

Conjuring Up Courage #116

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Lola Wright

Shohreh Davoodi: You are listening to episode #116 of Conjuring Up Courage. Today's guest is Lola Wright. She's a coach, an ordained minister with a gift for weaving together the mystical and material, and a speaker who has graced stages all over the world. Lola and I chatted about the path to figuring out who you are, the range of what it means to love, the connection between personal transformation and collective liberation, and more.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/116. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/116.

[Music plays]

This is Conjuring Up Courage, and I'm your host, Shohreh Davoodi. As a self-trust coach, I help people come home to themselves so they can be more of who they are and less haunted by who they think they're supposed to be.

I created this podcast to celebrate what's possible when you commit to being brave. You'll hear from diverse guests who are refusing to let fear and self-doubt stop them from building fulfilling lives and creating a better world for everyone. I'll also teach you my favorite tools, strategies, and mindset shifts so you can do the same.

Consider this your invitation to stop living according to "shoulds" and to step into your motherfucking magic instead. Stay open, get curious, and let's grow together.

[Music fades]

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Hi Lola! Welcome to the show. How are you doing today?

Lola Wright: I'm well, Shohreh, thanks for having me. So happy to be here.

Shohreh: Of course. I'm excited that we finally get to talk and I get to share you with all of my listeners. Your life has taken you to many interesting places as far as I can gather, and I would love for you to share a little bit about you and what has led you to where you are now.

Lola: Yeah. Thank you, it has. It's been many twists and turns. I was raised in the northern suburbs of Chicago for the first 13 years of my life. And I was raised in a very densely affluent, white community called the North Shore of Chicago. And a few things happened. So I'm 43, and in 1986 my uncle was dying of AIDS in L.A. and we spent a lot of time bedside with him. And AIDS in the '80s was a very different experience than what we're familiar with in 2021.

Shohreh: Right.

Lola: And so just to be witness to his experience as a gay man, as a gay man with lesions all over his body, having been one of nine children in a very Catholic family, you know, I was very clear about some of the dynamics that were unfolding in my family.

My mom had left my dad for a woman a few years later in 1992, and that really sort of blew up my family unit. I was going to Catholic school at the time, and there are just a whole bunch of unspoken social agreements that started to come into the foreground. Like, you are no longer welcome at the country club we grew up going to. There's not

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really a place for you in this church anymore. [Laughs lightly] You know, like all of these things that I was watching my family navigate.

And my dad then moved from the suburbs of Chicago into the city, and I moved with my dad. And got sort of deeply entrenched in the Chicago hip hop scene in the early '90s. It was a place that I found a lot of freedom, a lot of acceptance, a lot of celebration. Who I was, as I was, was not inherently problematic. And by that I mean, like, an outspoken woman, one that is not physically petite. There was a way that I always experienced being shamed as a young person in this highly affluent white culture that I grew up in. I just literally did not fit in that world.

And so my dad's move to the city was such a gift to me, and the Chicago hip hop community was just a *huge* salve to my soul. And at that time in the lineage of hip hop, there was a very strong Black-Muslim influence in the music and there was a strong social critique going on. So I became intimately familiar with Black liberation texts and at 16 read a book called *Asatta*, the autobiography of Asatta Shakur. And it gave a narrative of United States history that it was very clear had been eliminated from my schooling [Shohreh laughs lightly]. And it really, like, broke open my entire mind.

My mom had been a major in African-American History in college, and like, my grandparents were big social justice advocates even within the Catholic Church. So I was by no means living under a rock, but there was an explicitness to the work that I was reading at that point in time. And so I developed a pretty strong critique of the Christian church, and, like, I could go on and on and on [light laughter].

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Um, a few years later, yeah, I got pregnant at eighteen and went from, like, a very affluent family system where I went to boarding school for high school to standing in a welfare line in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood. And so just really pretty vast experiences in a very dense period of time.

So I now have four kids that range from young adults to little kids, and a lot of that has really informed how my work has come to life in the world.

Shohreh:

Phew, that is so many different and very intriguing pieces that all came together to kind of lead you to what you're doing now. Which I guess that would also be great for you to share a little bit about what is the work that you're doing in the world currently.

