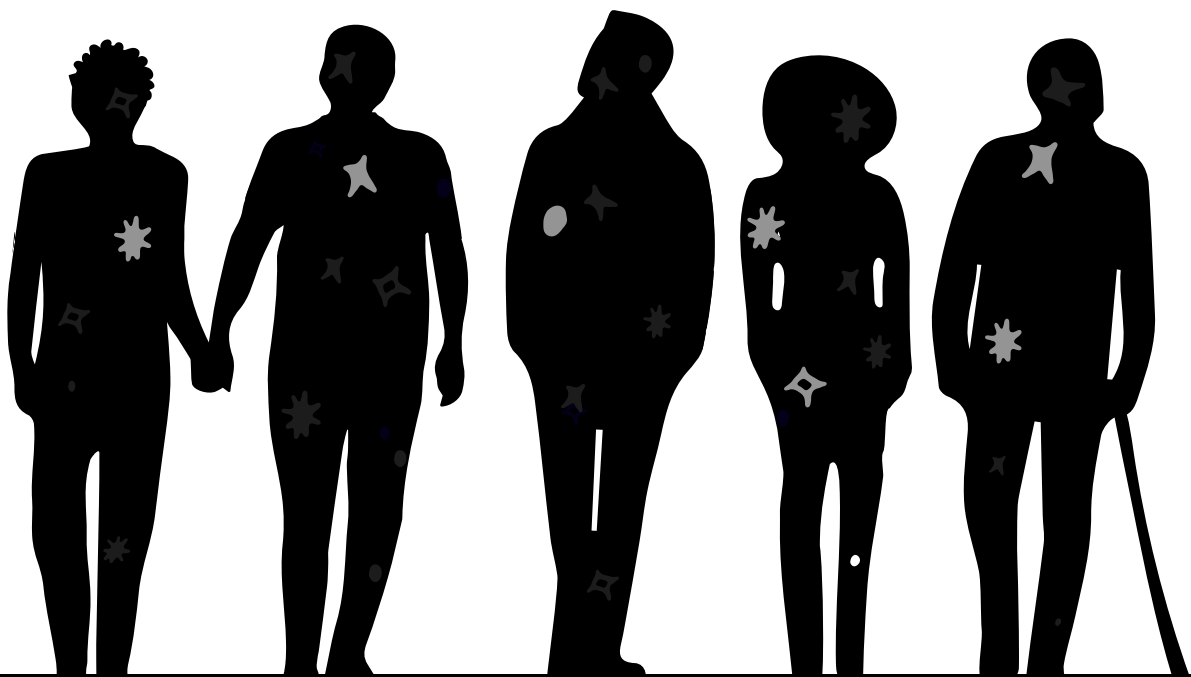


# THE COSMIC WE

Mysticism, Social Action, and the Path of the Soul  
with Dr. Liza J. Rankow

hosted by:  
Dr. Barbara Holmes and Dr. Donald Bryant



from the CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

- Liza J. Rankow: The whole dynamic, the whole paradigm of oppositional dualism needs to be transformed for us to survive. And in a way that's the gift of these times. This is not optional. We are either going to transform or we're going to perish. It's pretty clear. Do we choose the path of fracture, of division, of power over, of extraction, which is the path that is rapidly leading to our demise? Or do we choose the other path? The path of reverence, of kinship, of belonging to the wholeness of life.
- Barbara Holmes: This podcast explores the mystery of relatedness as an organizing principle of the universe and of our lives.
- Donnie Bryant: We are trying to catch a glimpse of connections beyond color, continent, country, or kinship through science, mysticism, spirituality, and the creative arts. I'm Donnie Bryant.
- Barbara Holmes: I'm Barbara Holmes. And this is The Cosmic We.
- Donnie Bryant: Dr. Liza J. Rankow is an interfaith minister, educator, activist, and writer. Her life work centers the deep healing that is essential to personal and social transformation. Liza is the founder and former executive director of OneLife Institute, an organization that served for 17 years to support the well-being of Frontline Change Makers. Liza has been a spiritual counselor and teacher for more than three decades. She works with individual clients, facilitates healing retreats, and offers classes and workshops in a variety of community and academic settings. Her topics include mysticism and social change, sustaining the soul of activism, deepening the well, and several different courses on the life and work of Dr. Howard Thurman. She's the producer and co-editor of the six-CD audio collection, my favorite, The Living Wisdom of Howard Thurman. Liza holds a PhD in Religion and Social Transformation from Union Institute & University, bachelor's and master's degrees in health sciences from Duke University School of Medicine, and a BA in human development from Hampshire College. Dr. Liza Rankow, welcome to The Cosmic We.
- Liza J. Rankow: Thank you so much. It's really a joy to be with you.
- Barbara Holmes: We're so happy to have you, Liza. I met Liza, and we're going to go with first names. We're all doctors, but we've known other for decades, so we're going with first names for this interview. I met Liza in the early two thousands when I visited Howard Thurman's Church. I was in the process of writing Joy Unspeakable, and that experience was pivotal for me. I wrote about it in my book, Joy Unspeakable, and we have been friends ever since. Traversing academia, spiritual direction, you name it, we've walked together. You know what, Liza, even though I've known you forever, I'm not familiar with your spiritual roots. I mean, I'm a church girl, grew up in the church, Donnie's a church guy. How did you find your spiritual calling?
- Liza J. Rankow: I came up in a very side kitchen door kind of way, I guess. My parents were what in the fifties was called a mixed marriage between a Jew and a gentile. And by the time I came along, they weren't really practicing much of anything. When I was maybe late elementary school age, they began reading about psychic phenomenon and eastern religions with this curiosity more for the woo-woo, I think, in terms of mediumship

