

Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation

Rev. angel Kyodo williams

Lama Rod Owens

with Jasmine Syedullah, PhD

Preface: A Lineage of Insurgence

By Rev. angel Kyodo williams, Sensei

The Weight of Freedom

“...until our capital-V vision for liberation gives way to an accessible, translatable, adaptable yet rigorous praxis at meaningful scale -- one that can match in energy and rebound through rhythm from the sustained stress the structures of oppression are designed to burden our minds, our bodies, and our hearts with -- we cannot uproot those forces.”

“As Bruce Lee famously said, “Under duress, we do not rise to our expectations, but fall to our level of training.” Hundreds of years of living in a context designed by pillagers of the land and captors of people -- without sufficient intervention -- naturally establishes the curriculum of the training to which we fall. Our methodologies are forged within the default mindset of colonization, capitalism-as-religion, corporation-as-demigod, domination over people and planet, winner take all, rape and plunder as spoils of victory, human and natural resources taken as objects of subjugation to the land-owning, resource-controlling, very, very privileged few.”

“Even when we are conscious about how these structures can manifest in our work, without appropriate training of skill and depth our strategies for coping play the well-intended flip side of the destruction card: suppression, depression, diversion, martyrdom, and simply taking it until there’s no room left in our bodies to contain the force of destruction, so that like the dis-ease it is, it turns inward against us. Most distressing is when conscious communities cannot provide support because the depth of suffering is not known as was the case in the suicide of the young Black activist MarShawn McCarrell II.”

Introduction: Enter Here

Radical Challenge

By Rev. angel Kyodo williams, Sensei

“The Black Radical Tradition is foundational to people who are not Black, for it is only with the liberation of Black people that humanity can be freed from its chains of oppression, just as Black people cannot be liberated while humanity is in chains.”

Why Radical?

“...with all due respect to Gandhi -- we can no longer afford to just be the change. We actually have to be the transformation, which is to say we have to transcend the form, the construct that we find ourselves in.

The only way we can do that is to observe the construct that we're in instead of trying to tinker with it right away with the same blind spots that we came to the problem with.”

“As a society, we are in danger of needing larger and larger social wake-up calls and shocks to the system.”

There Is No Neutral

! “If you have ever wondered how you would have shown up in the face of the challenge put before white America when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, upending the accepted social order, now is the time you will find out.”

“...our challenge, our responsibility, our deep resounding call is to be at the forefront of this overdue **evolutionary thrust** forward.”

Whose Liberation?

“Once you are aware of how you are being policed, you can begin the process of self-liberating, from the position of realizing the mutuality of our liberation rather than suffering under the delusion that you are doing something for me.”

The Social Ego

“The construct has been designed so that white America -- and by extension white teachers and practitioners -- lives inside the prison of that small mind, such that without intentional intervention, you cannot see over the wall of the reinforcing perspectives that affirm and perpetuate the **White Superiority Complex**.”

The Social Monastery

“I think we’ve mistaken the so-called hero’s journey. We believe that we can go on retreat into the monastery looking for something and get enlightened, then come out into the world as enlightened beings. But as people we are not monastics, our profound insight only comes in direct relationship with the world -- the field of our practice. It is our relationship to the outer world that is the source of our awakening. We then bring the insight to the monastery where we hone and integrate it during retreat.”

! “If the fruit of practice is not a desire to respond to the world, if it just remains in response to your own needs, “me” is all you are seeing: “I want to feel better. I want to feel like a spiritual person. I want to be seen as right. But I don’t want to actually be responsible for the world that I’m in.” Then you haven’t yet woken up.

Section I: Homeleaving - What We Left Behind

Remembering In Seven Movements

By Lama Rod Owens

Homeleaving

“As I have moved in my life, I have also experienced the death of who and what I was before the movement. I remember not as an act of moving back into the past but as a memorial to the struggle of movement. I remember to offer myself the grace to grieve for the person I used to

be. In the sentiment of my home community, I may not be where I'm going, but I am grateful that I'm not where I used to be."

Second Movement

"The trauma for othered bodies in institutions is the expectation that we should be grateful for being allowed in the door, and, once we are in the door, not much effort is made for us to have a seat at the table. My experience was like being told to sit in the corner and shut up. I call it being a causality of white supremacist grace. Unfortunately, this is not just what many institutions mean by diversity; this is what they mean by inclusivity as well."

"What I learned was the truth of the violence that can come from making white people uncomfortable."

The Abolition of Whiteness By Jasmine Syedullah, PhD

! "The problem with being at home in whiteness is that it goes hand-in-glove with the presumption that everything whiteness does must be best, right, noble, beautiful, moral, and productive."

"The tiptoeing around race and other forms of difference as if in fear of waking a sleeping lion is one of the most subtly toxic attributes of whiteness in our culture right now. Everyone fears making mistakes. For white folks, though, the coexistence of being historically lauded as the creators of what is right, making mistakes must be hard. We are all waking up. It is going to get messy. The good news is there are brooms, and there are rags."

"We can get lost in all the excitement of waiting for deliverance from the presence of what bell hooks so wisely names *white supremacist capitalist patriarchy*."

"Everywhere whiteness appears to be the golden ticket. The short cut. The glory of the few. The chosen. The entitled. The justification for injury. The use of force. The state of the exceptional."

“Whiteness is not the frontier. It is not an adventure. It’s a road to nowhere. It’s a captivity narrative. And there is another way out of its domain.”

A Different Drum

By Rev. angel Kyodo williams, Sensei

“I learned that context was everything, dictating norms of culture, speech, expression of gender, intelligence, and the rules for how to belong. This bridging, as both survival function and choiceful act, taught me a basic Truth: Each world you inhabit is no more or less real than the others. It is all just a protocol, a made-up and agreed-upon set of codes. In fact, moving fluidly between worlds of difference meant developing an awareness of what of “so-called-you” remained still and apparently the same.”

“It wasn’t always safe, but it was ours, and communities formed by truth mattered more than delusions of safety.”

“Poster child modeling pain, foreigner in my own land. Being in the territory doesn’t make you belong. Every time I tried to stay within the lines, they ran over me, so I chose the borderlands and left divisions behind.”

Section II: Stakeholders - What We Bring Forward

Bringing Our Whole Selves: A Theory of Queer Dharma

Testimony III: Rev. Angel

“...I had to shift my worldview to one that sees beyond binary truths handed to us to yoke ourselves into a system of control. To hold queerness as a practitioner is to be in active radical acceptance of everyone and all things as they are.”

Desire and the Dharma

Lama Rod:

“James Baldwin came along and actually reading his words, I realized that being gay was much more than the sex, it was about intimate connection to other men.”

“Great sex was fun, but there was more that I wanted. It is a bit difficult for me to articulate, but as I get older it is about connecting to people and finding that connection to be attractive, just that basic connection that is beginning to transcend sex and gender. Within attraction, sexual desire is part of the experience but not the totality of the experience for me. I had to begin to make that choice to transcend the basic appetite and desire for body where I find myself being at odds with other gay men. It is about liberation. It is about awareness and about an understanding of who and what we are.”

Get What You Need

Lama Rod: Within radical activist communities, which I’m a member of, there’s a worship of anger as being vital for community change. Now, I always have to go up against them and push back on that because I see people destroyed in anger and in rage. I have to go into the communities and say, “I think we have to acknowledge anger. We have to honor our anger, but we don’t have to ground ourselves in anger as a momentum to create change.”

