

The Lighthouse and the Ecosystem

Dr. Heather Sauyaq Jean Kwamboka Gordon responds to the Rolling Speaker Series prompt
University of the Bahamas · 7/15/26

Dr. Gordon recorded her response from Nassau, in the Bahamas. She opens with a land acknowledgment and a short water poem before her remarks.



The Prompt

Throughout history, artists and cultural experiences have been our lighthouses — cutting through deep darkness, revealing truth, illuminating futures we couldn't yet name.

That light has never belonged to one person. A lighthouse is an ecosystem. It takes builders and visionaries to design it. Fuel to keep it alive. People willing to tend it in the harshest conditions. Smaller lights — lanterns, flashlights — to reach what the largest beams can't. And a culture of navigators who know how to recognize light, trust it, and move by it.

So what happens when we look at our cultural landscape this way? Who are the builders, the keepers, the fuel, the travelers? What are we actually sustaining, and what are we letting go dark? And what would it take for each of us to think differently about our roles, act differently within them, and together illuminate a future that is alive, responsive, and always becoming?

The Response



Dr. Heather Sauyaq Jean Kwamboka Gordon - Rolling Speaker Series - Speaker #3

Let me start by briefly explaining how I got to this talk. When I met Calida and Doug, I was excited for the chance to talk with everyone about ecosystems. Two nights ago I sat with Calida's and Lee's talks, trying to work out how I might speak about boards from a sustainability perspective — sustainability in the sense of human and natural relationships. I wrote it all out, slept on it, talked it over with my husband, and realized this just really isn't me. I've worked for nonprofits, worked with boards, and served on boards; but trying to fit my work directly around a board simply wasn't the way I express myself. So I decided to throw all of that out and talk instead about how I speak about things in general — about life, and about human experience — and to leave it in your hands to interpret how it fits your own board experience.

Formally, I am in Nassau, in the Bahamas, and I want to begin with a land acknowledgment. I am on the lands and waters of Nassau. This is the home of the Taino people, prior to colonization. The Taino were largely killed by disease and by people, and removed from the island. Colonization disrupted their lives and their relationships with the natural world; that forced removal and enslavement took the vast majority of the population from the Caribbean region — though descendants remain in the area.

I also want to recognize the legacy of slavery in the Bahamas. After the Taino were removed, European colonizers brought Africans here through the transatlantic slave trade, and it was largely Africans who built the homes, the settlements, the docks, and the economic system that became the Bahamas we know today. The majority of the population — recognizing, of course, people moving in and out and mixing over time — descends from that history. So I want to recognize both that colonial history and that history of slavery, and the ancestors who have been in this space for hundreds and hundreds of years, who worked with the natural world and kept this

place as beautiful as it is today. Speaking today with those relationships centered and brought forward — that is how I will go forward.

A land acknowledgment is not simply an acknowledgment; saying the words is not the point of it. It is the start of a relationship, one I'm sharing with you to begin this talk. As I speak, I'm relating to the Peoples who are here, as much as I'm able, as a visitor. Part of that acknowledgment is recognizing that I am a guest in someone else's space — not someone occupying it or trying to take it. The chance to offer my own thanks, and to tie what I'm saying to people who have been here a long time, matters deeply to me, and it tries to recognize and build on the knowledge that is already here.

I want to do one more thing to bring you into the space. Right now — I don't know whether you can hear the ocean, the waves in the recording — we are in a very beautiful place. Where I've been staying is on the ocean, which is what you're seeing, but it's also on a lagoon: very quiet, smooth water, with the tides moving so smoothly you hardly notice. I wanted to bring you into what it feels like to be here, and to share a short musing — a poem — about my experience with the water, and how I came to the talk I'll give today.