and reincarnation. And so I was raised in a climate of seeking rather than one of any particular doctrinal path or any organized body of worship. So, it kind of boggles my mind to think about it now, but the summer I was nine, I read Paramahansa Yogananda's Autobiography of a Yogi.

Barbara Holmes: Oh, my goodness.

Liza J. Rankow: And then the next year when I was in fifth grade, I got up in the morning before school and read the gospels because I was as interested in Jesus as I was in Yogananda. Always though I have felt the presence of spirit in nature. And in a way my journey, and as you know, Barbara, I've studied world religions even long before I got to the doctorate program. But I've always been interested in different iterations of the sacred, different vocabulary, different cultural contexts. And as Dr. Thurman talks about your sniffer that can sense something within wherever it may be hiding. My sniffer was on the lookout for that something, right? I was in search of sniffing out the presence of the divine in all the places it expresses. And sometimes it expresses in the clothing of religion and theology and worship in a church or a mosque or a temple. And sometimes it expresses in the garden tending to the earth. So, the journey has been, I would say, delicious, right? It's a love affair with the divine in all of its many expressions.

Barbara Holmes: You know that probably is what leads you to interfaith ministry because a lot of people don't really know what that means. I've always been interfaith because I'm greedy. I know there is no religion that can hold all of God can. And so I've been, like you seeking, everywhere I could find a different aspect, a different expression of spirit. And so interfaith ministry gives you that ability. Tell us a little bit about why you are ordained to interfaith and what that really means.

Liza J. Rankow: Yeah. And in a way, I'm not what most people being by interfaith minister, I'm kind of borrowing the term as a signifier to point to something beyond any one particular faith. Generally, when people are ordained as an interfaith minister, they've gone through a seminary curriculum that is very structured towards studying different religions and the rituals and the texts of those religions. And I've done that, but that wasn't my destination. There are other people who talk about interspiritual or even intermystical. And I feel like in some ways, yes, but I don't use those terms because most people don't know what they mean. But also when you get to the place of the mystic, the particularities of the clothing are less relevant than the essence within. So, I delight in all the particularities. I love all the ways that the divine shows up and all the ways people express their relationship and experience their relationship with the divine. Interfaith is just, it's a finger pointing to the moon rather than the moon.

Donnie Bryant: Right. Right. Pointing. Liza, for someone to have such a curiosity at such a very, very early age, could you help give definition to the term mysticism for those who are unfamiliar with the term? I think there are still so many people who are curious and so many people who are seekers and sniffers who may not fully understand the terminology that oftentimes we use. So, for someone who actually has been experiencing this at such an early age, could you give us your definition of what mysticism would be?

Liza J. Rankow: Yeah, and of course the academician in me wants to acknowledge that there are many definitions of how people understand mysticism. The one that I use, and this is in some ways leaning into our friend, Dr. Howard Thurman, but many others as well. I think the simplest is probably the most helpful. Mysticism is a direct experience with the divine, right? Not mediated through any intercessor, but a direct experience of the divine. And I would say the divine within all of life. Because as we come into our oneness, our union, our communion, depending on how you parse that out, when you go into the divine, as Thurman says, “You come up inside of everybody else,” right? So, one with the one, we’re one with the all. Yeah.

