

CTZN Podcast: Lama Rod Owens

Kerri:

Lama Rod, oh my gosh, thank you so much for being here. Gosh. I just want to show you my books so that you can just see the where and the post-its, the scribble. I've drooled on these books. I've cried into these books. Love and Rage, in particular. I'm excited to talk about this really changed me. So, I'm excited to dig in. I think the first question I want to ask you is how does it feel to have your words read back to you?

Lama Rod:

Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for that question. Really, the first reaction is who wrote that because there's a beauty and an honesty to it. It's hard to, at least in my process, it's hard to connect to the honesty and the beauty of it. We are always so close to it. I've been close to this writing for almost two years now. So, when I hear though it read back to me, it feels like a medicine, like a bomb. It's so restorative to hear. Yeah.

Kerri:

I had the privilege of reading your words on Sunday at the GR3 Radical Read-a-thon, which if you all don't know about this, it was a 12.5-hour collective... It was a ritual, truly, collective reading of Radical Dharma, which is a book that you co-wrote with Reverend angel Kyodo williams and Dr. Jasmine Syedullah. I got to read a passage from Remembering Love, and was so struck by your words. I said to Angel afterwards, after I read it, I was sweating profusely. I was genuinely struck.

Kerri:

One of the things you wrote is that there is healing through lineage. You said, "Sometimes, I cannot describe what I mean by lineage. Yet my experience of lineage is about being received and held within a field of continuous loving, warmth, kindness, and compassion. It is about the trans historical gifting of unconditional acceptance. It is the inheritance of permission to transcend the silliness of living out of the confinement of the ego bound self. It is permission to sprout wings and take to the sky as others have before me. It made me reflect on how lineage reminds us that we're not alone in this work."

Kerri:

So, I'd love for you to start off by just sharing your lineage with us.

Lama Rod:

Absolutely. I come from so many lineages. My first lineage is the lineage of black people, of Southern, poor black people and the American South. That's my first lineage. I come from the lineage of the black church, and that's another lineage. I come from a queer lineage, and that's my other lineage. Those are the three first lineage that shapes me, that gave me a voice in the world. It taught me how to survive within systems that were trying to annihilate me, raise me.

Lama Rod:

So, I was embraced by that lineage and the ancestors within that lineage. Those lineages opened the door into the spiritual lineages that I would embrace in order to really continue to move towards freedom. So, my lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, the cognitive schools within Buddhism, the lineage that actually saved my life, the lineage that taught me about my mind. It taught me about my heart. It taught me how to dream in a way that I had never dreamed before. It taught me how to dream about liberation in a way that I'd never been taught to dream about liberation before. It made me believe in freedom. It made me believe that it was possible. There have been so many lineages.

Lama Rod:

My another lineage that I've been trained in is the [Kashi 00:11:23] lineage. That's the lineage in which I trained in yoga. That's the lineage founded by [inaudible 00:00:11:28], who was an American woman who died about eight years ago. She awakens and created this kind of American interfaith lineage with the inspiration of her lineage. That's the lineage that taught me about the mother. Actually, it gave me the language to embrace Shakti and the divine feminine consciousness. That has really propelled me into the space, that gave me the foundation finally, to write this book, to write Love and Rage.

Lama Rod:

All my lineages before gave me the foundations, right, Radical Dharma and then Tashi came along and gave me this final gift to write Love and Rage from a place where I felt as if I was speaking from the blessings of the mother of Tara, who's right here always on my shoulder.

Kerri:

Beautiful. Yeah. So, your most recent book, you just mentioned it, Love and Rage. It has so much medicine in it. One of the things that you said in this book that really resonated with me is that once you start the work of liberation, you can't stop the work of liberation. I imagine that's especially true through the contemplative practice, that once you become clear seeing, you can't unseen. It's funny, sometimes, when I tell the story of my own spiritual awakening, I say to people like, "Be careful what you wish for because there's no going back."

Lama Rod:

Yes, exactly.

Kerri:

So, I would love for you, if you would, to tell us of your own waking up your own story, of waking up at that intersection specifically of liberation and contemplative practice.