*Shadows dance across the wind-rippled surface.
They float to shore, disappearing as the small waves lap against the sand.
A splash — a school of small, clear fish bursts from the water.
I look toward the sound, yet they've already vanished,
except for the remnants of the splash moving ever outward in concentric circles.
I never actually saw the fish, but, alerted by the sound, I looked —
finding gray fish-shapes printed by the rays of the sun on the sand below the surface.
A long, thin fish comes into the shallows, watching me sit in the sun.
I see its dark black eye amid its near-clear body,
its shadow long and gray along the grainy lagoon floor.
The air is hot, humid, and without a breeze.
I step into the water to cool off, only to find it matching the temperature of the air.
I lay on my back, floating like the fish, casting my own shadow along the sandy bottom.
To the hermit crab dragging its huge conch shell across the lagoon floor, all of us are gray
shapes without substance.
We move along the floor, over the seaweed and the rocks.
The water seems still, but I can see the tide is coming in.
I flow with the water, an unseen current carrying me.
It is rare that life allows me to just flow, not needing to fight the current.
Time has slipped away here in Nassau.
I look over to see my husband under the thatched umbrella.
“What day is it, honey?”*

That's a little example of how time has been moving here — and it was an important part of the Bahamas convening, which was designed to ebb and flow. The agenda was meant to move with each topic, running as far or as narrowly as it needed, fitting around meals — a more Indigenous way of doing things. No one runs out of time to say what needs to be said. I was very excited to speak at this convening — and, although unable to be there in person, I'm excited to share some of this with you.

What struck me about the lagoon is that, as I looked for things in the water, it was easier to see the shadow or the reflection than the thing itself. I could see the after-effects rather than the beings themselves. Relationships are often like this: we encounter the results of a relationship through its impact, without quite seeing what's happening in the process. So I want to talk about the intentionality of building a relationship — how we center ourselves, how we prepare ourselves, whether we've dealt with our own issues, or are at least in the process of dealing with them, before we enter a space that could become heated, or full of conflict, or simply passionate.

In responding to Calida, who asked us to think about the ecosystem that surrounds the lighthouse, I found myself thinking about the ecosystem too. My own work is as an Indigenous sustainability scientist, so I work in both the human and the natural worlds. Let me start by introducing myself.

My name is Heather Sauyaq Jean Kwamboka Gordon. I have a lot of names. In Indigenous cultures, names show who we're connected to — who our family is, who we descend from, who we're married to — depending on the culture.

I am Iñupiaq, the Indigenous Peoples of the far north of Alaska; we are among the Inuit Peoples who stretch from Russia to Alaska through Canada to Kalaallit Nunaat, which is Greenland. I'm a tribal member of the Nome Eskimo Community. I'm mixed, and I was raised on my grandmother's homestead and reindeer ranch in Alaska. My mom is from Wisconsin; she married into our Native family at twenty, and by the time she had me at thirty, she had come from a very different life into one of moose hunting, fishing, four-wheeling, and crabbing — fully brought into Alaska Native life in the south-central region of Alaska, outside of Homer. My life was grounded in human responsibility to the natural world: the reciprocity and nurturance required of humans to acknowledge what has been given, and to care for the natural world so it can continue.

I also married into a Kenyan Indigenous family, the Kisii tribe, in the southwest of Kenya. My husband is Benjamin Oniego Okemwa. Okemwa is his father's name, so if I took my husband's name I would actually take Oniego — but I'm an academic and had already published under Gordon, so we're keeping Gordon, so my citations can be counted.

My Iñupiaq name is Sauyaq. In the Bering Strait dialect, Sauyaq is the big, flat Inuit drum — skin stretched around wood — and we play it from the bottom rather than striking the skin on top. In our culture the drum connects people: it brings us together for dance festivals and singing, and it is also a connection between humans and the natural world, and between humans and the

spiritual world. We have dances like the wolf dance; we have masks and ways in which humans imitate and share animal connections; and drums are used by medicine people to connect them to the natural world. A drum bridges different spaces. I was gifted this name by my grandmother, named after her youngest sister, Peggy Perry; after Peggy passed, the name was given to me, well into my thirties.

