

Rising Up Rooted: Black Wisdom as Emancipatory Contemplative Practice for Resilience, Healing, and Liberation

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Black wisdom is offered as a transformative, liberatory, and healing resource with particular applications for disrupting the five dynamics of oppression—dehumanization, disconnection, destruction, delusion, and disempowerment. Cultural wisdom is a key element of emancipatory contemplative practice which intentionally centers strategies for decolonizing inner life. The integration of Black wisdom into contemplative practices can provide an ancestral and experiential connection to a sense of belonging and “home,” as well as establish an empowering foundation from which personal and collective liberation can flourish. Black wisdom can be incorporated into contemplative practice through cultural expressions (music, African proverbs and symbols), applications that utilize embodied practice as communal ritual, and practices that emerge from concepts based on African-centered systems of wisdom and spirituality (e.g., ubuntu, sawubona, àse). The 3-part Rising Up Rooted process is offered as a soulfulness-oriented methodology that provides opportunities for planting, cultivating, and manifesting Black wisdom.

Wisdom is wealth. – African proverb

The centering of Black wisdom and knowledge in contemplative practice is offered as a rich, transformative resource for all peoples. More particularly, Black wisdom is lifted up as a resilience, healing, and liberatory resource for ameliorating the impacts of racial trauma and intersectional oppression on Black mental health. I locate myself as a Black

cis-gender woman, born and raised in Detroit in the 1960s. My primary professional roles are as a psychology professor, researcher, psychotherapist, meditation teacher, and facilitator of group processes. My intellectual homes are in multicultural and community psychologies with particular emphasis on Black/African-centered and liberation psychology approaches. I come to contemplative practice both through my own spiritual, cultural identity, and personal development journeys, as well as through seeking culturally-resonant, psychologically-informed methods relevant to the empowerment, mental health, and liberation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

The illumination and elevation of Black wisdom is an act of liberation. Asante (2003), in his seminal work on Afrocentricity, argued for resisting the marginalization of African culture as a necessary condition for Black liberation and social change. Disrupting the five dynamics of oppression—dehumanization, destruction, delusion, disempowerment, and disconnection (Harrell, 2021)—is facilitated through culturally-affirming knowledge that can serve as a foundation for resisting their negative physical, psychological, spiritual, and collective impacts. In dominant social narratives infected by the ideology of white supremacy, African indigenous knowledge systems are positioned as inferior to those of Europe (and Asia). Simultaneously, Africa is exoticized and cultural appropriation is reflected in the commodification of cultural expressions from throughout the diaspora (e.g., rap and hip-hop music). Thus, a central aim of the work described in this paper is to contribute to creating applications of contemplative practice that center Black wisdom as a strategy for healing and liberation.

Contemplative practices are conceptualized as a diverse group of strategies for deepening and expanding experiential awareness and critical consciousness by bearing witness to lived experience—internally, relationally, and collectively. Reflecting a holistic and integrative understanding of contemplative practices, the enhancement of awareness and consciousness is inclusive of somatic, emotional, cognitive, relational, communal, cultural, sociopolitical, and spiritual experience. From a liberation psychology perspective, the foundational concept of critical consciousness can be understood as an important contempla-

tive practice method. Evolving scholarship on critical consciousness theory has its foundation in the Freirian concept of *conscientização*, the process of using one's lived experience to see and make sense of the dynamics, contradictions, and social realities of oppression (Freire, 1993; Jemal, 2017; Montero, 2009; Watts et al., 2011). It highlights strengthening connection to what it means to be fully human (humanization) and to be in authentic relationship with other humans for the ultimate purpose of liberation. Critical consciousness involves developing sociopolitical awareness of oppression through praxis—cycles of observation, reflection/analysis, and action. Authentic dialogue is a core critical consciousness strategy in which relational processes facilitate the emergence of expanded awareness to inform transformative, anti-oppressive action.

