



## Transcending Internalized Racism with the Perfection of Resolve, Generosity, and Wisdom

KAMILAH MAJIED

ONE OF THE most damaging and entrenched delusions colonizers and enslavers carved into the psyche of Black people is that there was not enough. Because the scarcity model was presented to us as truth, Black peoples were often forced to give up Ubuntu and other collective ways of being. The word Ubuntu comes from both Zulu and Xhosa languages and describes the nature and ethos of human beings as naturally collaborative and interdependent. Sharing and generosity practices that reflected Ubuntu were prohibited as enslaved and colonized people of African heritage were compelled to compete for scraps from the “master’s” table in order to survive.

One of the principal means by which we can end structural and internalized racism and take agency over our own liberation as Black people is to release the delusion of scarcity whenever it appears in our minds and in our relationships to one another.

Resolve, one of the Buddhist *pāramitās*, or perfections of mind, is always the starting place for me. In addition to cultivating resolve to embody my Bodhisattva vow, I also commit to return to that resolve when I find myself drifting from it. The bodhisattva vow is itself an expression of resolve.

When I notice desire, longing, jealousy or greed arising in me, I turn towards it, neck back and head cocked as I look at my own mind and say, “Whoa, those sentiments are not running this life, not my life.” Those feelings are all manifestations of delusions deriving from attachment, a history of deprivation, and the fear of loss.

I have found that attachment has to be worked with. Some of what I want, what I am attached to, is beautiful and necessary. I want justice. I am attached to my commitment to Black liberation. Yet I know that although I can practice

the paramita of resolve toward this commitment, I have to let go of a single and rigid idea of what it can look like and instead allow the full spectrum of possibilities to emerge.

The more I iterate my search for greed and internalized racism (and internalized sexism) within myself, especially when they masquerade as healthy competition, the better I get at catching and releasing that restrictive cognitive schema and emotional grip that greed creates. When I notice how greed feels, instead of ignoring it, I decide to be in a conscious relationship with it. When I do this, I have an opportunity to show it the door when it marches into the house of my mind. Then I can allow the paramita of generosity to fill me and guide my action.

We all digest or absorb the social poison of greed whether we are conscious of it or not. The good news is that the Dharma teaches us how to transform it. Greed is merely one of the three poisons that sneaks in and disrupts our awareness of plenty within us and around us. Greed is substantively what drove the colonizers and enslavers to build and hoard superfluous wealth through the degradation of the planet and the egregious exploitation of Black and Brown people. Human tendencies toward greed, when mixed with the desperation caused by both racism and internalized racism, co-create the desire to have more for an individual “self.” This sometimes keeps Black people from knowing and growing our understanding of our own abundance and the abundance inherent in everyone and everything around us.

The historical trauma of deprivation and the immense shame that we Black people have been made to feel about being systematically impoverished can lock us into the tight space of endless want, jealousy, and fear. In his masterpiece, *The Prophet*,<sup>1</sup> Khalil Gibran writes, “What is fear of need but need itself? Is not dread of thirst when your well is full, the thirst that is unquenchable?” When I find myself worried that “I might need this later so let me keep it to myself and not share,” I recognize *that* as fear of need and release it so as not to live in neediness. When I notice that I have enough and still want more, I realize *that* is the hell of unquenchable thirstiness and I instead decide to reside in gratitude for the water that is already in my well. And when I surface the perfection of generosity, to share what is in my well, be it money, opportunity, recognition, or emotional support, I am joyous.

When I look at myself and feel jealousy flowing through me, I notice it without self-condemnation. I practice with it and decide not to let it be the driver of any of my words or actions. When I use it this way, jealousy gives me an expansive window through which I see my own insecurities. When we are jealous, we don’t believe good is coming our way. We think we won’t get a chance like someone else did. Even for Black people who are constantly made

to watch non-Black people get opportunities and privileges that we are denied, opportunities that we in fact earned but are passed over for, jealousy is still not what will give rise to our greater self. It is resolve, generosity, and wisdom that will give rise to that.

Yet jealousy is a useful ingredient in the muck of our emotional mud. We can begin by releasing the shame we feel about the jealousy and then renounce the jealousy and all the delusions and attachments that create it. When we apply our resolve to cultivate the sediment of jealousy with loving kindness, it causes lotus flowers of insight to arise. From that very detritus of deprivation, envy and self-disparagement, we can cultivate self-love and a sense of our interior magnanimity.

For Black people, it is vital for us to remember that food, water, jobs, housing, and success are only scarce when love, generosity, and wisdom are scarce. If we cultivate these virtues, we can eliminate scarcity in our worldview *and* in our world.

This requires that we do the work of transforming our individual and collective unconscious. That is the most rewarding work because when we reiteratively resolve to develop a cognitive and emotional orientation that is grounded in generosity and wisdom, we are free.

It is possible for Black people to be free from want, even amidst the clutches of capitalism, when we cultivate that freedom within ourselves. When we release longing for “the paraphernalia of suffering” such as attachments to wealth or recognition, we are able to travel lightly through the world.<sup>2</sup> We step out of the tight space of stinginess and into the spaciousness of generosity, assured of the abundance within us and around us. Being in a barrel together need not make us crabs. If we are obsessed with what others have or what we can get next, then we have no energy left to delight in our own achievements or the achievements of others. In that state of mind, we have no peace about the blessings that are surely coming our way and in fact already manifesting in this very moment for us.