Lama Rod:

Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. To speak to that piece just for a second, yeah, once you glanced happiness, you'll never forget what happiness is. When you taste happiness, that will be a taste... It will be something you'll never forget, and you'll always be oriented towards that

experience for the rest of your life. The act of violence and harm will be something that becomes so antithetical to who and what you are, when you have an authentic embrace and experience of happiness.

Lama Rod:

To speak of liberation and intersection with contemplative practice, I have always, again, been so concerned with freedom. From this earliest, as I can remember, I'd always been thinking about, "Okay, what else? What else?" I worked the black radical, prophetic tradition really well when I was growing up reading, and then getting into activism and organizing... the Black Panther has become really heroes, heroes, and heroines for me. Any experience or any history of black people organizing to get free guided me towards my understanding of liberation.

Lama Rod:

I was so fortunate in my early 20s to join intentional living community and the Catholic Worker tradition, where we were just a community of activists who live together, who work together. We were just trying to help people get free. We were trying to disrupt systems of violence by getting on the streets and organizing, disrupting, doing what we could. I was also really fortunate to be in relationship with folks in that community who had been doing the work for decades of bringing their spiritual practice into conversation with their activism. That was the first example of really particularly Buddhists, being really actively engaged in social liberation work. That was so inviting for me.

Lama Rod:

When I finally started getting interested in meditation to work with depression at the time, I really had this amazing mentorship from the elders in the community that helped me to continue this... Getting involved with this kind of learning about my mind and learning about ultimate liberation. I'll never forgetting that I was still working to get socially free.

Kerri:

Yeah. I remember reading your story in the book, and being really inspired how you came through the doing liberation into the being liberation. Then the two streams, it seemed like, in your story, really converge.

Lama Rod:

Yes, yes. It collided. That colliding just startled me. It woke me up. It was a jolt. I was never the same again. When those two worlds come together, when those two pursuits come together, the things that you love the most begin to intertwine. That's where the work really begins. For me, that's where I began to soar in a way. Not that this soaring has made things easier, it's made it much more complex because every day is a really complex nuanced conversation between ultimate liberation, social liberation because it's so easy to slip to one extreme. The work is to stay in the middle to always be integrating, weaving and twining, both of these streams together.

Kerri:

I love that framing. It reminds me that this work is capacity building, right?

Lama Rod:

Yes.

Kerri:

The soaring is just like a bigger and bigger capacity to hold the messiness, the unraveling, the unbecoming in many ways. I want to talk about anger. Let's talk about holding the messiness and the two colliding forces that have to catalyze in a way to become skilled. I just want to say before I read this that I never really contemplated my relationship with anger until this book. I knew that I had righteous indignation, and I was like fierce and fiery. I knew that was in me and that was what drove my activism, but I really didn't look at what was underneath it until I read this.

Kerri:

It really shook me in the best way, in a way in which I was truly impacted. So, you write in this book about how anger and rage has been a real pathway to your awakening and how anger is actually trying to tell us something. But it's not the main event. I love that. That anger is trying to tell us something, but it's not the main event. That really, we should be curious about the anger and what's underneath it.

Kerri:

One of the prompts that you give in this book that was so stunning is what is your anger trying to protect? That's the question that actually got me to start doing the real work around my anger, if I'm being honest. So, I would love for you to share with us what is the practice of lifting the rock up and looking underneath, and being brave enough to face what hurts?

Lama Rod:

Yeah. Well, I will start approaching that question by, first, saying that in many ways I had no idea what I was doing when I agreed to write a book about anger. I just-

Kerri:

Be careful of what you wish for.

Lama Rod:

Exactly, exactly. I knew that, that was in the air, that was in the atmosphere, that was the question I kept getting over and over again. That annoying pesky voice was like, "Well, you have to do this. This will be a challenge." I was looking for something to write about as a followup to Radical Dharma. This just seems like the book was calling, the book hadn't formed, but it was calling me. My ancestors were asking me to move into this process, to really begin to understand what this was. I knew at the beginning that this wouldn't be a self-help book.