Lola:

Yeah, so, I led a community in Chicago for many years called Bodhi Center. I'm an ordained minister, and I always like to put in parentheses, I am not Christian-identified. Oftentimes people hear the word minister and they freak out [Shohreh laughs], and I totally get that [laughs lightly]. People either feel, like, really safe with me or they feel really scared with me. There's not a lot of middle ground when you use those words.

Um, so I was trained in ancient wisdoms, new thought teachings, led a community in Chicago that was really an extraordinary place devoted to personal transformation, collective awakening, conscious activism, and community building. Left there in February of 2020, not imagining that four weeks later we would find ourselves in a global pandemic, and had

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planned on doing a sabbatical following my departure from Bodhi. And I sort of feel like to a large extent, that sabbatical went on much longer than I anticipated.

So now, over the course of the last year and a half, I have been working with my husband to sort of reimagine, what does my work look like in the world? And we recently bought three lots in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood that were, they were an old landscaping yard. My husband's a landscape architect.

So when I walked this land, I immediately could see sort of the new iteration of my work. A place where people could experience what we're calling plant growth and people growth. It's sort of the merging of the work that he and I love: growth, evolution, transformation, change.

And in a city like Chicago, there's not a lot of accessible outdoor space that isn't, like, sort of corporatized or public parks. I mean, we have great public parks here, but to create, like, a sacred space that's a magical garden that's really intended to support people in expanding their own awareness on the planet and listening for who they're here to be, like, that feels really, really special.

And I'm also a former jazz vocalist, so wherever I am, there's always good music. It's sort of like a requirement [Shohreh laughs lightly]. And so I'm just like, all I can see and hear is music spilling into this garden and people entering.

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So it's probably about a year away from completion, but we are going to be documenting the experience with sort of live gatherings of transformation in action, I suppose.

Shohreh: That sounds like such a beautiful vision for that space. And having lived in Chicago myself, I know how much those kinds of spaces are needed in the city. And like you said, accessible spaces. Because there are some beautiful spaces that aren't so accessible to everyone, and it's nice to be able to develop those.

Lola: Yeah. I'm born and raised in Chicago, and I love this city very, very deeply. There's a lot of narrative about Chicago that I think is very drama based. So I just feel so honored to have the opportunity to love these—you know, in the grand scheme of things, three lots, it's just a little corner of the world. But it's a corner of the world that I hope to cultivate a deep sense of peace and stillness.

I have this image that I oftentimes think of as, like, people walking over the property line. There are, like, these old rickety gates, and it's like there's a metamorphosis that happens in their being when they walk into this space. There's a way that they were before, and now there's a way that they are having had this experience. So that's the vision I hold, and I really, really look forward to having people here.

Shohreh: I'm curious because you mentioned that you are an ordained minister and then you have previously mentioned about how in your teen years in Chicago, really getting to a point of, like, critique with the Catholic Church, what was your journey in terms of growing up Catholic, going

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from this very specific set of rules and expectations there, to becoming an ordained minister and still wanting, you know, this spiritual piece in your life? Because I think some people, the critique for them goes, like, opposite directions. Either, you know, atheist, or just don't want to be involved with organized religion or anything like that. So I'm just curious about anything like that for you.

Lola:

Yeah, my grandparents were real seekers. My maternal grandparents were roaming meditators. They moved to a little town called Cerrillos, New Mexico, in between Albuquerque and Santa Fe and basically bought 150 acres as part of a preservation effort of sacred land so it would not be developed by real estate moguls, if you will. And so although I was raised Catholic, I was also raised with a lot of curiosity. My grandfather studied with Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist Monk. So that was always in me.

And then when I saw the way things went down with both my uncle as he was dying of AIDS, and my mom as she left my dad for a woman, and my grandmother's grappling with the church based on her children's lived experiences, it just started to unravel. So for me, I'm deeply, deeply grateful for the experience I had at Catholic school. I do not feel like a recovering Catholic at all. People will use that terminology; that doesn't feel true for me. It just became a matter of integrity.

