

## **Call and Response in Interreligious Chaplaincy: On Creating and Supporting Sanctuary-building through Ritual Practice**

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*Given the vast heterogeneity encompassed within Africana and Hindu traditions writ large, we explore the role of spiritual care to introduce key practices not yet fully integrated within the field of higher education chaplaincy. We use interdisciplinary methods grounded in interreligious comparative dialogue as individuals on a multifaith chaplaincy team navigating new roles. These new roles as chaplains are typically underrepresented in predominantly white higher education institutions and beyond. In writing this article, we offer techniques for creating and supporting sanctuary building through the ritual practice of call and response. The practice of call and response enhances cultures of inclusivity among interreligious faith spaces in higher education and beyond in three main ways: rooting our orientation to Self and others in matters of spirit; bearing witness to the need that is expressed whether incompletely or not; and answering with our own understanding of capacity and ability.*

*Keywords: sanctuary, ritual, chaplaincy, interdisciplinary, multifaith*

Welcome to our dialogue on the role of call and response in helping spiritual care practitioners to build sanctuary for their students, faculty, staff and self. In serving our communities in these various ways, we hope to open hearts and minds to what is possible. We are intentional about being in process and what makes this work meaningful for us is the practice of being transparent with each other in our not-knowing as we embrace interdisciplinary methods grounded in interreligious comparative education.

### **Returning to rooted concepts of care**

It may be important to lay some groundwork for what we mean when referring to practices from "Africana Spirituality" and "Hinduism" given the vast heterogeneity that is encompassed within Africana and Hindu traditions writ large. We tend to these "definitions" in due course. We also felt it important to identify our relationship to language as we use the term interreligious in the title very purposefully – to mean occurring between members of two or more worldviews. This is what we will prioritize as a practice in rooted concepts of care.

As bell hooks reminds us in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Praxis of Freedom*, "We know things with our lives and we live that knowledge, beyond what any theory has yet theorized."<sup>1</sup> This essay stems from our lived experiences, drawing upon our practices and simultaneously striving to put theory into practice (or praxis) is the challenge before us. We understand that in its production lies the hope of our liberation.<sup>2</sup>

In tending to definitions, contrary to the "world religions paradigm," borders and boundaries about the way religion is constructed limit the ample ways of knowing and being in

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<sup>1</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> In saying this, we are following Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition (New York: Continuum 2000). The basis for our dialogue is Preeta Banerjee's as yet unpublished paper, "Self Care Models from Hindu Shaktism."

the world that are represented by Africana and Hindu traditions.<sup>3</sup> Despite the absence of an identifiable (recorded or documented) beginning in history, single founder, central religious establishment, or sole authoritative scripture, both “Africana” and “Hindu” practices converge and diverge in distinctive ways, sharing foundational concepts or rituals within, across, and between traditions, tribes, groups or schools.

African and Diasporic religious practices are varied, nuanced, and distinct. Afro-Indigenous and Afro-Diasporic ways of life existed before, during and after colonization on the continent of Africa, predating Christianity and Islam in western Africa.<sup>4</sup> Emergent Afro-Diasporic religions include Candomblé in Brazil, Vodou in Haiti, Santería of Cuba, Ifá divination of the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria, and many others.<sup>5</sup> While grounded in Afro-Indigenous practices on the continent of Africa, these ways of knowing evolved in the Caribbean, South America, North America and around the world after the transatlantic slave trade. For this dialogue, the Afro-Diasporic principles that are drawn upon are rooted in the Afro-Brazilian tradition of Capoeira and the Afro-Diasporic practice of Hip Hop.

Hip Hop is a vast, and expansive Afro-diasporic tradition based on five key elements: break dancing, emceeing, graffiti, deejaying, and knowledge of self<sup>6</sup>. To some, Hip Hop is merely a cultural form of expression; for many, it is a way of life. It is filled with various traditions and rituals that practitioners employ through a spirit of resistance.<sup>7</sup> As the culture evolves, so does our understanding of Hip Hop. In this essay, we use Hip Hop educational theory to point out that resistance is spiritual, and we highlight the practice of “Checking oneself” as well as the cypher to point toward the ritual of call and response present within this tradition. The Afro-diasporic oral storytelling literary tradition is recognized as emcees perform. The lyrical composition invoked in the rhythmic tones, dynamic poetry and effervescent flow of emcees illuminate that there is a giver of the message, and a receiver; a call and a response.<sup>8</sup> In Africana Spirituality writ-large, there is an understanding that our relationships matter as the interactions, experiences, and life lessons that emerge from being in those relationships make up who we are as a person and a people. Relationships are not merely of benefit to oneself but are meant to benefit the community as a whole. As one learns to understand themselves as part of a collective, then the synergy and the dialogue between self and others become vital.