Lama Rod:

It wouldn't be a mindfulness book. It wouldn't be really a book out of my own lineages. It would be something that brought together everything. So, the way that I got into the book was this question. I was like, "Okay. My anger is functioning there for music. It is doing something really important, and I knew that it was protecting the hurts. That's where I started. I was like, "Okay. Where do I go from here?"

Lama Rod:

To do that work, I had to go back and really live through all the times in which I worked with my anger in the past and all the teachings that I'd ever gotten. I haven't really ever gotten a lot of really intense teachings on anger, but the teachings were really about emotions. So, I was like, "Okay, how do I work with my emotions?" Of course, that brought me closer and closer to really understanding anger.

Lama Rod:

For me, the primary teaching, if you study like Buddhist literature, you'll know that the antidote to anger is patience. That just wasn't enough for me. I understood that teaching, absolutely. But I needed more than patience. I started delving deeper and deeper. I realized that in order for me to understand what my anger is protecting, I had to give my anger space. I actually had to take care of it. I had to ask my anger what it wanted. I had to treat my anger like the most beloved. Then once you feed anger love and space and nurturing, and you tend to it, it begins to reveal, it begins to open, and lets you see past it because **our hurt is the most precious thing our anger is protecting**. So, you earned the trust of your anger. Once you do that, the anger opens, and it begins to reveal to you the trauma, the woundedness, the brokenheartedness, then you have to take it seriously.

Kerri:

Yeah. there's so much nuance around anger, especially, in a moment where anger is valid. Rage is valid in this moment. It really forced me to reflect on how I was just unleashing anger and rage, righteously so without really paying attention to what I was defending, and how sometimes I was just projecting my hurt onto other people.

Lama Rod:

Exactly, exactly. We weren't holding the anger. A lot of us don't hold anger. We don't contain it. So, it just becomes this expression, that's like toxic energy that gets sprayed into the space around us. It hurts people, and it hurts the environment because we're so disconnected from the hurt beneath it. But once we start really connecting to the hurt, our anger becomes contained. It becomes cared for. So, I can be in situations where I'm experiencing a lot of anger. But because I've done this work of taking care of the anger, and I've done the work of connecting to the broken hearted that's beneath the anger, my anger is contained. It doesn't become emotional labor for you. What it does become is a mirror that reflects back to you, the work that you should be doing and developing this kind of emotional labor for yourself.

Kerri:

Well. The other thing that I discovered along the way is this book is like a journey.

Lama Rod:

It's a meal. It's like a multi-course meal that you have to take a break. You get a little full, you have to digest it, then you come back to it. Yeah.

Kerri:

I do. I eat it in small meals. I'm like I have to take it in bites. But the other thing it gave me was direction because when I started to unpack what I was protecting and defending, it pointed to my Dharma and to my purpose. It actually was like, "Oh, this is why" because I was like, "I had to really look at like why do I get so fired up?" There are times where like my rage is out of control. It's like an Inferno. I'm like Italian, Irish. I go off. Everybody I know who knows me, knows that I go off. Instead of letting myself go off at a time that actually allows for that in this particular moment, when I started to actually peel away the layers, the heartbreak and the hurt was really pointing to a wound around belonging. I was like, "That's why I fight so hard for that." It was like all of a sudden, my purpose clicked in. All of these pieces connected and I understood what I love so much that's at stake.

Lama Rod:

Yes, yes. Yeah. What are we fighting for? Why are we, in a way, manipulating anger to keep-

Lama Rod:

... manipulating anger to keep ourselves away from the discomfort.

Kerri:

Okay. So let's talk about that because... So I want to talk about... I actually listened to your story time. I listen to a bunch of your story times.

Lama Rod:

Wow.

Kerri:

And in this one story time, you were talking about whiteness and you said, "To do this work of disrupting whiteness, you need to get dirty. And you have to get personal." What do you mean by you need to get dirty?