The concept of *emancipatory contemplative practice* is proposed to intentionally center strategies for decolonizing inner life and transforming internalized oppression in the service of mental, emotional, somatic, psycho-spiritual, relational, and collective liberation. Liberation requires both embodiment and activism. Liberation requires revolution and evolution, internally and externally, as it invites us into the perpetual dance between inner and outer change. The application of liberation psychology for Black people centralizes the reclamation of culture, identity, and agency to address the systemic causes and human impacts of racism and intersectional oppression (Bryant-Davis & Moore-Lobban, 2020; King, 2013; Thompson & Alfred, 2009). Sanchez Carmen et al. (2015) speak of healing through sociopolitical wisdoms that represent insights, meaning-making, and social analysis of our sociopolitically and culturally situated lived experiences. Recent scholarship on healing and liberation in the context of racial trauma and intersectional oppression has similarly identified critical consciousness as a vital element (Chioneso et al., 2020; French, et al., 2020). Emancipatory contemplative practice draws upon critical consciousness methods within a holistic, integrative, and culturally-inclusive approach to the interdependence of inner and outer transformative change. Accessing, generating, and circulating experiential, cultural, and sociopolitical wisdom are central mechanisms of action in emancipatory contemplative practice.

Conceptualizing Wisdom

Knowledge without wisdom is like water in the sand.

– Guinean proverb

The following discussion of wisdom guides the work of bringing together Black wisdom and emancipatory contemplative practice for healing, resilience, and liberation. The conceptualization of wisdom offered here reflects African indigenous and diasporic wisdom (Adams, 2020; Atta, 2017; Eze, 1998; James, 2018; Lajul, 2014; Presbey, 1999; Somé, 1999; Wiredu, 2004), diverse writings on wisdom in cultural and sociopolitical context (Barone, 2021; Classen, 1999; Doetzel, 2018; Grayshield & Del Castillo, 2020; Sanchez Carmen et al., 2015, Takahashi & Overton, 2002; Thaman, 2003), and is informed by general wisdom theory and research (Baltes and Smith, 2008; Bassett, 2005, 2011; Holba, 2011; Sternberg, 2004; Walsh, 2015; Weststrate et al., 2016).

Wisdom is ancestral and collective, connecting us to human experience that transcends time and place. Wisdom is passed along across generations and through the vast interconnected dimensions of life, in both horizontal and vertical transmissions. From an African-centered perspective, wisdom reflects an understanding of the deep interconnectedness of persons, nature, and Spirit. Wisdom is communicated via oral, written, and artistic expressions of cultural and lived experience. When we are in the presence of a wise person, we can *feel* their emanating wisdom in ways beyond the words they may speak. However, words and sound carry energy such that the experience of strong connection with a quote, proverb, song, poem, prayer, folktale, or sacred text passage can often be felt resonating in our bodies. These expressions of wisdom can put words to our own unformulated experience such that there is a resounding internal response of “yes.” They can touch an inner place of deep soul-knowing that is powerfully affirming, communicating that someone else has been through what I am going through and I am not alone. Wisdom can be experienced as an embodied deep knowing, intuitive sense, clarity of understanding, and relational resonance. While the specific organization of words may be attributed to a particu-

lar individual, these expressions are impactful because they communicate collective wisdom and illuminate shared human experience.

Wisdom is often associated with maturity, equanimity, and sound judgment. The *cognitive component* of wisdom reflects abstract reasoning, critical thinking, holding contradiction and paradox, and cognitive flexibility. Wisdom allows us to see beyond surface appearances and illusions, to see things as they are, to discern truth. Walsh (2015) offers the importance of self-knowledge and perspicacity, with the latter reflecting a sense of perspective, clearness of understanding, and discernment. The *affective component* involves awareness of emotional experience, connection to our emotional life, and the elevation of pro-social emotions such as compassion and love. Doetzal (2018), from an Indigenous cultural context, describes “heart wisdom” as a type of spiritual intelligence by which we come to know things through emotional connection and a sense of deep, soul-level experiencing.

A wise person will always find a way. – Tanzanian proverb

Wisdom is *alive* as a dynamic energy that manifests, moves, and evolves. Wisdom emerges and transforms from our lived experience. However, wisdom is more than the content of what we see and understand. Wisdom is also what we *do* with what we see and how we activate wisdom in our daily lives. Wisdom can inform and inspire the ways we live and relate to others. We can think of wisdom as both a tool and fuel for the art of living that enables us to be proactive and creative in co-constructing our lives. Activated wisdom reflects the processing and integration of “data” from both our own embodied experience, and as well as from the testimony and witnessing of the lived experience of others. This data includes the many pathways through which wisdom is communicated in our bodies, emotions, and mental processes (e.g., imagery, insights, imagination), as well as in human relationships, connection with nature, ancestors, and Spirit. Bassett (2011) describes wisdom as involving situational awareness and choices that enhance our shared humanity. While wisdom can be transcendent and universal, wisdom as action must be contextualized in ways that take the relational, social, cultural, political, and environmental dynamics of our lives into account.