Hinduism refers to traditions and practices that were present in the Indus Valley near the Sindhu River over 5,000 years ago.<sup>9</sup> There are as many ways to be Hindu as there are Hindus, depending upon the school of thought (the six principal Hindu *darshans* are Samkhya, Yoga,

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Hedges, “The old and new comparative theologies: Discourses on religion, the theology of religions, orientalism and the boundaries of traditions,” in *Religions* 3, No. 4 (2012): 1120–37.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob K. Olupona, *African Religions: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> This synthesis draws upon Dr. Funlayo’s work with the African and Diasporic Religious Studies Association (ADRSA) and Dr. Jacob Olupona’s work.

<sup>6</sup> Pierce Ellinwood. “Native Tongues and the Black Atlantic: Hip Hop and the Afro-Diasporic Tradition. (Dartmouth University. Digital Commons)

<sup>7</sup> Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> See Daniel White Hodge, *The Soul of Hip Hop: Rims, Timbs and a Cultural Theology* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Vineet Chander and Lucinda Mosher, eds., *Hindu Approaches to Spiritual Care: Chaplaincy in Theory and Practice* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019).

Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa, and Vedanta) and whether the individual holds a personal deity (ishvara) as well as regional and cultural inheritances.<sup>10</sup>

For this dialogue, two foundational concepts that are drawn upon are that of the oneness of existence and many ways of uniting with the Divinity within us. In expanding on the first concept, one may carry a posture that all beings, from the smallest to the organism, are considered manifestations of the Divine or reflections of the Divine's qualities. In expanding on the second concept, one may be open to the variety of practices, beliefs, and behaviors that flow like the many tributaries to the river that lead to the vast ocean of unification (*yog*) with the Divine. *Bhakti yog* (as considered distinct from *gyan yog*, *raj yog*, and *karma yog*) is the alignment with the Divine through devotional practices—such as singing, dancing, art, and poetry.<sup>11</sup> Through these acts of intense love, practitioners find that they are merging with the energy of the Universe. When focused in these acts, the distinctions and differences disappear and the unification emerges.

Having provided some background, let us move to the context of our relationship. In doing so, we hope to illuminate the significance of this work within the field of multi-faith Higher Education chaplaincy.

After years of student activism, Katrina Moore, director of the Africana Center worked directly with the University Chaplaincy to create an Africana Spirituality Advisor position that could provide social, emotional and spiritual support to students of African descent.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the students of the Hindu Students Council (HSC) had been working with administration to hire a Hindu Advisor for many years. After the pandemic hit, both processes were paused, but in 2020, the Interim University Chaplain, Dr. Jennifer Peace made it a priority to ensure the representation of both the Africana Spirituality Advisor and the Hindu Advisor were established. These positions support the spiritual well-being of students of African descent and Hindu traditions on campus. It is an honor to be among the first to hold these kinds of roles within Higher education chaplaincy. Given the tensions that arose in the U.S. and around the world after the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, the need for spiritual care and counseling at Tufts that was inclusive, diverse and equitable became even further apparent.