I experience a lot of anger, but I’m not involved in activism because I’m pissed off. I’m involved because I want people to be happy.

!!! **Rev. Angel:** “The cultural value in this society has been if you don’t know how to work with something, suppress it. Not only suppress it in yourself, suppress it in others, because if you don’t suppress it in others, then it reminds you that you’re suppressing it in yourself. That’s part of what we’re experiencing in the dharma communities -- the suppression of emotion. Suppression of anger, in particular, is a way in which folks are not actually being controlled in terms of expressing their anger because they want to control you’ it’s that they want to control themselves.”

! “One of the extraordinary things about liberation is that you do not feel the need to control things when you’re free. And the freer you get, the less you feel the need to control. Because the illusory nature of control becomes clear to you. It’s like, “I’m just making this up! I’m not actually controlling anything!”

"It's like your closet. It's not really clean in here; I just stuffed all the things in the closet, but now I'm anxious because the closet might burst open. I feel aware of the fact that there are things that are rotting in the closet, and they're causing a stench, and that stench is coming out. You may not even notice the smell, but I'm anxious, and I'm carrying and living under the burden of anxiety of you becoming aware of the way in which I have put all of this stuff away. You know, when you're really hoarding, it's not just your furniture, your papers. Your shit is in there. So your shit is making a stink and you're anxious and you can't relax in your own skin. You feel triggered by someone else's presence. Not because they're doing something. It's because you have so much shit in your closet that you're holding back.

Having these conversations is liberating for us all. It's just opening the closet and saying, "OK, you know what is there. At least I can relax because now we know it's there and I don't have to be so on guard and fearful."

We're not talking enough about the fear that white folks hold as a result of race. I'm not talking about fear of colored people or fear of Black people. I'm talking about fear of one's own self, because you don't know how to have the conversation, because you feel shame about where you're located in that conversation, about how to locate yourself. We all feel shame when we're sitting on the cushion and stuff pops up in our head. We come to realize everything we think when no one is looking. What's liberating is once we are like, "This is what's going on. Now I understand my behavior, which seemed inexplicable at the time."

"That's what happens; we get trapped. We behave in some way that's unconscious -- unskillful behavior."

Lama Rod: "I think we get distracted with trying to end white supremacy and oppression and racism, but there's still this work of healing that needs to be done for everyone, and we need to bring more attention to that piece.

Healing can be started now. I get pushback from people who say, "No! We need to end oppression. Or we need to end all these systems." I think that's how we get lost and distracted from the work of healing. I'm working to end racism and oppression, but at the same time I want to be liberated. I want to thrive. I want to be happy. How can we bring that ethic of healing back into our communities, into our *sanghas*, into our households, into our relationships, into our organizations?

Rev. Angel: "This is something that is challenging for people to understand -- the notion of transforming society from the inside out. We're so in a framework of dichotomies that many people are like, "We have to do it outside first.""

"Understanding that part of our capacity to make change outside in a way that's actually generative comes from having done work inside so we can actually have empowerment that doesn't have to do with external conditions. We actually have models for it on the grand scale. All people admire Nelson Mandela for his refusal to be imprisoned in his own being, which

enabled him to come out of prison after twenty-eight years, which then gave room for a level of change to happen on a social level.”

! “I’m not willing to have my happiness wait for what might happen out there.”

! “We have to commit to our own liberation regardless of what happens outside. And paradoxically, that gives way to change happening outside.”

Lama Rod: “We can have this rhetoric of overthrowing oppressive systems, but we have to balance that with the work of overthrowing the oppressive system operating internally that actually keeps us enslaved.”

Rev. Angel:

“Even though I had a lesbian teacher, I was still getting a white heteronormative frame of the Dharma. It didn’t allow for a radical Dharma, and it let me, compelled me, or positioned me, I would say, inside a certain kind of privilege. Inside of that privilege one cannot be radical. It is like inside that privilege, that is the basic question to me about radical Dharma, and the theory of radical Dharma is that you have to let go of your privileges and turn the lenses of Dharma on the full scope and expression of your life.”

Remembering Love: An Informal Contemplation on Healing By Lama Rod Owens

“Growing up, no one had ever talked about sexuality or sexual orientation. The boy knew he was gay by his mid-teens but did not have the language to express it. Even if he did, there was danger in saying the words.”

“The young man wanted more and did sit with the feelings and knew that the *sangha* and the teacher were not safe for him.”

Describing Trauma

“If I am to speak of healing, then I must first speak of trauma. When I speak of trauma, I speak of experiences that impact how we relate to ourselves and to others around us. These experiences, mostly related to our emotional capacities and also called woundedness, hurting, aching, or pain, refer to both the subtle and gross experiences that make it very difficult to feel confident, safe, or to experience happiness, well-being, and balance. In this understanding of trauma, trauma can be healed.”

“In my experience, trauma is the creation of a context that does not privilege my deepest desire to return home and inhabit my own agency and body, but instead triggers disembodiment and a loss of awareness of the body and its experiences. Thus, trauma becomes a cyclical experience of continuous unfolding, of continuous movement through places without consent as it perpetuates terror, despair, hopelessness, and disconnection. It is a voyage that never docks at any port, but is suspended, unexamined.”

Giving Voice to Healing

“We have learned that anger is a part of the work of social liberation, that being angry is what motivates and drives us. To a certain extent this is true. However, I believe that the true blessing of anger is how it can indicate an imbalance in our experience and in the world around us. But we have to be very clear: Anger is not about creating or building up. That is the work of loving.’

“It is hard for us to consider that if the oppressor is healed, then maybe he or she would not reproduce so much violence.”

“When I hear folks’ distrust of healing, especially in marginalized and traumatized communities, I hear the subtle and nuanced workings of internalized oppression that distract us from imagining liberation that is not about struggling against systems and regimes but about transcending the trauma of struggling and residing in the nature of who we are as people who can be psychically free though physically bound.”

! “Identity is wounding only because we survive in places where difference remains invisible instead of being seen and celebrated. Not only that, many of us do not know how to celebrate our difference because we have been taught to repress difference in an effort to gain social privileges or, to put it another way, access to the master’s house. Because I survived my intersectionality, I am showing up a survivor of conditions that were not set by me but that I still must endure.”

What Is Love?

“Healing is being situated in love. Healing is not just the courage to love, but to be loved. It is the courage to want to be happy not just for others, but for ourselves as well. It is interrogating our bodies as an artifact of accumulated traumas and doing the work of processing that trauma by developing the capacity to notice and be with our pain. If we are to heal, then we must allow our awareness to settle into and integrate with the pain and discomfort that has been habitually avoided. We cannot medicate the pain away. We embrace it, and in so doing establish a new relationship with the experience. We must see that there is something that must be befriended.

This is the true nature of our experience, and in finally approaching this experience we contact basic sanity.”

! “When we attempt to love out of our woundedness, then our loving is only violence.”

Coming Out and Risking Love

“There would have been significant woundedness if my mother said that she could not accept me or love me because of my sexuality.”

