

“Accepting the Gift of Presence”

Lola Wright - 10.23.18

Bodhi Spiritual Center

Lola Wright: There were 11 of us gathered around a table. We were tight. Shoulder to shoulder. There was a table off to the side with a whole series of beautifully wrapped holiday gifts. And we started to go around the circle. Someone started by asking "What is your favorite holiday tradition?" And someone started and said "This is the first Christmas without my mom." And they started to share about their experience of family and the reconfiguration of their life over the last year. And then the next person shared and they said "I don't have a family. I'm not connected to my family anymore. So this is actually a really hard time of year for me. My heart starts to break a little bit." And then the next person shared and spoke of the traditions of their family and the things that they remember from long ago. All of their family has passed. So they've gotten to a point in their life where they've formed their own experience of family. And then the next person went and said "I think this might be the last Christmas I have with my mom. She might not be here this time next year and so I'm really present to being with my family."

Lola Wright: And a few people couldn't share. It was too tender. And that was at our staff meeting last Sunday night. Our dinner to celebrate the end of the year. And I was just so present to the gift of being with the complexities of one another. And the gift, the generosity, of listening that we can always extend. And for me that was really a moment that distilled, that clarified, what I want to hold most sacred this time of year is the being present with one another.

Lola Wright: So I was inspired this week as I was sitting with that and titled this message Accepting the Gift of Presence. Being in this now moment exactly as one another shows up. To be with the people that you will spend the next several days with as you wind up this year and being completely available to whatever shows up. I find that yesterday when I was laying in bed I had so much attachment to how I wanted this weekend to go. It's the weekend before Christmas and I would prefer to be baking cookies with my kids. I'd prefer to be singing Christmas carols. I'd prefer to be having a glass of red wine. Just one before Sunday. And instead I was laying in bed, sick. And it was a great opportunity for me to just practice noticing my attachments. Noticing my preferences. Noticing how I think this time of year should be. And then breathing through it and saying "It must be that this now moment is perfect exactly as it is because it is the only moment that I have."

Lola Wright: So I don't know how this time of year goes for you. I don't know what gets stirred up in you. But my invitation is, if only for these next 20 minutes, we give ourselves the gift of being with whatever is here now. So I invite you to close your eyes for a moment and take a deep breath. There's nothing that need be manufactured here. Just begin to bring

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your awareness to your breath and start to notice the body sensations that are stirring in you. And just allow whatever is here now to be here. Perhaps begin to bring your awareness to your feeling states. Notice if there's a particular feeling state that's prevalent. A feeling of sadness or joy, creativity or fear, anger. Whatever's here is okay. I invite you to give yourself the gift of big, deep breath and an audible exhale. And you can run around after you leave here today. You can open your eyes if you want.

Lola Wright: So, what is a holiday like Christmas in a post religious community? What is it? What is this holiday if we don't identify in particular religious constructs? I want to provide a metaphysical context, which is what we do here, which is the whole world has organized itself around what? The birth of what? The birth of a new possibility. That is the idea of the birth of Jesus. That he actually came forward as a new possibility. And metaphorically that is always available for each of us. That something new may come forward. What he symbolizes is the intersection of your humanity and your divinity. What he came forward to say is that there is nothing out there that will save you. You are the light of the world. You're it.

Lola Wright: So that's a very big idea. The question of which we ask how do I make that manifest? There's all kinds of opportunity to be seduced into some lesser version of self. Into your woundedness or your brokenness. I had such an interesting interaction of Facebook this past week and this happens fairly regularly where I experience people wanting to argue for their brokenness. We would really like to argue and stay attached to our woundedness. The big idea of Jesus is that you are not your circumstances and conditions. That there is a transcendent capacity that lives in the center of your being that has never been hurt, harmed, or hindered. And the extent to which we can locate our conscious awareness with that high and holy place, we can walk in a capacity of greater grace.

Lola Wright: So I want to bring your attention to a really beautiful text called Practicing the Presence by Joel Goldsmith. He writes "The goal of the spiritual life is to gain God consciousness. To live and move and have our being in an eternal awareness of God's presence." You know, to move, and to move in a state of curiosity around our innate wholeness. You are whole. You are holy. You are perfect. You are complete. You are the presence of love made manifest. And then we put all this extra attire on top. And we spend our lives undressing ourselves hopefully.

Lola Wright: Someone gave me a card this morning and on the cover of it it had a whole bunch of humans in contorted positions. And on the cover of the card it says "99% of adulting is trying to figure out why your back hurts." I thought that was hysterical as someone who has chronic low back pain. But there's always this fixation on what's happening, why isn't this right, what's going on, I need something to be better or different. Then you have the gift of accepting presence is to be with all that is here and now and the more we strip away we find our eternal essential nature which is whole and holy. So if there is one message that I hope to imprint in humanity it is the constant reminder that who you are is divine. That that really was the message and the opportunity of Jesus, to come forward.