Wisdom also informs the existential human quests for meaning, purpose, and understanding of the human condition. Wisdom involves the capacity to live fully, authentically, and meaningfully, in alignment with one's highest purpose and deepest values. Indigenous African wisdom emphasizes responsibility to the collective, to descendants, and being in harmonious relationship with spiritual forces and the natural world in ways that reflect understanding of one's place in community and cosmos (Somé, 1999). Wisdom also includes an awareness and acceptance of the inevitable challenges of human existence (ICHes) (Harrell, 2016), those "givens" of the human experience that none of us can escape. These include change (impermanence), vulnerability and pain, isolation, disconnection, powerlessness, uncertainty, unknowing, unpredictability, and the inevitability of death. In particular, managing uncertainty is frequently identified as an important aspect of wisdom (Baltes & Smith, 2008; Walsh, 2015). Wisdom involves facing life's ICHes from an empowered place of equanimity and clarity. Black existentialism locates the quest for understanding our human condition and living a meaningful life as inseparable from what it means to be Black within the inevitable context of racial oppression (Bassey, 2007; Fanon, 1963; Gordon, 1997). Research on the phenomenon of post-traumatic growth suggests that wisdom can increase and evolve after significant life adversity (Calhoun et al., 2010). Adversity brings us face-to-face with the human condition and provides fertile ground for the emergence of wisdom.

Ultimately, wisdom involves a process where the multidimensional and multilayered nature of lived experience is metabolized into an energy that we can use to enhance our personal and collective lives. Synthesizing the above, wisdom is defined here as *a dynamic, interconnected, and integrative process of deep experiential, collective, spiritual, and embodied knowing and discernment that is both emergent from lived experience and enacted in our choices and actions. Wisdom reflects understandings and insights that are universal (transcendent), as well as contextualized in relational, cultural, sociopolitical, and environmental conditions and realities.*

Black Wisdom

“For I am my mother’s daughter, and the drums of Africa still beat in my heart.” – Mary McLeod Bethune

It is important to illuminate and center Black wisdom and knowledge. In both academic and popular media settings, wisdom has commonly and most strongly been associated with ancient Greek and Roman cultures. However, the human quest for wisdom is incomplete without the inclusion of wisdom from cultures of the global majority who represent Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The decolonization of wisdom involves a process by which indigenous peoples name what has been stolen and erased, and reclaim their indigenous knowledge and wisdom. Black wisdom incorporates wisdom traditions and cultural wisdom expressions from throughout the African diaspora, inclusive of the multiple countries on the African continent to the many locations globally where Black people live and have established community. Black wisdom reflects the spiritual and philosophical systems of African civilizations and communities across time, as well as the wisdom that has emerged from surviving and thriving in the context of racial oppression over centuries. The latter includes the racial trauma of the Maafa (the “great tragedy” of the Middle Passage), colonial occupation, and the multitude of ways that anti-Black racism and the ideology of white supremacy continue to operate. Black wisdom is revealed and enacted through cultural reclamation and cultural identity, activism for social justice and liberation, the beauty of Black love and family, the refuge of Black community, the achievement of Black excellence across multiple domains of life, Black creative expression, and Black joy and celebration. All affirm, express, and lift up the humanity of Black persons. Cultural systems and frameworks reflecting Black wisdom include, but are certainly not limited to, the following: the principles of Ma’at from Ancient Kemet (Egypt); the Yoruba Ifá spiritual tradition (the foundation of many religions including Lucumí, Santería, and Candomblé); Ntu/Bantu philosophy and the ethic of ubuntu; the adinkra symbols and proverbs of the Akan; the Nguzo Saba (7 principles) of Kwanzaa; Africana

philosophy; African-Centered/Pan African Black Psychology; womanist theory; Black theology of liberation; Black humanism; and Black existentialism (Akbar, 2003; Basse, 2007; Clark, 2013; Deterville, 2016; Gordon, 1997; Hopkins, 2004; Jones, 2003; Martin, 2008; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020; Myers et al., 2018; Nobles, 2006; Ojelade et al., 2014; Phillips, 2006; Sutherland, 2011; Udo, 2020; Wiredu, 2004).