Thus, we both came to Tufts as new to the role of Spiritual Advisors in the University Chaplaincy, where we jointly believed in the power of unlearning the harmful, rigid, ways of knowing and being that permeate predominantly white Christian institutions<sup>13</sup>, often inhibiting Black and Brown people from becoming all of who we are called to be. This became even clearer when we hosted the inaugural Unlearning Retreat for more than eighteen Black and Brown students in Jan 2021, less than two weeks after the January 6th attack on the White House by white nationalists. Students, deeply affected by such violence and without opportunities to communicate honestly and authentically, reported back that the space we co-created allowed for

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<sup>10</sup> Bhoomananda Tirtha Maharaj, *The Science of the Rishis: The Spiritual and Material Discoveries of the Ancient Sages of India* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *Bhakti Yoga: The Yoga of Love and Devotion* (Belur Math, India: Advaita Ashrama, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> For more context into the history of the Africana Spirituality Chaplaincy visit: <https://chaplaincy.tufts.edu/africana/about-the-africana-spirituality-chaplaincy/>

<sup>13</sup> Khyati Y. Joshi, *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2021).

healing, grief, frustration, despair that hadn't otherwise had the institutional container to be expressed on the college campus.

This essay moves towards answering the question: “How do we support sanctuary building in interreligious chaplaincy spaces while also upholding the sacred within our own traditions?” This task can be challenging, and represents a timeless tension when one practices Africana, Indigenous, Dharmic traditions yet is required to navigate spaces that don't always inherently honor their wholeness. When individuals are constantly asked to translate their own experiences in ways that fit into the domain not created by and for them, the need for adaptation and evolution becomes imperative. This comes with a pushing and pulling and stretching of self and the space whereby the first order of care involves boundary setting.<sup>14</sup> In exploring what it means to be fully human, with a range of feelings, experiences, desires, and emotions that deserve to be seen as valid and true, we offer a ritual practice that lends itself to preserving the dignity and beauty in our lives.

### **Laying the Foundation for Call and Response in Multifaith Contexts**

We begin by offering the image of a compass and locating one's coordinates. When multiple locations coexist in the same space, such as a multifaith chaplaincy, there is a way in which we offer a call and look for a response to communicate about our location, or situatedness, much like dropping a pin in GPS location. To enter into any conversation about matters of spirit, it is crucial for one to acknowledge *where we are coming from*—that is to say, to identify our location. In Ayurveda, the practice of health science from the Vedas, we often look to find one's frequency (or *dosha*) among the five elements (*panchabhoota*) so as to know what works with or against our True Nature.<sup>15</sup> One's True Nature and what actions, words, diet, literature, music one intakes co-exists within an ever-changing dynamic environment of life.

In Hip Hop pedagogy we often say “check yourself before you wreck yourself.”<sup>16</sup> Practically speaking, this is a practice of constantly identifying how we orient ourselves to the work that we are involved in. The practice is similar to that of meaning-making, otherwise referred to as theological reflection, which asks the individual to contemplate what is most significant to them in the experience that they've encountered or witnessed. The process of “checking oneself” involves taking the time to self-reflect about how one's words, thoughts, actions and deeds might inform the impact they are having on those around them.

This process supports us in arriving at a deeper sense of purpose and meaning in the moment. In this way, the location of the individual matters insofar as they are in relationship with the outer world. Thus, it is crucial to locate oneself in relation to others. In doing so, we honor our relationship to our cultural inheritance, and to our ancestors, those who came before and those who will come after. This supports us in remaining grounded in principals from our traditions, while always allowing room for evolution and growth.

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<sup>14</sup> Nedra Glover Tawwab, *Set Boundaries, Find Peace* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Vasant Lad, *Ayurveda: The Science of Self-healing: A Practical Guide* (Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> Hip Hop artists, writers and pioneers Ice Cube, Melle Mel, Sylvia Robinson, Clifton “Jiggs” Chase, and Duke Bootee composed a song in 1992 that popularized this phrase

In laying a foundation, we must recognize that off shoots of white supremacist, capitalist, imperialist culture, as bell hooks names, normalizes a sense of fear and terror at the unknown, rather than wonder and curiosity about what makes us different.<sup>17</sup> This inhibits and disrupts the foundation for authentic call and response, ultimately diminishing our sense of self-worth, creative confidence, and overall willingness to connect across differences. Rather than operating from a deficit or fixed mindset, laying the foundation for call and response within predominantly white spaces is rooted in a reality pedagogy whereby honesty, transparency and an awareness that we can only meet each other as far as we have met ourselves is imperative, a point made by Chris Emdin.<sup>18</sup> We encourage truth-telling, even when it is not neatly wrapped in a bow, between people to promote a culture of collaboration over competition. In doing so, we are pushed toward becoming our truest selves, allowing us to relinquish the false need to prove to ourselves and others that we are good enough. We rest assured of our inherent worthiness simply because we are navigating a world bent on categorizing us as Other.

