

Responsibility to Self and Service

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The dichotomy of our current time was most aptly described nearly 150 years ago in the unforgettable opening lines of Charles Dickens' great work, *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." Dickens' beautiful, yet painful rendition of his time rings very true for us now; and yet, we also are in a time that is replete with opportunities for resurrection and renewal.

I am still absorbing the power and positive energy that emanated from President Obama's inauguration. Through that process, I have thought many times about what my role should be in supporting the need for change that he preached throughout his campaign. The answer to that question really is simple...I must take responsibility for my actions and give of myself to the larger community, for I believe that the combination of personal responsibility and collective action for the greater good always have been, and will continue to be, the cornerstones for moving our society forward.

Personal responsibility is being accountable for those areas of our lives over which we have control; e.g. developing our minds, managing our financial resources wisely, and respecting our bodies by making smart choices about food and exercise, to name a few. Personal responsibility also means being accountable for our sexual selves and not engaging in risky behavior or creating opportunities for unplanned pregnancies.

Personal responsibility is an important means to an even more critical end. As an African-American woman, I am compelled to live my life in an accountable and responsible way so that I am available to commit myself to the larger community. During these times of unprecedented challenge, we all must view ourselves as the agents who will change the beloved community for the better. In doing so, whatever worst times we may encounter will be met with strength, hope and the capacity to find opportunity in the face of incredible odds.

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