Black wisdom is a powerful transformative resource. The multicultural psychology and Indigenous health literatures locate culture and cultural wisdom as a resources for healing (Adekson, 2017; Bojuwoye & Sodi, 2010; Brave Heart, 1998; Chioneso et al., 2020; DeLoach & Peterson, 2010; Duran et al., 2008; Edwards, 2011; French et al., 2020; Grayshield & Del Castillo, 2020; Gregory & Harper, 2001; Hanna et al., 1999; Hoskins & Padrón, 2018; Monteiro & Wall, 2011; Moodley, Sutherland, & Oulanova, 2008; Myers & Speight, 2010; Nobles, 2006; Ortega-Williams et al., 2021). Black wisdom provides a connection to culture enabling contact with an affirming center that provides an always available “home” to which one can return for grounding and guidance. It provides an alternative to the illusions of Black inferiority and deviance. Black wisdom has a particularly important role in liberation through countering dehumanizing and limiting narratives. Centuries of oppression have provided a reservoir of Black collective lived experience on how to develop and cultivate resilience, heal, and thrive. Black wisdom is thus a source of resistance to oppression and contributes to critical consciousness. The deep insights and guidance from this wisdom can be brought to bear on the challenges of surviving and thriving, as well as inform the work of dismantling systems of oppression and transforming the world toward justice. Black wisdom can free the mind and protect the soul from the damage of racialized and intersectional oppression, including internalized oppression.

One of the most devastating and pervasive impacts of racism and intersectional oppression is disconnection—from our bodies, hearts, and minds, as well as disconnection from the bodies, hearts, and minds of others. Hopson and Hopson (1999) offer the concept of soul detachment, and bell hooks (2003) describes the phenomena of soul murder. These both illustrate how disconnection from our aliveness is used as

protection from the pain of continual assaults to our humanity. Duran et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of culturally-grounded soul healing in the context of the soul wounds of intergenerational, historical, and collective trauma with the guiding position that “culture is part of the soul” (p. 288). Thus, central to healing is cultural reconnection, connecting to inner aliveness through soulful experiencing, coming into harmony with nature and in alignment with the activity of spirit. This holistic, culturally-infused, psycho-spiritual work involves accessing ancestral wisdom and increasing connection to culture and community. The process of releasing the ways oppression can take hold (mind, body, heart, and soul), and re-establishing awareness and grounding in our interconnectedness can facilitate the work of healing racial trauma, building resilience, and becoming whole (Chioneso et al., 2020; French et al., 2020; Harrell, 2018; Sanchez Carmen et al., 2015). Black cultural expressions (e.g., music, dance, poetry, spoken word) and cultural practices (e.g., rituals, ceremonies) can be powerful vehicles for cultural connection and healing trauma (DeLoach & Peterson, 2010; Monteiro & Wall, 2011).

The healing, resilience, and liberating functions of Black wisdom can be achieved through emancipatory contemplative practices that intentionally create opportunities for reconnection and revelation. This involves opening space to access our embodied cultural, collective, and ancestral memory. Black wisdom can be incorporated in multiple ways including: (1) the content of practices (e.g., use of African proverbs as prompts for reflection and dialogue); (2) the modality and implementation of contemplative practices (e.g., practice as communal ritual); and (3) centering key concepts from African diasporic systems of wisdom, knowledge, and spirituality.

An example of the latter is an integrative intention setting and breath practice inspired by the Yoruba concept of *àse* (Harrell, 2021). Conceptually, *àse* is the divine life force that unites the spiritual and material dimensions of life (Deterville, 2016; Vega, 1999). When spoken, it is a powerful claiming of manifestation (“make it so” or “and so it is”). A programmatic exemplar of the centering of Black wisdom in both communal and contemplative practices is the Emotional Emancipation circle

process of the Association of Black Psychologists and the Community Healing Network (Grills et al., 2016).