Healing and Showing Up

“Healing is never a definite location but something in process. It is the basic ordinary work of staying engaged with our own hurt and limitations. Healing does not mean forgiveness either, though it is a result of it. Healing is knowing our woundedness; it is developing an intimacy with the ways in which we suffer. Healing is learning to love the wound because love draws us into relationship with it instead of avoiding feeling the discomfort.”

[started tumbling quotes below here]

“Opening our hearts to woundedness helps us to understand that everyone else around us carries around the same woundedness.”

! “And while I continue to heal myself, I continue to hurt myself. Using racism as an example, though I struggle to use my practice to bring awareness of internalized oppression manifesting as racial trauma, I am also struggling to see how I am also an agent of white supremacy as I unconsciously value white bodies as aesthetically pleasing and cleaner, while simultaneously seeing my body and other brown and Black bodies as less attractive. How my internalizing of white supremacy urges me to be on guard when passing another Black male on the sidewalk, to be embarrassed when other Black or brown bodies are acting out in public spaces, or to hide my rage and despair in order to keep white people cozy.”

“One of the blessings of lovingkindness practice is that the heart remains raw, sensitive, and open to pain.”

“When we begin to confront our trauma, we give permission for others to do the same.”

Healing and Lineage

“There is healing through lineage.”

“I summon my identities like I summon the ancestors and demand that they speak truth to me because if they do not, I am living a lie. To be a lie is to go against my purpose as a body who holds and shares dharma.”

“I also evoke the blessing of Tara, the female Buddha of compassion, to support me as I lean into my own discomfort so that I can lean into the suffering I sense around me.”

Taking, Sending, and Receiving as Healing

“When I am in tune to my discomfort, I am less likely to avoid your discomfort. Or to put it another way: when I am able to show up to my suffering, I can also show up to yours.”

Epilogue

“In the end, what I have survived is not myself but people, systems, and institutions that have used physical, emotional, spiritual, and other forms of psychic violence to insist that I should be something other than myself. It is not my particular intersectionality that has been my suffering, but rather the suffering that comes from my intersectionality not being honored, accepted, or even celebrated. I am a survivor of perpetual invisibility, which has often resulted in me doubting my self-worth, integrity, and general health. Thus, part of my trauma has been believing that I do not matter and that the world doesn't care. In my experience, invisibility becomes a kind of murder. For communities I identify with that are struggling to be seen, it is genocide.

I want to say that I will continue smiling at police folks. And understand that when you blame me for your unexamined issues, I will still want you to be happy. When you call me a name meant to hurt me, I will try not to take it personally as you are also trying to express your own despair. I want to say that I am tired of struggling and am practicing being where I want to be. In my mind, I am saying all this, but I haven't figured out how to get this across. I apologize for my confusion. In the end, my healing has been learning to see myself and to celebrate myself. It is interrogating the stories about how I do not matter and choosing to let go of those narratives and engage in the necessary and revolutionary work, self-love, and liberation. Through self-loving, I can know my aching and choose not to show up in reaction to the aching, but to

show up being informed by my aching in a way that wakes me up to the reality that everyone else around me is aching as well. I am not alone in needing to be seen.

But I also want to say that despite my uneasiness in the world, I'm OK and that I'm fine with feeling angry and sad because that's a part of my humanity and I am learning to have more space to be human. I want to say that I try not to blame others so much and that I am trying to lean into the heaviness and despair, that I'm trying to stay open and not shut down. I want to say that my speechlessness in reaction to the ugliness around me is slowly giving way to a choice to honor life with silent contemplation.

In the end, I am no longer the little boy having to hold the potential violence of those in stress around him, or the little boy who is afraid to claim his love for other men, or the preteen who is challenged to make meaning out of race and class, or the young teen terrified of riding the bus, or the young man othered because of his body type, or the man who is told that his feelings of marginalization are his issue not the issue of a *sangha* steeped in white-supremacist cultural norms. I am no longer these people, but I remember their stories. They made me who I am. Because of them, I have earned my dharma. I have been blessed with a testimony."

Radicalizing Dharma Dreams

By Jasmine Syedullah, PhD

"On truth's path, wise is mad, insane is wise. In love's way, self and other are the same. Having drunk the wine, my love, of being one with you, I find the way to Mecca and Bodhgaya are the same." - #302, from Rumi's *Kolliyaat-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, edited by *Badiozzaman Forouzanfar* (Tehran, Amir Kabir, 1988)

"All that is deeply true is a paradox." - Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams, *Sensei*

Strangers at the Gate

Look into Stanley Tookie Williams

"Though many believed he was not guilty of the crimes for which he had been sentenced, and, though, I had no doubt he had contributed violent acts, I was also certain those actions should not cost him his life."

“The historical conditions of its formation rose alongside the globalization of the US empire that showed the seeds of 9/11 -- arming afghan mercenaries with military weapons and training them to fight Soviet soldiers in a war without end.”

Introduction to Meditation

“...lock it in a box, and throw away the key. Nothing can be truly destroyed this way. Not even the dead stay buried.”

“The older practices were not wrong; they were, however, alibis in my own desire to appear unflappable, while actually managing to be still hiding from myself.”

“...gazing gently ahead in order to maintain detached connection with the world and an attitude of readiness to rejoin it whenever the need arose.”

“At the end of the day, the assumption that crowds acting in concert need to be controlled taints our everyday connections to feeling each other -- to feeling interconnected. It makes us fear those we learn to call strangers. It makes us strange in the presence of the unknown.”

“But we were there. We were taking on, paying attention, and, because we were there, it was not a moment that went unnoticed.”

! “The tendency to police becomes less compulsive, more conscious with practice. Abandoned pieces, places and people cut off become inhabitable, hospitable, less hostile. What if we went there? Away from reliance on police, cuffs, kill shots, and caged? What if we flocked? What if we crowded conventions of justice with conduct becoming a more collective vision of freedom. Do we police because we fear we can be savages? Do our barricades from each other belie the blinds that keep us strangers to ourselves?”

Any Given Someday

! “It is not enough to know we want freedom. We have to practice it. We have to be able to live it out together.”

“We throw up borders of separation to keep ourselves safe and somehow manage to find ourselves more miserable.”

!! “So often the ways I hear folk talk about practice and represent its value are wrapped up in the idea that freedom is a means to an end, especially within the U.S. context, given our particular historical relationship to freedom being legally and morally bound up in discourse of

property, entitlement, mastery, exchange, dispossession, and exclusion. What if freedom is not a means to an end full of more comforts than this moment, right now?"

"A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth ... and say, 'This is not just.' ... The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just. A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war, 'This way of settling differences is not just.'"

"In Rev. angel's talk that day she reminded us all of the importance of not getting caught up in the hand-wringing that comes with worrying over what we ought to do with the obstacles to our liberation. That we stop checking out, check in and work together to try to do things in ways we might not yet know how to do is more important than knowing the right thing to do. Bodies are dropping while we're debating. She said the incessant preoccupation with trying to name the first thing to do can be itself a hindrance."

"The endless crunch of priorities punishes me for stopping long enough to notice my rage wreaking havoc on my body. It is not an accident."

"What if the thing that has to go, because something's got to give, is anxiety itself?"