Donnie Bryant: Wow, wow. I love that ‘cause that’s the union within the communion. When you go further in yourself, you become one with the community, one with everyone else.

Liza J. Rankow: We tap into it, right?

Donnie Bryant: We tap into it.

Liza J. Rankow: ‘Cause I would say we’re already one all the time, we just most often don’t remember that.

Donnie Bryant: Wow, beautiful.

Liza J. Rankow: And let me also say it’s a universal one. So, that includes being one with all the elements of nature, one with the ancestors, one with the yet to be born generations, one with the people that we love and one with the people we detest, which is really hard.

Barbara Holmes: Oh, yes.

Liza J. Rankow: So, people think mysticism is some airy-fairy kind of thing, but there’s a real rigorous ethical demand, I think, within the fact of that oneness. How do we put legs on that in our ordinary everyday lives and in the life of the world?

Barbara Holmes: Liza, since direct experience with the divine in all of its manifestations is such an important part of, and a relationship with a sacred, how is it that we’re so afraid to talk about it? Why is it that, I mean, I was so delighted when I finally encountered Howard Thurman’s work because that is not taught normally in colleges, so I didn’t encounter him until graduate school. So, what I’m trying to figure out is why don’t we want to talk about these mystical encounters so that the community can be less afraid of what they don’t know.

Liza J. Rankow: You know, Sister Barbara, I think there are different levels to that. One is political, that mystics disrupt the power structure of the institutional church.

Barbara Holmes: That’s right. Nobody wants them around.

Liza J. Rankow: They were not popular people and very often they were also bringing a

prophetic message, which wasn't very popular either with the power structure. I think there's also another layer of the why, is that there's such misconception about what mysticism is. When I teach mysticism in seminary or mysticism and social change, on the first day, I just have the students brainstorm a list. What are all the things you've ever heard about what mysticism or mystics is, whether you believe it or not. And it's this ridiculous list that is very internally contradictory as well. But most often mystics are some other people out there, some rare sanctified few who have some kind of rapturous, otherworldly experience with God that's not available to us, poor worms, right?

And in fact, if you ask folks, most at some time in their life, often in childhood, have experienced a sense of opening to something larger. We often don't recognize what that something is. If we take mysticism out of the binary, it either is or it isn't, it's this thing or it's not there, and put it into a spectrum, and instead of talking about who is or isn't qualified as a mystic to talk about the mystic experience or even the mystic consciousness, both of which are available to all, right? So, it may be just you smell a flower and your heart opens and you feel a oneness with the flower and with the sun and the air and the larger life. I would put that on the continuum of a mystic experience. Now, did I lose all sense of the world around me and wake up three days later not knowing where I'd be? No, that's another end of a continuum, right?

Barbara Holmes: Sure. I love that because in your explanation, you are encompassing mystery, things that you can't say. I mean, I'm asking you questions that I don't think there are really words for. And so I mean your responses are really warming my heart because it's coming out of a deep place. It's coming out of experience, not out of books. It's coming out of your direct contact with the sacred and not something you learned doctrinally.

Donnie Bryant: And thank God for pointers like you, Liza, because we need people to help us to see what we don't see. And so teaching us that practice of seeing, pointing out that that's a mystical experience, pointing out the ability to appreciate the beautiful colors of the changing that fall, or to be able to experience the heat that breaks through the blinds when you're waking up in the morning into experience that as a particular oneness with the divine, we need individuals like you to point that out. One of the things that I've been really seeing in some of your writings and blogs, this correlation between mysticism and social action. And I would like you to help us to see that connection because there's a nuance there that I think is really important for us not to just get caught up in just that experience, in just that moment, but to understand that there's a broader purpose in that moment. So, could you elaborate a little bit more on that, Liza?

Liza J. Rankow: Absolutely. And I began to walk in that territory earlier when I said there's an ethical demand that I feel comes with the experience of oneness. If all are one, then there is no other. There is no them versus an us. Now, that doesn't deny our beautiful particularities and our individual expressions, but it does mean that we have to somehow work out inside ourselves and among ourselves. How do we give life to what it would mean for us to be one? Who are you going

to bomb if we're all one? How can you decimate the earth if the earth is part of the oneness? In fact is the mother in of our physical and in some ways our spiritual lives. So, some of my work as certainly as Barbara knows, but I'm not sure if you might also, Donnie, is this strange and wonderful cohort of humans that I call mystic activists.