Rising up Rooted

A tree without roots cannot stand. – Congolese proverb

A contemplative process called *Rising Up Rooted* is offered as a methodology that can be used to center Black wisdom. The process is informed by the author's SOUL-centered (Soulfulness-Oriented, Unitive, Liberatory) approach to contemplative practice (Harrell, 2018). Soulfulness is defined as a quality of experiencing life in a deeply connected and connecting way, an enlivened and embodied inner attunement that illuminates authentic lived experience and radiates into outer expression. It is a spirit-infused, life-enhancing, interconnected aliveness that is characterized by deep connectivity and inspired expression. A soulfulness orientation is offered as one of the interrelated pathways into the enhanced awareness that characterizes contemplative practice. It emphasizes soulful experiencing and complements the repertoire of practices which center bodyfulness, heartfulness, and mindfulness. It is suggested that for people who identify with African diasporic cultures (and others with shared cultural sensibilities and values), a soulfulness path can be a resonant entry point into full presence and awareness. Soulfulness is an integrative somatic-emotional-spiritual *felt* experience that facilitates and reflects contact with soul-level experiencing (e.g., feeling moved, inspired, attuned, affirmed, called, rooted in truth/wisdom, spiritually-connected). Music and dance are core expressions of soulfulness that reflect the spiritual embodiment (an intense and intimate body-spirit connection) that is prominent among persons of African descent. As such, soulfulness is often accessed and cultivated through practices that involve music, dance, and other cultural expressions.

Rising Up Rooted includes a range of contemplative practices that emerge from the SOUL-Centered Practice (SCP) framework (Harrell, 2018). The SCP principles and processes reflect central elements of Black/African-centered psychology. These include the centrality of

spirituality, interconnectedness and interdependence, harmony and balance, a holistic orientation to human experience, a relational/communal sensibility, resilience and overcoming adversity, liberation in the context of historical and ongoing oppression, expressive creativity and inventive improvisation, and orality (storytelling, drumming, song, testimony of experience) (Akbar, 2003; Jones, 2003; Myers et al., 2018; Nobles, 2006). The SCP framework provides opportunities for enhancing cultural connection through practices that center Black wisdom as expressed through quotes, proverbs, music, art, cultural symbols, poetry, dance, and more.

Wisdom is like a baobab tree, no one individual can embrace it.

– Akan proverb

Given the significance of interconnectedness in an African-centered worldview, elevating communal and relational practices is central to bringing Black wisdom to life and maximizing the healing impact of enhancing human connection. This emphasis on connection reflects the African wisdom of ubuntu. This foundational African-centered ethos is concerned with the spirit-infused and interconnected nature of our personhood and relations with other persons (Dladla, 2017; Edwards et al., 2004; Magena, 2016; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020; Washington, 2010). While the word ubuntu has origins in southern Africa, the concept exists throughout the African continent (e.g., botho, hunhu, utu, maaya, biako ye) (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020). As a foundation for Pan African/Black psychology, Nobles (2015) states: “a human being is a spirit that affirms its humanity by recognizing the humanity of other spirits and on that basis establishes humane relations with them” (p. 408). An individual’s humanity is enhanced when they embody and express ubuntu wisdom in how they live, recognizing the fundamental interdependence of persons and thus being responsible for collective well-being. This means showing hospitality, care, cooperation, benevolence, working toward the communal good, and honoring the dignity, worth, and humanity of other persons. The wisdom of ubuntu can be strengthened through contemplative practices that incorporate rela-

tional-communal processes in ways that recognize the spiritual energy that binds all life together. Specific soulfulness practices have been developed that feature the wisdom of ubuntu (e.g., Soul Circle practice, Sawubona practice).

Wisdom deepens and emerges through human interaction. Gunlaugson (2011) describes second-person (relational) contemplative practice as transformative learning through dialogue and explores its connection to collective wisdom. This is the foundation for the practice of *Collective Wisdom Emergence* (CWE) (Harrell et al., 2017), a generative and dialogic contemplative method that utilizes wisdom sources in the service of resilience, transformation, and growth. The CWE (“see-we”) practice provides a relational structure for working with wisdom in group contexts. The process begins with the presentation of an intentionally-selected expression of wisdom (e.g., quote, proverb, poem, song lyrics, prayer, passage from a sacred text, an artwork, video clip, etc.) and invites bringing one’s full, experiential presence to it. As group members share associations, memories, and lived experience, opportunities open up for personal and collective insights to arise and evolve through interactive dialogue. CWE integrates communal and contemplative processes to provide a space for deep connection to (and affirmation of) human experience, revelatory insights, and the emergence of the group’s communal wisdom. CWE is an important foundation for Rising Up Rooted group practices that center cultural expressions of Black wisdom.