"We are experimenting with new strategies for survival," I told my friend. "Their efficacy is necessarily not reflected in dominant culture, and yet throughout history we hear stories of folks refusing competition in precisely this way and daring to walk together to another rhythm. The fact that this bluesy fugitive rhythm does not 'work' in this world is proof of its success. We just have to remember we are not alone in this journey. We sit to practice being with ourselves so we can better sit, love, and live with those who will show up and help us along the way."

! "We are not yet drones."

"Even under slavery I am told the people could fly."

"The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of hate. History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursue this self-defeating path of hate. As Arnold Toynbee says: 'Love is the ultimate force that makes for the saving choice of life and good against the damning choice of death and evil. Therefore the first hope in our inventory must be the hope that love is going to have the last word.'" - Dr. King

"We are yearning to connect with others, to be engaged in collective action. The greatest source of our self-defense against the mob mentality of law and order politics is each other. This is not a romantic notion of connection. It is not about connecting as couples or nice, neat households. Not because we are friends or lovers or because we share a common social network, but

because we know and share a common knowledge that the personal is political, but the impersonal is powerful. Our greatest liability is thinking we have to go it alone.”

! “It is about fellowship within the fray of friction.”

“We are not mercenaries. We are defending ourselves against the modern threats of mass disposability. We are not just hungry, we are starving. We could become one rather than scramble to defend *our* stuff and *our* families. Together, there are no individual selves to be defended. Together, self-defense is collective transformation.”

It's not About Love After All

By Rev. angel Kyodo williams, Sensei

“We have witnessed the way in which movements for justice that denounce dominator culture, yet have an underlying commitment to corrupt uses of power, do not really create fundamental changes in our societal structure. When radical activists have not made a core break with dominator thinking (imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy), there is no union of theory and practice, and real change is not sustained.... It is precisely because the dictates of dominator culture structure our lives that it is so difficult for love to prevail.” -- Bell Hooks

Vehicles to Freedom: What's Your Ride?

“Not long after finding my place as an activist for social justice, I came up against the need for not just reacting to what was happening in the world, which gave me a sense of purpose, but developing a way to look at what was happening, which provided a sense of meaning. I found a second home in cultivating a spiritual life.”

The Wake-Up Warriors

“Strongly influenced by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's teachings on the enlightened society of Shambhala...”

“...the ego as the ultimate foe to be vanquished. I saw this as a more sustainable path, especially for Black people, whose road to victory in the external landscape would likely be a long one given the deep entrenchment of the forces of the oppression set against us.”

Beyond Allies

! “My intense interest and eventual certainty about the connection between inner change and social change led me to go beyond studying what made me change possible in people and think about how deeply powerful change could be scaled to movements to affect many people - by reaching a critical mass of change-makers who could, on their own terms, cultivate destructible qualities, but, all working together, could create movements that weren't about a small handful of individuals doing things on behalf of the many but enrolling people in the deep project of their own liberation.”

Meeting Suffering

“The thing about our pain and our suffering is that until it is met and seen for what it is, it doesn't go anywhere. It's like the dark places in your refrigerator, things hidden in little containers that you refuse to open because you don't quite remember when it got there. So instead of opening and facing the smelly containers you find, you ignore them and eventually run into an infestation, an overgrowth of mold and spores and bacteria and things that can kill you, because you didn't want to deal with them whey were just plain stinky.”

Be With the Suffering

“What place are you not feeling?
What part of you are you rejecting?
What aspect are you not loving?
What truth are you not willing to accept?”

! “In my experience, whatever we're not facing about ourselves is never as bad as the ideas we are referencing ourselves off of.”

! “We cannot have a healed society, we cannot have change, we cannot have justice if we do not reclaim and repair the human spirit. We simply cannot. Imagining anything different is to really have our head buried deeply in the sand of hundreds of years of a culture of domination, colonization, the theft of this land, the theft of a people from their land, and the continued and ongoing theft and appropriation of peoples and cultures on a day-to-day basis that every single one of us is colluding with and participating in consciously and unconsciously.”

The Grand Central Station of Presence

“The question is: how do we allow people to be deeply in touch with themselves, and allow them to become deeply in touch with others?”

“We don’t have to fix people at all. We have to trust the evolutionary draw that is. What pulls you forward is presence.”

Every Body Home

“Predatory capitalist greed has deeply ingrained a self-worth confusion into our psyche. We associate our value as human beings with our financial worth. Our relationships are governed by the shadow game of acquisition. We can never have enough. The result is a devastating disconnect to a felt sense of our experience.”

Theory of Transformative Social Change

“Spirituality, by its nature, has a whole expressive range. Transformative Social Change looks specifically at “what is the trajectory?” and “what is the vehicle?” of the desired change. Spiritual tradition is comfortable with paradox, whereas many political movements are not. But all truth is paradox. What it is to live in a space of transformative change is to engender greater and greater comforts with paradox. So that paradox becomes something that we can not only acknowledge but also live more truthfully. We discover that Truth *is* relationship. And relationship *is*.”

The Language of Love

“The theory of Transformative Social Change was designed to do exactly what bell hooks speaks of, to unite theory and practice, providing an identifiable yet adaptive, concrete yet

flexible, rigorous yet permeable path to breaking with dominator culture through direct experience. Through praxis.”

Where's the Love?

! “What dawned on me is that not only has white supremacy robbed Black, brown, and yellow people of the spirit-given human right to life and liberty, it has also so thoroughly programmed and policed white people as to who and how they could love -- determining entire groups of people unworthy -- that the entirety of our descended culture suffers from a severely atrophied relationship to the most animating, elivening, equalizing force gifted to the human experience.”

“The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference.” - Elie Wiesel

“How else could the imaginably decent, moral, ordinary white people stand to live in proximity, much less partake, in open-market slavery? Generations of people allowed their children to witness the sale and degradation of other human bodies. This most unnatural of arrangements, executed for nothing more aspirational than the privilege of financial gain, required the compulsion toward compassion for other beings to be systematically uprooted and replaced with widespread indifference. This has continued into post-slavery lynching, Jim Crow denial of legal entitlements, systematic mass incarceration, prison-to-school pipelines, and so on. All of this has occurred while white folks gained from the resulting wealth, presumption of entitlement to fare better than colored people, and, most insidiously, a belief that meritocracy has been at work all along, shielding them behind a cloak of ignorance and innocence while they cash their spoils at the bank.

For generations upon generations, white America has traded its humanity for privilege.”

Section 3: The Conversations

Flow of the Evening

“The first was an invitation from Rev. angel that we leave niceness aside. She made a careful distinction between what it means to be kind to each other, rather than trying to be nice. Rev. angel reminded us that / *“This is a conversation that is long overdue, and we should take the opportunity of us being in the room together, but you're also welcome to challenge us. Please don't regard the fact that we are teachers as meaning that we can't be challenged. And we give good push-back. So please do just bring your full heart and your full voice, and I trust that your being here means that you are rooted in love, and that's what you can bring to this*

conversation.” / A second guideline for holding this conversation in a good way came from Lama Rod, who echoed the importance of being kind but also invited us into being messy, because we create much more damage in our communities and our relationships when we are always editing everything. Lama Rod placed this in the context of the current culture of silences and hesitations to speak our truths regarding race, love, and liberation, both in our dharma communities and in our everyday lives.”

“I want people to have a sense of agency, and I need people to feel as though they’re a part of the transformation. Not just sitting there and trying to get something from me.”

