the tumultuous 60's. A Kwanzaa "industry" has now matured, boasting everything from Kwanzaa cards to "Kwanzaa Sales" at major department stores to Kwanzaa dolls decked out in African garb. I look at these developments with a mixture of pride and skepticism. On one hand, it is gratifying to see Kwanzaa accepted into American culture. Still, I worry this very acceptance is gutting the holiday of its intended meaning and purpose. I do believe it is possible to celebrate Kwanzaa in a way which keeps the meaning of the holiday alive in your life.

Like any holiday, Kwanzaa is identified with a set of principles, symbols and rituals.

Over the years, I've begun to observe Kwanzaa by embracing the basic principles and symbols, but discarding the "pre-packaged" interpretations and instructions.

I begin with Nguzo Saba, the seven daily principles which are the pillars of Kwanzaa. Rather than just reread the traditional definitions of these principles, I use each principle as the basis of a question that I ask myself

during Kwanzaa.

**Day 1 UMOJA (Unity).** Umoja, a Swahili word, is also translated as *oneness or wholeness* and my first question is: How do I experience wholeness and oneness in my life? Here my thoughts turn to my physical, emotional and spiritual health; my relationship to nature and the earth; and my connectedness to life.

**Day 2 KUJICHAGULIA (Self-Determination).** This Swahili word has an original meaning closer to *self-selection, self-chosen or authentic*. I ask myself on this second day: In what ways am I leading an authentic life? I reaffirm my commitment to try to live my life by the dictates of my own conscience, and not by dogmas and doctrines supplied to me from some external source.

**Day 3 UJIMA (Collective Work and Responsibility).** On day three, the question that informs me is: How can I lead a life of service to others? I would like to feel that the actions I take in my life bring some benefit, no matter how small, to the lives of others.

**Day 4 UJAMAA (Cooperative Economics).** In Swahili the word *ujamaa* means *familyhood, brotherhood, and relationship*. So, on



Beautiful artwork to symbolize Kwanzaa

this fourth day of Kwanzaa, I question: Who is my family, and what are the important relationships in my life? My definition of family is very broad. It includes my biological and ethnic family, but it extends beyond both to encompass the family of humankind. I reflect upon the significant relationships in my life and how Love is that important force which binds together all human relationships.

**Day 5 NIA (Purpose).** This fifth day of Kwanzaa I query: Where do I find meaning and purpose in my life? I want to know to what extent my passions are my pursuits in life. Am I doing the work I love, or the work I must to make a living? How far am I living off the mark of how I would like to live? What changes can I make to alter the course of my life?

**Day 6 KUUMBA (Creativity).** More than simply "making something," I prefer to think of creativity as bringing forth that which has not existed before. When I apply this idea to myself, I can ask on the sixth day: To what part of myself must I give birth (create), in order to meet the challenges and promises of my life? Courage, wisdom, strength, determination, faith, love may be some of the inner resources I feel must

bring forth.

**Day 7 IMANI (Faith).** Imani has many definitions in Swahili, compassion, conscience, conviction, faith, and kindness. Of all these, compassion touches me most, and I find myself asking on this last day of Kwanzaa: In what ways do I (can I) lead a compassionate life? By compassion, I do not mean simply having empathy or sympathy for those less fortunate. Racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, homelessness, abuse, loneliness, disease, ignorance, grief; these are just a few of the sources of pain and suffering we all face daily in the world and in ourselves.

Compassion seeks healing in the face of such pain and suffering. I ponder where I can find that compassion and healing within first, before I can offer it to the world outside.

When I was approached Kwanzaa in this way, these seven days help set the tone of the year to come, and the life I choose to lead.

Clyde W. Ford is the author of *The Hero With An African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa*, a book about his personal journey of discovering meaning and purpose in life through the wisdom of African mythology, available January 1999 from Bantam Books and on audio cassette from Highbridge Audio.

## Crossroads Of The Season

*We are familiar with the outer world into which we are born, live and die*

By DR. DOMINIQUE MARGUERITE

Nested in the word holiday is an ancient meaning, suggesting that these days at the end of the year "holy days", but also days of "wholeness, uninjured" and of "good omen." Yet so much is said by psychologists like me, and other healthcare professionals, about this time of year being full of stress and depression. We give recipes to "fix" what many people suffer each year as we approach the winter holidays. How is it that we have moved so far away from the ancient meaning of the season? Or have we?

