



# Healing Love: Into Balance

A BROWN PAPER BY AUDREY JORDAN, KATE MORALES, ROSA GONZALEZ, AND SHIREE TENG

OCTOBER 2022



## So that happened, and so did so much more...

In November 2021, 20 months into the Covid pandemic, I asked a team of beloved colleagues to join me to create a follow-on to *Measuring Love*. The four of us—Audrey Jordan, Kate Morales and Rosa Gonzalez—embarked on a second journey to create this Brown Paper, *Healing Love: Into Balance*.

We want to acknowledge that we are writing from a different context, with new learnings and insights we are eager to share—both ours and others of our close friends and colleagues. In the next pages you will find

- **More acknowledgement of the earth as our necessary partner in life;**
- **More acknowledgment of similar, resonating work of others;**
- **Naming of some powerful shifts happening in our society right now that have affected us just as they affect all of us;**
- **Keener insights into the importance of embracing our shadow sides, and the functions of grief and trash in our lives;**
- **Quotes and stories from fellow “love warriors” we have incorporated in this paper—people we love who commented on our original paper and insights in the interim;**
- **Some revised and new framings for how we now think about love and change and accountability in community.**

We realized and need to name that there is a fifth and silent partner to this work, which is the environment. We find it absurd to think we can imagine a future and sink into love from a carpeted, windowless 70s hotel ballroom. So, we intentionally chose to do this work a hundred yards from the rushing ocean, walk barefoot in the sand, and be surrounded by birds, whales, and healthy foods. Paying attention to the environment has been critical to our creativity and joy.

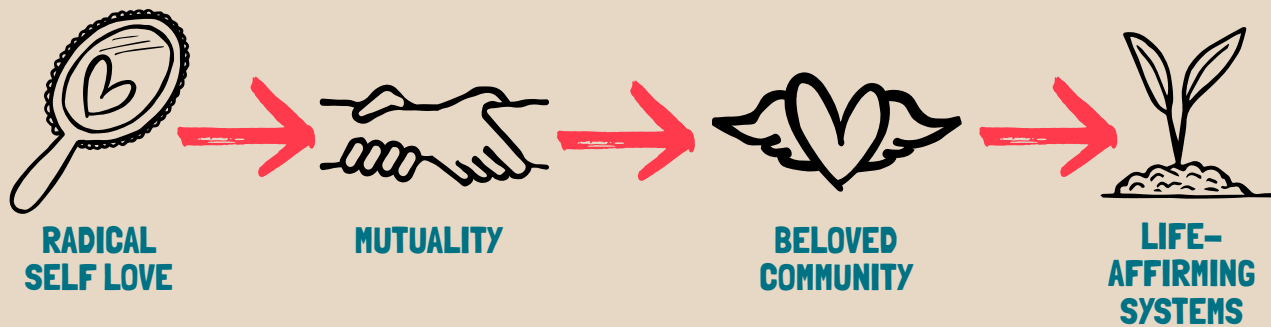
And I want to turn to our writing team for a minute: Audrey Jordan, a most beloved colleague, friend, coach, consultant, teacher who helped bring the first brown paper to life, is back as co-author. Kate Morales who made the first brown paper pop off the pages with their visual illustrations is back as co-author, gracing these pages with glorious visuals. And we invited Rosa Gonzalez to join us as the other co-author with her groundedness, ancestral wisdom, cultural understanding to building community power.



We will end by lifting up two feelings that exist on a continuum about the work of love that's required: **Decolonizing our own minds and spirit and being open to purification**. Both are stages of work. It's risk-taking and disruption on the one end, at the same time, it's about creating the container that is equipped to hold both. And, it's being prepared to withstand the backlash. It's exhausting to think about it, but also invigorating. Work feels exhausting. It's about being. Not thinking there won't be backlash, there will be - there is. Yes, if we do all of this with love, it will be liberating. Yes, it may be exhausting because all things have a natural cycle and must die to make way for rebirth and renewal.

The major themes and sections in this piece are:

## Moving from disconnection to...



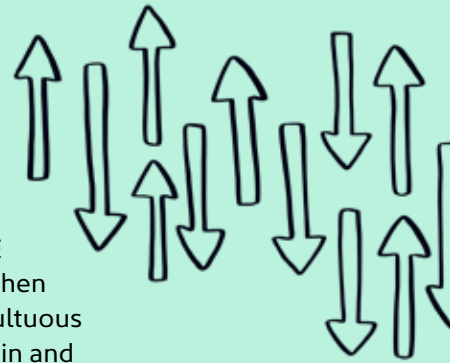
through...

- **Loving self in abundance + balance;**
- **Loving others and in community requires constant acts of self-cleansing + digestion + mutuality in transformation thru awareness;**
- **Power when held and wielded with love is fully alive + erotic + pure, and**
- **Bursting all of that forward held by our interdependence for ecological and ancestral balance.**

Within each section, there are four subsections that represent the healing cycle process that is relevant to each of the "levels" of connection:



# Love in the Balance...



What an invitation, what a calling in, to collectively write about the power of LOVE in the face of betrayal, injustice, mass-death, and violation of our mother earth. When the four of us came together to see how LOVE could help us navigate the big tumultuous questions spurred by the events of 2020-21, one organizing principle came up again and again—BALANCE.

This, of course, was not the first time BALANCE had revealed itself to us as an organizing principle. I remember in early 2017 when the inauguration of Trump unleashed a flood of hate against our communities, a string of intense storms hit the Bay Area and caused major flooding in my neighborhood. This massive flood displaced families, caused millions of dollars in damage, and revealed some of the ways in which our systems are completely out of balance. What it also revealed was the power of Love. Neighbor helped neighbor to remove the water, sludge, and debris from all that was destroyed. At City Council meetings to address the flood, many impacted residents used their two minutes of public comment to acknowledge the kindness of others, or to share their own efforts to support their neighbors.

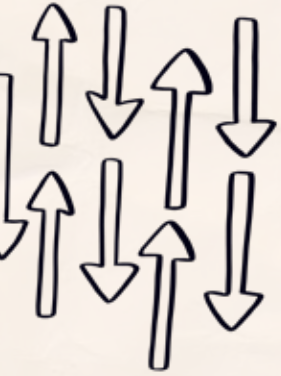
The neighborhoods most impacted by the flood were made up of predominantly Vietnamese and Spanish-speaking residents already negatively impacted by systems out of balance. In the days directly following the flood, gratitude (despite and in full awareness of the injustice) kept me centered and my energies high. A symbol appeared clearly in my mind's eye. It was a glowing orb with four arms extending out in the four directions and bending to the left.

As a student of Vedic wisdom and my own ancestral knowledge of ancient México, I recognized the symbol right away as signifying health and balance. The four directions represent the multiplicity of the material world (the elements earth, water, fire, and air; and all the living beings, birds, mammals, insects, etc.). The arms bend towards the left, indicating they spin clockwise around a single point of unity—the fundamental, absolute energy of the universe.

This symbol represents the interplay between diversity and unity, between the seen and the unseen, between movement and stillness. According to the indigenous Mexican philosophy of Nahuatl and

Mayan-speaking culture groups, **the material world is maintained by an equilibrium between the four elements who are in a constant struggle for dominance.** If one of the elements achieves supremacy over the others, the destruction of the material world is imminent. It follows that part of the responsibility of living beings is to help maintain the balance between the elements. For many generations now, economic systems based on resource extraction and labor exploitation have thrown the essential elements of life out of balance. The responsibility to cultivate balance has been largely replaced by the drive to accumulate wealth. And we are witnessing the consequences all around us in the interlocking crises of climate, health, and inequality.





I thought the other word that was interesting that you chose is that your aspiration is **BALANCE** and I definitely understand breaking from and avoiding destructive binaries. I know that my aspiration is to be more open and less judgmental. And that is one way of looking at my challenge with the word balance. Like mutual exchanges cannot just be transactions, right? Although transactions are part of the exchanges, it's deeper than that. Well, then balance is equilibrium. And this idea, that interrelationship, and this relates to reciprocity again, this idea of balance is not just like you have your level and you can see that it's even, It's not this middleman territory where everything is compromised, so nothing means anything. It's not that either. It's a recognition that somehow my constant work is to be and support equilibrium. And it is this idea that no extreme is the right way or the best way or the only way so that there's no perfect good and there's no perfect bad and that we are all different, we have diverse contributions.

—Frankie Blackburn

Centering Love in our work, in our communities, in our movements, means **reclaiming our sacred responsibility to cultivate balance**. Given the extreme imbalance in our economic, social, and ecological systems, in many cases this means redistributing resources, energy, power, attention, and care.

This starts with bringing awareness to the balance of these elements within ourselves. Our bodies are made up of space, air, fire, water, and earth. And each of these elements corresponds to our five senses (hearing, smell, sight, taste, and touch), as well as serving as symbols for the qualities of our thoughts and emotions. When I am angry, and especially when I am “hangry,” the element of fire may dominate my system. Through a balanced diet, exercise, and sleep we can maintain a healthy physical system. And through a balance between work and rest, mental activity and inner silence, we can maintain a healthy nervous system. This is what self-care, the foundation for radical self-love, looks like.

**Come back to our hearts. I talk with my heart. And I talk to my heart. I'm not just speaking; I take time, and speak to my own heart. Sometimes our hearts have things to say. These are not taught, not in trainings on how to do that.**

—Lupe Renteria Salome

Being connected to ourselves, being centered, feels to me the key to connecting and caring for others. The key to mutuality. If I am depleted, how can I extend myself to you in a real way? If I am hungry for love, or thirsty for your attention, not loving or caring for myself, how can I receive love and care from you in a healthy way? Without the inner strength of self-love, nor mutuality within my close relations, how can I contribute to Beloved Community? And what then, will feed our efforts to transform systems?

## **The questions this Brown Paper seeks to explore are big. They are about our capacity to love big, to love through injustice, to love beyond borders and betrayal.**

This paper is about our capacity to love our world back into Balance. Balance at the structural level, within and across systems like education, justice, food, housing, health, the media, and community development, is made possible by people and organizations cultivating balance within and between one another. We need to ask ourselves if we are building the kinds of organizational structures that not only allow for but cultivate balance. Are our structures replicating and perpetuating the power imbalances that led to the problems our work is meant to address? Are we replicating and perpetuating work patterns rooted in extraction and exploitation? Are our organizations too top heavy? Too reliant on specific individuals? If one piece is pulled from our collective Jenga will we topple over? Does our own self-talk and communications with others mine us of our energy and disturb our peace?

Balance as an organizing principle not only motivates us to attend to the energy and relationships we may have neglected, it also offers ways forward when the big questions and big crises that our organizations and communities face feel overwhelming.

Balance asks us to start with ourselves and attend to our inner imbalances, then move out from there to our relationships to find what needs mending, and from there to our organizations to shine a light on culture and power dynamics, leading us finally to reenvisioning the systems that impact what we need to live.

When we find ourselves stuck within binary questions, Balance pivots us towards the middle path. Questions like to be pro-vaccine or anti-vaccine become questions like, “How can we ensure our communities are healthy?” “How can we avoid becoming too reliant on one solution or another, and instead take a holistic approach to ending the pandemic and protecting those most vulnerable?” Balance as an organizing principle helps us avoid throwing people away when they have caused harm, and instead looking at how the harm can be addressed. Balance leads us to root causes and whole systems solutions. Balance is one of the keys that will help unlock our capacity to build a world organized by Love and care.



# Context for Healing Love: Into Balance

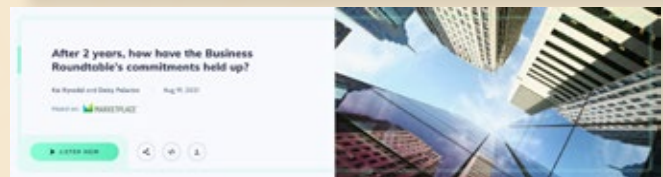
As we began the preparation for writing this second brown paper, we stopped and reflected on all that has happened since the first paper's release in early 2018.

We have to talk about the impact of 2020 and the aftermath. It has been a roller coaster ride of hopefulness mixed with deep disappointment because of broadened and deepened demand for solidarity, community and justice, and alas, the waning of the movement. At times it seemed like the whole world was outraged and ready to act that summer—and many people of all types proclaimed renewed interest and commitment to fighting for justice, for Black folks in particular. It inspired cautious optimism. And then ... then it all waned. Just like we feared it would. There is documented proof that so many of the promises made by philanthropy, corporations, academia, and others were not much more than performative.

What WILL it take? Can we muster hope again???

The trials we've witnessed in this last year—Rittenhouse, Arbury's Killers, Charlottesville. Two out of three? How do we understand their impact on the zeitgeist, on the atmosphere of "us against them"? As Charlamagne Tha God<sup>1</sup> would say "there is so much more here to unpack" - both the "two steps forward" (e.g., the rarity of a practically all-white juries finding white men guilty of murdering or grievously harming those who lift-up Black lives), and the "two steps back" (e.g., the lionization of Kyle Rittenhouse by a party more concerned with "owning the libs" than justice and equity—democracy itself).

And then there is the deepening hate, stoking of violence, and backlash "leadership" on display by the Republican party, at federal and state levels to turn back voting rights. It is palpable, and any sentient person is concerned—deeply concerned—with their fever-pitched push toward authoritarianism. The media seems incapable of naming and reporting on what is happening before our very eyes with the continued mindless fanning of "politics as a game" narrative(!). And let's be honest—it is not just the GOP (which is not even a party anymore and has no shame about it). Why are the Democrats not showing a greater sense of urgency—more responsiveness to those Black and Brown folks who put them in power?! At least find better messaging about all that is at stake if the GOP's shameless pursuit of power is not rejected.



1 <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/12/fashion/radio-host-Charlamagne-Tha-God-Celebrities.html>

Finally, the backlash—so reminiscent of the days following Reconstruction with the rise of the KKK—that has infiltrated our schools and stoked otherwise reasonable people with frenzied rejections of a truthful telling of our collective history in the faux Critical Race Theory<sup>2</sup> controversy. How do we find a common ground for honest conversation and growth as a democracy when there remains the white supremacist push to force a cherry-picked, white-washed narrative as the only truth?

Still, in the midst of a continuing, albeit shape-shifting pandemic and all the hunkering down it demands, we press on and are determined to share from this context and what we've learned from it.<sup>3</sup>

## Alignment and Coherence with Many Co-Sojourners

There have been many positive and exciting conversations with a myriad of people about the first paper and its contents. And we've presented at conferences such as the American Evaluation Association and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations to name a few; and we've presented to groups who wanted to dig deeper (e.g. Liberatory Leadership). The response at the presentations and conversations has been overwhelmingly affirming and uplifting.

One group in Memphis (Center for Transforming Communities) launched "**12 Days of Joy**" during the 2021 holidays based on our Measuring Love continuum.

There are many others who are aligned with us and who are doing incredible work across the country. In evaluation, philanthropy and community-building practice. In terms of aligned efforts, here is a sampling of some that are noteworthy:

**if Foundation** is a relatively new foundation, whose mission, as stated by former president & CEO Yanique Redwood is as follows: "We achieve our vision by centering the leadership and expertise of Black people and people of the global majority in the Washington, DC region who live at the sharpest intersection of systems of oppression, in particular race, class and gender identity." <https://www.iffdn.org/who-we-are>



**Social Insights Research**—Zuri Tau, CEO—where these unapologetic leaders practice research and evaluation in service of equity. <https://www.socinsights.com/about>

**Nicole Robinson, Ph.D.** - An evaluator who wrote a powerful article (e.g., Part 3 discusses the 10 global forces that must be examined and included in evaluation, including racial capitalism, neo-slavery, neoliberalism, white supremacy, neofascism, neocolonialism, neo-feudalism, imperialism, corporatism, and radical imagination!) that was recently published (not available publicly without paying for it): Robinson, N. (2021). A radical arc in systematically documenting political context in advocacy evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 2021, 95–117. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.20470>

The work of **Hawaiian indigenous evaluators: CREA-HI** (Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment-Hawaii) and their "Evaluation with Aloha: A Framework for Working in Native Hawaiian Contexts" which underscores the "relationships with love" approach to evaluation or paper speaks

2 <https://news.temple.edu/news/2021-08-05/untangling-controversy-around-critical-race-theory>

3 Kate Morales *Queerness Taught me That. An Open Letter to the Radical Educators of the Ecosphere and Beyond*



about, emphasizing the welcoming, inclusive, “whole person” space aspects that must surround these relationships. <https://www.creahawaii.com/about-us>

adrienne marie brown’s *The Principles of Emergent Strategy* which speaks so eloquently about an evolving and adaptive practice to knowing and learning together, very different from white dominant culture approaches that occupy too much of the respected space of knowledge building. <https://www.akpress.org/emergentstrategy.html>

The **Othring and Belonging Institute** led by noted scholar john powell, which is wrangling with difficult questions about connecting with people across race boundaries - even possibly the defiant and tribal MAGA voters - bridging with them (rather than breaking with them) calling them in (rather than calling them out) as our surest path forward to a strengthened democracy and beloved community. <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/>

**Heather McGhee**, board chair of Color of Change, in her excellent book *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*, which encourages us to respond to this era of “suffering and dysfunction the country’s white majority is willing to tolerate” in the wake of the Trump presidency by embracing the fact that “antiquated beliefs that some groups of people are better than others” can and must be replaced by “a new story of who we could be to one another.”