“What we wanted to do was generate a new protocol of truth-telling in regard to race, love, and liberation.”

Meal Gatha

We express our gratitude for this food that comes to us from the lives of plants and animals, from the light and warmth of the sun, the earth’s fertile soil, the heavenly rain, the labor of farmers, the work of transportation and the services of merchants.

Considering where this food has come from and the many labors that have brought it to us, we resolve to strengthen our body, to awaken our mind and to enrich our spirit.

Reflecting on all those who are in need of nourishment, we eat this food.

Resolving to think good thoughts and to do good deeds, we eat this food.

Committing to serve all those who strive to break their addictions and transform their delusions, we eat this food.

Vowing to attain our Way, we eat this food.

May we exist in muddy water with purity like a lotus, thus we eat this food.

Dinner Dialogue

Rev. angel: “And I so unfolded my life within Buddhist practice with the profound sense of aloneness and yet a simultaneous sense of having found home.”

Lama Rod: “...I’ve had to develop self-awareness of when I’m being used in that way.”

Rev. angel: “The relationship between race and privilege is complex. Definitely colored folks have privilege that sometimes gets bestowed upon them exactly because of their race. And yet we’re told, “You’re not going to be treated special.” It’s an ongoing dialectic that rarely offers liberation. I remember once attending a retreat with fifty other people, forty-seven of whom were white. One woman looked at me and asked, “Do you know that they’re going to have a *Martin Luther King* Day retreat here?” She put emphasis on “Martin Luther King.” The color of my skin was both something to be called out and yet something to be utterly undealt with.”

Lama Rod: “She was trying to make you feel special and welcomed into the space.”

Rev. angel: “I’m sure she was. I was not feeling welcome, that’s for sure. The real question remains: How can we address the barriers for people like me when the predominant culture cannot acknowledge its privilege? We are born into a particular body, and this can be a great source of pain, depending on how society views the identity [associated with it]. And yet, communities in power pretend the difference, and the pain, is not there, which causes the individuals in that skin to question our value.”

Lama Rod: So those who are being devalued -- whether it’s because of race, gender, economics, sexuality, are the ones forced to articulate that experience of being devalued in essence reflecting that truth back to those who have the privilege of doing the devaluing?”

Rev. angel: “...It’s an important entryway into the potential for healing when we start to recognize we are all participating unless we’re interrupting. The momentum of the dysfunction of how privilege operates in this society is such that if we’re not interrupting, we’re actually participating in it.”

Radical Dharma: Race

“the great fraud of the construct of whiteness is that it has coerced and convinced most white folks to no longer see their own oppression: by men over women, by straights over LGBT, by hetero fathers over their sons in arbitrating their masculinity, by capitalist values of personal acquisition over the personal freedom of one’s soul. white folks have been duped to trade their humanity for their privilege. the most insidious lie is that racism is a Black problem or colored folks problem. white folks wake up: not only oppressed people are complicit in oppression. it’s your problem, too.” -- Rev. angel Kyodo williams, Sensei, December 2014 (Facebook Post)

Building the Community

“Human beings are about communication, so there’s a communication in the power structures themselves. So who’s sitting here says something. All my life, this is never who was going to be sitting up here. That meant that I had to, as you said, weather it -- stick it out. As the

demographic changes and people are more empowered in their own lives and finding power in their own lives, they're more and more unwilling to stick it out.

So as we have more people that are ready and open to different teachings outside of the traditional, conventional religions that they grew up with, they're simultaneously politicized in such a way that they're not willing to subject themselves to what many of us subjected ourselves to for a long time.

They've had enough."

Beyond "A Starbucks *Sangha*"

! **Jasmine:** In the classroom, I often have to remind my students that racism is in the air we breathe. There's no getting out of being implicated by it. We're all affected. Acknowledging it is part of what we can do to fight it.

! **Rev. angel:** I have this theory that racism is required in order to keep capitalism in place. There is the form of capitalism that we have -- and I'm not mad at trade and exchange and barter and all of that -- but cancerous capitalism, hypercapitalism, parasitic capitalism requires racism in order to keep it in place. It requires a division of people that are producing what is consumed, and, frankly, the people that are consumed.

Female Speaker: I grew up in Utah in a white suburb, mostly surrounded by white people. And that is the social group in which I've always felt the most comfortable because that's what I knew. I've lived all over the country and related to people in different ways, and obviously there's assumptions made based on how I look. There's always been this feeling of longing to fit in, in one group or another. / In that process, there are these moments where you learn what not to say, and how not to be. It feels like all of those moments start to pile on you like a solid lead vest. And you carry that with you. And the process of taking off this really heavy lead vest feels like such an effort. There's also some sort of comfort in that vest, because you've learned how to wear it.

! **Rev. angel:** Thank you for sharing that. I think it's really important that we recognize how complex our realities are, and that we don't share a monolithic Blackness, and that there's no monolithic whiteness, actually. That's part of what the racialization of our society has done, created this place in which we can't really be who we are.

Lama Rod: This is across the board, so people with certain power. So you're talking about white folks being born into this kind of conditioning where [their whiteness is] so unconscious to an extent, that there are many cases where they feel like they have a right to say/do certain things, to think certain ways without ever thinking that it's particularly wrong. We see the same thing with gender, sexuality, classes. And for many of us there are boundaries constantly being crosses, and that leads to significant wounding and trauma. / That's the pain, the suffering, the

rage, the despair. There's a reality of that that has to be addressed through the work of liberation and healing.

<!-- what would freire say -->

Lama Rod: I said that we *all* have that trauma. We have different kinds of trauma, but it's still trauma.

Rev. angel: And I mean to say something else about that, because the problem is not whiteness or Blackness. The problem is the way in which we relate to those identities. It isn't inherently a problem to be white. The problem is that we have a whole way of relating to that identity that is the suffering itself, which I think is one of the things that dharma has an awfully good lens on. It's not inherently a problem that I'm *anything*, but the way that I relate to that often as a result of a collective social identity and social ways of relating to it -- that's actually where the problem lies. / There's nothing wrong with any of us. And there's nothing wrong with any of *who* we are or *who* we were born as and what skin and what gender and what parts we have. That's why I want to keep pointing out that there's a construct happening. Just like ego is a construct. It's something that's out there. And then we have all of these challenges and heaps of suffering that are induced by how we relate to that ego, or that socially induced "identity" -- that projection of ourselves.

Rev. angel: Race is the ultimate delusion in that it both does and does not exist in reality. Somebody went on around and decided to come up with something so that they could sell folks, that they could be "better" than other people, and yet, because of the paradigm, because of the system and structures, the impact of that creation, of that projection, this is felt and experienced as suffering -- not only by the people who are on the shit end of the stick but also by the people that are, often unbeknownst to them, continuing to carry that stick. / We're all suffering as a result of not race itself, but our unwillingness to address and be conscious about race and its impacts, how it has been constructed, how it's functioning in our communities, in our traditions, how it is obscuring our teachings and how it is affecting the teachings [people] will interpret and what they will not.

Radical Dharma: Love

Heart to Heart

Rev. angel: We open[ed] these conversations because we realized that [it] is going to shift heart to heart. It's going to shift at the deepest level. / We can have new legislation. We can put cameras on cops. But it's going to be heart to heart that we expose these wounds.