The Kisii name I was given — Kwamboka — came from two different groups of women. Literally, Kwamboka means “having a baby on a bridge.” The way each group used it, though, was to recognize that I was able to move between my own culture and into Kisii cultural space. With light skin, there were expectations about how I would or should act — which was not to fully engage in the gendered roles of women in that space, in how you jump in and participate in a family. That I did engage was a surprise for folks, and it was an honor to be gifted a name that recognized it. So both of these names, which came to me in my thirties, recognize that I have worked to serve as a bridge.

My scholarship is about bridging. I grew up in a mixed family — Iñupiaq and Western European — raised in an Iñupiaq lifestyle, but I went through the public school system like everyone else and learned Euro-American science and culture. So I was a bridge even as I grew up, learning multiple ways of knowing and being. That has continued into my work: understanding how outside scientists can work with Indigenous communities; how people move across different cultural systems and different understandings of what truth is, where it comes from, who an expert is, whom we turn to with a question, where values come from and what we value. For me, that's often between subsistence harvesters — of fish, caribou, and other animals — and management organizations at the state and federal level. It's also moving between cultural and generational spaces, because young people and Elders communicate very differently. That is my introduction.

I want to begin by really thanking Calida Jones for her lighthouse — the prompt and the story she shared at that first meeting. As someone who studies ecosystems from a more natural perspective: no species exists alone, and no system survives alone. When we talk about the environment, we're talking about many ecosystems within it, and no future is possible without all of these ecosystems working together.

Typical sustainability looks at social, economic, and ecological factors. I'd say social, built, and ecological factors — because the built environment tends to be our economic system. In an Indigenous perspective, to understand a sustainable planet, a well community, a healthy organization, healthy relationships, we add a concept of spirituality: the responsibility among the human, the natural, and the spiritual worlds as a way of understanding the world around us. This brings in a deep relationship between humans and the natural world, and the role of humans to care for it and to recognize the provisions it gives to sustain our lives.

My own work has revolved heavily around how culture is healing. I use the word “protective factor,” but it is both a protective factor and a way of healing. Why? Culture connects us to our ancestors, to each other, to our societies, to our families, and to our identity — which is so central

to our well-being. It gives us the power to feel we're in control of our own lives, our own fate, our own self-determination. And just as Calida explained that the lighthouse survives because of relationships, communities survive because of relationships too — and humans survive through these broader relationships with the natural world.

In some business spaces we talk about responsibility to the natural world. We've also talked about restorative justice: if an organization or a practice harms the natural world — something dramatic like dumping into rivers — what is the process of healing that relationship if we bring everyone affected to the table? In a restorative justice process, we have people representing all the harmed parties: representing humans, representing rivers, representing fish. This can be extrapolated to the workplace, where boards often sit external to the staff and the working people. In places I've worked, the executive director is often considered to represent the majority of perspectives at the company. They come to board meetings without the people who actually do the work and see, day to day, what the mission looks like in practice. What they share to the board is based on their own experiences at the company, often not the on-the-ground, mission-based work, as they are not involved in it.

I want to build on what Lee shared — that before the lighthouse there is the shoreline, before the keeper a community, and before the beacon there were already people finding their way through the dark. I would extend that even further back: before there was any need for light, and before humans, there were the ocean and the land, coexisting. We see it perfectly here in the Bahamas — the land gives as the tide rises, and the ocean gives as the tide recedes. It's a two-way relationship, easy to see as the hermit crabs follow the water in and out in their algae-covered shell you don't even recognize as a creature, or in the small minnows growing up in the shallows of the shoreline.