**Equitable Evaluation** by the Luminare Group—there is a lot of resonance. We could have written their vision statement: “*Our vision is one where evaluative practice works toward creating a world in which we all thrive and one where the multiple truths of the human experience are valued and valid.*” This group has provided valuable tools and guidance to evaluators concerned with the kind of evaluators and evaluation that take a divergent path to more traditional evaluation. From their website: “Everyday narratives that marginalize, minimize and disrespect people of color and those with less privilege should be replaced with ones that understand the systemic and structural barriers that limit possibilities and the ability to thrive. They can instead lift up the historical, contextual and powerful dynamics that create and sustain oppression and shed light on the strategies and solutions which can shift the “rules of the game” so that equity is achievable.” <https://www.equitableval.org/>

A few important thought papers from some of our trusted colleagues in the evaluation field:

By Julia Coffman, et al., *Advocacy that builds power: Transforming policies and systems for health and racial equity*. A report for The California Endowment. Center for Evaluation and Innovation. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aNyNsqqAZG-WS-38Lcx-WXH\\_IUGtWX8b/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aNyNsqqAZG-WS-38Lcx-WXH_IUGtWX8b/view)

By Sarah Stachowiak, et al., *Some lessons from participatory grantmaking and meditations on power and the field*. Read about it at this link: <https://fundforsharedinsight.org/more-than-money-participatory-grantmaking-and-perceptions-of-power/>

**Vu Le, blogger at Nonprofit AF** who writes often on the tragic absurdities of life as a nonprofit, who in a particular post discussed the way that the focus on “effectiveness” as a condition of funding has caused more harm than it has supported anyone: <https://nonprofitaf.com/2017/12/how-the-concept-of-effectiveness-has-screwed-nonprofits-and-the-people-we-serve/>



The **Latino Community Foundations' Love Not Fear Fund**, which raised over \$5 million dollars to support over 100 communities to survive through crises (e.g., pandemic, drought) and also to organize for longer term structural change. <https://latinocf.org/love-prevails-always/>

**Organizing Liberatory Networks: An Invitation**, is an effort by admired colleagues Trish Tchume, Susan Misra, and others, supported by the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, to cultivate liberatory space in equity networks. It is testimony, a live cultivation, and guidance for interested others. Read more at this link: <https://www.rsclark.org/blog/2021/10/11/organizing-liberatory-networks-an-invitation>

An evaluation report prepared by Social Insights Research about the pilot year of the **Liberatory Leadership Praxis** fellows experience. Read more at this link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YxWbA8dq1URb-q7oIRc36UWBqa6ZQZb-/view>

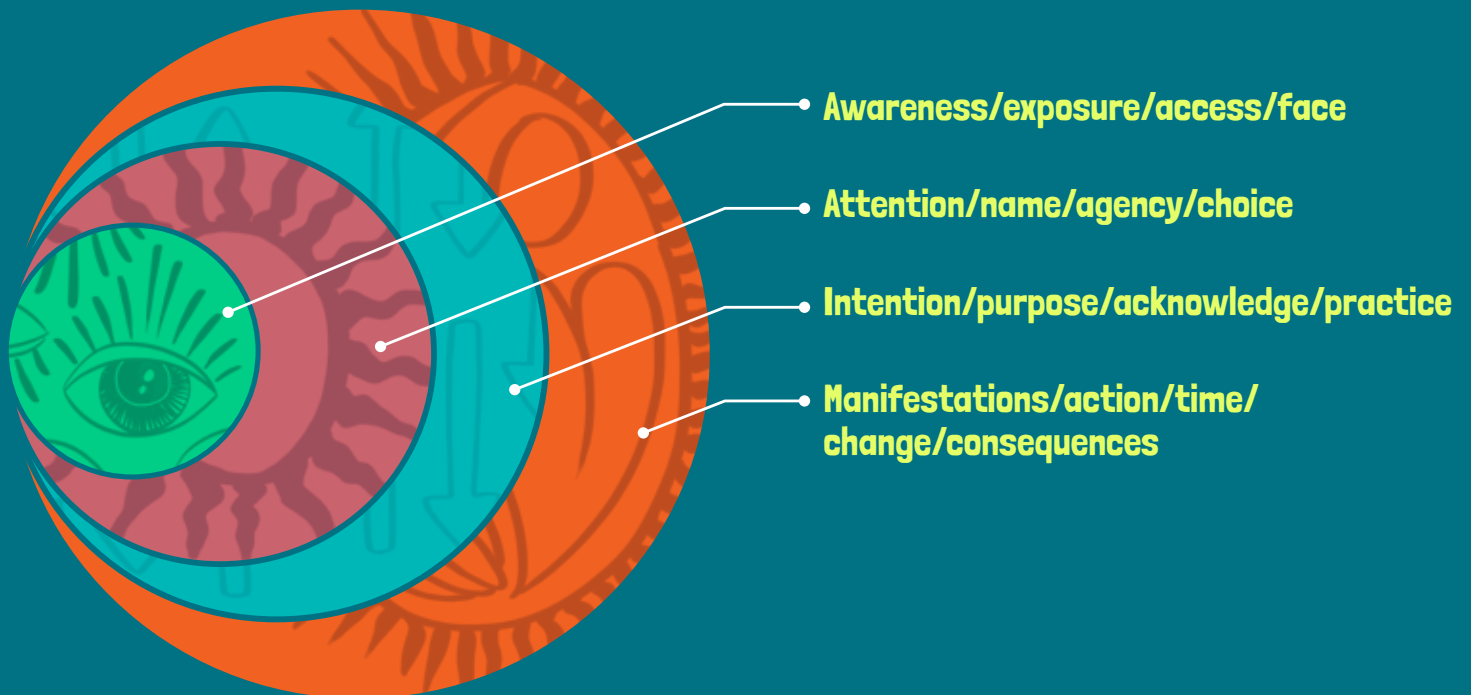
**Malkia Devich-Cyril**, Black activist as expressed in words the importance of processing grief, generational grief, together in social movement work in the article, **Grief Belongs in Social Movements: Can We Embrace It?** <https://inthesetimes.com/article/freedom-grief-healing-death-liberation-movements>



From *Grief Belongs in Social Movements. Can We Embrace It?* for *In These Times* by Malkia Devich-Cyril. Illustration: Malachi Lily

# Healing Love : Into Balance

Our learning and insights since 2019 have been elevated as we write this second brown paper. Beyond the 12 dimensions of love framing in our first paper, we are bringing forward a continuum that goes from disconnection to connection with indicators (Inside/outside separation and connection), within our original continuum of Self-Love to Loving each other to Community Love to wielding Power with Love in an ecosystem for change. That continuum is as follows:



This continuum contemplates a new understanding of:

- Fear of our own and collective **power**, and to name this as the real obstacle it is;
- Human nature and the **shadow sides** of us as parts we cannot ignore but bring into balance with our bright sides (wholeness);
- The need to **engage with the environment** we are in (place) as a source of our power, as our indigenous friends implore us to do;
- The **beauty that persists** in the midst of extraction, exploitation, erasure by the white supremacist culture or empire, and
- The **clarity and everyday celebrations** around us of what love is (which we miss too often)

**We are survivors  
of our ancestry  
and we are  
dream builders.**

## **Acknowledging the Ancestors**

As Resmaa Menakam, reminds us, in his brilliant body of work called *Somatic Abolitionism*, "We did not just pop out of thin air." We come from generations of experience, of love, and of trauma, much of which has been unmetabolized. Can we take a moment to remember where we have come from? Can we acknowledge what has been passed down to us through our DNA as well as through the societal norms in which we were raised? We are survivors of our ancestry and we are dream builders.

**Who am I?** I am all my ancestors who brought me here; honoring my ancestry is part of who I am. We are our ancestors and at the same time we are something new, the possibility of transformation.

**What am I doing here?** When I think of those who will come after me, I want to hand them a better, more balanced world.

**How do I honor my ancestors' teachings?** Our work is to bring forward the wisdom of our ancestors and become who we are here to be.

## **The Primacy of Context**

**What does it take for our movement spaces to be truly loving, healing? There's this gap understanding what's happening in these movement efforts, between older and younger generations. Both adults and young people need to be always in the same rooms. All the time. If not, that's how the gaps happen. Young and old people be in the same conversations, make decisions together. Younger folks need support, perhaps, not to be dismissed of our experiences. Beyond training as training by itself is not enough, but a start, an opportunity for organizers to be aware of youth needs. They need to be in the same space, learning and having these conversations... not just operate from what we think we know.**

**—Lupe Renteria Salome**

We must engage the transformative power of LOVE within the structural, historical, and intergenerational contexts we find ourselves.

**Where are we?** What cultures and ecology inform the experience of this place?

**What is happening here?** What dynamics are at play that affect how we relate to ourselves, each other, and the land?

**What clouds our perception of what is happening here?** How can we grow our awareness of the biases, the blindspots, the needs and desires that may affect our perception of this reality?

We are not ahistorical or a-contextual- what is history and context showing us? Becoming aware of the structural and cultural norms that uphold different forms of oppression is key to radical self-love because it helps us to interrupt patterns of self-blame. In this way, we can begin to reject the prevalent norms of white supremacy, heteronormative defaults, anti-Black and AAPI hate, and all other forms of socio-political oppression. **Awareness of structural and cultural contexts rooted in our racialized histories, leads to:**

**Humility**

**Authenticity**

**Doing our own shadow work**

## **Bringing a Vision of the Future into Focus**

What is love? How is love manifested? These are the things you would see if in fact love were centered:

- ALOHA principles: <https://www.creahawaii.com/aloha>
- Responsibility and accountability within a community of people practicing together, as bell hooks described it in *All About Love: New Visions*

We will constantly be faced by the systems of oppression that will push us back into the default of disconnection, isolation and alienation. Cultivating, discovering, nurturing connections is love in action. We have to do it all of the time against the prevailing headwinds of “normalcy.”

The boldness of risk-taking and naming something counter-normative,

- If you are really creating change it will create a backlash, a whitelash that we as people of color are too familiar with, unfortunately.
- It takes courage, but then when you say it’s courageous it makes it exceptional and doing the right thing shouldn’t be exceptional. There are no trophies for doing the right thing. But at the same time, it DOES take courage. And, **it shouldn’t be exceptional to be courageous.**

**“Failure is not an option.” I can’t count how many times I have said this to myself when I am about to embark on leading a new project or tackling a big challenge. But what I have learned is that this perceived inability to fail is part of how we are oppressed as BIPOC leaders. Systemic oppression creates narratives that I have repeated to myself about not being good enough or missing the mark. I have concluded that the reason I have failed was due to my negative character traits or inherent flaws within myself. If I fail, I am a bad leader. If I fail, I am letting my team down. If I fail, I am irresponsible. If I fail, I am incompetent. If I fail, I am a disappointment to our family and our community. Internalizing these messages about failure keeps me from dreaming bigger, from attempting to be more bold, and from getting up after I get knocked down. When I look back, I can see that when I took myself out of the picture because I was scared of failing, I played right into the hands of those with power, without them having to lift a finger. For all of these reasons, I find myself calling on my courage to embrace failure and see it as part of my journey towards individual and collective evolution and liberation.**

**—Eveline Shen**

We're looking for something that is not here. What's here is broken and it is breaking us. And we are accomplices in breaking other people. We inadvertently or unconsciously become the tools of the dominant structures and narratives. And, yet, we need to consciously challenge ourselves to be on a different horizon. That work to be able to get to a new horizon is not yet fully happening.

**We are in a state of suspension between what is dying and decaying and what is becoming. We are in the process of composting. Let's make that process conscious.**



Love in its purest form is the how: How we are going to get there. We may not know where "there" is just yet but it won't stink and harm like the present shit.

To be able to see, on a mass scale, that we have been accomplices in the destruction of our people. **People are saying no, I will no longer be an accomplice.** The reality is there are people all along the way who have been rejecting the bullshit. More and more of us are now rejecting it and paving a more liberatory way to be human together.

**What looks different when we embody the courage to embrace a "new way" of being, grounded in balance and love?**

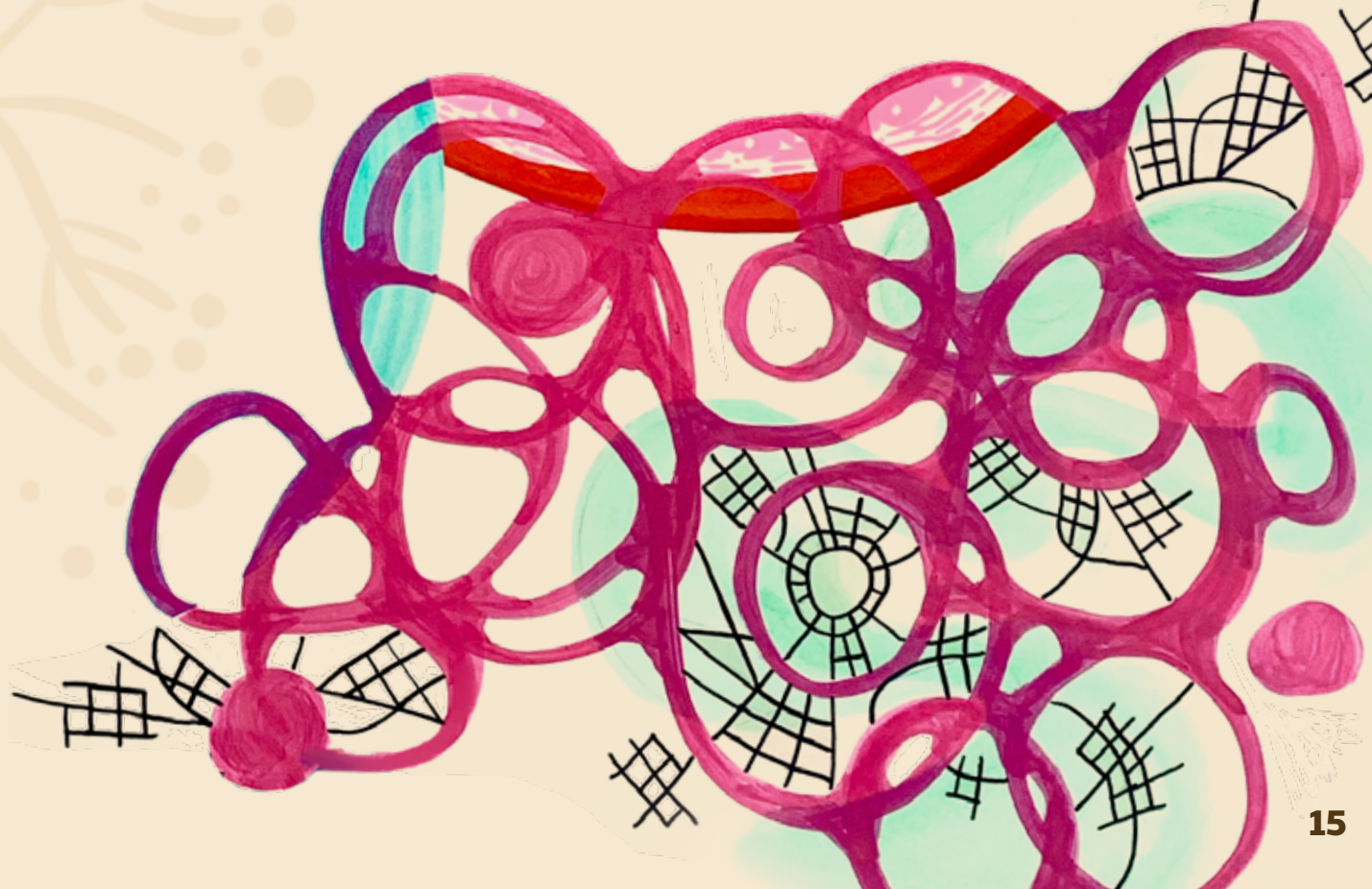
- More truth telling as a part of healing;
- More courage and leaning into bravery;
- More trusting & authentic relationships;
- Commitment to risk-taking, experimentation and innovation;
- Standing with communities most harmed by oppressive systems and lifting them up;
- Recognizing the contradictions inherent in philanthropy, [e]valuation, in our own community engagement practices, and
- The "no other way to get it" learning and development that comes through collective dreaming and efforts.

When we reach into our deepest desires and erotic energy as our life force, we attract other life forces and bring them into our energetic field. Like how protons and neutrons are attracted to each other, our love for one another is abundant, boundless, uncontained.

**What do we do as people who are leaders, trying to be a leader connected to our community and ultimately, we're trying to alleviate suffering, so people can be free to thrive. But that all gets lost in all of this power struggle. Then we get lost in the tactic. Rather than the strategy, the vision, we are so lost in the tactics – we have forgotten the big picture and if we want to look at the big picture, with a higher level framework that is a way to analyze it from a strategic perspective. And I feel like this is very clear with the Measuring Love framework. Here is a strategy that you can apply to different types of tactics. This is severely missing right now, particularly one that's done from the context of love. Like right now. We are confronting white supremacy with white supremacy behavior in extremes.**

**And our anger and suffering – we don't have to add to it as black folks you know? There are ways for us to be in relationship. We know this. We know about struggle, and not enough about how white supremacy shows up in us and how we treat each other—and there is a way we can NOT do that.**

**—Phillipe Cunningham**



# Part 1: Radical Self-Love Means Embracing Light and Shadow

Moving from disconnection to...  
**RADICAL SELF LOVE**



MUTUALITY



BELOVED  
COMMUNITY



LIFE-AFFIRMING  
SYSTEMS





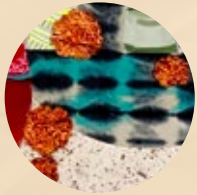
## Illustration Key:



**Disconnect:** Although this figure is made of the very same Earth that surrounds them, their mind has created a separation, causing them to forget their innate belonging to the land. Their suffering is not the loss of sacred connection, but rather the loss of awareness of that connection.



**Digestion:** This digestive system winds like a river, marking the body with deposits left by paths carved by choices and influences from the past. The meandering currents have carved a history, a record of all that this body has ingested.



**Cempasuchitl:** Known as “flowers of the dead” and used on dia de los muertos to invite souls of the departed back to visit the living, cempasuchil (marigolds) are for celebrating life collectively during the grieving times. Also inspired by the line from the poem A Plain Spring Song by Nezahualcoyotl: *“Life Giver, let us borrow your flowers, these golden flowers, these wailing flowers. No one can enjoy them forever, for we must depart. Ahuaya ohuaya ohuaya”*



**Coral Snake:** Freshly emerging from old skin, knowing how to shed what once contained them but that which is now too small, the coral snake deity has the body wisdom to metabolize the unprocessed grief.



**Cotton:** A closer look at the origins of an everyday modern object. Traced back to the soil, cotton is a plant whose labor-intensive cultivation and the inhumane industry built around it weaves a legacy of genocide, enslavement and land exploitation that literally clothes America. This legacy makes cotton seeds an opportunity to be a part of reparations and land rematriation.



**Open Space:** The breath-of-fresh-air feeling of clarity and possibility that opens on the other side of grieving or moving through challenge.



**Mask:** *“Sorrow is your joy unmasked”* -Kahlil Gibran. Let us not encounter each other and assume one another’s purity, but instead ask with curiosity, ‘what else is underneath the mask?’



**Jaguar/Ocelot:** A being with night vision, Jaguars can move between worlds, holding knowledge of what cannot be (or does not want to be) seen in the light. They are guardians of sacred places and use their power to see what others might think unimaginable.

These last several years have given us much to grieve. For many, quarantine and social distancing have been a call to look inward, and this has not always been easy. Our personal and collective shadow sides are harder to hide these days, opening up a portal to radical self love - a chance to see and embrace all that we are. We are abundant beings. Plentiful in our laughs and cries, sorrows and elations. Just as rain and lightning precedes growth and transformation, it is also capable of bringing death and destruction. **We ought not to hide our own abundance, which comes in both life-giving and life-denying ways.** In doing so, we're more able to accept and honor others' abundant light and shadows equally.

