

“Larger, Freer, and More Loving”

Lola Wright - Sunday, June 17, 2018
Bodhi Spiritual Center

Lola Wright:

I am encouraged by these young people. Don't let folks bring you down and tell you this place is going to hell in a hand basket. We have young leaders that are moving this world into a higher idea of what it can and will be. Many great movements that have occurred on the planet have been because of the divine discontent that has resided in young people. Let us encourage that and be grateful. In 2012, Nathan and I returned to Bodhi after leaving in 2009. When we left in 2009, we never intended on coming back. We were good. Bodhi was where it needed to be and we were circling the drain where we needed to be. We found ourselves hunkering down in Oak Park and really at the time, we found ourselves in the throes of self-induced survival.

We still felt recently married, although it had been five years. It still felt like we were getting our sea legs. It felt slightly traumatic. Perhaps some of you had a different marrying experience, where it was nothing but ease and grace. That was not my experience. When we got married, it was very swift. We met at Bodhi in 2007 and within 12 weeks, we were married, living together and had bought a house. It was this mystical encounter that many of you have heard before that went into many years of a dark night of the soul. As I've oftentimes said, had it not involved a marriage certificate and a mortgage, we never would have stayed together.

That was what I needed. Something to keep myself still. When we returned in 2012, Trey, my son, was in middle school. I was very clear at the time the importance of community. I understood that we were approaching an age and stage of life that me doing on my own felt like a Herculean feat. It just didn't seem like something I could do without the support of community. I arrived here. I returned here in 2012 and I basically told Trey, "You have no choice. You're going to participate in the Bodhi Teen Program. You're going to at least pretend that you enjoy it." We did that for a while. Sometimes I would say, [inaudible 00:03:13] We made that pact together.

Trey and Imani were really in this thing because their parents demanded it. Exactly. It was like throwing the gauntlet down. At least for me, the experience of parenting at that time ... We were five years married and we had four kids. They're now 20, 18, 9 and 6. They were a handful of years younger. Our life felt smaller. It felt

constricted and it felt more bitter. It was like the trenches of child rearing and marriage. Is anyone here familiar with that? Yeah, it's a real thing. I would say we arrived here or we returned here very optimistic, very hopeful, very hopeful that you all would help us.

I remember having a particular Sunday experience where the teens were serving brunch. There were a number of men standing around. I was longing for them to step in and provide a sense of connection with Trey and it didn't happen. I realize in that moment that there was an aspect to this community that I wanted to experience more of and it didn't happen automatically. Rainbow and I really got intentional from a staff perspective around what we wanted to create. One of the people that came onboard at that time was Cory Stevenson, our Youth Teen Leader who's up here.

Cory and I have very different ways of being on the planet. I'm so grateful for that because my heavy hand does not work with teens the way your light touch does. You are someone who has been constant and you are someone who I always feel comfortable knowing the guidance you will give our young people is solid. That to me is the value of community. If we are here to do this whole thing called life alone, that just sounds really hard. I have this experience sometimes where adulting feels real challenging. I had four what seemed to be 12-year-old girls walk across the street at a stop sign in front of my car the other day. I looked at them and I thought I was them. I don't always remember I'm not 12.

All of a sudden, I realized that I had that thought. Like, "Those are my peers." It was like, "Those are not your peers. Those are 12-year-old girls and it's a little disturbing that you're that unrelated to where you are in time and space." All of the thoughts that you're going to hear today are inspired by these young people. I reached out to them and I said, "What inspires you? Who are you here to be on the planet?" Everything you hear today comes from them. I want to start this morning with James Baldwin, one of the great truth-tellers of modern history. "If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of God."

I think there's something curious about that inquiry at this time and space in this country. If we are going to use the exploration of the sacred to guide our policies and our positions, let us not pick and choose. Let the high idea be to create a larger, freer and more loving experience. Many movements have been mobilized by young people. The young people that mobilize movements demand a larger, freer, and more loving context. They demand it. I've oftentimes felt that my

20-year-old and my 18-year-old have raised me perhaps more than I've raised them. They've always been a demand on a larger, freer, more loving context. The interesting thing that's happening in the consciousness of humanity now is that young people are being revered. They're being heard newly and differently. Are you of a generation perhaps that you remember children are to be seen and not heard?

