

*(Sing) I've been walking with my face turned to the sun...weight on my shoulders, a bullet in my gun...well I got eyes in the back of my head- just in case I had to run- I do what I can while i can when I can for my people- while the clouds roll back and the stars fill the sky- that when I'm gonna stand up take my people with me, together we are going to a brand new home- deep with one another-can you hear freedom calling- calling me to answer gonna keep on keeping on- I can feel it in my bones*

---

Good morning! Welcome welcome everyone...Goddard Graduate Institute, faculty, staff, students, alumni, families, friends, and graduate class of 2020- deeply honored to be here... sharing with all of our beautiful being-ness, this glorious morning, for this celebration of our brilliant, radiant graduates. Writer and recovering Catholic, Annie Lamott tells us that there are really only 3 prayers 1. Thank you, thank you, thank you 2. Help me, help me, help me and 3. Wow! In the spirit of gratitude from my tradition, מודה אני 'Modah ani lifanecha ruach chai v'kayam, sh'hechezarta bi,v'nishmati, v'chemla raba emunatecha"... thank you for this day, for the breath that you restore my soul with each morning, for this life force that swirls inside each one of us, in between us, so that we can see, feel, hear and show up for each other, in this world of radical amazement. We were made for this morning. We were made to be here...(take a moment to look at the person next to you and remind them, 'you were made for this morning..."). You ARE made to be HERE- הנני

Hineni-in belonging, connection, celebration, embracing a 'revolutionary love' (R'Michael Lerner), that is the formative foundation as to how we connect with each other, heal and inhabit more of who we are...EACH DAY A NEW CREATION, in relationship with each other and the communities in which we live and love.

---

To our graduates – – you brought your whole selves, your thinking, your curiosity, your vulnerabilities, your pain and suffering-your genius and 'hot mess-ness'-your knowing - your wildness and willingness, your radiance, your love of inquiry and meaning making. On behalf of your advisors, your program director, and the entire Goddard community we are deeply honored to have accompanied, held, learned with, LOVED and supported you in your being and your work in the world.

To the families of our graduates – birth, chosen, given – your love and support have been

ever present as the anchors to make this all possible.

To the friends, fellow students and alumni. Your vibrancy, exquisite presence and friendships, welcoming gaze, AND AT TIMES WELCOMING ARMS and deep care make this a place of belonging, of being seen, valued and heard.

---

We acknowledge, the traditional ancestral and unceded territory of the Elnu Tribe of the Abenaki, the Winooski River watershed and the land on which we are learning, working and coming together here, the land that holds us during our time here on campus, at Goddard. This land known, by its original and current inhabitants, as N'Dakinna, the dawnland. The borders created by non-native governments, associated with Vermont, Canada and the US are colonial divisions. Integrated into our pedagogy at Goddard is an understanding of how we relate to, steward, and live on the land, deepening our understanding of the ongoing process of colonization and its continuous impact-as we work to disrupt it on the land, the land of our bodies and our connection with each other ... Inherent in our scholarship is the dedication to decolonizing our ways of thinking, being, relating to the land and each other, so that we can repair relationships with indigenous communities, support reconciliation efforts among all peoples, and ensure the inclusion of the Abenaki Nation . As Nikki Sanchez says in 'Decolonization is for Everybody', " The history is not our fault, but it is our responsibility. ... לא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגַמֵּר וְלֹא אֶתָּה... בְּ "Lo Alecia hamlach ligmor lo Alecia ligmor v'lo ata ben chorin l'hibatel mimena. "It is not our duty to complete the work. Not up to us to finish it. But neither are we free to desist from it." Pirkei Avot 2:21,20 (Turn to graduates) You are taking that responsibility.

---

Sing: "Early in the morning, before the sun begins to shine- gonna start moving- toward that separating line- we're wading thru wading muddy waters- you know we got a made up mind- and we don't mind if we lose any blood on the road to salvation- and we fight with the strength we have each time we rise- Chorus- *That's when were gonna stand up, take our people with us, together we are growing a brand new home- deep with one another-can you hear freedom calling- calling us to answer, gonna keep on keeping on- You can feel it in your bones"*

---

“There is something in every one of you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. It is the only true guide you will ever have. And if you cannot hear it, you will all of your life spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls. (African American Theologian Howard Thurman).

Each if you have listened to the ‘sound of the genuine’ in yourself. However, we don’t do this alone. That’s the story of a self-reliant individualism. The late Feminist Christian Theologian Nelle Morton reminds us that we do not hear ‘the genuine in ourselves’ alone, rather in connection with each other-MORTON GIFTS US THE LANGUAGING, “Hearing each other into speech”...that it is in the listening, the deep, sacred listening, of being truly heard, and listening to one another, (disrupting the story of separation, isolation, that self-reliant individualism, competition...all what is soil for the culture of individualism to thrive), that we can embrace a relational culture, an ethic of care, maternal thinking and meaningful connection, where we can hear/feel and know “the sound of the genuine”, hold each other with dignity, agency and inhabit our ongoing becoming ( אֶהְיֶה אִשָּׁר אֶהְיֶה eheyeh Asher eheyeh), as we reclaim our humanity and the cultures of connection that we each come from, those whose shoulders we stand upon...