Lola Wright: So my gift to us this day is to know yourself as a glorious demonstration of life. To walk on the planet as a healing presence that alters the world you encounter. And to remind those you meet of the glorious demonstration that they are. Jesus walked on the planet with the ability to see beyond the illusion. He walked on the planet with the ability to see the divinity in all despite circumstances, despite conditions. So imagine if you and I really recommitted to that, first with ourselves.

Lola Wright: This past week I made a major purchase for myself. And I decided to walk through the entire experience as a spiritual practice. It was a purchase that I've been sitting with for a year. And I was sort of readying myself. Now you might be saying "Shouldn't you be buying gifts for you four kids?" No. And it was really interesting because I said to myself the entire time "If you're going to do this as a spiritual practice then if at any point the addictive one in you, or the compulsive one in you, comes forward, you got to kill the deal." And I wasn't then walking from a place of like ooh, I really want that. You better behave. It was like no, just being present with what is.

Lola Wright: So I went into the store, which will remain nameless. And had this experience with the salesperson. Had the experience of trying this article of clothing on. Had the experience of my car being in a 30 minute loading zone and we're at 29 minutes. And I said to myself "Okay, if you start rationalizing" ... Like I noticed myself saying "Put a bubble of safety around the car. It'll be okay. You won't get a ticket." I'm like you are so full of it. So I said to the man who was helping me, I said "I need to go right now. I need to go move my car. Because I can't make this purchase and getting a parking ticket. That would be too much." And he was like "Okay." I said "So I will be right back." And I thought he probably thinks this is like my exit strategy.

Lola Wright: So I went and I drove around, drove around, drove around, and I was like my parking karma was not working so I was breathing through that. Finally I found a spot, I went back in, made the purchase, picked it up the next day, and after that transaction went through, I signed the receipt, all of the fears came up. And I was just committed to being with them. Now if you remember last week, Gaylon McDowell talked about the spirit, the soul, and the body. And what he talked about is the soul is the houser of your world of beliefs, feelings, opinions, memories. So we have these high ideas of love, of peace, of joy, of abundance, and they push through what I call a filtration system. And depending on your world, your cosmology of beliefs, out comes a particular outcome.

Lola Wright: So when we talk about change your thinking, change your life it's really about get curious what's in the soul. Get curious what's in the subconscious mind. The extent to which you are aware of what lives in the subconscious mind, you will be able to produce more desirable outcomes for you at the level of the individual and at the level of the collective. So all the fears started popping up. And I noticed the one in me that I've inherited from my mother who has to justify every penny spent. How, why, et cetera, et cetera. I love my mother. She's right in the front row. We call her the [inaudible 00:14:52] course. But it's this tendency to explain why this financial choice was made. And I notice that one in me. And I decided I'm not going to tell my mother about this purchase because I do not need to justify this to her.

Lola Wright: And then I noticed the relationships in my life with people who have lots of wealth. And I started to notice that I didn't want them to know about this purchase either. Because if they knew about this purchase then they would have all kinds of judgments and stories about how irresponsible I am, how reckless I am. I did not want my kids to know about this purchase because they are taking on student loans and this was very irresponsible. Now understand the practice was awareness. I was just noticing all of it. And I was feeling some sadness. Like wow, look at the cosmology of thought that you live in. And here you have made a choice, as an adult who pays her bills, to purchase something for yourself. And it has elicited all of this shame and judgment and fear and paranoia. And I just kept breathing and I thought what is the payoff for me in keeping myself small like this? What is the payoff for me? Because if I cannot celebrate my full self expression, I require my mom to show up a particular way. I require my kids to show up a particular way. I require my super wealthy friends to show up a particular way. And then I'm trapped. Because of a cosmology of belief.

Lola Wright: Now please do not get lost in the point of the story being that I bought an expensive item. You could map this practice onto anything in your life. I was waiting for the right time to tell Nathan. I wanted to handle this gingerly. Not because my husband can tell me what to do with my money but I wanted to be strategic. So he had two major exams to his landscape architecture registration on Tuesday and Wednesday. I decided Thursday would be the day. He didn't need that going into the exam. An act of generosity on my part. So Thursday came and I was noticing ... Because one in me is like "Look, I got this thing. I just want to let you know." I was like don't do that one. Could you just be like "Lover, I have something I'd like to share with you." So it was funny because we saw each other that night at a community member Pat Levy's house and we walked in and he said "I have something to tell you." And I said "I have something to tell you too." I said "Do you want to go?" And he's like "Not now." I'm like "Me either." I said "Okay."

Lola Wright: I don't even remember, in fact, what he had to tell me. But I told him what I had to tell him. And I explained to him my traversing, my journey around this whole thing. And he said "You know what? It sounds like you spent the same amount that you would have on a weekend retreat, but the good you got out of it was the same learning in a fraction of the time and a great thing to boot." And I'm like "Exactly." And he was right. He was right. There was great, rich learning. So I share that as really my own practice. You can learn in any circumstance or condition. If you have a hunger to get more deeply connected to the power, the presence, the holy and whole nature that is you, you can use anything for fodder for that.