I have very distinct memories of being at my grandmother's house. Although that was never said, it was certainly palpable. What I know about this body of parents and these teens is quite the contrary. There has been a deference of this group of parents to the wisdom that lives in their children. That's what we're finding on the planet today. You can see all kinds of movements, whether it is the gun reform movement, whether it is trans youth leading the way in schools for policy changes. Young people have led in Tiananmen Square the Greensboro Four that started the sit-in movement. Young people move us out of our sleepy state to disturb the peace.

The older we get, I find, if we fall asleep, we can hold on to our peace and mistake it. We can mistake comfort for peace. We get increasingly attached to our creature comforts. Dang, those young people. A larger, freer, more loving context can feel inconvenient at times, but it is what we're here for. Consciousness always expands. It does not contract. No matter how ugly it can get in our political landscape, no matter how ugly it can look in our economy ... By our economy, I'm not talking about your balance sheet. I'm talking about our economy and the implications of it. No matter how tense it can feel, there is something to rest easy in that consciousness is always moving forward.

James Baldwin also said one of my very favorite quotes. "If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don't see." I was talking to someone yesterday and I was saying my experience on the planet is that I am oftentimes the one that is provoking the uncomfortable conversation. Sometimes I will sense that people will be in conversation with me and they're like, "Oh, man. Here she goes. Would she stop?" I know that one of my intentions, appointments on the planet is to say the thing that needs to be said. That is an opportunity for each of us. To love humanity, to love this planet, to love so much that I must make you conscious of the things you do not see. Cory, I just really honor you for being someone who creates a space that is larger, freer and more loving. I thank you for that.

A lot of times, we think of movement leaders as the ones you can name off. Mandela, Mother Theresa, Dr. King, Malcolm X, Assata

Shakur. There are movement leaders whose names you never know. Each of us in here has the opportunity to be a movement leader. For these teens, there are a handful of things that I extracted from the quotes that you shared with me, and I think they're incredibly appropriate. They're almost like an instruction to yourself. I think that they're a great little instruction book for all of us. Lincoln, one of the gifts that you bring to the world is you bring the contribution of leadership. You are someone who stands for excellence in yourself and the world around you.

I had the opportunity to speak the invocation at the Chicago City Council meeting a couple of weeks ago. As the universe would have it, that happened to be one of the most contentious City Council meetings of the year. Eileen and I were like, "Of course, Bodhi would be here on this day." As I'm walking through City Hall, which I grew up in this place and I've never been into City Hall. I just kept feeling like, "I know there's stuff I've done in this city that I could get caught up in. I just feel unsafe even being in here because someone probably knows what I've done in this city." There are a whole lot of police around. There were a whole lot of other men. I was like, "Oh, lord. Please help me."

My friend Tone was there with me. He and I had run the streets in varying capacities since the age of 16. I was just like, "Oh, lord. I don't think we're supposed to be here." He's like, "No, we are. We are." I'm like, "All right." Then Lincoln walks in. Lincoln walks in as the leader of the JROTC in the city of Chicago, being honored that day at the City Council meeting. I could see the cosmology of the universe coming together. There was this guy. His name was Malcolm X. He said, "Don't be in a hurry to condemn because he doesn't do what you do or think as you think or as fast. There was a time when you didn't know what you know today."

That is a word from me. That is a word that you contributed as guidance to yourself and to these teens. That you may be patient, that you may be kind, that you may be affirming. There is a conversation that you have had the opportunity to participate in by virtue of being in this community. You have accessed a level of your own voice and self-expression that some of your peers, when you go to college, will be new for them. The opportunity for you, which is my ever loving practice, dear God, is be patient with them. Be patient because as you know, Bodhi folks, I can be like, "Mah!" Just cut people off. You're the evolution of your parents. You're the evolved presence of your parents. You were in the womb with these teachings, many of you. It's in your DNA. Take heed when folks make you crazy. Take a breath and be kind.

Now Marlo, you gave me a man named Ludwig Jacobowski. Only one that didn't know him, but wisdom, my friend. Marlo said this was his favorite quote: "Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened." I think that the wisdom here is to live on the affirmative side of life. We always have a choice. We always have a choice. My dad would say, "Is the glass half empty or the glass half full?" I have old man adages coming out of me all the time, thanks to my father. That's what I get there. I make up that there's wisdom. You'll find peace in that. It's a reminder to look at the affirmative side of life. Be a leader. Lead a movement. A movement for peace, for justice, for freedom. Be kind when you lead that movement. Be patient. Live on the affirmative side of life.