So what I want to talk about is adaptation. Adaptation is essential. We have these natural movements — the tides, the seasons — but as humans, when we move into this space, we have to constantly adapt to change. What does it look like to be prepared to adapt, prepared to change? There's often a strong fear of change, and a tendency to get entrenched in the way things are, and to have a hard time being reflexive about ourselves. One thing I teach researchers before they come to work with Indigenous communities is: can they identify their positionality? Who are they coming as — their gender, their sexual orientation, at the most basic level, but also what they consider their area of expertise, where their family is from, their background in science, their background in living on the land? That is identifying positionality by being reflexive about who you are. It is very difficult to enter any working space, any relationship, without spending time understanding who we are. The more we understand about who we are, the more we understand why we respond the way we do — and responding without thinking is really problematic.

This isn't a cultural failing, either. In many Indigenous cultures, there are often long pauses between questions and responses in communication practices. People often take a long time to respond because they're thinking hard about how to say something in a way the other person can

actually hear. In Western culture, when a teacher asks a question, everyone raises a hand to be first to answer — there's a belief that there's a single right answer, rather than endless answers, to a question. These are some of the differences you encounter when you come into an Indigenous community and relate in a different way.

There's also a completely different perspective on well-being, one I think is very adaptable to organizations. In Indigenous communities, my own health and well-being are tied to my community. If I am healthy and well, that's only possible because my community is also healthy and well; it's impossible for me to be well if my family and the space I live in are not, and vice versa. If a community seems healthy but I as an individual am not, then it isn't truly well either, which is directly applicable to organizations and nonprofits. It works as an ecosystem — a connection of different parties that matter to each other, everything tied together and reciprocal. That's part of Indigenous ways of knowing: that relationships are a process rather than an outcome, and that balance is made through reciprocity, and being open to the change and adaptation necessary to reach well-being and reciprocity. So how we bring ourselves into a space to engage in that reciprocity matters. Our positionality, our reflexivity, and our preparation to engage in reciprocity are all important — and part of that is knowing where we come from, how we gained the knowledge we have, and what counts as expertise in the space we live in.

When I first heard the story of the lighthouse, I had a little trouble feeling I could speak to it, because where I'm from, lighthouses weren't a thing. There are lighthouses now, and my mom is from Wisconsin, so I've visited the big ones along the Great Lakes — but in my culture, the lighthouse wasn't part of life. So I want to adapt and talk about our version, possibly similar, and explain why and why not: the qulliq, our seal-oil lamp.



The qulliq is carved from soapstone in a half-moon, with a depression — an indentation — running through it. It's lit with seal oil, or with pounded whale blubber, and the wick is made from Arctic cotton mixed with moss and seal oil; traditionally it was lit with flint, before there were matches. The soapstone lamp is traditionally carved by a man and then cared for by the family's caretaker, who has tended to be a woman. In our culture the caregiver — the one raising the children — is typically the one who lights and tends the lamp.

And it is not just a lamp for light. This lamp has existed for twenty thousand years. We have periods of total darkness, so yes, it is light — but we don't have wood in the north, and any wood we find is used for other things, never burned. So the lamp is also how we heat the home. It's a very small flame, but in a sod house, or

in a smaller igloo you build while traveling to hunt, a seal-oil lamp would heat the whole place, provide light, and cook your food.

The lamp is made through relationship — a family relationship — but it's only possible because of the natural soapstone. It can only burn from the gift of the seal giving its oil, the gift of the wild cotton, the gift of the mosses. So it comes with relationships to rocks and plants and our seal relatives, and with the relationship of humans harvesting — but not harvesting too much, so there's still enough for future generations. The qulliq also shows how knowledge is passed ancestrally, down through generations. Like the lighthouse, it gives light in darkness and shows a communal relationship — but it brings in these other aspects too. And while the lighthouse protects and guides boats and navigators, the qulliq provides life. Without it there is no warmth, no light, no way to cook your food. It sustains life. Those who create it and tend it bring that life to it, and bring life to others.

So it carries a deep meaning in our community; when it's lit now, it's lit for spiritual and connected purposes. As I tried to bring the image of the lighthouse into my own culture, this is what I saw — and it brought a deeper meaning, not only of what a lighthouse can mean, but of how light, and a qulliq, is drawn upon for life at its most basic level.