And this is another place where I've just delighted in trying to find the folk who are giving life this intersection. They may or may not call themselves a mystic, but they in some way are giving life to a spirituality of oneness. And how are they living into the intersection of a spirituality of oneness and an internal urging to work towards a world in the outer that reflects that experience of oneness on the inner. And seeking out people in different faiths, in different cultures, in different historical moments, in different movement work, different causes for which they've committed themselves, and to look at what that embodiment looks like in each of them. And then to ask and what does that embodiment look like in me or in you or in Dr. B, right? How do we bring our unique gifts and our unique struggles as an offering to this intersection and how does that change then the way we engage in our work for social transformation for justice?

Barbara Holmes: But are we doing this right, Liza? Because the fight for justice and liberation is killing us. The reason that you're doing the soul care work that you do with activists is because the work is killing them. What about this struggle for justice is taking us emotionally down as a community and as individuals so that we burn out. What is that about? Is there a better way to do this?

Liza J. Rankow: Mm-hmm. And here again is where I think mysticism offers a resource for the work of social justice. We burn out because we run dry, we burn out because we're taking in so much trauma, so much rage, so much pain, so much frustration. And where does it go? Unless we're intentional about how we work with it. So, mysticism taps us into something larger that can both guide and sustain our work in the world. You alluded to what I call soul care as distinct from self-care, right? And some people mean by self-care, what I am pointing towards with soul care, but most often self-care is descriptive of ways to reduce the stress, to ease the pain in the moment, whether it's pampering or rest or just taking some zone out time. And those things are important, but they're not going to sustain us through the magnitude of what we face.

So, soul care is the term that I offered and that we came up with that OneLife Institute in our sustaining the soul of activism work. What are the practices that connect us to that larger thing, right? And for some folks, the larger thing is the god of their church or their masjid, of the temple. For some it's the higher power of the 12-step program. For some, it is nature. For some it is ancestors and cultural traditions. For some it's the community, it's the comrades. But we must be connected to something larger that can give us life and renewal in order to be sustainable through the struggle. And there are many folks that Barbara, you and I both know, and I'm sure Donna you some as well, who were actually leaders of that during the Southern Freedom Movement, all the starting off the marches in the church with song and with prayer as a way to nourish the spirit, connecting to the divine and connecting to the oneness among the people.

And that's what nourished their going forth. There's examples in the contemporary activist realm. The question is what is it that nourishes you? Each of us is uniquely wired. There's some things that might be supportive for all of us, and there are some things that are really specific to each individual. And to practice those, to fold those into your life on a daily basis, don't wait and just do first aid after you're already burnt out, although please do first aid if you're burnt out. But to do it as a consistent practice of communion with the larger thing, whatever the larger thing is for you, and let that animate our work in the world, including our activism.

Barbara Holmes: Liza, do you think we come to the world with a predetermined purpose? A lot of our audience members, a lot of folks we talk to all the time are seeking their purpose, wondering if they're wasting your time with this or that and why they came here. African traditions always talked about the child, the community recognizing who the child was and what the child's purpose was. Because we don't have the kind of a communal existence anymore. We don't have people saying, "Oh, we know who you are. We know who you were. We knew your ancestors. This is who you are." Since we don't have that, how do we find purpose if we don't come with it predetermined.

Liza J. Rankow: I do believe that we come with purpose, and purpose is a direction of the soul. It's not your career choice. It's not your short-term goals and objectives. Ideally those things would be in alignment with your soul's purpose. Our soul's purpose is not something we're ever going to achieve and check off our list, "Okay, that's done. Now, what?" It is something larger than we are that we give ourselves to and we seek to live in the direction of. Yeah, and it demands more us than we knew we had, which doesn't necessarily mean it's arduous. Sometimes it may be arduous, but sometimes it's the subtlest things that we wouldn't even count, like just patiently listening to someone who needs to get something off of their heart and be met with compassion.

