

RACIAL EQUITY & LIBERATION

Facilitated by Monica Dennis & Rachael Ibrahim



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Prewrite

CHOOSING VULNERABILITY

Choosing Vulnerability is a powerful practice that can deepen our relationships and strengthen our resolve. While each of us has internalized negative messages about what it means to be vulnerable, communities and institutions respond differently to our expressions of vulnerability based upon our identities and our access to power and privilege.

In our commitment to Racial Equity and Liberation, it is crucial that we acknowledge and address the disparate levels of risk. For instance, risk increases and intensifies for someone who is undocumented and queer compared to someone who is heterosexual with citizenship.

And even as we weigh the risks, Black feminist, lesbian, poet Audre Lorde compellingly reminds us that **vulnerability activates our agency, and agency leads to liberation**.

"In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality... what I most regretted were my silences. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you.

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?

And, of course, I am afraid because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger...

In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear — fear of contempt, of censure, of some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live.

And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid."

Audre Lorde's full essay is included on pages 3 and 4



Art Credit:
Trans Life & Liberation Series
Noah Jenkins

This week's practice: Choosing Vulnerability

Got a piece of paper, pen, and/or colored pencils?

Spend 30 minutes journaling or creating an art response about the following:

Watch Brene Brown's TED Talk, "**The Power of Vulnerability**" and reflect on the following questions:

- What connections can you make between the practice of Choosing Vulnerability and Racial Equity? Why is this practice relevant?
- What vulnerabilities are the most difficult for you to express personally and professionally?
- What's at risk for those who are most impacted by systemic oppression? What's at risk for those who benefit from systemic oppression?



"Vulnerability is not weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional.

Our only choice is a question of engagement.

Our willingness to own and engage with our vulnerability determines the depth of our courage and the clarity of our purpose; the level to which we protect ourselves from being vulnerable is a measure of our fear and disconnection."

~Brene Brown, *Daring Greatly*

Thanks for reviewing the pre-work!

The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action

By Audre Lorde

Originally delivered at the Modern Language Association's
"Lesbian and Literature Panel," Chicago, Illinois on December 28, 1977.

I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect.

I was forced to look upon myself and my living with a harsh and urgent clarity that has left me still shaken but much stronger. Some of what I experienced during that time has helped elucidate for me much of what I feel concerning the transformation of silence into language and action.

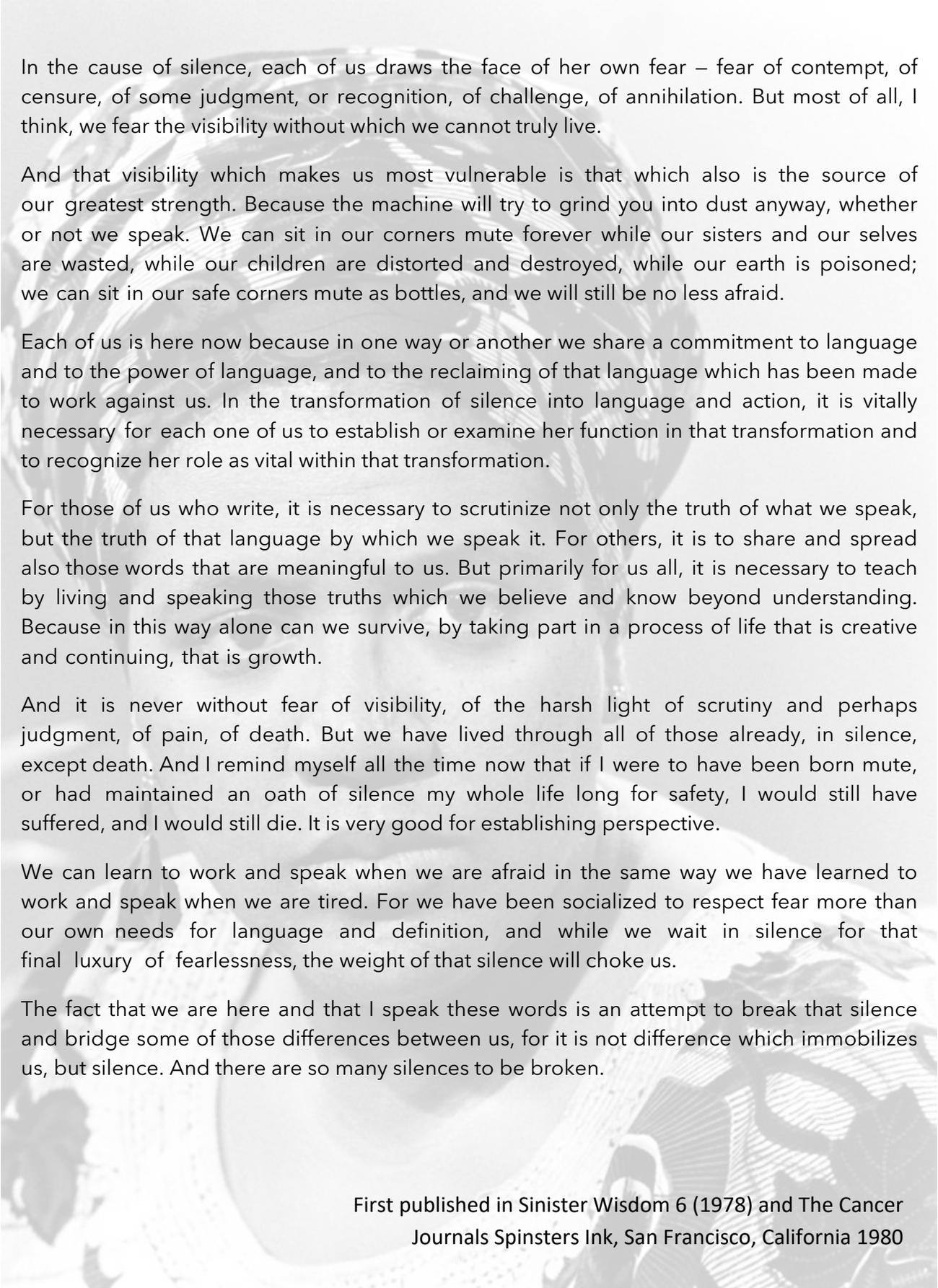
In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, and of what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I most regretted were my silences. Of what had I ever been afraid? To question or to speak as I believed could have meant pain, or death. But we all hurt in so many different ways, all the time, and pain will either change or end. Death, on the other hand, is the final silence. And that might be coming quickly now, without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waited for someone else's words.

I was going to die, if not sooner than later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself.

My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you.

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am a woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself – a Black woman warrior poet doing my work – come to ask you, are you doing yours?

And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger. But my daughter, when I told her of our topic and my difficulty with it, said, "Tell them about how you're never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there's always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don't speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside."



In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, of some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live.

And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid.

Each of us is here now because in one way or another we share a commitment to language and to the power of language, and to the reclaiming of that language which has been made to work against us. In the transformation of silence into language and action, it is vitally necessary for each one of us to establish or examine her function in that transformation and to recognize her role as vital within that transformation.

For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone can we survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth.

And it is never without fear of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment, of pain, of death. But we have lived through all of those already, in silence, except death. And I remind myself all the time now that if I were to have been born mute, or had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die. It is very good for establishing perspective.

We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.

The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.

First published in *Sinister Wisdom* 6 (1978) and *The Cancer Journals* Spinsters Ink, San Francisco, California 1980