Greed pushes all that we already are, all that we already have out of our awareness. If our current blessings and our own gifts are out of our awareness, then we cannot enjoy them. Appreciation helps us discern all that we have to give and allows us to give full play to our talents in the world. Greed, jealousy, and hoarding actually limit the fulfillment of our potential and create fewer opportunities for us to thrive.

The emergence of multitudes of Black Dharmic and contemplative teachers has opened a portal for patterns of ingrained internalized racism mixed with human tendencies towards greed and jealousy to emerge within and amongst Black meditative teachers as well. This can and does create some angst, yearn-

ing, fear, and competition for opportunities, recognition, and money amongst us.

What if, instead of giving in to those feelings, each time we have an opportunity, we ask ourselves, “Who can I share this with? Who else could benefit from it? How could this benefit Black people?”

Dr. Toni Morrison said, “The function of freedom is to free somebody else.”<sup>3</sup> This means that the actualization of freedom is inherently interdependent. We can only fully experience freedom to the extent that we are constantly using it to liberate and elevate the lives of others. As Black people notice the revolutionary nature of acting out of loving-kindness towards Black people, we become empowered to defeat not only external presentations of racism but also those that reside in our own hearts. We can use the dharma to disabuse ourselves of notions that we must suppress the success of other Black people in order to win. What if we utterly and consistently defeated the voice that makes us put ourselves ahead of other Black people? What if we instead made the decision to figure out how to share every blessing?

If we can do that, we can keep expanding the communities we are able to support. If only those in our inner circle benefit from our gifts and opportunities, then we are missing an opportunity to grow. Selfishness is a reflection of psychological and emotional fragility, and we can practice generosity to transcend it and become psychologically strong.

If we are Black practitioners who teach, we can use our privilege to center the voices of differently abled, economically disadvantaged, educationally diverse, and non-cisgender Black people. We have the wonderful karma to be able to use the Dharma to win over colorism, sexism, elitism, and everything else that separates us from our true selves and from one another.

We can, by our own hands and hearts, nurture the unique expressions of the life force of the Buddha within us and around us. We all have incomparable beauty and extraordinarily unique contributions to make. Resting in the power of that truth, we can manifest the aspect of our beauty and brilliance that shines only when we surrender the limelight to others. This aspect of our beauty is only revealed when we nourish, stand *behind*, and uplift the beauty of one another.

At the Embodied Social Justice Summit, Rev. angel Kyodo williams<sup>4</sup> invited participants to “practice the magic of attribution” by naming the people whose words, thinking, or being enriches us. As I continue to practice with that teaching, I see that it really is magic because when we honor those people, especially Black people we have learned from—when we say their names as we give our talks and write our articles—the magic of Black wisdom proliferates. *Cite Black Women*, the campaign focused on recognizing the contributions to

knowledge Black women make to all fields, is one example of an effort to practice this magic.

Defeating internalized racism by practicing resolve, generosity, and wisdom advances Black liberation starting with the liberation of our own hearts. As my mentor Dr. Ikeda says, “A person filled with gratitude is also filled with joy. And a joyous spirit is the driving force for new endeavors, development, victory, and happiness.”<sup>5</sup> When I cultivate a generous, spacious life, I *feel* generative and creative. And I am incredibly productive because I am in touch with the boundless energy, possibility, and productivity of my Buddha nature. With this state of life, I joyously cultivate and support the success and thriving of my beloved Black people and of all beings.

---

**DR. KAMILAH MAJIED** is an activist, therapist, educator, and internationally engaged consultant on building inclusivity and equity using meditative practices. She is a contributing author of *Black and Buddhist: What Buddhism can teach us about Race, Resilience, Transformation and Freedom*. Author of multiple articles and podcasts on contemplative practice, she has a forthcoming book with Sounds True entitled *Joyfully Just*. After years of teaching at Howard University, Dr. Majied is now a Professor at California State University, Monterey Bay. She is Founder and CEO of Majied Contemplative Consulting, which uses meditative practices in liberation work. To learn more visit [KamilahMajied.com](http://KamilahMajied.com).

## NOTES

1. Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 22.
2. Toni Morrison and Cornel West, interview by Amy Goodman, “A Historic Discussion on the State of the World, the 50th anniversary of the Brown Decision and Condoleezza Rice,” *Democracy Now!*, May 28, 2004, [https://www.democracynow.org/2004/5/28/toni\\_morrison\\_cornel\\_west\\_a\\_historic](https://www.democracynow.org/2004/5/28/toni_morrison_cornel_west_a_historic).
- 3.. Toni Morrison, Commencement Speech, Barnard College, 1979.
4. Rev. angel Kyodo williams, Speech at the Embodied Social Justice Summit, 2021.
5. Daisaku Ikeda, *The New Human Revolution: Volume 26* (Santa Monica, CA: World Tribune Press, 2015), 335.