We don't know what the pivot moment is for people. I know each of us, if we reflect back on our lives, we can identify perhaps pivot moments when somebody touched us in a way that shifted our trajectory. And sometimes it was somebody we only met once, or whose words we read in a book, or the stranger, the checkout person on line at the supermarket when we were having a hard day who smiled at us. Sometimes those things are the greatest gift. Now, those aren't career paths, but they're soul paths. What is the kind of person that we are called to be? And then out of the, what are the soul qualities that are descriptive of my truest nature?

And then what is the intention of those qualities? Because those qualities have intelligence. So, if one of your soul qualities is that you're creative, how does that creativity seek to express itself through the uniqueness of all the composite of who you are? For some it may be the creation of music that lifts the hearts. For others, it may be a creative solution to a very concrete problem for the community. There are no narrow confines. There is no hierarchy of one purpose is somehow more grand and special than another. It is living in integrity with that which is deepest in us and offering that as a gift to the world in the moment we find ourselves. We're at a very interesting moment in the history of the world and of humanity. And so my bias is anybody who's alive now is not here by accident, but we each have something to contribute.

Donnie Bryant: Liza, as you were talking about who we are today, and we are experiencing a lot of suffering today. And so what came to mind, and the image and the word, picture that I kept coming up as you were talking about purpose was suffering. And you talk a little bit about that in the audio version of Dr. Howard Thurman's work, *The Living Wisdom of Howard Thurman*. I think it was chapter five in my audible book, but I'm not sure whether it is in the CD. But chapter five, *Coping with Suffering*, you do a reading, at least to me it was a reading of *Coping with Suffering*. Could you share a little bit about suffering and how suffering plays a role in finding meaning and purpose?

Liza J. Rankow: I have experience with personal suffering, and I'm pretty good at ministering to that. The magnitude of collective suffering that we're facing in the world today stretches my ability to come up with a good answer. I do know from my own experience and from working with others and from studying folks way wiser than I am, that the experience of suffering can call forth something greater from us, deeper from us than we ever would have connected with or expressed without the urgency of that suffering. This is not to romanticize suffering or somehow make it seem like this is a great thing, let's all go do it. Life is going to contain suffering.

There are some theologies I have heard that look at suffering as somehow God's punishment. I don't believe that. I do not believe that. Suffering is part of human experience, which kind of makes you wonder if maybe one of the reasons our souls choose incarnation is to have the experience of suffering in order to access parts of ourselves that need to be expressed and to grow. My teacher in Ghana who I've been studying with for, gosh, almost 25 years now, Brother Ishmael Tete, he talks about suffering as the prism that the light comes through and then it breaks it into all of its many colors that suffering comes through us and allows us to express many different gifts and capacities that we would not otherwise have. I've lost track of your original question.

Barbara Holmes: No, but I think you're touching on it fully because basically our wounds include the medicine for the healing of those wounds. Because I mean, Jesus tells you, "In this life you're going to have trouble. You have a choice. You can wallow in it. You can remain in the valley, or you can turn your wounds into wisdom by deeply connecting to something greater than yourself and listening." I recently had that experience because I've had no health problems in my life ever. I sympathize with those who do, I counsel with those who do, but didn't have any of my own. The minute I wrote *Crisis Contemplation*, the world fell in. And I went through the last two years unbelievable kinds of distortions of health and issues and diagnoses, and it has been the best lesson I could have learned. It taught me more than anything I ever learned in any college I went to.

It taught me that I wasn't listening to what I was telling other people to do. And I was in the hospital and I was crying and my sister said to me, "Have you read the *CAC Meditation* today?" And I said, "No, what's wrong with you? We're having a crisis here." And she said, "It's yours and it's on letting go." And I said, "So?" She said, "Read it." And I thought, "Oh, no." So, now I have to listen to what I offered as a self to myself, and it was the only message I needed during those two years. Let go. Stop



trying to control it. Stop trying to beat it, win. Stop. Let go. And so I really, and your relationship with the African healer, you have other relationships with healers. How do you find these mentors in the faith.

Liza J. Rankow: Spirit does that. I wasn't looking for anybody. I really wasn't. I was not on the hunt at all life. And perhaps we could say it's our soul's purpose that leads us where we need to be. That led you and I to one another, Barbara. I want to say one thing to what you shared, because I resonate so deeply with what you shared, and I expect y'all have noticed how sneaky spirit can be like this, but it will put in our mouth or in our writing for somebody else what we need to hear. I sort of think God and them are like, "Look, we are trying to get a message through. Maybe if you hear it coming out of your own voice, you'll hear it." That's like, "Can you hear me now?" And sometimes it takes sitting us down to where we literally cannot do anything but be there. And then it's, "Can you hear me now?" Illness and suffering has been perhaps my greatest spiritual teacher, and I've had some really good spiritual teachers, but I would not be who I am without that teacher.