The message is clear: We are all capable of giving and denying life. We are at once all of our best and worst qualities. In fact, joy, beauty, and generosity would not be possible without sorrow, ugliness, and greed.

When we try to deny or cancel our shadow sides, we cut ourselves off from parts of ourselves and essentially imprison those sides perceived to be "ugly, nasty, evil" parts, and blame, shame those aspects of ourselves. More

likely than not, the result is  
that the shadow side  
becomes an  
energetic  
enemy,  
our own

monster shadow locked in an internal tense battle. Some of this is conscious - most of it is unconscious. It is all draining. We harm ourselves further. When we do that, we often feel unworthy of love, anxious about being "right, not wrong," and blame ourselves for others' displeasures or unhappiness. We spiral down a spiritual hellhole.

We can't cancel or deny our shadow sides—those parts of us that cause harm. We must face them, even embrace them so that we can do the inner work that allows us to blossom in our wholeness. This takes love—radical love of ourselves, and a deep commitment to inner balance. If we can have, and practice radical love for ourselves, we are more able to have and practice honest love for others. Consciously seeking balance within, we become more capable of cultivating balance in our relationships, in our communities, in our ecological and social systems.

**The message is clear: We are all capable of giving and denying life. We are at once all of our best and worst qualities.**



**The worst thing I've ever done is not fully honoring my own resilience the last 46 years of my life. I grew up as an "underdog." I was a short, chubby, socially awkward, colorblind Chinese American kid. I was constantly bullied. I was also the oldest son/grandson of a large Chinese immigrant family and was never able to meet the expectations of being a "good son."**

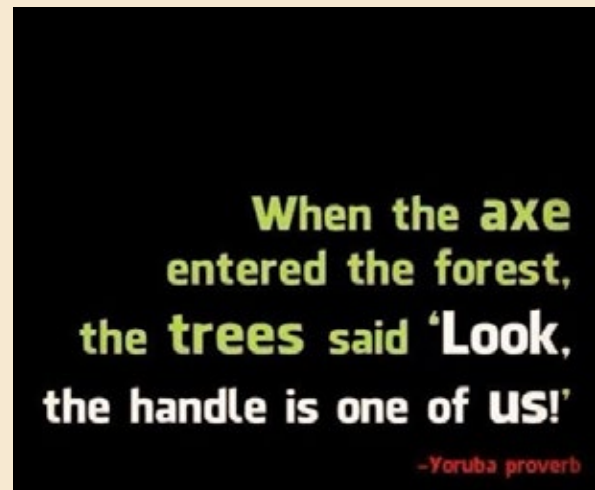
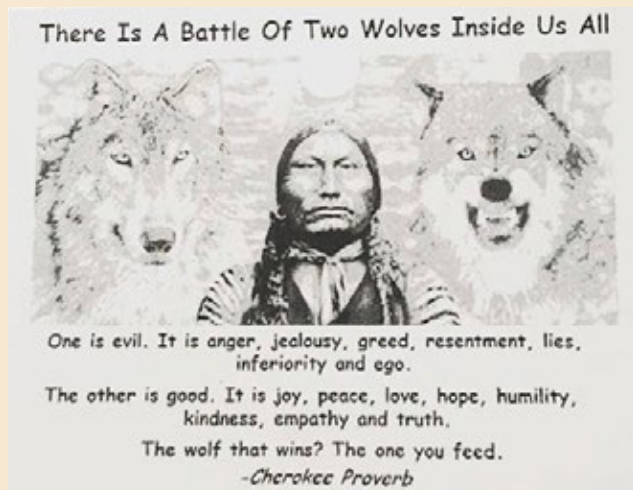
**I got politicized and I became very active in high school. I organized a "Malcolm X and MLK Jr. Unity" Day for the entire school. Since my school was mostly white and Asian, the white kids were angry and attacked me with racial slurs. I became a true underdog, a "Angry Asian man" with something to say and prove – ALL the time. But through the years this also hurt me in unimaginable ways. I used drinking as a way to cope and "power through." I isolated myself and became a martyr full of resentment and anger.**

**Even after 30+ years, this old story/narrative of me creeps up. Why? Because being an underdog has served me well... I have helped to win major campaigns, co-founded many organizations and developed the next generation of organizers. Zooming out, I know that I am not that "underdog" but what does that mean for my identity? What drives me?**

**—Alex Tom**

The inverse is also real. When we deny our abundant energy, joy, natural gifts and talents, we rob the world of our unique value. Ever notice how uncomfortable it may feel to stand in front of an applauding, supportive, affirming crowd? When we show up authentically and are noticed by others, we often shy away from being fully seen, appreciated and honored. Why is that? How might we bring more balance to how we see ourselves by trusting how others see us?

When we're able to stand in our own light, unconditionally love and accept ourselves as we are, not who others want us to be, we can stand a bit taller. When we shine, everything we're about rises with us. Let's not shrink to what dominant culture wants to see: being diminished, unsure, insecure, but showing up as best as we're able to be at every moment.







I've now had different trips with grief as my companion. I've navigated the deaths of dear ones. And, for me, in some ways the most challenging, I've traveled the dark road of betrayal – losing my way on a road where I felt confident, because of ruptures I would never have anticipated. On this windy, scary journey grief has given me an improbable and unexpected choice: how do I want to show up? Even while angry and hurt by this devastating breach; even while unmoored by the loss of what I believed was true, even while regulating my feeling of foolishness while attempting to access self compassion for trusting a messy human being. I still have a choice in how I show up.

And grief teaches me again, that love is the way. Loving life, loving even those who hurt and deceive me, loving myself. Grief reminds me to be curious about all my feelings, even the feeling of devastating hurt and righteous anger. And, I've been able to see how anger and hurt are parts of love, present due to love—and that love can guide us forward through the darkness. Grief is my curandera, guiding me to notice and experience the magnificence that is always around me. Gently coaching me: if I grieve with all my heart and soul, I have more access to loving with all my heart and soul.

—Belma Gonzalez

## Grief: a Portal to our Abundant Selves

In societies rooted in separation, that attempt to cut us off from our wholeness, grief is frowned upon. There is no space for sorrow, no supportive rituals that allow us to sit with the pain and metabolize it.

As a child I remember being scolded if I cried, and this message stuck with me into adulthood. Crying feels selfish, extra, and off-putting to others. How many times have we heard colleagues, friends apologize for crying? "I'm sorry for being so emotional..." as tears flow. Why is that? Denying ourselves the space and permission to grieve means denying ourselves the growth, perspective, and healing that can open up when we sit with the pain.

As many poets have expressed in different ways, hearts must break in order to grow. It is the pain of heartbreak and loss that calls forward our deeper human qualities. Loss creates space for different aspects of ourselves to emerge. But these natural growth cycles are interrupted and thwarted when we mask the pain, or doubt our capacity to move through it to the other side.

What would it look like to reclaim and reinvent grief rituals that allow us to honor, even celebrate what we have lost, to give our losses proper burials, that they may be composted and feed new insights, new skills, new ways of seeing and being in the world?





## Seeing and Owning Our Abundance

- What are you grieving?
- What sorrows are you holding onto that are asking for a proper burial?
- What fears may keep you from fully allowing yourself to grieve what has been lost?
- What are 3 small steps you can take to increasingly accept and even ritualize grief in your life?
- What sparks joy from the inside?
- What do you truly appreciate and love about yourself?
- Do you notice yourself finding it difficult to accept affirmation, appreciation, support? Why is that?
- What are 3 small steps you can take to accept, embrace being seen, loved, honored by others?

Until we learn to do otherwise, we process personal loss and harm inadequately, alone by ourselves. When we get past denying it, we become angry, disillusioned, vengeful, or depressed - or all of the above. Too often some of us get stuck there. In some ways, it becomes easier to be angry or vengeful (at others or ourselves), because we've convinced ourselves that the loss, the grief, is too much to bear.

## Grieving happens at different levels:

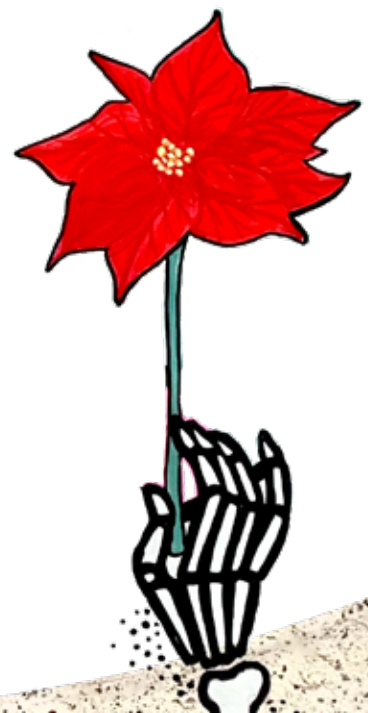


## Personal Internal Work of Grieving and Accepting Ourselves

Our parents and caregivers taught us much of what we have learned about grief and grieving by role modeling for us what's acceptable and what's not. We observed how they dealt with loss. In watching them grow old. In dealing with their dying and their death. In dealing with abuses they've endured. Perhaps in responding to our own abuse by our parents or others who say they love us.

We are all on our own paths to accept our own shortcomings, our mistakes, our trespasses. Remembering the times we've been harmed or caused harm to others. Recalling the times we have shied from responsibility, or failed to step up or in when others have needed us to. The times we have said "yes," when we really wanted to, and in our actions ultimately saying "no." The times we have lied. Covered up or blurred our truth and kept those more complex or uncomfortable aspects of truths to ourselves.

We grieve our internalized oppression - recognizing how we've been indoctrinated to believe we are not enough, never enough. Told in explicit and subliminal ways that we are not worthy. Inferior. Deserving of our oppression. And through this continuum, grieve the loss of power we were robbed of knowing we have.



The remedy? Feel ALL our feelings, in abundance, with loving support. Learn and lean into the power of forgiveness. Accept the clarity and freedom that comes with it. Not at all easy, but it brings us to the clarity and freedom to love and be loved, again and again, abundantly.

**I feel like the deep grief I feel needs an outlet, a path in which to allow itself to flow over the land and go back into the earth, to become nourishment and part of rebirth. I wonder if this is something I can do alone and with folks willing to explore this, as I know many have done and are doing... finding ways to heal, transform, alchemize and create. I struggle to focus my energy and have started to listen to a podcast about sacred sons, exploring spiritually new forms of masculinity and community. interestingly enough, brown boi project did a retreat this summer exploring liberatory masculinities. it was grounding to spend time exploring, resting and finding new paths towards healing. this all comes with me engaging more in the cisgay male community, and also considering and holding my "elder male" role in my family, as well as queer male in the broader community. Part of me just wanted to not really think about it, and another part of me wants to flow and discover. I think a balance of flowing, discovering and experimenting is where I'm landing on understanding my role/roles in community.**

—Freddy Lee



## Communal

When we gather with people in our grief, that grief can be about our regrets for what we have been or not been in relationship with others; how we may have harmed others; how others may have harmed us or others we hold dear. The process of working through communal grief requires us to come outside of ourselves and grieve with others.

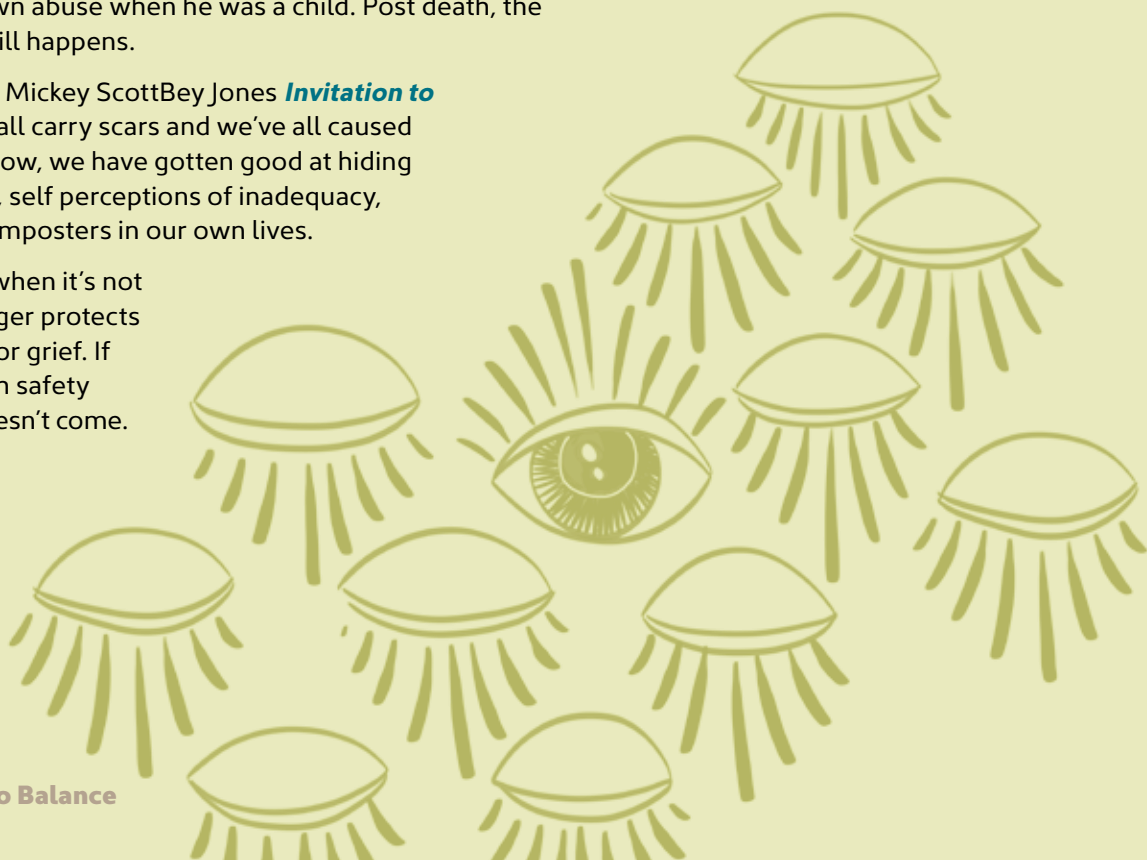
**I am grieving the way Parkinson's is slowly stealing my father's ability to talk. While I was growing up he didn't express his love verbally. He was always a jokester, and so you knew he loved you if he took the time to tease you. As I've gotten older and we've both engaged in our own healing work, sometimes being in ceremony together, he's started telling me he loves me, and opening up to me with some of his own struggles. Now, with the Parkinson's escalating, when I visit, he prefers to watch TV. I am grieving what feels like the end of our deepening relationship. I am grieving the book we never wrote together, the places we didn't get to visit. But most of all, I feel a huge lump in my throat that is full of most sorrow and gratitude that I am witnessing the withering of his expression of life. He has always been my role model, the person who connected me to my ancestors, who taught me that another word is possible, who showed me how to observe and honor nature, and who always reminded me the purpose of an education was to give back to one's community. I think the blessing of a terminal illness is it gives you and your loved ones time to start the grieving process even before you have actually passed away.**

—Rosa

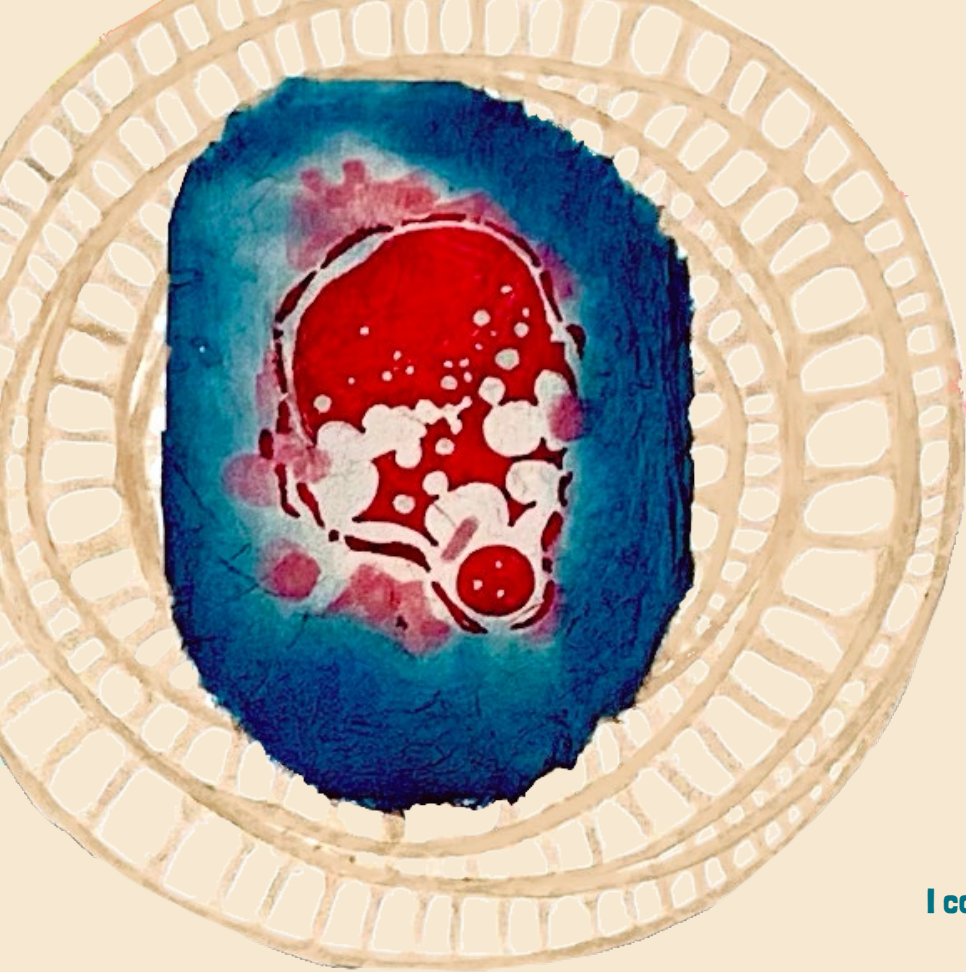
Grieving for his own abuse when he was a child. Post death, the work of healing still happens.

As in the words of Mickey ScottBey Jones *Invitation to Brave Space*, "we all carry scars and we've all caused wounds..." Somehow, we have gotten good at hiding our places of hurt, self perceptions of inadequacy, feelings of being imposters in our own lives.

Anger shows up when it's not safe to be sad. Anger protects the sacred place for grief. If there's not enough safety there, the grief doesn't come.







