

Daily Meditation 12-30-24

Holy Work – Critiquing Addictive Social Media, continued

Good morning.

A blessed Christmas season, and Hanukkah, and Solstice, and Kwanzaa celebration at this time of year.

I would like to focus on Kwanzaa, because I've not written much about it this season. But I think it, too, has a lot to teach us, and especially if we look at it in a deeply ecumenical way. Because Kwanzaa actually borrows a good deal of its symbols from the Jewish tradition, even while it honors the diversity of African traditions.

So Kwanzaa is celebrated from December 26 to New Year's, a seven day celebration, like Hanukkah also has the seven candles that are lit every day, like the menorah for the Jewish holiday,

And it began as part of the Black Power movement in the 1960s, responding to the racial and economic challenges that America was facing at this time. It was put together by an African scholar who borrowed practices from the 54 countries of Africa at that time. And it was meant to blend educative and spiritual elements, especially for those Africans who are in diaspora and living away from the continent.

It's been described as a seven-day, non-religious celebration, a family culture, and community. And each of the seven days honors a particular African-derived principle. The final day culminates in a feast called Karamu on New Year's Day, and each day is counted on a menorah-like candelabra. What I like about it a lot, is its emphasis is on community, and its emphasis is on behavior, if you will: on ethics, moralities, what we do, not just what we dogmatize about or think about, or imagine.

So each of the seven days is dedicated to a specific principle, inspiring people to exemplify their best selves. They homage their ancestors, and commit to building a positive legacy for future generations. Now, at its inception in the 1960s, it was seen as something of a counterbalance to Christmas. But today, it's more deeply ecumenical. It's not trying to rival Christmas or Hanukkah or Solstice for that matter -- but to integrate, if you will, with the best in other traditions.

As one scholar has put it, “this makes Kwanzaa a beautiful way to close off the old year, and embark on the new with renewed optimism, and cherish family and friends.” And I would add, and commitment to building healthy community. It emphasizes the harvest season, seeing as it comes in the Winter Solstice.

And it was invented in 1966 in the state of California, but is now celebrated around the world and United States, and especially in big cities in the United States, where there are large African American

populations, including New York City, Oakland, Atlanta, Chicago, Philadelphia and more. I lived in Oakland for 34 years, and I was very conscious of this holiday.

And the values that are focusing on the African tradition are not exclusionary, it's open to all people. So what are these seven principles, and how are they recognized? Some of the observance includes songs, dancing, African drums, storytelling, poetry reading, and shared stories. Storytelling and shared meals.

The first principle, celebrated on the first day, which is primal to all the others -- it's really an underlying foundation -- is the principle of Unity. Its purpose is to strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race. That is the first day celebrated, and the foundational day for all the other six principles.

The second principle is Self-Determination: To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves. So clearly this is a celebration of what Meister Eckhart calls looking from inside out, not outside in. Eckhart says "truth always comes from inside out, not outside in." So this is self-determination, not allowing myself to be defined by others, by another culture.

The third day is the day of celebration of Collective Work and Responsibility: To build and maintain our community together, and make our communities' problems, our problems, and to solve them together. So again, you can see the underlying principle of interdependence and of unity playing through all of these days, and all of these principles and communities at the core.

The next day is Cooperative Economics: To build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses, and to profit from them together. Again, to emphasize the economic principle of togetherness and building community, not just making individual millionaires and billionaires.

The next day is Purpose: To make our collective vocation -- notice that phrase, collective vocation, we've just talked about collective economics -- the building and developing of our community, in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness. So, development of community.

And the next principle is Creativity: To do always as much as we can, to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it. But just to honor creativity in this special way, in a special day, the Via Creativa, I think, is very significant.

And the next day is Faith, the principle of Faith: To believe with all our hearts in our people, in the righteousness and victory of our struggle. That is an understanding of faith. And that fills out the seven principles of Kwanzaa.

And I think that these principles are applicable to everybody. I don't find anything the least bit offensive, but integrating to my Christianity, and I find it integrative to Judaism, and to other religions as well. So I

think it is significant that in my lifetime, that African Americans gathered together to create their own holiday at this season of Solstice. And that the emphasis in this holiday is community and common values. And I think this could be celebrated by everybody.

So let us celebrate the intention and the purpose here, and integrate it into whatever your tradition is. Of course, a lot of African Americans integrate it into their Christmas time, if they're Christian (many are), and into whatever lives they were trying to live, fully and responsibly.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.