Donnie Bryant: Surrendered. That's what I heard when you say let it go, I just heard the word surrender. And yeah. I think it's so important. I would not want this time with you, Liza, to go without talking about your work as a producer and co-editor of *The Living Wisdom of Howard Thurman*. I mean, clearly he's had a profound influence on you, and Dr. B mentioned earlier the influence on her and her work. Could you share a little bit more about just that experience putting that work together for those who haven't listened to it? To me, it's actually my, I've listened to it at least three times. To hear the wisdom from the mouth of Dr. Thurman, it is breathtaking, life-changing. It helps you to process and understand. And so I thank you for your leadership in that work. And I just would love to hear from behind the scenes and what stories do you have to tell and what nuggets could you give us? Because we want more, we want more. So, give us more.

Liza J. Rankow: So, many stories, Donnie. Dr. Thurman is another one of those teachers that I wasn't looking for, and who has had perhaps the most central influence on my life and on the way that I embody what I experienced as my call to serve. I first heard, read from a pulpit some of his meditations. I was living in North Carolina and I got the Sunday service tapes from Michael Beckwith's church in Los Angeles, Agape. And every now and again, it'd be, "This morning's reading is from Dr. Howard Thurman." And I always liked them, but I didn't know anything about him.

Donnie Bryant: You said tapes, right? You said cassette tapes.

Liza J. Rankow: Cassette tapes. Yeah. For those that don't know, there was this thing.

Donnie Bryant: Right.

Liza J. Rankow: Yes. It was the cassette tapes. And I was, a friend of mine was speaking at Morehouse. This was in the mid nineties. And I went to go with her and she was doing the meet and greet afterwards, and I started just walking in the hallways. And for those that have been to Morehouse College and to the chapel there, the hallways are lined with

portraits and I am just casually looking at the faces. And then I'm standing in front of the portrait of Dr. Howard Thurman, his ashes are interred there at the chapel. I began to be curious. I thought, "Oh, that's the guy."

That's the guy from the, yeah. So, I picked up some of his books and I started to read. And then I got into a doctoral program that I had no intention of being anything about. Well, I can't do anything without spirituality, but that was not the focus. And in the course of my studies, things rearranged themselves as often happens to where spirituality, the intersection of spirituality and social transformation was really the heart of it. And Dr. Thurman spoke directly to that and from that, that he offered both an articulation and a lived expression of that intersection and specifically to mysticism and social change, which I had not heard anybody else talk about that. But that was the thing that I was sniffing for.

So, I dove in, and I started reading everything I could because I was in a doctoral program. I made it into a course, an independent study course. And Dr. Dorsey Blake, who has been on your podcast, who is the pastor at Thurman's Church, Fellowship Church in San Francisco, was my advisor. I joined Fellowship Church. At that time, many of the original members were still alive, and they started giving me cassette tapes of Dr. Thurman. People at another church that I was part of, heard that I was interested in Thurman and said, "I found this shoe box on my mama's top shelf in the closet. Her brother knew Dr. Thurman, and she's got these tapes and we're not using them for anything."

So, people started giving me cassette tapes and I'm like, "Okay, something's going on here." So, for my evidence of learning for this self-designed voluminous life course on Dr. Thurman, I started teaching in the community. This was back right about when I met you, Barbara. Back in 2002 was my first class. And it became a love affair that was central to my life, so to speak to the CD set or the audio collection for people that don't have hard goods, his got a huge volume of tapes. He was a pioneer in using media for ministry, which in his day was reel-to-reel tapes and radio broadcasts. So, there's a huge, huge library of physical tapes that were at risk of degeneration. And it is like, we need to digitize this. Now, I had raised it at the church and it didn't go anywhere, but when I became friends with Dr. Vincent Harding, who is in some ways the adopted son of Dr. Thurman, I raised it with him and he called Olive Thurman Wong, Dr. Thurman's daughter.