So for me, I have a deep reverence for this guy that we call Jesus of Nazareth. I think he sounds like he was an extraordinary Palestinian Rabbi, and I think that's a beautiful thing. And I do not believe that he is

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the source of my salvation. I believe he was a model of generosity, of love, of the capacity to shift circumstances and conditions based on his consciousness. I mean, if you read the Christian Bible from a metaphysical perspective, it's rich with so much invitation to recognize and realize our own inherent divinity and capacity.

Unfortunately, human beings are deeply addicted to being right and will use just about anything to support their position, and the Bible has served as, like, good fodder for that. I think for me, I just could never get with the notion that if you do not subscribe to this doctrine or this dogma, you're going to this fictitious place called hell. For me, the presence of heaven, the presence of hell, are states of consciousness that exist in this now moment, and they're always available to us. And we can choose. And that's, like, a very deep rabbit hole we could go down [laughter].

Shohreh: Yes.

Lola: Um, but, you know, at eighteen, becoming a mom, I was like, life felt hard. And I was in a very volatile relationship that was riddled with violence and addiction. And we were two amazing human beings that were dealing with all of our own challenges and they were butting up against each other. And I just had to surrender to something greater than myself.

And by that, I do not mean a Santa Claus figure in the sky. By that, I mean the presence of love that's moving and breathing and having its way in, through, and as me. That there is a piece that passeth all

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understanding. That there has to be a reality that is greater than my struggle.

You know, I oftentimes say the struggle is not real. The struggle actually is manufactured. In the human condition, we make up dramas all the time and then we play them out. And there is a way that we can actually exist without all of that adrenalized, separation-based, good guy, bad guy drama. Now we haven't realized that yet, by and large, but it is possible.

So for me, I had to reclaim a sense of spirituality that was not tied to a power system like an institution such as the Catholic Church. And I found a lot of comfort in more mystical interpretations of sacred texts. And that was a real game changer for me. I mean, when I first heard my friend and mentor Michael Beckwith speak in 2000, it was as if he was channeling what I would call truth statements and my cellular makeup was being reorganized. It was like I was being reminded of what's real. That who I am is the divine made manifest. The presence of love, peace, joy, beauty, freedom, unity, like, all of them. That who I am is not inherently wrong, wounded, broken, fractured.

So that was the beginning of a recalibration to what I call the truth. What's Real, capital R. Not what we get seduced by in this world of form. So that has been my work for the last 20 years, is just keep reconnecting with what's true and real. We get very seduced by our five senses and we think that that which we can see and touch is the most real thing.

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And it's not to dismiss the impact of the conditions we find ourselves in. You can look at any great—whether it's Marcus Garvey, Nelson Mandela, any great thought leader. [Laughs] We use the term "thought leader" so loosely these days [Shohreh laughs lightly], but like, people who have really transformed consciousness. Elie Weisel. You know, so many brilliant people who sat in very challenging circumstances and conditions and had to, by right of consciousness, say these circumstances and conditions do not define me. This is not the truth of who I am.

And that is where I was in my life. It was just like, okay, I'm a young mom in a violent relationship, on welfare. This can't be the most real thing. It just cannot be.

Shohreh:

And I think that's such a hard realization for people to come to. And the fact that you were able to come to it at such a young age, too. 'Cause I think of myself as, like, an eighteen year old, and that would have been the furthest thing from my conscious mind at that time. But even thinking of people in their twenties and their thirties and their forties and the people that I work with, there can really be this sense of stuckness, of "This struggle, it's what I've been given. I have to deal with it. It's so much of who I am." And I like what you're saying about how there's a separation from who we are and what we're experiencing in the world around us.

Lola:

Yes, I love that. And, by the way, like, just from a historical perspective, there has been a lot invested in having people believe that they are trapped. Original sin, for example, which came largely out of the

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Catholic Church, was constructed around the time of the French Revolution as a mechanism by which to control people. So if you have people believe that they are fundamentally flawed, then they're always going to have to outsource their salvation, their well-being, to something other than themselves. And in that case, it was, like, an empire that we now know as the Catholic Church, but there have been many iterations of that.