Continuing from the lighthouse and the qulliq: what are we actually tending? Do we all agree on what we're tending, and on what it means? From a mission perspective, it's very clear with the qulliq: we're tending the wick. It's actually difficult to keep going — to keep the wick from drying up. It isn't a wick like a candle's; it runs along the edge of the lamp and soaks up oil as it goes. Tending it is constant. No one can really sleep while it's lit. So do we know what we're tending? Do we all agree on it? And who is tending it — the board, executive director, staff?

This is what I've seen working for nonprofits and serving on a nonprofit board — the trouble is with the mission. I've assumed the mission is what's written as the organization's mission. But through discussion, it often turns out we (staff, leadership, executive director, Board) don't even agree that that's the mission, and we each interpret what it means differently — so we're not actually tending, or moving toward, or nurturing the same thing.

In the natural world it's simple. Salmon are born in a lake; they grow, head out through the river, feed in the ocean, and come back up the river. They stop eating at the river's mouth and travel all the way up while starving, to lay their eggs in the lake and continue the cycle. Then they die in the lake; their bodies decompose into nutrients for their offspring, become food for other animals, and, carried into the forest, food for the forest. It's a strong ecosystem, drawing on forests, rivers, lakes, and the ocean. It's basic for salmon — they know exactly what they're doing and what their goal is. Birds know when to migrate. These are very mission-driven; they know what's going on.

When it comes to humans, though, I ask: how much do we know our positionality? How reflexive are we about who we are when we enter these spaces? A mission statement on a wall is not necessarily a shared understanding or purpose. The staff member executing the mission holds

one understanding; there can be a massive disconnect between that and what it means to the board, or even the executive director — something I've seen in my own experience. There doesn't have to be a disconnect, but there absolutely can be one. If every person in the ecosystem cannot give a shared explanation of what we're there to do, then we're all going in different directions — not working together as an organization, and wasting a lot of time on misunderstanding and on strife with one another.

I can't count the board meetings I attended where even asking the executive director to explain what the organization is doing in relation to its mission was difficult — the director could not describe what the organization was doing in relation to the mission, not working on the ground, and often coming from a perspective of organizational financial need instead of mission. And being a staff member in a nonprofit is hard, because you see the strong drive by the board and the director to bring in money. I joined to serve the mission, yet when I'm writing grants to bring in money, I don't even get to center the mission — because we're willing to set the mission aside as long as we bring in money, or the mission quietly becomes something else for the purposes of winning the grant. Now the requirement for the organization to keep running is that it brings in a minimum amount of money per year; after that, we'll see if we can use the grant for the mission. The mission becomes very different, and very mobile. It's nice to work in a natural space, because the natural world doesn't compromise things that way. So how can we adapt the nonprofit space to learn from the natural world?

What we do see — and it's important in the space of adaptation — is climate change, external factors. Take salmon: we have trawlers, huge ships in federal waters that scrape the bottom, with nets about as wide as two airplanes and as long as the Space Needle, grabbing up everything. That's harming a great deal of salmon life in Alaska; David Attenborough just made a documentary about this in his film on the oceans. My point is that the whole cycle — the salmon going out to grow and coming back to spawn — is getting disrupted, and there hasn't been time for adaptation. So if humans are damaging that space, what is our role to step in and address that behavior? Can that be applied to a business situation?

Organizations may bring in someone to help get everyone back on track — that may be a traditional model. But I have to say, as a staff member for nonprofits, and having been a federal staff member too, that there is an unbelievable wealth of knowledge in the staff who know how to run the mission in practice, and I feel staff are sadly not drawn on enough. Whether the board is very active or very passive — and in the community-based organizations I've worked with, boards have tended to be more passive, more box-checking, letting the organization do as it pleases rather than offering true guidance, even when guidance is written into the founding documents — whose responsibility is it, then, to facilitate that space?