Lama Rod:

Well, you need to challenge this narrative of being a good person because whiteness is so intimately tied to the sense of false virtue. So the mechanism is, as a white person, if I began to question challenge or name whiteness, then there's this thing that kicks in that makes me start thinking, "Oh, I'm not a good the person, this is not what a good white person does. Let's question this." So **in order to move into whiteness, you have to hold the space for disrupting your fixation to the narrative of being good.**

Lama Rod:

This is why I say in the book, **let go of being a good person**. We have these narratives, you can be a good guy, you can be a good boy, you can be a good girl, these ways in which, goodness as applied to the binary and to gender and everything like that. So you have to wipe that all away. We were all raised, At least many people I've talked to have been raised with that narrative, at least I was. I knew early on the work that it took for me to be a good boy, because that was about belonging. If I was a good boy, and make good grades, and was nice and polite, then I would belong, and I would get the resources that I need, including love.

Kerri:

It's also about conforming.

Lama Rod:

Exactly, conforming, assimilating, fitting in at all costs. Right. And so now, for me, my practice is, okay, I just want to practice goodness in the moment. I want to make a choice in each moment. And then when I'm making choices to be good in the moment that I can see all the ways in which I'm not practicing goodness. And that becomes a work for me to move towards and into. If I'm just a good person, then it's going to be really hard for me to see the edges in the shadows because this idea of being a good person's very solid it's a static position. This is just who I am. I'm self identified with goodness and that's really not the case. We are complex nuanced beings, who are not always making the right choices to promote goodness, and virtue, and nonviolence, and so forth.

Kerri:

One of the [crosstalk 00:28:54].

Lama Rod:

So... Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kerri:

I was just going to say one of the refrains that you give in that same talk is that goodness is, I think you say something like, goodness is about harm reduction.

Lama Rod:

Yes.

Kerri:

It's about reducing violence.

Lama Rod:

Yes.

Kerri:

If that's the benchmark for goodness and we just do that all the time, we'd be so much better than just trying to be good.

Lama Rod:

Yeah. No, it's about looking at every moment and saying, "How can I be the least violent I can be in this moment. Knowing that I am not going to always get it right." Knowing also just to even make this more complex, knowing that sometimes I have to practice aggression and violence in order to disrupt the aggression of violence in the space, in order to disarm and minimize the harm I have to get harmful.

Kerri:

Well, and that goes back to the skillfulness I feel like that you're calling for in this book. Because if we're doing the work around our anger, we can channel anger in a way that disrupts without flinging our trauma and our harm.

Lama Rod:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, and that's a really good point because I think that you have to do work with this book. This isn't a book that you just read and you're going to get everything. I didn't write it like that. This is a book that you have to journey with. I remember Alice Walker for Radical Dharma, when she endorsed the book. She was like, "This is the book you grow with. This is the book, your journey with." And I couldn't get Alice to endorse the book In Love and Rage because it was so... I was on a very short timeframe. But this is a book that you have to accompany and be with, this book is going to change you. So I think we're used to consuming things we're used to, particularly in the industrial spiritual complex, all the so called spiritual industrial complex, that we find ourselves in. I think many teachers are in this habit of just giving these consumable tidbits, but this is my consumable, it's not a tidbit. This is something that's [crosstalk 00:31:02].

Kerri:

It's a reckoning

Lama Rod:

Yeah, it's calling you into this deep discernment, and if you're not ready to do the work, this isn't a book, you won't get it.

Kerri:

Yeah. It's funny, because I feel like I'm connecting like a million dots from your book right now. Because I'm thinking about... Another thing that you say is, you talk about how we move beyond the illusion of whiteness, which it sounds like it's connected to how we move beyond the surface layer of anger. How do we peel... Because you ask it in that talk, you ask, "How do we be with the pain and the trauma of whiteness? What are we avoiding? How are we not confronting the cost of whiteness on our bodies and on our souls, on one another, on the collective." And I think

about that as a white person, especially when I'm thinking about, what am I attached to about whiteness? And it brings me back to what you started with around lineage and how actually, if I can know what's at my back and how I got here, I don't have to cling to this artificial construct.