I think one of the most radical things that people can actually claim is that who you are is not your circumstances. And remember, there's a ton of investment made in you believing that something is wrong with you and you need something to fix it. Whether it's a face cream, whether it's a pair of shoes, whether it's a particular address.

One of my favorite lyrics is—is a Bob Marley lyric that is a direct nod to Marcus Garvey: "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery. None but ourselves can free our minds." And that's the bottom line.

Like, everything that you're experiencing in a material realm was preceded by a state of consciousness, by a thought pattern. And so that which I am experiencing now can be shifted, can be transformed to the extent that I'm willing to get in back of the thing itself, the condition or the circumstance, get to the subconscious and the conscious mind, and then create from there.

Shohreh:

And this of course leads to the big question, the how question of, because this feels so impossible, and in a lot of ways, countercultural to what we've been taught to do and how we've showed up previously,

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how can people start to make this kind of change and connection in their own lives to not feel like they're stuck and trapped? Especially given the world that we live in, right, which isn't so forgiving in this department.

Lola:

Yeah. I mean, I will just say for me, I got really disciplined about this when I was probably twenty-six. At that point, I'd been a single mom for several years and I wanted an intimate, loving partnership. And it was like I kept looking, and it was like these people that were showing up [laughs lightly] were not the right ones. And I had three girlfriends that I would speak to, like, every night. One of these three girlfriends I would talk to every night, and we would kvetch [Shohreh laughs lightly], we would complain about our dating lives and how, like, inadequate these experiences were and how marginalized we felt in them, and any number of things.

And it occurred to me, as part of my own awakening process, this was literally my closing prayer every night before I went to bed. One of these conversations. And I just was like, I had to stop. I had to disconnect from those relationships, not because they aren't lovely human beings, but because they weren't actually contributing to my growth and I wasn't contributing to their growth.

So I went on, like, a fast of friends. And I now am incredibly intentional about who I surround myself with and the caliber of conversations I have. Because everything that we speak has the capacity and is being amplified into form. So for me, I guess in response to your inquiry, one of the first things you can do is be more selective around who you

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invest your energy in and with. To be in community with likeminded people is an incredibly potent and powerful experience.

You know, I have this membership community and I recently did, like, a little survey of the participants. And I asked them, like, what do you get out of this? And hands down, it's like, I get likeminded community.

There's a particular conversation I get to have here. And most of us are, like, circling the drain in conversations. It's like, they're very survival-oriented. They're not particularly affirmative. And I think that that is so indicative of the world we live in.

You know, I talked to my dad recently and he was like—I don't know what in the world is going on with him—but he was basically like, "Well, you know, and the world is just really falling apart. I was watching Chicago P.D. the other night." And I'm like, Dad, that's a Dick Wolf show [Shohreh laughs lightly]. That's not reality. Like, it's as if he's watching Chicago P.D., Chicago Med, Chicago Fire, and they are the news.

And that may be, like, a really extreme version of that, but the news that you watch on your TV is not all that different. And if we're not curating what we are absorbing in our consciousness, we are susceptible to someone else's narrative. For me, it's just about disrupting that over and over and over again.

Shohreh:

Mm, what you're saying about what we speak can be such a powerful thing, that rings so true to me. And I'm even thinking about how we speak to ourselves and the ways that we put ourselves down, tell

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ourselves, like, what we can and cannot do and limit our own circumstances. And no shade to anybody because of course this what we learn to do. We're taught this.

Lola: Yes.

Shohreh: It's not like we're born treating ourselves like shit.

Lola: That's right.

Shohreh: But as we learn it and we keep doing it and it becomes a habit, that limits what our reality can be and it makes it so much smaller than when we're able to expand it and treat ourselves in a different way. And I always talk about how we so often will treat the people that we love, or the pets in our lives, the children in our lives, we talk to them and we are with them in such a different way than we are with ourselves because we feel like we can't extend ourselves that same love.

Lola: Yes. That is spot on. There's a song that we used to sing, and it's like, [singing] "I love myself so much that I can love you so much. That you can love you so much. That you can start lovin' me." And like, the premise of that song is that unless I love myself wholly, I actually don't have the capacity to really love you. So I think that's the game: how can I fall madly in love with myself?