### **Call and Response: A praxis for cultivating authenticity in multifaith chaplaincy**

As we embark on cultivating the praxis of call and response in multifaith chaplaincy, it is crucial to exercise care in ways that involve being an active participant in co-creating sacred and shared space. This is where the response comes in. Call and Response acknowledges that, when one person offers an invitation “a call,” the other has the choice to answer: “the response.” In responding, there is an exchange that can invoke an embodied and sonic dialogue, creating a world unto itself.

In the Afro-Brazilian Martial art of Capoeira, we practice a ritual of Call and Response in our *roda* (circle), which often occurs at the end of class. This exercise requires every member to be actively engaged, pushing against any stationary or static energy. There are no spectators, but rather, everyone in the room participates and contributes to the collective *ase*, energy, and life force in the room. When a fellow Capoeirista makes a call (either with their body or voice), whether it be a *rasteira* (sweep), an *equiva* (escape), a *ladainha* (ancestral song), a gesture, the exchange requires the other *jogador* (player) to respond. In doing so this invokes a synergy that is co-created and ongoing. To take the popular song called *Paranae* as an example: after the lead singer says “Paranae,” the rest of those in the *roda* would respond by saying “*parana*.” Everyone in the *roda* is aware of the response, and would offer it automatically, almost without second thought, as a way of cultivating the energy of the game and rising and falling with the spirit of the people as they clap, dance, sing.<sup>19</sup> Other practitioners recognize the different worlds that each person brings with them when they engage in the practice of calling to their partners in the game. They do so to elicit a reaction, and offer up a gesture in response. In this way, they also

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<sup>17</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to transgress*.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Emdin, *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education* (Boston: Beacon, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> This is knowledge based on fifteen years of experience training, and ethnographic research by Azmera Hammouri-Davis. Capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial art, tradition, way of life depending on who one asks, originated from enslaved Africans in Brazil who were not allowed to practice self-defense, so disguised it as a dance. Mestre Janja Araújo, revered Master of the craft and Professor of Interdisciplinary Women's Studies at the Federal University of Bahia describes it in this way “Quando a mulher entra na roda, a Mulher traz seu próprio mundo.” That is to say, when a woman enters in the *roda* (the circle/ring) where Capoeira is played, she brings her own world. See Janja Araujo, Grupo Nzinga Institute. <http://nzinga.org.br>

honor the spirit of the other beings, as call and response is a ritual practice of acknowledgement. That is to say, when one calls to another, and then another responds, they are actively acknowledging the existence of the other being. Such acknowledgement also elicits feelings of gladness, awareness, and increased attentiveness to the present moment, creating space for the tender to arise.

Call and response is also found in *Kīrtan* (communal song), which is practiced by many Hindus.<sup>20</sup> Beginning in the 6th century C.E. in southern India, *bhakti* (devotional) singing in this way, involves the leader expressing sometimes simple and well-known phrases of devotion, love, worship.<sup>21</sup> A *kirtan* leader, or *kirtankara*, would sing sacred words in a precise manner and the *satsang* (fellow singers), would repeat with equal precision thus orally learning not only the content but also the context of expressing in these ways. Their expressions are then mimicked back as exactly as possible by the *satsang* or fellow *kirtan* attendees. The *kirtan* leader, authentically in touch with their emotions, lets anything and everything flow through them. This practice of empathy is one way to invite the whole community, including young people, to understand and witness the complexity of what it means to be human. Having seen such practice first-hand, one is struck by the tears that might flow from the *kirtan* leader's eyes as they sing with devotion. One becomes comfortable with a range of expressions from great joy to sorrow, anger, grief, wonder, doubt, and deep longing.

To summarize, the ritual practice of call and response in caring for ourselves and others invokes the expression of a desire to witness, to hear, to hold space for one self and others to express authentically and candidly that which is most resonant with their spirit. This practice can be applied in caring for ourselves and others as a praxis. Are you being honest with yourself?