Lama Rod:

Yeah. There's a courage that comes into this. **We have to have the courage to turn back into this mountain of trauma that is at the roots of whiteness.** This calculated and precise construction of an identity at the expense of black and brown people. Initially at the expense of black people, obviously folks of African descent. That's what you have to turn back into. And that history is pain. It's heartbreaking, it's heartbreaking. And sometimes I don't believe that everyone has the capacity or the resiliency to do that.

Kerri:

To face that.

Lama Rod:

Yeah, to face that because I don't want to excuse anyone at all from doing the work. But I also want to say that it's a tremendous amount of work to enter into this kind of discomfort. But you understand from the book that discomfort isn't the issue because we have these incredible resources and practices to hold that discomfort. And we have to learn to undo whiteness. You have to learn to surrender to sources of refuge that can hold you as this identity is disruptive. Then you come into a deeper, more authentic expression of who you are.

Kerri:

Well, and it reminds me too, of what you were saying about liberation, because I think once you connect to the heartbreak and the hurt, that is whiteness, you can't turn back. You just can't. And I just think about white fragility and all of the contortionist ways that we try to defend, and prevent ourselves from touching down on that pain and that anger, and how we really twist ourselves into all sorts of shapes and forms to avoid that. And yet that is the very thing that will set us free.

Lama Rod:

It sounds so antithetical to the project of spiritual awakening because spiritual awakening has been co-opted by the marketplace and capitalism. And **so many of us have been led into believing that the spiritual practice is something that's supposed to be about happiness, and having fun, and going to beautiful spas, and looking beautiful, and having the right clothes, and really the spiritual path is really about the work.** And if you're not ready to do the work, then it's okay, actually. I'm in this place in my life where I'm okay with you not being able to do the work, or not choosing to do the work because we're on a continuum here. But you have to be willing if you choose not to do the work, or can't do the work, you also have to be willing for others around you to set boundaries and to say, "You know what, I can't be in a relationship with you if you're not doing this."

Kerri:

Well, and I would argue as someone who, I'm 45 years in a white body, I continue to unlearn, and that will be my life's journey, obviously. But as someone who is committed to doing the work of touching down on that hurt, the cost of not touching down on it is very high too, for humanity. And for people... Especially, I'm thinking about sort of like the spiritual industrial wellness complex, whatever you're calling it, and how you have these people that are desperately seeking feeling good, desperately seeking enlightenment, desperately seeking something, right. But refuse to go to the distance. Because you actually can't attain the thing that you're reaching for without unraveling.

Lama Rod:

Yeah, and I also think about it I like this, everyone's trying to get awakened and you think getting awakened is about going up. But actually awakenings about going forward. It's about, actually, moving along the earth, and coming into contact with people in relationships, and seeing one's awakening within relationship to other humans, and in relationships with the planets.

Kerri:

It's horizontal.

Lama Rod:

It's horizontal. We earn our ultimate experience by actually moving through the earth. The earth takes us up and to heaven. And we bypass, so we bypass all of this by trying to go up into heaven. When effect heaven is right here in our relationships.

Kerri:

Yeah, that's right. As is freedom and liberation.

Lama Rod:

Yes, exactly.

Kerri:

And we keep trying to do all these things outside of ourselves thinking that's how we attain it. A woman reached out to me on email today when she heard about this conversation, Susan Bizo is her name. And she pointed me towards a passage in Radical Dharma that speaks to this, about Tsonga. And in it you said, "The Tsonga that is very important because it can reflect the things that were missing that were bypassing." And I say this fully acknowledging that our Tsonga's are not reflecting who we are right now, at the same time. And so how do we do that? How do we navigate the who is missing, the what's missing inside of Tsonga, right? How do we stand in the, we're not there yet in Tsonga and move forward together?

Lama Rod:

Yeah. And it's so fascinating too, because that's part of the section that I read on Sunday in the great read-a-thon the great race or wherever we called it. The read-a-thon.

Kerri:

Angel has 18 names for it.