And by the way, very few people will necessarily throw you a party for you loving yourself out loud [Shohreh laughs lightly]. Nobody is going to go to the pep rally. So how comfortable are we speaking what we

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love and appreciate about ourselves out loud? And then watch who is available for that in your circle.

And it's distinct to love and appreciate yourself from your ego and to love and appreciate yourself from your essence. Those have a distinct quality. And so it's good for us to tune into that. But most of us think we are loving and appreciating ourselves from our ego, but it's really just because we're so unfamiliar with doing that.

You know, many years ago when I started to lead Bodhi, one of the things that one of the leaders said to me is he said, "I hope that now that you are leading this organization that it's not going to become the Lola Wright show." And I said, "That's so interesting that that's your fear. It is going to become the Lola Wright show." [Shohreh laughs lightly] And he was like, what? And I'm like, it definitely is going to become the Lola Wright show because my life is my show. But it is only in the finite mind or in the limited sense of self that you believe that me showing up as my biggest, baddest, brightest self somehow impedes on you doing the same.

Just because I am here to fully take up space and to own my brilliance and to appreciate myself out loud does not have to mean that that is an act of violence against you. It actually could serve as an invitation for you to show up, such that it could be the Lola Wright show, it could be the Shohreh show, it could be the Tom show, it could be the Jamil show. Like, my show does not have to impede on your show. And that is not what we have been trained to believe.

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Shohreh: No.

Lola: So I'm just like, bigger is better in this sense. The bigger you can love yourself, the better we all are for it.

Shohreh: We have this learned sense of scarcity around our own authenticity, of feeling like if other people can show up in certain ways that you've been told are bad, it's somehow taking away from you and the ways that you're able to show up. And then you add in systems of oppression and the ways that it doubles down on that depending on what kind of a marginalized body or life that you show up in, and you can very easily see why the world looks the way that it does and the power hungriness of the people who have been in charge of thinking that if anybody else gets something, then they lose something.

Lola: Yes.

Shohreh: And it's that inability to see that there is enough for everyone, and in fact, it's better for everyone if we are all showing up and sharing than if we are not. I mean, this is really the crux of so many things. And I think this is that connection between our personal work and our personal transformation and how that contributes to collective liberation. Because people can fall into the trap of thinking that this kind of work, to show up this way, is selfish. But actually, it can be done in a way that really moves us all forward.

Lola: 100%. I mean, that was actually one of the things that I appreciated so much about the hip hop community that I was invested in. Like, it was a model. And if you really look at sort of the essence of hip hop, it was a

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celebration of self, independent of whether society was affirming you or not. And that, to me, is like, that's the point. It's like, I have to love me. And the world will reflect back to me whatever it reflects back to me, and I have some say in that and then there's whatever else is happening in the collective consciousness, but the greatest act of generosity I can make for myself and for the world is to love me more.

I mean, I think the challenge is that in so many personal transformation spaces, they're very thin. And oftentimes these very ancient, mystical principles and practices are engaged with in sort of a McDonald's, kind of fast-food format. It makes sense that they get a bad rep because when not understood deeply, they can be misappropriated, and it can turn into, like, high levels of narcissism.

In the work of the Beloved Community, which is what the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. became famous for, came out of a body of work by a man named Josiah Royce. And the origin of the Beloved Community was that we have to get outside of ourselves, otherwise we become highly neurotic.

And so we will oftentimes hear these two things as if they are opposing. Well, if I love myself, then I'm not getting outside of myself and I have to be in service of other people. And it's like, no, you actually can do both. You can love yourself very, very deeply *and* be of service to the greater good. You can actually love yourself very deeply *and* be committed to deconstructing poverty, racism, militarism. Like, those two things can coexist [laughs lightly], you know?

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Shohreh: Yeah, because when we love ourselves, that means that we are in touch with our values and what is important to us in this world. And I think for most of us, we do have an inherent sense of justice and of wanting to seek equity in the world that we have, and through ourselves can often be a way to tap into that. 'Cause if you learn, oh, this is important to me, it becomes a piece of your purpose. Then, naturally, the thing that you're going to do is you're gonna go and figure out how can I take me and what I've been given in this life that I have and use it in a way that is furthering things for everyone.