Knowledge is a light that is in [hu]man[kind]; it is the inheritance of all that the ancestors knew and sowed deep within us, just as the power of the baobab is contained in its seed.

– Tierno Bokar, Sage of Bandiagara (Mali)

The Rising Up Rooted process is inspired by the majestic baobab tree, the African Tree of Life. The baobab symbolizes resilience, nourishment, protection, healing, versatility, growth, presence, strength, and wisdom. Baobabs can live up to 2000 years with every part of the tree having use and value to enhance life (Lewington, 2012). Baobabs

are mystical, medicinal, and ancestral. Metaphors reflecting the life of a tree are utilized throughout the Rising Up Rooted process and include planting seeds, deepening roots, nourishing growth, rising tall, and bearing fruit. In his beautiful book, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual, and Community*, Malidoma Somé (1999) states that “nature holds the wisdom of the cosmos” (p. 49). Drawing from a process in the natural world is congruent with wisdom commonly found in African diasporic cultures that illuminates the centrality and sacred interdependence of natural phenomena and human life. The three parts of the Rising Up Rooted process (Rooting, Resourcing, and Rising) each reflect a phase in natural growth “from root to fruit.” Various contemplative practices can be identified that are consistent with the focus of each of the three parts of the process.

Rooting starts with planting the wisdom seed. This involves identifying an aspect of human experience to bring into more focused awareness and full experiential presence. The seed can be an immediate somatic, emotional, or spiritual experience that is calling for our attention, a glimpse of personal or transcendent truth, the inner soul voice that whispers to us, or other indications of our embodied wisdom seeking to emerge. The seed could be a lived experience in the world that is ready to be metabolized into wisdom. The seed can also be an intentional stimuli that is selected for its embedded wisdom, including cultural and creative expressions (e.g., a wisdom quote). There is an element of discernment involved in order to determine what we will plant that is in the service of growth and transformation. Thus, this first phase involves choosing the seed we are planting and initiating an inner relationship with the seed. Rooting practices help us sustain presence with the seed long enough for it to take root within. Guided meditation, reflective writing, and the CWE practice described above are helpful rooting practices. An important rooting practice is getting to know our “inner soil” through scanning the body-mind-heart-soul for associations, sensations, memories, experiences, images, meanings, messages, or spiritual connections that arise in relationship to the seed. Various meditation strategies that loosen up and attend to the health of our inner soil can be critical to prepare a place to plant the seed where it can be nourished and grow optimally.

The focus of the *Resourcing* phase is to tend to what has been planted with loving care. After rooting in presence, resourcing is about cultivating transformative growth infused with an energy of love. Growth is optimized in the context of love. Practices congruent with this phase involve cultivating a nurturing relationship with what is moving, growing, and transforming within. By nourishing our own body-mind-heart-soul, we are watering and feeding the soil within which the wisdom seed has been planted. Resourcing involves intentional interaction with what is happening as the seed opens up and begins its amazing transformation. As sunlight facilitates growth, resourcing practices also involve a variety of ways to illuminate and shine more light on what is growing. We shine light on our own experience by naming, claiming, and speaking it. Resourcing involves opening ourselves up to be enlightened through observation, authentic conversation and deep listening, reading, expressive writing, experiential immersion, creative expression, movement, communing with nature and Spirit, and meditation. Resourcing can also involve protecting what is growing. As the seed opens and the emergent growth is bursting through the seed's protective covering, and as that initial growth begins to sprout above ground and is exposed to the world, we become more vulnerable. Grounding, compassion, and developing spaces of inner refuge are important resourcing practices. An example from initial implementations of *Rising up Rooted* is the offering of "metta" phrases. The Buddhist wisdom of the brahmaviharas (the "divine abodes" of lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity) is consistent with our grounding in the African-centered orientation of ubuntu in their offering of ways we can embody love towards ourselves, others, and in the context of life's challenges.