---

Graduates, you have listened to your callings, to one another, growing, manifesting, speaking the truth, continuing with your knowing to bring your work out into the world and helping us ALL reclaim our humanity, treating each other as embodiments, vessels, of the sacred.

So by now you can sense a bit of a spiritual and theological underpinning here. That’s what happens when you ask a recently ordained rabbi to be your commencement speaker.

*One of the people who inspired me to go to rabbinical school was Abraham j Herschel who when criticized for marching in Selma Alabama 1965 with Rev Dr. Martin Luther king, as he was ‘working on Shabbat/the Sabbath. Heschel responded to those critics with the following sentence, “I am praying with my feet.”*

How we walk in the world matters-how our bodies move matters-how we position ourselves matters, Who we chose to walk with, to stand with to hold hands with, is how we pray. and literally the ways we ‘stand’ or ‘sit’ or lay down,

for our values, for justice, for love in this world. You graduates, are living this prayer. *“Prayer is meaningless unless it is subversive, unless it seeks to overthrow and to ruin the pyramids of callousness, hatred, opportunism and falsehood. The liturgical movement (and I include education because the sacred lives in each of us), must become a revolutionary movement, seeking to overthrow the forces that continue to destroy the promise, the hope, the vision” (Abraham Joshua Heschel). Graduates, you and your work here at Goddard, the way you rigorously and skillfully inhabit your scholarship and practice, make your scholarship accessible, deeply listen to yourselves, each other and those in your communities, breathe your work into your communities, ARE that prayer.*

*(Reference to Dianna Walsh, Wellesley president- “But if you do not learn to listen to people when they are whispering their prayers, you increase the risk of meeting them later when they are howling their war cries.” 2*

---

Earlier I used the word “Hineni” as a response to the hearing the ‘sound of the genuine’. It needs some context. There’s a moment in Torah, the Hebrew Bible, where God, ( Divinity, Source of Wonder, God, Goddess, Great Spirit, Source of Creation, Love) calls out to Abraham and asks Aifo atah? Where are you? It’s the BIG where are you, the ‘moadin gadlut’, the big mind, with ‘Are you ready?’ Are you prepared? and Avraham replies, Hineni. Here I am. (vs. ani po-I am here).

It is the BIG ‘Here I am’- it's not just each of us here standing on this floor, or sitting in this chair in this particular place, rather it's our ‘presencing’ here, inhabiting this moment fully, How we arrived here? Standing on the shoulders, backs, embraces, joys, blessings, grief and tears of those who came before us...who made it so that we are here now in this moment ...it’s all the stories, prayers and escapes and the journeys and passages-all that came before- our ancestors wisdom, each of our wisdom traditions, whether we know them yet or not, and the field of Creation (what R”Zalman calls the ‘God Field’) which draws us to our ‘particular’ dream, unique to us, our visions, gifts to bring to each other, to create the “More beautiful the world that our hearts know is possible” (thank you colleague/friend/teacher, Charles Eisenstein).

Hineni. Here I am. We are ready. (Turn to graduates) You each said Hineni to your callings. Each time Hineni is used-it signifies a turning point, a potentially

life-changing moment, requiring being, knowing, doing, decision, action and perhaps resolution... and sometimes not...sometimes a steady continued movement, a walking toward...with a deep knowing-some may call this faith... and sometimes there is doubt...and discomfort... and not knowing...and that's when we need connection and community even more, to remind each other of who we are, to hold each other, to tend to each other, to lift each other up, to sometimes scrape each other off the ground...like the Redwood trees, whose root systems support each other...and in the moments of not knowing- we keep moving-because as one of my teachers reminds me 'the opposite of faith isn't doubt, it's certainty.' And to re-member that we are not alone-(gesture toward re- membering our bodies), which is why breath and movement can be SO GOOD, because it softens the stickiness and stiffness created by isolation, individualism and systemic oppressions...Our fascia literally hardens. We need the softening of our bodies. We need to sing and be sung more lullabies- attending to each other and be attended to...all which helps us hear the "sound of the genuine" and "hear each other into speech, into being.

---

The word for attention in Hebrew is *T'somet ha lev*. Hebrew invokes the metaphor of *placing our heart* on something. Comes from the shresh or the root- *laseem lev*- to place our heart on something or to place something on our hearts... that is attending and being at attention. What would it look like to move through the world that way? (I turn and hold the graduates and say) "This is what it looks like. Your advisors will sing your praises when its time for that.

Now, attending to and listening to our calling is not so easy- it requires a willingness to 'not know', which may be the most unsettling of all- living in a dominant culture that values, end goal, product, outside experts and a 'formulaic certitude', (all those coaching certification programs!). While there is expansiveness and possibility in no knowing, there is also a need for courage for vulnerability and connection. We don't do this on our own. There's a raft of neuroscience research about us being wired for connection and thriving in connection.