Lola: Yes. I mean, you know, most of us were raised with some version of the golden rule: do unto others as you would have done onto you. Except that if you don't do unto you very well, that breaks down pretty quickly.

Shohreh: [Laughs lightly] Yes it does.

Lola: So, you know, it's like, let's first get curious: how are you to you? Let's start there. Because what we have right now are like the walking wounded. Like, we have lots of people walking on the planet in very fractured relationships with themselves and then projecting that harm onto other people.

So if we really came to understand that we are deeply, deeply connected, that there is, nothing is happening in isolation, that the violence that we enact in one environment has a ripple effect in many other environments, we would take more responsibility for the way we walk on the planet. Whether that's standing in line at a Starbucks. Whether that's walking down the street. Like, there just is a way that we

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can organize ourselves with a greater sense of connection, curiosity, and compassion.

Shohreh: And what is the connection between that and this concept that you talk about, which is the fierce and loving purpose and finding that?

Lola: This word *hooba*, it's the word for love in the Aramaic language, which some would say is the language of Jesus. And again, I'm not Christian, so I don't have any agenda in that, but it's very striking to me because the word for love in Aramaic is *hooba*, which comes from the Semitic root *ha*, or *hav*, which means to set on fire. Most of us do not relate to love as something that sets on fire.

In the western world, our relationship to love is like, meek, mild, puritanical in nature. It's very measured. I think that needs to really be expanded. As someone who has officiated many weddings, almost every wedding has the Corinthian scripture, "Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not boast." And it's not that that is not true, it's just love is so much more than that.

Shohreh: Yes.

Lola: Like, as someone who has four young people for whom I'm responsible, like, my love in relationship with my children has looked like much more than patience and kindness. Like, it's looked like ahhhh, you know? [Shohreh laughs lightly] I have this piece that hangs in my bedroom that says "I am the raging sea." And to misunderstand me in that state as being anything other than love is to not know me at all. So this idea that

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love can be unapologetic, passionate, wild, ravenous, and not just, like, laced petticoats and chaste kisses [Shohreh laughs lightly].

You know, there's a reason why women in particular have been raised to believe that love is meek and mild. That's inside of an entire, like, infrastructure [laughs lightly]. And so for me, this invitation to claim the range of who you're here to be such that you understand yourself as both tender and wild, passionate and soft. You know, like, those things are not in conflict, but they are part of the vastness that is you.

And most of us have this pretty narrow range of who we allow ourselves to be and we do that to keep ourselves safe. And I'm just saying what if we could stretch that, expand that a little beyond what you're familiar with? And what if you could take up more space? And what if you could have that bold, fierce voice not be a problem but be a demonstration of love? And here, again, if you expect to get a lot of positive and affirming feedback in response, I mean, maybe you'll be lucky. That has not been my experience.

My 12-year-old daughter identifies as queer, and her older brother and sister are mixed-race Black, and, like, our dinner conversations are rarely light. They're usually, like, deconstructing significant issues. And I really appreciate that about our house. I appreciate my children's ability to do that.

And she has found herself in some precarious circumstances at school where there's sort of these, like, what she calls them are, like, the "popular boys," and she puts that in air quotes [Shohreh laughs lightly].

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And she watches the way that they move in the space at her junior high, and she has the experience that they're really dishonoring of some of the people that are important to her. And probably, no surprise, and not unlike me, she will say the thing to disrupt the heckling that she sees them do.

Well, to me, that's, like, a beautiful act of love. I don't see that as a problem. We got a phone call from one of these boys' parents yesterday concerned, and she said, she's like, you know, my son is sort of like a frat boy. Like, we're aware of this. It's a challenge.

Shohreh: Oof.

Lola: And it's like, wow. And so I, unconventionally perhaps, encouraged the fierceness that is my twelve-year-old daughter showing up in these spaces, and simultaneously don't want to rob her of the need for tenderness. Like, she doesn't have to be the one carrying the mantle all the time. You know, it's like threading a needle to give ourselves full permission to have that range of our humanity.