Finally, the focus of the *Rising* part of the process is to initiate movement from "nourishing to flourishing," to bring into manifestation what has been sowed and cultivated. The emphasis is on actualizing and expressing what has been growing within. The inclusion of the rising component is to emphasize that the ultimate value of contemplative practice is the connection of inner transformation and outer expression. As we become more intimate with our own inner life, our roots become deeper and we are able to rise higher. Rising practices aim to facilitate opti-

mal growth into expression of one's greatest potential such that the wisdom we planted and cultivated will bear fruit. Rising practices include visualizing and setting intention for the manifestation of our highest aspirations and the realization of our deepest values. Rising practices involve the practice of showing up in our lives authentically and engaging our lives with courage and integrity. We do not rise alone; rising is not a decontextualized endeavor. Rising involves living in alignment with purpose, in harmonious co-existence and balance with nature, in attuned relations with other persons, in conscious awareness of sociopolitical dynamics, and in rhythm and flow with spiritual energies and forces. Rising includes recognition of our interdependence and consideration of how our actions impact processes and phenomena outside of ourselves. Ultimately, rising is about how we live and express our unique gifts for the benefit of our community, humanity, and the planet.

The Rising Up Rooted process reflects a soulfulness-orientation and draws from African diasporic cultural values and expressions. While it can be applied in multiple ways and varied cultural and applied contexts, an explicit focus on Black wisdom is especially congruent. One programmatic application of the process, *A Year of Wisdom and Healing*, centers adinkra symbols as the primary wisdom seeds to plant, cultivate, and grow. Cultural symbols can provide powerful experiences of connection to deep meaning and wisdom. They can emanate energy that can be felt in both embodied and transcendent ways. Adinkra are visual symbols that originated with the Akan people in West Africa (Ghana and Ivory Coast areas) and represent a spiritually-centered philosophical system that reflects ancestral, cultural and communal wisdom (Agbo, 2011; Arthur, 2017; Quarcoo, 1994; Willis, 1998). Many adinkra are associated with proverbs regarding life events, relationships, and the qualities of people, animals, nature, and God. Historically, adinkra were stamped on cloth and worn at funerals to represent valued qualities of the person who had died. They are incorporated into weddings and other communal rituals and events. There are over 100 adinkra symbols that are printed on clothing, used in metalwork, jewelry, household décor, company icons, and more. Many adinkra are associated with proverbs, a common way that wisdom is generated and transmit-

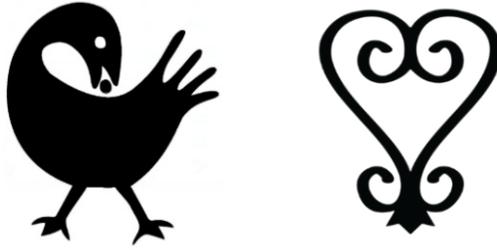
ted in African diasporic cultures (Appiah et al., 2007; Daniel et al., 1987; Kanu, 2014; Williams, 2003). According to Barone (2021),

proverbs are a simple way of expressing a well-known truth or adage based on common sense or experience. They are usually considered to be imbued with ancestral wisdom, passed down from generation to generation until they become part of a society's oral tradition. (<https://hraf.yale.edu/knowledge-is-power-anthropology-of-proverbs/>, para. 1)

A Year of Wisdom and Healing identifies a monthly wisdom theme (e.g., Rooted Liberation, Creative Excellence, Grateful Abundance) and offers a different adinkra symbol each week that is congruent with the theme. The adinkra symbol serves as the primary cultural expression of Black wisdom and the focal point for the week. Contemplative practices such as meditation, journaling, and community dialogue are used to strengthen the roots of the wisdom and tend to the seed's growth in order to facilitate flourishing and increase the likelihood that the wisdom bears fruit in one's life. Additional cultural expressions of Black wisdom such as quotes, music, poetry, art, are shared to expand and further explore the focal wisdom meanings in the weekly adinkra.

The familiar Sankofa adinkra will be presented as an example of how Black wisdom is utilized in the Rising up Rooted process. Each process starts with an in-depth exploration of the symbol. Sankofa means "go back and fetch it" and is a symbol of retrieval and reclamation (Dertville, 2016; Temple, 2010; Willis, 1998). The associated proverb says "It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten." As the proverb conveys, Sankofa is not simply a pronouncement to get something from the past, it also empathically acknowledges that we may forget or get lost. It is a reminder that if we find ourselves disconnected from our cultural heritage and history that we can always go back and get it.