## **Limitations**

It is important for us to be clear about our hopes in offering these practical ways of engaging. We, ourselves, are in process and progress—in our vocations, our relationship, and in expressing the need for new ways of being in interreligious chaplaincy. We aim to honor the sacredness of our practices by acknowledging the element of mystery and emergence at play. There is a part of this offering that will never make linear sense, and yet it cannot be reduced to the logic itself. Different ways of knowing are greater than and beyond our own attempt at words.

One primary consideration is the historical presence of the communities that we care for, along with the context and conditions. For example, Ruth Simms offers a paradigm

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<sup>20</sup> Sara Black Brown, "Krishna, Christians, and Colors: the socially binding influence of Kirtan singing at a Utah Hare Krishna Festival," in *Ethnomusicology* 58.3 (2014): 454–80. The 1923 Carnegie Hall kirtan, led by the famous yogi and spiritual guru Paramahansa Yogananda, author of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, is widely cited as the first kirtan held in the US, but the practice found a wider audience in the 1960s counterculture movements. Recently, kirtan has experienced an explosion in popularity mirroring the growing nationwide practice of yoga—in yoga studios, private homes, churches, theaters, convention centers, and other spaces throughout the U.S. Most examples of contemporary kirtan conform to the kirtan style, but generally include English language lyrics, phrases from the Jewish Torah, parts of the Sikh Guru Granth Sahib, or allusions to Mary and other aspects of the Christian tradition. This contemporary use of multiple context-appropriate languages is consistent with kirtan's bhakti spiritual roots, as spiritual plurality is also apparent in addition to the musical lyrics.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen M. Slawek, "Popular Kīrtan in Benares: Some 'Great' Aspects of a Little Tradition," in *Ethnomusicology* 32, No. 2 (Spring–Summer, 1988): 77–92.

demonstrating how African Americans across the diaspora have these fundamental realities constantly at play—being uprooted from ancestral land, being exposed to certain traumatic experiences, carrying a need to find a sense of belonging, and exercising their right to self-determine.<sup>22</sup> Rather than operate in the silos or isolation often found in predominantly white institutions (PWI), we acknowledge the weight of the history that many of our students carry. As we tend to their needs, we are cognizant that in doing so we can increase their capacity to care for themselves and those they love, too. Within this socio-political context of trauma and terror, which James Cone expands upon in his book *The Cross and The Lynching Tree*,<sup>23</sup> as does Howard Thurman in his book *Jesus and the Disinherited*, we see the heightened need for sanctuary building within Higher Education chaplaincy.<sup>24</sup>

## The Outcome

First and foremost, the relationality, invoked by a call and response ritual, moves us away from short-term and transactional behaviors toward long-term, and reciprocal thinking. In the prisoner's dilemma, we find that a long-term, or repeated game, moves both prisoners towards altruism.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, call and response moves us towards behaviors that are more growth mindset rather than fixed mindset.<sup>26</sup>

As Christena Cleveland demonstrates in her book *God is a Black Woman*, there is a necessity for self-examination to unlearn that which has caused harm and imbalance in one's relationship to self and others. She writes:

As I began to uncover the ghastly patriarchy and white supremacy within spiritual spaces and broader society, I began to understand that in order to truly encounter myself in the Sacred Black Feminine, I would need to fearlessly examine the *whitemalegod* in me. I would need to uncover and release all the ways in which I have adopted *whitemalegod's* ways, such as the obsession with certainty, perfectionism, and outside approval.<sup>27</sup>

In order to create a sanctuary of care for others one must first examine what practices and beliefs one upholds internally. Spiritual care practice in higher education chaplaincy, as with most predominantly white education spaces, is historically steeped in white dominant culture.<sup>28</sup> Thus, if internal practices are left unchecked, the possibility of ushering in liberation, hope and interdependence externally one must be cognizant of ways that white dominant culture invades higher education.<sup>29</sup> Building upon the commonly referred to Nguni Bantu concept of Ubuntu—

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<sup>22</sup> Drawing on Dr. Ruth Simms, specifically her paradigm research on African-Americans and Africans in Diaspora.

<sup>23</sup> James Cone, *The Cross and The Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013.)