! **Rev. angel:** (...) From love towards love.

! **Rev. angel:** So I encourage people to have conversations from the place of their own vulnerable hearts. I know that's scary, and I know that puts us on a line in a way, but I don't think that trying to have these conversations at the level of theory is going to work -- intellectualizing is not going to be what moves people that are most resistant.

Walk Out

! **Lama Rod:** What comes to mind is that taking care of ourselves is disruptive. The idea of self-care as a marginalized person or as a person of color or as a poor person -- it's not the kind of nice self-care that you were talking about before but some sort of the fierce kindness of disrupting my routines, like I didn't go to work today. I needed to come here. Things like that, which there's a privilege in and is also a conscious sacrifice. Self-care, I think, is a way of going against business as usual. It's a radical route. Learning to love ourselves is hard to do. It's a fierce kind of self-love that we need to work through -- that I need to work through.

! **Rev. Angel:** I think that any form or any way in which you're not productive is disruption. Anything that takes you out of the system where you are producing something -- I don't mean creating, I don't mean the things that nurture you and serve you and are generative for you -- but when you drop out of the system and you are not productive, it will have consequences. But those consequences are part of the imagination of this system that says that we have to be producing and we have to be making something happen in order for us to have value, in order to effectively know who we are.

Lama Rod: I'm saying we need to take a break. We can't be on level ten all the time because that's running our bodies down, that's running our emotional/psychological state down. So you take those breaks and you put up those boundaries. You stay off Facebook, you don't answer the phone, you don't even text, you stay home if you can, you go for a walk, you go out to the woods, you do something. But we have been told in our radical communities that that is betrayal to the movement. So we're reproducing this blame, and we're actually reproducing shame. An activist radical community is sometimes the most brutal place to be in. How do we disrupt that in those spaces too?

Rev. Angel: Yes, how do we disrupt this penchant we have for policing each other? Something that I see a lot is a sort of one-upmanship around having all the language right and being on all the fronts, because, if you have that all together, it really shows that you're radical. Of course, we want people to learn and to educate, but we also don't create any room so people that are trying to learn, and I want to say, especially white folks that are trying to learn, to understand how do I come to have a dialogue, to have a vocabulary about this? They can't get into the conversation because they don't already know what to say. That's kind of crazy. We're wagging our fingers because people don't already know, and then we're annoyed because they ask.

Then we're upset because people didn't know, but we didn't want them to ask, and we're mad that they didn't already know. I mean, do you understand it's a circular conversation here?
(...)

Because it just isn't. We have to really allow ourselves to create some space for people not knowing, not understanding, just saying stupid things. I mean stupid as in ignorant. That's going to happen, and we have to figure out how to create room for that, rather than policing each other, so that people can actually get into the conversation.

If someone is asking, there's a willingness there. Treat that willingness as love, and treat it with love.

[start here]

Female Speaker: Also, as someone again who is disabled, I think there's often a conflation of discomfort with being unsafe. That's one of the things I often find myself communicating in multiracial spaces to white folks, that uncomfortable does not mean being unsafe.

Rev. Angel: We have to disrupt spaces that are not seeing truth, that are not upholding our potential for liberation because they are invested in their comfort.
(...)

! But living and choosing to live in that discomfort of what gets foisted upon you right when you wear that label is stepping into a place of your own, as Lama Rod would say, being on your own frontlines and not trying to be on folks of colors' frontlines. Being on your own frontline is where the work is juiciest, and that's where it begins.

Rev. Angel: One of the ways in which you can really hone your own power is to not have these conversations at all in places that you are not invested in and where there is not love. There are so many places that you have investment in -- because it's your family, because it's your community where there is love -- that you don't need to waste your energy having conversations with people and in situations in which there is not love.

One of the things that we really have to do that is completely radical is utterly invest ourselves in love and to continue to practice that. Then the tone of being in a place and in a situation in which there is not love and in which you are not held in love will be something you notice. That doesn't mean that you are always comfortable... with love also comes discomfort, but you'll be attuned enough to say, "Oh, when there's no love here, I don't even need to have this conversation."

! We're habituated to being the victims of suffering, and we are habituated to being the perpetrators of suffering, so we go around and beat other people up that we have no investment in. I've watched so many people of color just banging their heads against that wall, trying to make those space change. That is deep, deep internalized oppression.

! We are desperately trying to make our abusers love and accept us when they do not love and accept us without them doing their work, and you can't do their work for them. I don't care how much you want to love them into being. They have to do their own work, and so you

have to really insist upon only living within the vibration of love. Love that changes, love that confronts, love that holds you, love that allows you to make mistakes but only within love.

! **Lama Rod:** I look at it like it's a hamster cage. You have the wheel on the hamster cage and the hamster gets on and runs and even when the hamster jumps off, the wheel keeps spinning. I think that's what change is like: You may jump off that wheel that is reproducing this violence and it's going to keep spinning for a while, but it's going to slow down and stop eventually. We need to have the patience to wait. It takes time for love to sink in.

Trying to Love

Rev. Angel: When you are steeped and rooted in your own power, a lot of the perceived dynamics of what's coming at you actually changes because you don't let it. I don't make space for a whole bunch of bullshit, and so it doesn't come from me.

What happened to people? What did they have to do to be born, live, and die watching Black bodies sold on the corner like popcorn or cotton candy or a cell phone cover? What kind of cut-offness had to happen for generations in order for people to abide by that? These are bodis. It's not like you can kind of *pretend* that they're *not* bodies. They have arms and legs. All the parts look the same. They're just darker; their hair is kinkier, but they are human bodies. White folks need to inquire into what is running through their generational line as a result of whiteness, what had to happen for people to see that and to live with that for generations. Not just focus on what has happened to us, but what has happened to *you*.

Jasmine: My sister is impacted by race more than I am. Our families are constructed in ways that completely black out the ways in which violence impacts us differently. Part of what I'm interested in talking about is how we can love each other through that imbalance.

Lama Rod: Not to be told, "You'll be OK." I just wanted to experience what I was experiencing in community. I know people love me, but we get into these situations where we feel like we have to say something, instead of being vulnerable and allowing ourselves not to know what to do. Plenty of times people come up to me and I have no idea what to say. I just sit with them. It's all I can do.

Radical Dharma: Liberation

One of the extraordinary things about liberation is that you do not feel the need to control things when you're free, because the illusory nature of control becomes clear to you.

-- Rev. Angel kyodo Williams, *Sensei*

“The People of Color Problem”

Lama Rod: I think it says a lot about *sanghas* when the line is, “Well, we need to be more diverse. How do we get brown bodies into these seats?” I don’t care about brown populating the *sangha* because that’s a distraction for me. I am interested in the healing piece. I’m interested in looking at how we’re suffering, how we’re creating these relationships that actually exclude people. I don’t use the word “diversity.” I really rarely use the word “racism.” I think we have this programmed response to these words, and we have to disrupt that by transforming the language a little bit or by using more precise language. The suffering of whiteness. The trauma of whiteness. Let’s look at our suffering. How do we practice in such a way that we’re restoring our humanity? How can we instigate that kind of transformation? Because healing is also transformation.