**Forgiving my mom, I had to learn to forgive myself, too. My mom called me mean. I didn't realize it – I was actually offended by her characterization – but then I realized I was consciously mean to my mom when I knew what she wanted and I didn't give it. She wanted validation and a gesture of love. I purposely withheld that. I'm not proud of that. She wasn't the kind of person I could have a vulnerable conversation with, so now that she has transitioned to the next life, I am coming to terms with this regret on my own.**

**So far I have thought deeply about where did that impulse come from? I wanted her to feel what it's like to have love withheld. I was aware I was withholding something she needed because I felt like she did it to me as I was growing up. What am I to do with this sense of perpetrator's grief? To make amends, make it right, to do something... I can't go back. I can't say I'm sorry to her now that she has passed and try to fix that. What I can do is break the pattern: forgive myself and truly see and understand me, learn to be better and to do better. Feel all my feelings – let the regret and the grief go deep, so the hole that is dug and be filled with the joy that goes in place of the grief. Put love in the world myself and with others. Sing in harmony! When I feel myself being asked to give and my response is to withhold – pause. Check myself – what's going on here? Try and understand what that person needs from me and why they need it from me. Consider what I can give freely while staying true to my own need to have boundaries. Talk about it with that person.**

**Expanded wisdom allows forgiveness to happen, and authentic actions can follow. This is my lesson as I have zoomed out to see I wasn't just mean, but withholding with intention.**

**—Audrey**

**There is a story about the Buddha and forgiveness. A merchant's only son chose to leave the family business and become a disciple of the Buddha.**

**He packed his things, left home, and dedicated himself to the Buddha at his ashram. The merchant was furious. All he ever wanted in life was to be able to pass on his life's work to his son. So, after several months of seething anger, he traveled all the way to where the Buddha and his disciples lived so that he could express this anger that was boiling inside of him. When he entered the ashram though something strange happened. No words would come out of his mouth. There was such peace in the room that he could not use his voice to express anger, so he spit in the face of the Buddha. All of the Buddha's followers gasped in horror. Even the merchant was stunned.**

**As soon as he could gather his wits, he ran out of the ashram full of shame. That night he could not sleep. He tossed and turned with guilt and inner turmoil. He came face to face with his own inner demons. As soon as the dawn broke, he made his way back to the ashram and bowed before the Buddha. He begged for his forgiveness. And the Buddha said, "No, I cannot forgive you." Again his disciples were shocked. But then the Buddha continued, "I cannot forgive you because you are not the same person who was here yesterday, nor am I.**

**—Kate**

The wisdom of forgiveness asks us to zoom out. To see human behavior from our own true humanity. A combination of critical thinking, observation, feeling; no forgiveness happens without it. To be able to see "it," - the root cause. Not just stuck in the feelings of it requires us to get outside of ourselves to see humanity.

**My dear, in the midst of hate, I found there was, within me, an invincible love. In the midst of tears, I found there was, within me, an invincible smile. In the midst of chaos, I found there was within me, an invincible calm. I realized, through it all, that... in the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger – something better, pushing right back.**

**—Albert Camus**

- When assessing the harm someone has caused us, consider “what is the worst thing I’ve ever done?” and proceed from that place of radical love and compassion.
- Have I forgiven myself for the worst things I’ve ever done? What am I learning about myself in that process?
- Confront the question: what do we do when trust has been betrayed? What is happening here? What limits our perception and understanding of that? How do we see the wholeness here? What needs to be restored for reconnection? For balance?
- How are you judging those who have caused harm? How do your beliefs in restorative justice change your views? And how do you see yourself in the judge’s seat?
- When I am able to forgive, from the depths of my heart, what do I learn about the process of grieving and healing that I can share with others?
- When I zoom out from the dance floor of my life, what do I understand about humanity’s grief more globally?



## Societal

The ability to see ourselves as part of the collective, and to experience life that way is directly counter to white supremacist culture that has colonized us deeply and thoroughly. The illusion that we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps all on our own. We are special. We, as singular individuals, are born with special gifts. We are each an island, creating our own destinies if we work hard to produce more.

We can easily slide into that place that gets so precious “*poor me,*” so personal (*what about me?*). Yet the principles of Ubuntu<sup>4</sup> remind us that “***I am, because we are.***” The word *ubuntu* is part of the Zulu phrase “*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,*” a person is a person through other people.

We grieve the lack of understanding in our society that living and dying is one continuous cycle. And we are in community, living and dying together. Human nature, fueled and nurtured by capitalist exploitative and extractive practice systems has reinforced and elevated our instincts to fight or flight, for self preservation, to over-consume and hoard out of fears that we will not have enough.

We also learned to tear each down like crabs-in-a-barrel from scarcity mentality and beliefs, and structural ways that bake in these behaviors. Those beliefs and practices are all nurtured and modeled to us from day one. Today, those human instincts are very ingrained, “that’s just how it is,” serving as the most base in these dominant culture and supremacy defaults. We’ve been imprisoned long enough by those beliefs that drive our behaviors. When we see the rising presence and voices of our sheroes and heroes, we are moved. Our hearts soften. Our hopes reaffirmed. Our candles glow up.

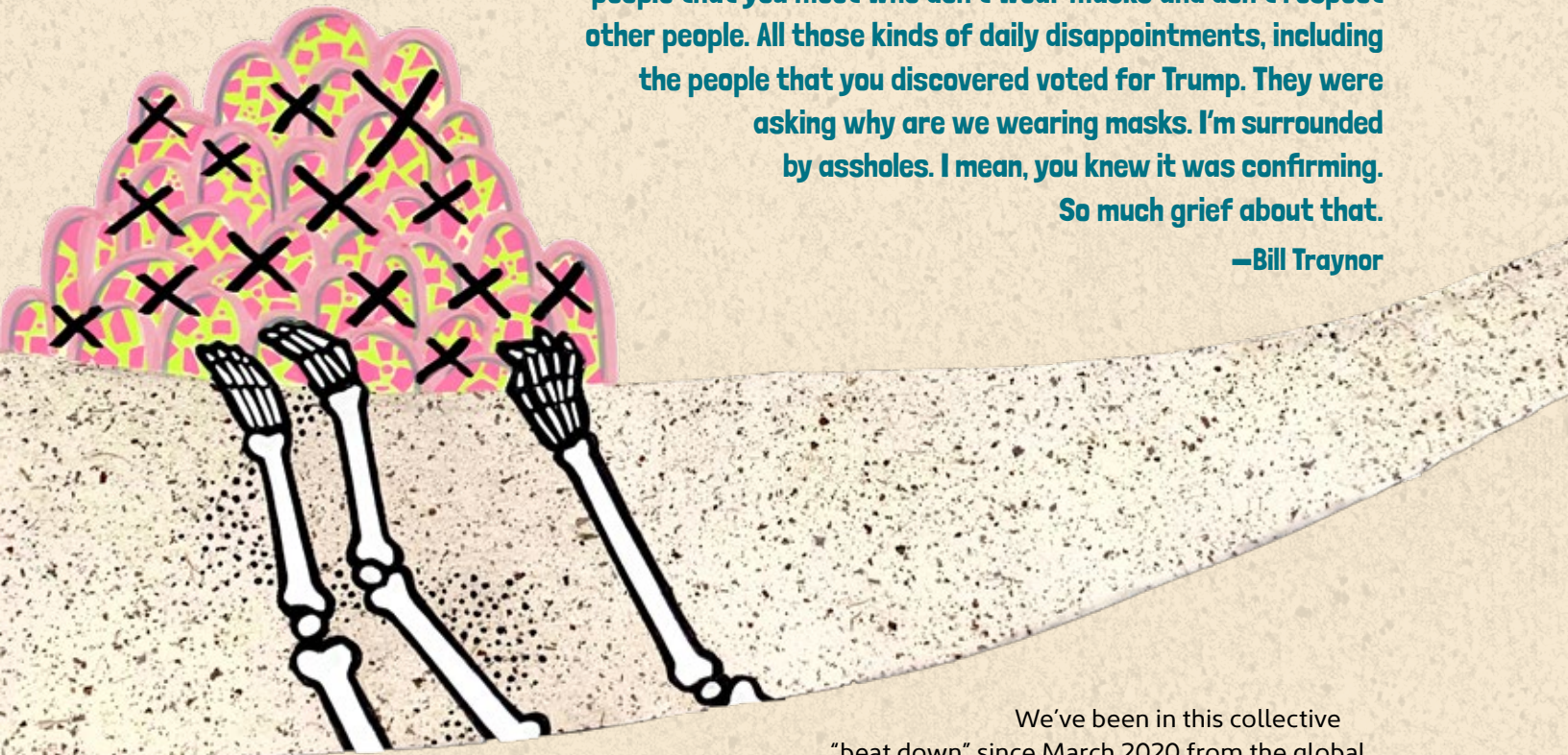
**When we’re fearful, we become these individuals, on islands, who fight for our own survival. When we’re connected and in community we can let go of fear reigning down on us. We’re both. We demand an honest love of ourselves that is righteous. Persistent. Loud. Accountable to self and future. The reward is greater connection in a deep community out of trust, respect, justice and liberation. This is fundamental to how we love ourselves.**



<sup>4</sup> <https://sullivanfdn.org/ubuntu/>

I think with COVID, I would say with Black Lives Matter, the George Floyd tragedy - I don't know what I expected. I was encouraged by the movement for a moment. But with COVID, there was this other moment, I remember, it was probably the end of March, early April 2020, where we all we all thought, Oh, we're all in this together. And this is gonna' be a breakthrough moment and people kind of understanding, relationships and community and possibility. And then the data came out that this was mostly impacting people of color, and then it switched up and it's all gone in another moment. And we went away from everything else. So that to me was a fresh, deep disappointment and then everything that came from that... like all the people that you meet who don't wear masks and don't respect other people. All those kinds of daily disappointments, including the people that you discovered voted for Trump. They were asking why are we wearing masks. I'm surrounded by assholes. I mean, you knew it was confirming. So much grief about that.

—Bill Traynor



We've been in this collective "beat down" since March 2020 from the global pandemic. We need to express our grief, our sorrows, our disappointments, our hurts as well as to acknowledge all the resistance, the joy, the awakenings, the coming together of hope and resilience. Both are true. This is an important part of embracing the abundance living inside each of us.

In a white supremacist world, how do I love someone who fears having equanimity with me, as a person of color, bridge my rejection and righteous anger of what they want me to think of myself and other BIPOC? How do we bridge?

Whiteness, in a white supremacy world, unfortunately lives in everyone. It's a mindset, a worldview, a set of beliefs. Whiteness doesn't just belong to White people. Remember Clarence Thomas and countless others who may be "skin," but not "kin."

Many if not most or all of us in the justice work are full of righteous anger. Righteous anger is an expression of love. It's a part of defending something we love. Healing is not rejecting righteous anger,

but going to its source. Seeing the layers of our righteousness... sorting through the complexities: anger, sadness, loss, hopes, expectations, ideals, disappointments, fear, pain, trauma, longings, dreams, aspirations, what we know to be rightfully ours.

Loving our own grief and righteous anger in abundant ways remind us to **demand that our voices and power are present**. Each time we give that up, we leave ourselves open (again) to colonization, subjugation, erasure, exploitation and self-denial.

Each time we claim our voice and power, everything we value, and are about, rises with us. Each time we tell our stories, we bring healing to our lineage, our ancestors who dreamed of one day shouting loudly, **"We are free..."**

A keynote speaker at a graduation ceremony I attended recently was Tim Shriver who's the chair of the board of the Special Olympics. I thought to myself, here's another privileged white man giving a keynote talk. But in fact I thought he gave a wonderful address. And his core mantra, which he acknowledged was going to feel idealistic, anachronistic, and out of time and place was "Love your enemy." And he unapologetically leaned into that and said, that's what we need to figure out how to do, love those who are different from you, love the other, love those who you might otherwise hate. Because what are we going to solve to hate? Where do we get to, what do we generate? What is generative about hate? It only tears you down and everything around you. I feel like pretty much everyone could agree with that. I don't know if you find anyone who would say here is the productive thing about hate. When you realize that, then you can see that the solution is focusing on love as a transformative force.

But... I think we're at a moment where it's going to be extremely challenging. To get folks on all sides of the ideological spectrum from us who are gonna embrace it. But even short of embracing it, to just sit with it. I'm struggling with the reaction of two young Black women I was with at the graduation who I have tremendous respect for who are our next generation of leaders. They weren't having any parts of the speech because it came from a white man with significant power and privilege. It made me think, wow, what have we done? To get to the point where even something as profound as the statement he was making would just be rejected because of who it was coming from. I was like, wow, we've got our work cut out for us.

—Mark Joseph

# Part 2: Where I End and You Begin

Moving from  
disconnection  
to...



MUTUALITY



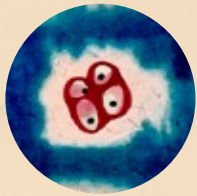
BELOVED  
COMMUNITY



LIFE-AFFIRMING  
SYSTEMS



## Illustration Key:



**Cell Division:** Basic building blocks of the body, cells make the first separations from self to self and other. Despite being unique, they all contain the fundamental genetic material of the whole system. How do we pass on the DNA of our movement while maintaining diversity, and not scaling up a monoculture?



**Darwin Quote:** The colloquial understanding of Darwin's theory of the "survival of the fittest" is largely misunderstood. He is quoted as saying *"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change."*



**Not Good, Whole:** Balance doesn't exist unless we welcome and nurture cultures of wholeness. We must put down our assumptions of purity and binaries of inside/outside - we are in relations of constant contamination.



**City Planning:** Our built environments shape us as much as we shape them. We can use universal design principles and accessible architecture in our towns and cities that facilitate easeful flow, resource distribution, and ways to connect the inner work with shifting structural conditions.



**Lace Lichen:** Lace lichen grow in an intricate netted structure and are health indicators in their ecosystem. They are holobionts, meaning they are a single organism made up of cells from more than one kingdom - namely fungi, plant and bacteria (the human body's reliance on bacteria to survive technically also classifies us as holobionts).



**Apoptosis:** The death-sequence of a cell that gets triggered by various factors including cellular stress, DNA damage, and dissociation (the absence of survival signals) from neighboring cells. The health of the single cell is always shaped by the health of the neighboring cells.



**Jade:** A flowing river of Jade soaks its cleansing waters into the inflamed network. In order for there to be repair and accountability, what is stuck must be washed and soothed so that flow can be restored.



**Tree Cross Sections:** Trees are models of vast and organized resource distribution, conductors of give and take, communicating via porous and bounded channels.



Often in the journey to justice, we start with the problem, conjure trauma spirits, and then hopefully offer solutions. **What if we were to begin our social justice work by bringing forward that which allows us to metabolize what no longer serves us? What if we were to build our shared capacity to compost the trauma of injustice into nutrients to feed a more loving world?** We are envisioning pathways to justice rooted in love that are made with our collective composted pain, anger, frustration, and fear.

**“What matters is that this country was built on racism, domination, and genocide. That’s what matters. And we’ve tacitly agreed to it and enabled it for a really long time. A lot of the violence and harms we’re seeing right now is just a manifestation of that original bad. It’s like an old, old baked in thing: You can’t actually have America and our brand of democracy without this other thing. And we’ve never reckoned with that, there’s no space. We’ve never composted it, we’ve never sorted through our history, our choices as a country and said, these are problems, these are possibilities. We talk about reparations, but that truth-telling part, right, that’s the composting.”**

**—Trish Tchume**

We’re connected in visible, tangible as well as invisible, spiritual ways. As so many leaders and visionaries who have come before us have reminded us in different ways – when one is oppressed, none can be totally free. Our liberation is wrapped up in the liberation of others, even those who we disdain. Opening ourselves up to this kind of love with mutuality requires us to cleanse and metabolize that which makes us put up walls of separation between ourselves and others.



As we immerse ourselves in the cleansing and digestion processes, we are transformed by it. Reconnecting to our ancestral knowledge, we find spiritual icons dedicated to this process – a reminder of how sacred this work is. The Nahuatl deity, Tlazoteotl, for example, found in the Valley of Mexico, is dedicated to metabolizing the lust, filth, vice, desire of humanity as part of a continuous cycle of purification, regeneration, and rebirth. Mayan deities, similarly, all have powers to give life as well as take away life. The dual and cyclical nature of sin and purification, as in death and life, is an ongoing rhythm of the universe. We can’t have one without the other. By cleansing, we rigorously and continuously interrogate our inner being, in the journey towards becoming fully human, in deeply interconnected and just relationships with all that is.

What if we were to see all of our interpersonal relationships as opportunities to become more fully human? And what if we saw becoming more fully human as the necessary work of building a more just world?

A pivot toward this mindset of mutuality may be the container we need to both inspire as well as hold and nurture our individual and collective healing and transformation processes. In this way, we would see our family members, friendships, and relationships with colleagues as sacred. We would allow our relationships to reveal to us our strengths as well as those qualities that keep us separate from others.

In seeing ourselves more clearly, we could consciously engage in composting (or transforming) the qualities that have become barriers to being in a healthy relationship to all. This approach is a pivot away from judgment of what we don't like in ourselves, and instead seeing them as the nutrients for the qualities we do want to grow in ourselves, and in our relationships. As Brene Brown has asserted, *"What stands in the way becomes the way."* By looking into, as opposed to denying, the walls we put up, we deepen our connection to ourselves, become more open, more vulnerable. There is often a reason, something that has happened in the past, either to us or our ancestors, that has caused us to erect these walls. What was it that happened? What wisdom is there in the walls we put up between ourselves and others? How can we deconstruct our walls and reuse the wisdom and experience they are made of in other ways, to build bridges perhaps?

**In allowing others to be a mirror for us to more clearly see our strengths, our fears, the walls we have erected, some questions we may ask ourselves:**

- What ancestors, qualities, or spiritual icons from my lineage can I call forward to protect, guide, and support me in seeing myself more clearly and composting that which is not serving me?
- What clutter can I clear in my life to be able to more fully see and connect with myself and others?
- What gifts have I been given that I can share with others?
- What walls have I erected to protect myself from others?
- What happened that caused me to erect these walls?
- What wisdom and insight do these walls hold?
- When are we willing to drop defenses and allow vulnerability?
- What can happen when we do?
- How does this willingness enable us to come alive? Does it?

**Shadow parts of us  
serve a function.  
The work is for us to  
call them close, love  
them, acknowledge  
them. Shadows, at  
times, blindside us  
because they bide  
for our attention  
and love.**

Shadow parts of us serve a function. The work is for us to call them close, love them, acknowledge them. Shadows, at times, blindside us because they bid for our attention and love.