I don't want her to be, like, pigeonholed into being, like, the radical activist presence at twelve. I was that. And it took a lot of years to untangle from that. And yet, I want her to be fully granted space to say what's most true for her and to do it in a way that disrupts those social agreements and patterns of the "frat boys" or "popular boys" or whatever that is.

Shohreh: [Sighs] Oh my goodness. I'm just thinking about how you couldn't pay me to go back to middle school or high school [laughter] and to deal

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with that. And kudos to your daughter and your parenting that she has that fire within her, because at that time in my life, I was so focused on being liked and trying to fit in and, uh, not rock the boat too much. And as a result, I didn't actually come out as gay until I was in my thirties, 'cause I grew up in a space where I just was not in touch with that and that was not encouraged within me.

But I think that range that you speak about is so important. And it's important to teach kids and it's important for us to realize as adults that I think we often feel pigeonholed into one identity. Or we think, well, because I've done it this way or I've acted this way all this time, I have to keep doing it. Especially because we'll tell ourselves, well, others expect me to show up this way and I cannot disappoint them.

Lola: Yeah.

Shohreh: And it becomes about what other people need from us because of how we've shown up before instead of about what do I need right now and what's most true to me?

Lola: Yes, totally. And that was actually one of the things I said to her. I'm like, I have so much appreciation for your commitment to, like, be the voice for—well, I didn't want to use the word, the language, you know, marginalized, or I'm thinking of the book *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman who was a really incredible theologian, a Black theologian, and really one of the early teachers of Martin Luther King. But anyway, I've said to her, like, I have such deep appreciation for your

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willingness to be that voice, *and* you will crumble if you have to be responsible for every injustice that you see in your wake.

Because when I was leading Bodhi for so many years, it was oftentimes—it became a kind of rehabilitation center for activists, and it was largely just because the place from which change and activism was coming was unsustainable. It's easy to have it chew you up and spit you out.

Because she is a twelve-year-old queer, vocal, confident, young person, that's a lot of pressure, also, to have to be the one to say all the things. We all have to pay attention to what we have capacity for in any given moment, and you can't save the world. You can do what you can where you are with what you have, and if you've been granted a lot of benefits in this society we're in, you have a responsibility to go beyond your comfort.

Shohreh: Mhm. And I speak about this often with my clients as well in terms of doing activism and social justice work in a way that can be sustained over time because when we have that fire that's raging all the time, it will burn you out.

Lola: Totally.

Shohreh: Because, like you said, we can't do everything. And people get overwhelmed with this idea of there's so many problems in the world, everything is so terrible, nothing will change, and it becomes very defeatist of, like, well, why should I even bother? I'm just gonna focus

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on me, right? This is the, like, ego me, instead of dealing with this stuff because I can't change it.

Whereas like you're saying, if each of us uses our unique skills and talents and what's important to us and what we value and we work on that and we make strides there, if everyone does that, that's collective action across the board.

Lola: Totally.

Shohreh: And it's such a different thing than if you go in hard, do more, do as much as you can, but then you burn out in a month and then you don't get back to it for, you know, six months or several years later.

Lola: Totally.

Shohreh: Like, smaller, sustained action over time is always going to put you in the direction that you want, versus, like, I'm gonna to stop and start and stop and start, which of course we saw a lot of [Lola laughs lightly] last summer during 2020 with the various awakenings that many white folks were having. And then, like, where are they now, right? A lot of them never moved beyond the black square.

Lola: Yes, exactly. It's a long game. I mean, it really, really is a long game. And I have a body of work that I support white-identified people in developing their racial consciousness. And one of the first things I say in that work is like, hey, I'm inviting you into a new way of living, not just, like, a six-week course where you're going to get this all buttoned up.

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It's like, I'm asking you to consider a new way of moving on the planet. And to your point, you know, that has to be done in a sustainable way, otherwise it's coming from adrenaline and you can't maintain an adrenalized state.

So, yeah, it's a really interesting time to be alive. It's a really interesting time to be on the planet. You know, I think it's also worth noting that media relies on us being in an adrenalized state. So there's not a real value for media outlets if we aren't in a fear-based cycle. So we really have, I think, a responsibility to interrupt that tendency and to say, wow, this is actually an extraordinary planet. There are beautiful people everywhere. I'm going to contribute more love and peace and harmony and curiosity and freedom in any place and space that I have the opportunity to do so.