She said, "Well, if you are going to be part of it, then I give my full endorsement. But I also want Luther Smith," one of the preeminent Thurman scholars, "I also want Luther Smith to be part of it." So, the four of us, Dr. Harding, Dr. Smith, Sister Olive, and myself became the midwives of this work. And most of the hands-on editing, I did in some kind of rigged up cassette tape to computer ambient recording to make a digital file. And in the wee hours, I would just, it's quite a responsibility to edit the words of a master like Dr. Thurman. And so I'd say, "Doc, you need to show me where to put these edits. Show me what you want here." And I really felt him guiding the process. Olive called me out of the blue one day. She said, "I found a box of tapes. I don't know what to do with them. I'm sending them to you."

And so it became this process of partnering really with Dr. Thurman in the ancestral realm to pull the pearls. Dr. Harding, Dr. Smith, and I met at Haley farm one weekend to do a marathon listening session. We each brought the recordings that we felt should be in it, and we cross-listened. And we mapped out, “Okay, we can divide it. Here’s these six categories for the six CDs and what needs to go in each one.” We had a big chart paper that we were doing this grand project. And the whole thing, Donnie, was just so guided by mystery in the beautiful way that my soul looks back and wonder, really. It was a true gift. And at that time, that was the only way to get... The Howard Thurman Trust used to distribute the tapes. And they no longer did. And none of the corpus had been digitized. Oh, I’ve got another wonderful story for you. At the risk of really bending all your ears.

Many of these tapes were recorded when Thurman was at Boston University. And he would go into the closet in his office and run the microphone cord under the door, ‘cause that was the closest they could get to a soundproof studio. And one of his students was the engineer sitting in the office doing the tape. That student’s name was Bob Voght, V-O-G-H-T. A gazillion years later, 50 years later, we’re doing this project. Sister Olive says, “I only want Bob to do the digitizing.” Bob is still alive. Bob Voght, who made the original recordings in the fifties when Thurman was at Boston, got special dispensation from the woman in charge of the archive, ‘cause they don’t let those tapes out of their site.

They gave Bob a box of the tapes we requested. He took them back to his studio. And he could correct the acoustic tone because he knew what Thurman’s voice should sound like. So, tapes over time, they get stretched or they get loose, and so the tone shifts. So, because he was there, he could correct the tone to accurately reflect Thurman’s voice at that time, and the speed and the pace, all the things. So, there was just so much absolute magic that I can only credit Dr. Thurman was the guiding principle.

- Barbara Holmes: Liza, I’m not sure you know this about Donnie, but Donnie runs a church, started a church. It’s a founding pastor of a church based on that Thurmanesque interfaith ministry. Do you have any words of wisdom? That’s hard work.
- Donnie Bryant: Especially today.
- Barbara Holmes: Do you have any words of wisdom from what you learned from Thurman’s Church for congregations attempting to do that work?
- Liza J. Rankow: Brother Donnie, I have such deep respect for your ministry. I don’t think you need me to tell you how to do it. I really don’t. Tap into Dr. Thurman’s spirit and ask him. Your heart is right. I’ve listened to every episode of y’all’s podcasts, so I feel like I know you.
- Donnie Bryant: Well, I appreciate, I mean, there’s one thing that you do offer, and I truly appreciate it, is your sensitivity to spirit. And we would all benefit from mirroring and becoming more aware to that level of sensitivity and even practicing that sensitivity within our own lives, just as humans, just as basic people. And so I do appreciate that, and just listening to how you engage the world and engage life, engage suffering, and engage

your activism and your work. You don't do it just based on an intellectual approach or kind of a, "This is what I must do."

But you truly listen. You are truly in tune. And that you model what Dr. Thurman has taught us, you model what is ultimately true for all people. And I think Dr. Thurman once said, the transcendent that you seek is within you. And that voice, when you listen to that voice, that voice that you hear is at the same time your voice, but also the voice of God and that oneness. And so thank you for modeling that for us. I do appreciate that. It's something that I take to heart as I have listened to you today and listened to and witnessed your work, particularly through the work of The Living Wisdom of Howard Thurman.

Barbara Holmes: I have great confidence in the project that Dr. Donnie has started. He was my pastor in Minnesota, one of them, and he's doing a wonderful job in Detroit. So, excited to see another iteration of what Thurman tried to do in San Francisco because it isn't the easiest to put people of different faiths together, to come together, to acknowledge their oneness.