Lama Rod:

I know, I know, so do I, apparently. So that's actually really fresh in my mind, that passage. And also say that Sangha's aren't country clubs. I also say that that same section, because, again, we have this misunderstanding of Sangha. Where we are like, "Oh, I come into the space, I'm supposed to feel good." Where in fact, we come into the space and the conflict that we experienced it's supposed to be a sacred conflict because this conflict arises out of our needs, our desires to get awakened. And we're taking our relationships as material for awakening. There is a de centering of comfort and a re centering of discomfort in a way that is transformational and liberatory. Not something that becomes a burden, not something that's just there that we have to get through.

Lama Rod:

It becomes the material by which we actually experience awakening because as we engage in conflict with openness, lovingness with compassion, with wisdom, we actually began to awake into our higher states of consciousness or higher states of being. Our Dharma is trained, should be trained in the Tsonga. Our Dharma won't be trained if we're always seeking comfort, right. If we're always seeking silence, if we're always seeking places where everyone looks like us. And so I think that one of the things that has to happen now, I'm not so much into reforming anymore, but I'm really invested in creating new spaces for people to really center this kind of work.

Lama Rod:

I think this is the time that we're in, this is a falling away, this is the apocalypse. I wrote so much about the apocalypse in Love and Rage because I want everyone to understand that, no, **this is about letting go of these old structures and creating new structures. It's about dreaming new ways of being free because we realize that there's so much at stake if we don't do the dreaming,** we get it now. And more of us will get it by the end of the year, that we have to dream new realities instead of being fixated on the old structures that weren't really working for many of us.

Kerri:

Well, and we're seeing this parallel right. In the defund police conversation and the abolitionist conversation, that there is no reform at this point. It's really about the full unraveling and deconstructing, so that we can actually imagine the thing that's never been.

Lama Rod:

Yeah. It's telling the truth. It's letting go of these narratives, these fantasies, and just telling the truth. No, this doesn't work anymore, this has never worked. If we can just let go of that and practice this courageousness to step into a new truth, a new reality, a new dream, that's actually

about everyone getting the resources that they need. We have to challenge that for ourselves. It's like, I have to be willing at some point to think about the collective.

Kerri:

Yeah. Yeah, that's what I was just going to... I mean, you just made me think of faith, as you were saying that. There's faith involved because in some ways there's no ground, right? We're moving into groundlessness in the way that our practice calls us to. But it's also making me think about... And this is why I wanted to ask about Sangha, how not only is so much of the dominant culture of spiritual practice and wellness. Not only is it material and shallow, but it's been individualized. That we can just do all of this work within the safety and comfort of our cushion or our yoga mat. But that's not what you're naming here, right. You're naming that its in the in between nodes, between people, within Sangha, is more room, more capacity, more space, it's just more.

Lama Rod:

Yes, you don't have to do it by yourself. And that's the America individualism that perpetuates whiteness and it drives the marketplace as well, is that individual, that competition. Because we know that once we start thinking about collectives, collectives, when we really... It's more than just saying, "Okay, I'm a part of this group." But saying even further that like, "I'm a part of this group and we're all trying to benefit the group together. And we're going to center these qualities of compassion, and wisdom, and love, and kindness, and generosity."

Lama Rod:

We're going to center these qualities and create a collective around that. And that's where stuff begins to change. That's where liberation really starts. But I just say, I grew up in a collective, I grew up in the black community, and the black community in the South. There was no point at which we ever thought that we were separate, that we were alone. We were raised within the context that we were like, "No, when you do something you're helping everyone else." Then the other side of that, that's also a function of systematic racism where you're forced to be a representative within a group, right. But in the more liberated sense of this collective mentality, it's like, "No, we're in this together and we're going to do this together. We free each other."