Because our brains are wired to always perceive threat. Our brains are wired to always see a problem. So how do you hold both of those things at the same time? Wow, I'm noticing that change is needed in these specific ways, and this is how I'm uniquely skilled and gifted to contribute. And, don't lose the wonder. Don't lose the magic. Don't lose the awe and the gratitude and the appreciation for all of the extraordinary living that's happening in this now moment. I mean, there's a lot that's happening in the human experience that I am profoundly optimistic about.

Shohreh:

Yes, I think that's such an important point to make here because it is very easy to get jaded with all of that. And like you said, the media, that's mostly what we're seeing. We're not seeing the heartfelt, like,

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good news, the way that people are stepping up for each other. And I think being more in our own communities and looking for that and showing up that way ourselves is a really beautiful thing to be able to do. And I personally think it is activism and it is social justice work.

Like, I encourage my clients that it's not just going to a protest. It's not just donating money or these other things that we always see spotlighted. Like, yes, that is activism and it is important. But it is just [as] important how you show up in spaces and that people can witness you in that way. If you show up as the kind of person that you are authentically with your values and you don't back down from that, it gives other people permission to do that too, and that is a form of activism.

Lola:

Totally. I mean, I led a conscious community that wanted to experience world peace and eradicating all the big isms, and I think that's really noble and I'm here for that. And there were lots of ways that we couldn't experience peace among the thousand people that were engaged in the community. So until we can figure that out in our microcosm, it's a little bit naïve and a distraction to look at these massive global issues.

A company that my husband and I operate that has 15 employees, and it's like there are microaggressions happening among human beings all the time. And they're subtle. And they're just 15 people. But if we're not dealing with that in this environment, like, I don't—I mean, okay, go to a protest. Good for you. Now what?

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Shohreh: Yeah, exactly. We have to show up amongst our own people and be introspective of the ways in which we contribute to harm as well, and what microaggressions are we putting against other people? And being around people who look and have different experiences from us so that we have that awareness and that consciousness of how am I showing up in the world, what is the harm I'm doing, and what can I do to make less of that harm? Like, this is the individual work that if we all do it over time, it contributes to helping to solve these bigger problems.

Lola: Yep. And I don't mean to sound discouraging, but, like, just keep in mind, for our listeners, this is what exists in the human condition. When we believe that we are separate and apart from one another, we will create all kinds of systems and structures to divide. The most healing thing I think we can do is to really see that we are deeply connected, that we have a responsibility to and for one another, and to look for ways that we can contribute to a more peaceful, loving existence on the planet. But we're pretty hardwired to perceive threat, and so we have to be aware of that tendency in ourselves so that we can create new patterns, new possibilities.

Shohreh: Yes, absolutely. Thank you so much for being here, Lola. I loved this conversation. How can people find you? And is there anything my listeners can do to best support you at this time?

Lola: Yeah, thanks for asking that. I love social media, although I've been taking a break as of late. But you can find me @LolaPWright on all the platforms. And I have a membership community called Our Circle, which gathers weekly on Zoom and then an occasional in-person for those

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willing to come to Chicago. It's a really powerful place to support people in conscious conversation, personal exploration, and, um, really creating a life that they desire. So if you're looking for a more intimate community, that's available too.

Shohreh: Lovely. I will include links to all of that in the show notes so people can check it out. And I appreciate you sharing some of your time with me today.

Lola: Thanks for having me. You're brilliant. This space is powerful. I so rarely find people who are having a meaningful conversation about personal transformation *and* collective awakening, and one does not exist without the other. So I just bow very deeply to your willingness to create this space.

Shohreh: Thank you so much. Our work is very aligned in that way, and I wouldn't have had you on the show if I didn't think that you had that commitment, so I appreciate it.

[Music plays]

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newsletter, The Sunday Share, and get more details about how to work with me by going to ShohrehDavoodi.com. Thank you so much for listening, and I hope you'll join me for the next episode.

[Music fades]