Liza J. Rankow: And Thurman didn't do it just in the manner of like, "Let's all come together and get happy and get in the spirit together." It was what does the commitment, because the church has a commitment that speaks to its principles, demand of us. And so in the early days, the church members were going out. It was actually, some of the first organizing meetings were with folks from Core. So, they have had that, that movement spirit has been part of it from the beginning. And at a time when, this was during the forties, right? The height of Jim Crow World War II, to have Black folks and white folks and Japanese folks and Mexican folks and folks from everywhere be welcome in shared worship. Because Thurman's conviction was that as we come together across the lines of what society has erected to separate us and have consistent shared experiences of the spirit, of the oneness, of the larger life that lives us all, that it will ultimately break down the barriers and allow us to express that oneness in our relationships and in our world.

Barbara Holmes: Liza, you have a new book coming out. It's called-

Liza J. Rankow: Prayerfully so.

Barbara Holmes: Healing Self, Healing World: Soul Medicine for Apocalyptic Times.

Liza J. Rankow: Apocalyptic Times.

Barbara Holmes: Apocalyptic Times. Couldn't get that word out.

Liza J. Rankow: I know.

Barbara Holmes: So, how do we do it? How do we hospice the dying world while midwifing the new one?

Liza J. Rankow: Again, it's not something that I can say, "Well, here's the three steps. Sign up for my webinar and I'll teach you how to do it." It's not.

Barbara Holmes: Come on, Liza, you can give us.

Liza J. Rankow: It is really everything we've been talking about today. How do we discern and live into our soul's purpose? And as I said earlier, if you are alive on the planet right now, this is not an accidental time. This is not a casual time in the life of the world. What are we called to? And especially right now when there is such deep fracture, such deep fracture. And when the activist in me is like, "Oh, F all y'all, because this is not... How dare you? I am not trying to be one, but there's a whole lot of people that I'm really not trying to be one with right about now."

And yet the demand of my spiritual conviction means that I have to wrestle with that and find what is the, I call it spiritual akito. How do we take this energy that's coming at us in an attack and redirect it in a transformational way? You don't meet it head on opposition to opposition and try to duke it out. That's the paradigm that got us here. So, even if you shift who's on top, as long as there's on top and on bottom, you're going to keep doing the rerun of oppressor and oppression. You might change who's playing which role, but the whole dynamic, the whole paradigm of oppositional dualism needs to be transformed for us to survive, right? And in a way, that's the gift of these times. This is not optional. We're either going to transform or we're going to perish. It's pretty clear. I look to the wisdom of cultures who have lived through apocalypse. Those whose cultural memory extends back hundreds of thousands of years, and whose prophecies speak to the times that we're in.

And the messages of those prophecies is remarkably consistent across cultures, continents. It comes down to what we've been talking about, right? The whole dynamic, the whole paradigm of oppositional dualism needs to be transformed for us to survive. And in a way that's the gift of these times. This is not optional. We are either going to transform or we're going to perish. It's pretty clear. Do we choose the path of fracture, of division, of power over, of extraction, which is the path that is rapidly leading to our demise? Or do we choose the other path? The path of reverence, of kinship, of belonging to the wholeness of life?

That to me, when you say, "How do we get through this?" That's the way. Can we? Will we? I don't know. I don't know. The cultures who are our elders tell us that we have been here before, that we have come to the brink and chosen the wrong path, and led to essentially a reset. And that there were those who remained faithful to the oneness, to the wholeness, who then survived and essentially began again. We are at that pivot point. I don't know which way we're going to go, but what I do believe is that we must lean with everything we have toward the transformation, toward oneness, toward wholeness. Right? And that now is the time.

Barbara Holmes: Thank you so much, Dr. Liza, for this conversation. Would you mind leading our listeners through a short practice to close us out? If you'd prefer a reading, whatever you'd like to just close us out.

Liza J. Rankow: I do think Dr. Thurman's piece, *The Growing Edge*, speaks to where we are. And this is the epigraph for my book. Thurman writes, "Look well to the growing edge. All around us worlds are dying, and new worlds are being born. All around us life

is dying, and life is being born. The fruit ripens on the tree, the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth. Against a time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit, such is the growing edge. It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung, the one more thing to try when all else has failed. The upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavor. This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and people have lost their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash. The birth of the child, life's most dramatic answer to death. This is the growing edge incarnate. Look well to the growing edge." So, we are in growing edge times.

Donnie Bryant: Thank you, Liza, for that reading, and thank you to our listeners for being with us today. Until next time. Bye-bye.