As the days get shorter and finally begin to lengthen again, we

disperse and congregate with others in a wide array of stores, temples, churches, great halls, and homely homes. The rituals and stories told are different from one another, yet they are told with the same conviction year after year, generation after generation. Family stories pass down, adventures and fortunes are announced and weighed, survival is celebrated. How essential it is to so many of us that we take part in traditional holiday activities, and experience the sense that we do indeed belong to a larger human community!

During periods of ritual and tradition, we are held in a state of

timelessness, an in-between place where we repeat the same gestures again and again (exchanging presents, lighting candles, decorating our homes, going to church, visiting friends and family). Often we do not understand exactly the origin of our gestures. Do you, for example, know why you hang lights on a tree? They look pretty and very special, but so would snowballs in July. Did you know the evergreen Christmas tree perpetuates ancient Egyptian rites of death and resurrection? Or that Santa Claus is related to Saturn, the mythical old man and father of the Greek gods? According to some accounts, he

lived in the North Pole and brought with him a sprig of evergreen and the gifts of the New Year.

In fact, it does not seem to matter so much that our gestures are fully understood. Setting is equally important, which is why the rituals and story telling of our winter holidays take place under very specific circumstances with ceremonies seen no other time of the year. Jung thought that the ancient patterns of rituals and stories brought us to the crossroads between the rational and the irrational - where the imagination meets outer reality - and where the human, the finite, the temporal and the infinite (or what some call

the divine) are all present. Winter holiday ritual brings us to the crossroads between the rational and the irrational where the imagination meets outer reality - and where the human, the finite, the temporal and the infinite (or what some call the divine) are all present. Winter holiday ritual brings us to a crossroad in the progression of time from one year to the next, from dark into light. We are familiar with the outer world into which we are born, live and die. As winter sets in, our lives become more interior and contemplative. We move inside from the weather, and nights grow longer. According to Native American tra-

dition, people "tell stories, dance spirit dances and gather songs and poems," getting ready to "live with the spirits all winter long." We come once more to a larger world, a world which includes our inner voice and the imaginative. We are given the opportunity to get back to this place of wholeness within ourselves, uninjured by the slings and arrows of life, and see it as a good omen for what will come. This is an opportunity well worth celebrating.

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### Attention! City of Portland

Memo from SOS, an Elf-help program  
**To:** Good Little Boys and Girls and Elf-helpers  
**From:** Santa, Ms. Santa, and Elves  
**Re:** Greetings from North and Northeast Pole  
 SANTA and MRS. SANTA'S ANNUAL SLEIGH WITH SANTA AND SANTA'S WORKSHOP  
 ON CHRISTMAS DAY!  
 3:00-4:00 ELF-TIME!  
 Two Locations for Toys!  
 Portland Miracle Revival Church  
 4828 N. Williams Ave just south of Alberta for the little Northeast Elves and THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF PORTLAND, 8920 N. WOOLSEY AVE, COLUMBIA VILLA for the little North Elves (exact time to be posted)  
 Remember: An Elf on Time Saves Nine!  
 An Elf in Need is an Elf in DEED! If you care to donate your time we need you!  
 We need donations of multicultural dolls, non violent toys, action figures! ALL DONATION TAX DEDUCTIBLE! but don't forget that every girl and boy deserves a new toy! Raina Beavers for more information call Head Elf in Charge, Lisa at 284-6152 or Mrs. Santa at 287-8577 come and see the little firefighter elves, the little marine elves and the little reindeer moose!  
 Seek and ye shall find!



# Happy Holidays!



**Cook's Smoked Ham**  
 Bone-In. Shank portion.  
 Limit 1 per household.  
**SAVE up to \$1.00 lb.**



**Folgers Coffee**  
 34.5 to 39-oz.  
 Assorted varieties.  
 Limit 1.  
**SAVE up to \$3.91**

**.69 lb.**

**4.78**  
Safeway Club Price



**Holiday Yams**  
 Grown in California.  
**SAVE up to \$2.52 lb. on 4 lbs.**

**4 lbs. \$1**  
Safeway Club Price

**Now the savings are in the Card!**

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