Lola Wright: I am on the planet with a great hunger and a great desire to take off whatever old clothing that I've inherited from previous generations, previous sacred contracts, and to remember more clearly my divinity. The big idea is that there's only one of us here. And that we create all kinds of suffering through our seduction with separation. And then we have to ask ourselves what's the payoff? So for me, the payoff was ... Let me get it. What if my family and friends won't be as generous with me if they know that I did something nice for myself? Like I feel heat in my face saying that. Have a little bit of sweatiness.

Lola Wright: This old paradigm of being sacrificial of one's self has created a lot of suffering on the planet. The word Christmas means gathering of the chosen one. I think we miss the point if we think the whole idea was about a man called Jesus of Nazareth. You're the chosen one. You have a great responsibility to untangle your false and limiting beliefs that hold back your glorious demonstration. This life is about exploring the God consciousness that is you and sharing that with those you meet.

Lola Wright: There's a medical doctor by the name of Rachel Naomi Remen. And she has a class that is in many medical schools and it's called The Art of Healing. And she says "We are here because we are born with the capacity to find the hidden light in events and all people. To lift it up and make it visible once again and thereby to restore the innate wholeness of the world." So this month our theme is titled Light Workers. And you're here on a treasure hunt to find the light in every circumstance and condition. The moment we start to make someone or something or someplace the other, we are trapped. So all of the noise in the mind is good and holy material. Even the one in me that says how irresponsible it is to buy this item. How much more noble it would be to do something with those resources. That's a zero sum game. There's not a finite capacity.

Lola Wright: On Thursday, because of one of our community members Marshall Douglas, who's the director of human resources at Breakthrough, formerly known as Breakthrough Urban Ministries, 11 of our staff members went and made a meal and served it to a women's residence in Garfield Park. And actually I want to clarify. So the purchase happened on Wednesday and the meal occurred on Thursday. And I watched the mind go and start to create the women before me as other, as less than, as victim of, and then I just started to watch the cosmology of my mind start to work. How could you have bought that thing when there's so much need on the planet? I just want to ask us to pay attention because it is all of the work that is occurring in the soul and the subconscious mind that starts to create the suffering. All is possible. I can make a contribution on the planet and I don't have to be a sacrificial lamb. I can be generous in time, talent, and treasure, and I can take care of myself in the process.

Lola Wright: You are the light of the world. You are the light of the world. You are worthy of love. You are worthy of joy. You are worthy of peace. You are worthy of freedom. And as we each say yes to our own expansion of those qualities, no one has to be left out in the process.

Lola Wright: Ernest Holmes says "To realize within one's self a divine presence, a perfect person is to recognize the Christ. No man ever walks life's road alone. There is ever another who walks with him. This is his inner self. The undying reality which his personality but poorly emulates. Let us learn to be still and let the truth speak through us to be still and know that the inner light shines."

Lola Wright: I'll often talk about putting on the Christ. The Christ is the anointed one. Putting on the Christ to walk through this dimension of reality and see the light of the world in each one you meet. It's easy to do with the ones you like. It's a little more challenging to do with the ones you don't like. But that's where the practice is. See for me the easy thing is to go without. I have great muscle around that. I have a lot of practice in that. I have a lot of practice in bartering. I have a lot of practice in creating something out of nothing. Very good muscle there. And so it was fascinating for me to try on something new. To

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try on something new. So I wonder, between now and the end of the year, who is the person or who are the people, who are the places, or who are the things that you've created as the other?

Lola Wright: You might just close your eyes for a moment and take a breath. See what comes to your mind's eye. Don't limit it to individuals. I love to play in the realm of organizations, systems, the IRS, whatever your favorite place is to make wrong. Yourself. And would you be willing to take that thing, that person, that place into holy practice for the balance of the year? And to walk with it? Open your eyes.

Lola Wright: I'd love to close with some meditation and some practice together, but before we do that I want to do something that makes some of us extremely uncomfortable. So I apologize in advance. I'm going to ask you to stand up for just a moment. If that's comfortable for you. You can stay seated if it's better for your body. And I'm going to ask you to hold the hand of the person next to you. Would you be willing to come this way? And if you're online, and if you're alone and online, I'm going to hold my hand up, you can hold your hand with me at the screen. I'm going to again, just invite you to close your eyes. Just notice the energy field of the one that you're touching. Notice that you're holding the hand of the divine. You are holding the hand of the light of the world. I invite you to bring in your ancestors. Perhaps those that you've lost this year. Anyone that is near and dear to your heart, your mind, your body, let them be here. And notice as you hold the hand of the one on either side of you that you are bringing in this unified field of awareness.

Lola Wright: Imagine as you hold the hand of the one next to you that there is a transference of love, an amplification of joy, a relaxing into grace. You might signal to the one whose hand you're holding that you feel them, that you sense them, that you know that you are intrinsically connected, bound one to another. And free of words, a wellspring from your heart chakra, invite a well of gratitude to spill out from your arms into your hands, letting this entire web of humanity know that no matter what is occurring in any one of our lives there is always a presence that can be felt. I invite you to take a deep breath. When you're ready open your eyes. You can have a seat. We'll do a little prayer-