



Celebrating Kwanzaa – A Reflective Feast

The week of December 26 to January 1 is a special time in many African-American communities. African Americans get together to celebrate Kwanzaa, a holiday created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga. When establishing Kwanzaa, Dr. Karenga included an additional "a" to the end of the spelling to reflect the difference between the African American celebration (**K**wanzaa) and the Motherland spelling (**K**wanza).

This holiday's traditions come from African celebrations of the first harvest of the year. During Kwanzaa, children help make decorations of red, green and black, the colors of Kwanzaa. A ceremonial table is set with a straw mat, a candle holder, and a bowl of fruits and vegetables. Each child places an ear of corn on the mat. Families gather each evening to light one of seven candles and to discuss one of the seven values of African-American family life: unity, taking control of one's own life, collective work and responsibility, sharing money and profits, purpose, creativity, and faith.

Kwanzaa is neither political nor religious and despite some misconceptions, it is not a substitute for Christmas. It is simply a time of reaffirming African-American people, their ancestors and culture. Kwanzaa means "first fruits of the harvest" in the African language Kiswahili. It has gained tremendous popularity and acceptance in many parts of the world since its founding, and it has come to be observed and celebrated by more than 18 million people worldwide, as reported by the New York Times. Kwanzaa is based on the Nguzo Saba (seven guiding principles), one for each day of the observance, and is celebrated from December 26th to January 1st.

The Seven Guiding Principles:

Umoja (OO-MO-JAH) Unity stresses the importance of togetherness for the family and the community, which is reflected in the African saying, "I am We," or "I am because We are."

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.

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 to play in the community, society, and world.

Ujamaa (OO-JAH-MAH) Cooperative economics emphasizes our collective economic strength and encourages us to meet common needs through mutual support.

Nia (NEE-YAH) Purpose encourages us to look within ourselves and to set personal goals that are beneficial to the community.

Kuumba (KOO-OOM-BAH) Creativity makes use of our creative energies to build and maintain a strong and vibrant community.

Imani (EE-MAH-NEE) Faith focuses on honoring the best of our traditions, draws upon the best in ourselves, and helps us strive for a higher level of life for humankind, by affirming our self-worth and confidence in our ability to succeed and triumph in righteous struggle.

For more information on Kwanzaa, go to the following sites:

<http://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/>

<http://www.melanet.com/kwanzaa/whatis.html>