<sup>24</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and The Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> The prisoner's dilemma is a standard example of a game analyzed in game theory that shows why two completely rational individuals might not cooperate, even if it appears that it is in their best interests to do so. It was originally framed by Merrill Flood and Melvin Dresher while working at RAND in 1950. Albert W. Tucker formalized the game with prison sentence rewards and named it "prisoner's dilemma."

<sup>26</sup> Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Random House, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Christena Cleveland, *God is a Black Woman* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2021), 48.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, *White Dominant Culture and Something Different*, adapted by Partners for Collaborative Change (2023). <https://www.cacgrants.org/assets/ce/Documents/2019/WhiteDominantCulture.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Tema Okun, *White Supremacy Culture—Still Here* (Whitesupremacyculture.info.2021).

“I am because we are”—the willingness to examine oneself and shift one's orientation, marked by intention and humility, cultivates a heart posture of genuine curiosity around the various ways in which one can move throughout their world. It presumes the recognition that there is more than one way of knowing and being, recognizing that all can be equally valid and simultaneously true.

Recall the need for healing-centered engagement as explored in the limitations section and integrate call and response in terms of a grounded, centering dialogic experience that can be an exchange whether it is verbal, physical, spiritual, energetic.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the community that one belongs to is a vital component to allowing one to establish a sense of self and understand the value they may bring to others and those around them.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, we hope these practices accompany your journey of unlearning that which restricts and limits life and expands a path for honoring that which grows your relationship to self, others and the community. Below are reflections on how being in relationship with one another has enhanced our understanding of spiritual care within higher education. We hope this will be a well for you to draw from for years to come.

Having met each other in a unique phase of our vocations, we were mutually able to heal by tending to our common as well as individual needs. By co-conspiring, forming our own microcultures within space otherwise unknown, we can move away from the “master’s tools” of centering.<sup>31</sup> Rather than dividing and pitting those in the margins against each other to get to the center, we can usher each other to our best, most authentic selves, and meet each other in the work. Call and Response is the expression of a desire and the witnessing, hearing and holding space of the other’s expression as one’s own. Ask yourself: What are the rhythms you are hearing? What is your soul in need of? What new dance move is life asking you to learn and/or engage? What is your relationship to your ancestors? How might we restore balance and harmony in our lives through our relationships?

Perhaps this is what we appreciate most about our relationship. As we have learned about each other’s personal stories, we have wondered together through revisiting memories from our childhood. Those memories are marked by so much joy, curiosity, and excitement brimming inside. We have shared about how our experiences with the celebration of Shakti and Sacred Black Feminine have shaped our spiritual formation, and how there is still so much more learning and life ahead of us. By inviting each other into our stories, we illuminate the beauty of that which makes us different as well as those interwoven threads that feel like home because they are so similar. In other words, this practice allows us to respond with precision and vulnerability, thus modeling behavior patterns of relational, community building.

Thus, call-and-response leads to communities of care. For example, to speak about Africana Spirituality or Hinduism—both of which encompass a vast array of practices that are informed by different tribes, ethnic groups, languages, and cultures both native to homelands,

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<sup>30</sup> Shawn Ginwright, *The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement* (2018). <https://ginwright.medium.com>.

<sup>31</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: The Crossing Press, 2012).



but also emergent across our expansive diaspora—one’s authority can only come from lived experience. We must think of all the women who would love to have the privilege to sit down and write, the many ancestors of women who came before us and wrote, such that our lives, and the life of our sisters, nieces, daughters and future daughters may be better. To do this work, rooted and concerned with matters of the spirit, one must first be aligned and aware of their orientation. That is to say, the way in which one *relates oneself to the work*, matters tremendously.

When we speak of care, we cannot speak about caring for any other person if we have not cared properly for ourselves. The response is found, then, in care for the ones we love, which begins with a certain sense of humility. An acknowledgement that we are but one small speck, in the grand scheme of the cosmological order that we've been gifted to be a part of. But specks, atoms, attract other specks, atoms to form organisms. While such practices might push against the term expert in our context, expertise assumes linearity and subordination. Both of our traditions acknowledge collective knowledge and as much as an individual contribution, the collective is enriched by each contribution. These principles helped us hold the Unlearning Retreat and we hope they may guide you in your own journey of Unlearning.



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