Let me go back to culture as a protective factor, to support this idea of strength in a space of difference and uncertainty. Connecting to our culture connects us to our identity, our language, our social relationships, our land-based relationships, our ancestors, and our traditional activities

— food, games, crafts. All of these together are important to well-being; they're different factors of connectedness. So just having a mission statement, like well-being, is not the practice of how things get done. It's a higher-level goal — but what are the steps underneath it, the true richness beneath it? When I speak of well-being from an Indigenous perspective, it's inseparable from land-based connection, from knowledge of traditional activities, from your ancestors. This connection is itself an aspect of governance: a stretching across time of ancestral relations into the present. It doesn't mean we can't build a new future — but we build it on what we've learned from the past.

I spoke earlier about self-determination — individual agency, being in control of our lives, fate control. When I've worked with communities on fate control, yes, people identify an individual aspect. But what people stressed even more was the collective aspect. Western self-determination theory is rooted in psychology and speaks of individual effort; when I worked in a tribal community, everyone spoke of tribal effort — things only get done when the whole community is involved, not just individuals. It didn't matter how wealthy or motivated one person was; it took the community, whether for youth mentoring or supporting families. So instead of self-determination meaning the freedom to do whatever we want, it became about care and nurturance: connection to other people mattered more than the individual, and a person saw their own importance in relationships rather than in separateness — in caring for those we love, and acting to support others.

In the Indigenous work I do, I often feel that as a heavy responsibility. Having advocacy and heart work as my actual job can be exhausting. Sometimes I've thought: why can't I just do a job unrelated to Indigenous self-determination or colonization, and advocate on my own time, on the side, so I'm less tied to those pains and stresses in the day-to-day workplace? But I haven't left that heart work yet. An Elder phrased it better for me. The way I was raised — by my grandmother — you offer before you're asked. That's how it works in our community. It's a hard thing if you didn't grow up with it, and a hard thing if you did; it can feel like a heavy responsibility when you're trying to make social change. But the Elder rephrased it: it's not a responsibility, it's an honor. You are honored to have this opportunity, honored to be chosen to do it. It's a reflection of who you are, and of being believed in. That's just a different way of phrasing things.

That brings me to my last main point: who is an expert? I've worked a lot in Indigenous spaces alongside scientists — Euro-American scientists with PhDs — and Indigenous community members with ancestral knowledge, lived experience, and generations of observation passed down. When PhDs come to these spaces, they often see themselves as the experts. But they may be collecting data for two weeks — maybe their whole field season is two weeks out of the year — while community members live there the other fifty weeks. So who is truly the expert? Who has been observing, and who carries the knowledge passed down from the preceding fifty generations? Often it's the community member, the local, and in my case the Indigenous person.

So how do we do credentials and titles? Is it years of service, or the positions we've held? I've met board members whose CVs are boards — board, board, board. That's a unique experience to bring, but it's less tied to the missions of those different organizations, and it's a different experience from the people working for them in the communities they serve. If we're stepping away from finances — from having someone on the board to support fundraising, someone who has connections — what are the real indicators of knowledge and leadership? Whom do we need to keep us tied to the mission? That's often seen as the executive director's role, but I've often not seen it embodied by a director, who is also tied to the need to fund the organization and keep their position. So who is going to hold the mission at the center?

What do we consider relevant in the bodies on a board? In Indigenous communities we say that Elders carry memory — so yes, we have experts in the field. But we also say that even a two-year-old is full of knowledge, inherently intelligent, and sees the world so differently than adults. We can no longer see it that way: without that innocence, without the jaded perspective and all the layers of our positionality. So what is the unique gift of a younger person? What is the difference among generations that we can bring to these spaces?