Applying this understanding to our human digestion process,<sup>5</sup> we see it is not a pretty or simple one. ***“Our digestive system breaks nutrients into parts small enough for the body to absorb and use for energy, growth, and cell repair. Nerves and hormones help control the digestive process.”***

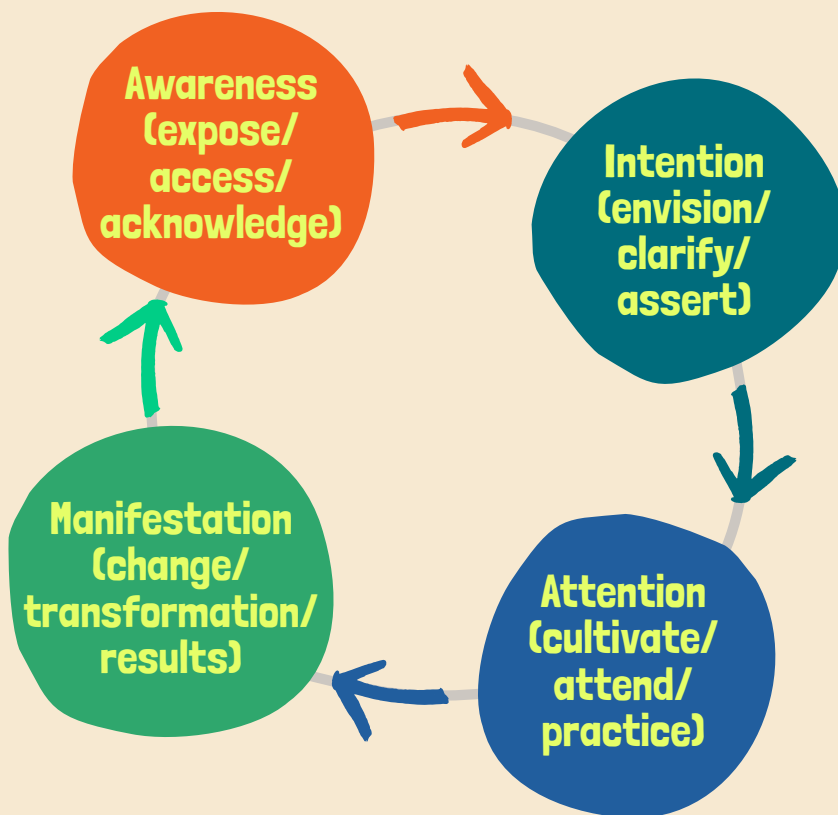
Food that we consume breaks completely down inside our bodies into nutrients. In that process, like a caterpillar inside its cocoon melting into liquid before emerging in the metamorphosis process as a butterfly. We often don't acknowledge this process that liquifies a caterpillar as we marvel at the end result. **The process of metamorphosis is at once life-ending and life-giving.** Humans, we, go through this every moment of every day. *“Building the plane as we fly it...”* yes, that's a journey called life!

Imagine we apply that process of cleansing, purification and digestion to ourselves. **Digest and then compost the worst things we've done, learn and reflect on the lessons, excrete or proliferate what serves more self-determination and freedom.** Imagine what can happen when we see ourselves as an integral natural element that belongs to the earth, our communities, our families and each other.

What if we were to name our shadows? Literally give them names, wait for them to come, honor them. Welcome them like friends knocking on our spiritual and energetic doors. They evolved to protect us, and are stuck at the time of trauma. When we're triggered, they come forward to protect us.

***“One of my shadows is an emotional abuser. That was a way to get my father's attention, to emotionally abuse my brother. The inner child that got scared and didn't mature...to get dad's approval I had to emotionally abuse my brother to somehow make sure like me he got straight A's.”***

**—Audrey**



The healing comes when we speak to the child in us. We've got to name it to change it. Let the shadow sides inside know they're seen, honored and loved.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases/digestive-system-how-it-works>

What keeps us from fully embodied in love is all of the clutter, distractions on the surface. Purification is releasing all of the stuff on the surface from seeing who we are and each other. Toxins have clouded our perceptions. Cleansing through rigorous examination, purging, growing and nurturing is an inner cycle that belongs in our entire life cycle, the constant loop between our awareness, where we put our attention and our intention towards external behaviors, manifestation.

Demands to love self does not translate into loathing; it's about our awareness and making conscious choices, not ridding ourselves of this or that.

**We are here beyond a frame of operationalization.**

**Breaking free of that and leaving ourselves open to the marigolds and the jaguars in our midst. The trees will protect us, the waters will cleanse us.**

**The wailing flowers cry for and with us.**

**We're here to help wail the grief. We are holy and sacred right here and now.**



## **Nexus of agency, choice and self-determination**

Holding ourselves with love and agency while we interrogate the darkest corners of ourselves, holding ourselves accountable to our own purpose and values; going through the dark nights of purification; digesting our pains, traumas and victories, and emerging more whole. That is our sacred work, each and every day. And we have each other, side by side, on this sacred journey together.

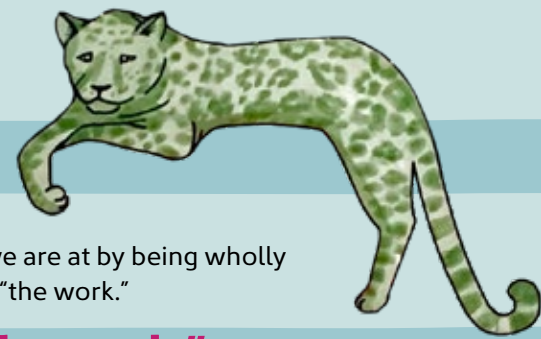
Where we are going may not be fully understood or able to be perceived by our collective rational, colonized minds. We need to learn to surrender to what emerges. Allow ourselves to be guided by our ancestral wisdom, gut knowing, as well as our intellect.

We are in womb time, we can't see. These necropolitical systems - politics organized around or that result in death, destruction, harm<sup>6</sup> don't offer a way forward. We are in the darkness and we have to feel our way through. Trusting emergence won't come out of the colonial desire to see and control the future. It is so difficult to vision from an expansive place, because we tend to get stuck in what we know, which for most of us is white supremacy, colonization, and oppressive systems.

<sup>6</sup> Bayo Akomolafe

## Times are urgent; let us slow down.

What we need is beyond what we can see. Rather than trying to fix where we are by projecting or worrying into the future, let it unfold from where we are at by being wholly present. We can't bypass our inner work and go straight to the systemic as "the work."



## Let us stay here a little longer and do "the work."

### Balance and Equanimity

Before contact with European invaders and colonizers, many indigenous cultures practiced and embraced balance and equanimity to how they lived on the land, with nature, and within their communities. The first task for us is to break the binary: we are either good or bad, racists or anti-racists, queer or hetero, femme or homme, pure or unpure. We are free to be two-spirited, somewhere along the gender identity and all other spectrums to bring more balance and equanimity.

Physiologically, our bodies are hardwired to react in a flight or fight mode as a survival response. Under the colonized educational system, we have learned to shrink complexities down to this or that. But we must remember that we are divinely capable of so much more.

We are capable of inspiring vicious desire. We are capable of forgiving and cleansing. We can recycle and compost failures, mistakes, trespasses into life force energy for collective wellbeing and harmony.

We are capable of loving ourselves rigorously through all that are trying to disconnect us from ourselves, each other and the earth. We are capable of both, simultaneously; it's an intention and choice to steer away from the gravity of status quo "normative" expectations.

Love connects and creates connections. Fear, on the other hand, is protection, and reinforces disconnection. The opposite of love is not hate, it's apathy. Apathy is the sense "I don't care..." and it comes from fear. Fear of rejection, helplessness, and disappointment.

Both love and fear are fundamentally motivating emotions. Everything we do (or don't do) is motivated either by fear or love. If we allow fear to run rampant in our psyches, we ally ourselves with the status quo. The secret to growth is not shutting out fear because fear is part of us. We must lean into and move through fear if we are to evolve beyond the status quo. The source of creativity and transformation is *uncertainty*. A caterpillar enters a cocoon not knowing what is to become of it. The greatest artists and thinkers our planet has seen embrace the unknown to create things the world has never seen before.

What would it look like at the organizational and community levels to embrace uncertainty? In the ancestral language of Sanskrit (from the region now known as India and Pakistan) the word **Shraddha** has been described as, "**love for the unknown.**" It is often translated as faith, but it isn't



necessarily attached to religious belief or icons. Instead, it is a sense of devotion to the great mystery, to all that is beyond what our five senses can perceive and yet responsible for all the workings of the material world.

In these times of chaos and uncertainty, how can we support one another to align ourselves with the unseen organizing principle of the universe – LOVE? **Towards this vision, reflect with family, friends, colleagues, or community members on the following questions:**

- When was the last time you experienced uncertainty? What happened? What did you feel in your body?
- When was the last time we (together) experienced uncertainty? How did we respond?
- What are we most afraid of?
- What and who inspires us to embrace the fear and move through uncertainty together?
- What allows us to turn towards each other when things get difficult?
- What's one practice we can collectively do to build our collective capacity to face fears and fall in love with uncertainty?

We need to wrestle with and compost fear as part of our abundance. Look at what fear is protecting. Unveil the fear energy. We, too, can face and digest wrongdoing and harm, and in so doing bring out new insights and knowledge beyond what we understood before.

**At this stage of my life, I reflect on how strong you have to be and how you have to be on top because you're weakened by shame. You're weakened by doubt, by regret, by fear. They're good live questions, but they also weaken resolve and they kind of make you pause. How can I be part of the change process I feel like that kind of grappling is in the way for me in a sense.**

**—Bill Traynor**

Imagine what will happen when we can face fear, and through the process of digestion, return that energy into clarity, motivation and positivity to transform ourselves and the world?

# Part 3: Opposite of Life is Not Death; It's Trash



Moving from  
disconnection  
to...



RADICAL  
SELF LOVE



MUTUALITY



BELOVED  
COMMUNITY



LIFE-AFFIRMING  
SYSTEMS

# Illustration Key:

## “What Is Longing To Die”

- Linear cityscape trash-conveyor belt, banished
- The real death is trash
- What new ways of being are asking to be nurtured?
- Community and cultural wealth that go ignored
- Regenerative ecologies and economies
- Returning what was thrown away back to the sacred circle



**Trash Pile:** Understanding death as what creates conditions for new life, the concept of trash is what creates true endings. Banished from the sacred circle, what gets thrown away is denied the opportunity to grow into its purpose. What we lose when we believe in waste is the imagining of a next cycle.



**Farmworkers:** The legacy of the UFW movement lives on today as our globalized food supply chains have complexified while remaining entrenched in extractive growing practices and exploitation (perceived disposability) of farmworkers.



**Mycoremediation:** Mycelium contain enzymes that are able to digest biological, chemical or industrial pollutants. Mycoremediation shows us a way for human/fungi collaboration to remediate contaminated environments without causing more harm to living organisms.



**Poinsettia:** Poinsettias (*cuetlaxóchitl* in Nahuatl) bloom in response to lengthening times of darkness. Endemic to present day Mexico and Central America, their bright red leaves have been associated with new life and immortality from pre-colonial Aztec culture to contemporary religious uses.



**Speaking to the Maiz:** Decolonization is not a metaphor. To honor the sacred we must speak to it directly, re-learn the language of that which sustains us, and center those who carry the wisdom of living intimately with our wider ecological body.



**Regenerative Economies:** We make the shift from capitalist consumers to cultural creators when we divest from systems of extraction and instead nurture the commons and invest in solidarity economies. What community strengths have been ignored that are now asking to be nurtured?



**Grandmother Wisdom:** This abuela reminds us that the question of how to be in harmony with ecological life and death cycles is not a “problem” that requires a high-tech design solution. Traditional wisdom is future facing.



We live and we will die. This is the natural cycle of life. There is no life without death. The fear of death is the fear of transformation. It's all about flow vs. stagnation. And, trauma is and causes stagnation.

Over the last three years we got some insights about who we are as humans. We're both the shadow and the light. We're each capable of causing great harm and bringing transformative healing. We are each capable of causing great joy as well as deep pain. The Mayan deity Chalchiutlicue brings water to crops, enabling life. And, she cried for 52 years that took away life. We, too, have those extraordinary powers.

We break the sacred cycle when death is not allowed. With some things, we need to let it die so what is needed can be reborn.

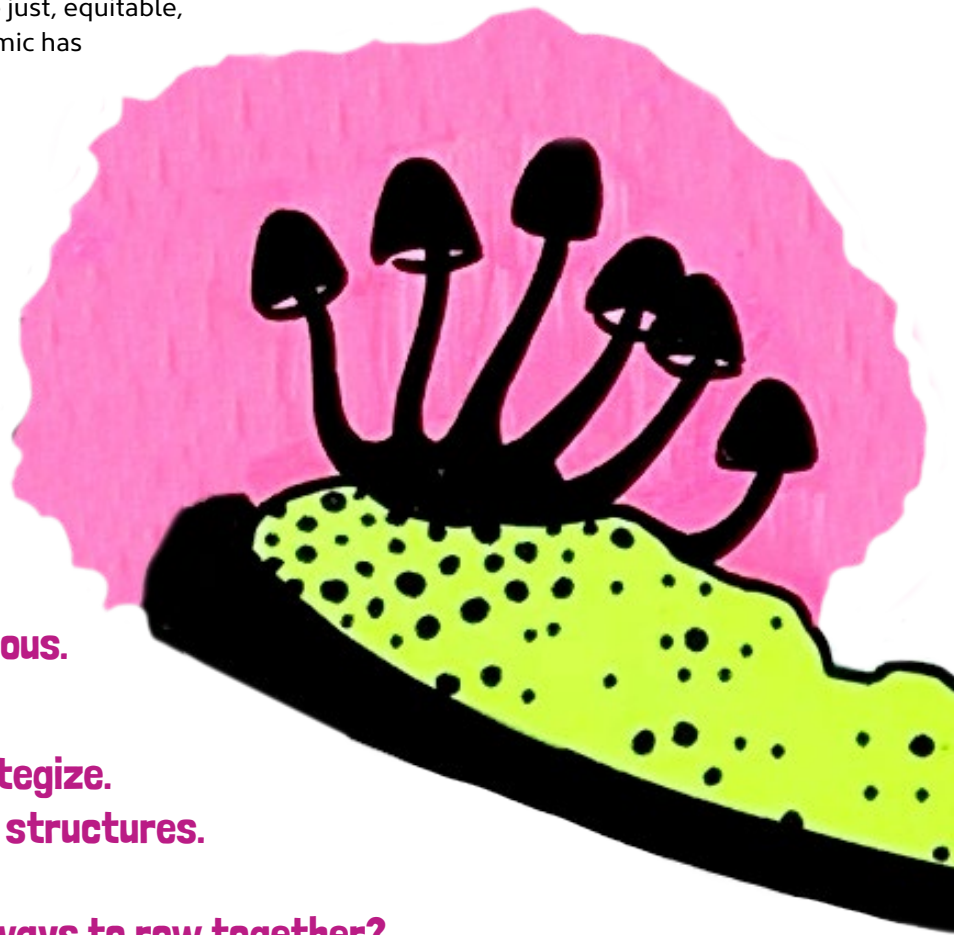
Death is sacred medicine right now. White supremacy is dying. We're living in late-stage capitalism. It's a decaying system on a slow death trail. We need to let it die. Just like in some of our organizations, coalitions, communities, ourselves, there are practices, beliefs, ways of doing things that need to be let go of and die to make openings for more just, equitable, liberatory ways. Being in a global pandemic has shown us how many of these previous practices need to die for a new birth of human-centered ways of being.

**Come as you are.  
Whatever your brokenness  
is; we all have it.  
Let's not pretend it's  
not true, it just is.  
How we can just be.  
Connected, warts and all,  
in love and power  
relationships that are conscious.**

**All of us are doing it.  
We gotta plan, mobilize, strategize.  
Connect dots, channel. Shift structures.  
Shift states.  
How do we continue to find ways to row together?**

Monoculture and mono cropping is killing the earth. The problem has been 5% taking up 95% of the space. What would be pluralistic, holding spaces for much more diversity just like how nature creates, and stays interconnected?

We dream of a world that is immersed in hyper democracy, neighbors and families deeply interwoven with each other. We are deeply interdependent while rooted in our uniqueness and that's where individuals and collectives thrive. Not allowing for mono cultures dictate how we ought to be. It is entirely possible to have a shared values framework, one we all have in common is we are children of the earth.



Regeneration. Mutuality, maintaining balance so that there is flow. A living democracy is based on those ecological principles, of how life organizes itself.

Dismantling the system and replacing it, can we be honest with ourselves, consider ourselves to be “successful,” wanting that status, prestige, incentive, can we unlearn all that? It’s a matter of undoing and unlearning a load of shit. And not valuing it. When we’ve been taught all our lives to value it.

For those of us who are more impatient, we ask, “*What is taking so long?*” Recognizing that we are all tainted by colonization. As a clear default to white supremacist culture, we’re breathing that air and water, and consistently taught and rewarded to act in certain ways.

## **We have to consciously purge, die, out of this old paradigm of colonization and white supremacy.**

Death has been and is a huge theme in the mass consciousness in a world infected by disease, war, and interpersonal strife. Because of the tragedies brought on by the pandemic, climate change and poverty, death and destruction are more available as a teacher right now.

Purification happens when we let things die inside. When we do the work to purge in our own consciousness. And, we have to do it on a mass scale to take individual and collective shifts in consciousness.

- What is calling to be digested? Purified? Purged? Die?
- What is longing to replace the purged?
- From the digestive work, what nutrients, or lessons remain that nourish us?
- When we are in an experience, ask, “Is this life affirming?” If not, let it regenerate, be composted.



## **Life and Death = Continuous Cycle**

**Orcas eat dolphins as predators. Dolphins eat fish, shrimp, octopus and squid.**

**Love is preparing those sacred cycles**

**So that no one and nothing is thrown out and made to be nothing.**

**Don't have a word for it other than trash...**

**Dead... but that is just a transition...**

**Devoid of its sacredness, banished from the sacred circle,  
cut off**

**Our job is to repair those circles, honoring generational learning as in  
learning, reflection and with the tools of [e]valuation.**

**Stopping the cycle of burn, bury and declared forever useless**

**Abolishing prisons**

**Where the "human trash" go.**

**Our fear of death...**

**Fear of the void, the womb, infinite blackness/fertile darkness as the  
source of all regeneration**

**Fear of chaos - need for order in reaction.**

**Those cycles out of hands of man**

**... can't be exploited as the very nature of maintaining cycles and  
balance so you can't extract -**

**short term returns destroy the natural cycle that**

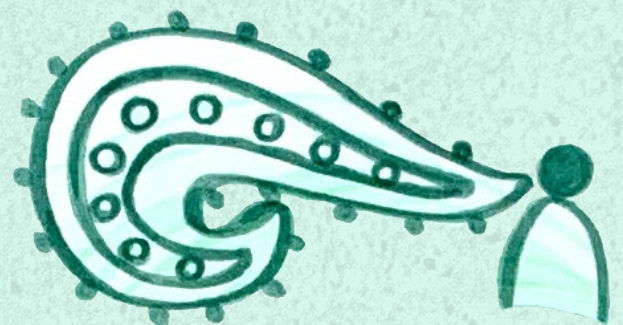
**Which is abundance.**

**Ripples of the invader conqueror**

**colonizer have deadened our senses.**

**If you were being truly vulnerable,**

**what would you share right now?**



We are the people who have caused and allowed harm and demand an approach from a non judgmental stance. No matter who you are, what you've done, these practices and principles will allow us to be in a community of mutuality.