Kerri:

And I want to ask a hard question about that, because I think it's hard to be together right now across lines of difference because we're all having a really different experience of this moment, and that's real. And so I'm wondering if you have... I feel like there's some wisdom in the practices that you have in here around anger, and lineage even, that can help us locate ourselves inside of those experiences. But I'm wondering if you can... Because I think some of what's also inspiring people to stay individualized is because they're afraid to step in, to the collective because it's hot. And so I'm wondering what does it look like, in this particular moment, while we're on a journey for moving. Were coming from someplace clearly, and we're moving someplace, what does it look like to come together in Tsonga across lines of difference

that honors this practice, but that moves us forward. It doesn't need to be perfect, not good Tsonga, but what does that look like, do you think?

Lama Rod:

I think that being in relationship to our brokenheartedness, no matter who we are, is one of the most honest, authentic and disarming things that we can do to create community together. To sit together in the brokenheartedness. Not to sit together in the fear of the brokenheartedness, it's not to sit together in the pity.

Kerri:

The fragility.

Lama Rod:

The fragility. I don't need, just to use this binary hero, black and white, I don't need necessarily white people to feel my pain. I need white people to feel their own pain. Feeling my pain, it's a bypass.

Kerri:

Yeah.

Lama Rod:

We need to do... And the collective, everyone is still called to do their individual work. And in Radical Dharma, talk about going to your front line. That's what Alice showed me, is for me. And so your front line is going to the places where you hurt, and developing the capacity to be at that hurt, and to experience that hurt. I promise you once we develop the tools to experience the hurt, we will begin to develop authentic, loving, compassionate relationships with folks who show up differently, who are different than us, no matter what that difference is. There's a holding our brokenheartedness is a language, it's universal.

Kerri:

Yeah, and it feels different. I feel like we need to make this distinction because sometimes I think people, white people in particular, confuse discomfort with pain.

Lama Rod:

Exactly.

Kerri:

And that's not the same thing.

Lama Rod:

Yeah. And how does comfort is wrong? There's something wrong about this?

Kerri:

That's right. Or to be avoided, or we must fix this because I feel uncomfortable.

Lama Rod:

Yeah. Yeah, and we have to develop this critical awareness and critical sensibility to really identifying liberatory discomfort. And discomfort becomes liberator in a way when we are, actually, practicing awareness and holding space for. But I think that many of us believe that we won't survive our brokenheartedness. That we will be annihilated by that brokenheartedness. If you read the book, you know that one of the things that I say quite often is that, you can't be annihilated by something that is just an experience.

Lama Rod:

My mind is deeper and more spacious as well without bounds. Is nothing possible within phenomenal reality that can fill my mind and overwhelm me. I have to practice expanding, getting spacious. That's how I begin to consume the brokenheartedness through space. So again, I become the mother. The mother, the feminine principle is an expression of spaces, self. And so I begin to take care of my brokenheartedness, by expanding to the spaciousness, by becoming the mother who begins to tend to the brokenheartedness. And that case, I develop agency over the brokenheartedness, not the brokenheartedness having agency over me. And that will take our whole lives to do, but this is... Go ahead.

Kerri:

Well, you just made me think about too, how not only will we survive, but we will become more human. I just think that there are so many parts of us that have been lost to white supremacy.

Lama Rod:

So many parts that have been lost, so many parts that have been consumed and annihilated within other groups of folks. White supremacy has cost us so much. And I think that we're moving into this time where we're getting a little bankrupt. we're realizing that we don't have any more to give. There's no more to sacrifice to this. I think this is why we're in the largest American movement in history right now, as we're in the middle of a pandemic.

Kerri:

Well, and I wanted to just bring you back to apocalypse and we're going to move on to questions in a moment. But I do love how you write about apocalypse. And I think apocalypse is misunderstood. People don't know, so can you share like what apocalypse means and how it's this moment?

Lama Rod:

Yeah. Yeah, so apocalypse is a Greek word, it means uncovering, unveiling. And I remember it was exactly two years ago, it was two years ago when I was... I remember the day I was in Portland, Oregon, just about to give a Dharma talk. And I was preparing for the Dharma talk just doing some reflection, and I was just scrolling online, and I found a video by Nadia Bolz-Weber, who was one of my favorite spiritual leaders.

Kerri:

Love her. We love...

