

## LYNDA'S STORY: ON BEING AND BECOMING WHOLE

*"My inheritance was particular, specifically limited and limiting, my birthright was vast, connecting me to all that lives, and to everyone, forever. But one cannot claim the birthright without accepting the inheritance."*

—James Baldwin, Preface to Notes of a Native Son

All of my life it appeared as if I was “on the right track,” so that by the time I was in my twenties I had all the trappings of conventional success: I was married, I had earned my Ph.D., I was financially comfortable and traveled often. But always, deep within, I felt a haunting sense of incompleteness—a pervasive longing for something I couldn’t name.

One cold Saturday in February when I was twenty-eight, I participated in a Leadership Training Program, where I shared this deep sense of longing for something more. After I spoke, a member of the group suddenly turned to me and asked permission to do an exercise. He told me to sit before him while he repeated over and over, “Lynda, you’re a beautiful person.”

I couldn’t let in his words. Each time he repeated the phrase, I found a way to dismiss it. Finally, he told me, “Lynda, if you have to, just put your hands over your mouth and be quiet.” Literally, I had to place both my hands over my mouth, forcing myself to sit and just listen.

Suddenly, in that one seemingly eternal moment, I was truly able to hear him. His words entered my heart, and I had the thought: “I feel like an empty well and this is my first drop of water.”

That day, I came to the profound realization that for my entire life, up to that point, I’d lived within walls I had unknowingly erected to avoid pain. Instantly, I resolved that if I had built these walls, I could take them down. I experienced an expansive place in myself that I never consciously knew before, sending me a powerful message. It showed me that I had more power than I ever believed. An extraordinary loving energy then flowed from my heart throughout my entire body.

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If my particular upbringing (what James Baldwin calls our “inheritance”) had not been limiting, I would have received sufficient early nurturing and support. This creates a solid foundation for developing into the whole individual we were meant to be. In this way, our unique talents and gifts are honored and given space to flourish. We then emerge from childhood having developed a positive *personal self*: the “conditioned” place in us, which contains our subjective emotions and beliefs ingrained by our parents and society.

In the well-integrated person, the personal self is rooted in a healthy relationship with what can be called unconditioned presence, or the universal self. This is what Baldwin refers to as our “birthright,” which I was unable to experience in my own life. This place in us directly accesses a loving wisdom beyond conditioning. This intuitive “gut” self knows our own intrinsic goodness and self-love, and also recognizes it in others. When we remain sufficiently connected to the universal self, we’re anchored in a larger perspective that allows us varying degrees of freedom from the issues that arise within the personal self.

Ideally, the personal self and the universal self work together as partners and co-creators. When there is not a healthy confluence between the personal self and the universal self, we can become fragmented and lose our connection to our wholeness.

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By the end of the day, I realized that I had found what I had been unknowingly searching for my entire life: my universal self. This experience was nothing of short of life-changing, allowing me to connect to the depth of my being and to enter the present moment. To experience the reconnection between my personal and universal self was critical, allowing me to become present to my entire experience.

I now had a compelling vision for my life. From that moment on, I dedicated myself to developing my personal and universal self, and honoring the connection and interaction between them.

To integrate and embody an experience as profound as this, shifting identification from the personal self and increasingly aligning with the universal self, took a considerable amount of work for me. This process varies from person to person, based on their own specific experience and needs. It is a process that gradually unfolds, leading to a new way of living. As I traveled along my own path, it became clear that my calling was to facilitate this process of self-growth and awareness for others. Over the years, I studied as many different modalities as possible, from psychology to spirituality to body-therapies and coaching, to help other people reclaim their wholeness and manifest it in the world.

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Whether or not the specifics of my story mirror yours, what’s important is how the larger meaning of my experience resonates in your own life.

Whether we are in pain or suffering or perfectly content, or somewhere in between, it is crucial to recognize that we have a personal self and a universal self. The most important consideration is not to get stuck in either the personal or the universal. Rather, we must differentiate and then integrate them into a larger

perspective that takes into account our particular conditioned beliefs and our vast unconditioned awareness.

This synthesis represents who we truly are.

From where I stand today, what I know for sure— and what people I've worked with have repeatedly expressed— is that there's nothing better than coming home to yourself and to life.

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