In 2014, within four months of each other, four unarmed Mexican and Salvadoran men were killed by police in Salinas, California. Three of the four men were farmworkers. All were emotionally distressed. One suffered from mental illness. His name was Carlos Mejia, and he was shot by police in front of several teenagers, one of whom caught the shooting on her phone. His body was left in the street on the eastside of Salinas, uncovered for four hours. Dozens of school children walking home from school that afternoon saw his body lying lifeless on the concrete. He had been a familiar face in the neighborhood. Everyone knew he suffered from mental illness. And now he was dead for everyone to see, his body cordoned off by police tape.

The teenage girl who caught the killing on video evaded police and returned home to upload the video to YouTube. It went viral. Especially because it was a controversial police shooting, but also because we have lost our ways, there was no space for the children and their families to grieve this unfortunate and very visible death.

The following day, east Salinas youth took to the streets with signs that read, "Fuck the Police." Rage stood in for grief. Those of us who worked in community-based organizations did our best to organize impromptu healing circles for residents. Families showed up by the hundreds to the Alisal Center for the Fine Arts where we give space for people to express themselves. Many, still wearing their work clothes, muddied from fieldwork, shed tears and expressed anger. The questions in our collective hearts were, "How could they do this? Do they think we are savages? How could they just shoot down an innocent man in plain daylight in front of our kids?"

The pain was palpable. People needed a space to grieve, but we also needed to see that pain transformed into change. Unfortunately change is slow to come. Not only have we become alienated from our collective grieving processes, we have become alienated from our local democracies. And for undocumented workers, democracy feels like an unattainable luxury.

For Salinas, and many cities like it, the question remains, ***"What collective healing is needed to stop throwing away people, places, and pain?"***

**Vulnerable feels like we need to defend  
and be defended**

**Guard and be guarded inside our safe,  
hard shells that have become resilient,  
impermeable, unaffected**

**because of fear**

**because soft things do need defending.**

**We're creatures with long childhoods.**

**Willing at times, to be vulnerable.**



- What needs to die, be metabolized/composted? For our continued, collective emergent growth?
- What and who have we been treating as “trash?”
- What collective healing is needed to stop throwing away people, places, and pain?
- What does healing and transformation look like at the community level? What does it look like in my community specifically?
- What collective rituals resonate with my communities to invite a communal approach to grieving, to honoring those who have died and ensuring that not only their bodies, but their stories and human qualities are composted back into who we are becoming?

**The premises underlying Measuring Love are particularly important for people playing intermediary roles between communities and potential sources of power and money for communities, whether foundations or public agencies. These are tough roles. Usually, the intermediary’s deepest commitment is to the community, but they must approach sources of power and money respectfully. This bridge of broker role can in fact be transformative. When these intermediaries’ value systems includes the principles underlying Measuring Love, they can help communities and outside sources of resources function as more committed, honest, respectful, and ultimately more effective partners.**

**This type of intermediary role often exists within institutions as well, for example, as the critical mid-level staff person within a foundation making decisions about foundation support for communities. These are complicated roles. How do you remain true to a community’s interest? Whose interest do you ultimately represent? This is an underappreciated leadership role which often determines whether community/foundation partnerships succeed or not and reinforce a community’s power, or whether patterns of extraction, even exploitation repeat themselves.**

**—Frank Farrow**



**Pedestals, like those monuments paying homage to white supremacists, need to die...**

Pedestals that we put people and “leaders” on are so harmful for us. Let’s examine the link between pedestalizing leaders and consumerism.

We need to deconstruct and not conflate or equate pyramids - kings, executive directors, board chairs, those with “special” leadership qualities - with pedestals. And for those at the top of pyramid structures to not be seduced by the pedestalizing. You, and we, are there to make the pyramids useful, with humility, love, sharing, regeneration, building others’ capacity and leadership. Those who are being “pedestaled” must learn to invert the pyramid from within, and practice from that place.

When we cede our power to those we pedestalize, secretly worship, put on a “can’t do no wrong” ledge, we unintentionally widen the disconnections between us and them.

When we are placed onto, and accept our place on such pedestals and accept the perceptions to be of a “higher” consciousness, we fall into the traps of dominant culture. We unintentionally reinforce the disconnections between us and them.

The enemy is inside us. How do we heal ourselves?

Imagine if our healing leads to the healing of others we love and hold dear, what would we do then?

- How do I contribute to our collective having more power? What’s my part?
- What decisions am I making to support life flourishing?
- How do you see the power that your leadership gives you? Do you see it as “cargo” as in responsibility?
- Who gave you the permission to carry this “cargo,” or sacred responsibility?
- What practices do you maintain to stay humble and not corrupt?
- How are you showing respect, empathy and love for the communities, families, people that have given you this sacred leadership responsibility?

To reclaim our wisdom and regenerative relationships, we need to demand more from our leaders and not the opposite of putting them on pedestals and demanding less of them.

**Leadership is evident in the ones who listen, turn trash into compost, embrace and bring healing to shadows. When you concentrate and hoard leadership and power, and only share it with those that look or think like you, you leave the wisdom and wellbeing of others at the door, walking away thinking you’ve been successful.**

**Imagine if our healing leads to the healing of others we love and hold dear, what would we do then?**

# Part 4: Power from Below



Moving from  
disconnection  
to...



RADICAL  
SELF LOVE



MUTUALITY

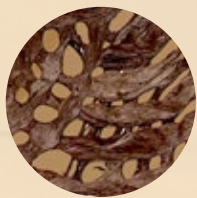


BELOVED  
COMMUNITY



LIFE-  
AFFIRMING  
SYSTEMS

## Illustration Key:



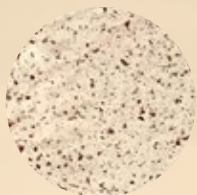
**Ant Nest:** A nest of ants works as one self-organizing, self healing system building ant-scale underground cities that demonstrate applied collective power, decentralized organization, and below-the-surface structures designed for every body.



**Cave:** Our oldest humxn ancestors used the resonance in caves to amplify prayer. Our deep wellsprings of rich underground mineralized water, that which has dripped inward, containing the mysteries of vast internal darkness.



**Water Cycle:** The life giving rain blesses the canopy, collects at the feet, carves deep underground caverns. Water is co-creative, life-giving, ecological wholeness.



**Amatl Paper:** Made from the pulp of the Amatl tree, this fibrous, woven paper descends from an ancient papermaking tradition that was used for thousands of years to make records of Nahua cosmology in painted codices. The legacy of recording peoples' knowledges lives unbroken in the present day.



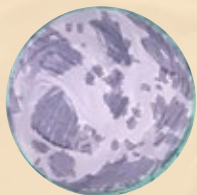
**Sunflowers:** Faces devotionally following the light, sunflowers are one flower made of thousands of tiny flowers, generously giving pollen for the pollinators and seeds for the birds.



**Perspective:** We look up on ourselves, a moss-eye-view of things. The feeling of aliveness lives in this threshold of above and below, sand between toes, the forest's delight in muddy bare feet soaking up the dirt's minerals. Our connection to the Earth is erotic, it restores us to life.



**Pedestals:** The pedestal stands empty, there are no worshippers around. In the web of relations at the foot of the tree, power is amongst us, not over us.



**Moon:** Our oldest teacher of rhythms, cycles, waxing and waning, death and rebirth, rising and falling waters, and balance of it all.



We're seeing so much of the violence in society originating in colonized teaching and reinforcing false binaries, in particular the gender binary. We are all wounded by gender-based violence. Violence upon the earth is part of that. To soften that binary is a sign and symptom of healing. Already the healing is happening. We will heal as that gender softens and violence softens and changes.

As we heal by reclaiming our erotic power, which is being fully and wholly alive, we can hold more and more complexity.

**Truly, my love affair with the brilliance of queerness is as expansive as the thing itself. It's an identity. A strategy for surviving. An aesthetic. An orientation. A posture. A feeling. A mood. A politic. A Fuck You. A Yes Please. A fashion. A scene. A community. A critique. A ritual. A demand. A future. Some days queerness is hope itself.**

**And yes, it's a pedagogy.<sup>7</sup>**

**Not pedagogy as we've come to know it through our experiences of education in systems inherited from Empire - a study of how teaching can discipline, assimilate, master, control - but pedagogy as a passion for learning as unlearning, This is a pedagogy that wants to know in whose bodies, in what context; that already knows we become, unbecome and transform anew through knowledge and skills, yes, but also through desire**

**and power. A queer pedagogy not only seeks "other ways of knowing, doing, becoming and relating;" it produces knowledge from the cracks of being othered from "normal" embodiment... Queer Pedagogy does more than elevate the knowledge of a community under erasure - it**

**celebrates the erotic as a primary organizing principle of life,**

**and seeks the wisdom of bodies that resist being disciplined, assimilated,**

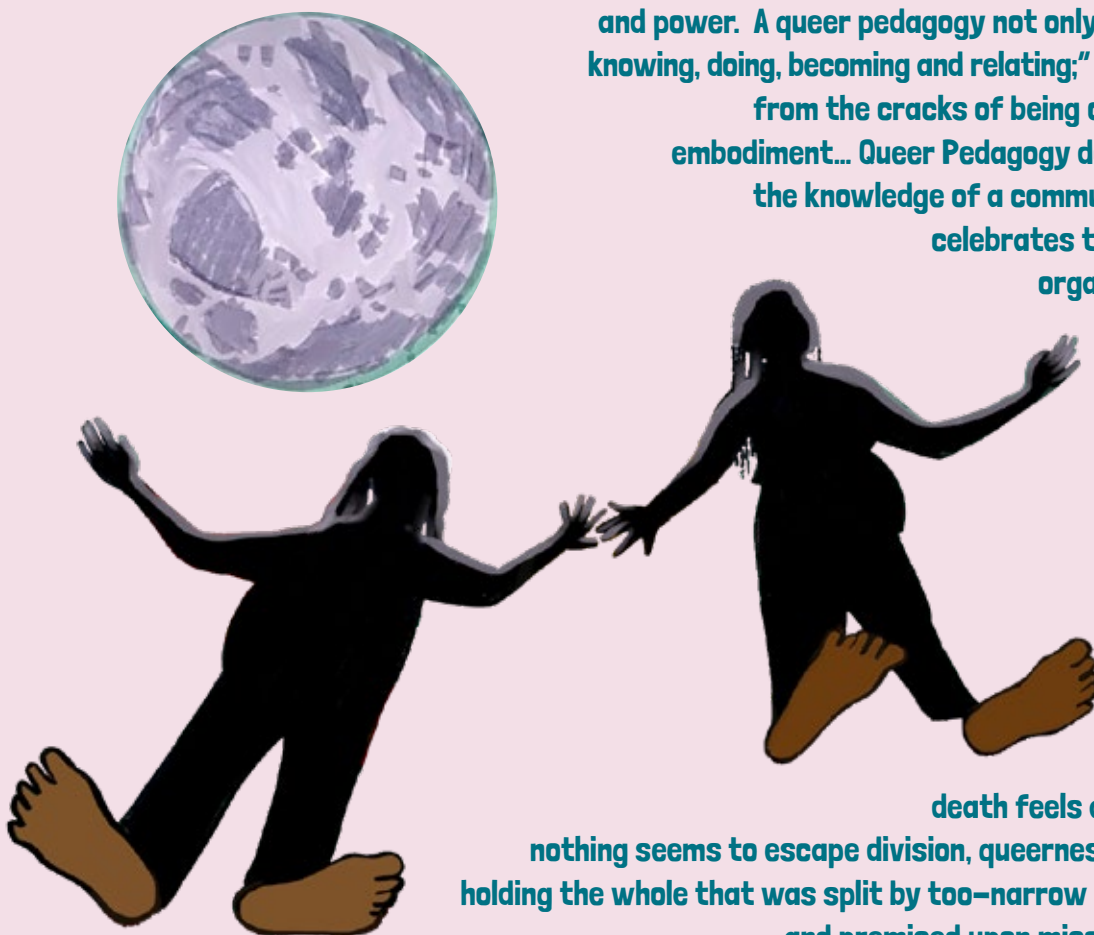
**mastered or controlled... Where masculine and**

**feminine are taught as mutually exclusive, when**

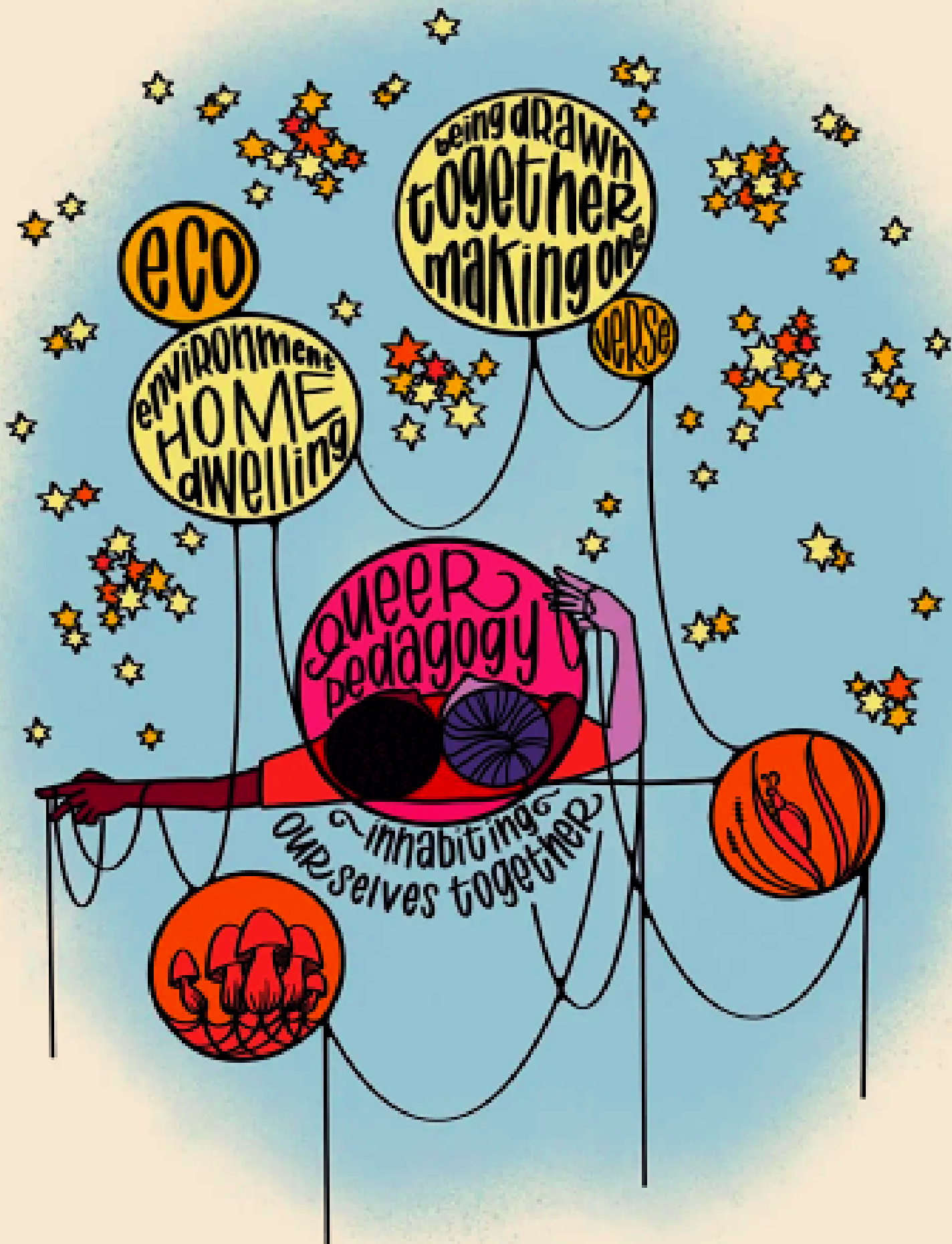
**death feels antithetical to life and**

**nothing seems to escape division, queerness embraces totality - holding the whole that was split by too-narrow perceptions of duality and premised upon misconceived separability.**

**-Kate**



<sup>7</sup> <https://ecoversities.org/queerness-taught-me-that-an-open-letter-to-the-radical-educators-of-the-ecoverse-and-beyond/>

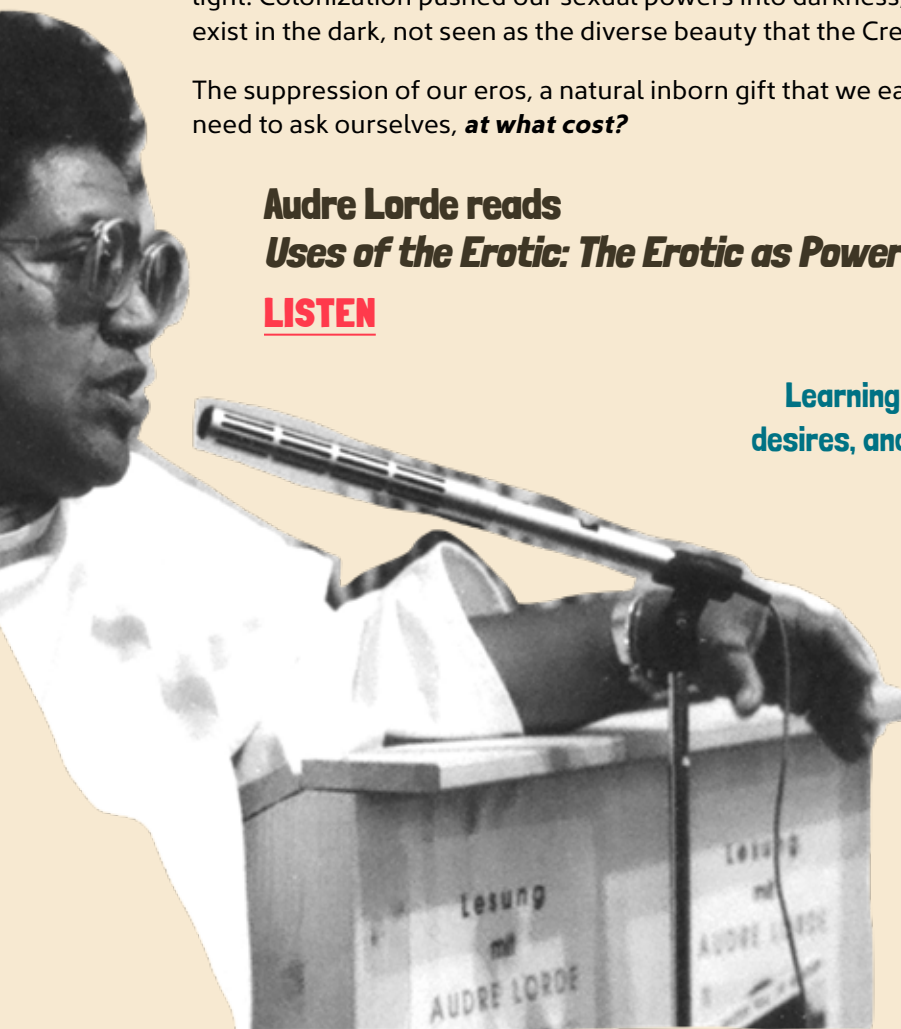


Colonization put a straight-jacket on our sexuality. It denigrates sexuality and sexual powers into a commodity, an object, and associated it with dirty, shame, something impure and not to be seen in the light. Colonization pushed our sexual powers into darkness, and called it "bad." Naked bodies are to only exist in the dark, not seen as the diverse beauty that the Creator gave us.