Two symbols represent Sankofa. The first is the mythic bird who is moving in a forward direction, but whose neck is turned backward to retrieve an egg. The egg represents birth and growth, conveying



the significance of the past in order to develop optimally into the future. The symbol conveys bringing back the wisdom from the past for our betterment now and going forward. It is not just looking back, it is about what we bring back. The second Sankofa symbol is the stylized heart. While less has been written about this variation, it can be understood as emphasizing the importance of imbuing our retrieval with the quality of love and compassion; love of our heritage and in gratitude for our beloved ancestors to whom we give reverence for their sacrifices and achievements. We go back also as a demonstration of love for our descendants as we bring back treasured wisdom that will allow them to thrive. Retrieval and reconnection are acts of love. Sankofa reminds us of the connection between past, present, and future. The past must inform our actions in the present so that we prepare for future generations.

After grounding in the adinkra symbol's meaning, the *rooting* process continues with an invitation to slowly and mindfully draw the symbol multiple times. A guided meditation is provided and there is encouragement to meditate with the symbol and tune-in to how the symbol is experienced visually, somatically, and emotionally, as well as to connect with one's inner wisdom voice to access existing wisdom related to the symbol. There is an invitation to listen for a message from the symbol representing the most resonant and relevant take-away. Identification of a few words or a short phrase reflecting this message is encouraged as a connect point to be repeated throughout the week as a reminder of Sankofa's message. An example from Sankofa could be "reach back, propel forward." Journaling is encouraged during both the rooting and resourcing processes. Specific journaling prompts are

offered for *resourcing* in order to cultivate the wisdom of the symbol (e.g., “How does cultural ‘forgetting’ show up in your life?” and “How are you already manifesting the wisdom of retrieval, reclamation, and revival?”) There is encouragement to surround oneself with the energy of Sankofa through objects and expressions, as well as to engage in creative expressions such as writing a poem, engaging in movement, or taking photographs that represent Sankofa. Resourcing also includes an offering of a few metta phrases that reflect the adinkra’s theme (e.g., “may you know the power of Sankofa to bring you home”). Finally, the *rising* process focuses on intention and manifestation. This includes constructing a clear intention statement emerging from the symbol’s wisdom. There are also specific suggestions for praxis, transforming reflection into action, such as “reflect upon life lessons from an ancestor and identify specific ways you can manifest the wisdom from those lessons in your life right now.” The *rising* process also encourages exploring how the symbol’s wisdom can be applied to current stressors and life challenges (e.g., “What have you become lost from, something that you can retrieve as a resource to support what you are going through in your life right now?”). Finally, in an attempt to cultivate communal spaces for transformative dialogue and space for collective wisdom to emerge, the Year of Wisdom and Healing program offered a monthly wisdom circle and opportunities for online chat.

In conclusion, this work affirms the transcendent and transformative power of Black wisdom. Indigenous and diasporic African wisdom is conceptualized as a resource for resilience, healing, and liberation. A soulfulness orientation provides a framework for grounding, illuminating, and lifting-up the “soul” of indigenous and diasporic African wisdom, and emancipatory contemplative practices emphasize that the work is in the ultimate service of liberation. Through the Rising Up Rooted process, Black wisdom can be the focus of various practices that provide opportunities for planting, cultivating, and manifesting the wisdom. Centering Black wisdom is achieved through explicit attention to the content included (e.g., proverbs, symbols, music) and intentional infusion of African-centered values and worldview (e.g., spirituality, communal orientation). The integration of Black wisdom into contem-

plative practices can provide an ancestral and experiential connection to a sense of belonging and “home,” which establishes a firm and empowering foundation from which personal and collective liberation can flourish. As such, Black wisdom is a vital healing and transformative resource for Black people. It is important to note that indigenous and diasporic African cultural wisdom shares much in common with the wisdom of many Indigenous cultures of the global majority, particularly Native American and First Nations peoples (Grayshield & Del Castillo, 2020; Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2013). Collaborations among diverse cultural groups can open possibilities for multiplying the healing potential of amplifying the shared and collectively resonant wisdom across cultures. Future directions include: the development and testing of specific group curricula that utilize the Rising Up Rooted process in target populations (e.g., Black youth, BIPOC persons who identify as women, people experiencing homelessness) and settings (e.g., schools, mental health), continued development of emancipatory contemplative practice strategies that incorporate Black wisdom within the broader SOUL-centered practice framework; and further learning and exploration of the many rich and deep sources of indigenous and diasporic African wisdom. Black wisdom is a gift to humanity that offers a healing, humanizing, and liberating path for all people.

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