! Rev. Angel: For too long these conversations have circulated around the healing that has to be done for people of color. Even reconciliation. Even South Africa. The lens that is conventionally held is that there’s healing to be done, but largely that healing is to be done on *behalf* of people of color. I may have to say I’m sorry as a white person. I may have to deal with some guilt and shame. But who’s really being impacted has heavily focused on people of color, “different” people. “Oh, women are suffering. Oh, queer people are suffering. Oh, Black people are suffering.”

But for me, too, there’s been too little conversation allowing space for the unearthed suffering of white folks. Almost because of the power dynamics involved and almost because we have been so racialized into saying, “If I’m white, I’m supposed to feel bad for folks of color.” But there’s zero space for white folks to really claim suffering around living in a racialized society. There’s no space, it seems to me, for white people to actually get down to the conversation. Even folks sitting there are feeling it and they’re, like, “Hm, I better not say anything.” It can’t even be acknowledged that there is any suffering. I just don’t see how we can ever expect that this dynamic is going to change if we can’t allow people to fully claim their own suffering.

Defining Liberation

Lama Rod: I go back to this analogy of the lotus in the mud. The lotus actually emerges from the mud. So we’re talking about wisdom emerging from the chaos, the ignorance, the suffering because we’re learning to transform this relationship to what is around us.

“A Kinder, Gentler Suffering”

Lama Rod: The question I have is when is enough enough? When do we finally start making the choices to confront, to interrogate, and to strategize around the forces of hate and materialism and devaluing? How do we create antidotes to the otherness that many of us feel in our communities? How do we practice self-agency and reimagining our lives, not within the context of someone else's imagination but within our own? Not within an imagination that is about control and domination, about silence and hate, especially self-hate. How do you take that power away from people?

! These are the questions I started with when I began my dharma practice those dozen or so years ago. I wanted to seek refuge; I wanted peace from the overwhelming trauma of being all these identities. I was seeking liberation from this deep, deep hunger, this deep, deep sense of loneliness, this deep, deep sense of feeling like I didn't matter, that I wasn't important, that no one cared. What I was able to see was that liberation was up to me, and that's what my early dharma teachings were really about. Liberation was a choice, and at some point I had to choose liberation on my own.

Rev. Angel: What we're missing in dharma communities is that people seem to have forgotten that this is about liberation. And that is a significant challenge I see all over the place. I think that we're settling for this as a result of white-skin privilege and white supremacy and the complacency it engenders. We've ended up settling for a kinder, gentler suffering rather than actually seeking and seeing our practice in our communities and our *sanghas* as places for liberation.

!!! But we've all acquiesced to minding our businesses. And that's not liberation.

“The Real Thing”

Rev. Angel: Meditation is not the primary practice for most Buddhists in the world. The thick number of people who practice meditation would be here in the States and in the UK. I think it's not an accident that white convert *sanghas* are putting such a strong emphasis on non-relational ways of developing their *sanghas*. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with meditation, but I think that's our mistake.

! We don't have to know what the outcome is; we just have to know we have a neurosis around hyper-individualism in this society and disconnection and distraction and that we are increasingly out of relationship with each other, no matter how many Facebook friends we have.

Lama Rod: I think any authentic spiritual teacher is concerned with your liberation.

“What Are You Willing to Give Up”

Lama Rod: Sometimes our *sanghas* are country clubs. This is not a social club. This is not a country club. I mean, there's snacks and drinks and everything; that's fine. But this is a place for us to be uncomfortable, and for it to be safe to be uncomfortable, because discomfort is where liberation really emerges from, just like the Buddhist symbol of the lotus that emerges from the mud. We need to emerge from our confusion through strategies of awareness. You can't emerge from something you haven't owned and recognized. What we are seeing now, instead of folks owning that confusion, is that we try to bypass the chaos of the mud or the confusion because we see *sanghas* as being this really nice place we can relax, but it doesn't serve us actually. Like I said, you can relax anywhere. We waste *sangha* and community when we choose not to engage in discomfort associated with liberatory practice.

Rev. Angel: We're more invested in some sense of continuity because we have a fear of death. Because we're invested in extending continuity beyond this current moment, we can't just have our dharma practice in our living rooms and forget about high rents, and forget landlords and all of the things that we have to pay for. We need to figure out how we just create real true *sangha* wherever it is that we are.

Lama Rod: We have no idea who we are because no one's showing us. We're distracted by these things because we prioritize and value trying to fit in, trying to belong, instead of actually privileging our deepest desires for equality, equanimity, community. And I think that for those of us who struggle there's a lot to learn from others who have made these choices before, to privilege who and what they are at whatever cost that comes.

Rev. Angel: Too many of us as dharma teachers have also given up our authenticity because our livelihood is tied to people's feelings of being comfortable. Too many of us are more and more willing to allow a kinder, gentler suffering. Just give people a little bit of a salve, a little bit of a balm on their suffering, and not really touch the place of challenge and woundedness that needs to be touched to release the energy so that people can actually find their liberation. So if you're going to dharma communities, if you're going to walk in the path of the Buddha, if you're going to any place of spiritual enrichment in which you are not meaningfully experiencing discomfort, not all the time, but meaningfully uncomfortable frequently, you are not doing your work, and you are not walking the path of liberation. I just want to let you know that. If it's all warm and fuzzy all the time, then someone is really not dropping wisdom. Otherwise, it just means that we're all sitting in here awake already. Right? Because that's about the only time that it should stay warm and fuzzy, is if we're already awake.

If that's not what's happening, if you're not being challenged, if you're not feeling uncomfortable, and particularly made uncomfortable by the teacher, someone's dropping the ball. I'm not saying you're wasting your time. Maybe you want kinder, gentler suffering. Maybe that's what you're in it for. But if it's liberation you're after, and you're not experiencing discomfort, liberation is not where you're headed. You just need to know that.

<!-- LB: why don't christians (mainstream) think like this? -->

!! Lama Rod: Even two days ago [before the Charleston massacre,] you all needed a space to grieve; we always need spaces to grieve because we don't have public spaces to

grieve anymore. We do not like to do public mourning in our country, in our world. We are really uncomfortable around grieving people and sickness and death, so we sent it off somewhere. That's trauma. We're told, "Oh, you can't be sad. You can't be upset. You can't be sensitive to the suffering of the world because that makes you uncomfortable. You're not going to be productive if you're sitting around weeping all the time."

!! Lama Rod: I'm an activist, so I can say this: sometimes we got to do the easy stuff. Let's go to a march, let's go plan something, but meanwhile we can't even talk to our friends and families. We can't even be ourselves and have that courage in our meetings to stand up and say, "don't agree with this. Let's do something different. I believe in love, not this aggression." That's the kind of disruption we're talking about. You can do everything else, but let's start with the basics.

(..)

I see too many people who will not think twice about going out to the march and to the ide-in and to all these great fun things we do as activists, but aren't willing to talk about these issues with the people that live with them. And I think our activism has to be about equipping ourselves with the tools to have the conversations with the people that are closest to us, because these people will listen to us much more than they would someone else that's further from them.

Section IV: Closing Words - Why Your Liberation is Bound Up With Mine

What the World Needs Now

By Jasmine Syedullah, PhD

! [Despotism, dispossession, and disenfranchisement] are rooted in the injustices of liberal individualism and the exploitation of a vampire capitalist system of wealth accumulation. The reality of American freedom is that it requires that many of us remain captive to preserve the illusion of freedom for all.