*This week's Torah portion, is Parashat Bo, the portion of Bo. The word 'bo' means 'to come'- and it reminds us that liberation and justice don't happen when we distance ourselves from the work that we are called to do. In the story, God sends Moses to Pharaoh with a singular word that should mean "go" to*

Pharaoh, but instead conveys how Moses *must come close with others to heal the root of the oppression, injustice* , in order to free the people, for all our liberation is bound up with each other.

I am making this connection, so bear with me. In calling us to come together it means our edges meet one another- and that can feel unsafe, because it has been unsafe historically for many of us- but if we work for dignity, integrity and belonging, creating safety, we can begin to slowly feel our edges next to another...just like the fields of inquiry that you each dove into with so much intellectual, critical and social rigor- where edges of disciplines meet-and how rich those places of overlap and intersection are... its the same with us , when we connect in a learning community where a pedagogy of belonging lives and thrives and sings, we meet each other at our edges, which can be exciting but also uncomfortable, because its a place of not knowing...

The term the '**edge effect**' is an ecological concept that describes how there is a greater diversity of life in the region where the edges two adjacent ecosystems overlap, such as land/water, or forest/grassland. At the edge of two overlapping ecosystems, you can find species from both of these ecosystems, as well as unique species that aren't found in either ecosystem but are specially adapted to the conditions of the transition zone between the two edges. So, while ecosystems A and B each contains three species, the overlapping transition zone contains nine.

This increase of diversity results from ecosystems over-lapping. *Where two ecosystems overlap, the overlapping area supports species from both, plus another species that is only found in the overlapping area. It's as if 1 plus 1 equals 3 or 18 or more. Imagine a world where we overlap with each other, so the places of our overlap not only support the centers of each other, but they generate new fertile ground. Beloved graduates you are doing that work and taking it out into the world.*

---

So now what? What are the medicines from your remarkable scholarship, practices, connections that you take with you into your next movements in this magnificent world in need of deep healing, grieving, meaningful

connection and revolutionary love?

Know that 'systemic white supremacist christian hetero- patriarchy is no match for the flames of intersectional social justice and femme rage'. Know that ALL of us who have had our stories and voices silenced, our bodies violated, that we keep listening each other into speech and into our body's knowing, with exquisite loving presence for each other, to speak and feel and dance and cry and rage and soften and shake our truth in beloved witnessing.

Sit together, sing together and hold each other. With our feet, toes, fingers and all of us, dig into the earth and cry and weep and call out to all that is sacred. Sob into the arms of one another. Hold someone while they sob or hold them in their deep stillness. Feel your anger and your rage and your intention and purpose. Remember that anger is a fuel and fuel without purpose burns everything. Laugh together laugh together, laugh together. Pray together, whatever that means for you!

Rub each others feet with lavender and mint leaves and coconut oils. Borrow that shit from each other if its not in your kitchen! Get some soil, seeds, and plant it in a tea cup and grow it on your window sill! Get more coconut oil. Eat chocolate and dance-don't forget to dance and move and sway and thunder your feet, and belly and shake...and sing...definitely sing...together- that's easy co-regulation-get wild with your deepest knowing primal animal gorgeous self who knows! who remembers! who knows and remembers! who breathes and fully inhabits their body-bodies-inhabiting our bodies in collective-calling in our ancestors...

remember that institutions and systems have not necessarily been places of emancipatory practice or liberation for SO MANY of us. Know that our freedom LIVES in our connections with each other, in our bodies, our music, our languages, our voices, our sexualities, all the ways we hold each other, support each other, catch each other, allow ourselves to be held by each other. These are the places and spaces of love and liberation, of healing, of being feeling our wholeness... of inhabiting ourselves in spaces where we belong and are seen and valued.

Take time every day to remind each other who we really are, when the veil of dominator culture falls over our eyes, and clouds our BODIES KNOWING...remind each other what are gifts are, what our magics are, what we KNOW/BE/DO/ARE...all the creative skill sets we learned to

survive our individual, collective and ancestral traumas, using that fire of rage, that intense heat to burn what no longer serves-use what is still useful, let go of what has become extra weight and compost the rest into what is generative, what is life giving, what supports us in 'choosing life'.

Choose life so that you and your children and your children's children may live...and love and thrive and be loved...remind each other of what we know and who we are, knowing our ancestors have us, our bodies remember us into freedom.

Remember your tenderness and how strong you are. Remember your dreams and visions and power to create other ways; these skill, born from trauma, saved your life. Now we get to transforms and make new ways live, live into them, our ancient melodies...

remember all your lifetimes in which you ran through the night, barefoot, free, connected, joy filled and knowing, emeralds and rubies in your pockets, and fire in your hand.

## **Blessing**

On this New Moon of the month of Sh'vat the Hebrew Lunar calendar...the sap is starting to come up through the almond trees along the Jordan River...

May the Sap of revolutionary love, meaningful connection and healing justice

Rise up in your Veins  
and May the Tree of Life

Bear the Fruit of your  
Visions and Dreams

Congratulations!

כן יהי רצון

Kain y'hi ratzon

May it be so