When I talk about the natural world, I talk a lot about how humans have raised themselves up above everything else — and how specific humans have raised themselves above all other humans. This idea that human beings are exceptional to the natural world, that they deserve to dominate it, run it, manage it, control it — is that really our place? Is it really the place of a few people to tell the rest of the world how it functions? Does someone higher on the org chart actually know more? Do they know what's best for those below them — when the people below may be the ones actually working with the community and knowing what its needs are? In Indigenous spaces we often work with a community advisory board made up of people from different parts of the community, and there are always Elders on it, and always youth. The recognition that generations are different is so important for continuity: if we don't have youth in that space, we have no one to pick things up as others age out or pass on.

This is where I want to build back to the qulliq, to a central mission. When we know our goal, when we know what we're working toward, we can remove the extra weight — the money, the disputes, all the things that get in the way of the mission. When we center the future generations to come, the mission becomes the most relevant thing. Even when we work with Elders, future generations remain relevant; we're putting something in place to support people as they age. Our success, then, is no longer measured by output — it's measured by continuity. Continuity of mission, not quarterly growth. Who is inheriting the mission? What is the new way to lead it? How do relationships stay healthy with our community partners as different generations come up and new people arrive? And how can organizations adapt to this approach?

I'll wrap here.

I've been told, more than once, that some of my biggest faults are that I believe people come to a space with the best of intentions — that when I'm talking with someone, they're actually looking

out for me. I've been told these are naive perspectives: that I hope for something that isn't there, that I trust people in a way that isn't accurate, that I'm not recognizing human faults or that people can be self-motivated. I've also been told that when I work for an organization, I care too much.

But the mission is the center of my work, and I want to hold that optimistic perspective — that when I come into a space, I am thinking the best of the other person, and that through that, I hope they will think the best of me. I hope that, as I've done some work on myself, they are doing work on themselves — and even if they're not, I hope that what I bring into the space can bring that out in them. So no matter how many times I've been told I care too much, that I'm not realistic, that that's not how the world or how companies work, that I won't survive in companies with this perspective — maybe it is more of an ideal. But it's what I'd like to see, and what I'd like to keep working toward.

Right now I'm a consultant. I've found it very difficult to work for companies. I come from a culture that isn't hierarchical, and hierarchy has been the hardest thing for me to understand. Yes, I've gone directly to an executive director with a concern, passing three people on the org chart without asking — and those things haven't gone well for me. But in my work experience, I often find that the people at the bottom of the org chart have the most important things to say. I try to uplift what people are seeing on the ground — people who are often paid the least to work the hardest and the longest hours, and who are the most dedicated to the mission. Those are the people we have so much to learn from.

So regardless of where we are, regardless of the struggle, regardless of the storm outside — regardless of whether we're in twenty-four hours of darkness, or fifty below zero with another twenty degrees of wind chill — in my culture, the family, the organization, the people there will come together to tend the qulliq, to tend that wick, to maintain life. It's a heavy thing. It's not just light; it's life. It's essential for life. I feel that when many organizations are formed, the mission is that strong — driven to make a change in society, to promote life, imagination, and learning, to lift up a generation of children to be the next artists, the next leaders in our community.

When things don't go as planned, do you fall hard? Yes. But would I have done it any other way? Absolutely not. My work has taught me that the more I commit to the communities I work with and support — to what they ask of me — the healthier I actually feel, the more dedicated I feel, and the more I see a future for them and for younger people. I see that separation, and the transition of control, ownership, and hierarchy, become more fluid. Yes, there will always be some form of governance or leadership. But the question is less about whether the light is there — whether we know we have something guiding us. It may be there; we may have a mission, a direction. The question is: who is tending it? And as much as this is about boards, I ask us to reflect on the people really tending it, at the very base level, doing the work in the community. I will continue — despite some challenging experiences — to do that work, and I hope you all will continue as well. Thank you. Qu yana.

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The next entry in the Rolling Speaker Series will be in Seattle on July 25th, from Lauren Ruffin. All recordings and transcripts will be available on MomentumRevolutions.com.