Number one, it's way better for your immune system, way better for your mental space and it's actually a way of being that moves things forward. He would not call me King. He laughed to think a black man could be King. I did not want to lose my name, so I told him to call me the name my father gave me and he laughed. He would not call me King. I beat him hard with a stick. The work of August Wilson, profound. This is one of his less known bodies of work that you gave me. I did my research and one of the things about this character, Headley, in August Wilson's play is that he was thought to be a little crazy. Yeah. I thought that was perfect with the Assata Shakur quote that was provided to me. "Only the strong go crazy. The weak just go along."

Really, what both of those speak to is that Headley was being challenged by a black man in his community that said, "You can't be called King." He said, "Yes, I can. That's my name. I own that. I claim that." Then he gave up the name King because the burden was too great to bear. He gave up his name because it was too inconvenient. It was too heavy to keep asserting his voice on the planet. This man said, "Your name can't be King. You're a black man." He said, "No, my name IS King. My father gave me that name." What I take from that is that do not forget your place in space. Do not give up your name. Do not give up your voice. Occupy the space that is you.

Sometimes we look crazy when we do that, but you want to know what crazy is? I often walk on the planet and I will ask my husband, I will ask Rainbow, "Am I out of my mind?" When I heard Assata Shakur's words, which I first read at 16, when I heard those words, it was comfort. There's nothing crazy about you. You are just seeing that which doesn't work. You're just seeing the cry for some kind of reconciliation in humanity. I feel encouraged by these young people. I feel encouraged by the generation of young people that are leading us.

If you remember a number of weeks ago, we had a young woman named Jay Jameson here. What she asked of us is that we, as elders to varying degrees ... I would prefer not to be an elder yet, but that's all right. For their context, we as elders, have a responsibility to make space for the voice of young people, to trust the wisdom of young people. The days of dominance and authority, the days of children being seen and not heard have erupted. Try raising a small person today. The consciousness is very different. I have a 9-year-old who reminds me daily, "You will not use control as a tactic here." It is not effective with these little beings anymore. It was effective with my 20-year-old. Not as effective with my nine-year-old. That's a good thing. It's only when you risk failure that you discover things. When you play it safe, you're not expressing the utmost of your human experience.

Imani, if there is one thing that you have contributed to this community ... Of course, there are many more than one. If there was one thing that you have committed to contributing to this community, it is your bold presence. You are the one among our teen leaders who has shown up in your power and your authority. I don't say that to diminish anyone else, but you have shown up consistently and you have owned your presence. You have done that within this community. You have done that nationally. I know enough about you and what you navigate to know that there have been plenty days where that was not the easy road to take. You did it, anyway. My prayer for you as you move into this next chapter of your life is that you continue to be your bold self, that you do not diminish or dampen yourself for anyone.

One of our teens is not here because she is facilitating a body of work at the Omega Institute, so I apologize that she's not here to be with you. Really, the contribution that Jalen Brown brings to this community and to the planet, the body of work I know she's contributing to at the Omega Institute, is disturbing the peace. If there was one thing that I hope you heard from her through this morning, it's do not be afraid to disturb the peace. We are all whole human beings that can handle a little disruption. If there was a second thing that you take from this morning, I hope it is influenced by Lincoln's presence on the planet, which is to be a leader, to step in and stop waiting for someone else to lead. To step in.

Lincoln Rogers is a renaissance man. He is in the JROTC. He is in some kind of dance troupe. Is that right? What kind of dance troupe? The Middle Eastern dance troupe. He plays the viola and he is taken. He has a girlfriend, all right? My invitation for us as the onlookers is who can I find inspiration from up here? Is it the presence of Marlo, who

leads with a gentleness, who leads with a thoughtfulness, who leads with a presence that is felt more than heard? Is it Imani, who is bold and brave? Is it Trey, who is quiet, but captivating? Is it Victor, who is fierce and independent? Is it Lincoln? Also quiet, but captivating.

These are young people that require our support, that require our trust in them. It is my honor and my privilege to celebrate them this day. May we close with one final reflection provided by one of our teens, attributed to a man named [inaudible 00:26:43] "Nirvana is not something that we should search for because we are nirvana, just as the wave is already water. The wave does not have to search for water because water is the very substance of the wave. There is no thing outside of you. When you leave this place in space and go on to your next adventure, you will be met with plenty of opportunities for transition, for challenge. It can be easy to forget who you are and what you stand for. May this moment be a moment that you remember, where you are is the presence of all you are. There is no thing outside of you that you need to be whole and holy. You got it." Many blessings.