The suppression of our eros, a natural inborn gift that we each have, has robbed us of our aliveness. We need to ask ourselves, **at what cost?**

**Audre Lorde reads**  
***Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power***

**LISTEN**



Learning suddenly implicates us in each other, our desires, and eros. We talk a good game about finding deep connections and even family when we gather but I say *ibasta!*, we can no longer meet each other with the word 'love' in our mouths while we shove desire into some dark, unexamined corner of our pedagogies. And when I say desire, I'm talking about it all: Eros. Attraction. Sensuality. Creativity. Sexuality. Sex. Passion. Creation. With self, with other humxns, with the divine.

—Kate

When in truth, our erotic power is something so pure, beautiful, powerful, and sacred. Our sexual selves is an integral part of our being. Systems we live in keep us from our erotic power, designed to keep us from our interdependence.

**THERE ARE MANY kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling.**

**—Audre Lorde in *Erotic is Power***

To counter that, we have to dream with our feet in the sand. We've got to remember we are sacred beings, intact with our erotic longings, our bodily desires, our sexual energies. All that is part of our power.

**I asked my mom where I came from. She told me from under her armpit as the picture of me as a newborn was cradled under her armpit... Until the day she passed at 88 years old, I had never seen my own mother naked. The implicit messages I've received throughout my life around sexuality and naked bodies are: it's a taboo subject, not to be talked about out loud or at all. Bodies are to be covered up, not to be seen in its natural state. Sex is... (blank). Void. Null. My mother was a gorgeous, funny, proud, self-reliant, progressive person. There are so many conversations I wish I could go back in time to ask her... and to help her heal; help me heal.**

**—Shiree**


Capitalism thrives on things. So many things have been manufactured to separate us from the earth. Systems have trained us to value things over people and the earth. Moving from disconnection to greater connection requires us to shed our "things," masks, protective armor and to soften back into our eros, imagination, dreams, who we really are at our essence.

To counter the dominant practices of extraction and self-denial, we need to be in active dialogue with the earth. Take walks. Talk directly to the land. To the wind. Meditate as a way to connect with the land and as a way to listen. Make offerings.

**One of those things that is sustaining me is having the presence of these very wise, I call these trees the wise ancestors, I go out at night often and I touch the trees just as a moment of grounding and restoration.**

**—Frankie Blackburn**





The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling.

For every one of us who sat in classrooms for years at tables cutting off our lower bodies and disconnecting us from our gut, intuition and sexual and reproductive organs, in bodies trained to be obedient and desires overpowered, it is imperative now, as a precursor to reimagining, to be in our bodies and reconnect with our centers where Eros lives and where life begins. If we don't know where our own desire lives, we leave the door open for someone else to tell us who and how to love, what to want, why to learn; to traumatize us and shrink our creative power, only to then fill us up with the desires of empire. We will not re-imagine. We will reproduce. We will replicate.

Friends, trauma and scarcity may be what we've inherited, but like every ancestor in our collective tapestry, it is what we will spend our limited humxn lifetimes attempting to not pass on. Decolonizing requires healing from this trauma and healing trauma requires accessing and staying in our bodies and desires. That makes decolonizing education a queer thing to do. It very literally requires turning our bodies back on, reclaiming them from dusty, colonial and traumatized parameters of gender expression and scarce options for who and how to love.

Queerness has the power to dom the empire out of us. I'm re-imagining the pain of decolonizing as the key to our deepest pleasure. I'm fantasizing about decolonial education that happens in bodies that move with the kind of freedom that tells the story of radical self love. Teaching that happens between people who long for each other because we know that the wholeness we seek is in our interconnectivity. Learning on land that we love like the body of a lover, the learning of lovers as whole landscapes. Loving this way will be how we know we are alive.<sup>8</sup>

—Kate

**We hold secrets. We all do.** We hold them in varying degrees on a spectrum from very harmful to not so harmful. We've got to find a way for the shadows to come into full bloom, as in abundance so they're not secret and hidden away. When they're secret and held hidden, they hold way too much power over us. And our ability to be free.

<sup>8</sup> Kate Morales, <https://ecoversities.org/queerness-taught-me-that-an-open-letter-to-the-radical-educators-of-the-ecoverse-and-beyond/>

**THE EROTIC is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge. This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of... We have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings.**

**—Audre Lorde**

To embrace the yes within ourselves, we need to increasingly disconnect with the daily trappings and spend time and energy by being in the universe with people who don't require the trapping but who see us for who we really are. We step outside of boxes, roles we have to play and the masks we have to wear. We're producing. Not just consuming. Producing in community.

As we shed the layers of the in and out binary, the yes and no, boy and girl and all those insidious dominant practices, it bodes well to know that the system is in us. We are not always the idea of "purity," as with those in our beloved circles. Remember to embrace the abundance, including both ends of our "good - bad" spectrum. None of it is an enemy that we need to keep out as we endeavor our efforts to building alternative realities: distributed power sharing systems; consejos del elders y jovenes; community governance circles for our organizations; parent and family voices to elevate community wealth, knowledge and practices; restorative circles where more truth is held. Just like we need the four directions on the Medicine Wheel. Including the ether. The spiritual realm that one can only intuit.

Many species are one being: lichen - fungi, bacteria and plants make up one thing. For those living organisms, there is no such thing as inside / outside. Humans are also holobionts. We're more bacterial cells than human cells with trillions of bacteria living in our digestive tracts. **The perceived borders where I end and you begin are murky.** It's the same culturally. My own self, my coherence, yet we're different people and we breathe the same air. We're actually really intimate with each other's insides and outsides. The permeability touches on our longing for separability and coherence.

In a chronic stress state that people of color constantly must navigate and live under, we rely on our flight or fight, "gotta react" instincts to keep us safe. We have had to choose this or that to survive. And, inundated with so much sexual trauma, of course we have the gender binary. We have not been taught or supported to hold complexities around eros, sexuality, sexual traumas.

**Heat rises... bellies tighten to protect the soft body.**

**Heat rises...in societies that value the head, it's not safe to have soft bellies.**

**Tight abs. Poop on toilets. Meet at tables where we can't see each other's bodies.**

**This is what we can look at to identify what a culture values.**

**Chronic stress or traumas that have not been integrated, look at cultural bodies that are bigger than us.**

**Harmful spirits - fight them, war metaphors... we will lose.**

**Let's take war language out of our movements and replace it with love language.**

**Instead of fighting the demons, how about if we call them in and heal them?**

**Fighting them is not working so well... culture around you can't talk about your shadows with anyone.**

**In hyper vigilant chronic stress, we can't talk about our shadows.**

Invite dialogue and reflections on what's the best / worst things I've ever done? To expand our capacity to love and see ourselves, then others.

**Not about being good but about being whole. We miss the mark on that.** In our colonized and extractive world, things that are longing to die are stuck in trash. And, we rob that trash of the death cycle.

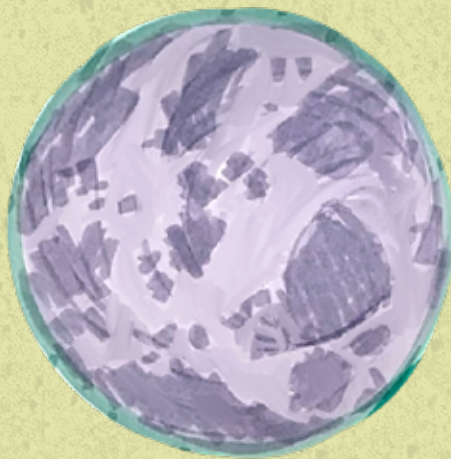
I'm currently struggling with the idea of "one step forward and two steps back" progress. And the reason that I'm struggling with it is as a female body about to give birth to another female body in a country that is overturning all these things. With pregnancy being such a difficult experience on my body and my mind and my soul. I feel the visceral effects of what a forced maternity could be, where although I wanted this and imagining if I didn't, how much I would resent this being and in my situation. And so I've been doing a lot of thinking about what happens during retrenchment and during backlash, and really leaning into the hope that comes from knowing that progress isn't linear. The fact that bad progress sometimes is better. And that as things fall, there is opportunity for things to be built back. But that really our role shifts as progress crumbles to palliative efforts. We're forced to construct and build because that's such a capitalistic thing. Like if we're not producing and building then we're not doing things of worth, but there's huge value in making the crumbling more palliative. In other words, as we lose our rights, we have the opportunity to make that shock

less painful to our communities. And in doing that, take the time to actually reimagine what we want to build.

So, I'm trying to lean into that invitation that comes from seeing something you thought wouldn't crumble, fall apart. And that's been very humbling throughout this pregnancy. And I think that there's a lot of power there to have us not lose sight of what can be done in the moment, to reduce suffering, to lick our wounds, and decide what we want to do from that point forward. And to acknowledge that in this time, we're not going to build, we really are just going to reduce suffering. And then we'll figure out what's next when we have the opportunity to figure out what's next.

You know what I mean? Like reducing the sense of urgency to rebuild right away.

—Adriana Loson-Ceballos







## Practices to Cultivate Authentic Self Love, Love of Other and Community Love

One big insight for us, threaded through our first and now second paper is that authentic love practice is hard work! Life-changing and community-changing, but we've got to be committed and disciplined for lifelong toil. This means practice to adopt and adapt new habits that feed our mind, heart and souls. We asked some of our co-sojourners to share example of their love practices and we received some heartfelt and wise offerings to share.

**Through the decades, I have realized that self care is an active and ongoing practice and part of a larger community – it is everyday self care. Here are some of my daily practices.**

**I enjoy long bike rides (and now some shadowboxing!). I feel blessed to be the baba of an awesome and autistic soon to be 8 year old. I feel my best self when I write and reflect. I have found purposeful paid and unpaid work. I have a loving and caring community.**

**I feel grateful for my generative somatic practice where I can accept my old self and can slowly nurture and heal the pain that has accumulated over decades while being on the path of becoming the best version of myself.**

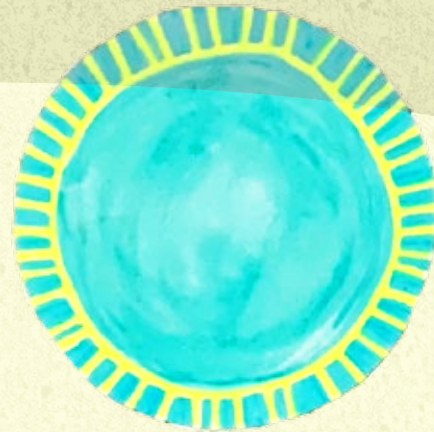
**—Alex Tom**

**When it comes to self-love, I've found some different practices that help me be more centered, more authentic, more emotionally intelligent, more present. So daily, well six days a week, I do morning pages. Morning pages is a practice I got from a book called "The Artists Way." It is a practice to help unleash creativity, but I have just found it a very helpful way to be present. Every day you write you sit down and you write three pages. Some days I have huge epiphanies and some days they fly by and some days they're hard. I also have my weekly breathwork practice that I mentioned doing with a leader and group of people who call in at the same time ...it's a somatic practice of doing a particular kind of breath pattern with music, but there's also a weekly theme, so there's talking and doing it in community and being vulnerable together.**

**—Sarah Stachowiak**

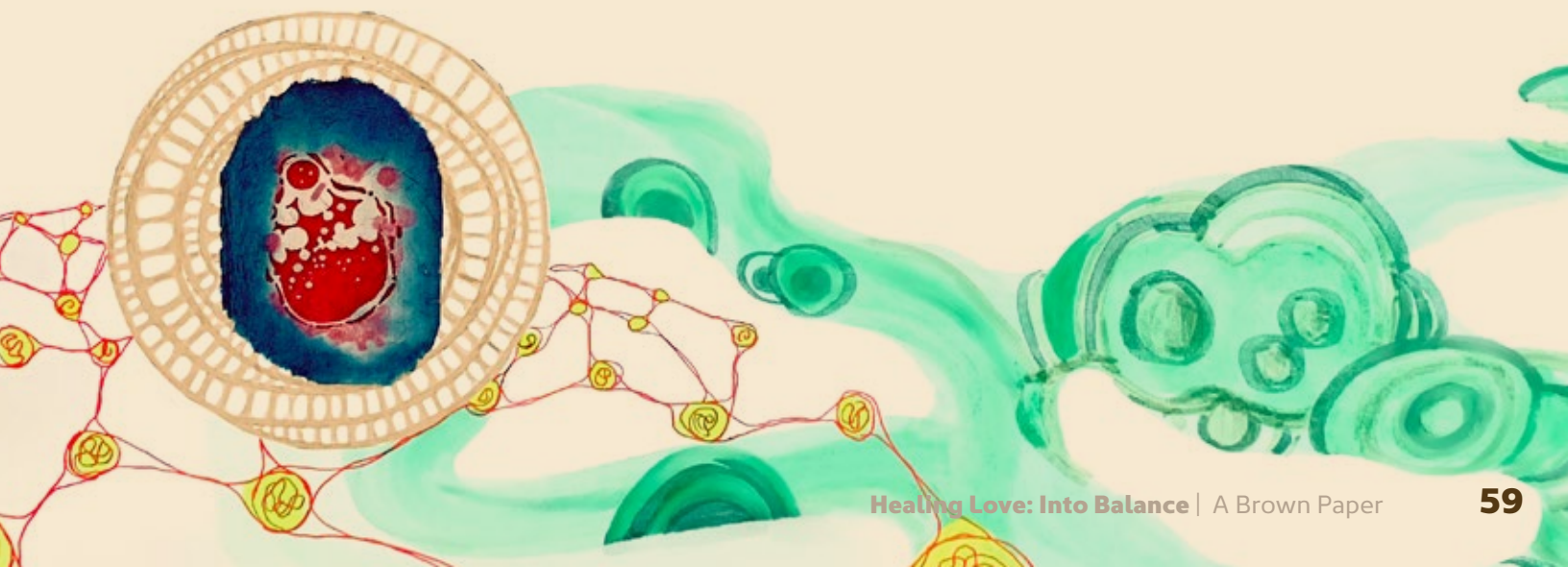
What practices do I need? Well, I start my day before I go out into the world, before I jump on social media, with some practices to ground myself. And so for me, personally now last three years or so, my mornings start with a few minutes of meditation and then some devotional prayer time. In the last year or so I've added writing a morning message of love and encouragement to my wife. And I now do this routine every single morning to make sure I start each day the same way. By grounding myself to be ready to be open hearted and vigilant. So that gets back to the person–role–system framework, how do you start with yourself? Then we can get into what do our organizations need to be doing? What are the routines and practices our organizations need to be doing? Likewise, what would an organization do each day that would equip that organization with collective vigilance? And with practices to build each other up and hold each other accountable, calling in and calling out. These practices will support the individual vigilance and be collective communal vigilance. The solutions are at the microlevel. It's about us down here on the ground, block by block, neighbor to neighbor, colleague to colleague. Proximity as Bryan Stevenson says.

