

## **I Have Dreams**

It is empowering to dream. Dreaming in our slumber, daydreaming, or dreaming of a better world are all small peeks into the life we wish to have. I love that they do not have limitations, as we are encouraged to dream big and participate in the big cliché of following our hearts. I learned that in this lifetime, one is not following one's heart but instead working every day in some capacity to bring it to fruition. To organize my movements, I separate my dreams into two internal categories: dreams for what Kameryn wants and dreams for what Kameryn wants for her community. Both are necessary for my duration on Earth and my purpose in this lifetime.

The visions for my community have been the driving force for my community work for the past seven years. There have been these crucial moments where I have been mentally punched in the stomach by racism. The first moment I was thirteen when I saw the video of Trayvon Martin killed by George Zimmerman, and I could not fathom the lack of accountability. Another moment was sneaking to watch a documentary of the Black Panther Party and being temporarily frozen in my bed from the death of Fred Hampton. I always say a piece of my soul died when I saw his blood run soak into his mattress and pour into the floor like a river. I can recall jolting to the living room, angry and confused about why I did not know more about the Black Panther Party.

These moments have birthed this internal calling for working towards emancipation. I would go to sleep and envision talking with the ancestors about what to do next, and I vowed to make them proud by any means necessary. From then, I organized as a Black student leader, became a member of a Black sorority based on social action, and even fantasized about becoming a Congresswoman who wanted to abolish solitary confinement upon graduation. The pandemic and the national reaction to the murder of George Floyd killed that hallucination as I realized that people were just throwing money at systemic racism and did not really care about the long-term investment of dismantling systemic racism. Then, I imagined creating my nonprofit organization around social justice education because I felt that every nonprofit I worked in was missing something. This opportunity has flourished as every initiative begins with an intention for community building because we have to do what we can.

My aspirations for liberation have changed over time, as I now question its sustainability for my community. At this moment, I dwell on two things: Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech from 1963 and the NBC interview he gave in 1967. In 1963, Dr. King went off script and spoke about his desire for human beings to simply love each other. In his interview with NBC, he stated his dream had "turned into a nightmare" (King, 1967). These two opposing statements from Dr. King are almost unbelievable because, to an entire generation, he was seen as the beacon. Even though our figments differ, the desire for freedom from oppression is synonymous. This contradiction makes me wonder if Dr. King felt so strongly about hopes for his community

in 1963; how can my dream survive in this current climate where things have worsened, and society feels like it will just pop?

At the quarter mark of my existence, I often think about our new ancestor Nikki Giovanni's poem "Revolutionary Dreams." If you had asked me five years ago, "What is the dream for your life?" I would have responded with an answer that had nothing to do with me but everything to do with the deliverance from oppression. I would want to charge headfirst against a system I used to believe I could overthrow with my two bare hands. I have finally released that hallucination because it no longer brings me relief. I would rather be content with the power of being natural and present on Earth.

The dreams for my life have created a sense of comfort. They serve as these pockets of vivid moments void of anxiety, societal pressures, or the need for conformity. They belong to me and cannot be stolen, assimilated, or appropriated. Fantasies can adapt over time, as I used to want to be many things, such as a professional Disney princess, an astronaut, and an animator. I could often picture myself existing in these professions, but they were just sporadic ideas of a temporary fascination. But in all these illusions, the constant theme is that they were BIG. I like to dream without any restrictions or constraints. When I am asleep, I can be anywhere physically, go forward or backward in time, or see foggy glimpses of the future. As I rise in the morning, I try to hang on to what I remember or interpret the meaning. It is an ethereal feeling when they happen in real time, whether big or small because I saw something from another realm happen before my eyes. This is why I believe and trust in the power of my dreams.

Lately, I have been aspiring for a peaceful existence in every form. I am slowly working to separate myself from divisive things and focus on healing my entire being, inside and out. I do not know if I want to carry around this rebellious spirit forever; it sometimes functions as a mental blockage to my personal happiness. There is constant spiritual tugging at my present and future self. I constantly wonder if they can coexist as a part of my multifacetedness. I just do not know. However, dreams are not for the present but figments of the future I can work towards right now. I can start working to preserve my joy right at this moment and not wait fifty more years to go after something that I wanted since I was twenty-five. This is important for me to internalize because there will come a time when I will not have the same freedom as I have now.

In this season, I am pushing my dreams to the front of my mind instead of hanging them up in my closet like an old sweater I have forgotten about. There is just this conviction for me to move toward the things that bring me unconditional joy and simply go for it. The time is now. My ambitions are pouring inward for me instead of outward for my community. My passion for others is shifting to a passion for personal welfare instead of societal welfare. What holds me back is whether my ancestors would be upset that I wanted to do something different. I got into this work because of the desire to carry the torch while standing on their shoulders. But when I

heard Nikki Giovanni speak at a conference last year, it clicked for me. I was listening to the same person who wrote “Revolutionary Dreams” in 1968, another time of collective upheaval, saying that it was brave to have dreams for yourself.

It hit different hearing her say it live because, for a moment, freedom moved through me in a way that felt original, and I have held on to that. So, I now refute the notion of my ancestors being disappointed in me for thinking about my dreams; it is something they would want. They would encourage it. They would want me to reach for every single star in the universe, no matter the obstacle. Everything I would accomplish would be because one of my ancestors opened the door or at least started the conversation. Any big or small thing brings honor to them, the struggle for our humanity, and the struggle for our joy. It is imperative to acknowledge that dreaming is a revolutionary act, and joy has been a form of resistance for generations.

Now, my intention is not to turn my back on my community or think of myself as above community work. I have been blessed with the gift of a voice that advocates for the voiceless, but in that same belief, my gift will make room for me wherever I go. So, I challenge myself not to be afraid to wonder about my individual happiness but to allow me to advocate in a different capacity. I could advocate for radical self-care, which is my growing interest, or advocate for the lives of my future children. Whatever the dream, I will allow it to flow through me and approach it with love and my inner peace of mind. I have dreams worthy of bringing to reality so that when I am in a state of reflection, I am wholly satisfied with my time in this world.