

i've struggled through writing my statement of Spiritual Call(ing) - searching hard for the exact words to share that can prove that i feel that all that i've experienced in life has brought me to this moment for this very thing. The whole process has me feeling as if i am stuck in newly created mud around the base of a cactus after a fresh monsoon rain - too afraid to move - too afraid of what comes next.

Does this "call" need to happen like with so many mystics or prophets - would or do i need to hear G-d speak to me directly? How do you prove to other humans what you hear or feel? How can i prove that my "call" is one that is divinely guided and furthermore, that i'll or it'll be this way for the whole time that i tend and serve alongside G-d's people?

What if i'm not believable?

And then it dawned on me, return to what brought me to this journey, the analysis of literature where i find so many references to G-d or to the ways that characters and people make sense of the world. i turn to literature as a way to say or to provide perspective to what i can't say. Here are the words written by the main character, Lauren Olamina, in Octavia E. Butler's, "Parable of the Sower" that i believe shares so much of my own learning and struggles with a world that is in chaos and a belief in a system that continually fails its followers:

"I've never felt that I was making any of this up - not the name, Earthseed, not any of it. I mean, I've never felt that it was anything other than real: discovery rather than invention, exploration rather than creation. I wish I could believe it was supernatural, and that I'm getting messages from G-d. But then, I do not believe in that kind of G-d. All I do is observe and take notes, trying to put things down in ways that are as powerful, as simple, and as direct as I feel them. I can never do that. I keep trying, but I can't. I'm not good enough as a writer or poet or whatever it is I need to be. I don't know what to do about that. It drives me frantic sometimes. I'm getting better, but so slowly. The thing is, even with my writing problems, every time I understand a little more, I wonder why it's taken me so long - why there was ever a time when I didn't understand a thing so obvious and real and true."

The verb "to call" in Hebrew is *vayiqra*. Like the English verb, it can mean many things - to summon, to proclaim, to be invited. Through just a few of the smatterings of what i shared in

my Statement of Spiritual Journey, i've been invited to use my gifts and my curiosity to continue to lead others in this process of life, collectively. G-d has "used" nature and humans and

literature and storms and poverty and brokenness and love and grace and kindness over and over again - all through the times when i didn't want to listen - to invite me into the space of discovery of what it means to lead others... to explore what it means to be a part of something much larger than we'll ever really get to understand.

One long common thread in my life has been that desire to teach, to learn, to explore, to dialogue, and put that collective growth into action. These are all evident in that ways that i have become engaged in prison ministry through the teaching and exploration of G-d's liberating love that each of us are given with our first breath; in my outreach to communities experiencing homelessness through the learning of someone's name and the dialogue around what dignity means to us; the learning more about the ways that humans impact the environment and desire for land occupation that forces human migration; and all of this while struggling with the theology of what G-d's love really means in these real lived experiences.

These are the invitations that G-d has given me - a purpose and a passion that has been a nagging feeling that hasn't gone away. Like Lauren Olamina, i'm not creating anything new, i'm discovering what was there all along - antiquity, growth, justice, love, and liberation. And in that, learning what it means to bring others with me - summoning of all to better understand how to live a life knowing that one is loved and what our collective roles as a church can be beyond charity.

In a consultation with a womxn i admire deeply, Dr. Gamez helped me to understand that my journey is one that i've finally decided to "lean into" - the journey or the invitation to the still speaking G-d who continues to show me the presence and the call in all things and all beings.

Saying yes to this invitation prior to COVID-19 and now deeply exploring this invitation in the midst of this global calamity, has led me to better understand that my journey is one that is centered in liberation and justice through action and deep study of the written text. And, to one of understanding my "divine" invitation is really one that centers G-d's love to discover how to be with people in the spaces of the in-between of life (however each of us define that) - to practice collective healing and to embark on the journey of understanding.

For, "every time I understand a little more, I wonder why it's taken me so

long - why there was ever a time when I didn't understand a thing so obvious and real and true."

To be named is to be summoned into being and to name is to participate in this project of living.