Lama Rod:

I would love [crosstalk 00:25:17]. Yes. And I would love to do something with her. I love her books, I love her presence, I love her straightforwardness. But she had put out a video on the apocalypse and I watched it before giving this teaching. And in that moment, I was like, this is my teaching now. This is my teaching. And ever since then I knew something was coming. Because a lot of astrologers and so forth, everyone's like 2020, 2020. I'd never heard those predictions at all. I was just feeling this. I was like, this is something, we're changing. The shit is about to hit the fan.

Kerri:

The great reveal.

Lama Rod:

The great reveal. So this isn't about the ending. This isn't about about brimstone and hellfire and all this stuff that maybe some of us grew up with and Abrahamic religions. No, it's really about truth and it's painful because many of us are not interested in the truth, or many of us have not dealt with the truth often so this is going to be really painful. One analogy that I used to use all the time, it's like living in a dark room your whole life and then someone comes in and throws open the shades and the drapes and the sunlight comes pouring in and you're like, "What the hell?" Because your eyes aren't used to that. I think that's exactly what we're going through. Our eyes aren't used to the light of truth now, but it's coming. **We either have two choices; first choice is we get with it, we do the work, we begin to metabolize the truth or the second choice is we don't. If we choose not to get with this, then we're not going to make it.**

Kerri:

Yeah, I think we'd see that coming now. That it's extinction or it's liberation.

Lama Rod:

Yeah, so I see a lot of people getting with it and doing the really hard struggling with the truth. I see also a lot of people who are like...

Kerri:

Who are comfortable.

Lama Rod:

Who are comfortable, and again, I say that's okay because in my belief structure, I believe in many lifetimes and so we're where we're at. Well, I will say this, wherever we're at, we're at. Maybe it's not our time to get woke, maybe the next lifetime, maybe in a year, maybe 10 years from now, but maybe it's not our time to get woke and that's okay. That comes from my practice,

that kind of compassion, that kindness is like, I'm not going to pull people along. I'm not going to pull people, kicking and screaming. We have to make a choice to step into this light.

Kerri:

Well, that's my organizing orientation too. It's like, we don't need everyone to win. We actually don't. There's actually enough of us that are on the brink of letting the shit drop. And I just love this idea of, "The work is horizontal." If we can just hold on to each other, on the human plane, rooted in our ancestors and spacious like the mother, we actually, we can withstand the crumbling.

Lama Rod:

Exactly, and I just really believe that, for the folks we see who aren't doing the work we have to mourn it. We have to mourn folks. It's like we have to, we see it and we see people just not getting with it. And you say, "Okay," but that doesn't stop you from doing the work, right? And lastly I'll say this, because this is what I'm going to be exploring in my next book. So it's like a little bit of a preview. I'm looking at the tradition of the bodhisattva, the spiritual saint, the spiritual warrior within Buddhism, and just reinterpreting that whole tradition for folks. So much a part of the bodhisattva mentality is that the bodhisattva stays, the bodhisattva is the last one, the bodhisattva's pushing everyone, guiding everyone towards freedom but I think that's a misunderstanding of the bodhisattva ideal. What I understand the bodhisattva ideal would mean is that, "I will come into the places that are really difficult to become an example."

Lama Rod:

I will become an inspiration, but I can't not disrupt the work of my own enlightenment to stay in ignorance. So I say this to everyone, don't be so upset that you're moving on, you're going to move on, but also maintain the compassion, that there are people who may one day come to you for the help, that they weren't maybe open around when you... At the beginning of the work so-

Kerri:

Well, it's a full circle to what Ryan started with, which is even those people, how do we love? How do we love?

Lama Rod:

Yeah, you want people to be happy, that's it. It's not a judgment, it's not a value statement, it's like, "I just want you to be happy, I want you to be free from suffering." That's it. And I keep that really strong. Even if you get on my fucking nerves, I still want you to be happy. Even if you believe in things that are so... [anti-detacals 00:57:04] of everything that I stand for, I still love you. I still want you to be happy.