!! Ever since the loophole of the Thirteenth Amendment empowered the United States to democratize the experience of captivity far beyond the color line, far beyond the physical space of the prison, the United States of America has become the planet's largest jailer, representing almost one-quarter of the world's total prison population. As much as we want to believe in the promise of the American dream, the complete autonomy, the protections of our private property from the interference of the national government in our everyday lives, this halcyon wholesome image of freedom is only thinkable because of the fictions we spin around it. It is, in reality, a thing rendered unfathomable for a large population of those this country seeks to protect.

! What I would like to propose in these closing words is that *what we need now is not more freedoms but more fugitives!* We needed fugitives now to keep abolishing the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and genocide that persist in the present day. What the world needs now is a pursuit of freedom rooted not in fear of someone “taking” what’s “ours,” but in a radical kind of love that refuses to settle for meanings of justice, safety, and independence that re-create the shackles, borders, color lines, and other punitive forms of policing and surveillance we just escaped to claim our freedom. Our imaginations of freedom have to be born out of a practice of inhabiting places of containment with an improbable sense of unity, compassion, conviction, and possibility.

Radical Presence

By Lama Rod Owens

*“I feel to arrive 10 minutes early just to let bitches know who the f**k they dealin’ wit”*
-- RuPaul

*“There is a candle in your heart, ready to be kindled.
There is a void in your soul, ready to be filled.
You feel it, don’t you?”*
-- Rumi

“The secret doctrine nonsense: it’s secret because no one understands it. When they think they do, that’s when things really go awry. In reality, nothing is hidden. The whole point is that it’s there always. But we have to uncover the wisdom that is.”
-- Karma Wangmo

!! Radical presence is being in the world, taking up space, and loving myself without apology.

When bodies are controlled, then there is less chance that the dominant group will be made uncomfortable having to tolerate a dharma expression that reminds them of their implicit role in the suffering of underrepresented groups.

!! Radical presence is the practice of authenticity, which is the practice of staying true to one’s self. It implies that what we say or do is in accord with our truest desires and aspirations.

A New Dharma: Prophetic Wisdom and the Rise of Transcendent Movements

By Rev. angel Kyodo williams, Sensei

"Black Prophetic Fire is simply a way of saying... we need a renaissance of integrity, courage, vision, willingness to serve and, most importantly, willingness to sacrifice."

-- Cornel West

The Voice of Prophetic Wisdom

!!! People who disrupt the American dream-state by laying bare the connection of the cancer of multinational corporate capitalism to the theft of indigenous and first-nation lands, the genocide of their people, the struggles of the poor in Latin America, the starvation of sub-Saharan Africa, the mass incarceration of Palestinians, the displacement of Middle Easterners, and the disruption of the climate in a habitat known to us as earth have been few in numbers.

A New Dharma

* With the exception of Malcolm X, the Black prophetic voice has been erringly associated with Christianity. The prophets called for in these times necessarily arise from, to paraphrase Dr. Ibrahim Farajajé, organic (post, trans, and) multi-religiosity.

New dharma also integrates emerging fields of study that draws heavily across traditions, theories, methodologies, pedagogies, and practices. It is willing to embrace the revelations of new sciences while recognizing they are only revealing what has always been known by peoples and wisdoms since lost or never validated within the narrow scope of Western ontology. Most notable are embodied cognition, somatic lenses, brain science, and all praxes seeking to reunite the mind-body complex in an act of insurgence against the disembodied culture that is a direct outcome of white supremacy and mass oppression.

So, whether they reveal themselves as spiritual warriors, humanistic soldiers, yogic guerillas, political organizers, religious idealists, intellectual theorists, creative luminaries, cultural technicians, architects of the sacred, protectors of the mundane, they are all modern-day prophets. Wisdom prophets who lay bare the unarmed truth of the transgenerational cultural illness of white superiority in equal measure with an unapologetic love that holds those besieged by that plague in the light of their humanity, distinguishing disease from host, are being called forth... and they are gaining in number.

Possibility, Presence, Power, People

! As is the case with any prophetic instrument, practitioners must cultivate an interiority, an attention to the inner life that unhooks overdependency on external sources of validation.

Awareness - reflective and contemplative practices that turn attention inward - converts self-inquiry into a welcome opportunity rather than a threat. It exposes unvarnished aspects of your self, which may give you the opportunity to work it into a shine.

!! A steady mind is a mind empowered to see more clearly what is being called for and relieves the prophet from an unsustainable, externally motivated drive to do.

!! That said, leaders and prophets may not be one and the same, though they both function on behalf of the people. "The people" must always mean having the voices and needs of the oppressed, disenfranchised, marginalized, underserved, subjugated, and silenced as its center. While they may have hailed from the margins, leaders often draw their power from the center and then stand out in front, that others might emulate -- both a gift and a curse. Prophets always insist that the mainstream extend to the margins -- which they live among and speak from -- rather than trying to "bring them in," which only relocates who is in and who is out, once again leaving an elite few to decide.

Interconnectedness

"Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world."

-- Bell Hooks, Killing Rage: Ending Racism

This experience of being under siege makes for a life that is intolerable. If our movements focus solely on rights (as if there were wrongs, as if there were human beings -- species even -- that are not entitled to thrive by the mere fact of their existence), then that polarized view gives rise to the very policing that diminishes humanity by seeking to sort us into categories of relative entitlements. When we allow ourselves to operate inside of this framework, we abdicate our responsibility to fully engage each other as human beings. We give power over to a few people to qualify and quantify those categories of entitlement.

Transcendent Movements

!!! It has long been believed that you can only truly organize people around issues that matter to them, but collective liberation asks something greater for us. It requires transcendent movements.

Transcendent movements require people to organize around issues beyond what people perceive they are affected by. How to do that? People have to experience their interdependence. To recognize that any limit in your ability to love limits my ability to love. One has to penetrate the truth of interdependence such that I am moved to a place in which I am not

doing something for you, but it is actually about me, which is tied to you because there is, in an absolute sense, no separation.

More than a political concept, embodied intersectionality is the lived reality of an increasing number of people crossing boundaries of race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, national citizenry, ethnic origin, etc., and the cultures formed by those identities and locations. It is a tangible, modern-day expression of oneness. The long-standing ways of tribalism and hyper-individualism are both fading from the mainstream, while at the same time are inciting reactivity in the form of greater political division.

Lotus Out of the Mud

The reason we can is the result of so many people -- approaching a critical mass -- living intersectional lives. Enough of us can feel beyond cosmetic sameness and experience the deeper interdependent relationship, moving the mutuality of liberation from theory to practice to praxis.

Embracing What Is, Throwing Nothing and No One Away

! Simultaneously with our commitment to disrupting and dismantling structures that degrade humanity, a commitment to the practice of engaging the humanity of people wed to perpetuating those structures must co-exist. Whether by arrogance, ignorance, or fear, we must bear witness to their suffering as our own. Challenge what is unjust. Invest in their basic goodness. Always moving toward integration. Without this commitment and practice, we merely mirror the destructive forces of polarization and power.

! This is a huge evolutionary leap: to be able to see past sameness and likeness as the lens through which we view our potential to care for one another. (...) Biologically speaking, we are programmed toward being tribal as a means of survival. We literally have to transcend an aspect of our own biology.