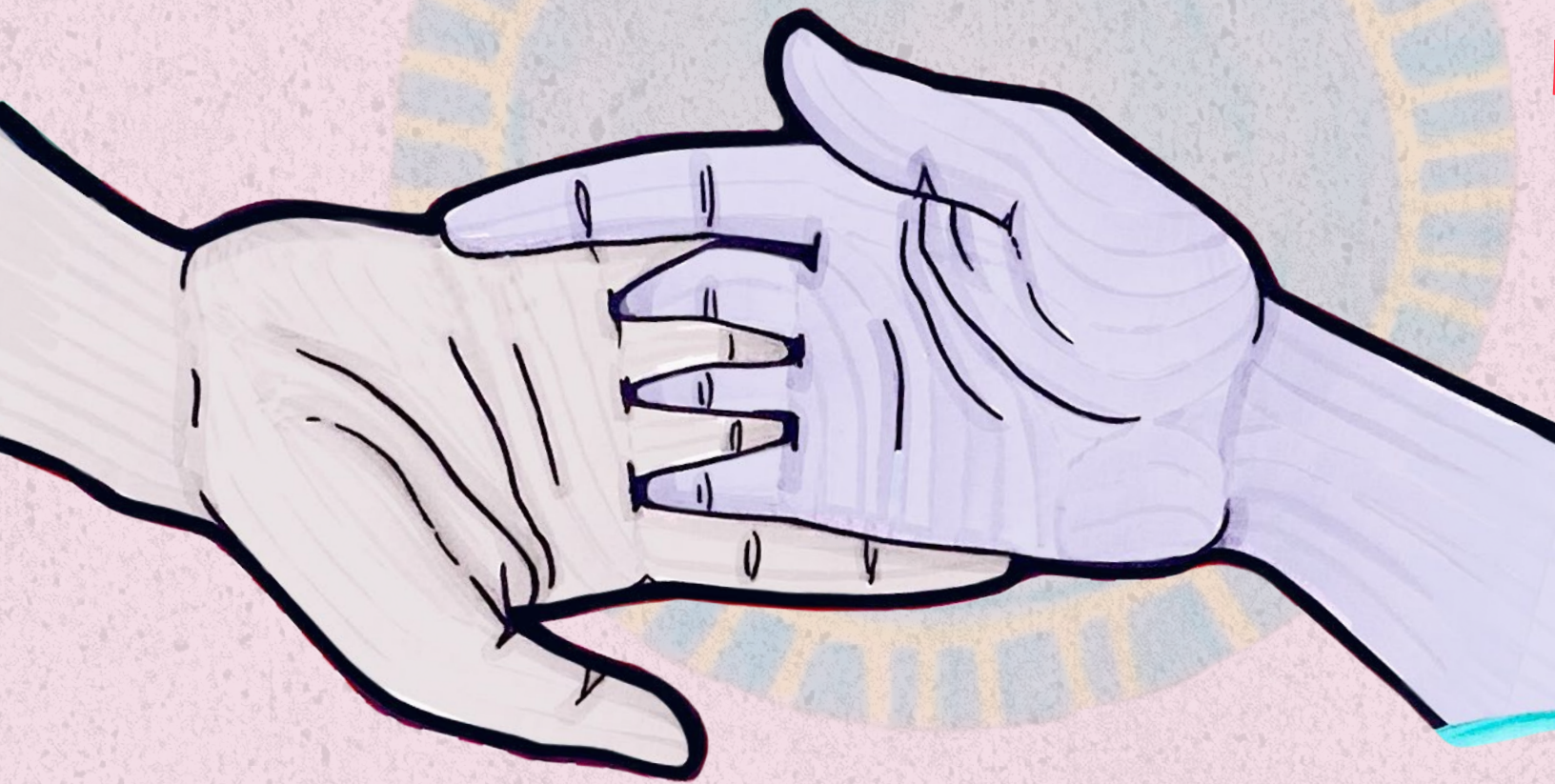
—Mark Joseph



How do we create more and more settings where people are able to bring their best selves? So I'll give you a very specific example just to ground it. So this morning 7:30am my call was with the director of a local public agency. And the debate he and I were having is one that will be very familiar to you. We're forming a steering committee for the implementation of a local neighborhood initiative. I'm going to be co-chairing the steering committee, along with a pastor in the community who is ideal for this purpose. And then the debate is, it would be ideal to have a resident of the neighborhood as the third co-chair. The problem is that there's really only one resident who is ready to play that role and she is a longtime community leader, has anointed herself as the gatekeeper for the neighborhood, and she has alienated everybody else. And her voice dominates. And she's been at it for years. She is an incredible human being who has been through so much trauma and pain and just gives and gives and gives. And she wants so badly for there to be other leaders to step up in our community. And she doesn't understand that she's part of the problem for why they aren't stepping up. And I've been on a five year journey with her, we're building really good, trusting relationship. So this initiative is literally going to live or die with if we can figure out how to help this gatekeeper on her journey to learn to lead while not crowding out others – we have to get there. And I have to love her to bring her best self in a way that makes space for others to bring their best selves. That's the part of the formula that is broken. Her loving the community has shut out other leaders and now the head of the public agency is insisting that we make her the co chair because he is coming from a political position that if you don't make her a co-chair she's going to undermine this thing. And he's right. And it's a little bit of damned if you do and damned if you don't. You put her the co-chair now you have empowered her in a position where she will feel she has been appropriately respected, but if we do we have to support her to lead in a whole new way. Can we really do it? So we have to go with her co-chairing the steering committee and I am just going to have to be right there with her, before, after, and during every meeting asking: 'How'd we do with loving folks in this work today?' With me coaching her and her coaching me.

—Mark Joseph





**The most important thing I've learned is that my priority is the relationship I have with my partners as we work on racial justice projects together. Prioritizing the relationship has led me to make choices that are sometimes different than I would have in the past when I might have asked instead, 'What do I have to do to advance this work?**

**Or what do I have to do to get this done?,' instead of 'What do I have to do to make sure that I am in right relationship as we do this work together?' When you prioritize the relationship, it might increase the time you need to accomplish something, but the results are a lot richer.**

**—Julia Coffman**

# Call to Action to Conjure More Love

Let's remember the power of love that helps us choose connection over disconnection. Here's the charge and call to action for each of us:

- **Let's dedicate ourselves to these rigorous and radical ways of loving ourselves.**

This inner work is like gravity or air; it's everywhere and is the solid ground for everything but often taken for granted, not seen. Same as all the inner work that we do, it's unseen, unsexy, hard work that takes courage with astronomical returns.

Why do this, and what do we need to remember when we're tired? We commit to this inner work because we're tired of white supremacy. We're sick and tired of being sick and tired. We're ready to rise. We can't wait for the calvary to come – the calvary is US. Setting clean, clear, strong boundaries is step one to deeply loving ourselves radically.

- **Things got to end and die when it's their time.**

We gotta learn how to let shit go when it's time. A special proviso for OGs: we have to let go of the ways we've held onto white dominant culture and how we've weaponized that with young people. Let go of our pain and compost our triggers, baggage and what we think we know. It's time to rededicate ourselves to learning and growing with our yelders and young ones.

- **Lean into eros. Cry a river. Be fully humxn** and all that we are as that's the biggest act of rebellion to a white supremacist world that seeks to dehumanize us. Don't ever apologize for crying ever again. Please. Unless you will apologize for every time you smile or laugh.

- Take on leadership roles, **embrace our power** as amphibians to step up. More stepping into boundaries spanning roles. Serve as catalysts to bring about all the amphibian qualities in us and others. (See [Measuring Love paper](#))

- **Feel into all our being nature.**

Open eyes and hearts, see ourselves in our work with new awareness

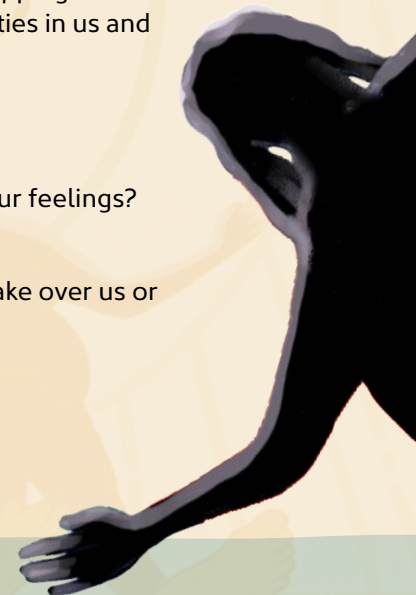
- How would you change your practice to transform the world if you leaned into your feelings?
- How would you engage with your friends and communities?
- When you embrace rage, how might you compost rage with choice so it doesn't take over us or unconsciously influence the ways we treat other people?

- **Popularize and claim love proudly and loudly** in our social benefit sector

- Embed love in all that we do; expand beyond equity, data, evidence, logic models

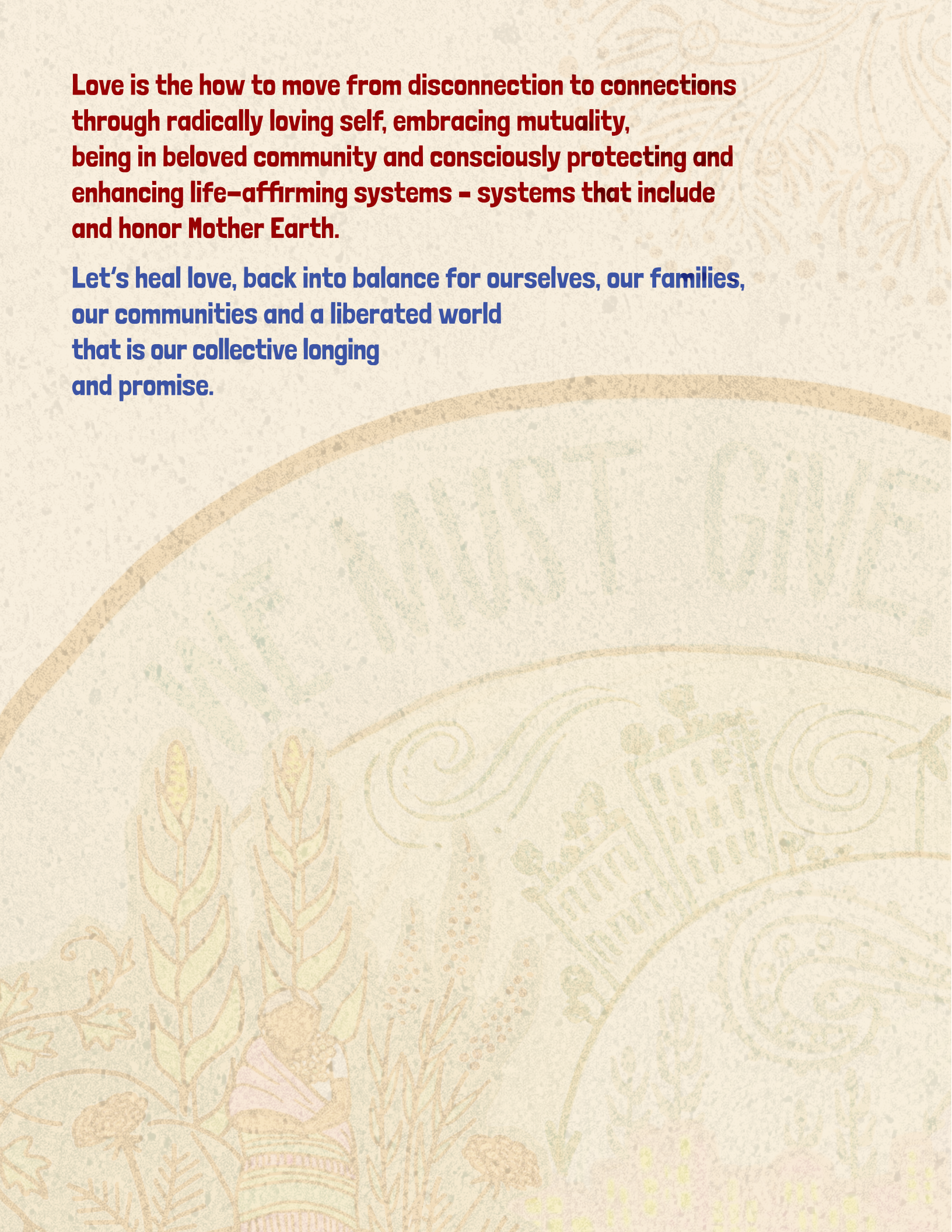
What if "To work" were replaced with "To love?"

Touching, hearing, seeing, tasting, and feeling the joy is the work.



**Love is the how to move from disconnection to connections through radically loving self, embracing mutuality, being in beloved community and consciously protecting and enhancing life-affirming systems - systems that include and honor Mother Earth.**

**Let's heal love, back into balance for ourselves, our families, our communities and a liberated world that is our collective longing and promise.**



# From Disconnection to...



## THEMES

LOVE SELF →

MUTUALITY →

BELOVED  
COMMUNITY →

LIFE-  
AFFIRMING  
SYSTEMS



## ABUNDANCE

Recognize and call in that which holds us in unconditional love

Who and/or what is holding you in loving care as you do this work?

What are your brights? Your shadows? To what extent have you embraced both, all to be truly whole?

In this relationship, what am I giving? What am I taking? How does our mutuality sustain our relationship?

What sacred cycles allow for abundance?

What community and cultural wealth (strengths, values, ways of being, resources) will sustain us through the tougher work we have to do together? What community strengths have been ignored?

Who is willing to throw down for this place?



## CLEANSING THROUGH AWARENESS

Confront the pain of your heart and you will be soothed and restored

What is keeping me from living in full integrity with my purpose and my values?

What lies do I tell myself? What conditions need to exist for me to be fully honest with myself?

What boundaries are asking for respect?

What do I/we need to be more honest about?

What harm needs to be repaired?

What extractive or exploitative ways of being have I internalized?

What toxic behaviors are getting in the way of "beloved community?"

What dams have been constructed that interrupt the sacred cycles?

What systems of extraction and exploitation are destroying the sacred cycles that sustain us?

What skin is society preparing to shed so that we may?

What is asking to die? To be sacrificed?



## THEMES

LOVE SELF → MUTUALITY → BELOVED COMMUNITY → LIFE-AFFIRMING SYSTEMS



### DIGESTION

Allow space and time for digestion, honoring the sacred cycles that compost and transform that which is being cleansed

What is rotting inside starving for love?

What's the worst thing I have ever done?

How can I metabolize any guilt or shame that may be holding me back from being in mutuality?

What is longing to die in this place? Who or what is being thrown away and longs for love?

How can we reclaim collective power, redistribute our power to transform conditions, to restore the sacred cycles?



### EROS: BEING FULLY ALIVE, IN TUNE

Not about being good but about being whole

What does being fully alive mean to you right now?

By being fully in touch with all that we are, embodying our full selves, how will that bring us closer to each other?

In our beloved communities, families and chosen families and lover circles, how does leaning into eros support the healing we need?

What might we do to be more in touch with nature and nature's rhythms today?

How does that bring more healing to ourselves and those we love?

What do we try to cover up and hide?



### READY TO BURST FORTH

Celebrate & nurture what is being born in the shell of the old...

What is longing to be born from my wholeness?

What truth does this relationship give rise to?

How can honesty create a third space for our relationship to evolve?

What is longing to be born of and for a beloved community?

What new structures and cultural ways of being are emerging now and asking to be nurtured?

What does it look like when I am growing into my purpose & my values?



# A Gathering of Flowers



**RADICAL LOVE  
FOR SELF**



**LOVE WITH**



**BELOVED COMMUNITY**



**LIFE-  
AFFIRMING  
SYSTEMS**

"And so it goes in every heart there is a wound, and it goes and so goes, and so will you, I suppose..."

**-Billy Joel**

I break chains all by myself / Won't let my freedom rot in hell / I'mma keep runnin' because a winner don't quit on themselves.

**-Beyonce**

I am not the things my family did, I am not the voices in my head, I am not the pieces of the brokenness inside, I am light, I am light.

**-India.Arie**

I learned to love myself unconditionally because I am a queen.

**-India.Arie**

In a society that says, 'Put yourself last,' self-love and self-acceptance are revolutionary.

**-Brené Brown**

There can be no Black love without the attempt to promote the death of white supremacy inside of Black people... Black love has nothing to do with hating people; it has everything to do with hating white supremacy.

**-Cornel West**

"Boundaries are the distance at which I can love you and me simultaneously."

**-Prentis Hemphil**

"Honesty is such a lonely word because everyone is so untrue. Honesty is hardly ever heard, but mostly what I need from you."

**-Billy Joel**

The risk of love is loss and the price of loss is grief. But the pain of grief is only a shadow when compared with the pain of never risking love.

**-Hilary Stanton Zunin**

My work is to carry this love as comfort for those who long for you, to go everywhere you've walked and gaze at the pressed-down dirt.

**-Rumi**

Love's in need of love today.

**-Stevie Wonder**

To love someone, really love someone, is to really know them and to allow them to really know you.

**-Baratunde Thurston**

Never, never my darling – never you'll be alone; Ever, forever my darling, true love is written in the stone.

**-Earth, Wind, & Fire**

"Compassion is a sense of concern that arises when we are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to see that suffering relieved."

**-Thupten Jinpa**

While loss is deeply uncomfortable, we can learn to adapt to the natural phenomenon of loss. But when structural inequalities produce major and secondary losses, leading to widespread collective grief, death is out of balance with life. Individual and collective, repeated and generational, traumatic loss stacked on top of existing natural loss. We must tear down the systems, institutions and narratives that engineer death, fuel it and simultaneously distract us from it. This is the essential rebalancing act is the charge of 21st century social justice movements.

**-Malkia Devich Cyril**

All my grandmother's love and wisdom is still with me and that gives me the strength to look for more. Thousands of years back, how? Ahead of me thousands of years to look forward to.

**-Lupe Renteria Salome**

**Nicole Robinson's 10 forces**

"We must believe that we can radically transform the world, and we must do it all the time."

**-Angela Davis**

Love, the author of space and time, keeps the galaxies and each sparrow alive.

**-After All, David Foster and Al Jarreau**

Justice is what love looks like in public.

**-Cornel West**

# WAYS TO SELF-SOOTHE\*

## BREATHE

practice taking long deep breaths for 60 seconds

## STRETCH

stretch your body for 10 minutes

## MEDITATE

do 15 minutes of mindfulness meditation

## MOVE

go for a walk or do some other type of exercise you enjoy

## BATHE

have a warm shower or bath

## 5 THINGS

look around and identify 5 things you can see, taste, touch and/or smell

## GROUNDING

do a body scan or grounding exercise

## JOURNALING

write about whats going on for you and how you're feeling

## MASSAGE

give yourself a massage to help reduce tension

## TAPPING

use EFT tapping—there are many free clips on YouTube

## TALK

talk to a friend

## MUSIC

listen to some calming music

## EXPRESS

share your emotions rather than suppressing or bottling them

## BE KIND

speak kindly to yourself and challenge negative self talk

## PRACTICE COMPASSION

be compasionate towards yourself

## HOW WE RADICALLY LOVE OURSELVES:

stay in integrity with my values and be ruthlessly honest about that

be on purpose with my life goals

do the mirror work of interrogating my inner life

bring repair or resolution to worst things i've ever done

address the traumas blocking our full integration

ask what's blocking my energy flow to remain positive

# OUT OF MY CONTROL

the past

the future

my energy

my self-talk

who i follow on  
social media

my words

algorithms

my response

## IN MY CONTROL

my self care

the media

my attitude

my boundaries

my work on self

what i consume

other people's  
behaviors/beliefs

other people's  
opinion of me

**we acknowledge all of our fellow lovers, justice warriors and heroes whose shoulders we stand on.**

**we acknowledge all of our movement relations who lift us up with their healing powers and love fully in the face of everyday trauma and oppression.**

**our gratitude goes to each one of you reading this Brown Paper. we love you. we're grateful for your truths and dreams.**

**We're grateful for our beloved colleagues' contributions to this Love Chapter... we're honored and lifted by your wisdom.**

**Phillipe Cunningham** | Former Minneapolis Councilmember

**Julia Coffman** | Center for Evaluation Innovation

**Adriana Loson-Ceballos** | Cofounder, Colmena-Consulting

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**Trish Tchume** | Senior Director of Leadership Research & Practice & Sterling Network Organizer

**Alex Tom** | movement yelder, Center for Empowered Politics

**Sarah Stachowiak** | CEO, ORSImpact

**Bill Traynor** | Cofounder, Trusted Space Partners

**Frankie Blackburn** | Cofounder, Trusted Space Partners

**Lupe Salome Renteria** | Student

**Nasha Chernyak** | Latino Community Foundation

**Belma González** | B Coaching and Consulting

**Eveline Shen** | Courageous Leadership consultant

**Frank Farrow** | Former Executive Director, The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)

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